

UDC [316.774+81'25-028.26]:316.344.6-056.262/.263(474.5)
DOI https://doi.org/10.32999/ksu2663-2691/2024-96-7

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS SHAPING THE USAGE OF PRODUCTS WITH AUDIO DESCRIPTION: THE LITHUANIAN VIEWERS' PROFILE

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The audiovisual content including cinema, theatre, visual art, or other media has broad and heterogeneous audience: blind and sighted, hearing, and deaf viewers of various age, gender, cultural background, or mental abilities. The profile of the audiovisual content viewer is vivid and changing. People with different physical abilities, for example, blind and partially sighted people, face numerous challenges watching movies or theatre performances: the problem is not only the language barrier of foreign films, but also the inaccessibility to the visual layer of the product, which can be solved by the audio description service. Cintas states, that audio description “consists in transforming visual images into words, which are then spoken during the silent intervals of audiovisual programmes or live performances” (Cintas, 2008: 7). Hence, audio description (hereinafter AD) can generally be understood as verbal commentaries of the visual layer of an audiovisual (or statical visual) product, and the demand of the AD service is increasing with the rising amount of audiovisual material at this time.

The **purpose** of this scientific article is to define the profile of the Lithuanian consumer with a visual impairment when it comes to the accessibility of audiovisual material. The first objective of the research is to carry out a statistical analysis and provide structured information on the evolution of the number of blind and visually impaired people in Lithuania from the earliest times when such data began to be recorded. The second objective is to present research conducted in Lithuania during the last 15 years with the scope of information and cultural content accessibility for the blind and partially sighted, concentrating to the AD service. The three research works will be analysed and presented in this article: two of them were conducted by other authors and the third (as well as the newest) was implemented by the author of this article – the Lithuanian scientific research project “Inclusive culture: the study on accessibility of audiovisual products for the visually and hearing impaired” (hereinafter “KlaRega”), which was dedicated to the analysis of Lithuanian deaf and hard of hearing as well as blind and partially sighted audiences with special attention to the viewers' profile.

Methods. The article combines diachronic (historical) analysis, statistical analysis, and critical content analysis. The studies analysed in this paper use audience research methods such as paper and electronic questionnaires, live interviews, and discussions.

Results. For many years, Lithuania has not had any research that reflects the profile, needs or experiences of the Lithuanian blind and partially sighted audience in relation to AD. In 2008, the first attempts of research on the AD service and method can be identified. The first in-depth research was only conducted in 2018, when the research initiative by “Create for Lithuania” was launched. The “KlaRega” project, which ran from 2021 to 2022, allowed for a detailed study of the profile, experiences and needs of the audience of both deaf and hard of hearing as well as blind and partially sighted people, for which the films with AD or SDH are intended. The study also analysed the demographic factors that shape the profile of the visually impaired consumer of AV material. The research has shown some relevant insights in the understanding the need of audio described audiovisual content and the possibilities to reach that content by the Lithuanian visually impaired viewers.

Conclusions. The structured material presented in this paper has shown that there is a high degree of unevenness in the studies of consumers' profiles, with very different aspects being included in the research, which leaves information gaps and makes it difficult to draw generalised conclusions. In this article, the conclusions are based on the commonalities observed and highlight the differences between the three studies presented and goes some way to describing how the viewers' profile has changed over time.

Key words: accessibility, blind, partially sighted, cinema, theatre.

ДЕМОГРАФІЧНІ ЧИННИКИ, ЩО ВПЛИВАЮТЬ НА ВИКОРИСТАННЯ ПРОДУКТІВ З АУДІОДИСКРИПЦІЄЮ: ПРОФІЛЬ ЛИТОВСЬКОГО ГЛЯДАЧА

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Аудіовізуальний контент, включаючи кіно, театр, візуальне мистецтво чи інші медіа, має широку та різномірну аудиторію: сліпі та зрячі, чуючі та глухі глядачі різних вікових, гендерних, культурних та розумових характеристик. Люди з фізичними обмеженнями, такими як незрячі та слабозорі, стикаються із проблемами під час перегляду фільмів чи театральних вистав. Аудіодискрипція, яку Сінтас визначає як перетворення візуальних образів на слова (Сінтас, 2008: 7), допомагає вирішити ці проблеми, забезпечуючи вербальний опис візуального шару аудіовізуального чи статичного візуального продукту. Запит на аудіодискрипцію (далі – АД) зростає із збільшенням обсягу аудіовізуального матеріалу в сучасності.

