EBU in Action Episode 14: Press Start to play: Levelling up Gaming through accessibility

Intro

(Music)

(Neven): Hello everyone and welcome back to "EBU in Action", the podcast where we bring you the latest news and updates from the blind and partially sighted community across Europe.

I'm Neven Milivojevic and I am joined once again by my wonderful co-host and friend, Paweł Masarczyk. Hi Paweł.

(Paweł): Hello Neven. And greetings to our listeners. How are you?

(Neven): Well, I'm very well. And how are you? Are you ready for the action of this year?

(Paweł): I don't know. To be fair, I don't know because I don't know what to expect. There is so much happening, both in accessibility and blindness communities around the world and in the world in general.

To be fair, it's so much I don't even know if I'm ready, but I'm interested and I'm keeping my ears, eyes, everything else open and we'll see what happens. Hopefully, it's just the good things, right?

(Neven): Well, of course. And that sounds as a very good, I think, starting point from my point of view. But as you know and saw, you know, EBU have really worked quite a lot. They never stop advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities, and especially persons with visual impairment across our continent.

So, as usual, we will share the latest news today from the European Blind Union, and I can already tell you that there has been quite a lot happening on the advocacy front lately.

(Paweł): And it's no wonder because we are right in the middle of the EU Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030. So, we can assume that it'll be summed up: it's time to reflect on what's worked, what still requires some improvement, and what are the activities for the second half of this period that we can look forward to.

But that's not the only thing we'll discuss. Of course, we have our topic of today. And it's an interesting one and I'm quite curious what our listeners

will think about it because it's gaming, it's time to play some games. And we know for a long time now, and actually for many years, that blind people are very accomplished and also very happy gamers.

Of course, we can discuss whether all the games that we would like to play are accessible. Now it's all changing with the emergence of artificial intelligence as well. But we have been playing for a long time and also what differs is how the games used to be made and how the games are made now, and also what they mean culturally.

Because it's not just a pastime anymore, it's a part of culture, just like books and movies and series and music and everything else. It's also another means of telling a story. So, in order to wrap this topic nicely we'll talk to two wonderful guests: Svenja Ottawa, a German gamer, streamer and developer.

And Philip Bennefall from Sweden, who runs [Blastbay Studios](). And I guess this name is not strange to anyone who's ever played any audio games. Also a developer and gamer, I'm so looking forward to this interview.

(Neven): Well, we are indeed talking to very interesting guests on an amazing subject this time. I can't really wait to listen to them.

And, of course, as we have already done many times in the past, we are also bringing back the correspondent' section to our podcast in the end. And, you know, this section where we usually bring you the latest news about one of EBU's members.

And, today, we will get in touch with our friends from the Austrian Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted. And we will talk to their President, Marcus Wolf. He will tell us a little more about their activities. So, quite an interesting show, isn't it Paweł?

(Paweł): Yes, I look forward to hearing what's up in Austria. I mean, I am in Austria, so I should know all of that, but we'll see. Maybe I will find myself surprised. But yes, let's see what the episode has in store. So, on with the show.

(Neven): Let's go.

News section

[Music]

(Neven): Now, there is a lot on our plate today. So much has happened over the last few months and EBU has been incredibly busy.

So, to tell us more about this and the work of the organisation, we have asked our dear colleague, Nacho Lopez, to join us. So, hola Nacho, how are you doing today?

(Nacho): Hola, Neven, how are you doing? I'm doing fine. I'm very happy actually because the sun is coming back to Paris and we are currently enjoying weeks and days of good weather, so it's incredible.

Honestly, it's incredible because this really cheers you up and also prepares you to produce an interesting episode of "EBU in Action."

(Neven): Well, absolutely, and I can tell you it has been a really long winter here in Sweden too, so we really look forward to the spring. So, well, let's go to the EBU news then.

I know that, for instance, you've been working on the second half of the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Can you tell us a little about that?

(Nacho): Yes, let's start things off, Neven.

As you said, in January, EBU responded to the EU Commission's call for evidence on enhancing the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030. The European Blind Union's response referred to a series of key actions in the areas of accessibility, enjoying EU rights and decent quality of life and living independently.

In the domain of accessibility, EBU called for a review of the Audiovisual Media Services and the Marrakesh Treaty Directives, as well as for an ambitious agreement on Air Passenger Rights Regulation and more awareness-raising about the key impact of inaccessible household appliances. For that same domain, EBU also signalled the importance of having a strengthened AccessibleEU center

Regarding enjoying EU rights, the European Blind Union called for continued efforts to improve the freedom of movement of persons with disabilities throughout the European Union. EBU also requested a legislative initiative to ensure the equal political participation of persons

with disabilities as voters and as candidates to run for office, at least in European elections.

