Periodic Reporting for period 2 - WAI-Tools (Advanced Decision Support Tools for Scalable Web Accessibility Assessments)

Berichtszeitraum: 2019-05-01 bis 2021-01-31

Zusammenfassung vom Kontext und den Gesamtzielen des Projekts
WAI-Tools Project, Advanced Decision Support Tools for Scalable Web Accessibility Assessments, drove innovation with sustainable impact on web accessibility evaluation and repair through:

- Building on on-going international standardisation efforts on web accessibility conformance testing;
- Ensuring consistent accuracy across automated, semi-automated, and manual accessibility testing;
- Pursuing leading edge technologies for website testing, including dynamic and mobile applications;
- Leveraging the existing market of commercial, free, and open source accessibility evaluation tools;
- Demonstrating large-scale accessibility monitoring built on open standards and open source tools.

WAI-Tools achieved this by carrying out key efforts in the vendor-neutral environment of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). WAI-Tools drew together expertise from industry, public bodies, and research to develop common understanding of web accessibility requirements in exchange with the existing community and networks of the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI).

WAI-Tools maximised the impacts while minimising the use of project resources by building on existing open source tools from leading market vendors, rather than investing in new and less mature tools. WAI-Tools deployed testing tools in existing accessibility monitoring observatories and explored the integration of such differing national approaches using open data, to demonstrate easier and more cost effective assessment of web accessibility requirements, at scale.

All project results and accompanying resources are available from: https://www.w3.org/WAI/Tools/

Project efforts resulted in the following outcomes:

- Developed 72 test rules following the W3C Accessibility Conformance Testing (ACT) Rules Format 1.0. These test rules were implemented in the open source engines from Siteimprove, Deque, and University of Lisbon, and were validated on real websites. They were reviewed by the broader community involved in the W3C work on Accessibility Conformance Testing (ACT). 11 of these test rules have been formally published by W3C and will be part of the supporting documents for the upcoming WCAG 2.2 and more of the developed test rules are in the pipeline for formal W3C publication. The test rules are available from the W3C ACT Rules Community Group (CG): https://act-rules.github.io/rules/

- Development of an open data format for reporting test results, to facilitate the exchange and the comparison of results from different implementations of test rules (automated tools and manual methodologies). This open data format is based on the W3C Evaluation and Report Language (EARL) 1.0 using a JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) serialisation. This data format is currently implemented by Siteimprove, Deque, and the University of Lisbon, as well as by other vendors outside the project. It was implemented in the W3C WCAG-EM Report Tool to support manual methodology developers. This open data format is publicly available from the W3C GitHub repository: https://github.com/w3c/earl

- Development of authoritative guidance from W3C on developing accessibility statements, that is accompanied by a generator tool to help website owners to create accessibility statements. This guidance and generator tool highlights some of the requirements for public bodies in Europe that adhere to the EC Directive on Web Accessibility. At the same time, it is equally suitable for other public and entities who may not be required to provide accessibility statements. This resource is provided
Helping to establish and support a community around W3C work on Accessibility Conformance Testing (ACT), to help ensure sustainability of this effort beyond the lifetime of this project. This includes actively reaching out to the community and engaging in dialog and exchange. Foremost, this includes developers of automated tools and manual methodologies but also researchers and policy makers as well as user organisations relevant to the project. The project carried out “Open Meetings” with the community (including physical and virtual), contributed research papers, and participated in numerous events to promote the work of the project and the W3C work on ACT.

The WAI-Tools Project aspired to the ambitious goal of advancing the entire field of web accessibility evaluation and repair, and thereby help advancing web accessibility generally from the bottom up. Specifically, WAI-Tools aimed to address many of the core criticisms from researchers and practitioners regarding web accessibility evaluation and repair tools by building a foundation of transparency and trust. This provided a common basis and platform for building innovative products and services that advance the current state-of-the-art, which is essential to help make the web accessible to people with disabilities. Some of the specific achievements beyond the State of the Art include:

- Promote common understanding of accessibility – by documenting test procedures in form of ACT Rules, the project contributes towards more transparency and openness in web accessibility testing. Implementation, validation, and comparison of these test rules in the consensus process of W3C leads to more consistent understanding and interpretation of the underlying accessibility requirements. The WAI-Tools Project contributed to an initial set of 72 rules to help initiate this broad international effort.
- Advance web accessibility evaluation methods – by providing open, reliable, and authoritative test rules, developers of web accessibility evaluation tools and methodologies can focus their effort on innovation beyond the current state-of-the-art. For example, recent advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning can help increase the level of automation in testing, provided that vendors can rely on a common interpretation of the requirements rather than needing to continually re-define their own interpretation without authoritative guidance from W3C.
- Improve interoperability in web accessibility – by ensuring consistent results from different tools and methodologies, website owners are not locked to particular vendors. Results from different sources and over time become more comparable, ensuring a more open eco-system for the Web. At the same time, developers of tools and methodology are continually encouraged to innovate, to maintain their customers and address their growing demand for interoperability.
- Contribute to open data on web accessibility – also by ensuring consistent results from different sources and over time, more comparable data on web accessibility can be made broadly available. For example, to support longitudinal and large-scale surveys across entire regions, such as the EU.
- Improve accessibility for people with disabilities – by improving accessibility testing tools and methodology, ultimately people with disabilities will benefit from a more accessible Web.
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