Метою цієї наукової статті є визначення профілю литовського споживача з порушеннями зору з точки зору доступності аудіовізуального матеріалу. Перше завдання дослідження – провести статистичний аналіз і надати структуровану інформацію про зміну кількості сліпих і слабозорих людей у Литві з найдавніших часів, коли такі дані почали реєструвати. Друга мета – представити дослідження, проведені в Литві протягом останніх 15 років з питань доступності інформації та культурного контенту для сліпих і слабозорих людей, зосереджуючись на службі АД. У цій статті буде проаналізовано і представлено три дослідження: два з них були проведені іншими авторами, а третє (а також найновіше) було реалізовано автором цієї статті – литовський науково-дослідний проект «Інклюзивна культура: дослідження доступності аудіовізуальних продуктів для людей з вадами зору та слуху» (далі «КлаРега»), який був присвячений аналізу литовської аудиторії глухих і слабозорих, а також сліпих і слабозорих, з особливою увагою до профілю глядачів.

Методи. У статті поєднано діахронічний (історичний) аналіз, статистичний аналіз та критичний контент-аналіз. У дослідженнях, проаналізованих у цьому документі, використовуються такі методи дослідження аудиторії, як паперові та електронні анкети, інтерв'ю наживо та дискусії.

Результати. Протягом багатьох років не проводилося досліджень, які б відображали профіль, потреби та досвід незрячих і слабозорих людей у Литві у зв'язку із захворюванням на АД. У 2008 році були зроблені перші спроби дослідити послуги та методи АД. Перше поглиблене дослідження було проведено лише у 2018 році, коли дослідницьку ініціативу запустила організація «Створюй для Литви» (по-англійськи «Create for Lithuania»). Проект «КлаРега», який тривав з 2021 по 2022 рік, дозволив детально вивчити профіль, досвід і потреби аудиторії як глухих і слабозорих, так і сліпих і слабозорих людей, для яких призначені фільми з тифлокоментарем або з субтитрами для глухих і слабозорих (англійська аббревіатура SDH). У дослідженні також проаналізовано демографічні фактори, які формують профіль споживача аудіо-відео матеріалів з вадами зору. Дослідження показало деякі важливі моменти в розумінні потреби в аудіодискрипції аудіовізуального контенту та можливостей доступу до нього для литовських глядачів з вадами зору.

Висновки. Структурований матеріал, представлений у цій роботі, показав, що існує високий ступінь нерівномірності в дослідженнях профілів споживачів, оскільки в дослідження включаються дуже різні аспекти, що залишає інформаційні прогалини і ускладнює формулювання узагальнених висновків. У цій статті висновки ґрунтуються на виявлених спільних рисах і підкреслюють відмінності між трьома представленими дослідженнями, а також певною мірою описують, як профіль глядачів змінювався з часом.

Ключові слова: доступність, незрячі, слабозорі, кіно, театр.

1. Introduction

The article consists of 4 chapters: the first is devoted to the statistical analysis of the data related to the amount of blind and partially sighted people in Lithuania in diachronic perspective – from the first congress organised by the Lithuanian Association of the Blind to the present time. The second chapter presents the diversity of AD target groups and reveals a typical picture of Lithuania. The third chapter encompasses the research on blind and partially sighted audience in Lithuania with special attention to demographics and needs. The concluding chapter gives relevant insights about the current Lithuanian situation of the products with AD, notes the relevance of the audience feedback and defines the profile of typical Lithuanian visually impaired viewer.

2. Statistics of the Blind and Partially Sighted in Lithuania

The Lithuanian census of 17 September 1923 along with other information recorded the statistics of the blind in our country – 3 129 visually impaired people were recorded, but the data lacks completeness and specificity, because the questionnaire marked people with visual impairments in the same graph with those with other physical impairments. The questionnaire data reveals the sex and age of the respondents, but no information on the causes of sight loss, socio-economic and marital status, or educational background (Lass.lt, 2024). According to the yearbook of the Lithuanian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted, in 1926, 1 748 blind people, including 1 606 adults and 142 children, were registered in the Vilnius-Trakai, Vileika, Ašmena, Švenčionys, Breslauja, Dysna, Pastovys counties and the city of Vilnius, which belonged to Vilnius Voivodeship. Almost a decade later, in December 1935, the first census of the blind in independent Lithuania took place, during which 2 983 blind people were registered in the country (excluding Vilnius and Klaipėda regions). The Lithuanian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted does not provide data on the blind from subsequent censuses.