Finally, when it comes to decent quality of life and living independently, EBU demanded to complement the Disability Employment Package through guidance to Member States to support reforms of social protection to fight the disability benefits trap. At the same time, it also called for a new funded employment and skills guarantee for persons with disabilities.

(Neven): Wow. That's really a lot. And I really think that this advocacy work from EBU is really very significant and important for the development. So, thank you to our colleagues who've been working with this. So, tell me: what about other advocacy work which you have done?

(Nacho): As you said earlier in the introduction, Neven, it has been quite a busy time at EBU at an advocacy level lately.

On 11th December 2025, the European Commission published its report on the review of the Marrakesh Directive, the Marrakesh Regulation, and the attached evaluation of these legal instruments.

While welcoming some important learnings of the evaluation, EBU regretted that the Commission did not take the opportunity of this evaluation to follow the recommendation by the UNCRPD Committee to amend the Directive to drop the article that allows Member States to provide for compensation of right holders by authorised entities that produce accessible format copies of printed work for print-disabled persons.

Regarding the EU Lifts Directive, the European Commission published its evaluation on January 23rd. EBU participated in the consultations for this evaluation, essentially to let the European Commission know that the revision of the Directive was necessary to strengthen the accessibility requirements therein.

Overall, the European Blind Union was disappointed that the evaluation considered that the EU Lifts Directive doesn't need to be revised, but still, on the positive side, EBU was satisfied to know that the EC announced that it could study more in depth four issues identified in the evaluation, including accessibility of lifts for persons with disabilities.

(Neven): Yes, that's a very complex question about the accessibility of the lifts. But, Nacho, is there anywhere our listeners can find more information about the statements?

(Nacho): Sure Neven. In the show notes, you can find the information included in all statements.

All our listeners can find the links to our statements there. So, yes, there you will have access to EBU's position on the European Commission's review of the Marrakesh Instruments and the evaluation of the EU Lifts Directive.

(Neven): Wonderful. Well, I think we will manage to find time for one more piece of news. I mean, we talk sometimes in this podcast about gender equality and that we are very male dominated, but actually, EBU has a very active gender equality work. So, tell us a little about that. What's planned?

(Nacho): Indeed, there's something audiovisual that has been launched.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, EBU launched a facts-based gender equality video. Featuring the testimonials of Tytti Matsinen, EBU's President; Esma Gumberidze, a young blind woman from Georgia; and Victoria Harrison, the British Ambassador for Slovenia, the video underlines the daily challenges that blind and partially sighted women face in domains such as access to employment or balancing personal and professional life.

This video can already be found on EBU's YouTube channel in English, French, German, and Spanish.

I would just like to stay in this point, Neven, about producing videos; because later this year, the European Blind Union will also release a video underlining the benefits of hiring visually impaired people.

This production will underscore the strengths of having a blind or partially sighted person in your team, such as a multifaceted and diverse team, and the presence of accessibility expertise.

Filmed with the help of volunteers from blindness and partial sight associations in France, this video will also be launched in English, French, German, and Spanish.

(Neven): Wow, that's really great. Well, it's a very important work and thank you very much for that.

So, Nacho, could you please stay along in the podcast and then, we can, include you when we are coming to the Correspondent' section. But thank you very much for all these news.

(Nacho): Thank you very much, Neven. And sure, I will be there. I will stay in action, as the title of the podcast says.

(Neven): Great. So Paweł, are you impressed by all this fantastic work which is done? I mean, very impressive, I think.

(Paweł): Yes, this is something to be said about the European Blind Union in general.

Whenever I hear from Nacho here or I read the Newsletters every month, I can see that there is so much going on. I can barely wrap my head around it. And I hope it'll bring out really great outcomes. All of the PR work, all of the communication work, all of the videos, the consultations, it's just amazing.

(Neven): Yes, it is indeed. And I really think it's worth for listeners to go to the EBU webpage and to actually read some of these statements and the paperwork because there is a lot of information to be found.

Well, but I think the time has come to do our focus segment. So Paweł, the stage is yours.

Focus segment: Press Start to play: levelling Up Gaming through accessibility

[Music]

(Paweł): Video games have become an important element of digital accessibility in the recent time, and it has been also an important element of the digital world in general. We have more games than ever, with even more being produced all the time. And, in the middle of it, we would like to ask ourselves the question: to what extent can blind people participate in that culture?

