

Notes for presentation Mia Ahlgren Swedish Disability Federation
(presented live, not recorded)

Right2participate – Accessible Online Meetings

Case: Political participation Almedalen

To participate effectively in political and public life, we need to be able to access digital communication and media content. Today everybody with a mobile phone and an internet connection can broadcast an event like this one live to the rest of the world. If we use social media like twitter in combination with the live web cast we can interact and get feedback in real time. These communication tools are increasing rapidly – but most of the web casts are not accessible even if you have access to internet. With live subtitles, these events could also be translated to other languages and reach more people at the same time.

In 2010 we had general elections in Sweden. Persons with disabilities are seldom participating or mentioned in political debates on National TV. So the Swedish Disability Federation as a national umbrella for 39 DPO:s usually invites politicians to events that we organize ourselves. But only the people present in the room will be able to take part and listen to the debates, that is usually taking place in the capital. At least 2 million people with disabilities in Sweden plus their friends and families are not participating in election public debates. In 2010 we decided to make live web casts on 3 occasions. But six years ago nobody in Sweden had produced a web cast with live subtitles. We made a deal with an innovative supplier to try to improve accessibility. This became an enjoyable, learning and success story that we could use in our advocacy work.

With easy access to users with hearing impairments we tried out prototypes step by step. The final event took place during the political week in Almedalen on the island of Gotland. This is an annual event when people from political parties, private and public stakeholders get together to discuss politics and public issues of a great variety for a week, with thousands events. We had made amazing progress, so we invited the government and Public Service Broadcasters and showed them the results.

We could show live subtitles and sign language interpretations done remotely with a cost effective solution, and we

demonstrated a solution for closed sign language where the user could change the size and place of the interpreter and switch it on and off.

This was six years ago. Since then progress has been made on occasions. User generated platforms have increased possibilities to add subtitles and multiple images to your live web cast. But there are very few trying them out. Public Service Broadcasters in Sweden are still not able to produce accessible live webcasts. If a small NGO can do it, why not others? Lets make it work. Lets think that for every new occasion to have the ambition to try to make an improvement and share the knowledge.

So that broadcasters and institutions under the UN, the EU, national governments, parliaments and municipalities can show the way and make accessibility and active participation the standard solution for communication.