According to the Lithuanian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted (Lass.lt, 2024), the old membership statistics of the Lithuanian Association of the Blind and the Lithuanian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted can be traced back to congress¹ information. This information is presented in the Table 1.

Table 1

Statistics on the blind in Lithuania (created by L. Martinkutė)

#	Number and date of the congress	Organiser	Number of delegates	The delegates represented the following number of members of the organisation
1.	1 st			
1.	24–25 July 1926	[Lithuanian Union of the Blind (LAS ²)]	200 participants	It was decided to set up the LAS.
2.	2 nd			
1.	21 September 1930	LAS	N/A	N/A After the congress, the LAS disbanded.
3.	1 st			
1.	29–30 April 1947	Lithuanian Association of the Blind (LAD) ³	28	153
4.	2 nd			
1.	25–27 August 1951	LAD	44	279

¹ All the congresses mentioned in the table were held in Vilnius.

² Lith. Lietuvos aklujų sąjunga (LAS).

³ Lith. Lietuvos aklujų draugija (LAD).

#	Number and date of the congress	Organiser	Number of delegates	The delegates represented the following number of members of the organisation
5.	3 rd			
1.	24–26 March 1955	LAD	62	964
6.	4 th			
1.	24–25 April 1958	LAD	75	1 150
7.	5 th			
1.	11–12 April 1962	LAD	82	1 720
8.	6 th			
1.	20–21 May 1966	LAD	97	3 124
9.	7 th			
1.	4–5 June 1970	LAD	131	7 121
10.	8 th			
1.	24–25 June 1974	LAD	104	7 536
11.	9 th			
1.	21–22 May 1979	LAD	102	7 560
12.	10 th			
1.	15–16 June 1984	LAD	103	7 539
13.	11 th			
1.	16–18 November 1989	LAD	99	7 725
14.	The extraordinary (12 th) congress	Lithuanian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted (LASS) ⁴	89	No report from the LASS, the number of LASS members not specified
1.	28 May 1992			
15.	13 th congress			
1.	25–26 November 1993	LASS	77	7 805

According to the Lithuanian Department of Statistics, the community of blind and partially sighted people in our country is quite small: in 2015, there were about 15 000 visually impaired people. As of January 2019, the Lithuanian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted had 5,869 official members (about 0.21 per cent of official Lithuanian citizens), and as of January 2020, it had 5,672 official members (about 0.20 per cent of citizens). As of 2021, the Lithuanian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted no longer provides official data on the number of members of the Association, as the data is not entirely accurate, both due to inaccuracies in the medical diagnoses of potential members and the fact that for some time now, the Association has been accepting not only people with visual impairments, but also their relatives, their assistants, or persons who are otherwise connected to this community, but have no visual impairments. The figures up to 2021 show that relatively few people in Lithuania identified with and considered themselves members of the community of blind

⁴ Lith. Lietuvos aklųjų ir silpnaregių sąjunga (LASS).

and partially sighted people. The very small target audience could be the reason why the theatre and cinema accessibility in Lithuania was an irrelevant or forgotten question for a long time.

3. Diversity of AD Target Groups

Not only the visually impaired community, but also other less frequently mentioned groups such as people with autism spectrum disorders or learning difficulties, dyslexics, the elderly and cognitively impaired, can benefit from and be interested in audio described products. Healthy individuals who are learning new things benefit equally from AD: AD helps to improve verbal and non-verbal communication skills, enriches vocabulary, helps to learn grammatical structures and language style, helps to understand more clearly the relationship between certain actualised phenomena, and can be used to explain illustrations, maps, diagrams, describe visual artworks, etc.

The AD service can be useful for anyone and is not specifically for people with disabilities or very narrow groups. Each target group benefits individually from AD: for the blind, it is a way to find out what is going on in an AV product (film, play, fashion show or sporting event), what is depicted in a visual work (painting, sculpture). For language learners or those with disabilities related to learning a language, speaking it or communicating through language in general, it is a way to learn, expand vocabulary and master a language. This way of adapting an AV work is also useful for those whose cognitive abilities are impaired due to ageing or certain illnesses: by listening to the AD commentary, it is easier to understand the flow of the action, to notice important details that would otherwise be missed, and the AV product would not be fully understood. For those without vision problems or other impairments and who are fluent in the language, AD helps them to follow the plot of an AV product (e.g., a film) without having to sit in front of the TV or computer, for example while doing household chores, playing sports, etc. However, according to official sources, the AD service and methodology in Lithuania has so far only been applied with the blind and partially sighted audience in mind.