Can accessibility standards be coupled with something as creative, as difficult to predict as a video game? Which, of course, can happen in a different genre, which can have different mechanics, which has different principles guiding the whole gameplay, and it's not always easy to imagine it for accessibility.

In order to answers these questions, we have our two wonderful guests today in the studio. That's Svenja Ottawa, a German streamer, gamer

and developer, and also Philip Bennefall, who runs Blastbay studios, who used to develop but it's still a software developer and, of course, an avid gamer.

I can only imagine Philip is still playing games. You are Philipp, are you?

(Philip): Sometimes, yes. I'm terrible at it, actually, but I try.

(Paweł): OK, good that you're still finding the time to do this and I personally struggle, but it's great to have you here.

Svenja, how are you?

(Svenja): I'm fine, thank you.

(Paweł): How did it happen for you? How did it begin? Did you start playing games at a really young age? Or is it a recent development on your side?

(Svenja): Yes, if that's how you want to take it, because when I was a little child, I played Pokémon Stadium on the Nintendo 64 from my sister that was accidentally accessible.

I knew what to press and the text have been announced from the speaker, so I also knew what was happening, and that was the first time. And back then I couldn't imagine that I'd ever be really into video games because, back then, it was accidentally accessible. And I was like: "OK, that's all I can get right now".

And when I was older, then I played multi-user dungeons that are text-based games where you just have to type in what you are doing. And yes, in 2021, I found out about Hearthstone Access. And yes, then I really started playing video games with Hearthstone and now also with Stardew Valley and yes, I stick to it.

(Paweł): Interesting that you're mentioning Pokémon right now because I think two days ago or three days ago, it was that Nintendo has released the re-runs of the Pokémon Games, the classic ones for the Game Boy Advance, but this time they're running on the Nintendo Switch too, that the Crystal, the Red, and so on.

It's interesting. It was interesting to hear the music again because my brother is playing that right now, and we used to play also the Game Boy versions as children. Back then, of course, my brother and cousins were steering the character for me and making the decisions, so all I know is

the music and the decisions I was making and they were executing them on my behalf.

(Svenja): When I was really small, I also took the Game Boy from my brother and tried to play anything because I liked the music there. But, of course, I could not do anything. So yes, I left it then.

(Paweł): Yes, my beginnings were actually Commodore 64. That was also interesting because they had all these games, like Park Patrol where you had to save people on the beach from drowning in the sea and to clean up the beach.

It was an Activision Game. And I still have the music from that running in my head sometimes. So, it's a very interesting development, looking now how many of those games we can play and how the gameplay and the sound effects and everything around it evolved.

What do you think are the biggest changes from that time until today? For us, for blind gamers?

(Svenja): It's that games have screened the support in themselves, that you don't have to always move around stuff. Back then, there was nothing like that. So yes, if it was accidentally, it worked somehow, but it was not designed to work like that. And now, there are games that have accessibility in mind and where I know that there have been developers that took that opportunity. So that has really changed.

(Paweł): Yes, that's also what I see, so many triple A titles becoming accessible too. We have seen a bit of a down drop with that recently, but still we had a couple of notable titles and, of course, the modding scene that you mentioned, that people are modding games to create accessibility.

We'll come back to that in a moment. But before we do, Philip, you have been developing games, and I already said this in the introduction, but I will have to mention it again. Anyone who had anything to do with audio gaming in the last 20 years must have come across your games or anything you've created.

The most notable example being the, of course, Blastbay Game Toolkit (BGT), which I think a lot of audio games used to be based on. From your experience as a software developer and also as a game developer, how do you find the challenge of adapting something as complex as a game into something that is accessible and playable for blind audiences?

Would you say that there are some genres of games that are more difficult to adopt than others?

(Philip): I mean, yes, I think there are genres that present more of a challenge to adapt. I mean, I started with really basic arcade games. You know, you hear a sound, you press a button. A lot of simple arcade games are based on that premise with variations.

But yes: I mean something like an open-world kind of environment where there's a lot of navigation elements that don't necessarily make sound.

I mean then you have to find other ways of conveying that information. But you know, in general, you can get by with relatively little adaptation.

I mean, if you have some kind of way to view the map, for example, or you have some kind of, you know, proximity detector to either items or creatures or something like that, I mean, with relatively small additional elements, you can convey the necessary information.

Now is that necessarily the same as playing a game that is a hundred percent intended for someone who's blind? I think not, but I do think that we're bridging that gap.

(Paweł): I guess, and I think also from what I have seen, we have already by now established certain standards that we come to expect, as you said.

So, in the beginning, I feel when the first mainstream games were slowly being made accessible, we were wondering in the dark, proverbially, trying to figure out how to adapt a certain game to be accessible and what to recommend to the developers.

