

Creating Effective Customer Policies for Disabled People in the Mainstream Private Market

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others

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Abstract

This thesis explores inequality and exclusion of disabled people as customers in the European single market and identifies potential causes of market inaccessibility and opportunities for creating more effective customer policies. The study adapted the concept of the 'travel chain' and examined disabled customers' experience in acquiring customer information, traveling to the shop, navigating retail premises, and interacting in a shop. While the capitalistic nature of and processes in the market prohibit customers from fully exercising customer freedom and choice, for disabled people, customer participation is even more difficult and restrained. Putting forward the experiences of people with impairments gathered through mystery shopping and semi-structured interviews (in Lithuania and the UK) formed the foundation of this research. It was augmented by stakeholders of the European single market for information and communication technology products as well as civil society's insights gathered through covert observations and semi-structured interviews. This stage of the research investigated the stakeholders' actual lifeworld regarding disabled customers and market accessibility, power relations among them and access to the formulation of discourse in the public sphere. The presented work has been influenced by the social model of disability, which, combined with Habermas' theory of communicative action, provided deeper understanding into multiple levels (global, regional and national) of the social, political and attitudinal factors shaping business, civil society and disabled customers' experiences and realities.

A range of overlapping restrictions emerged within discussions about shopping experience challenging legal construction of disabled people as 'vulnerable' consumers because of their impairments. They demonstrate how disabled customers' exclusion is shaped by ableism, as well as the state and business' focus on non-disabled citizens and customers. The role played by business and civil society's notions of and ascribed values to disabled customers and market accessibility has been relatively overlooked in the existing disability literature. As well, there has been a focus on the 'social dimension' of this issue within the European Union policy context rather than the single market aspect. This study therefore directly addresses the single market dimension and reveals significant tensions between global, regional and national policy instruments. It has also shown how policy frameworks within which the actors operate and certain business' practices often create further disabling lifeworld in terms of market accessibility and disabled customer equality, in addition to shaping

unequal power relations and eliminating certain actors and disabled customers from accessing the formulation of the discourse in the public sphere. This limits availability of accessible products, links product accessibility features with individuals' 'accessibility needs', creates division between disabled and non-disabled ICT users and customers, forbids stakeholders from creating comprehensive and quality knowledge and additionally prevents knowledge innovation and its implementation. Taken together, this all inhibits the assurance of disabled peoples' rights established in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. By highlighting these issues, the work here argues that cooperative action is needed to address the problem and raises questions about what types of policy framework the European Union and national governments should introduce in order to encourage the private market to take into account aspects of accessibility for disabled customers.

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List of abbreviations

ADA – American Disability Act

BSA – British Sociological Association

BSH – Brand Specific ICT Shop

BSI – British Standard Institute

CA – Communicative action

CESCR – Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

CRPD – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

Committee – Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Council – European Council

DPO – Disabled People’s Organisation

DREAM – International training network Disability Rights Expanding Accessible Markets

DTCA – Direct to Consumer Advertising

EA – Equality Act

EAA – European Accessibility Act

EC – European Commission

EP – European Parliament

ESC – Economic and Social Council (UN)

ESR – Early Stage Researcher

ESRC – Economic and Social Research Council

ESO – European Standardisation Organisation

EU – European Union

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GPA – German Psychiatric Association

IBR – International ICT Business representatives

ICT – Information Communication Technologies

IDPO – International Disabled People’s Organisation

IL – Independent Living

LŽNS – Lietuvos Žmonių su Negalia Sąjunga
MS – Member States
NBSH – Non-Brand Specific ICT Shop
NSCP – National Strategy for Consumer Protection (LT)
OFT – Office of fair Trading (UK)
OMC – Open Method of Coordination
PA – Personal Assistant
PACs – Professionals Allied to Community
PAMs – Professionals Allied to Medicine
TRC – Technical Regulations for Construction (LT)
SME – Small and Medium Enterprises
SP – State Parties
UCD – User Centred Design
UD – Universal Design
UPIAS – the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation
US – United States
WHO – World Health Organisation

INTRODUCTION

This thesis sets out to understand the diverse experiences and perspectives of disabled customers, industry and civil society, and how their interaction could create more effective customer policies for disabled people in the mainstream private market. This is important because the intensifying link between being a customer and a citizen (Bauman, 1988, 2007) and inaccessibility of the mainstream private market (Baker, 2006, 2007) questions the issues of people with impairments' experiences and roles played as customers and citizens. Even though the interest in disabled people's shopping and customer participation is emerging (Baker, 2006, Burnett and Baker, 2001, Cheng, 2002, Kaufman-Scarborough, 1998, 1999, 2001, Ray and Ryder, 2003), the area remains under-researched. The majority of studies focus on barriers faced by people with a certain impairment type, either in retail premises or when interacting with shop assistants. While some authors question the deeper roots of disabling practices (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1998, 2001, Kaufman-Scarborough and Menzel Baker, 2005), the majority of the studies address empirical rather than actual and real domains of reality as suggested by Bhaskar (1975). Furthermore, industry and civil society's experiences and perspectives regarding disabled people's customer rights and market accessibility remains an under-researched and hidden knowledge domain. Respectively, this research adopts a multiple perspective approach, bringing together experiences and perspectives of disabled people, industry and civil society. It firstly aims to investigate and describe disabled customers' experiences beyond the market exchange process in the shop. It then seeks to detect perspectives, interactions and experiences of the EU industry and civil society that may shape disabled customers' experiences, and which should be considered aiming to introduce greater accessibility to the EU private market.

The necessity to address the aforementioned issues was recognised by the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006), that positions access to customer goods and services in the private sector as essential for full participation in society. Specifically, article 9.2b requires states 'to ensure that private entities that offer facilities and services which are open or provided to the public take into account all aspects of accessibility for persons with disabilities'. Recalling the Convention's focus on Information Communication Technologies (ICT) (art.9.2h), this thesis focuses on the consumer market for ICT products as an example of the dynamics, although with wider implications for other markets. It positions ICTs as a case study of a product and uses them as an

example of purchasing an item, leaving its technical features aside. The present research was funded as part of the EU Marie Curie Initial Training Network 'Disability Rights Expanding Accessible Markets' (DREAM). It is underpinned by the social model of disability and Habermas' theory of communicative action. Habermas' history of thought and his focus on Europeanisation, political, legal, economic and philosophical relationships between the state, market and an individual, allows the use of social model analysis with a materialist approach and multiple justification of different levels of barriers. The chosen theoretical perspective frees disabled people's customer experience from the vacuum of an individual. It sheds light on multiple levels of barriers and potentials, shaped by political decisions and processes, and the nature of the capitalist market. This study focuses on how the ICT industry and civil society's lifeworld, access to the discourse and power relations shape disabled customers' shopping experiences beyond the actual exchange process in a shop and may lead towards more accessibility in the EU private market.

General outline of the study

One in six EU citizens is recognised as disabled and currently there are around eighty million disabled people across Europe (COM (2010) 636, final). Growing number of individuals with impairments (WHO, 2011) and the intensifying relation between being a citizen and a customer (Bauman, 1988, 2007, Gabriel and Lang, 1995) positions access to and equal participation in retail market as an important element for full participation in society (CRPD, 2006). Shopping, being a form of participation in the market, provides individuals with a possibility to exercise choice and control (Bettman et al., 1991), engage with social networks and communities (Miller et al., 1998), may be a form of leisure (Graham et al., 1991) and a means of shaping and communicating identity (Dholakia et al., 1995, Andreoli, 1996), among others. While usually non-disabled individuals are relatively free to engage in the customer role, disabled people are often eliminated from barrier-free and equal participation in the shopping process (MacDonald et al., 1994, Burnett and Paul, 1996, Cheng, 2002, Baker et al., 2007, Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999, 2001). This study, therefore, goes beyond actual seller-customer exchange interaction in retail premises. Even though it recognises the growing importance of online shopping (Häubl and Trifts, 2000, Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2001, Limayem et al., 2000), it focuses on shopping process and experience in retail outlets and treats shopping as a holistic process and a chain that is experienced by each individual in a unique way. In such a context, accessibility of customer information, home and public environments,

public and private transport, external and internal shop environments, and shop assistants' awareness of disability and accessibility may play a part in shaping accessibility and equality of a disabled customer's participation.

Aiming to discover customers with impairments empirical experiences (Bhaskar and Danermark, 2006) and to reveal underlying mechanisms and processes (Blaikie, 2010, Proctor, 1998) that may shape them, the research was divided into two stages. First, it aimed to document shoppers with impairments' experiences, faced barriers and enablers, coping strategies and resilience practices, looking at different stages of the accessible shopping chain. It was important to include people with different types of impairment and to document their customer experiences in their own words. This allowed exploring diversity of experiences and perspectives, as well as a variety of barriers and enablers. Potential roots and underlying structures that shape disabled customers' empirical realities would be impossible to identify without investigating realities and perspectives of, and faced challenges and opportunities by the industry and civil society who seem to be key stakeholders in the process. Hence, the second stage of the research aimed to document notions, perspectives and values of regional and national ICT industries and civil society toward disabled people as customers; roles played by global, regional and national policies and legal instruments in shaping these perspectives; and the ways stakeholders, including disabled people, may engage into communication and cooperative innovation with regard to market accessibility. The revelation of empirical experiences and potential underlying structures was essential in aiming to identify disabled customers, and EU industry and civil society's perspectives and experiences that should be considered, in order to create effective customer policies for disabled people in the mainstream private market.

The following questions targeted different areas of possible actions and informed the focus of the study:

- What are the experiences of disabled people as customers in the mainstream private retail market and their perspectives toward accessibility?
- How do stakeholders of the European single market for information and communication technology products (ICTs) perceive disabled people as customers, and what factors shape their knowledge and positions?
- How do private business and civil society engage into communication and collaborative innovation to create more accessible market and more effective customer policies in the EU?

Research questions were investigated in a qualitative way, by employing a variety of methods. Additionally to methodological decisions and processes, conceptual perspectives were equally important and are addressed in the following discussion.

Conceptual perspectives

The social model of disability and Habermas' theory of communicative action are at the core of this research. Firstly, the individual model of disability and the role played by language in creating disabling experiences are addressed. The attention is then shifted to the social model of disability, its core concepts, and the idea of 'people-first language'. This is followed by a brief discussion on reasons behind choosing Habermas' theory of communicative action as another conceptual key-stone of the research.

Models of disability

The individual model of disability that is also known as the 'medical' model, perceives disabled people's experiences as a direct result of their impairments (Oliver, 1983). It portrays disability as a 'personal tragedy' (Oliver, 1990, Barnes et al., 1999) and positions people with impairments as 'abnormal' and weak individuals, who need sympathy (Brisenden, 1986) and have to be 'cured' or 'cared' for (Finkelstein, 1991). It converts disabled people into actors, dependent on non-disabled society members, professionals and the state (Barnes et al., 1999, Stone, 1984, Oliver, 1990). The latter usually responds by providing 'special' provision such as segregated schooling (Barton, 1997, 1995, 2004, Oliver and Barnes, 2010, Cook et al., 2001, Walker, 1993), special labour market (Gleeson, 1999, Airhart, 1987, Thornton and Lunt, 2006), housing (Clapham and Smith, 1990, Imrie, 2004c, Stewart et al., 1999) or accommodation in certain neighbourhoods (Eskytè, 2014). Such practice often leads to exclusion, segregation and stigma. Retail market also seem to be premised on the individual model, this being discussed in Chapter One. An important point to underline is that both the state and the market locate the problem of market' inaccessibility and disabled customers' exclusion ontologically within a person rather than within society, state's actions and business' practice.

For the purpose of the thesis it is important to address language roles in shaping disablement practices (Oliver, 1996, Mallett and Slater, 2014). While Bickenback (1993) notes that using appropriate and exact labels may provide professionals with a possibility to create and share similar

vocabularies and to improve communication, usually labels have a negative and disabling effect on people's everyday life (Auslander and Gold, 1999, Foreman, 2005, Blaska, 1993). For instance, Zola (1993) argues that language is not only a personal but also a political issue, enabling more powerful or privileged actors to keep others 'in place' and to take over the control of minorities' lives. Terminologies that are alive in narratives and mind set of policy makers, professionals, media and disabled people, often have a negative effect on attitudes toward people with impairments, foster stereotypes and portray them as vulnerable and dependent (Auslander and Gold, 1999, Pierce, 1998). Expressions and abridgements such as 'the disabled' or 'the blind' deny people's individuality and personality (Zola, 1993). Words such as 'unfortunate', 'suffering' and 'difficulty' (Byron et al., 2005) position disabled people as victims, poor or helpless and needing pity (Shakespeare, 2000). Likewise, usage of diagnoses may stigmatise and have a negative impact on individuals' participation in community and social networks (Penn and Nowlin-Drummond, 2001), and the term 'patient' may eliminate disabled people's activity and imply passivity (Oliver, 1996, Zola, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1993).

On the other side of the spectrum is the social model of disability that positions social structures as the main source of people with impairments' disadvantage and disablement. Being inspired by the Independent Living Movement in the US in the 1970s (Gillinson et al., 2005), the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) (UK) entrenched this alternative approach in the Fundamental Principles of Disability (UPIAS, 1976:3-4):

In our view, it is society which disables... impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society. To understand this it is necessary to grasp the distinction between the... impairment and the social situation, called 'disability', of people with such impairment.

In Oliver's terms (1983:23), the social model 'involves nothing more or less fundamental than a switch away from focusing on the physical limitations of particular individuals to the way the physical and social environments impose limitations upon certain groups or categories of people'. In such a context, while an impairment is an individual's physical feature, society's reaction to impairment (Morris, 1993), unequal power relations between disabled and non-disabled people (Barnes and Mercer, 2003, Campbell and Oliver, 1996) and social barriers and prejudice (Shakespeare, 1996) are the factors excluding, marginalising, oppressing and disabling people with

impairments. The social model positions disabled people as a socially oppressed group (Barnes and Mercer, 2003) and as 'collective victims of an uncaring or unknowing society rather than individual victims of circumstance' (Oliver, 1990:2). Hence, it provides a political and conceptual framework enabling tackling of collective oppression, rather than fixing, curing or adjusting separate individuals.

Despite the recognised importance, the social model is widely problematised by actors within and outside the disability movement (Crow, 1996, Terzi, 2004, French, 1993, Abberley, 1996). While there is no room here for a discussion of the raised concerns, for the purpose of the thesis it is worth noting that similarly to the individual model, in the social model context language plays an important role in shaping disabled people's representation and experiences. Some scholars advocate for 'people first language' (Auslander and Gold, 1999, Blaska, 1993, Foreman, 2005, Penn and Nowlin-Drummond, 2001, Zola, 1993) and the term 'people with disabilities'. As an example, Blaska (1993:27) notes that such phrasing 'demonstrates respect for people with disabilities by referring to them first as individuals, and then referring to their disability when it is needed'. In a similar vein, La Forge (1991) argues that such expressions secure one's individuality and personhood, and Zola (1993) emphasises that the preposition 'with' reflects ideology of the social model of disability and establishes a clear grammatical and figurative distinction between an individual and his/her disablement experiences. While the scholars make a valid point, this study uses the terms 'disabled people' and 'people with impairments'. Firstly, as Oliver and Barnes (1998:18) assert, 'the use of phrase 'people with disabilities' is unacceptable because it blurs the crucial distinction between impairment and disability'. Secondly, among a number of people criticising the 'people with disabilities' term, Titchkosky (2001) notes that it disconnects disability from social and political contexts and supports measurement of conditions of limitation and lack. She goes further and argues that 'disability is something that individuals have to deal with, but *only as individuals*. Disability is not something that individuals *are*, and no one needs to deal with people who have an identity as 'disabled people' – an oppressed minority group' (Titchkosky, 2001:136).

This research aims to document a variety of barriers, preventing people with impairments from accessible and equal participation as customers, and argues that their customer exclusion from the mainstream private market is shaped by external factors and structures. Hence, it seems legitimate to use the term 'people with impairment' and so to identify a variety of barriers and potentials, and to refer to them collectively as 'disabled people' as an oppressed customer minority group in the EU

market. The chosen phrasing neither negates people's abilities, nor positions impairments in front of the person. Indeed, it allows achieving more clarity in terms of identifying barriers and potentials for exercising customer rights. This is important, as such employment of language enables shaping and challenging the validity claims discussed by Habermas (1976, 1984, 1985) in a way which is more 'understandable' to the stakeholders involved in the process.

Communicative action theory

The decision to adapt Habermas' theory of communicative action is premised on several interrelated strands. First, since this research aims to explore disabled customers' experiences within the EU single market, Habermas' history of thought on the Union is particularly useful. His discussions are premised on concrete historical events, policy developments, and various time periods (Verovšek, 2012). He critically evaluates challenges and opportunities, and links these with national governments and EU citizens (Habermas, 2001). Despite awareness of the shortcomings of the EU, Habermas believes in the Union. He notes that political processes and developments that started after the ratification of the Treaty on European Union (1992) positioned the Union as an 'exemplary case' of 'democratic politics beyond the nation-state' (Habermas, 2001:88) and acts as a vehicle for social integration and common political culture (Habermas, 1999, 2001). Most importantly, he treats the EU as a tool that may provide citizens with an opportunity to 'assume influence upon the development of worldwide systematic operations through their own political public spheres and their own democratic content' (Habermas, 1994:165). This is particularly important to this research as such perspective recalls general principles of the CRPD and provides a framework for disabled people's participation and leadership as citizens and customers in the EU policy and market processes to emerge. The adaption of the theory enables identifying potential roots of customers' disablement and exclusion, laying in regional and national policy instruments and mechanisms, as well as detecting EU policy potentials in shaping an accessible EU single market.

Second, in the theory of communicative action Habermas interlinks state, market and individuals. This may be linked to Bhaskar's (1975) critical realist perspective, suggesting that reality is composed of three overlapping domains: empirical, actual and real. While the empirical domain can be experienced and observed by an individual directly (Bhaskar, 1975) in the actual domain the observed events occur with an individual

having no knowledge of them (Tsoukas, 1989). The real domain of reality is identified with 'underlying tendencies or mechanisms which may in a given situation give rise to events' (Partington, 2000:98). Hence, linking Habermas' work with the critical realist ontological position enables us to shed light on how market structures and procedures (real domain) may shape accessibility practices and policies, attitudes and interaction patterns between state, market and disabled people (actual domain), which are directly experienced by customers with impairments (empirical domain).

Hence, adapting Habermas' communicative action theory allows holding on to the social model and its materialist approach. It enables focusing on multiple levels (global, regional and national) of social, cultural, political and attitudinal factors, shaping business, civil society and disabled customers' experiences and realities. The theory is seen as an appropriate way to negotiate barriers and tensions between key stakeholders and disabled customers. It provides a framework within which they can share experiences, concerns and perspectives, shape common language and knowledge, establish and maintain social relationships and negotiate the common goal of accessibility and strategies for its achievement.

Thesis overview

The following chapters are structured in a way so as to answer the outlined research questions and to reveal perspectives, interactions and experiences of disabled customers, European industry and civil society that should be considered in aiming to create effective customer policies for disabled people in the mainstream private market.

Chapter One starts framing disabled customers' experience in the mainstream private market and their perspectives toward accessibility. The chapter begins by providing an overview of people with impairments' experiences in the market. It suggests that state and the market restrict and suspend disabled individuals' agency, independency and freedom. They are excluded from equal participation in retail market and are perceived as 'vulnerable' consumers. The chapter then adapts the concept 'travel chain' from Scandinavian disability and transport studies and introduces the notion 'accessible shopping chain', consisting of four stages: customer information, journey to a shop, navigation in retail premises, and interaction in a shop. It disconnects faced obstacles and customer vulnerability from individuals' impairments and suggests that state and market's actions and an ontology premised on ableism and the focus on non-disabled citizens and customers are important factors, shaping disabled customers' exclusion and inequality. It then suggests that

discrepancies in professionals, involved in different stages of an accessible shopping chain, professional ontologies and insufficient knowledge about and awareness of accessibility and disability contribute to shaping barriers and customer exclusion. It was suggested that disabled people's involvement as co-designers in all shopping chain stages, and positioning Universal Design (UD) as a founding conception behind the practice, may lead retail market towards more accessibility and transform disabled people from 'vulnerable' into equal customers.

Chapter Two sheds light on the framework provided in global, regional and national policy instruments for more accessible retail market to emerge. It suggests that public movements and public policy developments in the area of accessibility and rights via social claims brought the private market into the public sphere. It therefore demonstrates how law and public policy frames public discourse on private market as they relate to disabled customers and the EU, and so provides a platform for the accessible shopping chain to emerge. It suggests that even though global instruments introduce the discourse on rights and accessibility and aims to reconstruct disabled people from 'vulnerable' consumers to equal customers, the practice is not consistent across global, regional and national levels. Indeed, some tensions are present in these policy discourses. The chapter firstly sheds the light on the CRPD, concepts of accessibility and requirements for member states to provide a framework, within which private providers would take into account all aspects of accessibility. It then moves on to explore the way the EU responds to such obligations and notes that contrary to the Convention, at the regional level disabled people are constructed as 'vulnerable' customers and certain measures for market accessibility are premised on the individual model. The chapter then looks at national perspectives in Lithuania and the UK, and suggests that the perspectives are similar to regional practice.

Responding to the discussion in Chapters One and Two, Chapter Three argues that in aiming to create effective customer policies for disabled people in the mainstream private market, cooperative action is needed. It draws on Habermas' theory of communicative action and suggests that it can provide a useful insight and understanding to inform the way market accessibility and customer rights should be ensured. It sheds the light on three elements of the theory: lifeworld, access to the discourse and power relations. It builds on previous studies analysing the EU and the private market. It suggests that the EU may either provide a framework for more accessibility to emerge or may act as a system, preventing member states and business from creating common language and accessible customer experience. The chapter concludes with an overview of Open Method of Coordination (OMC). It suggests that located within a deliberative

democracy framework OMC may be employed as a tool, enabling stakeholders to access formation of the discourse in the public sphere and getting closer to meeting CRPD requirements.

Chapter Four outlines the research methodology and methods used to detect disabled customers' experiences and underlying mechanisms and structures that shape their exclusion from and inaccessibility of the EU single market. Sampling strategies (locations and participants) and qualitative data collection methods (mystery shopping, interviews and observations) are presented and justified. This is followed by a discussion on research challenges, interviews transcription, data analysis process and ethical considerations. Finally, the findings dissemination strategies are addressed. Although this research is premised on a relatively small amount of data and is initially concerned with ICT market, gathered knowledge can be applied to other retail markets.

Chapter Five begins the empirical journey of the research. It explores a micro level of disabled customers' experiences of and perspectives toward accessibility. These were gauged through mystery shopping and interviews with shoppers with different impairments in the UK and Lithuania. The analysis is framed within the concept of the 'accessible shopping chain', identified in Chapter One. The discussion suggests that despite differences in individual experiences, customers with impairments usually go through all stages but face different obstacles. A variety of attitudinal and physical barriers is outlined showing how they impede customer participation, and shape their exclusion and vulnerability. The chapter expands the discussion started in Chapter One and provides empirical evidence, supporting the claim that disabled customers' exclusion, vulnerability and inequality is shaped by ableism that respectively informs the state and markets' focus on non-disabled citizens and customers. In addition, a number of customers with impairments' resilience practices and coping strategies are presented. This suggests that people with impairments are not passive victims of market inaccessibility, and that their customer vulnerability and exclusion should be detached from their impairments and positioned as a result of oppressive practices of the state and the market.

Chapter Six begins developing some explanations for underlying mechanisms and processes that are potentially causing disabled customers' experiences outlined in Chapter Five. Drawing on Habermas' theory of communicative action and in particular on the lifeworld, and on the data gathered through observations of and interviews with regional and national ICT industry and civil society, it starts the discussion by outlining stakeholders' understandings and perspectives of disabled people as ICT customers and their 'accessibility needs'. It suggests that despite some

ontological differences and tensions, all stakeholders acknowledge the need for more accessibility in the EU private market. It suggests that notions, positions, values, norms and other elements constituting their lifeworld are often shaped by global, regional and national policies and business practices that either de-construct or strengthen disabled customers exclusion and vulnerability. The chapter provides unique and under-researched insights into empirically unobservable structures, potentially shaping accessibility of the EU single market.

Chapter Seven suggests that even though sometimes stakeholders inhabit the same lifeworld and may position accessibility as a common goal, their access to the formulation of the discourse in the public sphere may differ, as one may be oppressed by the other. Unequal power relations and elimination from contribution to shape the discourse forbid them from creating comprehensive knowledge about market accessibility and manifests in disabled customers' exclusion and vulnerability. The chapter firstly suggests that since business and civil society acknowledge the need for a more accessible private market, the majority of the stakeholders engage into communication to achieve this common goal. The chapter demonstrates that before engaging into communication with each other, the actors usually shape a unified position within a setting. It then discusses how they engage into communication with each other, what the interactions and communication strategies are and how the process is related with the achievement of common or strategic goals. It also links communication with awareness raising of accessibility and becoming alert to other stakeholders' realities. The chapter suggests that while international stakeholders have better opportunities to engage into innovative cooperation, national actors and disabled customers usually access the formulation of the discourse and knowledge creation through participation in different organisations' activities. However, their involvement is insufficient and often suppressed by power relations in industry and policy mechanisms and structures.

The concluding chapter summarises how the outlined research questions were addressed and provides key insights. It firstly discusses methodological contributions and advocates for more research on disabled people's access to retail markets, including the online environment. It then recapitulates disabled customers' experiences in the mainstream private market and their perspectives toward accessibility. It highlights the role played by ableism and the state and market's focus on non-disabled citizens and customers. It then discusses the way stakeholders of the European single market for ICT products perceive disabled people as customers, and what factors shape their knowledge and positions. It provides some insights into legal and market structures that through

shaping stakeholders' lifeworld, potentially mould disabled customers' realities. The chapter concludes by shedding the light on the way private business and civil society engage into communication and collaborative innovation to create more accessible markets and more effective customer policies in the EU. The discussion demonstrates that despite potential inhabitation of the same lifeworld, due to unequal power relations and focus on the achievement of strategic goals, stakeholders do not exploit the full potential to innovate knowledge on accessibility and do not engage into communicative action in the Habermasian way. It suggests that regional and national policy bodies should employ various incentives, founded on CRPD and encouraging stakeholders to engage into trans-regional and trans-sectorial communicative practice on accessibility, positioning disabled people as equally important stakeholders. The chapter concludes by suggesting the way forward aiming to ensure equal opportunities for all EU customers and society members.

Overall, the thesis demonstrates that disabled people do experience exclusion and vulnerability as customers of mainstream goods and services. Usually these experiences are moulded by external factors that do not depend on or can be managed by an individual. It also demonstrates that even though key stakeholders of the EU private market acknowledge the need for more accessibility and position it as a common goal, perspectives and actions oriented toward the achievement of strategic goals dominate in current practices and prevent the actors from engaging into communicative action, as suggested by Habermas. However, even if the ideal speech situation remains utopic, stakeholders, including disabled people, should continue their present communication practice, and the EU and national governments should provide a stronger framework for such interactions to occur.

CHAPTER ONE: DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE MARKET

Disabled people's exclusion and marginalisation in society is well documented. Alongside restricted participation in mainstream education (Barton, 1995, 1997, 2004, Cook et al., 2001, Polat, 2011, Buchner et al., 2014, Connor and Bejoian, 2014), limited access to health care (Iezzoni, 2011, Osborn et al., 2012, Ubido et al., 2002), family life (Anderson and Kitchin, 2000, Goodley and Tregaskis, 2006) and leisure (Devine and Dattilo, 2000, Tregaskis, 2003), people with impairments are not free and independent agents when choosing their position and activities in the market either as employers (Barnes, 1999, Barnes and Mercer, 2005, Ravaud et al., 1992) or as customers (Baker, 2006, Baker et al., 2007, Chan and Puech, 2014, Department of Trade and Industry, 2000, Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001, Nemeth and Del Rogers, 1981). Historic marginalisation of older and disabled customers was partly premised on limited spending power and market autonomy. Poor recognition as equal market participants manifests in the creation of special market niches (Office for Disability Issues, 2010), legal construction as 'vulnerable' customers (Mansfield and Pinto, 2008) and is evidenced through an inaccessible shopping process. Likewise, tensions in professionals' ontologies regarding accessibility (Pirie, 1979), insufficient user involvement in developing accessible environments and products (Imrie and Hall, 2001, Heylighen, 2008, Till, 2005) as well as business' focus on non-disabled customers contribute to excluding people with impairments from equal participation as customers of mainstream goods and services. After ratification of the CRPD, it has been argued that in order to achieve independent life and full participation in society, disabled people have to have equal access to the private market and equal rights as customers as non-disabled individuals have. Even though the overall situation is improving, equality of practice is still more rhetorical than actual. Aiming to understand the nature and the roots of the phenomenon, the present chapter sheds light on three key dimensions: disabled people's position in markets as customers; the shopping process as an accessible shopping chain; and concepts of accessibility, reasonable accommodation and universal design in the context of the shopping process.