4. Research on Visually Impaired Audience in Lithuania: Demographics and Needs

In Lithuania, comprehensive research on the blind community in demographic terms was carried out as early as the Soviet era, but in this publication, it has been decided to limit the research to the period of the last 15 years and to mention a few of the most significant studies in the author's opinion.

The first of them is the Master's thesis by Arūnas Vilčinskas, a graduate of Vytautas Magnus University, written in **2008**. This research paper with the title "Integration of people with visual impairment into the community" was not only one of the first to mention the AD service in a scientific context, but also delved into the demographic situation and the needs of blind and partially sighted people.

This study applied a survey-method to analyse the audience of the blind and partially sighted. The surveys were conducted from November 2007 to March 2008, involving visually impaired individuals from Alytus city and Lazdijai district who were members of LASS (100 respondents). Additionally, individuals of pensionable age with moderate special needs (5 respondents) and severe special needs (5 respondents) were interviewed (110 respondents in total). The study also included interviews with 8 experts (Vilčinskas, 2008: 25 and 28). The questionnaires were completed by visually impaired people aged between 24 and 80 years old, with an average age of 48.52 years. The respondents were 48 per cent male and 51 per cent female. 55 per cent of respondents lived in villages, 40 per cent in cities and 5 per cent in towns. The educational attainment of visually impaired respondents can be categorised into two groups: 46 per cent had completed secondary education, 25 per cent had post-secondary education (college), 10 per cent had university degree and 1 per cent had a Master's degree. The other participants were of lower educational level. The data shows that more than half of respondents (65 per cent) had health problems due to particularly poor sight (Vilčinskas, 2008: 30).

Among many other questions this MA thesis mentions the use of AD services, which were already in use in the world and were still a rarity in Lithuania at that time. Speaking about the use of information

communication technologies in the lives of the blind, the author highlights the importance of digital literacy in telecommunications and the digital era. The author states, that blind and partially sighted people are not yet able to use, adapt or benefit from the new technologies (e. g. Vilčinskis 2008, 21). It is impossible to assume if the author is referring to the global or to the Lithuanian audience's practice but probably his statement is about Lithuanian audience and this could be confirmed by the fact that in 2008 (when Vilčinskis's research was conducted), the new technologies and in particular AD service were already known at least in the most advanced and economically strong countries (e. g. USA, Germany, Spain, UK etc.), even if it was not very widely developed (unlike Lithuania). Immediately after Vilčinskis mentions the AD service as a service, that is promoted by the European Blind Union (EBU), and describes it as “audio information that is provided alongside broadcast television programmes and films to help blind and partially sighted people understand the action” (translated from Lithuanian by L. M.) (Vilčinskis, 2008: 21).

Vilčinskis emphasises that information communication tools are particularly important for the integration of people with visual impairments into the community, as they help compensate for visual impairment and adapt to the living environment (Vilčinskis, 2008: 31). One of the questions in the questionnaire for the blind and partially sighted as the target group of the study was focused to the information communication tools. The respondents were asked whether they had information and communication tools to help compensate for their visual impairment. The following devices were offered as options: phone, television, radio, video recorder, Braille devices (stylus, writing slates, typewriter), talking clock, tape player/recorder (for reading audio books), special computer equipment, other (optional field 9) (Vilčinskis, 2008: 31 and 56). No mention is made of the equipment needed to obtain the AD service, as smartphones were not yet sophisticated enough to have AD-related functions, and the Lithuanian television was only available in its usual format, certainly without AD, as until 2012 Lithuania had only analogue television (Telecentras. It, 2012), which is in principle incompatible with the AD service format. At that time, the most popular genre of AD was the theatre AD, and this required specific equipment only on the theatre side but did not technically oblige theatre-goers in any way. The answers of the respondents showed the following: 60 per cent had a telephone, 25 per cent had a tape player/recorder, 1 per cent had a Braille writing set and 14 per cent wore a talking watch. Unfortunately, no respondents mentioned a TV set (Vilčinskis, 2008: 31), and this is understandable for the reasons outlined above.