But I think, in the meantime, we already have very well-established standards, so definitely there must be screen reader menu navigation, and all the menus being read out, all the textual information being read out.

This is quite easy. We most likely will need additional sound cues for events that are only visual. This also can be tricky depending on the game, I suppose. But, more or less, you can figure out what needs appending those cues. And, also as you said, dislocators, right?

Any way to locate something that a sighted person can see from very far away. And we also need to have this experience replicated for and

adapted for hearing, most likely. And we have seen a lot of games implementing that.

And another question stemming from that: what do you think should we expect? So, in which direction should we actually head more when we think of accessible gaming and reaching out to developers of mainstream games?

Is it more about expecting accessibility by default, so that the developers of the game, with varying budgets, do the heavy lifting and implement accessibility? Or should we let it on to the shoulders of individuals who would be willing to take up the task of modding these games do their job and mod it because they can develop the modes at their spare time with the drawback, of course, that, well, the whole accessibility depends on voluntary work, which may stop at any time, where the resources may be easily be exhausted and so on? What is the best path to go?

(Philip): I mean, if you ask me personally, I think there's room for both. I do think that, you know, in this stage that we're in, where the market is mostly inaccessible, I think modding definitely has its place. I mean, the fact that the developers are opening up the game framework in such a way that it is possible, I think that's great.

However, looking in a more long-term perspective, I think, of course, the ideal scenario, which I don't know if we will ever achieve, but that would be that you kind of get accessibility for free. And I think one way to do that is if we can try to get some sort of automatic accessibility features into these major game engines like Unity and Unreal. That, I think, would definitely give developers the ability to, without too many extra hours, to put at least rudimentary accessibility into their titles without having to hire a team of consultants and play testers and developers with accessibility expertise.

I mean, you'll still need some of that because you can't make everything generic in terms of accessibility. There's tons of stuff there that does require careful thinking of how to adapt because, essentially, you're trying to squeeze-I guess you're trying to squeeze some another dimension into the game that wasn't there originally, or you're trying to convey the visual stuff, you know, in a way that only has audio. So, you only have a certain amount of bandwidth that, you know, the human brain can receive.

And I think thereby you do have certain limitations on how much you can perceive simultaneously when just listening, rather than getting two channels of information, if that makes sense.

But yes, so to answer your question, I think modding is definitely a good start. However, I do think that it, as many generic accessibility features in the mainstream game engines, would take us a long way forward.

(Paweł): Yes, let's hope these changes will be introduced. I have seen some significant work being done on screen reader support in some of those engines, either via third party plugins or just integrated straight away, baked in.

(Philip): Yes, but I'm not only thinking of screen reader support. I mean, that's easy, right?

Like that's trivial to do, but I'm thinking more of something like generic navigation aids, for example. I mean, you've got all the information necessary to implement those in your average scene or map, whatever they call it.

You have all of that geometry and all of the points that you can interact with and so on. All of that's there. So, it's just a matter of trying to convey that. So, I mean in a lot of the cases, when it's just the regular movement, you've got a character, you've got the world, the environment with obstacles and so on and so forth.

A lot of that, since the game engine knows about all those things, you could, I think, potentially, at least, make some kind of generic implementation that would give the developer a huge advantage when trying to implement the accessibility layer simply because they would only have to adapt it if they deviated from what the generic sort of accessibility support expects and is accounting for.

(Paweł): OK. Yes, we'll have to see if the companies making those engines would actually step up the game. I hope it'll happen.

(Philip): I hope so. I mean, I think it would be the way forward that would make most, the majority of games could then automatically essentially receive some sort of accessibility rather than relying on each individual company to do it, which to be honest, I don't think they could afford to because it does take a lot of extra work if they have to start from scratch.

(Paweł): Definitely, definitely. Just as a quick word of explanation to the listeners who are not so much into gaming, modding is a process in

which the community, so every single player who has the knowledge, can modify, hence the word mod, the game to offer some features and characteristics that it didn't before.

It is often used to replace characters with something else or some other ones. Or often also to add additional features to the game which weren't there before, so to make the community creative with a product that already exists.

And, of course, one of the spheres in which modders can excel is accessibility. And many games we can play today are playable thanks to mods indeed.

For example, Hearthstone, as Svenja mentioned before, Hearthstone Access is a mod and it's developed by a person who decided to dedicate their time to do it.

But, of course, we can hope and expect in the future…

(Svenja): I have to correct that, in that case it's not only one single person.

(Paweł): No more because it used to be, right?