The discussion starts by addressing certain changes in disabled people's position in markets, related with consumption and customer participation. Provided insights aim to grasp the rationale behind the current construction of disabled people as 'vulnerable' customers. It then proceeds

to discuss the shopping process as an accessible chain. It firstly sheds light on customer information, discusses the journey to the shop and then turns to navigation and interaction in retail premises. It suggests that society and industry's orientation towards non-disabled citizens and customers, accompanied by the discourse of ableism, are important factors shaping disabled customers' exclusion. This is followed by a discussion on how more accessibility could be introduced to retail markets. It explores the notion of accessibility, provides a critique of User Centred Design (UCD), and addresses ontological tensions in developers' professional realities and the reasoning for applying Universal Design (UD) principles in the retail premises.

1.1. Disabled people and markets: historical insights and current practice

This section provides an overview of disabled people's transition from passive consumers to active customers. It sheds the light on the way people with impairments were perceived as 'useless eaters', passive service users, valuable clientele of special markets for disability products and 'vulnerable' customers in the mainstream private market. While there is no theoretical or historical justification of the focus on these dimensions it is believed that, understanding changes over time and in different market types, may provide some insights into underlying structures that have been preventing disabled people from equal customer participation. The discussion starts by looking at the world wars and the interwar period that positioned people with impairments as wasters of national resources and measured their value by the ratio between consumption and production. It then addresses an ascribed and socially constructed role of passive recipients of rehabilitation goods and services before providing an overview of how personal budgets created new markets and market relationships that previously were inaccessible for disabled people. It then proceeds to discuss how special markets for disability products challenge dominant understanding of people with impairments as lacking autonomy market participants and positions them as valued customers. The section ends by a discussion on practices in current markets for mainstream goods and services. It suggests that private providers perceive people with impairments as 'vulnerable' customers and premise customer vulnerability on individuals' impairments.

1.1.1. Useless eaters

Disabled people's exclusion due to their 'deviance' from established norms, standards and expectations typical in/ to different history stages or social institutions and developments is well documented (Barnes, 1991, Priestley, 1997, Robert, 1995) dating back its origins in ancient Greece and Rome (Oliver and Sapey, 2006, Stiker, 2009, Vlahogiannis, 2003), and feudalism (Gillin, 1929, Priestley, 1997, Beier, 1974). Later, in industrialisation and liberal utilitarianism times the philosophies, perspectives and practices introduced by Social Darwinism and Eugenics movement continued positioning people with impairments as unworthy living or as a threat to a common welfare (Barnes, 1991, Gleeson, 1999). Economic instability brought by the world wars and political doctrines that emerged in the 20th century contributed to strengthening the exclusionary practices.

For the purpose of this thesis, it is worth shedding light on the way disabled individuals were positioned as national resource consumers, the ratio between production and consumption being the key-measure. To begin with, disabled individuals were seen as not rendering back consumers of national resources and this impacted on governments' actions. Since it was assumed that 'the right to life did not exist intrinsically but rather must be continually earned and justified by a measure of personal productivity' (Parent and Shevell, 1998:80), people with physical and cognitive impairments were seen as a 'national burden', 'empty husks', 'ballast lives' or 'useless eaters' (Burleigh, 1994, Mostert, 2002, Parent and Shevell, 1998, Thomas et al., 2006). Burleigh (1994) notes that human value was directly linked to contribution to the fatherland and calculated by the amount of consumed food, water, drugs, clothing, beddings and salaries for staff in asylums. As a result, expenditure cuts on institutionalised disabled people's needs were introduced in the second quarter of the 20th century; the most drastic saving measures being applied by the German government. Such a policy agenda led to significant decrease in the number of institutions, beds and caring personnel (Proctor, 1988). As an example, Klee (1985) demonstrates that since people with cognitive impairments occupied the lowest strata among those doomed as unworthy to live, the expenditures for meeting their needs dropped to 40-38 pfennig for one person per day and which often was insufficient to ensure survival. Although the German Psychiatric Association questioned such measures (Burleigh, 1994), the position that spending for the disabled people from the national budget is irrational as they are unproductive (Hoche, 1920 in Burleigh, 1994) was deeply entrenched in national policies and dictated related decisions and actions.

The association of human value with consumption and economic productivity led to the adoption of certain measures that were applied to unproductive disabled individuals (Proctor, 1988). Policies such as 'mercy death' or 'alleviation of suffering' (Mostert, 2002) were introduced, aiming to release the country from the 'burden' brought by disabled individuals (Burleigh, 1994, Proctor, 1988). Likewise, sterilisation, castration, euthanasia, gas chambers or shooting (Burleigh, 1994, Mostert, 2002, Proctor, 1988) were employed, aiming to liberate countries and especially Germany from 'useless eaters' and their wasteful consumption. As a result, while the damnation of institutionalised disabled children and adults to cold or starvation with the hope for a natural death saved some money on injections and gas (Thomas et al., 2006), sterilisation and euthanasia had the greatest effect on liberating the economy. For instance, sterilisation of 390,000 in 1936-1943 (Lifton, 2000) and the killing of 80,000 disabled individuals (Tamura, 2004) allowed Germany to save 10 million Reichsmark for medical insurance, expenditures for 22,800 nurses' salaries, and money for maintenance of 786 medical care institutions (Proctor, 1988). Proctor (1988:184) notes that 'altogether, the euthanasia operation had saved the German economy an average of 245,955.50 RM per day and 88,543,980.00 RM per year'. While the apogee of disabled people's association with waste of resource and their killings aimed at de-burdening the economy was in Germany, some European countries (Thomas et al., 2006) and US states also applied euthanasia as a means of preventing economic challenges (Silver, 2004). For Straight (1935 in Proctor, 1988), the logic of such policies is simply the combination of pure nation ideology and the ratio between consumption and production: 'they could no longer manufacture guns in return for the food they consumed; because their death was the ultimate logic of the national socialist doctrine of promoting racial superiority and the survival of the physically fit'.

Aiming to return disabled war veterans into the labour market, a variety of rehabilitation programmes were introduced (Linker, 2011, Greasley and Oxley, 1996, Jongbloed and Crichton, 1990). They aimed to get individuals off the compensation system (Jongbloed and Crichton, 1990) but instead of perceiving them as active actors in the process, they were positioned as passive service users. The following section, therefore, addresses how service provision practice shaped around the individual model positioned disabled people as passive service users.

1.1.2. Passive service users

Historical events, humanism ideology, traditions of social life medicalization and deeply entrenched ideology and practice of individual

model of disability (Zola, 1975, 1977, Barnes et al., 1999, Jahensen and Jacobsen, 2012) coupled disabled people with notions of 'health' and 'ill'. While discussion in this field is broad (Zola, 1972, 1975, 1977, Conrad, 1992, Broom and Woodward, 1996, Judson and Langdon, 2008), for the purpose of this thesis it is worth noting that in the rehabilitation market, people with impairments are usually perceived as passive users and have limited choice and control over acquired goods and services. To begin with, Zola (1977:59) notes that the 'expansion of what in medicine is deemed relevant to a good practice of life' is one of the factors positioning people with impairments as passive receivers, having limited possibilities to actively participate in the decision making process about which goods and services they receive. The decision on what should be purchased usually depends on an individual and the professional. However, having historically and legally established control over technical procedures and medication prescriptions (Zola, 1977), professionals seem to dominate in the process. Due to the use of legitimate power, language and culture to label disabled people as 'special', 'needed to be fixed' or 'vulnerable' (Albrecht, 1992), professionals entrench individuals' low status and promote a dependency culture. This often leads to de-powerment and exclusion from choosing and controlling needed and purchased goods and services (Finkelstein, 1999, 1999a, Eskyté, 2013). While Finkelstein (1999, 1999a) identifies professionals who practice such professional behaviour as Professionals Allied to Medicine (PAMs), Broom and Woodward (1996:375) refer to them either as to overtly authoritarian professionals, or to professionals who are 'inadvertently paternalistic in their efforts to avoid what they felt to be disabling medicalisation'. Either way, they often control the amount of provided information about an individual's condition and the manner in which it is presented. The communication between this type of professional and service users is insufficient. This results in uncertainty, lack of cooperation and misperceptions of service receivers' needs and experiences (Skipper and Leonard, 1965). In such a context, the potential for disabling conditions to be identified and cooperative relationships regarding the creation of more enabling practice to emerge is not exploited.

At the other end of the spectrum is interaction between service users and Professionals Allied to Community (PACs) (Finkelstein, 1999, 1999a), or the third group of health care service providers, as described by Broom and Woodward (1996). In this case, professionals acknowledge that medical knowledge and expertise may not provide comprehensive understanding. They prioritise collaborative relationships, acknowledge the impact of social environment and people's position within the society (Broom and Woodward, 1996). They involve individuals in the service planning and provision process. Such practice enables service providers to better

understand users' needs and preferences (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1995), position them as experts of needed care (Tait and Lester, 2005), and reduce stigma that often accompanies impairments and especially mental health conditions (Rutter et al., 2004).

Evidence from Lithuania and the UK suggest that despite changing political and professional discourse in health care and the rehabilitation service market (Juškevičius and Rudzinskas, 2014, Shakespeare et al.), the interaction between professionals and service users is often founded on unequal power relations and positions a person as passive receiver. As an example, Butkevičienė et al. (2006) demonstrate that disabled children and their parents often do not receive sufficient or relevant information, and feel devalued and excluded from service planning and provision. Likewise, Petrauskienė and Zabėlienė (2014) note that despite Lithuanians with mental health conditions positively evaluate social workers' informal communication and provided services, they often lack information about services and do not feel like being a part of the process. Meanwhile, Crawford et al. (2002) and Mockford et al. (2012) suggest that even though disabled UK citizens have recently become more involved in planning and developing health care services, the impact of involvement remains unknown. Several reports suggest that individuals often are seen as receivers and not as partners, with this trend being most common regarding people with cognitive impairments (Department of Health, 2001, Mencap, 2007).

The discussed professional practices prevent disabled individuals from having choice and control and are chosen by professionals (Albrecht, 1992). Drawing on Habermas (1984, 1985) and Ritzer (2004) work, it can be argued this is shaped by society's modernisation, dominant focus on a person's functional insufficiency (Golbe, 2004) and governments' failure to encourage professionals' motivation (Habermas, 1984, Eskytė, 2012). Modernisation replaces the implicit meaning patterns with explicit ones (Habermas, 1984), though does not provide more different forms of communication between disabled people and professionals (Finkelstein, 1999, 1999a). Legal standards for achieving professional and procedural effectiveness increase segregation of communicative patterns. Broom and Woodward (1996) argue that settled power, monetary gain and legal requirements entrap professionals and transform them from being a resource to support individuals in overcoming the disabling barriers into being 'modernised' care workers, who follow technical duties and rules rather than disabled people's life peculiarities and expertise (Finkelstein, 1981, 1999, 1999a, Eskytė, 2012). In addition, due to a full rationalisation of a system (Habermas, 1984), professionals become workers who automatically follow the requirements of the system that they operate in.

In such a context, their personal and professional decisions and actions are maximally reduced (Ritzer, 2004). This results in the exclusion of people with impairments from choice and active decision making, and positions them as passive service users.

Challenges faced by the welfare state and increasing activity of the disability movement brought some changes into the social service system. For the purpose of this thesis, the following discussion sheds light on direct payments and the way they may reshape disabled people's position in the market.

1.1.3. From consumers to producers: example of direct payments

Demographic changes, welfare state's failure to meet disadvantaged citizens' needs, growth of the public sector, rising consumerism and intensifying discourse of the social model of disability shaped public acknowledgement of social care services and shifted the state's monopolistic market to privatisation. However, emerged social care quasi-markets (Ajzenstadt and Rosenhek, 2000, LeGrand, 1991), competition among conditionally independent private agencies (Priestley et al., 2007) and higher independence in controlling budgets had no significant impact either on greater quality and efficiency of services (LeGrand, 1998), or on disabled people's choice and control over them (Common and Flynn, 1992). Indeed, the actual 'customers' for services and assistive technology were public service professionals, who purchased on behalf of disabled people and so eliminated them from customer choice and control (Glendinning et al., 2000, Hoyer and Harrison, 1993). However, the introduction of direct payments or personal budgets as a part of social service system privatisation gradually reshaped people with impairments' position in the market. Generally, 'personal budgets mean that people in need of services receive a certain amount of money which they can spend on services and support to meet their expressed needs. Usually those needs are assessed by health and social care professionals in consultation with the service user' (European Platform for Rehabilitation, 2013:3). Despite some structural and systematic differences, cultural contexts and public policy frameworks, in countries such as Canada, Sweden, the Netherlands, the UK, France, Austria and elsewhere personal budgets provided disabled individuals with more opportunities for independent life (Priestley et al., 2007, Riddell et al., 2005, Stainton and Boyce, 2004, Carr and Robbins, 2009, Kodner, 2003). In addition, they created new markets and new market relations, both markets for the employment of personal assistants and markets for the sale of assistive technologies. With regard to newly emerged labour market and employment relationships, the received allowances enabled

individuals to choose personal assistants who best meet their personal needs and preferences, to train, hire and fire them (Glendinning et al., 2000, Stainton and Boyce, 2004).

Being direct employers rather than objects for professionals' employment (Glendinning et al., 2000), people with impairments seem to exercise greater agency in selecting carers (Kodner, 2003) and have more control over provided services (Carr and Robbins, 2009, Dickinson and Glasby, 2010). Prior to the introduction of direct payments it was public professionals who purchased assistive technologies on behalf of disabled people. In other words, disabled people were mediated as customers, with occupational therapists being proxy customers for them. Yet, the possibility to manage funds independently transformed disabled people from recipients into purchasers (Glendinning et al., 2000, Scourfield, 2005), who choose assistive technologies (Clark et al., 2010) or home modifications (Kodner, 2003) In addition, several studies suggest that personal budgets have a positive impact on individuals' shopping and customer participation, as people independently managing funds are more likely to participate in community life and leisure activities, including visits to shops (Stainton and Boyce, 2004, Carmichael and Brown, 2002, Carmichael et al., 2001).

Despite potential challenges such as insufficient provision of the right support when managing personal budgets (Carr and Robbins, 2009, Carmichael and Brown, 2002), managerial and monitoring difficulties (Clark et al., 2004, Littlechild, 2009), and emergence of 'black markets' Leichsenring (2003) and others (Arksey and Baxter, 2011, Brisenden, 1986, Carr and Robbins, 2009, Kestenbaum, 1996, Kodner, 2003, Littlechild, 2009, O'Brien, 2001, Pearson, 2000) suggest that personal budgets transformed disabled people into more active market participants and deconstructed existing power relations between professionals and service users (Carr and Robbins, 2009, Dickinson and Glasby, 2010). The possibility to choose and decide on services and assistive technologies provides an actual and not an imitative choice and control, and deconstructs the prevailing position about people with impairments as passive and dependant actors.

Having established the link between a state and a customer, it is worth shedding light on how private providers perceive people with impairments as customers. The following discussion provides some insights into the way special markets for disability products position disabled people as a customer group.

1.1.4. A target for new business

Historic marginalisation of older and disabled people as customers was premised on their otherness from what was perceived as a 'normal' market participant, lack of spending power and limited market autonomy. However, an increasing number of disabled and ageing population in Europe (European Commission, 2011, Coleman and Lebbon, 2010), including Lithuania (Mažionienė et al., 2011) and the UK (Rutherford 2012), gradually increasing disabled people's employment (Grever, 2009) and growing spending power (Ray and Ryder, 2003, Office for Disability Issues, 2010, Kingman, 2012, Eurostat, 2009) reframes the situation. Some businesses, being aware of older people's financial advantages and a link between ageing and disability (Age Concern and Help the Aged, 2010, Statistics, 2010) position disabled and older people as a target client group (Office for Disability Issues, 2010). Yet, while such dynamics is insufficient in the mainstream market, it is alive in 'special' markets for disability products.

Aiming to attract this group of potential profit bringers, 'special' markets adapt various marketing (Ludke and Levitz, 1983), management (MacStravic, 1989) and advertising (Adeoye and Bozic, 2007) strategies that contribute to changing the portrayal of a disabled customer. To begin with, while usually marketing and advertising of rehabilitation products shed light on medical features and ability to 'fix' individuals (Bonaccorso, 2002, Ulinchy, 1994, Adeoye and Bozic, 2007), more advanced 'special' market players seem to shift this position toward product personalisation and social dimensions of usage. As an example, the Dynamic Controls, producing electronic control systems for power wheelchairs and scooters, aims to understand mobility device users' physical, emotional and social needs, and combine this knowledge with technical product features. Such an approach is premised on an intention to meet clients' physical needs, and personal preferences (DynamicTM, n.d.). Likewise, Customised Mobility offers an opportunity to personalise wheelchairs and to adjust them to individual lifestyles, or to create a unique design theme (Mobility, n.d.). In a similar vein, 'Sports'N Spokes', a magazine for wheelchair sports and recreation, challenges the dominant preconception of who can access the sporting arena (DePauw, 1997, French and Hainsworth, 2001) and provides information about products, thereby assisting disabled people in doing different kinds of sport. Fost (1998) indicates that more proactive mainstream retailers include 'special' items in their supply and mix them with products for non-disabled shoppers. Such a practice increases shopping convenience, creates a mainstream atmosphere (Fost, 1998) and boosts customer volume (Office for Disability Issues, 2010). In addition, it increases customer loyalty (Cheng, 2002) and gained profits (Heskett and

Schlesinger, 1994, Kim et al., 2013). Similarly, Kaufman-Scarborough (1999, 2001) notes that private entities, providing accessibility solutions even if small, are prioritised by disabled customers and receive their grace.

On the one hand, these outlined practices suggest that some business players are becoming aware of the changing customer segment and position disabled people not as passive users, but as active choosers and profitable clients, and aim to meet their needs and preferences. On the other hand, the manifestation of such practices in 'special' markets and their absence in mainstream providers' practices questions the segregation of people with impairments' in certain market niches. In other words, the focus on disabled people as active customers within special markets for disability products and insufficient attention within the mainstream market may 'lock' disabled individuals within 'special' markets and prevent equal customer participation with non-disabled shoppers. Likewise, it may frame business' understanding of a customer as either being deemed as a 'traditional' or 'normal' participant in the market. This may prevent the ontological shift from individual to social understanding of a disabled market participant. Respectively, the following discussion sheds light on disabled people's position in the mainstream market and the way current practices position this group as 'vulnerable' customers.

1.1.5. Vulnerable consumers

Mainstream private providers position disabled people as 'vulnerable' customers. General terms of vulnerable groups refer to minority groups or individuals, who face one or another form of ignorance, exclusion and are considered as objects for protection (Sime, 1991). While there is no room for a more detailed ontological discussion, it is worth noting that individuals' vulnerability in the market is usually linked with either situational or enduring conditions (Brenkert, 1998, Gentry et al., 1995). With regard to situational causes, factors such as grief (Gentry et al., 1995), temporary unemployment (Macchiette and Roy, 1994), divorce (Jones and Middleton, 2007) or changes in social status (Braunsberger et al., 2004) are often linked to this customer state. Mansfield and Pinto (2008:426) demonstrate that individuals, who are 'unable to navigate in the general marketplace; having diminished access to goods; being physically vulnerable; unable to adequately understand fraudulent claims or advertising messages', are at the opposite end of the spectrum and experience permanent customer vulnerability. Additionally to these individual model based characteristics, race and ethnicity (Bristor et al., 1995), gender (Hill and Dhanda, 1999) and different impairment types

(Baker et al., 2001) are factors, contributing to the latter type of customer vulnerability.

While policy instruments legally construct disabled people as 'vulnerable consumers' (see Chapter Two), on the empirical level they are often seen as opposite to 'other normal adults' (Brenkert, 1998:302), with physical or cognitive features being the ground for this categorisation. It seems that the discourse of ableism plays an important role in shaping the practice. Goodley (2014:21) notes that 'ableism's psychological, social, economic, cultural character normatively privileges able-bodiedness; promotes smooth forms of personhood and smooth health; creates space fit for normative citizens; encourages an institutional bias towards autonomous, independent bodies; and lends support to economic and material dependence on neoliberal and hyper-capitalist forms of production'. Respectively, in the context of the private market, evaluation of disabled customers' vulnerability refers to what is deemed as normality standards and functions (Amundson and Taira, 2005) and is measured in the presumed competencies of an 'average' customer, who usually has no impairments (Edward et al., 2000). For example, according to Mansfield and Pinto, the main reason why people with cognitive impairments experience challenges using credit cards is 'their disability or low literacy skills' (Mansfield and Pinto, 2008:434). Similarly, Braunsberger et al. (2004) show that college students also experience similar challenges, often leading to financial loss. However, the latter authors do not ascribe customer vulnerability to young individuals. On the contrary, they note that one of the reasons for unwise choice and customer practice is limited knowledge, impacting on the ability to evaluate complex and competing product offers. Mansfield and Pinto (2008:434) suggest an advocate working on behalf of individuals with cognitive impairments as a means to overcome credit card-related challenges. Whereas for college students, education and information provision are perceived as the master means for enabling them to act more securely in the marketplace (Braunsberger et al., 2004). Hence, although the experiences of the two groups are similar, their interpretation and applied measures differ. While students' customer vulnerability is seen as a result of commercial practice, analogous challenges experienced by people with cognitive impairments are perceived as a result of their impairments. Likewise, college students-oriented 'solution' means are premised on an empowerment concept, and the means oriented towards people with cognitive impairments are shaped around protection and substitutive decision making (Dunn et al., 2010, Dunn et al., 2008). This restricts customer freedom, choice, control and possibility to equally participate in the market.

Linking customer vulnerability to *who* experiences vulnerability (Baker et al., 2005) leads to perceived rather than actual vulnerability (Smith and Cooper-Martin, 1997) and suggests the individual model approach. Although gender, race, ethnicity and belonging to the category of disability are usually perceived as factors causing permanent customer vulnerability, Baker et al. (2005:130) note that 'there is no empirical proof that biophysical characteristics of individuals (age, ethnicity, disability) should be the sole basis on which to define customer vulnerability'. Similarly, Ringold (1995) notes that belonging to a certain gender, ethnic or racial group does not determine vulnerability in the market, as representatives of these groups are equally competent customers. On the contrary, stigmatization and categorisation of those who do not meet pre-defined market standards, contribute to customer vulnerability (Peñaloza, 1995) and create particular groups' exclusion (Baker et al., 2005).

Additionally to structural and societal factors, 'physical and logistical elements' (Baker et al., 2005:131) play a role in causing customer vulnerability. As an example, disabled shoppers have to overcome barriers such as lack of information provided in alternative formats (Waddington, 2009), inaccessible parking and pathways (Kaufman–Scarborough, 1999), inaccessible shop premises (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001), and other elements that are addressed in section 1.2. As a result, the private market, and especially shops, which are usually designed by non-disabled architects for non-disabled customers (Imrie, 1996, Weisman, 1994) discriminate and patronise people with impairments (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001), create dependency practice (Baker et al., 2001), restrict customer choice (MacDonald et al., 1994) and eliminate them from active and equal customer experience and participation (Baker, 2007). From a broader perspective, factors such as inaccessible public transport (Department for Transport, 2013, Kung and Taylor, 2014, Soltani et al., 2012), lack of accessible information about public and private transport facilities (Baker et al., 2001), inaccessible public environment (Hanson, 2004, Imrie, 1996, 1998, Kitchin, 1998, Marcos, 2011, Matthews and Vujakovic, 1995), and other elements play a part in shaping disabled customers' vulnerability and exclusion (see 1.2).

It seems that the map of people with impairments' participation in the private market is expanding and their customer portrayal acquires few forms. However, as mainstream market participants they are seen as 'vulnerable' customers, impairment and the dependency to the category of disability being the factors for classification and applied measures to overcome barriers. The following section aims to challenge such perspective. It identifies key stages of an accessible shopping chain, and addresses the elements within each stage, that may cause customer

vulnerability and exclude from equal participation in the mainstream private market.

1.2. Shopping chain and disabled customers

Although the ‘hot spot of shopping’ is a shop, shopping itself is not a static practice that happens exclusively in retail premises. Instead, it is a fluid and continuous process, consisting of different stages and is experienced by each customer in a unique way. With this in mind, this thesis adapts the concept of the ‘travel chain’ that originated in the Scandinavian disability and transport studies. The original concept aims to address every link of the travel chain from start to finish, focusses on the person-environment relationship and aims to assist the legislative process in order to provide disabled and older people with more accessible travel experiences and rights that non-disabled individuals take for granted (Stahl, 1996, 1999, Iwarsson et al., 2000, Carlsson, 2004). With regard to disabled people’s shopping, some attempts to look more broadly than only at individuals’ experience in retail premises are present (Schmöcker et al., 2008, Bromley et al., 2007a, Burnett, 1996, Baker et al., 2007, Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999). However, the studies often focus either on specific elements and shopping stages, or on people with particular impairments’ experiences. Either way they do not provide a wide-ranging picture. This chapter, therefore, expands the discussion and addresses how individuals with different types of impairment acquire customer information, travel to the shop, operate in retail premises and interact with informal shopping assistants and salespeople (see Figure 1). Empirical findings in Chapter Five are organised in the same way and detect different elements of each stage of the chain.



Figure 1 – Accessible shopping chain

Not denying the importance of customer education, product warranty or repairs among others, it was decided to focus on the identified elements as they seem to play a key role in shaping customer experience. For instance, different marketing and advertising strategies on TV, radio, newspapers and public spaces (Adeoye and Bozic, 2007, Arens et al., 2009, Buclin, 1965, Jeffords, 2004, Steiner, 2001) are well recognised as important means to communicate with and inform a customer before reaching a shop. Likewise, a number of studies demonstrate the way the public environment and transport mould shopping patterns and customer experience (Bromley et al., 2007b, Butler and Bowlby, 1997, Eskyté, 2014, Imrie, 1996, Carlsson, 2004). Of the most significance is the shop, its exterior and interior design, product marketing strategies and interaction with shop assistants. However, identified environments, practices and market relationships seem to be premised on ableism that marginalise, exclude and prevent people with impairments from an accessible and equal shopping process. The following sections, therefore, look at how business and governments' focus on non-disabled customers and citizens shape disabled people's customer experiences in the identified shopping chain stages.

1.2.1. Customer information

Information is a concurrent part of making customer decisions (Bettman et al., 1991, Hoffmann and Inderst, 2009, Kivetz and Simonson, 2000, Nelson, 1970). Its gathering starts before leaving home or entering the shop (Barthes, 1973, Gabriel and Lang, 1995). Browsing product catalogues and magazines (Vijayasathy and Jones, 2000), market generated websites (Häubli and Trifts, 2000, Peterson and Merino, 2003) or online forums (Bickart and Schindler, 2001) is a common experience in the pre-shopping stage. Later on it continues in public spaces (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006, Rosewarne, 2005) and retail premises, where individuals need to acquire information not only for choosing a shop and finding a way to get in it (d'Astous, 2000, Hackett et al., 1993, Otterbring et al., 2014, Passini, 1996) but also familiarising with and evaluating the product, its features, price and other attributes (Chang and Wildt, 1994, Peck and Childers, 2003). The importance of customer information is also recognised by policy makers (see Chapter Two). However, even though the European Commission (EC) accepts the need to provide customers with information (Maastricht Treaty, 1992, art. 153.1), in actual shopping choices, people are rarely fully informed (Dick et al., 1990, Johnson and Levin, 1985, Simmons and Lynch Jr, 1991).

One of the most marginalised groups in terms of access to customer information is disabled people. Since this group of market participants is

not recognised as an important segment in the marketplace (Freeman and Selmi, 2010), and while business players have control over provided information (Kivetz and Simonson, 2000), people with impairments experience additional barriers when accessing information that is taken for granted for non-disabled people. Lack of information provided in alternative formats such as Braille, large print, audio, sign language, text-based information, and easy to read texts and symbols (Waddington, 2009) exclude individuals from autonomous and informed decisions. As an example, Baker et al. (2001) note that while people with vision impairments are capable of making sovereign purchase decisions, due to a lack of accessible information they need assistance in retrieving the information. In a similar vein, information about products that are accessible for people with certain impairments is insufficient (MacDonald et al., 1994).

Limited access to customer information deprives disabled people from selecting purchases closest to their preferences and lessens the possibility to participate in the economy (Howells, 2005). Biehal and Chakravarti (1986) suggest that insufficient provision of information negatively influences accessibility of information in the customer's memory, and this has a negative impact on customer autonomy, judgments and decisions made (Lingle and Ostrom, 1979, Walsh and Mitchell, 2010). Hence, customers with impairments' freedom and autonomy seem to be impeded by limited provision of accessible information, this practice being premised on the current market's perception of a customer and particular informing strategies.