A decade later, in **2018**, a study by Asta Dumbraskaitė on cultural accessibility to the people with disability was conducted. The research explored inter alia the profile of blind and partially sighted respondents and revealed much more about the needs of blind and partially sighted audiences in relation to AD. The research with the title „Kultūros paslaugų prieinamumo žmonėms su negalia didinimas“ (Engl. “Improvement of Cultural Accessibility for People with Disabilities”) was based on the online survey which was carried out to find out the opinion of people with visual impairments on the current situation. The aim was to find out whether people with visual impairments used to go to the cinema, why they did or did not go, and what kind of film adaptations could encourage them to go to the cinema. In April 2018 44 people responded to the survey. Most respondents (34.1 per cent) were aged between 26 and 35. People aged 36 to 55 accounted for 29.5 per cent of respondents, while 20.5 per cent were aged 18 to 25. 11.4 per cent were people over 55. The remaining 4.5 per cent were under 18 (Dumbraskaitė, 2018: 36). It is important to note that most of the respondents (about 80 per cent) were visually impaired people themselves, but the questionnaire was also filled in by people who do not have visual impairments, such as relatives of the blind and visually impaired people, family members, friends, or people who work with the visually impaired people (Dumbraskaitė, 2018: 37). A large proportion of respondents (45.5 per cent) have been to a cinema or a film festival but do not attend regularly. 11.5 per cent of respondents visit once a month. 29.5 per cent visit more than once a year but less than monthly. 13.6 per cent go once a year. There was not a single person who has not visited a cinema or film festival (Dumbraskaitė, 2018: 37).

Respondents were also asked why they do not go to the cinema/film festivals more often. The main reason was the lack of access to films (indicated by 66.7 per cent of the respondents). 38.5 per cent said that they do not go because of a lack of information about adapted films. For 28.2 per cent, the main obstacle was the high ticket price (Dumbrasuskaitė, 2018: 38). 84.1 per cent of respondents said that they would be most encouraged to visit a cinema/festival if they could attend joint movie screenings (together with sighted visitors), using smartphone with headphones for synchronised AD. 40.9 per cent of all the participants would also like to have special screenings with AD (Dumbrasuskaitė, 2018: 38–39). It can be assumed that this refers to closed screenings with AD, which are not intended for a heterogeneous audience. Dumbrasuskaitė's study also revealed that if films were adapted to the needs of people with visual impairments, as many as 38.6 per cent of the respondents would go to the cinema/festival once a month, 36.4 per cent would go to the cinema/festivals more than once a year, but less than once a month, and 13.6 per cent would go to the cinema/film festival more than once a month (Dumbrasuskaitė, 2008: 40). The study revealed the audience's interest in audiovisual material and highlighted the main barriers to accessing it as well as possible solutions. Already in 2018, audiences mentioned that for people who do not understand the language of the film, the dialogue of the characters that is subtitled must be dubbed / voiced over, as otherwise they will only understand the AD track in mother tongue. Looking at the present, this is already being fully done and is no longer just an aspiration. By analysing the research of Dumbrasuskaitė in detail we can see that the situation of AD in Lithuania has improved by mean of quantity of products with AD and its' quality. In 2018 the majority of audio described content was theatre performances, cinema production with AD was the rarity, and the TV broadcasts with AD just made their beginning. Until 2018, there were no publicly available films with AD in our country at all, the focus was on theatrical AD, while for films, there were only sporadic, very isolated, closed screenings. In 2018, as the Lithuanian national broadcaster started to produce content with AD, the number of films with AD started to increase. This allowed both to raise awareness of the AD phenomenon among the Lithuanian public and to expand the audience for AD products.