(Svenja): It's no more because the first developer dropped that, but the community decided to pick it up because otherwise we would have lost it completely. The community asked Blizzard to make it natively accessible.

And Blizzard also answered that they will do that, but no one knows when. So yes, until then, we have to do it ourselves.

(Paweł): Which is what we do often in a lot of cases. The problem is that as long as you have the people willing to put in the work, and it's not little, I mean, it's a lot of work, especially because every single update that comes out needs to be adopted again and again and again.

And sometimes, we had this situation. I play Hearthstone myself, so I can tell where there were a couple of days after a new update was released where the mod wasn't adopted yet. So, we couldn't play the game for several days at a time, which, of course, for an average player, is, of course, sad, but it's not the end of the world, of course.

But here, I'm coming over to the next question I had for you, Svenja, because you're also a streamer and I'm sure, being surrounded by other streamers. If you interact in any community, you might have come across

eSports as a career. eSports for those who don't know is competitive playing of computer games for a competition where you can actually win prizes, win medals, earn money, and there are people who dedicate their whole careers, their professional careers around eSports so they make a living by playing video games.

Do you find that a blind person could be successful in that at this stage of the development of the gaming industry?

And if yes, are we bound to compete with sighted players? Or is it like with regular sports; we need, so to say gaming or eSports Paralympics games? How do you see that?

(Svenja): I think we could compete with sighted folks in these parts as I have already seen a few blind Hearthstone streamers that also reached legend for more than once. And so, a lot better than I'm, and also are competing with sighted players on this level.

And these tournaments where you have in-house on, with a Blizzard world championship and stuff like that, it would be possible. Yes, I didn't, see it yet.

There's also, he's not blind, but there's someone who's called "NohandsGamer" who can't use his hands, therefore the name. And he was also a really highly competitive player. So, I think that blind people could also achieve that if they wanted and if they were good enough with such games.

(Paweł): Unless an update comes out on the day of the competition and the mod stops working, right?

(Svenja): Yes. But if we are lucky enough, then one of the developers says, "Just the updates". Nowadays, it is that fast that it will still work at the same day. But usually, the time zones are that way, that it's not happening that a patch comes out at the tournament day itself.

A few days before yes, that we already had, but not the same day when a tournament starts, that would be really not good at all. So, I don't think Blizzard would do that because often that are balanced patches, they change cards and all players have to get used to the new cards or the new effects or whatever. That wouldn't be good for a tournament, so I don't think that'll happen.

(Paweł): Yes, because Hearthstone is like a turn-based game where you fight other players with cards. So you have a stack of cards, you choose

one, you send it at the other player and things happen. So, I guess this is quite slow-paced, even if you play it competitively.

There is, of course, a time limit in which you have to make your decision but, otherwise, everyone takes the same amount of time to choose their cards. Do you think a blind person could compete in something like Counter-Strike?

I mean, I tried AudioQuake once, where you just run around with different weapons and shoot the other players. We had an AudioQuake, which is a Quake adaptation for the blind, with graphics also, and I played it against my brother and another sighted friend.

What they basically did was they snuck up from behind and they shot us from behind and we had no chance with the mechanics of the game, as it was implemented, to detect that and counter the attack in time.

So, do you think there are games which could be less playable for us in the eSports context?

(Svenja): Yes. If you really have that quick reaction, it could be that maybe…I've also seen in another game where that's a kind of, not shooter, but a fighting game, where also someone blind competed in such a case.

But yes, so for myself I would say no. But for others, maybe, yes.

Street Fighter, was it?

(Paweł): Ah, yes. Street Fighter and Mortal Kombat, everlasting dispute. Which one is better?

Yes, you mentioned having watched other blind streamers and blind gamers, do you think the community of blind gamers is big already?

Do you have a lot of people to discuss blindness-specific issues in gaming with? Or do you find yourself rather alone or not very well-supported on the scene?

(Svenja): Relative to other communities, it's not that big, but I always have someone. So, for most games, there is at least a community where we can talk to.

But yes, it's not that huge, but the blind community is also not that huge in relation.

(Paweł): And the streaming part of your activity, do you find that the platforms you use, Twitch; just to shout out what is your Twitch, what is your name on Twitch so people can call you?

(Svenja): My Twitch channel is SvenjaDev, dev coming from developer.

(Paweł): Do you find the platforms accessible?

(Svenja): Mostly yes. Last week I have tested this "Streaming Together" feature Twitch has, where you can stream together with someone else and both can share their chat also. That could be improved.

Many people also stream on YouTube. I don't know how accessible that is because I don't see YouTube as a streaming platform because when I joined YouTube, it was 2008 and it was just a video platform. So yes, it needs to improve, but that's with everything that's video related, I think.