After the purchase, the retail place or spontaneous consumption decision has been made, individuals step into a public space aiming to reach a shop. With respect to this, the following discussion sheds light on individuals' journey to the shop either as pedestrians or as transport users. This is followed by a brief discussion on potential factors behind particular disabled customers' experiences.

1.2.2. The journey to the shop

Individuals' journey to a shop shares features typical to pedestrians and transport users' activity. With regard to travelling to a shop as a pedestrian, factors such as directness (Hoogendoorn and Bovy, 2004, Hughes, 2002), shortest and the quickest distance (Borgers and Timmermans, 2005, Seneviratne and Morrall, 1985) and safety of the route (Brown et al., 2007, Weinstein et al., 2008) are important. Likewise, pleasantness related factors such as attraction of the route, activities and aesthetic amenities,

building attractiveness and social milieu impact on travel decisions (Brown et al., 2007). Convenience-related elements like weather protection, wide pavements, reasonably low noise level, the presence of open retail space (Guo, 2009, Guo and Ferreira, 2008, Guo and Loo, 2013, Seneviratne and Morrall, 1985) often are 'on the list' when choosing an itinerary. Hoogendoorn and Bovy (2004:188) describe pedestrians as 'subjective utility maximisers', who found their pedestrian choice on maximal 'predicted utility of their efforts and walking'.

At the other end of the spectrum are disabled pedestrians. Their choice of the route to a shop is often restricted by an inaccessible built environment. The intention to serve non-disabled city actors' needs and wants, and provide them with comfortable and conveniently planned public space (Imrie, 1996, 2000b, Freund, 2001), create visible and invisible obstacles (Hanson, 2004) impeding disabled people's freedom and participation. As an example, people with mobility impairments and especially wheelchair users often face hindrances such as steep and high kerbs, uneven surfaces (Fänge et al., 2002, Matthews and Vujakovic, 1995), lack of ramps, various footpath- and crossing-related barriers (Abir and Hoque, 2011), insufficient lighting and limited places to rest (Rosenberg et al., 2012). Limited reliability or non-existence of audible traffic lights (Ivanchenko et al., 2010), lack of directing information in Braille and alternative formats (Crandall et al., 2001), and limited installation of integrative tactile paths (Imrie, 1996) are important factors preventing people with vision impairments from independent, stress-free and safe interaction in public spaces on the way to the shop. In a similar vein, Imrie (1996) notes that lack of visual aids and information signs prevent people with hearing impairments from easy and free activities and migration in the public environment. While the above discussed challenges are mainly related to the physical environment, people with cognitive impairments often face peer-interaction related challenges. For instance, Bertoli et al. (2011) and McClimens et al. (2014) demonstrate that going to town is one of the most preferred outdoor activities of youths with cognitive impairments and Down Syndrome. However, safety concerns and lack of support shape their pedestrian choices, including the way to shops and the overall experience in public spaces.

With regard to travelling to a shop by public transport, customers' choice for shopping site and location (Gardner and Sheppard, 1989) and the need to carry several or big bags, (Ibrahim, 2003) shape particular preferences for public transport. These include: time reliability and consistency with the time table (Hensher et al., 2003, König and Axhausen, 2002), frequency (Jansson, 1993, Beirão and Sarsfield Cabral, 2007) and comfort (Redman et al., 2013). However, public transport often does not succeed in satisfying

customers' needs and preferences (Hamilton and Jenkins, 2000). As a result, cars are prioritised for shopping trip purposes (Beirão and Sarsfield Cabral, 2007). Speed, flexibility, convenience, a sense of control, power, self-esteem (Steg, 2005) and representation of social status (Ibrahim, 2003) all can be communicated via a car, and are important reasons why this transport means is preferred for shopping purposes among non-disabled individuals (Bromley et al., 2007b).

While people without impairments' choice for shopping trip transport means mostly depends on their individual travel preference and customer choice, disabled people's options are often restricted by various barriers. To begin with, while disabled and older EU citizens often have access to public transport affordability means such as discounts or free journeys (Lathia and Capra, 2011), due to inaccessibility of transport infrastructure this type of transport means often becomes unusable. To illustrate, Bromley et al. (2007b) report that wheelchair users in Swansea (UK) find using public transport difficult (90%) or very difficult (72%) and face obstacles such as high steps, insufficient provision of ramps, reasonable accommodation and facilities for disabled people. Additionally, Abir and Hoque (2011) report that insufficient grab rails, split-level floors, narrow aisles and standard seat spacing burden travellers with mobility impairments' travel in public vehicles in Dhaka city, and with this being a common trend in the majority of EU countries (Lawson, 2012). Popovas' (2012) study conducted in Lithuania highlights the importance of accessible buses and notes that 60% of buses in Klaipeda city are low-floor, this being the main focus of accessibility instalments in national public transport. While her study does not address travel experience, Bromley et al. (2007b) note that despite having a longer experience of accessibility requirements and provisions and a higher number of low-floor buses (Department for Transport, 2013), the UK does not provide constraint-free travel experience by public transport. Similar trends are common across the EU, as public transport infrastructure often meets neither legal requirements, nor disabled travellers' needs (Zhou et al., 2012). With regard to challenges experienced by people with vision impairments, the most common experiences address lack of accessible information about vehicle, line numbers, timetable, bus stops (Markiewicz and Skomorowski, 2011) and tactile surfacing (Abir and Hoque, 2011). Likewise, insufficient bus drivers' training and limited awareness often is a barrier, burdening the shopping trip of people with cognitive (Risser et al., 2012) and physical impairments' (Abir and Hoque, 2011, Azenkot et al., 2011). Although Sammer et al. (2012) suggest that people with hearing impairments use buses more frequently than wheelchair users and travellers with mobility impairments, there is a gap in the literature addressing their experiences, needs and preferences.

The above discussed non-disabled pedestrians and transport users' freedom, and barriers faced by disabled people are not without some foundation. Visible and invisible obstacles in the public environment (Hanson, 2004) and transport infrastructure causing discomfort, restriction and exclusion (Imrie and Kumar, 1998) emerge due to ableism – 'ideas practices, institutions, and social relations that presume ablebodiedness, and by doing so, construct persons with disabilities as marginalised, oppressed, and largely invisible 'others'' (Chouinard, 1997:380). Relph (1981:196) supports this idea and notes that 'modern landscapes seem to be designed for forty-year-old healthy males driving cars'. Hence, only a limited variety of individuals may use, and freely function in the public environment (Freund, 2001), as all Western (Imrie, 1998) and non-Western cities (Freund, 2001) are created by and for non-disabled society members.

The ethos of ableism in built public environment and transport infrastructure is reflected in and compounded by architects, engineers and other design professionals (Imrie, 1998, Livingston, 2000). They are widely critiqued for excluding minorities' interests and promoting oppressive, segregating and alienating environments and facilities (Bickford, 2000, Hanson, 2004, Imrie, 2000b). Indeed, because of their limited disability awareness (Imrie and Kumar, 1998, Livingston, 2000) and utilisation of anthropometric characteristics of an 'average' body as 'young, physically fit, educated, middle-class (usually) male adult' (Hanson, 2004:10), professionals share ideology of 'sameness' and 'normality' or an understanding 'that all sections of the community want the environment to do the same things for them' (Matrix, 1984:4).

Alongside ableism, the auto-centred systems and increasing governments' focus on shared spaces (Imrie, 2012) disempower disabled public and private transport users and non-users (Freund, 2001, Kitchin, 1998). Poor design or inadequate provisions spatially disadvantage people with different impairments (Kitchin, 1998), locate them within an officially defined travelling timeframe (Freund, 2001) and restrict spatial behaviour. Such practice is shaped by political decisions, agendas, resource distribution and local authorities' policies (Kitchin, 1998, Freund, 2001, Imrie, 2012). They often support motor vehicle drivers' rights and dominance in the city and hamper physical participation and bodily integrity of individuals, who do not comply with a standard of a 'normal' citizen (Imrie, 2012). In addition, even though the majority of disabled car owners may get financial support for adjusting the car (Prasad et al., 2006), insufficient state financial support, exclusion from labour market and income (LŽNS, 2012), as well as inaccessible car parking provisions (Matthews and Vujakovic, 1995), prevent them from using private vehicles to the same extent and for the same purposes as non-disabled individuals.

Such practices shape 'no go' areas (Kitchin, 1998:346) that mirror modern ideals for aesthetics (Imrie, 1998), same-able-bodied understanding (Matthews and Vujakovic, 1995) and prioritise non-disabled wealthy males (Relph, 1981). This conditions disabled people's travel choice and freedom. It may restrict customer normalcy, as the experienced barriers prevent people from 'participating or being in-the-marketplace' (Baker, 2006:41). In such a context, not only geographical boundaries within the city (Imrie, 2000b), but also the shopping map and the routes via which it is explored are shaped and customer vulnerability is constructed (Eskytè, 2014) (see Chapter Five).

After arriving at the shop, individuals have to find the way how to navigate in it and acquire needed and wanted items. With this in mind, the following discussion sheds light on strategies applied to seduce non-disabled customers in the shop, and the ways these shape disabled people's shopping experiences.

1.2.3. Navigation in retail premises

'Shopping mall as customer habitat' (Bloch et al., 1994), 'the world in the shopping mall' (Crawford, 2004), 'the magic of the mall' (Goss, 1993), and 'the mall as entertainment' (Baker and Haytko, 2000). Such and similar phrases are common when talking about individuals' experience in shops. Being aware of the way the environment shapes human behaviour (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), designers, decorators, managers, sales experts and other professionals adopt various design and branding strategies (Turley and Chebat, 2002), invest time, energy, and effort to create the atmosphere which would provide customers with the above mentioned emotions and affiliations. The hidden goal of creating a space for a positive shopping experience (Andersson et al., 2012) is to control individuals' emotional states (Babin and Attaway, 2000), encourage impulsive and unplanned purchases (Tendai and Crispen, 2009, Turley and Chebat, 2002), pursue hedonic consumption (Ryu and Jang, 2007) and so to increase profit (Babin and Attaway, 2000, Tendai and Crispen, 2009, Turley and Chebat, 2002).

In order to achieve capitalistic goals, retailers perceive and exploit retail premises as 'environmental stimuli' (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) and use various strategies to shape customer in-store behaviour and purchase decisions. To begin with, aiming to stimulate shoppers' senses of pleasure and arousal (Garlin and Owen, 2006, Turley and Milliman, 2000), retailers often choose positive and unobtrusive music (Andersson et al., 2012) fitting with the retail place image (Vida et al., 2007). This stimulates affirmative emotions, and has a positive effect on longer shopping time

and willingness to wait for the service or to queue. Likewise, different lighting choices are exploited to communicate about the price, attract clients (Ryu and Jang, 2007) and build their loyalty (Walsh et al., 2011). As an example, while Summers and Hebert (2001) demonstrate that under the bright light shoppers tend to examine, touch and pick up more items than under soft lighting, Mangum (1998) notes that lighting directly correlates with product attractiveness perceived by customers, and impacts on the turnover. Either way, it seems that lighting is exploited to attract customers and shape their purchase decisions.

Alongside music and lighting, customer seduction means such as scent (Teller and Dennis, 2011, Guéguen and Petr, 2006), in-store signage (Otterbring et al., 2014, Drèze et al., 1994), atmospheric colours and decor (Ryu and Jang, 2007, Ballantine et al., 2010) are exploited to mould shoppers' positive emotions and affiliations (Turley and Chebat, 2002). Shelves and product display, however, receive special attention as they often play the most important role in attracting customers' attention (Castro et al., 2013, Chandon et al., 2009) that directly correlates with sales and profit (Yang and Chen, 1999, Drèze et al., 1994, Desmet and Renaudin, 1998). As a result, different product location strategies are adopted (Nelson and Ellison, 2005). For instance, since large shelf space significantly increases brand sales (Bemmaor and Mouchoux, 1991) and general sales frequency (Desmet and Renaudin, 1998), retailers tend to double the number of facings, and this seems to increase a customer's choice in a particular item by sixty-seven percent (Chandon et al., 2009). The reduction of shelf space has an opposite effect (Eisend, 2014) as this increases the possibility of running out of stock and portrays items as less attractive (Parker and Lehmann, 2011, Castro et al., 2013). The most popular articles and brands are located in the centre (Chandon et al., 2009, Valenzuela and Raghuram, 2009) and are surrounded with store brands, which are less popular but have a direct impact on shops' turnovers (Valenzuela et al., 2013). Likewise, the extremities of the layout are dedicated to promotional items (Valenzuela et al., 2013) and are often accompanied by large-sized and intrusive signage. Aiming to boost habitual and frequent consumption, check-out line displays are usually filled with products such as cigarettes (Drèze et al., 1994), and more expensive or higher quality products are located on the top shelves and the cheapest on the bottom (Valenzuela et al., 2013). Drèze et al. (1994:312) demonstrate that manufacturers and retailers perceive eye-level location of a standing individual as an ideal place for product location, and lower-middle and bottom shelves as a good place for children's products.

These shop design and product location aspects are oriented towards non-disabled customers' gratification and profit increase, and often have an

opposite effect on disabled shoppers' experience. To begin with, Kaufman-Scarborough (1999) notes that before entering a shop, people with mobility impairments and wheelchair users in the US have to deal with an accessible but unsatisfactory parking lot surface and an unpleasant to manoeuvre route from a car to the shop. Bromley and Matthews (2007) echo the observation and highlight that although private retailers in the EU are required to ensure accessibility of retail premises, apart from large and new shopping malls, access to the majority of shops is littered with obstacles such as steps, lack of ramps and narrow doorways. Additionally, the leverage, dexterity and strength often needed to manipulate doors cause feelings of fear (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001) for certain shopper groups. While Kaufman-Scarborough (1999) notes that such practices may prevent people with impairments from visiting specific stores, Bromley and Matthews (2007) elaborate further and note that such practices may negatively impact individuals' participation in community life.

Disabled customers' exclusion reaches the peak in retail premises. Here non-disabled individuals' oriented provisions act as barriers for customers with impairments. To begin with, a number of studies (Bromley and Matthews, 2007, Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999, 2001) suggest that promotional displays, products waiting to be stocked and the crowdedness impede people with mobility impairments and wheelchair users' barrier-free movement. Kaufman-Scarborough (1999) demonstrates that narrow aisles and multiple level stairs and balconies, intended to create pleasure atmospheres for non-disabled shoppers, cause disabled customers' spatial segregation. Additionally to manoeuvring and movement, non-disabled shoppers' oriented product location restricts customers with impairments' choice and independency. As an example, a study carried out by Kaufman-Scarborough (2001) suggests that products located on shelves based on a horizontal shelving logic, are often unreachable by wheelchair users. Likewise, coin slots and change machines are often inaccessible due to their high location that is convenient for non-disabled shoppers. Such practices are founded on ableism and may cause worry and hazard feelings (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999), prevent an independent reaching and handling of goods (Bromley and Matthews, 2007), and shape dependency practices. A focus on non-disabled customers and limited recognition of disabled shoppers are well manifested through fitting rooms. Specifically, limited number and insufficient space, too highly located clothes hooks and mirrors, impossibility to call for assistance (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001, MacDonald et al., 1994), remote location or use as a storage space (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999) are more a rule rather than an exception, and signalise that people with impairments are neither expected nor desired shoppers.

Retailers often do not provide information about retail premises and products in alternative formats (Baker et al., 2001) and so exclude customers with vision impairments from equal choice and shopping experience. Although technological inventions such as body micro- and nano-sensors (Domingo, 2012) and similar assistive devices (López-de-Ipiña et al., 2011) are present and could provide this shoppers group with more independency when gathering information about products, for the majority of the public they are unavailable or unaffordable. Baker et al. (2001) notes that although trained shop personnel could assist in overcoming disabling practices, this opportunity is not yet sufficiently exploited. Instead, individual coping strategies and informal shop assistants are often used as a means to overcome barriers, and which are discussed in Chapter Five.

Contrary to shoppers with mobility or vision impairments, lack of communication-related reasonable accommodation means prevents people with hearing impairments from having a constraint-free shopper experience. Kaufman-Scarborough (1998) notes that this customer group is less 'visible' compared to people with mobility or vision impairments. Hence, business is neither aware of the approximate number of potential clients, nor is ready to provide reasonable accommodation. Chininthorn et al. (2012) demonstrate that pharmacy personnel's unpreparedness to communicate with clients with hearing impairments in South Africa may cause misleading understanding of provided instructions, and incorrect or ineffective consumption of medication, causing health threats and financial loss. While technologies (Chininthorn et al., 2012) or information leaflets (Van Mil, 2005) may assist in overcoming such challenges, the findings of a small-scale Master's thesis by Metz (2013) demonstrates that staff awareness and training play a crucial role in creating a more equal and accessible customer experience. Specifically, the author notes that although often real estate staff are unfamiliar with a reasonable accommodation of people with hearing impairments, those who are aware of or have experience in interacting with this customer group are more flexible in using alternative communication formats or are able to communicate in American Sign Language. Consequently, such companies have higher customer loyalty, better ensure customer confidentiality and empower people to make independent decisions (ibid.)

Similarly to the case of customers with hearing impairments, literature addressing people with cognitive impairments and mental health conditions' customer experience is limited. Goldblum (2006) is one of the few authors addressing this matter. She argues that traumatic brain injury and accompanying communication difficulties is an important source of experienced challenges in retail premises. Such an individual model

position ascribes to an individual's condition difficulties in reading and understanding labels and prices, reaching products, communicating with shop assistants, and manoeuvring in noisy and crowded shops. It also ascribes responsibility for overcoming the barriers to the customer and not to the disabling shop environment. A similar position is adopted by Cromby et al. (1996), who instead of shedding light on business players' training and awareness raising, positioned young people with severe cognitive impairments' training in a virtual environment as a means for 'successful' shopping. Attribution of experienced barriers to the disabled individuals prevents the deconstructing of a historically and socially constructed portrayal of what is deemed to be a customer. It locates private providers in a convenient position, where neither broader group of customers is considered, nor accessibility and reasonable accommodation means are provided. In such a context, even though individuals with impairments 'happen to be' in a shop, their bodily integrity is undermined as well as the status of equal customer is negated.

While the retail premise is a key space where customer experience manifests, interaction with shop assistants is equally important (Menon and Dubé, 2000, Rutherford, 2012). The following section therefore sheds light on characteristics that are usually associated with professional and quality customer service, and the way this preaches with their interaction with disabled shoppers. It also touches upon some of the factors shaping shop assistants' responses to customers with impairments and the role played by training on disability and accessibility.

1.2.4. Interaction in the shop

Interaction with salespeople is an important factor shaping customer experience and satisfaction (Goff et al., 1997, Menon and Dubé, 2000, Rutherford, 2012, Wirtz and Bateson, 1999, Wislon, 1998). Yuksel (2004) argues that in aiming to provide an effective and quality service, shop assistants should possess features such as friendliness, attentiveness, respectfulness, expertise and competence. Prompt reactions, honest answers, hospitality, kind treatment (Reisinger and Waryszak, 1994), awareness of and knowledge about customer emotions and interpersonal processes (Menon and Dubé, 2000) are also important in aiming to meet individual's desires for a product and shopping process (Szymanski, 1988). Price et al. (1995) note that mutual understanding, extra attention, authenticity and competence are important dimensions of shop assistants' performance and have a direct impact on customer experience.

Despite businesses looking for employees who would possess such features, professionals often lack knowledge and skills to enable them to exercise the aforementioned behaviour, provide quality service and positive customer emotions. Menon and Dubé (2000) demonstrate that limited knowledge on and ineffective responses to customer emotions manifest through shop assistants' rudeness, unhelpfulness, ignorance, and use of sales pressure that generate customer anger. While Rutherford (2012) argues that economic satisfaction is the main factor influencing a customer's commitment to a seller, Wirtz and Bateson (1999) note that dissatisfaction with a service provider's behaviour is more likely to have a negative effect on customer experience and purchase decisions than wrongly chosen music, scent or any other design and decor choice. Martin (1987, in Reisinger and Waryszak, 1994:3) supports such a position and argues that interaction between a shopper and service provider is more important for and valued by a customer than 'the mechanistic skills of selling and delivering a product'.

These shop assistants' characteristics are equally important and expected in serving disabled customers. However, shoppers with impairments often are at the other end of the spectrum. As an example, Kaufman-Scarborough (1999) notes that some shop assistants avoid serving disabled people, 'over-help' them or react in fear. Others position individuals' impairment in front of the customer – provider interface (Baker, 2007). As an example, MacDonald et al. (1994) demonstrate that customers, who need more assistance when trying clothes, identify salespeople's patronising attitude as a barrier, preventing an accessible shopping process. Overall, shop assistants' behaviour often receives negative evaluation and is associated with disempowerment, discrimination¹, negative stereotypes, unequal treatment and disrespect, among others (Ryan et al., 2006, MacDonald et al., 1994).

¹ In particular, direct discrimination (treating people less favourably than others because of their dependency to a certain category or group (Neutfeldt, 2000)), indirect discrimination (imposing a requirement or condition for a job, facility or service which makes it harder for disabled people to gain access to it' (Neutfeldt, 2000:177)), positive discrimination ('aims to achieve equality of outcome or results. It discriminates in favour of certain individuals on the basis of characteristics seen as common to their group (Noris, 2000:3), and institutional discrimination ('Is evident when policies and activities of all types of modern organisation result in inequality between disabled people and non-disabled people. It is embedded in the excessive paternalism of contemporary welfare systems and is apparent when they are systematically ignoring or meeting inadequately the needs of disabled people. It incorporates extreme forms of prejudice and intolerance usually associated with individual or direct discrimination (Barnes, 1991:7)).

Discriminatory treatment and disabling service provision is not the intentionally chosen shop assistants' behaviour. It originates from limited procedural- and social-service delivery knowledge. Specifically, limited information from memory about client groups, inability to ascribe them to particular categories, and insufficient information about selling scripts lead to unsuccessful selling practices (Szymanski, 1988). This suggests that, limited recognition of disabled people as customers (Freeman and Selmi, 2010) shapes insufficient possibilities for shop assistants to develop particular selling scripts. However, Menguc et al. (2013) note that a team manager's empowering leadership is a key factor and its lacking prevents retail personnel from acquiring customer knowledge creation capability. In addition, limited information and skills in service quality management (Yuksel, 2004), tendency to adopt a selling-oriented rather than customer-oriented approach (Goff et al., 1997, Roman et al., 2002), insufficient sales people's involvement in planning and implementing training (Lassk et al., 2012), and absence of manufacturers' participation in shaping product-related information provision for a customer (Goff et al., 1997) prevent shop assistants from gaining full and detailed information about different customer groups and product features. These, indeed, are important factors, shaping shop assistants' disabling attitudes and discriminatory practices when serving shoppers with impairments.

Salespeople's training on disability and accessibility may be one of the ways to overcome disabling seller-customer interaction. While studies addressing this kind of shop assistants' training across the EU are scarce, literature from the US suggests that sales personnel, who have been provided with the training, tend to respond to disabled customers in a more simple and appropriate way, and treat them with respect, dignity and confidence (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001, Baker et al., 2007). MacDonald et al. (1994) position shop assistants' training as a means to overcome limited product-related knowledge and tackle attitudinal barriers. In this respect, Baker (2006) demonstrates that shop assistants, who are familiar with reasonable accommodation and allow disabled customers to define the assistance that is needed and respectively provide it, enable people to remain active, maintain control and achieve customer independence.

Hence, shop assistants may either exclude or empower disabled customers. However, they are not free and independent agents choosing the occupied role. Although professionals' personality, disability awareness and social sensitivity may play a part when serving shoppers with impairments, a great part of their professional behaviour is shaped by ableism and a business focus on non-disabled customers and achievement of capitalistic goals. Nonetheless, expedient training on disability, accessibility and customer equality may reshape existing disabling and marginalising

practices, introduce more accessible shopping experience and lead towards equal customer participation.

1.3. Accessibility and the private market

In addition to the limited disabled people's recognition as equal customers and the historically and socially constructed exclusion, insufficient discourse in professionals' practice regarding accessibility, reasonable accommodation and universal design contributes to customers with impairments' exclusion. This thesis, therefore, takes the position that UD should be the founding conception in developing an accessible shopping chain. Instead of treating disabled people as the main users of universally designed products and environments, they should be seen as *one of* the user groups. It is also acknowledged that since in some instances it might be impossible to create spaces and items that are usable by all people under all circumstances (Imrie, 2000b, 2013, Imrie and Hall, 2001, Nussbaumer, 2012, Steinfeld and Maisel, 2012), reasonable accommodations and assistive technologies should be provided at any stage of the shopping chain. While UD is often associated with the process rather than the final product (Vanderheiden, 1996) and is applied to *all* people, this research holds the position that all products and environments that are provided to the public should be accessible to people with different impairments. Accessibility is perceived not only as a technically usable product, environment or service, but also incorporates contextual and individual dimensions and aims to overcome disabling decisions rather than 'fixing' individuals.

Positioning accessible shopping as a chain suggests that professionals, operating in different stages of the chain, have different ontological and epistemological positions on the issue (Pirie, 1979) and operate in different policy contexts, respectively shaping their professional realities. With this in mind, after providing an overview of how the involved parties may understand accessibility, the discussion addresses various dimensions that may either lead to or prevent from more accessible shopping. It then suggests that shop designs should be founded on UD principles that would lead to unification of the customer segment and elimination of labelling and stigmatisation of shoppers with impairments.

1.3.1. Accessibility and user involvement

A generic concept of accessibility in the context of disability was provided by Iwarsson and Stahl, who addressed it as ‘the encounter between the person’s or group’s functional capacity and the design and demands of the physical environment. Accessibility refers to compliance with official norms and standards, thus being mainly objective in nature’ (Iwarsson and Stahl, 2003:61). However, accessibility as an objective character tightly linked with standards, norms and requirements does not necessarily provide accessible experience to a disabled individual. Indeed, Imrie’s (2013:289) concern regarding standardization of the design process may be applied to producing accessible items. He argues that standards often result in ‘the (re)production of design environments that are not necessarily sensitised to body variations, or to the almost constant changes over the life course’. Similarly, having to meet ‘prescribed code requirements for people with disabilities’ (Centre for accessible housing, 1991), accessibility standards introduce similar risks for accessible product development. As an example, Petrie and Kheir (2007) demonstrate that despite website accessibility requirements, users with vision impairments’ experiences differ, as well as provisions that should make websites more accessible for one user group may be a barrier for another. Similarly, Imrie (2000a) notes that wheelchair users’ barrier-free movement is often restricted by accessibility provisions for people with vision impairments that were installed following legal guidance.

Hence, it seems that accessibility should be understood more broadly than in an architectural and standard-based manner, as compliance with technical requirements neither ensure quality (Power et al., 2012), nor provide space for considering user diversity and experience (Horton and Sloan, 2014). While common practice to address the issue is to treat accessibility as person-environment interaction (Iwarsson and Stahl, 2003, Evcil, 2010), Kaufman-Scarborough (2001:460) proposes considering the psychological dimension and links it with ‘feeling of accessibility, dignity, and respect’. In a similar vein, Imrie (2013:289) sheds light on individual’s expertise and knowledge about what is accessible, usable and designed in quality. Hence, while accessibility requirements play an important role in widening and increasing accessibility of the public environment, products or websites (Imrie, 1996), the concept should be released from technical standards and requirements. Indeed, as suggested by Kaufman-Scarborough (1999), disabled users should be involved in the development of accessibility standards, and their opinions, expertise and contextual experiences (Sloan and Kelly, 2011) should be considered.

Additionally to accessibility standards, professionals' knowledge, skills and awareness play a part in shaping the way people with impairments experience accessibility. However, usually the practice is disabling rather than enabling. To begin with, despite a great volume of information and guidance on how to design in an accessible way (Persad et al., 2007), designers and developers often lack knowledge on how to actually design (Heylighen, 2008, Imrie and Hall, 2001, Coleman and Lebbon, 2010, Keates et al., 2000) and evaluate (Persad et al., 2007) accessible environments and products. In addition, they often lack understanding and knowledge about inclusive design (Imrie and Hall, 2001) and awareness of physiological and bodily diversity (Evcil, 2010, Imrie, 2003, Keates et al., 2000). Goodman et al. (2006) suggest that one of the underlying reasons is insufficient presence and availability of sources addressing how the requirements should be implemented in design. To illustrate, although the Department of Mechanical Engineering (UK) is aware of the importance of inclusive design and product accessibility, it lacks knowledge and information about how to improve openability of plastic and glass containers (Langley et al., 2005). Hence, it seems that professionals lack knowledge about how to transform theoretical knowledge into successful and efficient accessible solutions.