Several years later followed the project "KlaRega", which combined the research of the blind and deaf audiences and was scientifically oriented, although also covers many practical aspects of the AD and SDH (subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing). This research project was funded by the Research Council of Lithuania and was carried out over 23 months (from February 2021 to December 2022) by Assoc. Prof. Dr L. Martinkutė (formerly Niedzviegienė) (Vilnius University) and Assoc. Prof. Dr Jurgita Kerevičienė (Vilnius University). The scope of the research was the needs of Lithuanian blind and deaf audience related to AD and SDH in cinema and theatre production. The research resulted in a scientific study as well as in Lithuanian guidelines for AD and SDH (see Kerevičienė, Niedzviegienė, 2022a), and its presentation to Lithuanian cultural and art authorities. Since the scientific study was carried out by the author of this article and is the main focus of this scientific paper, it is necessary to present the methods used in the scientific project "KlaRega", which helped us to form a profile of a blind or visually impaired cinema and theatre-goer and to find out their needs. Hence, during the "KlaRega" project the analysis was conducted using some methods: an extensive online questionnaire and live discussions with the target audience. An anonymous survey was conducted using the Google Forms platform in this research. This survey comprised multiple sets of questions, serving the dual purpose of identifying a standard profile for visually impaired users and uncovering individualised experiences and requirements related to cinema and theatre access. The research also incorporated a direct and unstructured interview-discussion method. This approach was essential for capturing insights into the experiences and needs of blind and partially sighted individuals who, for various reasons, were unable to participate in the electronic questionnaire. The focus of this paper is to delve into the primary aspects and trends that emerged from the anonymous surveys of the blind and partially sighted participants.

The questionnaire for the blind and partially sighted people included questions relating to general information about the respondents, as well as a section on their habits, experiences and needs in relation to watching films and (in a separate section of the questionnaire) attending theatre performances. Additionally, the questionnaire sought to gain insight into the accessibility of cinema and theatre, giving real examples of films and plays with AD and asking of evaluative feedback from the respondents. The concluding remarks section allowed participants to provide additional insights.

The general part of the questionnaire allowed us to form a profile of a typical respondent and to conclude that the survey was mainly attended by the following type of people: persons over 50 years old (45.9 per cent), women (78.4 per cent), mainly residents of the capital city of Vilnius (40.5 per cent), whose mother tongue is without exception Lithuanian, the majority (56.8 per cent) of them have attended regular schools for sighted, have completed higher education (59.5 per cent), are partially sighted (54.1 per cent), have been visually impaired since birth (43.2 per cent), grew up in sighted families (94.6 per cent) (Kerevičienė, Niedzviegienė, 2022b: 51–52). Most of them (67.6 per cent) like to watch films but visit cinemas very rarely: 45.9 per cent do so only every few years. In contrast, TV is much more popular among blind and partially sighted people as a much more accessible medium: 37.8 per cent of the respondents watch TV for more than 2 hours a day, and they prefer informative programmes (40.5 per cent of the respondents). Regarding viewing habits in relation to AV production equipment, some trends emerged: 37.8 per cent do not watch films on a computer at all, and 40.5 per cent of respondents never use online platforms to watch films and programmes. Among those who do use such platforms, the LRT media library⁵ was the most popular, with 43.2 per cent of respondents naming it (Kerevičienė, Niedzviegienė, 2022b: 52–53).

In summarising the second section of the survey, related to the habits and needs of the audience related to films, it is relevant to note that slightly more than two thirds of the respondents like films (67.6 per cent), but almost half of the respondents (45.9 per cent) go to the cinema very rarely, only every few years. 37.8 per cent of respondents spend more than 2 hours watching television daily, with informational programs being the most popular choice (40.5 per cent of all respondents). 43.2 per cent watch films and recordings of programmes in the LRT media library, while 40.5 per cent do not watch any such content online. Less than a fifth (18.9 per cent) of respondents are interested in films offered by foreign platforms. 37.8 per cent of the survey participants do not watch films on the computer, while almost a third (29.7 per cent) devoting 1–2 hours to it daily. Nearly four-fifths of respondents (78.4 per cent) have seen films with AD and watch them at least once a year (43.2 per cent). This experience evokes positive emotions for three-quarters of them (75.7 per cent). 73 per cent of respondents are satisfied with the pace of the audio described films they have watched. Over half (56.8 per cent) appreciate receiving detailed information about the characters' body language from the AD text, as it allows them to learn and discover new things (Kerevičienė, Niedzviegienė, 2022b: 55–56).