(Philip): I know that there are some blind YouTube streamers. I've heard of a few.

(Paweł): I think it's much easier now also with software like Open Broadcasting Studio where you just use one interface to manage all your streaming needs, right?

I mean, you have one familiar interface and you connect all your streaming services. At this one point, it's apparently tedious to set up if you're completely blind. But is that what you're using?

(Svenja): Yes, that's what I'm using. I could not figure out yet what to use for multi-streaming because there are also people streaming on Twitch and YouTube at the same time, or Twitter or TikTok, something like that.

But yes, I also always wonder how they do it because OBS itself can't do that, I think, but there will be other programs that can do that, I think.

(Paweł): And you're able to manage everything at the same time, as in when you play and your viewers are sending you donations or chats, messages. You're able to respond to that in time.

(Svenja): Yes. Sometimes if the chat blows up, I lose part of my concentration because I try hard to not miss any message, but that is very rare that happens.

(Paweł): Yes. It's maybe hard for sighted streamers too, I guess. Especially when the viewers are very active.

So a final question to you, Philip. Again, since you've developed games and you're still developing software, we were talking about modding, we were talking about libraries implementing different standard procedures to cater for most gaming scenarios.

How do you think artificial intelligence, especially now with generative models coming up and doing some of the heavy lifting, how likely is it that this will accelerate the accessibility of gaming in general?

Do you see it as a potential deal breaker and a breakthrough in the sense? Or will it not make as much of an impact as we think it will?

(Philip): Well, I mean, let me say first that I, like most other people, cannot predict exactly where we're going to be six months from now, or even three months from now, the AI field is moving so incredibly rapidly that I think it's impossible to predict with any kind of certainty.

However, my experience thus far over the last years or so has been that if you try to talk to these large language models about blind accessibility, all they'll do is they'll come up with some cheerful sounding idea.

Like "let's play a sound". When that happens, I mean, that if you have a "beep" when this happens, then you will know. I mean, it's very rudimentary, put it that way. And that's, I think, it's simple. It's because, you know, there's not a whole lot of information about how to make a game truly accessible for blind users out there.

I mean, these LLMs large language models, they go based on what they've been trained on, right? And the amount of training data is minimal. I mean, we don't really have a lot of accessible games that are open-source that it could have learned from. And you know, we don't have that many accessible games, period.

So, I mean, open-source ones are even fewer. So, I think, you know, if you tried to sort of prime one of these large language models with all of the accessibility knowledge that you possess, then maybe they could assist in that endeavour, like if you're trying to make something accessible and you already know a lot of the theory, like how it's done and examples of how to solve certain problems, you can either fine tune or just give a massive prompt with instructions of how to do accessibility.

And with that in mind, maybe the LLM could give you a hand, but I guess the key issue is if you already know it, then you might not need the LLM as much because you already know how to do it.

However, I do think that over time, you know it will be a good tool because I think the idea of sort of custom tailored LLMs for each individual user is going to become more prominent. And given that, I think, if you're a developer who is interested in accessibility, you might be able to use it as a tool.

I mean, right now, I don't think it's that great at it, but I think, depending on how quickly it happens, I don't know- but I think it could certainly be something that could help, but we're just not there quite yet, I would say.

(Paweł): So, what I am seeing for now definitely is an explosion of mods. So many more people are modding games, I guess using AI, so the mods are probably a hundred percent or to large extent vibe-coded, and people seem to be playing that and enjoying that. So, I guess it's what how you said it: you need to know what you expect from this thing to come out.

So, you will not tell it: "Make this game accessible for me". You most likely will have to tell it: "Introduce sound cues for when my HP, my health parameters drop below; this and that percentage. Or whenever I drop my weapon and I don't know how to locate it, so then you can let me know where it's lying, so I can go and pick it up.

But yes. We'll have to see.

(Philip): I mean, vibe coding in itself is a bit of a minefield, right? I'm not really a fan of vibe coding as a phenomenon.

(Svenja): Same here.

(Philip): Yes. I mean, simply because you cannot, if you're not a developer yourself, you cannot judge the quality of whatever code the LLM writes.

And usually there are gaping holes and bugs, and especially if you're doing anything that might have sensitive information attached to it, it's a big no, you don't touch that.

(Svenja): If you know what you're doing and you can prove what the LLM did, it can help you, but you can't just say: "Do it for me", so it's like a project manager who talks to his steps and says… You need to formulate the requirements before it can even do something.

(Philip): Why does just remind me of sprint planning meetings anyway?