One way of overcoming the outlined challenges is the adoption of certain principles of user-centred design (UCD). The term that originated in the 1980s emphasises the user's needs and interests as well as usability of the design (Norman and Draper, 1986). Locating this position at the heart of the development and design process (Newell and Gregor, 2000, Norman and Draper, 1986) enables professionals to develop more efficient and safer products (Sharp et al., 2002) that are usable by a larger group of people (Gheerawo and Donahue, 2004). User involvement and their expertise was recognised and formalised in the publication of International Organisation for Standardization (1999, ISO 13407) Human-Centred Design Processes for Interactive Systems. The standard notes that key principles of the UCD are: active involvement of users; allocation of function to system and to user; iteration of design solutions; and multi-disciplinary design. However, although UCD suppose user involvement (Newell and Gregor, 2000, Gheerawo and Donahue, 2004, Keates and Clarkson, 2004), it contradicts with the essence of participatory action research. It suggests that 'in product research and development, the role of potential users who are disabled should not include setting research agendas, developing research questions, and the choice of evaluation methodologies, all of which need trained researchers. Users should be 'involved in' the process, but not have a dominant role in it' (Newell and Gregor, 2000:40). Such rationale suggests that although disabled people's needs and expertise are

perceived as a fulcrum of the design process, their knowledge is valued only to a certain degree, leaving the power to the professionals (Heylighen, 2008, Till, 2005). Hence, although UCD opens up the space for gaining knowledge about usability and accessible design decisions, it neither encourages broader changes in social, institutional and technical relations and procedures, nor does it completely redraw historically entrenched unequal power relations between professionals and disabled people.

The adoption of participatory (Muller and Kuhn, 1993, Sanders, 2002) design doctrine may assist in overcoming the weaknesses of UCD. Specifically, the involvement of users as co-designers (Abrams et al., 2004) enables identifying design decisions, usable by non-disabled users, but excluding people with impairments (Heylighen, 2008), and increasing environmental injustice (Gleeson, 1999). Experience-based knowledge and evaluations intensively shared during the whole design process (Abrams et al., 2004, Sanders, 2002) and not only in the initial product development and usability evaluation stages (Newell and Gregor, 2000), continuously direct and shape product design. Horton and Sloan (2014) note that while user involvement in the product evaluation stage may assist in validating accessibility-related decisions, their participation from the early stages of the design process may provide unexpected insights and innovative ways of overcoming inaccessibility. Furthermore, according to Imrie and Hall (2001), the adoption of a participatory approach assists in conceptualising forthcoming changes that could maintain product or environment accessibility despite the changing individuals' needs. Most importantly, participatory design enables users and designers to engage in communication as equal actors (Sanders, 2002), who negotiate their knowledge and enter into compromises (Bucciarelli, 1994, Horgen, 1999). According to Newell and Gregor (2000), methods and techniques employed have more potential to reveal user needs and knowledge, compared to user-centred design practices. Finally, direct and proactive participation in the design process (Sanders, 2002) re-shifts power relations between professionals and disabled users (Imrie and Hall, 2001), providing people with impairments with more control over the environment they live in and products they use. It also challenges the entrenched and socially constructed understanding of the user (Imrie and Hall, 2001) and introduces a possibility to design sensitised products, reflecting the context of use and enabling users to exercise accessibility, dignity and respect while using the product.

1.3.2. Accessibility and a common language

Since accessible shopping is an 'outcome' of chain processes, it is important that professionals involved in the development process for each stage of the chain, are committed (Horton and Sloan, 2014) and share similar ontological positions regarding accessibility. While this can be linked to common language (see Chapter Two), it is important to note that in representing different professional backgrounds, professionals have internalised definitions and understandings of accessibility that are clear, known and legitimate in their professional practice context. However, they may cause tensions and misunderstandings when working with other professionals. For instance, Litman (2008) notes that transport planners perceive motor vehicle travel conditions, quality of other modes, transport network connectivity and land use proximity as key factors for accessible transport infrastructure. For land planners accessibility is determined by the 'spatial distribution of potential destinations, and the magnitude, quality, and character of the activities found there', with travel cost being the central factor (Handy and Niemeier, 1997:1175). Iwarsson and Stahl (2003:58) note that while environmental and planning architects in Sweden treat accessibility as 'the simplicity with which activities in the society can be reached, including needs of citizens, trade, industries and public services', the main emphasis is on distances and time, rather than human capacity and interaction. Similarly, Pirie (1979:308) in his extensive review of accessibility concepts emphasises the dominant focus on the time-space accessibility measure, acknowledges the multiplicity of the notion, and challenges brought by it. Hence, while an accessible shopping process is possible only when separate stages are accessible and interconnected, it seems that professionals operating in separate parts of the chain have different understanding of accessibility.

Inconsistency in professionals' ontological positions may act as a barrier, preventing more accessibility provisions and practices. While this thesis does not suggest that professionals' ontologies should be unified, it supports Haase et al. (2005) argument that they are not static but change over time. Hence, changes in education curriculum may evolve the understanding of the concept across disciplines, so to reflect principles entrenched in the CRPD. Indeed, currently, education curriculums of different disciplines insufficiently address accessibility from disability perspectives (Imrie and Hall, 2001, Evcil, 2010). As an example, Foley and Regan (2002) demonstrate that although the need for better web accessibility for disabled people is recognised and legally addressed in policy instruments, training and information provision for the developers is either insufficient or absent. Similarly, while Velasco and Verelst (2001) suggest that often web designers receive no or insufficient training on

accessibility for users with vision impairments, according to Imrie and Hall (2001), this is a trend in the majority of design disciplines. A lack of relevant training shapes differences in professionals' knowledge and estranges the way professionals and disabled users understand and experience environments (Heylighen, 2013). Ontological differences in professionals' mind set continue preventing a systematic shift towards greater migratability from specification to design and actual practice (Masuwa-Morgan and Burrell, 2004), which manifests in rhetorically accessible but empirically segregating environments and products.

Since legal instruments emphasise accessibility more than education curriculums do (see Chapter Two), they may serve as a tool encouraging interdisciplinary knowledge exchange and providing accessible practices. In this regard, it is worth shedding light on the American Disability Act (DDA) (1990) and on the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1995) in the UK. Both documents are well-known punitive legislations, establishing the framework within which identified parties should provide accessibility. On the one hand, as suggested by Keates and Clarkson (2003) the instruments increased awareness across industry and expanded their knowledge. This led to more accessibility and opened up the possibility for civil society to intervene in the process. On the other hand, both documents address minimal standards and guidelines and in such a way neither create a framework for knowledge exchange nor encourage stakeholders to further the progress and provide more accessibility than is required (Imrie and Hall, 2001). To illustrate, the ADA section 4.3.2 states:

At least one accessible route within the boundary of the site shall be provided from public transportation stops, accessible parking, and accessible passenger loading zones, and public streets or sidewalks to the accessible building entrance they serve. The accessible route shall, to the maximum extent feasible, coincide with the route for the general public.

Similarly, in the UK, part M of the Building Regulations (2010) requires providing access where 'reasonable and practical'. Operating in the framework of minimal requirements, developers remain within a particular niche of expertise, and rarely cross the boundaries of professional knowledge. This, in turn, prevents bringing in multiple perspectives related to a problem, and narrows down the context within which the phenomena manifests (Lay and Mol, 2002). It also isolates knowledge across different disciplines (Klein, 1996) and prevents identifying the ways how to negotiate different professional ontologies and to address the issue (Haythornthwaite, 2006) of inaccessibility. In other words, operating within a legal framework, requiring minimal accessibility provisions, and having

limited or absent training on accessibility from disability perspectives, professionals are neither aware of the issue nor are able to provide accessible solutions in different parts of the shopping chain.

1.3.3. Universal design and retail premises

Current legal requirements and retail practice to make accessible only specific elements of the shop, or the provision of only assistive devices and instalments, shed light on individual's impairment (Imrie, 2013) and opens up the space for stigmatizing practices (Parette and Scherer, 2004). Provisions such as ramps, accessible back entrances, loading bays (Imrie, 1996), mobile communication tools (Chininthorn et al., 2012) or navigation systems (López-de-Ipiña et al., 2011) signalise that individuals using these devices are not ordinary customers and require different behaviour towards them (Brookes, 1998). Oliver (1990) notes that although accessibility or reasonable accommodation instalments provide people with the final 'product', the experience of the process is often excluding, promoting ableism and non-disabled society's values and norms. Hence, this research suggests that all stages of the shopping chain, including retail premises, should be universally designed, 'sensitising design to the capabilities of the human body, in ways whereby anyone, irrespective of how their body performs, is able to gain access to, and make use of, the artefacts' (Imrie, 2013:289).

Imrie and Hall (2001:14) note that to its broadest extent universal design can be equalised to a social movement, whose activities are oriented towards 'making products, environments and communication systems usable to the greatest extent possible by the broadest spectrum of people'. In a similar vein, Mace (1988:2) defines UD as 'an approach to design that incorporates products as well as building features and elements which, to the greatest extent possible, can be used by everyone'. Hence, universal design 'targets *all* people of *all* ages, sizes, and abilities and is applied to *all* buildings' (Mace, 1988:2). It is important to note that UD acknowledges the importance of assistive devices (Imrie and Hall, 2001). Vanderheiden (1998), for instance, argues that while UD should be prioritised in the development process, its combination with assistive technologies may provide individuals with the best outcome and advantage. In this respect, Mace (1998) notes that while universally designed homes eliminate the need for the majority of assistive devices and additional spending, if needed, special instalments should be provided aiming to ensure an individual's freedom, independency and dignity. Hence, aiming to provide disabled customers with equality and a pleasant shopping experience, developers of public

places, transport infrastructure, shops and provided services should prioritise universal design but not negate assistive devices and instalments.

Application of UD principles to the shop environment is important not because of disabled shoppers, but mainly because of changes in customer segment. Specifically, with the emergence of shopping malls in the 1880s, middle-aged middle class females were perceived as the main group of shoppers (Gardner and Sheppard, 1989, Weisman, 1994, Witkowski, 1999). This led to the dominance of beauty, pleasure and aesthetics in external and internal shop environments (Gardner and Sheppard, 1989), diminished designers' social responsibility (Tisdale, 1996) and entrenched the focus on forms and shapes instead of functions (Imrie, 2013). However, such design tendencies being well alive in the modern shopping places have to be reconsidered as the customer profile is becoming more diverse. As an example, the number of men shopping is rapidly increasing (Otnes and McGrath, 2001, Dholakia et al., 1995); shopping is becoming an element of men's self-identity creation (Torres et al., 2001, Reekie, 1992). Indeed, traditionally being founded on achievement orientation (Otnes and McGrath, 2001) and satisfaction of clearly defined needs (Anselmsson, 2006), men's shopping behaviour does not fit in the retail environment oriented to meet what is perceived as female's shopping habits and expectations (Anselmsson, 2006, Otnes and McGrath, 2001, Gardner and Sheppard, 1989, Dholakia et al., 1995). This leads men to have unpleasant customer feelings and negative attitudes such as 'dislike' or 'hate' (Campbell, 1997). In addition, while in the past children and teenagers used to be associated with inconvenience in shopping malls (Andreoli, 1996: in Mangleburg et al., 2004), recently their spending power and customer role is getting to be recognised by the industry (Mangleburg et al., 2004, Quart, 2008), which positions them as desired customers.

Growth of the ageing and disabled population and their spending power (see 1.1.5) and slowly increasing disabled adults' participation in society (WHO, 2011), suggest that their partaking in the private market and presence in shops may increase. Hence, founded on femininity stereotypes and oriented towards aesthetics and female customers' seduction (Weisman, 1994), shops threaten to exclude or not completely include various groups of potential shoppers, including people with impairments. The employment of UD principles (see Centre for Universal Design, 2008), sensitisation of the retail environment and integration of impairment accommodations as suggested by Imrie (2013), may therefore 'unlock' shops and provide a more pleasant shopping experience for more diverse customer groups. Focusing on usefulness and simplicity of places and artefacts in a way they are used to ease individuals' capabilities and functioning in a chosen manner and way (Nussbaum, 2003), simplifies

everyone's life and allows different individuals to use the same spaces and artefacts without major differences (Nussbaumer, 2012), and without labelling and stigmatising them (Brookes, 1998, Parette and Scherer, 2004). Most importantly, such practice introduces the discourse of human rights (Nussbaum, 2003) and reflects the philosophy of markets accessibility and customer participation as entrenched in the CRPD article 9.2b.

1.4. Concluding comments

This Chapter has explored three key dimensions regarding disabled people's participation in the mainstream private market as customers. It firstly explored people with impairments' position in markets related with consumption and customer participation; it then shed light on the shopping process as an accessible chain; and concluded the discussion by examination of the discourse on accessibility, reasonable accommodation and UD in the context of the shopping chain.

In drawing attention to disabled people's position in markets related with consumption and customer participation, this chapter has suggested that people with impairments neither were nor are free agents when choosing and deciding the role and position as market participants. Indeed, state policies and market practice seem to play the dominant role. Not fitting the requirements for a 'standard' or 'beneficial' market participant, people with impairments were either isolated from participation in society and markets, or were off-sided. The introduction of personal budgets reshaped historic marginalisation that was also partly premised on older and disabled people's lack of spending power and market autonomy. This created new markets as well as new market relations and positioned disabled people as employees as well as independent purchasers for assistive technologies. Increasing older and disabled people numbers and their spending power encouraged the emergence of special markets for disability products. While this kind of private providers positions disabled people as a valuable clients group, providers of mainstream goods and services perceive them as 'vulnerable' customers. Such ontological tensions impact service provision practice and may isolate customers with impairments within 'special' markets and prevent engagement with mainstream providers.

There have been significant contributions toward demonstrating different barriers faced by people with impairments (Carlsson, 2004, Bromley et al., 2007b, Chouinard, 1997, Fänge et al., 2002, Goldsmith, 2011, Baker, 2006, Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999, 2001, Nemeth and Del Rogers, 1981). While

the studies confirm that facing obstacles is a constant part of disabled people's lives, there is a knowledge lacuna in linking them with customer experience and addressing in the context of the private market. This chapter, therefore, identifies four shopping stages: customer information; the journey to the shop; navigation in retail premises; and interaction in the shop. It suggests that barriers in one of the stages may prevent people from experiencing a smooth and independent shopping process, construct customer vulnerability or exclude from participation in the market. In light of the social model of disability it argues that faced obstacles are shaped not by individuals' impairments, but by ableism and state and business' focus on non-disabled citizens and customers.

The present chapter has also shown that focusing on UCD and insufficient disabled people's involvement in the whole design process prevents developers from knowing how to implement accessibility requirements into practice, and to actually design and evaluate accessible products and environments. Accordingly, it argued for the adoption of a participatory design doctrine (Muller and Kuhn, 1993, Sanders, 2002) that alongside assisting the conceptualisation and foreseeing forthcoming changes in individuals' needs and accessibility provisions, also acts as a platform for users and developers to communicate and negotiate as equals and to enter into compromises aiming to provide more accessibility. It was also suggested that tensions in professionals' ontologies, who operate in different stages of the shopping chain, may prevent and in some cases corrupt accessibility provisions and intrude into equal customer experience. While it is unrealistic and disadvantageous to aim to unify professionals' knowledge and perspectives, it is suggested that awareness raising, education about accessibility from disability perspectives and a stronger focus on the issue in legal instruments may encourage interdisciplinary knowledge exchange and reshape current practice. The chapter concludes by suggesting that aiming to lessen disabled customers' exclusion and stigmatisation, and to ensure equal participation in the mainstream private market, it is not enough to focus only on accessibility. Indeed, philosophy and principles of UD should be applied aiming to create a shopping process that is equally accessible and pleasant to all market participants.

The following chapter continues the discussion and demonstrates how disabled customers and accessibility of the mainstream private market is addressed in global, regional and national policies. It focuses on how the emerged discourse on rights and accessibility rhetorically reshaped disabled people as customers and created some tensions across the multi-scalar governance.

CHAPTER TWO: ACCESSIBILITY IN THE EU MARKETS

The emergence of the discourse on accessibility and rights calls for customer equality and an accessible mainstream private market. Via social claims of public movements and the development of public policy in the area of accessibility and rights, the new discourse brings the private market into the public sphere. While traditionally the governments are perceived as key players shaping public debate (Devetak and Higgott, 1999), they are often incapable to independently deal with challenges brought by globalisation, global economic integration and the necessity to develop public policy outside an economic and financial vacuum. Indeed, in being able to offer different skills and knowledge, broader perspectives and capital, business is a welcome actor in shaping the public domain (Hodes, 2001). However, as suggested by Hodes (2001) and Drache (2001), business' role in public discourse and in becoming a part of the solution depends on its relation with the state. Nevertheless, the capitalistic nature of the market and its common prioritisation of profit over equal rights (Marx, 1893) should not be ignored and should be considered when developing policies and foreseeing potential scenarios of its implementation.

This chapter, therefore, aims to demonstrate how law and public policy frames public discourse on private market as they relate to disabled customers in the EU and so provides a platform for private entities to make the shopping process accessible. It is suggested that the new public discourse aims to reconstruct disabled people from 'vulnerable' consumers to customers. However, the position toward the issue and markets accessibility differs at global, regional and national levels and certain tensions between these policy discourses are present.

The discussion starts by looking at the global level and exploring concepts entrenched in the CRPD. They are treated as a 'moral compass' (Kayess and French, 2008, Quinn, 2009b), guiding the discussion. This is followed by an exploration of how the European single market policy system regionally constructs the position regarding accessibility and customer participation. The attention is drawn on legal construction of disabled people as vulnerable EU market customers. This is followed by a discussion on accessibility of customer information and retail premises. The chapter concludes by providing a short overview of how global and regional concepts and positions are integrated into national policies in Lithuania and the UK. The chapter suggests that since the adoption of the CRPD, the EU and its Member States (MS) have been experiencing a transmutation

that introduces challenges and potentials, shaping business' positions and disabled customers' participation.

While academic disability literature usually focus on social policies and so spotlight the 'social dimension' of the EU, the following discussion directly addresses the single market dimension. It aims to untangle some of the processes that may play a part in creating a more accessible and equal EU single market, but yet have not received academic attention.

2.1. Accessibility in the global context

The CRPD is the first human rights Treaty adopted in the 21st century. Agreed and adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006, the Convention and the Optional Protocol were open for signature on 30 March 2007. As of July 2015, the number of signatories amounts to 159 for the Convention and 92 for the Optional Protocol. The European Union and the majority of the European states have signed the Convention, and 25 EU Member States have ratified it. Article 1 of the Convention notes that the purpose of the Treaty is 'to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity'. Consequently, in its 50 articles the Convention covers a broad range of rights. Quinn (2009a) clustered them into dignity, autonomy, equality, solidarity, and access and participation rights. The Convention does not introduce new or special rights. It elaborates and clarifies existing human rights, and translates them in a manner addressing people with impairments' situations and needs (Kayess and French, 2008, Ferri, 2010). The Convention combines and blends civil and political rights with economic, social and cultural rights within the whole document and its individual articles (Kayess and French, 2008, Quinn, 2009a). In the light of article 4.2 the States are obliged to progressively achieve the same.

The Treaty is often seen as the embodiment of 'paradigm shift' from a social welfare, charity and individual model of disability to a human rights based approach (Kayess and French, 2008). According to Dyson (2007), the 'paradigm shift' emphasises the partnership between governments and civil society, relegates the central role to Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) in the CRPD negotiation and implementation processes, and entrenches the principle of 'nothing about us without us'. Kayess and French (2008:4) represent a commonly used view that 'the CRPD is regarded as having finally empowered the 'world's largest minority' to claim their rights, and to participate in international and national affairs on

an equal basis with others who have achieved specific treaty recognition and protection'. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Committee) (2014) in its General Comment No. 2 on Accessibility (General Comment) entrenches that the main precondition for exercising the rights, and fully and equally participating in society, is accessibility. With this in mind, the following section addresses the way accessibility is conceptualised in the CRPD. Recalling the purpose of the thesis, light is shed on disabled people's participation in the mainstream private market.

2.1.1. Accessibility and the CRPD

Accessibility is one of the CRPD principles (art.3f) and is closely linked with other global human rights instruments. For instance, in the General Comment of the Committee (2014) notes that article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) can be linked with the CRPD's reference to accessible physical environment and public transport. Likewise, access to information and communication can be linked to article 19 and article 19 (par.2) of the same instruments respectively. The two documents emphasise every citizen's right to have *access to* and link it to equality and non-discrimination. While CRPD also positions *access to* as a right, it takes it further and introduces the concept *accessibility of*, which in 1993 was addressed in the Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993). In other words, the Convention recognises accessibility as 'a vital precondition for persons with disabilities to participate fully and equally in society and enjoy effectively all their human rights and fundamental freedoms' (Committee, 2014:4).

The CRPD does not define accessibility either in the definitions article (art. 2) or in article 9, outlining State Parties' (SP) responsibilities regarding the issue. The same practice is observed in the General Comment of the Committee (2014). Identified as a precondition for independent life (art. 19), the principle is intertwined throughout the Treaty. To begin with, article 3 characterises accessibility as a general or normative principle which, according to Lord (2010b:6), serves as a filter 'through which discrete pieces of existing law should be run to assess conformity with the object and purpose of the CRPD' and guide the implementation of substantive rights. Accessibility as a general principle appears in a preamble paragraph, in two general application articles (3 and 9), articles dealing with substantive rights (21) and implementation measures (31, 32, and 49). Together with respect for inherent dignity and individual autonomy, non-discrimination, full and effective participation in society, equality, and respect for disabled children rights, the principle contributes

to the provision of what is commonly called as a 'moral principle' of the CRPD (Kayess and French, 2008, Quinn, 2009b). Hence, while Lord (2010b) uniforms *access to* and *accessibility of* and positions these as a substantive right and a general principle respectively, this thesis echoes the position established by the Committee (2014). It perceives *access to* as a right and *accessibility of* as a precondition for exercising substantive rights.

Article 9.1 outlines SPs' obligations regarding accessibility. It requires taking 'appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access on an equal basis with others, to physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public'. Aiming to ensure these rights to disabled citizens, SPs are required to remove barriers and provide appropriate measures both in rural and urban areas, which encompass a principle of geographic equity (Kayess and French, 2008). While the initial report of the UK on CRPD article 9 (2013) demonstrates that provisions for accessibility are heavily regulated by the Equality Act (EA) and are founded on the principle of exercising human rights, the Lithuanian initial report suggests the dominance of the individual model approach. Here accessibility is premised on accommodating 'the specific needs of the disabled' and is often linked to the 'acceptable' rather than equal provisions (Committee, 2014).

With regard to barriers removal, article 9 demonstrates awareness of different forms of obstacles impinging on equality (Ferri, 2010) and autonomy (Mégret, 2008) and interrupting human rights (Lord, 2010b). While these obstructions are not specified (Lord, 2010b), the article distinguishes the rationale of physical, institutional and attitudinal barriers, and calls for cross-disability implication of rights. The Committee (2014) notes that contrary to access to newly designed artefacts, the removal of barriers is a gradual process. Hence, national governments should set definite time frames, allocate adequate resources for barriers removal, prescribe responsibilities for different stakeholders, establish effective monitoring mechanisms and monitor sanctions against parties that do not follow the obligation. While Chapter One makes it clear that different barriers shape exclusion, civil society's participation in identifying these obstacles (art.4.3) is positioned as an important factor for achieving the duty (Lawson, 2010).

The CRPD goes further than barriers elimination and lays out specific measures and positive obligations that should be taken in order to ensure accessibility. For the purpose of this thesis, it is worth shedding light on article 9.2b that requires 'private entities that offer facilities and services

that are open or provided to the public take into account all aspects of accessibility for people with disabilities'. These include: developing and monitoring the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines; stakeholders' training on accessibility; providing signage in various alternative formats; providing assistance means (human and non-human); promoting access to new information and communication technologies and systems, including the Internet; and promoting design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communication technologies and systems at an early stage and at minimum cost. While the strength of the language vary among the measures (Lord, 2010b), the clear requirement to 'ensure' accessibility refers to accessibility as a justiciable right (UN Commission on Human Rights (39th sess.), 1983 in Hendricks, 2007), that can be decided by a court. The roots of the position can be traced in the requirement to 'take appropriate measures' to ensure access to 'on an equal basis with others' (art.9.1). While Lord (2010b) notes that the CRPD does not outline precise conditions under which a failure to provide accessibility may produce discrimination, Lawson (2010:14) states that 'a failure to fulfil this [accessibility] obligation would result in inequality of access which might, at least in some situations, be expected to constitute discrimination on the basis of disability which States are required by Article 5 to prohibit'.

In a similar vein, Quinn (2010) notes that

there is some elusive line beyond which the non-discrimination principle will not generate the more robust obligations contained in Article 9. Put another way, failure to have an accessible environment is clearly a form of discrimination. Using the non-discrimination tool it is possible to craft some limited positive obligations on States to undo this discrimination. But failure to achieve all the positive obligations outlined in Article 9 is probably not in itself a form of discrimination. By definition, many of these obligations will require resources and extensive systematic change – all subject to the overall obligation of progressive achievement contained in Article 4.2 with respect to socioeconomic rights. Where this line falls is very hard to say – but it does exist.

One of the stipulated measures for ensuring accessibility is to 'develop, promulgate and monitor the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines' (art.9.2a). Recalling the concerns regarding accessibility standards raised in Chapter One, it is worth focusing on the Committee's call to mainstream different accessibility standards and guidelines. According to the Committee, such practice may potentially lead to the generalisation of UD (Committee, 2014), which means matching user

profile and different utilisation of the product (Burzgali and Emiliani, 2013). In addition, the CRPD notes that the standards have to be in accordance with other SPs' standards and developed in close consultation with disabled people, DPOs and international bodies. In addition, article 9.2e addresses provision of different forms of 'live assistance and intermediaries' in order to facilitate access. Hence, it requires to go further than technical and established design standards (Lawson, 2010). In other words, the CRPD recognises that technical features do not ensure accessibility and even if a shop meets technical requirements and minimum standards, personal assistance, for example, in gauging information about product or changes in product layout might be essential for providing access for customer participation and service quality.

Accessibility is also related with availability (Halvorsen, 2010, Lord, 2010b), which throughout the Convention is addressed in the context of an obligation to provide universally designed goods and services (art.4f), information and communication technologies (art.4g), community services for independent living (art.19c), and assistive devices (art.20b) among others. Halvorsen (2010) links availability with actual product presence in the market and its affordability. Hence, additionally to technical product specification, light is shed on distribution of economic resources (Lord, 2010b) and suggests that disabled people may be prevented from using accessible products not only because of technical inaccessibility but because of high cost. While this reflects one of the CRPD's goals to blend civil and political rights with economic, social and cultural rights (Kayess and French, 2008, Charitakis, 2013), it also mirrors the economic principle of accessibility established in the General Comment 14 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2000), requiring equity to be the fundamental factor determining payment for health-care services.

The Convention goes further and identifies UD as a next step of accessibility. Although the concept is not explicitly articulated in article 9, it can be traced in 'implementation of minimum standards and guidelines' (9.2), and must be read in junction with general obligations outlined in article 4.1.f 'to undertake or promote research and development of universally designed goods, services, equipment and facilities' and 'to promote universal design in the development of standards and guidelines'. Whilst, article 2 defines UD as 'design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design'. In a similar vein, the General Comment notes that 'strict application of universal design to all new goods, products, facilities, technologies and services should ensure full, equal and unrestricted access for all potential consumers, including persons with disabilities, in a way that takes full

account of their inherent dignity and diversity’ (Committee, 2014:5). In addition, echoing the position held by UD proponents (Chapter One), article 2 of the Convention and the Committee notes that UD ‘shall not exclude assistive devices, technical aids or live assistance where this is needed, and the application of UD ‘makes society accessible for all human beings’ (Committee, 2014:5).

When goods and services are inaccessible or cannot be reached via UD, reasonable accommodation should be provided. Article 2 defines this as ‘necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms’. The Committee (2014) notes that reasonable accommodation provision is an *ex nunc* duty and should be provided from the moment an individual needs and requires it. Although the obligation raises some tensions and discussions, for the purpose of this thesis it is important to shed light on three of them. First, the essence of reasonable accommodation demands that the ‘consideration be given to identifying the most effective means of removing the relevant disadvantage for the particular person in question’ (Lawson, 2010:13). In the context of shops, alternative formats of information about products should be considered as reasonable accommodation means, that are identified through dialog rather than decided in advance and based on retailers’ assumptions (Lawson, 2010). Second, while reasonable accommodation is framed within the principle of ‘disproportionate or undue burden’ (art.2), it should not be associated explicitly with financial cost, as it may include factors varying from situation to situation, and it often brings benefits instead of encumbrances to burden-bearers (Kayess and French, 2008). Third, the level of the ‘burden’ should be sensitive to each stakeholder (Lawson, 2010), and if needed and agreed, sensible interventions in the market could be undertaken (Lord, 2010b) by the state. In the last-mentioned case, ‘reasonable accommodation can be used as a means of ensuring accessibility [...] in a particular situation. [And should] seek to achieve individual justice in the sense that non-discrimination or equality is ensured, taking the dignity, autonomy and choices of the individual into account’ (Committee, 2014:8).

