**EBU 2020 Webinars**

**Acoustic Systems for Information and Navigation**

10, 18 and 27 November 2020

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**REPORT**

This year’s EBU conference focused on acoustic systems for information and orientation for the visually impaired and was hosted by the Austrian Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted (BSVÖ). The idea for this topic was proposed by Czech Blind United (SONS) and BSVÖ developed the conference programme in close cooperation with SONS and EBU.

Due to the current Covid-19 situation, the conference could not take place in Vienna but was instead – for the first time – held in the form of 3 webinars, moderated by Josef STÖGNER, from BSVÖ. This allowed participants from outside EBU to join as well and a high number of participants was reached. Also, an interpretation system was used which allowed for interpretation in 4 languages (German, French, Spanish, English). Due to joint efforts from the organization committee (Stefanie STEINBAUER and Josef STÖGNER from BSVÖ as well as Jan URBANEK from SONS), all 3 webinars went very smoothly with only minor technical challenges.

# Webinar 1, 10 November 2020

“Overview of National Practices”

47 Participants

Webinar 1 started with opening words from the EBU Executive Director Lars BOSSELMANN and BSVÖ’s President Markus WOLF. As keynote speaker, Doris OSSBERGER from BSVÖ addressed the situation within Europe from a general perspective, making clear that there are standards from national and European bodies which support the installation of products for the blind and partially sighted but also industry standards which everyone is free to accept. There are still improvements to be made for the existing acoustic components already installed and travel experience within Europe could be improved.

Luciano BUTERA from the Swiss Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted (SBV) introduced the navigation-app “MyWay pro”, which SBV programmed on their own, making sure that the needs of blind and partially sighted users are met. Sylvain DENONCIN, CEO of Okeenea, reported on new technologies to activate acoustic traffic lights with both Bluetooth remote control and smartphone apps, which could be installed on top of existing push-button-solutions, giving an interesting opportunity for upgrading existing solutions at reasonable costs.

The panel discussion that followed the presentations showed that there are real opportunities for EBU and its members to improve the situation in their countries. Legislation is one way to enforce accessibility, industry standards are another, but the importance of additional technologies was deemed very high as well.

# Webinar 2, 19 November 2020

“Mobility and Supportive Technology”

40 Participants

Webinar 2 offered advanced information on the status of AVAS by Ercan ALTINSOY from the Technical University of Dresden. Even though the legislation is clear, there were still a lot of questions on the implementation. A solution for autonomous travelling was presented by Tim ONTRUP from GeoMobile. This solution informs passengers inside and outside public transport vehicles. Due to a lack of legislation, costs are a major factor here, which is why the installation rate is still low.

Another smartphone app was presented by Mr DENONCIN. “Evelity” provides precise indoor-navigation, for example in metro stations, and could be an opportunity for autonomous door-to-door navigation. Also, a similar solution to GeoMobile’s was presented by Mr BUTERA called “Intros”.

The following panel discussion offered a glimpse into the future. Real door-to-door navigation and information support might become a reality but only if these various applications work together or offer interoperability.

# Webinar 3, 27 November 2020

“Acoustic Adaptions to the Environment”

35 Participants

Webinar 3 focused on acoustic traffic lights and national adaptations. Jan URBANEK from SONS presented a broad basis of installed acoustic componentswith a lot of features and advantages through a 6-button-remote control. It was interesting to hear that within the last 2 decades most public transport vehicles have been equipped with supportive technology and acoustic systems in the Czech Republic, even though no legislation is in place.

The opposite is the case in Denmark, where acoustic traffic lights or information technology within public transport vehicles are scarce and have to be negotiated at municipal level. But there was good news as well: Ask ABILDGAARD from the Danish Association of the Blind mentioned that just recently, a nationwide agreement was reached on how acoustic traffic lights should sound and what each sound will mean.

Susanne BUCHER-SABATHY from BSVÖ then presented an accessible online database for acoustic traffic lights in Austria and how this database supports blind and partially sighted people in their daily lives and when travelling to a foreign town.

# Conference outcome: On the way to an EBU knowledge base

In preparation for the webinars, we received a good response rate on Jan URBANEK’s questionnaire on acoustic traffic lights in various member countries.

A major aspect of the conference theme was to start a basic knowledge base at EBU level to learn more about best practises and the level of support blind and partially sighted people receive in various member countries and how this support is best achieved. Therefore, we hope that the information shared and the active discussions held during the webinars are a first step towards such a knowledge base. A more active Road Safety and Accessible Transport discussion list within EBU would be a positive outcome of this year’s webinars as well.



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