(Svenja): Yes, that's it. But that's how it is, and in the end…

(Paweł): I've seen some of those vibe-coded projects where somebody, through very generic instructions at the model, the first proof of concept was very promising, but the deeper you go and the more features you stuck on top of each other, the more unstable the base becomes, and then the code is, by the time you start having serious problems, the base is so unstable.

Neither a human nor an LLM can untangle this cold spaghetti that you've created.

(Philip): Yes, I mean, that's also because the LLMs have a limited context window, and even if you're within the context window, if you've got a large one, there's still deterioration in the quality of responses when the context window grows, even if you're within the intended limits of the model manufacturer.

(Paweł): OK. So we are nearing the close of the interview. Thank you so much for being here. Before we let you go, would you like to shout out some of your socials or any projects you're working on? Svenja, anything you would like to shout out for?

(Svenja): As I always say, thanks for having me and yes, you can come to my Twitch channel. Even if you hear me talking in German, you can always write something and I will answer you. So, the stream is not only in German. But, yes, most of my audience is German, so I mostly speak it.

But, yes, if you come in and say "Hi", I'll gladly answer you. Yes, you can ask anything. I won't judge you. That's always something that many blind people have: "Oh, don't ask this question".

I'm just like "You can ask everything". I can decide if I want to answer.

(Paweł): It's also a myth about the gaming community that, in order to discuss with gamers, you have to be professional already. So glad to hear that you're not like that. You're newbie friendly, that's good.

(Svenja): I'd shoot myself in my own foot if I did that, so…

(Paweł): Great to hear that. Philip, anything you'd like to mention?

(Philip): Yes, I used to develop games, but it was quite a few years ago. The last thing I released was actually 10 years ago. So, I feel old. But, you know, nowadays I work with text-to-speech. I build custom voices and I released a couple of voices for Windows last year for Sappy.

Yes, you can, if you're interested in that kind of thing, that's available at Blastbay.com. And yes, I do custom voices, custom freelance work in that sort of field. I'm also developing new products as we speak. So, yes, working all the time.

(Paweł): The voices will definitely be useful in one or another game that you might be playing if you need a very nice voice to guide you from the beginning.

(Philip): Yes, I mean, these voices can be used by so, you know, they're Sappy voices, right? Any program on Windows that is written to talk to the Sappy voice…

(Svenja): Something for NVDA.

(Philip): Yes, exactly. It works for NVDA. It works with custom applications as well, such as a game. If they have, you know, if they've implemented Sappy support, it'll just work.

(Paweł): Svenja Ottawa and Phillip Bennefall were my guests today. Thank you so much again and take care. Bye.

(Philip): Thank you. Thank you for the invitation. It's been a pleasure.

(Svenja): Bye.

(Paweł): So, Neven, have you ever tried playing any computer game? Like anything? mean, it doesn't have to be very advanced, maybe some quiz or scrabble, a word game, card game, anything like that. Have you ever tried that?

(Neven): No, actually, I haven't. When I was young, I played chess and then it did start with some kind of computer, but it was not on a computer at that time. It was like a specific computer device and then you could play chess on that, which was kind of boring, I thought, because I liked the interaction, live interaction. And then I guess I didn't bite into the new development with computer games.

So no, I have to admit. And it was very interesting to listen to all this knowledge which was shown here today. So, thank you very much for that.

(Paweł): Anytime.

Correspondent' section: Austria

[Music]

(Paweł): But then we move over to our correspondent section.

(Neven): Exactly. And Nacho, you have been very kind and decided to make this interview for us.

(Nacho): Yes, of course. This is why I said earlier on that I would stay in action for this episode as you already introduced in the episode's introduction, Neven.

For this episode, we had the chance to talk to Markus Wolf from our Austrian Member, the President of the Austrian Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted.

Interview with Markus Wolf, President of the Austrian Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted

(Nacho): let's start with screen readers because I actually know that you're in the process of building up a network of screen reader testers. And you're in the middle of a program to training screen reader testers to build a network of testers of those devices. How did you come up with the idea of creating that network of screen reader testers? How do you go about it? And how many people do you currently have in your network?

(Markus): Yes, thank you. The screen reader testers is a project that developed through a certain need. We have a unit for accessibility and that unit started with the built environment. But in past years, we have noticed that digital accessibility has become more and more important, companies and organisations need to get their websites and apps accessible.

But they are often uncertain on how to do so. What do they really need to do? We decided to get volunteers trained, members of ours who are interested, get them trained to identify certain problems, have knowledge about standards and be able to identify solutions for companies and organisations that need to get their websites more accessible.