The Convention and the Committee acknowledge that accessibility is often viewed only as an accessible built environment. Hence, aiming to ensure accessibility, availability and affordability of accessible environments and artefacts, ‘State Parties should strive systematically and continuously to raise awareness about accessibility among all relevant stakeholders’ (Committee, 2014:10). Article 9.2c requires providing training on ‘accessibility issues facing persons with disabilities’. While the General

Comment notes that ‘training should be provided not only to those designing goods, services and products, but also to those who actually produce them’, this thesis goes further and notes that relevant training should also be provided to actors directly or indirectly participating in any stage of the production process and shopping chain. This is important because, as Chapter Five suggests, limited professionals’, who operate in any of the shopping stages, knowledge or awareness may prevent disabled customers from acquiring accessible products.

The obligation of accessibility is applied not only to public but also to ‘private entities that offer facilities and services open or provided to the public’ (art.9.2b). However, as identified by the Committee (2014:4), ‘the focus is no longer on legal personality and the public or private nature of those, who own buildings, transport infrastructure, vehicles, information and communication services. Indeed, their provision to the public is the key factor for being accessible. However, the private sector is not seen as the only responsible party in implementing the duty. Indeed, national governments are obliged to ‘take appropriate measures’ and to shape a framework, within which accessibility of the private sector is ensured. In addition, while discussed concepts are applicable to private entities, the underlying principle of equality across the CRPD and especially article 9 (Ferri, 2010, Kayess and French, 2008, Lawson, 2010) suggests that the diversity of disabled customers should be expected and respected, and they should be treated on an equal basis with non-disabled market participants (Kayess and French, 2008). Hence, with the elimination of social exclusion (Ferri, 2010) and promotion of personal autonomy (Mégret, 2008) being enshrined between the lines of the Convention, accessibility of the private market and equality of the disabled people as active market participants is established. Their portrayal as ‘wasting’, ‘special’, ‘passive’, or ‘vulnerable’ (see Chapter One) is redrawn by the Treaty into active and exercising equal rights. Furthermore, SP are obliged to provide a legal and policy framework, within which private actors engage in the public discourse. With this in mind, the following section sheds light on the regional level. It considers the way the EU, which has signed the Convention and locates the internal market at its heart (COM (2011) 206, final), reacts to and integrates concepts of equal participation in the market and accessibility into its instruments and policies.

2.2. Accessibility in the European single market

The EU signed the Convention on the 26th November 2009, with the concepts of equality and non-discrimination being already rooted in the Union's and Member States' laws and constitutions (Bell, 2003). Many obligations introduced by the Convention reflect and share a common core with EU competences and values (Reiss, 2012) that are linked with the four single market freedoms establishing free movement of capital, labour, services and goods across the Union (Bellamy, 2012). Specifically, similarly to the Convention that requires State Parties to remove barriers preventing from equal participation in the private market, the EU 'single market is all about bringing down barriers and simplifying existing rules to enable everyone in the EU – individuals, consumers and businesses – to take the most of the opportunities offered to them by having direct access to 28 countries and 203 million people' (European Commission, 2014). In addition, in 2012 the EC published an initiative to publish the European Accessibility Act (EAA), aiming to improve accessibility of goods and services for the disabled EU citizens (European Commission, 2012). However, while the initiative is premised on the equality principle and removal of economic and social barriers, it remains unpublished and so denies the right of equal and accessible customer participation. Meanwhile, even though the recently adopted 'Vision for the internal market for industrial products' (COM (2014) 25,final) aims to set recommendations for the legislation on the internal market for the next decade, it does not directly mention disability or accessibility.

Hence, it seems that the combination of CRPD duties and obligations and the EU's goal to create a barrier-free single market may supplement each other and shape tradition and praxis, enabling EU citizens to equally exercise customer rights. However, the EU seems to be confused between barrier removal for non-disabled citizens' participation aiming to boost the economy, and the removal of barriers in order to ensure internal markets accessibility to all citizens. These tensions are well reflected in additional laws and directives, ensuring the presence of the single market and demolishing further barriers in specific areas (European Commission, 2014). The present section, therefore, addresses some of the contradictions in the public discourse surrounding disability, accessibility and retail customers. The discussion starts with an exploration of legal construction of disabled people as customers within the EU single market. This is followed by a discussion on customer information provision and either discriminatory or enabling practices introduced by EU instruments. Finally, requirements for accessible retail premises are discussed.

2.2.1. Disabled customers

The notion of the 'consumer' is separately specified in several EU instruments. The definition has been established in procedural law², and contract³ and non-contractual⁴ obligations law. Although the conception within the instruments does not entirely coincide, it shares a common core and identifies a consumer as 1) a natural person, 2) 'acting for purposes which are outside his trade, business, craft or profession' (Council Directive 2011/83/EC, art.1 on Consumer Rights). However, the EU does not have competence to act solely in the interest of protecting customers. The impact is indirect and the competence on consumer protection is linked to the single market objectives (Miller, 2011).

Seeking to promote customers' interests and to ensure a high level of their protection (TFEU, 2012, art.169) the EU has established fundamental principles of customer protection, acknowledged existing distortive practices within the private market and defined two groups of customers: 'average' and 'vulnerable'. When particular measures are applied for an 'average' customer protection, the emphasis is on market practice, which 'materially distorts or is likely to materially distort the economic behaviour with regard to the product of the average consumer whom it reaches or to whom it is addressed' (Council Directive 2005/29/EC, art.5.2b on Unfair Business Practices). In contrast, when measures established in the same instrument are applied to 'vulnerable' customers, including people with impairments, one of the identified reasons for the protection is a particular vulnerability 'to the practice or the underlying product because of their mental or physical infirmity, age or credulity' (Council Directive 2005/29/EC, art.5.3 on Unfair Business Practices). Hence, while the CRPD does not use terms such as 'customers' or 'vulnerable' and calls for accessibility of the private market in its broadest sense, the EU positions people with impairments as 'vulnerable' customers. This contradicts the equality principle enshrined in the Convention as current EU documents separate non-disabled and disabled market participants and treat impairment as one of the sources of experienced challenges in the market. Morgan et al. (1995) note that such an individual model perspective is often used in court cases as it is easier and more convenient to attribute experienced troubles to customers rather than to marketing strategies or products.

² Council Regulation 44/2001/EC on Jurisdiction in Civil and Commercial Matters;
Council Regulation 593/2008/EC on Contractual Relations

³ Council Directive 2008/48/EC on Credit Agreements for Consumers

⁴ Directive 85/374/EC on EU procedural liability

Legal evaluation of customer vulnerability may include social, linguistic and cultural factors (Edward et al., 2000). However, since the interpretation of similar connotation in different Member States varies (Abbamonte, 2006, Edward et al., 2000), what is protective in one country may be misleading in another and introduce legal and practical tensions. The interlink between individual's dependency to the category of disability and customer vulnerability may lead to perceived rather than actual vulnerability (Smith and Cooper-Martin, 1997) and maintain unequal power relations between non-disabled and disabled customers (see Chapter One). In addition, customer vulnerability assessment is founded on non-disabled customers' competencies (Edward et al., 2000) and refers to normality standards and functions (Amundson, 2005). In such a context, non-disabled individuals are provided with legal superiority in the market. In this respect, those who deviate from the 'normality' standards, are devalued as equals. Hence, by introducing categories of 'average' and 'vulnerable' consumer, the EU communicates what is a 'normal' and expected, and what is an 'abnormal' and less expected participant of the EU single market, and redeploys unequal power relations and oppression to the retail domain.

Disabled people's categorisation as vulnerable customers may introduce misbalance between customer protection and customer rights. Specifically, while the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (art.153) and especially the Council Directive 2005/29/EC on Unfair Commercial Practices require the EU to ensure a high level of consumer protection and rights, disabled people's identification as 'vulnerable' put the emphasis on protection and not so much on rights. As an example, the Council Directive 2010/13/EU par.104 on Audiovisual Media Services equates disabled customers' rights assurance to the protection of minority groups and treats as equally important the seeking of the creation of an open audio-visual media services market. This suggests that while the CRPD shapes disabled people's participation in the private market around concepts of rights, equality and non-discrimination, the EU links it with protection that, if achieved, leads toward a better functioning of the single market economy.

However, some changes are occurring, the most significant being documented in the EU staff working document on Knowledge-Enhancing Aspects of Consumer Empowerment 2012–2014 (European Commission, 2012). The instrument acknowledges that specific circumstances within the market may lead to customer vulnerability. However, a person's impairments are treated as equally important factors. Hence, while a mild shift from customer vulnerability as an internally pre-defined feature toward vulnerability as a constructed state is occurring, people with impairments are still seen as responsible agents for the difficulties they

experience. In other words, despite some attempts to move responsibility from an individual to socio-political and market causes, the document is premised on an individual model and ascribes responsibility for the performance and the results of the performance in the market to a disabled customer.

The discussed EU policies may position disabled people as having low self-esteem, poor decision making abilities and less personal control (Sanders, 2006), lead to marginalization, exclusion and negate their customer equality, rights, abilities and strengths. They legally entrench the status of being 'vulnerable' and position an individual's impairment as an important factor, determining customer position in the market. The marriage of the capitalist economy and the nature of the private market with the existing EU policy discourse separate disabled people's skills, competences and knowledge that they could use to negotiate their position and actions in the market. Positioning disabled people as important and sensitive social concern that needs protection (Baker et al., 2005) presses their experiences, emotions, expectations and abilities to the bottom (Edgar, 2006). A legally established portrayal as needing protection intrudes into everyday life, destroying and lessening individuals' meanings of life and weakening their fundamental freedoms and rights.

2.2.2. Information provision

The EU acknowledges the need to provide consumers with information (TFEU, art.169.1). However, information provision in alternative formats is overlooked or permeated with discriminatory features. To begin with, the Council Directive 2011/83/EU art.5; 6 on Consumer Rights states that before signing an official contract, the trader should provide the customer with information such as 'the main characteristics of the goods and services [...], the identity of the trader [...], the total price [...] the arrangements for payment [...]'. Although the instrument targets technical features of information presentation and invites national governments to introduce 'language requirements regarding the contractual information, so as to ensure that such information is easily understood by consumer', it does not address accessibility of the provided information. Likewise, the Council Directive 2001/95/EC art.16 on General Product Safety states that information about 'risks to consumer health and safety posed by products', which is available to legal authorities, should be available to the general public. However, despite that disabled people are more likely to experience risks caused by mainstream products (Department of Trade and Industry, 2000), the directive does not address information accessibility and in such a way negates customers with impairments' rights to safety.

Waddington (2009) notes that a lack of specific agreement on how to balance information presentation needs of 'average' and 'vulnerable' customers is one of the reasons causing tensions in product labelling requirements and practice. Limited consensus and unestablished practice shape exclusive and discriminatory practices that, in some instances, lead the European Court to acknowledge that some customers will be misled by particular marketing practices, including provided information (Waddington, 2009). As an example, while 'small print' in contracts is usually accessible for people without vision impairments but often causes confusion, risks and financial disadvantage to customers with vision impairments (Eardley et al., 2009), the court may not treat it as a discriminatory practice. This recalls Weatherill's (2011) point about the imbalance and inequality between 'average' and 'vulnerable' customers, suggesting that the second group is 'sacrificed to the interests of self-reliant customers in deregulation, market integration, and wider choice' (Weatherill, 2011:842). Similarly, Charitakis (2013) emphasises that legal instruments, aiming to oblige private entities to provide customers with information, are not relevant for disabled people, since they do not address information provision in alternative formats. In other words, while current EU provisions address customer information, they shed light on non-disabled market players, so depriving disabled customers' right to an informed choice and decision (Hoffmann and Inderst, 2009, Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

Only the Council Directive 2004/27/EC on the Community Code Relating to Medical Products clearly requires the provision of information about publically available products in accessible formats. However, its focus is on medical products and information provision in Braille. Thus:

The name of the medicinal product [...] must also be expressed in Braille format on the packaging. The marketing authorisation holder shall ensure that the package information leaflet is made available on request from patients' organisations in formats appropriate for the blind and partially-sighted (art.56a).

On the one hand, the directive challenges current EU customer information concept and provision practice, as it goes further than the requirement to label products in national language. In such a way the instrument acknowledges that the customer segment is broader than just non-disabled people. On the other hand, it illustrates the prevailing attitude to people with impairments and associated needs. The obligation to alternatively label only medical products and the lack of similar requirements to label mainstream articles maintains a stereotypical attitude that the most important goods and services for disabled people are those related with

health or impairment (see Chapter One). Furthermore, the directive focuses on information provision in Braille and so discriminates against customers who need other formats. With this in mind, it is worth focusing on Abberley's (1987:7) point that 'at an empirical level, it is to argue that on significant dimensions disabled people can be regarded as a group whose members are in an inferior position to other members of society because they are disabled'. Although the author addresses the relation between disabled and non-disabled individuals, this can also be adapted to customers with different impairments in the context of information provision. Specifically, the directive creates a framework within which customers without vision impairments are in an inferior position to people with vision impairments. This includes people who need audio information, easy to read texts and symbols, etc. In other words, legal requirements, prioritising particular accessible formats and negating others, create stratification among and segregation of customers with certain impairments.

However, not all practices are discriminating. As an example, Commission Regulation 1107/2006/EC on the Rights when Travelling by Air requires that 'all essential information provided for air passengers should be provided in alternative formats accessible to disabled persons' (preamble). Likewise, the Council Directive 2009/136/EU on e-Privacy establishes several requirements regarding information provision for disabled people. The instrument obliges providers to 'regularly inform disabled subscribers of details of products and services designed for them' (art. 21f). Furthermore, it adjudicates the power to national regulatory authorities to 'specify, *inter alia*, the quality of service parameters to be measured and the content, form and manner of the information to be published, including possible quality certification mechanisms, in order to ensure that end-users, including disabled users, have access to comprehensive, comparable, reliable and user-friendly information' (art. 22.2). Thus, the instruments blend the measures for disabled and non-disabled customers and provide both an information provision framework about existing accessible goods and services, and a quality and equity framework regulating access to information.

2.2.3. Accessibility of retail premises

The EU law does not directly address either accessibility of the built environment or access to retail premises. Being aware of potential differences and policy incompatibilities across Member States (Prideaux, 2006), the Union locates related instruments within the soft and hard law context, and covers built environment accessibility in a separate piece of

legislation. With regard to instruments that could shape shop accessibility, Council Directive 89/645/EEC on Minimum Health and Safety should be noted. It addresses 'doors, passageways, staircases, showers, washbasins, lavatories and workstations used or occupied by handicapped persons' (Annex I, para. 20). While the instrument does not require elements to be accessible, it demands considering disabled workers' needs and usability of the workplace. These provisions could also benefit disabled and non-disabled customers, who interact in environments usable by disabled employees. Furthermore, Council Directive 95/16/EC on lifts requires designing and constructing lifts in a way that they 'do not obstruct or impede access and use by disabled persons and so allow any appropriate adjustments intended to facilitate its use by them' (M2.1.2). Despite the reference to barrier-free access, the instrument targets assurance of disabled people's health and safety, and not equal access to premises. While the two documents do not directly address accessibility of retail premises, their applicability either to private employers or to buildings and constructions suggests that retail premises should comply with the identified requirements.

Similarly, the Council Regulation 305/2011/EU on Construction Products alongside general requirements determines safety and accessibility in use. Thus:

the construction works must be designed and built in such a way that they do not present unacceptable risks of accidents or damage in service or in operation such as slipping, falling, collision, burns, electrocution, injury from explosion and burglaries. In particular, construction works must be designed and built taking into consideration accessibility and use for disabled persons (Requirement No. 4).

Even though the regulation is applicable to private retail premises and addresses accessibility for disabled people, similarly to previous instruments, requirements are underpinned by the assurance of health and safety, instead of equality and non-discrimination.

EU procurement law⁵ notes that the award of contracts should be based on principles of free movement of goods and services, equal treatment, non-discrimination, mutual recognition, proportionality and transparency. Contracting authorities and entities are invited (but not required) to address accessibility and UD in technical specifications of tender documents. However, they are free to choose whether to implement the measures advancing equal opportunities in awarding contracts or not:

⁵ Directive 2004/17/EC and Directive 2004/18/EC

Contracting authorities should, whenever possible, lay down technical specifications so as to take into account accessibility criteria for people with disabilities or design for all users. The technical specifications should be clearly indicated, so that all tenderers know what the requirements established by the contracting authority cover (Council Directive 2004/18/EC, preamble 29 on Public Works Contracts).

In addition, technical provisions addressing the built environment, and goods and services that are covered by Council Directives 2004/17/EC on Utilities and 2004/18/EC on Public Works Contracts

shall be set out in the contract documentation, such as contract notices, contract documents or additional documents. Whenever possible these technical specifications should be defined so as to take into account accessibility criteria for people with disabilities or design for all users (Directive 2004/18/EC, art. 23).

While the directives provide Member States with freedom to choose the form and method of how to adopt the requirements (Craig and de Burca, 1998) in a way that best meets national peculiarities (Toshkov, 2008), the process usually is slow (Craig and de Burca, 1998) and introduces differences in accessibility practices across countries that shape diversity in customer experience (see Chapter Five). Most importantly, accessibility requirements are not binding and should be defined 'whenever possible'. This suggests that despite the instruments acknowledge the need to provide more accessibility, they prioritise contracting entities' interests and provide them with the power to decide when it is possible to provide accessibility.

Aiming to facilitate accessibility of the built environment via public procurement, the EC (2007) issued a mandate to the European Standardisation Organisations (ESO) to draft European accessibility standards (M/420). Contrary to outlined instruments, the mandate shares some similarities with the CRPD and positions accessibility as a right and a precondition for exercising rights. Likewise with the Convention, the instrument shifts the focus from legal personality and the nature of the owner. In long-term oriented strategic actions it requires the ensuring of equal and accessible access to built and newly designed environments. The instrument also seeks to develop an online toolkit, available for public procurers that would assist them in ensuring that functional accessibility and minimum technical functionality requirements are met. However, Marcos (2011:44) warns that it is not enough to just support procurers. In seeking to achieve outlined goals it is necessary to treat accessibility standards as a 'fundamental and absolute requirement of the procurement

process' and to develop 'a set of accessibility related criteria for awarding the contract and later for carrying out conformity assessment'. Most importantly, the accessibility standards goal cannot be seen only as a support resource for procurers. It has to be positioned as one of the means leading toward equality, non-discrimination, independent living and exercising human rights.

Additionally to technical requirements, the EU promotes accessibility via provision of financial incentives. Council Regulation 1303/2013/EC on Structural Funds defines accessibility and disability as factors that have to be taken into account during the preparation and implementation of different programmes (art.7). Since the financial instruments may be applied to the private sector (preamble, 36) and can be used to fund infrastructure projects (preamble, 47), the instrument acts as an incentive for the private market to consider and provide accessibility.

It seems that currently the EU is undergoing conceptual and empirical tensions and transmutations regarding market accessibility and disabled customers' participation. Hence, aiming to better understand the factors that should be considered in aiming to create effective customer policies for disabled people in the mainstream private market, the revelation of how national governments react to global and regional policies and the way they deal with the outlined contradictions becomes important. With this in mind, the following section sheds light on positions of and practices in Lithuania and the UK.

2.3. Accessibility in national markets: Lithuania and the UK

Multi-scalar governance is nuanced, and the ratification and conversion of global (Buergethal et al., 2009) and regional instruments (Cuthbert, 2012) into domestic is not a hierarchical, but a complex and bipartite process (Haas, 1998). In terms of the adoption of global human rights instruments, while Koo and Ramirez (2009) argue that signing international treaties may be highly symbolic, Maniruzzaman (2001) notes that countries' perspectives and practice depend on whether they follow a monist or dualist approach toward international law. With regard to compliance with EU instruments, it seems that it is mainly a matter of Member States' choice, political calculation (Gourevitch, 1996) and technical factors (Haas, 1998). The adoption of regional instruments have to go through various stages of domestic absorption (Lord and Stein, 2008), with the processes of identification, translation, consultation and adaptation varying from country to country (Toshkov, 2008). Indeed, the EU has no competence to

act solely in the interest of protecting consumers and ensuring accessibility of national markets, except to support and monitor governments' efforts. In this regard, interpretation and innovation at the national level is a key driver and the competence to act in the interest of consumers and market accessibility lies with the Member States. With this in mind, the present section draws the attention to Lithuania and the UK which have different economic structures and welfare regimes but operate within the same global and regional policy frameworks. Both countries have ratified the CRPD and are members of the EU, although they joined the Union at different times and under different circumstances. With this in mind, the following discussion sheds light on how the two countries legally construct disabled people as customers and what the premises are for accessible shopping.

2.3.1. 'Socially vulnerable consumers' in Lithuania

The definition of a 'consumer' established in Lithuanian legal instruments is consistent with the notion provided in related EU instruments⁶ and defines a 'consumer' as a 'natural person, who expresses his intention to buy, buys and uses goods or services to meet his own personal, family or household needs and that are outside his business or profession' (Law on Consumer Protection, art. 2, par.15, 2009). In terms of customers with impairments, it is worth focusing on both equality and general framework instruments. With regard to equality legislations, the Law on Equal Treatment (2008) establishes sellers and producers' responsibility to 'provide consumers with equal access to the same goods and services, including housing, as well as apply equal conditions of payment and guarantees for the same products, goods and services or for products, goods and services of equal value' (art.8 para.1). Furthermore, paragraph 2 of article 8 notes that information provided about products shall not be humiliating, contemptuous or discriminate against people with impairments. Hence, while disabled people are not distinguished as a separate customer group, some practices that should be avoided when aiming to ensure non-discriminatory participation in the market are identified.

With regard to general-framework legislations, although non-disabled customers' protection is established in at least 12 statutes and 5 sub-statutory acts, none of them refer either to disabled customers' rights, or to 'vulnerable consumers' protection. Disabled people are categorised as 'socially vulnerable consumers' and some actions oriented towards their

⁶ Directive 2008/48 on credit agreements for consumers, Directive 85/374/EC on EU procedural liability and Directive 2011/83 on consumer rights

protection are established in separate instruments. The category of 'socially vulnerable consumers' is not officially established and may change according to the government or its authorised institution (Law on Electricity, 2012). It usually includes disabled people, single mothers, under-retirement age or unskilled young people, ethnic minorities, and people who cannot find a job (VPVI, 2011). Hence, it seems that disabled customers are located within the social welfare framework. It suggests that their participation in the mainstream private market is recognised as a social problem and their functioning as customers is hardly possible without social interventions and organised activities of governmental and voluntary organisations (Dolgoff et al., 1997).

Similarly to the processes at the regional level, some changes in conceptualising disabled people as customers are emerging in the Lithuanian instruments. To begin with, the National Strategy for Consumer Protection (NSCP) 2007-2010 defines disabled people as 'consumers, who experience social exclusion' and ascribes an individual with the responsibility for facing and fighting the exclusion. Contrary to this, the NSCP 2011-2014 replaces the notion 'consumers, who experience social exclusion' with 'socially vulnerable consumers' and introduces a mild shift from premising customer vulnerability on individual features toward the role played by external factors. However, as Chapters Five and Six suggest, the changes remain mainly conceptual as neither customer equality nor private providers' ontological position and attitudes are in compliance with the mentioned change.

Second, NSCP 2007-2010 acknowledges insufficient education of 'consumers, who experience social exclusion' (para.35), and accordingly aims to provide special needs-based relevant knowledge for informed decision-making (action 3.1). The 2011-2014 Strategy goes further and highlights the necessity to develop 'socially vulnerable consumers' skills that would allow for more effective practices in the market place (para.18.2.2). Although the latter instrument refers mainly to e-commerce, finances, insurance, transport and tourism, the shift from having knowledge to having knowledge and skills is observed. On the one hand, this suggests government's awareness that challenges experienced by disabled customers cannot be overcome by using only knowledge. In order to convert knowledge into effective customer participation, particular skills are necessary. On the other hand, despite this conceptual fracture, the ideological position remains the same as the shift from knowledge to knowledge and skills strengthen disabled people's individual responsibility for their performance in the market. Instead of emphasising state and business' responsibility, the government aims to convert people with impairments into knowledgeable and confident actors, who are

responsible for their customer performance and exercised customer rights. In such a way, the Lithuanian government establishes what Bauman (2000) identifies as customer's *de jure* autonomy. In other words, the responsibility for overcoming the barriers that are common to and experienced by masses is ascribed to separate individuals, with this duty being entrenched in legal instruments.

With regard to provisions specifically focusing on disabled customers, it seems that measures for providing service affordability are the most common. As an example, the Law on Electricity (2012) anticipates additional guarantees for electricity supply and affordability measures (art.43). 'Socially vulnerable' users are obliged to pay 20% of the inputs of the electricity network operator or other prices based on this proportion (art. 67, para.6). Similarly, the Law on Natural Gas (2001) establishes availability and sufficiency of natural gas for a reasonable price as one of the means to protect this customer group. Article 58 notes that in the context of customers' rights protection, one of the functions of the National Control Commission for Prices and Energy is to ensure that adequate remedies are applied to ensure 'socially vulnerable consumers'' rights (art. 58). Hence, it seems that at the empirical level 'socially vulnerable' customers' protection is premised on financial measures and provisions ensuring that they remain solvent clients.

In some instances some non-disabled customer rights' protection measures may prevent disabled people from exercising and demanding customer rights. As an example, the Law on Consumer Protection (2009) protects customers' rights only when service or supply relations between a customer and a provider exist. This means that if, for example, a person using a wheelchair cannot enter a shop because the entrance is inaccessible, customer rights protection law is not applicable, since there is no provider-customer relationship. Such practice can only be addressed as an impediment into barrier-free movement in the built environment. Hence, it seems that the customer rights protection approach is relatively narrow and customer rights assurance is directly linked with and depends on their participation in activities that generate profit.

Customer rights protection bodies do not address people with impairments' customer rights. As an example, while the State Consumer Rights Protection Authority is the main agency responsible for the assurance of customer equality and rights, it does not specialise in disabled customers' rights nor does the European Consumer Centre in Lithuania. Similarly, other consumer protection agencies, private lawyers or DPOs do not specialise in disabled customers' rights and protection against unfair commercial practice. This maintains the position that individuals, belonging

to the category of 'socially vulnerable consumers' are customers de jure and are individually responsible for participation in the market.

2.3.2. 'Vulnerable consumers' in the UK

The notion of consumer established in the UK legal instruments is in line with the EU instruments and shares a common core with the definition provided in Lithuanian documents. The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations (2008) defines a customer as 'any individual who in relation to a commercial practice is acting for purposes which are outside his business' (part 1, para.2). A similar position is established in the Consumer Protection Act (1987) (part 3), the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations (1999) (part 3) as well as in other related acts and regulations.

In terms of disabled customers, similarly to the EU and Lithuania, the UK categorises people with impairments as 'vulnerable consumers'. As in Lithuania's case, the primary UK legislation in the customer area lacks focus on and reference to disabled people. The only exception is established in the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations (2008), which refers to 'mental or physical infirmity, age or credulity' (part 1.2(5)):

(5) In determining the effect of a commercial practice on the average consumer-

(a) where a clearly identifiable group of consumers is particularly vulnerable to the practice or the underlying product because of their mental or physical infirmity, age and credulity in a way which the trader could reasonably be expected to foresee.

Guidance on the UK Regulations (May 2008) implementing the Unfair Commercial Practice Directive (Office of Fair Trading, 2008) consolidates this position by stating that 'consumers are only treated as vulnerable, to a practice or to the underlying product, if they are vulnerable because of infirmity, age or credulity' (14.37). Thus, as in the case of EU instruments, the UK positions impairment as one of the reasons for and a cause of disabled people's customer vulnerability.

