Iberoamerican Observatory of Web Accessibility

A Benchmarking and Educative Tool

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Abstract. The web content accessibility guidelines (WCAG) were first published 15 years ago. Since then, there has been a lot of progress in web accessibility, but much work is still needed to reach good levels of accessibility. It is therefore important to measure the degree of accessibility of current websites and the rate of improvement. There have been several studies on the implementation of web accessibility in Europe and the world, but such studies are unstable, with a methodology and sample that changes from year to year. The Iberoamerican Observatory presented in this paper aims to correct this situation, coordinating the work of the observatories of the different participating countries, so that all use the same methodology and a consistent sampling and data structure. Thus, results can be compared within the same country and with the other countries of the region.

Keywords: Web Accessibility, Review, Benchmarking, Monitoring.

1 Introduction

In 2014 we celebrate 25 years of the web, and 15 of the publication of WCAG 1.0 (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) [1] that indicate how web content has to be to provide equal access to all users, including persons with disabilities.

The WCAG have become an internationally accepted standard as the basis of accessibility legislation in most countries [2] and version 2 (WCAG 2.0) [3], published in 2008, has also been published as the ISO / IEC 40500:2012 standard [4]. However, evidence indicates that neither the regulations nor the existing standards are being properly implemented in most websites, which still present significant barriers for users with and without disabilities.

Studies on the implementation of web accessibility criteria in Europe and the world are published regularly (i.e. [5,6]), but such studies are partial and unstable, with methodologies and sampling changing from year to year. The Iberoamerican Observatory aims to correct this situation, coordinating the work of observatories of the
participating countries, so that all use the same methodology and consistent sampling and data structures. Thus, results can be compared within the same country and with the other countries of the region. In addition, the evolution over time can also be measured.

The Observatory will serve a dual purpose. On the one hand, it will provide clear and precise information about the evolution over time of the conformance to the subset of success criteria and sufficient techniques that can be automatically checked (not only showing accessibility errors but also highlighting good practices). On the other hand, it will fulfil a pedagogical function, as it will provide those in charge of each country’s websites with specific guidelines on how to check for and repair the errors found, based on the combination of an internal communication system and outreach public activities.

2 Related Work

In America’s Spanish-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries, large scale accessibility monitoring projects are hard to find. In Spain, there are various observatories for IT [7], disability [8] and Public Administration [9]. One example is the e-Government Website Accessibility Observatory, set up in 2010 by the General Directorate for the Promotion of e-Government. The activity of this Observatory ended in 2011 and its reinstatement for 2014 is currently being considered. Unfortunately, most of the observatories do not publish information enough about their investigations, or they publish sector-specific studies that do not have continuity over time.

In Portugal, Unidade Acesso of Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia [10] has been monitoring Public Administration websites since 2006, but without releasing the benchmarking directories. This activity has resulted in the publication of four reports about the Portuguese Central Public Administration in 2002, 2003, 2008 and 2010.

Out of the Iberoamerican area, the most immediate antecedent is the European Internet Accessibility Observatory (EIAO), founded in September 2004 and active until 2008. In that year they published a report with their results [11]. EIAO was part of a cluster of European projects on web accessibility, WAB CLUSTER [12]. After EIAO, the eGovMon [13] project was carried out in the Nordic countries, and it is intended to be continued in the European Internet Inclusion Initiative project (EIII) [14].

Some other projects have been carried out, such as SMART 2008-0066 "Monitoring eAccessibility in Europe" [15]. This activity was commissioned by the European Commission as a follow-up to the study "Measuring Progress of eAccessibility in Europe" (MeAC) [16], developed during the period 2006 - 2008. One of the goals of the SMART 2008-0066 activity is to draw up an annual report, taking as a starting point the data provided by the MEAC study. The results have been two reports published in 2010 and 2011.

Recently, a Study on Assessing and Promoting E-Accessibility [6] was published. It is a study prepared for the European Commission DG Communications Networks, Content & Technology, whose main aims were to describe the extent of e-accessibility across the EU27 countries and some third countries, as well as the policy efforts that have emerged in this area.