So, we trained them, we have a certified accessibility trainer. She coordinates the training and we had about 20 people trained. These 20 people are the network we have throughout Austria. And after the training was completed, they can be, let's say, implemented to advise companies and organisations on how to get certain problems solved.

After the training, the issue is not closed. This network has regular meetings to be up to date, to have an exchange. And it's something that I think is one of the issues on which we can really look with a lot of pride. It's has worked. It is something that has put us in a situation where we are more visible in society and where companies and organisations can come to us and get some service from us. And I think it's working well.

(Nacho): Interesting. Apart from working on digital accessibility, you are also currently participating in an EU project to enhance accessibility in mobility, which is called Danova and Danova next.

In general, why is it important for your organisation to be part of EU projects? What are the difficulties that you have found in carrying out such projects? And, in general, what have you achieved with Danova?

(Markus): We have a division for international cooperation in our organisation and one of the main aims is to do international projects. Why do we do so? Because doing international projects allows us to be more connected.

I think the most important or the most difficult thing about doing EU projects is getting into the project. It's sometimes not very easy to do the application and really get the project, but once one is in, I think it's very worthwhile. Danova is a project, it's actually a second part now already called Danova Next, which focuses on accessibility in mobility environments in the Danube region in different countries.

Danova, the first, had nine countries with 14 organisations participating. Danova Next has 11 countries with 16 participants. And the aim in the first one was to do a mapping of best practice solutions for mobility, and it covers all areas from airports to train stations, to bus stops and, well, actually everything.

Long-distance travel, as well as short-distance travel. The main aim was to learn from each other, and I think that is something very important. First of all, learn from each other and then be connected, be connected for possible future projects where we work on different solutions.

(Nacho): Now, I would like to address another subject that you're currently working on at your organisation. And that's the importance of PR in getting a bottle deposit refund system to be accessible for all. You have actually a very strong division on PR. Have you managed to get the system changed so that it is accessible? How have the actions of your PR division performed so far?

(Markus): I think it's important for our organisation to have a very strong PR department. Why? Because getting our message out to the public. Have we managed to solve all problems through the PR division? No. And one of the examples is the bottle refund system, which has been in place in Austria for a year now.

It was rolled out in January, I think, 2025, and it was not accessible for blind and partially sighted users. It wasn't accessible for other people with disabilities neither. What we did do is get this message out strongly to the people involved to the general public. And we were very successful.

We got into the main newspapers. We were even mentioned on television, and I think the general public who now takes their bottles back every day to the supermarket down the road where they have these machines is aware that it is not accessible to everyone and that solutions are still needed.

We are working at getting it changed. Through the PR department, we have managed to have accessibility problems solved in other areas. We are still working on this one. The bottle refund system is not accessible yet, but I'm quite confident that with enough pressure and through the PR department, we also communicate with other organisations, getting other organisations to work together with us, build up pressure.

Show the public something has to be done, this, which is not inclusive, is extremely important for us. And I think this is one of the issues that has kept us busy quite a lot last year, but through which we have really become visible as an organisation as well. We try being visible and I think this is one of the issues that has really furthered that cause.

(Nacho): Indeed, indeed. Dear Marcus, thank you very much for your time. It was a pleasure talking to you at "EBU in Action".

(Markus): Thank you very much for having me.

End of interview with Markus Wolf, President of the Austrian Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted

(Neven): OK, so the time has come for us to wrap up this episode. I would like to say thank you very much to both you, Nacho and Paweł, for this great episode. It was very interesting.

(Nacho): Yes, thank you very much, Neven. It was great to listen to you again and I would also like to congratulate everybody for the excellent

accessible gaming interview; it was very insightful for me. And, of course, it was also a pleasure to interview the President of our Austrian member, Markus Wolf.

(Paweł): Yes, also, thanks for me, Neven. Thanks for hosting yet another episode with me, the first one this year. Hopefully many more to come. Greetings to all of our listeners. We hope you enjoyed it.

[Music]

(Neven): Great pleasure speaking to you. And before we go, we have also, as usual, a heartfelt thank you to our very important sound master, Emiel Cornelisse in the Netherlands, for his invaluable work behind the scenes. He's making the episode possible by all this great work he's doing with the sound. So, thank you for that.

And well, if you have enjoyed this episode today, please subscribe to "EBU in Action" on your favourite podcast platform. You can also rate us there, give us five stars so we feel that we are doing a great job.

And also, if you would like to learn more about the European Blind Union or you would like to share some thoughts with us, all the contact details will be in the show notes and we would love to hear from you.

So, by this, thank you from all of us. Bye bye.

(Voiceover: "EBU in Action" is co-funded by the European Union).

END OF EPISODE