Within the last two decades, disabled customers' position in the UK's general customer rights and protection system has been constantly changing. In 1999, the White paper 'Modern Markets: Confident Consumers' (Department Trade & Industry, 1999) introduced a term 'consumer empowerment', which remains an important concept in current policy instruments. At that time, much like the presently undergoing changes in Lithuania, it was acknowledged that having only knowledge is

insufficient and the development of particular skills is necessary for the aim of enabling customers to become more confident and demanding market actors (Department Trade & Industry, 1999). In a disability context, the document referred only to information provision in alternative formats (para. 3.2) without specifying the actual formats. Later, despite the significance of the customers' empowerment being emphasised in the 2005 report A Fair Deal for All (Department of Trade and Industry, 2005), it did not refer to disability. Furthermore, while the Consumer Empowerment Strategy (2011) positions access to information and skills as one of the means to empower customers, it does not refer to information provision in accessible formats. Hence, while the instrument aims to empower non-disabled customers, it excludes individuals who need alternative formats, such as Braille, large print, easy to read or audio formats. This discriminates against customers with impairments prevents them from making informed customer decisions.

Similarly to Lithuania's case, five UK regulatory bodies address special measures for general services and utilities that aim to protect the interests of 'vulnerable consumers' including disabled people. These include postal services, water services, gas and electricity, communications, and railway services (House of Lords, 2006-2007). However, these are only five out of ten main regulatory bodies, having statutory power and seeking to protect non-disabled consumers' interests. Thus, despite the duty to protect customers' interests, customers with impairments' rights and protection do not receive equal attention. This suggests fragmentation in the system that may create a separation between disabled and non-disabled market participants.

In terms of the provisions for disabled people, the identified documents require the consideration of disabled people or chronically sick customers' interests. Hence, there is a necessity to operate within a Disabled People's Protection Policy. Nevertheless, separate documents have different practices for addressing disability-related issues. As an example, similarly to Lithuania's case, the UK's regulations on postal and railway services do not refer to a particular type of impairment and group all disabled people into the category of 'vulnerable consumers'. Conversely, the Communications Act (2003) determines some requirements for the provision of 'Television services for deaf and visually impaired' (part. 3.303) and links these with reasonable accommodation. In other words, in terms of regulatory bodies who have established the duty to protect 'vulnerable consumers', there are both general-disability and specific-impairment protection frameworks.

Disabled customers' protection is also addressed under the equality or non-discrimination framework. The Equality Act (2010) is the main instrument and covers the provision of and access to different goods, services and facilities. While Priestley (2012) notes that under the Act, provision of accessible information may be treated as reasonable adjustment, part 10 of the Act determines that the contract may be treated as unenforceable if it constitutes, provides or promotes unfair treatment of a person because of his/her impairment (142.2). In such a case, a county court or the sheriff can remove or modify the contract (143.1).

Similarly to Lithuania, the number of bodies promoting and representing disabled customers' rights in the UK is limited. Specifically, although the Office of Fair Trading is the main organisation, seeking to 'make markets work well for consumers [...] by promoting and protecting consumer interests throughout the UK' (Office of Fair Trading, 2012a), neither in its general agenda, nor in the Annual Plan 2012-2013 (Office of Fair Trading, 2012b) does it refer to customers with impairments. Disability Rights UK, the largest national disability organisation led by disabled people, also does not emphasise disabled customers' rights protection (Disability Rights UK, 2012), this being a common practice in other DPOs.

2.3.3. Accessibility in Lithuania

The Law on the Social Integration of the Disabled People (2004) is the key instrument with regard to accessibility requirements for people with impairments. It perceives accessibility as one of the principles for social integration that allows participation in all spheres of life, and the use of available sources (art.3 (par.6)). Interestingly, while the Law on Equal Treatment (2008) is the main instrument on equal opportunities and addresses the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability, it neither links accessibility with non-discrimination, nor positions it as a precondition for exercising human rights.

Recalling the concept of an accessible shopping chain (see Chapter One), it is worth shedding light on how national instruments address accessibility with regard to customer information, built environment and retail premises. Regarding to customer information, there is a lack of mechanisms addressing its accessibility. The most comprehensive is the recent National Programme of the Disabled Integration (2012) that among other goals aims to ensure access to information that is available to the general public. The document acknowledges limited information accessibility, including product packaging and customer information. It calls for consideration of UD and disabled users' involvement when developing

and providing accessible information. Concurring with the challenges outlined in the programme, Ruškus and Motiečienė (2012) demonstrate that the practice is insufficient, fragmented and is usually initiated by the third sector.

With regard to accessibility of the built environment, the Law on Social Integration of Disabled People (2004, art.11) requires its implementation through 1) the planning of territories and construction design, and 2) through the adaptation of public buildings, dwellings and their environments, public transport objects and the infrastructure, and the information environment in a way they meet special needs of disabled people. Hence, similarly to the CRPD, the instrument establishes a relatively broad understanding of accessibility and incorporates the requirement to consider it from the early stages of the development. It covers accessibility of urban infrastructure and the built environment and in such a way lays a path for barrier-free movement and connectivity between places (Imrie, 2000a). However, the instrument is premised on an individual model of disability. It positions the provision of accessibility as a means to meet disabled people's 'special needs' and so interconnects accessibility with impairments rather than with the provisions that are beneficial for all society members.

While the Law on the Social Integration of the Disabled People (2004) deals with the accessibility concept, the Law on Construction (2011a) and the Technical Regulations for Construction (TRC) (2001) address specific requirements to make the built environment accessible. Whereas the Law on Construction (2011a) briefly establishes that 'design, construction, reconstruction or overhaul of buildings (with the exception of renovation (modernization) of apartment houses) and civil engineering works must be carried out in such a way that they will accommodate the specific needs of disabled people' (art.6 para.3), the TRC is more comprehensive. The document provides a systematic-approach to technical requirements for accessibility in/ of cities, towns, and villages; footpaths; parking lots and garages; public and commercial buildings; among others. The measures are treated as a means through which disabled people's social integration and free usage of different elements in the built environment should be ensured.

Although public and private bodies have to follow the requirements when preparing construction projects, the reality differs. As an example, physical and social environments, including cultural heritage objects (Vilnius Tourism, 2012), public institutions (Ruškus and Motiečienė, 2012), public and renovated public buildings (Merkevicius, 2012) remain inaccessible, as they are designed for non-disabled individuals. For instance, the Lithuanian

Association of People with Disabilities (2011) describes the journey to the shop as requiring 'para-Olympian's courage and persistence'. While shortcomings in national legal acts, insufficient financial support by the state (Merkevicius, 2012), disablist attitudes and limited awareness (Mačiulevičiūtė, 2012) play a part in shaping inaccessibility, limited interpretation and innovation of regional requirements by the Lithuanian government contribute to creating exclusion. Specifically, mirroring EU practice to focus on accessibility provisions for people with mobility and vision impairments, requirements regarding provisions for individuals with cognitive impairments are left aside. This is well reflected in projects and academic studies, evaluating accessibility that are usually funded by government bodies (Ruškus and Motiečienė, 2012). Hence, it seems that Lithuanian instruments are insufficiently innovative with regard to regional policies as well as that current academic studies do not efficiently challenge national policy discourse.

Regarding accessibility of retail premises, section 7 of the TRC (2001) addresses the entrance into the building, free movement and usage of all accommodations for visitors, exits, evacuation routes, sanitary facilities and special means designated to make an internal and external environment accessible for people with impairments. The instrument acknowledges that different elements of the built environment have to be accessible in order to provide a barrier-free environment. However, similarly to the discussed EU instruments, it positions accessibility as a health and safety issue (par.73) and consolidates the stereotype that disabled people are vulnerable market participants and need protection. Hence, while the instrument acknowledges the need for more accessible buildings, it positions the concept as 'protecting' certain groups rather than ensuring their equality. In terms of the internal shop environment, paragraph 79 notes that all items and instalments that are provided to customers in shops have to be easy to reach for disabled people. Although currently there is no available evidence on disabled customers' experiences in shops in Lithuania, Chapter Five suggests a mismatch between this policy rhetoric and empirical reality.

2.3.4. Accessibility in the UK

The emphasis on accessibility in the UK equality and general framework legislation is more explicit than it is in Lithuanian policies. With regard to equality instruments, EA (2010) outlines a number of requirements relevant to accessibility; anticipatory reasonable accommodation and indirect discrimination being of particular importance for this research. To begin with, Lawson and Woodin (2012) notes that the anticipatory

reasonable accommodation duty requires to anticipate 'ways in which disabled people (or broad groups of disabled people with particular types of impairment) might be placed at a substantial disadvantage in accessing services and to take reasonable steps to ensure that this does not happen by 1) altering provisions, criteria and practices, 2) altering or removing physical features and 3) providing auxiliary aids or services'. Hence, a duty to ensure accessibility via the anticipatory reasonable accommodation duty is broad in its nature and as Lawson and Woodin (2012:1) note, is 'subject to the qualifier of 'reasonableness', which may be enforced by disabled individuals through actions of discrimination'. While Fraser Butlin (2011) notes that the requirement to provide reasonable accommodation when a person experiences substantial disadvantage contradicts the rights-based approach, in reality it manifests in experienced difficulties in accessing goods and services (Office for Disability Issues, 2011).

Another important concept introduced in the EA (2010) is indirect discrimination (section 19). It is group-oriented, tackles systematic barriers and institutional discrimination and can be applied in addressing accessibility barriers faced by individuals with particular types of impairment. However, Lawson and Woodin (2012) question its significance regarding the provision of reasonable accommodation in the area of goods and services. It is a novel concept in the disability realm and there is no established legal practice of how it should be used in demanding and ensuring accessibility.

With regard to general-framework instruments, the Approved Document M (Document M) (2010) and standards produced by the British Standard Institution (BSI) play a role in shaping accessibility. To begin with, Document M outlines accessibility requirements for new buildings, extended or altered existing non-domestic buildings and for existing buildings or their parts which are altered into public or commercial use buildings such as shops. Alongside accessibility of indoor facilities, the document addresses elements, ensuring access to (section 1) and into (section 2) the buildings and so facilitates the connectivity between some of the shopping chain elements. The instrument does not set strict methods but is advisory in nature regarding certain building situations and the parties are free to decide how to meet the requirements.

The increasing number of disabled and older people, and their rising spending power shaped the demand for more accessible facilities in different life spheres (British Standard Institution, 2012). The changes led BSI in collaboration with the Disabled Experts' Reference Group to develop a set of British, European and international standards that are often considered by manufacturing and service industries, national governments

and customers. One of such standards is 8300:2009. It is a detailed advisory code of practice, which targets designing convenient, accessible and usable public and residential buildings, with the exception of dwellings. The Standard emphasises that the environment of commercial buildings, including retail places, must be fully accessible for disabled people, including disabled children. The designed shop environment shall ensure disabled individuals' independent functioning, regardless of whether they are customers or staff members. In planning and projecting a shop, signing should be considered, seeking to reduce the level of experienced barriers when finding different places, goods and services within a shop (section 13.3.3). The code also covers accessibility of approach routes to shops, as well as setting-down points for different types of transport and parking spaces. Furthermore, section 13.3.3.3 determines that 'all counters, checkouts and service points should be accessible to disabled people. A clear space should be provided in front of them, and writing surfaces for seated and standing customers should be provided. Where feasible, hearing enhancement systems should be fitted'. The standards also cover accessibility of external (car parking, routes around and to the building, etc.) and internal (steps, stairs, ramps, lifts, etc.) environments of commercial buildings and different internal facilities (changing rooms, shelves, telephones, ATMs etc.).

However, despite the policy developments and increasingly positive service providers' attitude towards disabled people (Simm et al., 2007), disabled customers in the UK continue experiencing barriers and exclusion. As an example, during four years (2005-2009) the number of customers with impairments 'experiencing difficulties related to their impairment or disability in accessing goods and services' decreased only by 5% (from 37% in 2005 to 32% in 2009). Furthermore, a study conducted by Gore and Parckar (2010) demonstrates that while 40% of disabled customers experienced difficulties in accessing goods and services in the last 12 months, 23% felt to be discriminated against because of their impairment in the same time period. The reported difficulties behind the experienced customer exclusion are reflected in the majority of shopping chain stages, the main severe impediments being related with public transport (16%), lack of facilities for disabled people (15%), and entering or getting around premises (13%).

2.4. Concluding comments

The present chapter has demonstrated that there have been some legislative attempts to make the private market more accessible for disabled customers. However, there are some tensions between global, regional and national instruments in the way they address market accessibility and disabled people's participation as customers. At the global level, the CRPD positions accessibility as a general principle, which should be applied to all substantive rights, and links it with disabled customers' participation in the mainstream private market on an equal basis with others.

The Convention does not use the term 'customer' and addresses disabled people's participation in the private market on an equal basis with others. Contrary to this, the EU does not recognise people with impairments as equal customers and legally construct them as 'vulnerable' consumers. The entrenched division between non-disabled and disabled market participants is premised on individuals' dependency to the category of disability, with impairment being an important factor for the classification. Positioning disabled people as 'vulnerable' customers, the EU violates its obligations, adopted after signing the CRPD, and promotes an individual model of disability within the EU single market. The same tendencies are alive in the UK and Lithuania. Here, people with impairments are defined as 'vulnerable' and 'socially vulnerable' customers respectively, with physical or cognitive features being the foundation for the distinction.

With regard to accessibility, the Convention intertwines the concept with the removal of different kinds of barrier, implementation of specific measures and positive obligations, non-discrimination, progressive realisation, UD, reasonable accommodation, availability and affordability, among others. These measures and the underlying principle of equality require an expectation and respect of disabled people and to treat them on an equal basis with others. Meanwhile, despite a number of instruments defining and addressing accessibility, the EU lacks a unified position and often links the concept with the assurance of health and safety rather than equality and non-discrimination. Only the Standards M/420 position accessibility as an issue of equality. It can be argued that such contradiction within the regional instruments is potentially shaped by the need to balance complying with the Convention, the obligation to ensure citizens' fundamental rights, and the aim to assure stable and efficient functioning of the single market. National policy discourse introduces more tensions. Specifically, even though Lithuania and the UK have ratified the Convention and operate under the same regional instruments, Lithuania links

accessibility with social integration and the UK with non-discrimination and provision of reasonable accommodation. In terms of technical implementation, the practices also differ and require further research addressing the reasons, shortcomings and potentials behind the differences.

In terms of accessibility of the mainstream private market, the Convention requires State Parties to shape a framework within which private entities could and would engage into accessibility discourse and practice, and provide disabled and non-disabled customers with an equal and quality service. However, similarly to the position towards disabled customers, EU provisions regarding market accessibility share some features typical to an individual model. As an example, provision of accessible customer information is mainly addressed in the context of medical products and services and so reflects a dominant attitude towards disabled people as needing to be 'fixed' or 'cured'. However, requirements on accessibility of retail premises are broader. Even though they are addressed indirectly, a great number of separate legislations set the framework, within which accessibility of shops should be ensured.

With regard to national instruments, the UK's requirements for retail premise accessibility are more comprehensive than Lithuania's. The UK's position shares more similarities with the position entrenched in the CRPD and has stronger links with the social model. It can be argued that a stronger disability movement, longer experience in the EU and better familiarity with the promoted values, philosophy and rights provided the UK with better opportunities to position disability and accessibility within a social model and human rights context. Meanwhile, being independent only for twenty-five years, Lithuania has still imbibed some of the practices, perspectives and values that were typical for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Experiencing the period of transition from socialist to human rights' values, the country is behind the UK in terms of understanding and providing accessibility and equality for disabled customers.

It seems that there are some significant contradictions in the public policy discourse surrounding disability, accessibility and retail customers, and some form of cooperative action is needed to address the issue. The following chapter, therefore, suggests how adaptation of some concepts of Habermas' theory of communicative action may be employed to approach the outlined tensions and to introduce more equal customer experience and market accessibility.

CHAPTER THREE: COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND THE EU MARKETS

Discussion in Chapters One and Two revealed significant contradictions in market practice and public discourse surrounding disability, accessibility and retail customers. Specifically, Chapter One illustrated empirical dimensions of disabled people's exclusion from participation in the mainstream private market as equal customers. Chapter Two provided evidence of how public discourse on rights and accessibility has rhetorically reconstructed people with impairments from consumers to 'vulnerable' customers, and introduced some tensions between different policy discourses. Despite the occurring changes, disabled customers remain excluded from equal participation and a cooperative action is needed to address the issue. For this purpose, the thesis uses Habermas' theory of communicative action (CA), as it can provide useful insight and understanding to inform the way customer rights and market accessibility can be ensured. Being aware of the width of the theory and recalling the core of the social model, this thesis adapts three out of four elements of CA: lifeworld, access to the discourse and power relations, empathy leaving aside. The concepts are employed to explore the roots of the tensions that lay in global, regional and national policy instruments and customer service. Since democracy, emancipation (Godin et al., 2007) and human rights (Habermas, 1998, 2012) are central concerns in Habermas' work and premise the chosen concepts, it seems appropriate to use this Habermasian theory, as it reflects ontological and epistemological positions of this research (see Chapter Four). In addition, employment of the three concepts in other authors' studies on disability has been verified at the theoretical level as well as provided valuable empirical insights, leading toward more inclusion, emancipation and equality (Silver and Francis, 2000, Bates and Davis, 2004, Godin et al., 2007). Habermas is also concerned with Europeanisation and democratisation of the discourse. He emphasises opportunity for all citizens to access the discourse, develop capacity for democratic debate (Godin et al., 2007) and so to achieve enlightenment and emancipation (Habermas, 1974). This, indeed, mirrors the goal of this research to adapt the emancipatory research approach (see Chapter Four), expand the general obligation of the CRPD to involve civil society in the policy decision making process (art.4) and call for all relevant stakeholders' involvement in shaping ontological and epistemological premises for an accessible EU single market.

Habermas' theory of communicative action is linked with ethics of discourse, where he is primarily concerned with the public sphere and contrasts it with the private sphere. This dichotomy has been criticised, especially by feminist scholars (Godin et al., 2007, Kellner, 2000, Young, 1985, Goodman, 1992, Fraser, 1990), who identify it as too idealistic, prioritising white property-owning men, and neglecting excluded groups, among others. However, since this thesis deals with the private market and not with the private sphere, this criticism should not devalue the chosen theoretical framework. Specifically, Chapter Two demonstrated that recent establishments of social claims and policies for disability rights and accessibility impinge upon the discourse and relations between the market stakeholders that were previously 'private'. The private market is brought into the public space as a legitimate focus for policy discourse. Furthermore, in Habermas' ethical frame, access to the discourse is about democratisation of access to the formation of public discourse through free communication and debate. Private ownership and private opinion are excluded from the ethics of the public sphere.

Habermas is mainly concerned with discussing common public affairs and shaping public opinion, opposing state power and elite's interests that may potentially mould citizens' everyday life realms (Kellner, 2000). This is particularly relevant when addressing disabled people's participation in the mainstream private market. While their involvement in shaping policies on the accessible market is rhetorically established at the global level (see Chapter Two), in reality it is insufficient (see Chapter One) and citizens are denied the right to access the formation of the discourse. Indeed, people with impairments should be recognised as equally capable to shape the rhetoric and practice of the EU single market as well as have equal access to the discourse on the issue.

This chapter, therefore, aims to explore existing preconditions for communicative action on the EU single market to emerge. The discussion starts by an overview of the relationship between the lifeworld, EU policies, and the private market. Then a closer look is given to the concept of communicative action, access to the discourse and equal power relations with a focus on bargaining and arguing practices in international relations. Finally, the potential of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) to provide relevant stakeholders with an access to the formation of the discourse on the accessible private market is explored.

Insights have been gained through the use of Habermas' work and literature on the EU, international relations and the private market. The chosen theoretical framework has provided useful insights and understanding that current EU policies and private market practice may

either lessen or sharpen the contradictions and tensions outlined in Chapters One and Two. Specifically, the EU may serve either as a framework for a common lifeworld to emerge, or act as a system, colonising national lifeworlds. In a similar vein, although the private market is more likely to colonise EU customers' lifeworlds, under specific circumstances they may share similar values and contribute to the maintenance of the lifeworld. The balance between strategic and communicative action is also dual. Although the first dominates over the second, communicative rationality and communicative action may also be present and emerge in particular contexts.

This knowledge set is important and will serve in Chapters Six and Seven when analysing stakeholders' norms, values, notions and positions toward market accessibility and the underlying reasons behind them.

3.1. Market accessibility and a lifeworld

Lifeworld is one of the key factors upon which depends the possibility for communicative action to emerge (Habermas, 1984, 1985, 1991, 1996b). Hence, this section examines the patterns of the lifeworld shared and created by the EU and the private market. Such an approach assists in understanding the possibilities and preconditions for communicative action regarding an accessible EU single market to emerge. The discussion starts by exploring the concepts of lifeworld and system as introduced by Habermas, but positions the lifeworld as a collective rather than an individual domain. This is followed by a discussion on whether EU policy moulding processes create a framework for a common lifeworld among EU members to emerge or act as a system colonising national realms. Light is then shed on large and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating within the EU, and the way two types of business contribute to maintaining a common lifeworld across the Union. The section ends in a discussion on how retail practice and new movements in consumer culture may intervene into shoppers' realities and reshape their values, norms and customer behaviour.

3.1.1. 'System' and 'lifeworld'

Habermas borrowed the concept of the 'lifeworld' from Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz, and after significant developments used it as an opposition to Adorno's point that all an individual's acts and thoughts are administratively controlled by modern capitalism. Although Habermas is

concerned with how capitalism and bureaucracies restrict people's freedom, he uses the lifeworld as an evidence that to a certain degree society is created and sustained by human actions (Edgar, 2006). He integrates Durkheim's 'conscience collective' (Habermas, 1984:113-152) as the lifeworld of a social group, and its internal and external interactions are the preconditions for social interrelation. In a similar vein, Sayer (2001:689) adds that lifeworld is 'a product of the relation between embodied actors and the cultures into which they are socialised, though it can, of course, become an object of reflection by actors'. In such a context, lifeworld does not serve as background knowledge for understanding the world or communicating about it. Its function is to 'ensure that interpersonal relations are ordered in a way which makes society function effectively' (Fairthlough, 1991:550). In the ongoing discussions on communicative action, Habermas emphasises an inbuilt role of the lifeworld in the process:

Subjects acting communicatively always come to an understanding in the horizon of a lifeworld. Their lifeworld is formed from more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions. This lifeworld background serves as a source of situation definitions that are presupposed by participants as unproblematic. The lifeworld also stores the interpretative work of preceding generations. It is the conservative counterweight to the risk of disagreement that arises with every actual process of reaching understanding (Habermas, 1984:70).

Additionally to using phrases such as 'pre-reflective' and 'naively mastered skills', Habermas also addresses a variety of competences and knowledge used by individuals to negotiate their position in the world, relate to and interact with others and to maintain social relationships. Such acts are located within the intersubjective realm of people's everyday life and are shaped by 'taken-for-granted background assumptions' (Habermas, 1984:335). These usually include created and shared knowledge, values, and language; actions; and the justification of such actions (Fields, 1991).

Aforementioned individuals' everyday beliefs and skills that are taken for granted have to be critically reviewed, questioned and justified (Habermas, 1984, 1985). While this strengthens and reproduces the shared lifeworld, it also provides a framework for the rationalisation of the lifeworld. Rationality, in Habermas' (1984) understanding, is necessary for the lifeworld and is an inextricable part of social evolution of modern and emancipated societies. As long as rationalisation is guided by commonly achieved understanding and happens in small-scale homogeneous cultures, the lifeworld does not lose its power for individuals and societal processes, as 'cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialisation' (Habermas,

1985:374) are secured. However, due to the growth of and increasing diversity within society, and the nature of rationalisation shaped by modern capitalist societies, the lifeworld 'gets cut down more and more to one subsystem among others' (Habermas, 1985:154). Complexity of the society and the market determines that previously legitimate narratives in justifying law and morality become replaced by generalised and abstract ideas and principles (Edgar, 2006). In other words, value generalisation (Habermas, 1985:179) takes place. Habermas borrowed this concept from Talcott Parsons, who proposed that 'the more differentiated the system, the higher level of generality at which the value-pattern must be 'couched' if it is so to legitimate the more specified values of all of the differentiated parts of the system' (Parsons, 1971:307). Habermas (1985:179-185) radicalised this approach and noted that value generalisation results in an uncoupling of communicative action from all behaviour patterns that previously were perceived as normatively binding. Society's traditional norms become detached from the basis for social cooperation. In such a context, the need for means to regulate social conflict and maintain social relations and society's functionality emerges. For instance, religiously anchored agreement is replaced by institutionalised rules and procedures; and more rational and technical means, such as judiciary. The increase of social growth and diversity as well as the intensity of value generalisation in modern capitalistic societies lead to the expansion and proliferation of social labour necessary to coordinate and manage societal processes. As a result, socially significant coordination of social processes and actions happens not through the language, but through steering media, mostly through money and power, including bureaucratic power and market (Habermas, 1985). Hence,

the lifeworld contexts in which processes of reaching understanding are always embedded are devalued in favour of media-steered interactions, the lifeworld is no longer needed for the coordination of action (Habermas, 1985:183).

In Habermas' terms, the result of the transfer of action coordination from language over to steering media (Habermas, 1985) is a creation of steering media regulated institutions, such as the market and the state – or in other words – the system. Social interactions steered by the system lose the connections with society's moral and political ideologies and foundations. Steering media erases a great part of interpersonal human activity and estrange it from the practices alive in pre-modern societies. In other words, 'the more complex social systems become, the more provincial lifeworlds become' (Habermas, 1985:173). Nevertheless, lifeworld is the domain of everyday personal and social life as intersubjective communication:

Only the limited segments of the lifeworld brought into the horizon of a situation constitute a thematizable context of action oriented to mutual understanding. [...] The lifeworld appears as a reservoir of taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation (Habermas, 1985:124).

However, sometimes the influence of steering media is so strong that people are unable to understand and justify processes happening around them. The lifeworld's structure is affected in a way that regular lifeworld renewal processes and communicative action practices no longer exist. In Habermas' terms, this is when 'the mediation of the lifeworld assumes the form of colonisation' (Habermas, 1985:196).

For Habermas, colonisation of the lifeworld is the undermining of individual freedom by more complex societies. Large-scale social processes are routinised, formalised and governed by employing different, especially bureaucratic, rules and procedures. Such practices make social relations, practices and responses static, standardised and fixed. This restricts individuals' actions, who are subject to such practices in modern societies. Communicative forms of social interaction are replaced by actions mediated through money and power. While in the lifeworld actions are coordinated through consensus, here they are synchronised through 'a functional interlocking of system 'inputs' and 'outputs' (found, for example, in the capitalist marketplace of supply and demand)' (Edwards, 2008:304). The system intrudes not only into personal lifeworlds, but also into society as a lifeworld. Following Habermas (1984, 1985), colonisation erodes society-, personality- and culture-related lifeworld resources, and this affects not only actions per se, but also the manifestation of individual lifeworlds in the context of the system.

Having established the notion of the lifeworld and its colonisation, it is worth looking at how EU policies may impact the processes related with either creation or colonisation of Member States' lifeworlds. Hence, can the EU provide a framework for a common lifeworld to emerge? Or perhaps it acts as a system colonising national lifeworlds? Answers to these and other questions are touched upon in the following discussion and further elaborated in Chapters Six and Seven.

3.1.2. EU policies and the lifeworld

EU can either provide a framework for a common lifeworld to emerge, or it can act as a system intruding into national lifeworlds. With regard to the Union's role in creating a common lifeworld, a great volume of literature

exploring European integration argue that the EU by its nature can be considered as a lifeworld, or that it provides conditions for a common lifeworld to arise (Risse, 1996b, 1999, 2000, Lewis, 1998, Müller, 2004, Niemann, 2004). The premise for this proposition is 'dense interaction patterns within highly regulated international institutions' of the EU (Risse, 2000: 15), which although differ from issue area to issue area, are present across the EU policy-making processes (Risse, 1996a). Having high socialisation and institutionalisation of the negotiating settings (Lewis, 1998), the Union provides a scene for creating collective identity and sharing common values and norms. This, according to Niemann (2004), is one of the preconditions for a shared lifeworld among the Member States to emerge.

Since the single market is the foundation of the EU and since the basic freedoms are premised upon it (see Chapter Two), values and norms that are introduced by the Union and play a part in creating a framework for a common lifeworld to emerge, should be critically assessed. Specifically, in 2001 the EC released a White Paper on European Governance, where the reinforcement of 'European identity and the importance of shared values within the Union' (COM (2001) 0428, final:3.3) were highlighted. The emergence and the content of the document were influenced by the Maastricht Treaty (1992:art.2), where one set of goals is to establish

a common market and an economic and monetary union and by implementing the common policies or activities [...], to promote throughout the Community a harmonious and balanced development of economic activities, sustainable and non-inflationary growth respecting the environment, a high degree of convergence of economic performance, a high level of employment and of social protection, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion and solidarity among Member States.