The third part of the questionnaire focused on habits and experiences related to watching theatre performances. Among the respondents there were two who do not like and do not watch plays. As many as 73 per cent like watching plays. 40.5 per cent go to the theatre several times a year, 27 per cent very rarely, only every few years, 18.9 per cent go once a year, and 8.1 per cent once a month. There were also some who have never been to the theatre or go several times a month. The largest share of the audience prefers dramatic plays (37.8 per cent), followed by comedies (16.2 per cent), musical plays (10.8 per cent), and plays dealing with social issues (8.1 per cent). The majority (56.8 per cent) do not watch recordings of performances online. Almost a third said they watch freely available recordings online (29.7 per cent). The rest were not aware of this option or said they pay to watch a recording or live stream of a performance. As many as 62.2 per cent of the respondents have

⁵ LRT mediateka. In: <https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka> (accessed 11 January 2024).

seen performances with AD (live or online), and almost a third (29.7 per cent) have not yet watched theatre with AD and are planning to do so. 8.1 per cent of the participants said they did not know audio described performances exist. When asked about the frequency of watching performances with AD, two trends emerged: 40.5 per cent watch at least once a year, while almost a quarter (24.3 per cent) watch it once every few years. 27 per cent said they had never seen audio described performances before. When it comes to their experience of performances with AD, almost two thirds (59.5 per cent) said that such an event evokes only positive emotions. 32.4 per cent admitted that they had not yet had the opportunity to see a performance of this kind but would like to do so. Other responses were more specific: some said that such a format would (possibly) be too difficult for them, or that they still have some residual vision and are annoyed by the premature commentary or the discrepancy between the video and commentary. The majority (48.6 per cent) of the audience was satisfied with the pace of AD during the performances they had already seen. The same 32.4 per cent (as in the previous question) said they did not have an opinion because they had not seen such a performance yet. 13.5 per cent stated that sometimes they do not hear everything, but this does not interfere with the content. Other sporadic responses indicate that the visually impaired viewer is confused by the large amount of information or that sometimes is commented not what is needed (Kerevičienė, Niedzviegienė, 2022b: 56–57).

5. Concluding Chapter

The Lithuanian audience of the blind and partially sighted people, which lacked in the availability of audiovisual content with AD for a long time, now has the access to different genres of audio described audiovisual and visual content: theatre performances, TV series, full-length TV films, film festivals with AD, live sport events, museum and galleries content with AD, etc. But the audience feedback is still a rarity, although it is crucial for both the creators of visual or audiovisual art and the practitioners involved in making such art accessible.

The analysis of the data collected during the three studies presented in this article provides an opportunity to create a profile of a typical respondent. The attendees of the first research (implemented in 2008) were from very specific location (one geographical region) and presented a profile of the visually impaired population in two cities about 40 km apart (Alytus and Lazdijai). The average age of the respondents was 48.52 years. Most of them were female (51 per cent), residents of villages (55 per cent), who mainly had completed secondary education (46 per cent of all respondents). 65 per cent had particularly poor sight.

The newer research, implemented by Asta Dumbrauskaitė in 2018, lets us form such profile of the typical respondent: most respondents (34.1 per cent) were aged between 26 and 35, and the main tendency was that most of the respondents were between 18 and 55 (about 85 per cent). About 80 per cent of the respondents were visually impaired people.

The survey of the presented newest research, conducted in 2021–2022, was mainly attended by the following type of people: persons over 50 years old (45.9 per cent), women (78.4 per cent), mainly residents of the capital city of Vilnius (40.5 per cent), whose mother tongue is without exception Lithuanian, the majority (56.8 per cent) of them have attended regular schools for sighted, have completed higher education (59.5 per cent), are partially sighted (54.1 per cent), have been visually impaired since birth (43.2 per cent), grew up in sighted families (94.6 per cent).

As the three presented studies show, the most active respondents are young to middle-aged (younger than 50), female, residents⁶ of villages (according to data of 2008) and urban areas (according to data of 2021–2022) as well as those with increasing level of education (compared to previous surveys: finished secondary education (data of 2008) in comparison with finished higher

⁶ The fact of the participant's place of residence cannot be considered in the context of the profile of a typical viewer, as the surveys were carried out in different geographical areas.

education (data of 2021–2022). The study conducted by Dumbrasuskaitė did not specify the gender of the participants, their territoriality or level of education and is mainly focused to the experiences and needs of the audience related to the adapted AV material. All the three studies witness that audience's need of (audio described) audiovisual products are constantly growing, the audience becomes more aware of its own experience as a viewer. The viewers are increasingly able to assess the shortcomings of AD, make suggestions for corrections, etc.

Despite a recent in-depth study conducted by implementing the project “KlaRega“, the profile and needs of audiences are constantly changing to some extent, and as the amount of audio described products is gradually growing, visually impaired viewers are gaining more and more experience of viewing such products, so it can be assumed that their insights will become deeper and more specific over time. Therefore, studies of this kind should be conducted periodically.

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 06.02.2024
The article was received 06 February 2024