On the one hand, this suggests that a framework for common norms, values, activities and obligations among EU members have been introduced and legally established. On the other hand, potential impact of the EU's position towards the single market and free movement of capital as a value questions the origins and the content of the values and common norms. In other words, do the introduced values contribute to the creation of a lifeworld as suggested by Habermas, or do they act as a tool, reshaping and transforming intersubjective everyday life realms into settings, convenient for maintaining and boosting the regional economy? If the latter is the case, then EU surreptitiously colonises national and individual lifeworlds and encapsulates them in a new form or values. While there is

no room for an exhaustive discussion of this duality, some of the instances are outlined below.

To begin with, Chapter Two provides some insights into how global and regional instruments may provide Member States with rules, norms and procedures, either encouraging to engage into interaction with and development of legal norms, values and rights, or providing a framework for ignoring them (Risse, 1996b). For example, by signing and ratifying the CRPD, the EU and national governments adopted similar vocabularies, definitions, and fundamental norms and human rights values in disability policy (Kayess and French, 2008, Lord, 2010a, Quinn, 2009a) that should be translated into national practices and individual realms. While this can be treated as a positive example, legal construction of disabled people as 'vulnerable' customers in the EU instruments, followed by the implementation of the same conventions at national level (see Chapter Two) suggests opposite practice. Specifically, by ascribing and legally establishing the responsibility for participation in the market to an individual, the EU intrudes into and corrupts individual realities, as well as does not reflect the actual roots of customer vulnerability. On the one hand, the duality demonstrates global and regional instruments' power in shaping a normative framework, which structures stakeholders' interaction and serves 'as arenas in which international policy deliberation can take place' (Risse, 2000:15). On the other hand, this questions Member States' reflexivity, power and willingness to challenge and negotiate EU institutionalised values and norms that shape collective identity and constitute a common lifeworld across the Union.

Unchallenged internalisation of the proposed EU framework for the common lifeworld can be linked with Wessels (1992) discussion. He suggests that due to the growth and complexity of modern states, citizens' needs and prospects cannot anymore be met only by national governments. As a result, welfare states join into one union aiming to regulate the ongoing processes. On the one hand, this provides cohesive means to tackle increasing challenges, ensures more coordinated economic growth, universalised rules and standards, and introduces the foundation for more equal individuals' treatment across the union (Schmidt, 1997). On the other hand, it eliminates states' freedom and control in making decisions such as resource distribution or service provision (Schmidt, 1997, 2005, Wessels, 1992).

The shift of policy decision making from national governments to the EC and the Parliament (Verovšek, 2012) weakens national parliaments (Schmidt, 1997) with the current responsibility of the EU for over 75% of all legislation passing through national governments, including 90% of

consumer protection legislation (Schmidt, 2006: 63-64). This may not match the realities of Member States that are not actively involved in the process or share atypical features. As a result, national lifeworlds may become diffused and national democracies get in deficit (Schmidt, 2005). Such practices can be interpreted as the EU as a system's intrusion into states' lifeworld. According to Habermas (2001, 2006), this and unequal distribution of power between the EU and its members can be overcome by developing EU democracy at the supranational level. This can be achieved by 'providing political institutions and citizenry that can be mobilised, as well as economic social milieu that can be administered legitimately' (Verovšek, 2012:369).

Literature on international relations identify another challenge suggesting that decisions made by the EU are often shaped around the preferences of large states, such as Germany, France and the UK (Lewis, 1998, Moravcsik, 1991, Schneider, 2011, 2013). This may affect bargaining outcomes, norms, values and vocabularies introduced to the community in the specific issue area. It may also intrude into smaller and less powerful members' lifeworld and realities. Hence, even though the EU has a potential and preconditions for providing a framework for a common lifeworld across Europe to emerge, the introduced norms, values and their content should be critically assessed, as under specific circumstances national realms and lifeworlds may be intruded or corrupted.

Having established the link between EU policies and the lifeworld, it is worth turning the attention to the private market. The following discussion, therefore, provides some insights into the relation between the EU, large enterprises and SMEs. It aims to answer the question of how this interaction contributes to shaping a common lifeworld across the Union.

3.1.3. Large business, SMEs and the lifeworld

Despite the dominant assumption that large and multinational enterprises dominate in the EU economy, the most recent study of the EC demonstrates that 99 percent of all European business is comprised of SMEs (European Commission, 2013). Small or medium size of company provides more freedom, flexibility, personalisation (Nooteboom, 1988, Man et al., 2002) and better opportunities to bring in and reverb specific time- and place-related norms, values and conventions (Legendijk, 2004a, Hammann et al., 2009). Contrary to large businesses, SMEs are often characterised by socially responsible behaviour and management (Hammann et al., 2009, Fox, 2005) that correlates with a local community's practices, values, norms and trust (Jenkins, 2004). In addition, while

governments and corporate businesses are looking for order, formality, accountability, control measures, formal standards, systems and positional authority, small businesses are characterised by features such as trust, more informal relations and interactions, holism, and freedom (Gibb, 2000). Hence, SMEs are more likely to connect with and reflect local customers' realities that mirror culturally and locally embodied knowledge, regional identity and the lifeworld (Lagendijk, 2004a).

However, quantitative advantage of SMEs over large global enterprises is dominated and diminished by the latter's profit precedence. The Annual Report on European SMEs (Gagliardi et al., 2013:7) demonstrates that while the value-added decline of large enterprises in 2012 was €8.6 billion, medium-sized enterprises lost €17 billion, followed by micro-enterprises (€14 billion) and small-sized enterprises (€13.2 billion). In addition, in 2012 the SME sector as a whole (99% of all the EU business) delivered 57.6% of the gross value, with 42.4% delivered by large enterprises (less than 1% of all the EU business) (Gagliardi et al., 2013). On the one hand, this may be linked with the economic crisis in 2008 and treated as an exception and not as a common practice. On the other hand, financial dominance of large enterprises is well documented over time (Chen and Huang, 2004). This suggests that SMEs' strong regional identity may be challenged and dominated by global companies that are more likely to use financial advantage as a steering media and act as a system.

SMEs' vulnerability may also be shaped by trade policy developments, applicable to foreign (Fliess and Busquets, 2006) and domestic (Gagliardi et al., 2013), small and large companies. Under such circumstances, multinational business players and their goal rationality dominate SMEs' value rationality (Nooteboom, 1988) and may restrict professionals' competences and informal practices (Man et al., 2002). This suggests that in aiming to create a single market the EU may inadvertently introduce policy instruments and promote market practices that are oriented towards profit origination and circulation. Respectively, being more resistant to financial instabilities and generating more turnovers (Gagliardi et al., 2013), large global enterprises may be in a more beneficial position compared to small and local companies. Such actions of governance in juncture with global market mechanisms strengthen SMEs' vulnerability and become disconnected from local norms and values, or in Habermas terms, are 'delinguistified' (Habermas, 1985:154).

Marketization and ongoing growth of global enterprises provides large companies with characteristics, typical to a system (Lagendijk, 2004b), which are 'relatively formal and have a logic and momentum of their own that go beyond the subjective experience of actors, both insofar as they

impart a formal rationality to action through their interlacing and consequences of action' (Sayer, 2001:691). Hence, it seems that some processes and policy traditions may intensify SMEs' lifeworld colonisation, making it 'more and more subject to the identity-blind mechanisms that rule the 'systemworld'' (Lagendijk, 2004b:513). On the other hand, stronger SMEs' position in the single market may maintain and connect personal, regional and national lifeworlds (Hammann et al., 2009), leading to better and more available knowledge about the customers, their needs and preferences (Lagendijk, 2004b). Policy developments and incentives, empowering SMEs and harmonising power relations between large, medium and small enterprises could create a framework enabling customers' voice and diversity to be heard and taken into account.

While this thesis positions OMC as one of the ways to achieve such praxis (see 3.2.4), the following discussion focuses on the micro level and addresses customer experience in the private market. Light is shed on marketing strategies and innovations that may intrude into and reshape customers' lifeworld.

3.1.4. Private market, customers and the lifeworld

Back in 1981 Karl Marx made it clear that individuals' choices are rarely made of their own choosing. Similarly, the dominant theme in Bauman's work is the way the market restricts customer freedom. Such theoretical positions are supported and illustrated in Chapter One, demonstrating how retailers may control customers' emotions and feelings (Ryu and Jang, 2007), shape choice, consumption style (Tendai and Crispen, 2009), eliminate rational purchase decisions and do this for business benefit (Zhou and Wong, 2004). Even though customers are becoming aware of the controlling retail environment (Jackson, 1999), their power to reshape existing practices is insufficient (Bauman, 1988). These and other examples suggest that customer purchase decisions do not guarantee customer freedom. Indeed, choice, preferences, wishes, desires and the way they are met are shaped by industry. In such a context it seems that the retail sector restricts customers' lifeworld as they are prevented from implementing and expressing values, positions and preferences.

In addition, new forms of consumption, such as ethical (Carrigan et al., 2004, Cherrier, 2007) and green or sustainable consumption (Gilg et al., 2005, Connolly and Prothero, 2008, Prothero et al., 2011) introduce and promote new values, penetrating into customer practices and personal realities. On the one hand, the emergence of these forms increases individuals' altruistic (Karp, 1996), ecocentric and biospheric values (Gilg et al., 2005) and environmental concerns (Stern et al., 1995). Likewise,

particular practices of recycling, food consumption (Connolly and Prothero, 2008), and respect for animal rights (Cooper-Martin and Holbrook, 1993) become more present. On the other hand, by introducing new consumption patterns the market provides a framework within which individuals pursue and exercise their identity (Cherrier, 2007), and reconstruct current beliefs, norms and values. In other words, even though new consumption modes are founded on positive intensions, by positioning them as a form of value, market covertly shapes customers' perspectives. While the purpose of this control does not necessarily lead to destruction of customer freedom, it regulates and constrains human interaction and introduces certain shared elements, through which customer experience intrude into their everyday life realms and reshape knowledge, moral values, positions and understandings.

Received customer information may shape disabled customers' lifeworld. Specifically, business focus on non-disabled customers and limited accessibility provisions mould exclusion and vulnerability (see Chapter One) and the content of customer knowledge and experience that shape the lifeworld. In particular, inaccessible information in the pre-shopping process (Baker et al., 2001, MacDonald et al., 1994), steps and sills, and lack of ramps (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001, 1999, Bromley and Matthews, 2007) often prevent disabled people from entering particular shops (see Chapter Five). This respectively shapes their customer knowledge (Walsh and Mitchell, 2010), norms and values, as being deprived from constrain-free access, people become loyal and tend to come back to accessible shops and producers (Office for Disability Issues, 2010, Chan and Puech, 2014). This directly impacts on their customer service experience and knowledge about products. In other words, while non-disabled shoppers are able to gain information and build knowledge sets about a wider spectrum of goods and providers, for disabled people this kind of knowledge and experience is partial. In such a context, an 'intersubjective coordination of actions' (Habermas, 1985:137) does not take place, as non-disabled and disabled customers do not share the same meanings, and a stock of customer culture knowledge is limited. Thus, since Habermas sees lifeworld as a resource for action per se, disabled individuals' customer lifeworld and participation in the market are constrained more than are the same domains of non-disabled people.

Having established lifeworld patterns at policy, market and customer levels, the following section explores whether current practice of shaping EU policy instruments provides possibilities for democratising access to the formation of public discourse. It aims to explore whether current communication and debate are free and provide a framework for communicative action to emerge regarding the EU single market.

3.2. Access to the discourse and power relations

Access to the discourse and recognition of each other as equal partners in communication are important factors for achieving communicative action (CA) (Habermas, 1984, 1985, 1991, 1993, 1996b). Being related with 'ethics of discourse' and concerned with the public sphere, CA is about democratisation of access to the formation of public discourse through free communication and debate among all relevant citizens. Positioning CA as the way of addressing and solving the outlined tensions and contradictions in the public discourse surrounding disability, accessibility and retail customers, and creating a more accessible EU single market, this section briefly introduces the concept of CA as described by Habermas. Aiming to provide deeper insights and reflecting the idea of lifeworld and system, the section then sheds light on communicative and strategic communication models, and arguing and bargaining communication modes. Indeed, arguing being associated with reasoning and rational argumentation is frequent in global and regional international politics and international relationships (Lagendijk, 2004a, Müller, 2004, Niemann, 2004, Risse, 1996a, 1999, 2000). Likewise, bargaining premised on lying (Seymour, 2013), efficiency, effectiveness (Johnson, 1991) and logic of consequences (Habermas, 1984) is present (Risse, 1996a, 1999, 2000).

With this in mind, the following discussion aims to provide some insights into the manifestation of the two communication models and modes in the EU policy development process and private market practice. It aims to explore whether they serve in overcoming or strengthening the tensions in public discourse. The discussion is concluded by an overview of OMC, its limitations and potential in creating a framework for CA to emerge regarding an accessible EU single market.

3.2.1. Communicative action

Habermas started the discussion on communicative action in the essay 'What is Universal Pragmatics' (Habermas, 1976). In this and later work he defined it as a meaningful interaction between two or more individuals, who establish and maintain social relationships in oral or written formats of ordinary language or in gestures. However, communicative action should not be equalised with language or communication acts. In the discussions on reason and the rationalisation, Habermas (1984) makes it clear that language is a mechanism for coordinating the action. Respectively, teleological, dramaturgical, normative and strategic models of action use language as a medium to achieve the goals determined by the

nature of each of the models. For instance, teleological action perceives language 'as one of several media through which speakers oriented to their own success can influence one another in order to bring opponents to form or to grasp beliefs and intentions that are in the speakers' own interest' (Habermas, 1984:95). Dramaturgical action employs language for self-presentation, and normative model perceives it as a 'medium that transmits cultural values and carries a consensus that is merely reproduced with each additional act of understanding' (Habermas, 1984:95). Language as a mechanism to coordinate actions is also used in strategic action. Specifically, here it is used to direct participants' actions 'through egocentric calculations of utility' and to coordinate these 'through interest positions' (Habermas, 1984:94). Only the 'communicative model of action presupposes language as a medium of uncurtailed communication whereby speakers and hearers, out of the context of their reinterpreted lifeworld, refer simultaneously to things in the objective, social, and subjective worlds in order to negotiate common definitions of the situation' (Habermas, 1984:95). In other words, while the first four types of action take language as a one-sided medium, communicative action positions it as an interactive medium.

Actors involved in communicative action have to utter 'something understandably', give the hearer 'something to understand', make 'himself thereby understandable' and come 'to an understanding with another person' (Habermas, 1976:2). This shapes the content of three validity claims that can and should be challenged in the communication process, namely: the intention to communicate true content in order to share knowledge with the communicating partner; do this truthfully, in order to build trust with a hearer; and 'the speaker must choose an utterance that is right [richtig] so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognised normative background' (Habermas, 1976:3). In other words, actors who engage in communicative action are guided by the aim and acts of reaching mutual understanding and not by egocentric intentions for personal success. Hence, they construct their individual positions and intentions in order to co-ordinate and harmonise these with individual objectives of participating agents and base this on shared definitions of the situation (Habermas, 1984:385-386). Within such communicative milieu, actors do not treat objectives and preferences as fixed. Indeed, they are fluid, may change through the whole argumentative process, and can be challenged and questioned by the participating actors.

With regard to communication mode, strategic action employs bargaining and communicative action uses discussion, deliberation, arguing and reasoning as the main modes of communication and speech acts. Aiming to

achieve reasoned understanding, participants lay the path for the 'ideal speech situation', where only a better argument counts and the engaged parties aim to convince each other in light of the three validity claims (Habermas, 1993:56-57). If validity claims are questioned, the speaker has to provide explanations and reasoning in a rational discourse. Summarising Habermas' work Niemann (2004:382) notes that 'by arguing in relation to standards of truth, rightness and sincerity, agents have a basis for judging what constitutes reasonable choices of action, through which they can reach agreement'.

Communication mode plays a crucial role when engaging in any model of action. Hence, the following discussion sheds light on bargaining and arguing that are associated with strategic and communicative actions respectively. It is important to know the essence of the concepts, as later on this enables understanding the practice of accessing the discourse on accessibility of the EU single market and to identify possibilities for improving the praxis.

3.2.2. Bargaining and arguing

Bargaining and arguing are two types of speech modes (Holzinger, 2001), directly linked to strategic and communicative actions respectively. As discussed, Habermas (1984, 1985, 1991) makes a clear distinction between the use of language as a medium to state facts, and speech acts which use meaningful and truthful language to construct and maintain social relationships. Using Habermas' theory of communicative action as a framework, Müller (2004:397) summarises Kratochwil's (1991) work and describes speech acts as 'complete structured utterances that use elements (words) which have a certain meaning in a given language community, conduct a specific activity and are intentionally directed to achieve a specific effect in the audience'. While Holzinger (2001) notes that arguing and bargaining are simply two different types of speech act, broader academic debate attribute them to social theories such as communicative action theory and rationalism or ontological positions such as holism and individualism respectively. Habermas refers to bargaining in discussions on strategic action and to arguing on communicative action.

With regard to bargaining, Habermas (1991:117) notes that competing opponents, who are 'determined by the intention of influencing each other's decisions in a purposive-rational way, that is, in a way oriented only to each's own success' are more likely to use different bargaining strategies, than the actors, oriented to reaching common understanding. In bargaining situations, stakeholders are aware that strategic goals can be

achieved only if other actors agree and consent (Nash, 1950). Their cooperative relationships often last as long as the processes fit their purposeful and egocentric interests (Niemann, 2004, Powell, 2002, Habermas, 1991). In addition, since the main goals of bargaining are to influence opponents' decisions and to force them to consent with the provided claims (Johnson, 1991, Habermas, 1984), self-interested actors often invoke threats and promises as a means to achieve the goal (Elster, 1991). Operating in different environments, often having unequally distributed resources and decision making systems (Johnson, 1991), actors vary in their access to and usage of threats as warnings of punishment and promises as offers of reward (Schelling, 1958). Croson et al. (2003) refer to such actions as 'cheap talk', which aim to affect specific beliefs and outcomes typical to particular situations as well as provide an advantage to one of the opponents (Cheney et al., 1972) and power over the another (Cheney et al., 1972, Croson et al., 2003, Elster, 1991).

In discussions on the discourse principle, Habermas (1979, 1993) notes that non-neutralisable bargaining power should be disciplined by its equal distribution among the parties. More specifically, the negotiation of compromises should follow procedures that provide interested actors with equal opportunities for pressure. That is, equal opportunities to influence one another during the actual bargaining, so that 'all the affected interests can come into play and have equal chances of prevailing' (Habermas, 1996b:166). Otherwise, negotiated agreements should not be treated as fair. Strategic convey of information often accompany promises and threats in the bargaining process (Seymour, 2013), as this enables increasing the size of the 'pie' (Powell, 2002). While such practice makes it difficult to establish trust and credibility (Cheney et al., 1972, Croson et al., 2003, Seymour, 2013), 'the existence of potential gains from acting jointly creates an incentive to cooperate' (Powell, 2002:2). Therefore, strategic action and bargaining have to be bounded or institutionalised (Habermas, 1991). This would found the consensual action on intersubjectively recognised validity claims (Habermas, 1991) and strategic values would become replaced by delegated duties, trust and responsibility that are usually assigned by the authority or more powerful actors (Müller, 2004).

Contrary to this, arguing actors behave in a communicative manner and introduce their positions and arguments. They coordinate or harmonise individual perspectives in the framework of shared notions and circumstances of particular situations (Habermas, 1984:385-386). Each actor who enters the arguing process has an individual position and is aware that the objectives and preferences are not fixed, are flexible and change through the process of argumentation (Niemann, 2004). In some cases, individual views of the world, interests and identities may also

change (Risse, 2000). Speakers themselves are aware of potential persuasion and are ready to be persuaded. In this respect, Habermas refers to argumentation

as a procedure for the exchange and assessment of information, reasons, and terminologies [...]. The procedure cannot itself generate these elements; its task is to ensure that the argumentative exchange can proceed on the basis of all relevant information and reasons available at a particular point in time within the most fruitful and appropriate descriptive framework in each instance [...]. Arguments are essential components of reflexive learning processes that for their part certainly cannot be explicated solely in terms of argumentation (Habermas, 1993:58).

Drawing on Searle's (1969) and Austin's (1975) works, Habermas notes that provided validity claims can be challenged only if they are understandable. The content of the provided information and statements have to be true; the intentions expressed truthfully; and manifested intention is right (Habermas, 1991). Then, the hearer is able to filter and share received information, trust the speaker and be sure that they mean what they say. Actors participating in the argumentative process thematise debatable validity claims and criticise or challenge them through arguments. In this respect, arguments are treated as strong only if they fit within a given context, and provided reasons convince the actors and motivate them to question validity claims (Habermas, 1984). Arguing may be time consuming as reasoning is often a slow and fractious process (Mercier and Sperber, 2009). However, arguing, reasoning and deliberating are the main modes via which parties can engage in a 'successful' arguing (Niemann, 2004) that manifests as a 'better argument' (Habermas, 1984, Risse, 2000) leading to communicative action.

Having established the concepts of communicative and strategic action, and arguing and bargaining as communication modes respectively, it is worth shedding light on their manifestation in international relations and EU policy settings.

3.2.3. Bargaining, arguing and international relations

While Habermas (1984, 1985, 1991) argues that in aiming to achieve an ideal speech situation power relations should be absent and only a 'better argument' should count, literature on international relations demonstrates that the nature of and power distribution within international politics and business define who is provided with access to the discourse and which argument is defined as a 'better argument' (Risse, 2000, Elgström and

Jönsson, 2000, Lewis, 1998, Schneider, 2013). As an example, Risse (2000) uses the UN Security Council, and demonstrates how more powerful states, such as the US and Germany that have a permanent access to the deliberations and economic power, introduce power asymmetry and prevent stakeholders from developing better arguments and achieving an ideal speech situation. Similarly, Schneider (2013) addresses the distribution of the EU budget and notes that although more powerful countries should be aware of the importance of equality and non-hierarchical decision making processes, they are often informally ascribed with and exercise their advantage during the bargaining process of finance distribution.

The practice of when few states constantly dominate is more a rule than an exception (Elster, 1991, Lewis, 1998, Moravcsik and Vachudova, 2002, Schneider, 2011, Schneider, 2013, Jacobsson and Vifell, 2003). Such practice is often accompanied by a 'joint-decision trap' described by Scharpf (1988) and leads to bargaining, instead of arguing practice and strategic rather than communicative rationality. As an example, since the 'agreement of constituent governments must be unanimous or nearly unanimous' (Scharpf, 1988:254), powerful EU Member States do not avoid either threatening to delay or vetoing proposed decisions (Schneider, 2011), or stalling the negotiations until they meet their state's strategic interests (Schneider, 2013). In addition, Dür and Mateo's (2010) discussion on the negotiation of the EU's Financial Perspective (2007-2013) suggests that hard bargaining strategies such as coalition formation, public criticism of other countries or the Commission, and public commitment not to give in are frequently employed as they are more effective and efficient than soft bargaining strategies. However, they are more accessible and available for dominant and large countries than less powerful EU members. Weaker Member States adopt soft bargaining strategies, such as praise, public positions and concession, which are less likely to ensure the same results as hard bargaining strategies. As a result, large Member States' preferences, positions and needs often dominate smaller and weaker countries' interests and positions.

On a softer tone, Lewis (1998:489) notes that aiming to achieve strategic interests, national governments employ cooperative strategies based on reciprocity, as they acknowledge 'a value in reaching agreement, in collectively solving problems, and understanding each other's domestic political constraints'. To illustrate, he quotes a deputy of a large Member State: 'there is a higher sense of defending national interests and of leaving aside instructions, which is rooted in preserving the goodwill of my colleagues for the future. Without this, I won't have their respect and their help next time' (Lewis, 1998:489). Hence, countries' will to cooperate and

make political sacrifices may be motivated by the achievement of strategic interests, rather than the creation of a common knowledge and position. Under such circumstances and decision making culture, actors risk getting involved in political- strategic interests persuasion. Unanimity and unequal power relations asperate trust and fairness, without which neither common knowledge, nor common position can be shaped (Habermas, 1984, 1985). As a result, the 'bargaining style of decision-making' (Scharpf, 1988:686), being common within the EU prevents the Union from mitigating social dilemmas (Risse, 2000) and structural changes (Elgström and Jönsson, 2000), especially in marginalised areas such as disabled customers' rights or markets accessibility.

It would be misleading to state that the current EU decision making process is explicitly premised on bargaining or is disconnected from communicative rationality and is constantly moving towards strategic action (Elgström and Jönsson, 2000, Lewis, 1998). Although equal access to the discourse is hard to achieve in world politics and private market (Dür and Mateo, 2010, Elgström and Jönsson, 2000, Elster, 1991, Howorth, 2010, Moravcsik and Vachudova, 2002, Schneider, 2013), non-hierarchy, argumentative consistency, weaker actors' empowerment and actions justification may lead toward communicative rationality and 'the better argument' (Risse, 2000:18-19). As an example, the study on the World Trade Organisation liberalisation of basic telecommunications (Niemann, 2004) demonstrates that in pre-negotiations stage, the processes typical to communicative action dominated over strategic action. Actors engaged into communicative rationality and argumentative practices as they shared a strong lifeworld, lacked knowledge about the subject, dealt with cognitively complex issues, had a possibility to discuss, were persuasive and the level of politicisation was low (Niemann, 2004:385-391). This recalls Risse's (2000) observation that international politicians are more likely to engage in truth-seeking behaviour when the issue area is highly institutionalised, interaction is more informal than formal and is based in network-like settings.

In addition, when actors are not certain of national interests, they are more likely to be willing and able to communicate in a meaningful way. Crawford (2009) adds that stakeholders have to share similar linguistic and factual understanding of the issue. As an example, with regard to a common lifeworld, although the process of socialisation of international human rights norms into domestic policies involves 'cheap talk' and rhetorical action, due to a global human rights regime that provides a 'collectively shared principles and norms and common discourse' (Risse, 1999:537), actors are able to engage in argumentative practice more effectively. Furthermore, while unequal power relations prevent negotiating parties

from engaging in arguing and communicative rationality, Niemann (2004) uses negotiations on Article 133 of the Amsterdam Treaty as an example, illustrating that by putting aside rank, status and qualification, actors are more likely to open up a scene for achieving a common goal and engaging in communicative action. These and other examples suggest that even though the EU decision making process is often characterised by bargaining, non-coerced understanding and communicative rationality oriented practices are also possible.

Habermas (1993) notes that arguing and communicative action should not take place behind closed door. In modern democracies it should be public. This encourages speakers to be truthful and regularly explain and justify behaviour. However, Risse (2000) notes that public spheres in international politics and business relations are dynamic and not static. In addition, in public speaking, policy players are likely to use a rhetorical type of argumentation, focus on convincing the audience and avoid being persuaded. The involvement of NGOs (Seymour, 2013) and different social movements (Crossley, 2003) may help to reshape the practice, frame the agenda, improve the introduction of arguments and appeal to existing language, knowledge, norms and discourses. Indeed, international debates that involve NGOs and other non-governmental representatives usually are more open and accessible (Risse, 2000).

Since neither strategic nor communicative actions may appear in a pure form (Risse, 1999, 1996a), the EU policy decision process is distinguished by a mixture of communicative and strategic arguments (Niemann, 2004, Risse, 2000, Crawford, 2009). Such practice is a direct result of socially constructed processes and interactions (Wendt, 1994) that are typical to the EU as an institution (Lewis, 1998). One of the scenarios that may assist to reshape existing practice and to poke the processes towards arguing and communicative action is the adoption of the Open Method of Coordination. The following section, therefore, addresses the concept and discusses its potential to provide a scene for communicative action to emerge regarding the EU single market.

3.2.4. Communicative rationality and Open Method of Coordination

Positions toward the OMC vary and the method is criticised as well as is supported. To begin with, the opponents often shed light on hierarchy, different forms of control (Lodge, 2007), insufficient involvement of civil society organisations (Friedrich, 2006) and selective involvement of elite actors (Casey and Gold, 2005, Friedrich, 2006). This results in limited ability to challenge and reshape current power relations and structures (Chalmers

and Lodge, 2003). Likewise, a lack of public discussion about the OMC (Friedrich, 2006), focus of the EU on information dissemination and limited attention to the procedure (Casey and Gold, 2005), and insufficient time for discussions (Kröger, 2009) prohibit and corrupt the intended learning process (Mailand, 2008) that is essential for creating common knowledge (Habermas, 1984, 1985, 1996b, Habermas and Cronin, 1993). It is also argued that the introduction of the OMC has changed policy discourse, shedding light on competitiveness and 'rational (economic) interpretations of public problems and their solutions' (Radulova, 2009:12). This, indeed, may support neoliberal political rationality (Flear, 2009) and respectively shape the relations between an individual, the state and the market (Kröger, 2009).

Scholars' position towards the OMC depends on their interpretation of the instrument and attitudes towards soft law (Kröger, 2009). Hence, the outlined points should not be treated as a disproof of the OMC and its potential. On the contrary, recalling the ontological position of this thesis, it is argued that the OMC may be a useful instrument, employed in creating a framework for communicative action between citizens, the state and the market. One of the proposed ways to realise this is to locate the principles of the communicative rationality and the procedures of the OMC within the deliberative democracy framework (Eriksen and Fossum, 2002, Habermas, 1996a, Cohen, 1989). Similarly to communicative action, deliberative democracy puts the emphasis on public arguing and citizens' reasoning, who are seen as free and equal (Cohen, 1989, Cohen and Sabel, 1997, Habermas, 1996a). Clifford (2012) notes that deliberative democratic scholars and disability rights activists perceive inclusion as a keystone of legitimacy and political participation. However, the author highlights that alternative modes of communication should be ensured, otherwise the speech may be disabled and some individuals may be excluded from participation in the discourse formation. In this respect, the Lisbon Strategy (2000:para 37) introduced the OMC as a 'fully decentralised approach [...] applied in the line with principle of subsidiarity in which the union, the MS, the regional and local levels, as well as the social partners and civil society, will be actively involved, using variable forms of partnership'.

Keeping in mind that the EU as a system privileges organised lobbies and large states (Eriksen and Fossum, 2002) and is colonised by the ideology of free market, economic competitiveness and the interests of big businesses (Traxler and Schmitter, 1995, Radulova, 2009, Andersen and Burns, 1996), the inclusiveness and participation of different agents and especially of small or weak countries and civil society organisations, may help to reshape power relations and introduce the praxis of public arguing and the provision of justifications and reasons (Cohen, 1989, Seymour, 2013). In

other words, an OMC premised on common guidelines and objectives (Jacobsson and Vifell, 2003) may 'bridge the gap' (Armstrong, 2002) and enable citizens to express their concerns, interests and ideas and exercise self-governance (Friedrich, 2006). Such processes may enable Member States, industry, civil society and other actors to 'share a commitment to the resolution of problems of collective choice through public reasoning' (Cohen, 1989:72) and change opinions and positions when 'faced with qualitatively better argument' (Eriksen and Fossum, 2002:402).

Some procedures and decisions of the EU bureaucratic mechanism are unavailable or inaccessible to the general public (Eriksen and Fossum, 2002). Hence, by implying a non-hierarchical mode of governance (Lodge, 2007), the OMC reduces the power of the EC in the agenda setting process (Chalmers and Lodge, 2003) and transfers more power to national governments. Horizontal and transnational communication within and between Member States through regular benchmarking and peer review of own and of other states' programmes (Casey and Gold, 2005) enables the countries to learn from each other, and exchange information and best practices. It provides comparative analysis and advice as well as promotes innovative approaches and evaluates experiences as it is established in the Amsterdam Treaty (1997, art.129). Such practices of creating knowledge, exchanging information and changing preferences enables the participating agents to form a common will (Jacobsson and Vifell, 2003) and step towards communicative rather than strategic rationality. On the one hand, while collective choices made in a deliberative way (Cohen, 1989) dilutes the Commission's role in steering the system and producing a common agreement on particular issues, they also allow individual differences across the Member States (Scott and Trubek, 2002:17) and do not colonise their national lifeworlds. On the other hand, common agreement on broad objectives among the members of the Union introduces a possibility for bottom-up practices not only when shaping policies (Lodge, 2007) but also when altering the EU's common beliefs and moulding its lifeworld.

3.3. Concluding comments

Recalling the discussion in Chapters One and Two on the contradictions in market practice and public discourse surrounding disability, accessibility and retail customers, the present chapter explored how Habermas' theory of CA could be employed aiming to provide insights and understanding, informing the way accessible customer policies for disabled people in the mainstream private market should be created. It shed light on the lifeworld

as a collective domain and explored the conditions under which EU policy and market practices either enhance market accessibility or prevent its achievement. It was suggested that while 'dense interaction patterns within highly regulated international institutions' (Risse, 2000:15) may introduce a framework for a common lifeworld regarding an accessible EU single market to emerge, some practices and decision making procedures may corrupt and destabilise national and customer realities. It was argued that the CRPD introduced similar vocabularies, definitions, norms and values regarding disability and accessibility, and so to some degree unified regional and national positions toward markets accessibility and customer equality. Meanwhile, unchallenged internalisation of regional instruments into national policies and insufficient Member States' innovation in the area, may continue the maintaining of exclusionary discourse and prevent from creating a more accessible EU single market.

Financial advantage of large enterprises over SMEs may prevent the emergence of a common lifeworld. Specifically, large business' nature and practice are often disconnected from local norms and values. Their financial advantage and dominance in the market prevent small businesses to reflect, connect and maintain personal, regional and national lifeworlds. In such a way, available knowledge sets about what would work in creating an accessible market are negated and the potential remains unused. At a customer level, additionally to business' role in controlling customer decisions, market innovation, despite its positive intensions, may intrude and reconstruct customers' everyday realities and values. While these processes are applicable to both non-disabled and disabled customers, their impact on customers with impairments' participation seems to be more severe (see Chapters One and Two).

The present chapter has also outlined key elements and differences between strategic action accompanied by bargaining and communicative action going together with arguing, reasoning and a 'better argument'. This was linked with the EU policies and processes in international relations. The discussion suggested that prioritisation of political interests, unequal power distribution among Member States and strategic rationality behind the processes, decisions and legislations may prevent introducing more equality and accessibility for disabled customers. On the contrary, communicative rationality and a 'better argument' oriented interaction, civil society's participation, shared lifeworld, equality and high institutionalisation of the issue may enable stakeholders to engage in communicative action and position markets accessibility as a common goal. In this respect, the chapter has suggested that the OMC located within a framework of deliberative democracy can be used as an instrument for

reshaping power relations among the EU, its members, market and disabled citizens.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY AND DATA GENERATION STRATEGIES

One way of understanding the discussed tensions and the potential for reconciliation in the European policy process and market practice is to build a knowledge set about all stakeholders' experiences, and the processes that may affect their perspectives towards markets accessibility and disabled people's participation as equal customers. Drawing on Habermas' theory of communicative action, this research brings all parties, including disabled people, into one academic space as equal partners and informants. It invites them to share experiences, knowledge, norms, values, and perspectives. The employment of qualitative methodology potentially provides an opportunity to indirectly shape common language and knowledge, to engage in communication, and hopefully communicative action, regarding an accessible EU single market. Global, regional and national instruments, addressing customer rights and protection and accessibility of public and private spaces, as well as insights from previous studies are employed as a framework for this communication.

This chapter addresses methodological considerations of the research. The discussion begins with a brief examination of emancipatory disability research paradigm and its application to this PhD research. It then moves on to an overview of the research strategy and key research questions. This is followed by an explanation of key strategies employed to select research locations and participants, which leads to an examination of employed methods and data generation strategies, as well as access techniques. The chapter then sheds light on some of the research challenges, data transcription and analysis, ethical considerations and findings dissemination strategies.

4.1. Research strategy and key research questions

Research design, implementation and data dissemination strategies and practices receive great attention in disability research. Due to a long history of disabled people's exclusion, oppression and unequal power relations in the research field (Oliver, 1992, Kitchin, 2000, Stone and Priestley, 1996), an emancipatory research approach has been introduced (Oliver, 1992, Kitchin, 2000). Although it has been debated by the scholars, the UKDPC (2005) distinguish seven core principles that should be implemented when

adopting the approach. These are: disabled people should be in control of the research; the researcher should be accountable and explain the intentions of the research as well as use appropriate methods for findings dissemination; the research should be based on the philosophy of empowerment and the improvement of disabled people's lives; the rigour of the research should be achieved through the applied methods and the research itself should be open to detailed examination; applied methods should be appropriate for the research as well as for the informants involved in it; the focus should be on the disabling practices in the society; and all this should fit with the social model of disability. Although ideally this PhD research would like to be emancipatory, the pure adoption of the approach is impossible. Nevertheless, several aspects are adopted. To begin with, the initial objective was to reveal disabled people's customer experience and to identify the structures that prevent them from equal access to and participation in the mainstream private market. It was aimed to do this through their perspectives and the identification of the experiences of key stakeholders that are involved in the process. Furthermore, adoption of the social model, and used methods and strategies for research findings dissemination bring the research closer to the emancipatory approach.

As it has been already suggested, the research holds the position that aiming to create effective customer policies for disabled people in the mainstream private market, the revelation of disabled customers and key stakeholders' (civil society and business) experiences is essential. Hence, the research investigates accessibility of the private retail market for people with different impairments beyond the exchange process in the shop. It explores how contradictions in the public discourse surrounding disability, accessibility and retail customers (see Chapter Two) manifest at an empirical level, and shape stakeholders' experiences. With this in mind, the main research question inquires:

What are disabled customers, EU industry and civil society's perspectives and experiences that should be considered, aiming to create effective customer policies for disabled people in the mainstream private market?

Subordinate research questions seek to explore various dimensions of the topic. For instance, the first secondary question asks:

What are the experiences of disabled people as customers in the mainstream private retail markets and their perspectives toward accessibility?

It aims to provide insights into empirical customer experiences in different stages of the shopping chain. It sheds light on faced barriers, potentials,

coping strategies and resilience practices. This requires detailed disabled customers' experiential perspectives gathered through mystery shopping and semi-structured interviews. The second secondary question targets EU industry and civil society's perceptions of markets accessibility and disabled customers. It also addresses factors potentially shaping this knowledge and positions. Hence, it asks:

How do stakeholders of the European single market for information and communication technology products (ICTs) perceive disabled people as customers, and what factors shape their knowledge and positions?

Finally, it is intended to provide some insights into the way private business players and civil society may engage in communication, aiming to innovate and produce knowledge regarding what would work for creating accessible EU single market. Hence,

How do private business and civil society engage into communication and collaborative innovation to create more accessible markets and more effective customer policies in the EU?

The last two questions required detailed examination of unique stakeholders' experiences and perspectives. These were gauged by employing covert observations and semi-structured interviews; and interpreted in light of policy instruments and Habermas' theory of communicative action.

Being aware of the four key research strategies (deductive, inductive, abductive and retroductive) (Blaikie, 1993), this research adopts retroductive perspective. It aims to 'discover underlying mechanisms that, in particular contexts, explain observed regularities' (Blaikie, 2010:87). Being tightly linked to Bhaskar's (1975) work on reality domains, this strategy suggests that while on the empirical level experiences can be detected, the actual domain consists of events that not necessarily can be observed. Either way, behind the two types of reality are structures and processes, making reality to produce events (Proctor, 1998). In other words, social structures within which an individual is located cause and affect the behaviour. With this in mind, the research firstly aims to provide an adequate description (Blaikie, 2010) of disabled customers' experiences. It addresses these beyond the actual market exchange practice, shedding light on the shopping process as an accessible chain. This research holds the position that disabled customers' exclusion, vulnerability and markets inaccessibility is a result of contradictions in the public discourse surrounding disability, accessibility and retail customers. Hence, the second part of the research aims to reveal ICT manufacturers, ICT business

representatives, sellers, and international and national DPOs' attitudes, norms and values toward the issue.

Epistemologically, aiming to answer the main research question, it was important to examine barriers and potentials through disabled customers, ICT industry players and civil society's experiences. The study took the position that while the actors can represent social reality within which they operate (Blaikie, 2010), the employment of various methods is essential in order to allow the informants to engage in a 'dialogic' process, revealing underlying realities and social structures (Habermas, 1970). A combination of qualitative methods provided insights into the setting of a phenomenon, and allowed gaining understanding of underlying reasons and motivations (Blaikie, 1993). It also contributed to uncovering new and under-researched trends in thought (see Chapter One), responses to the EU policies (see Chapter Two) and dimensions of the lifeworld and communicative practice (see Chapter Three). The main empirical sources involved mystery shopping and semi-structured interviews with disabled customers; and semi-structured interviews with and observations of ICT industry actors and civil society. While applied methods and the rationale of the research are qualitative, in aiming to either provide a background or to support the data some explanations are of a quantitative nature.

Triangulation was another important element of the research strategy, that ensured a multidimensional perspective of the phenomenon (Foster, 1997) and increased validity, reliability and strength of the study (Denzin, 1970). For this purpose, data source, methodologic and theoretical triangulation approaches were employed. With regard to data source triangulation, the data was collected from disabled customers, ICT manufacturers, regional representatives of ICT products industry (IBR) and civil society (IDPO), national disabled people organisations (DPOs) and ICT shop assistants and managers in Lithuania and the UK. In terms of methodologic triangulation, within-method triangulation (Kimchi et al., 1991) was adopted. Specifically, when gauging disabled customers' experiences, mystery shopping was combined with semi-structured interviews. Aiming to reveal industry and civil society's perspectives, semi-structured interviews were combined with covert observations. With regard to theoretical triangulation, although Denzin (1970) refers to the employment of multiple theories, this study uses literature on disability, markets, international relations, the EU, the social model of disability, Habermas' theory of communicative action and specific global, regional and national soft and binding policy instruments. This assisted in increasing alternative explanations of EU markets accessibility and enabled looking beyond retail practice. The sum of the three types of triangulation allowed to provide rich, multi-perspective and unbiased data (Thurmond, 2001), which is currently insufficient in the field.

The research has been carried out by a non-disabled researcher. Kitchin (2000) argues that non-disabled researchers may approach the project from a subjective and biased position and promote pre-determined agendas. This, in return may have a negative impact on applying research results in an empowering way (Branfield, 1998), continue limited representation of disabled people's knowledge and experience (Shakespeare, 1996) and maintain their marginalisation and oppression (Barnes and Mercer, 1997). Faulkner and Thomas (2002) suggest that research carried out by individuals representing the researched group have more potential to gain deeper knowledge and provide more meaningful outcomes. Although the authors make a valid point, Barnes (1992) notes that having an impairment does not ensure a high quality and implementation of emancipatory research and that non-disabled researchers may also positively contribute to the field. Indeed, 'the cultural gulf between researchers and researched has as much to do with social indicators like class, education, employment and general life experiences as with impairments' (Barnes, 1992:121-122). Hence, it was important to be aware of how researcher and research participants' personal, social and cultural characteristics may affect their interaction and research processes. While professional social work experience, DREAM training events and lectures at the University of Leeds helped to identify strategies for dealing with the outlined challenges regarding disabled customers, internship at the IBR and the IDPO assisted in relating to the informants of industry and civil society.

Having established research strategy and ontological and epistemological positions, the following section sheds light on sampling strategies and techniques that were chosen to identify and involve the participants.

4.2. Sampling

Since 'you cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything' (Miles and Hunberman, 1994:27), sampling becomes an important part of social research (Punch, 2005). While sampling in quantitative research seeks for representativeness of the studied population (Marshall, 1996), qualitative research requires depth (Patton, 1990), appropriateness, 'good' informant (Morse, 1991:27), and a close fit with research questions (Marshall, 1996) and aims (Coyne, 1997). For the purpose of this research, purposeful sampling strategy has been employed. However, applied techniques differ when it comes to selecting research locations and informant groups. To begin with, the intensity sampling technique (Patton, 1990, Teddlie and Yu,

2007) has been chosen for selecting research locations (see 4.2.1). Aiming to answer the question dealing with disabled customers' experiences and perspectives, maximum variation and snow-ball sampling techniques (Patton, 1990) have been adopted (see 4.2.2). Finally, aiming to identify stakeholders of the EU single market for ICT products and civil society's perspectives and experiences, information-rich cases technique (Patton, 1990) has been chosen (see 4.2.3).

4.2.1. Research locations

The research aimed to select countries that share differences and similarities in terms of generic political developments, market economy, retail practice, social policy, and disabled people's history and current position. In addition, it was aimed to look at the EU members, which in one way or another reflect processes and experiences that are typical to disabled customers, industry and civil society in other EU countries. Hence, intensity sampling technique has been chosen. According to Patton (1990:171), this sampling technique 'consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensively (but not extremely) [...and] seeks excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, but not unusual cases'. Keeping in mind that Lithuania and the UK meet the outlined selection criteria and I am fluent in both languages, it was decided to carry out the research in these two countries.

With regard to generic political developments, both countries are EU members. However, the UK entered the Union in 1973, and Lithuania joined the Union in 2004. Both countries act in the EU economic area under the EU Single Market framework and legislations, and seek to guarantee the fundamental freedoms of the Union: free movement of goods, services, capital and people. Furthermore, both countries have ratified the CRPD and the Optional Protocol (26/02/2009; 07/08/2009 and 30/03/2007; 18/08/2010 respectively) and are obliged to transfer the duties into national legislations.

In terms of general and disability-related characteristics, Lithuania is an Eastern European country with 2.9 million inhabitants (Lietuvos Statistikos Departamentas, 2014) and the UK is a Western European country with 64.1 million inhabitants (Office for National Statistics, 2014). While 8.03% of Lithuanians are identified as having impairments (Bringing Neighbours Closer, 2012), the number in the UK reaches 19% of total population (Papworth Trust, 2014).

Regarding market history and relations, the two countries share more differences than similarities. To begin with, as a post-Soviet Union country,

Lithuania has a short history of a small, still developing market. The 'rebirth' after regaining independence in 1990 (Vebera, 1994) brought challenges such as unbalanced economy, fragmented and unevenly developed market sectors, blurry import/ export patterns, lack of legal instruments, regulating market relations (Hohnen, 2003, Bertelsmann Stiftung BTI, 2010) as well as limited trading traditions and market economy skills (Bouloff, 1991). At the other end of the spectrum is the UK, having long-time domination in the European and world economy (Aldcroft, 1964), leadership in international and domestic banking (Collins, 1988), and international commerce and finance (Rota and Schettino, 2011, Mollan and Michie, 2012). Thatcher's era (1979-1990) and the new approach to economic policy introduced privatisation, tax changes and reformed industrial relations (Crafts, 2002) that played a part in positioning the UK as a long-term competitive economy.

The research activities have been carried out in city A in Lithuania and cities B, C and D in the UK, all the locations being urban areas. While due to confidentiality the names of the cities are not revealed, it is important to note that the locations are similar in terms of inhabitants' consistency, retail market, shopping facilities, and accessibility of public spaces.

4.2.2. Customers of private goods and services

Maximum variation sampling is used as a primary technique to select disabled customers and is accompanied by the snow-ball sampling technique. Patton (1990:172) notes that maximum variation technique 'aims at capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant or program variation'. Since the research aimed to represent diverse disabled customers' experiences, the adoption of these techniques enabled the yielding of shared patterns of the experiences, heterogeneity of circumstances, and to reveal and describe unique cases (Patton, 1990). The initial research proposal aimed to involve disabled children and gauge their customer experiences through polymer clay and photography activities. Although two polymer clay activities had been organised, due to time and access restraints it was decided to withdraw this part of the research and implement it as a new project after the PhD.

Employment of only the variation sampling technique may prevent from involving disabled people with different customer experience (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992). In this respect, the adoption of the snowball sampling technique allowed identifying an additional number of informants (Gray, 2009) who are valuable knowledge sources (Davenport and Prusak, 2000).

The combination of the two strategies enabled the study to include individuals who have different impairments, share similar experiences of disablement (Bryman, 2012), are from various contexts (Blaikie, 2010) and represent a spectrum of social, personal and situational characteristics. Some may argue that such a methodological decision may introduce limitations and disadvantages such as a demographically unbalanced sample (Sadler et al., 2010), over-representation of a particular group of participants (Magnani et al., 2005), and so provide biased and unreliable findings. Seeking to overcome these challenges and to increase data validity, the following attributes were introduced: impairment type; age; gender; nationality; different economic background; and living location.

Research participants were not asked directly about their impairments or conditions. However, since the research focuses on the diversity of experiences and since industry's responses and experiences may differ according to their commitments to different impairment types, it was important to classify informants' impairments. A great number of the participants had visible impairments. In those cases when impairments were invisible, they were either revealed by the participants during mystery shopping and interviews, or were identified when discussing faced shopping process barriers. The sample included people with different types of impairment, with vision and mobility impairments dominating amongst others.

Table 1 – Participants – customers by impairment type

Type of impairment	Number of informants in Lithuania	Number of informants in the UK
Vision impairments	7	3
Hearing impairments	4	1
Mobility impairments	8	2
Cognitive impairments	6	2
Mental health conditions	2	-
Multiple impairments	-	1 (vision, mobility, speech impairments) 1 (mobility, cognitive impairments)

		1 (vision, cognitive impairments)
Total	27	11
	38	

One could argue that an unequal number of Lithuanian and British participants questions validity and reliability of the research results. While reasons that shaped this difference are outlined in 4.3.2 and 4.4, it is important to highlight that the informants in both countries were treated as one group of participants, representing different contexts of the EU. Indeed, the focus was on data saturation and not on statistically representative informants number (Gray, 2009, Ruane, 2005, Blaikie, 2010) in each country.

The initial plan was to involve disabled people who live in the community as well as in institutions. However, the reality reshaped these intentions and all participants identified themselves as living in the community. Since customer experience may differ according to a life-stage (see Chapter One), it was aimed to involve individuals representing the following age groups: eighteen to forty, forty-one to sixty-four and older than sixty-five (see Table 2). The youngest participant was twenty-one and the oldest seventy-nine years old. With regard to nationality, Lithuanian informants identified themselves as white Lithuanians, and in the UK all informants referred to themselves as white British, with an exception of one who identified himself as black African, and one as Indian.

Table 2 – Participants – customers by age

Age categories	Number of informants in Lithuania	Number of informants in the UK
18 – 40	10	7
41 – 64	11	4
65 +	6	-

4.2.3. Industry and DPOs' stakeholders

Information-rich cases was the purposive sampling technique used to select stakeholders representing the EU ICT retail market and civil society. According to Patton (1990:181), this strategy selects 'cases from which one can learn a great deal about matters of importance'. Drawing on his discussions about judging purposeful sampling on the purpose and

rationale of the study, and the necessity to not disconnect the sample from the context (Patton, 1990), it was decided to select those informants who directly operate within the EU single market for ICT products, are active in the accessibility field, have different relationships with disabled customers, and operate under global, regional and national instruments outlined in Chapter Two. As discussed in Chapter One, disabled people's participation as customers in the mainstream private market is relatively new, as is the concept of retail markets accessibility. Hence, the main attention was paid to the sampling criteria, ensuring validity and reliability of the accounts shared by a relatively limited number of people, instead of a quantitatively reliable number of participants. Thus, it was aimed to access individuals acting at global, regional and national levels, as they possess qualities and information relevant to the purpose of this research (Tongco, 2007). Second, it was aimed to gather information from actors who have different experience and interest in the field, but who are willing to engage in communication and share their knowledge (Bernard, 2011, Seidler, 1974). Since their reliability and competency were treated as important selection criteria (Tongco, 2007), only stakeholders having relevant knowledge and skills (Bjork, 1999, Godambe, 1982) were invited to take part in the study. Although the samples of the representatives of the EU ICT industry and civil society were relatively small, interviews with the unique players provided rich information about underlying structures and realities (March et al., 1991) that through shaping the informants' activities, mould the accessibility of the EU single market and disabled customers' experience. Therefore, the following actors were invited to take part in the study: ICT manufacturers, EU industry representatives of the ICT products, international and national DPOs, and ICT shop managers and shop assistants (LT and UK). The process of accessing and interviewing each of these groups was different and the focus of the questions was not identical. The following section, therefore, deals with these and other related issues.

4.3. Methods and data generation

The study involved three stages of data generation:

1. Secondary data investigation. The aim of this stage was to discover what is already known about the area; how global, regional and national policy instruments address disability, accessibility and retail customers; and how the identified contradictions can be addressed.

2. Mystery shopping and qualitative interviews with disabled customers in Lithuania and the UK. The goal was to explore key elements of an accessible shopping chain and to reveal disabled people's shopping experience, existing barriers and potentials, used coping strategies, and factors causing customer vulnerability.
3. Qualitative interviews with the stakeholders, representing the EU single market for ICT products and civil society. The aim was to explore social, political and market structures and realities that shape their lifeworlds and the patterns of their involvement in communicative interaction that may impact the creation of an accessible EU single market.

4.3.1. Secondary data investigation

The first stage aimed to provide a framework for the further research stages and therefore involved an exploration of literature (disability, sociology, marketing, international relations and the EU) and policy instruments (global, regional, and national). As seen, key issues discussed in earlier chapters addressed disabled people's past and present position in markets; accessible shopping chain; concepts of accessibility, inclusion and universal design. In addition, key concepts of Habermas' theory of communicative action were discussed and linked with the EU policy and private market mechanisms. Due to ontological and epistemological positions and the knowledge acquired through literature review, global (CRPD, US), regional (EU), and national (LT, UK) policy instruments, addressing customer rights protection, accessibility of public spaces and shops were examined. The analysis of the discourse of policy instruments enabled detecting potential roots of the disablement (Barnes, 1991), and underlying legal norms and rules (Henn et al., 2006) that may impact stakeholders' obligations and interactions and disabled customers' experiences. Since EU negotiating settings are distinguished by high levels of institutionalization and socialisation (Lewis, 1998) that shape a framework for a common lifeworld to emerge (Risse, 2000) and may lay preconditions for engaging into communication and collaborative innovation regarding an accessible EU single market (see Chapter Three), the analysis of the aforementioned instruments became an important part of the research.

The initial research design also aimed to conduct customer complaint analysis and treat this as a secondary data. The idea was to position this information as symptoms of the problem (Schibrowsky and Lapidus, 1994), enabling 1) to identify difficulties faced by disabled customers, that have occurred over time and possibly across using different ICTs; and 2) to

provide uniform guidelines for improving the current service delivery system. However, due to time and resource constraints this intention fell by the wayside and was not conducted.

4.3.2. Mystery shopping

The research demanded methods enabling to reveal a range of different experiences and not purely focusing on barriers encountered in the retail premises by people with a certain type of impairment. In addition, although shopping is a natural activity of everyday life (Baker, 2006), ICT shopping is not so common. Therefore, it was decided to use methods which stimulate participants' experiences, enabling to negotiate them as they unfold and not just narrating afterwards. With this in mind, prior to describing ICT shopping experiences via qualitative interviews, the informants were invited to participate in mystery shopping.

Mystery shopping is a form of participant observation where the researcher interacts with the research participants being observed and stems from the field of cultural anthropology (Miller, 1998). Despite existing similarities, because of its structure and systematic approach, the method differs from the original form of subject observation in anthropology studies (Hudson et al., 2001) and has become a mainstream market research technique (Miller, 1998). The adoption of the method provided several benefits. To begin with, being a form of participant observation (Wilson, 1998), it enabled identifying different elements of the service delivery process on natural conditions (Grove and Fisk, 1992) and served as a reliable tool to test whether disabled consumers are treated equally or are discriminated against (Morrall, 1994, Wiele et al., 2005). Furthermore, it enables overcoming the discrepancy between real and reported behaviour (Friedrichs et al., 1975). Some facts, especially if they are about people's everyday life and are internalised as natural, may be revealed only by means of natural settings, since participants may not be conscious of them (Hudson et al., 2001). Hence, the method valuably assisted in revealing under-researched elements of disabled customers' experience beyond the interaction in retail premises. The current research expanded the focus of mystery shopping and applied the method outside the shop. It positioned customer experiences as a process that starts before the person leaves the house; travels to, reaches and interacts in the shop. This, indeed, assisted to detect the way different elements in the home and public environment, transport infrastructure, retail premises, and interaction with shop assistants and other customers shape customer experience and an accessible shopping chain. These, indeed, are

overlooked in literature and prevent from unlocking accessible and equal customer experience.

4.3.2.1. Access to disabled customers

The process of accessing disabled customers in both countries varied. To begin with, the majority of the informants in Lithuania were contacted through gatekeepers in DPOs and were approached personally. This strategy did not work in the UK. Here, only one organisation that provides services for people with cognitive impairments expressed the will to discuss the study in more detail. Another seven out of eighteen approached DPOs and charities in city B, UK, agreed to share information about the research via electronic communication means. Those who provided negative responses, noted that due to financial cuts and shortage in human resources they are unable to help to recruit research participants. Hence, short (75 to 100 words) notices about the research were prepared and shared on emailing lists, e-newspapers and Facebook. The response rate in city B (UK) was lower than expected. Only four people expressed an interest to take part in the study. Seeking to increase participant numbers, seven DPOs in cities C and D of the same UK region were contacted. Similarly to the experience in city B, organisations neither wanted to meet and discuss the research, nor were positive about my offer to volunteer and organise some activities. They instead suggested sharing the information on their websites or on Facebook. Three people (two from city C and one from city D) responded to the invitation and took part in the research. In addition, two informants were approached through personal connections and two were identified by other research participants.

The discussed experience suggests that funds allocated to DPOs shape not only disabled people's participation in community (see Chapter One), but also social research practice. It is evident that austerity measures and ongoing policy changes re-shape traditional ways of approaching research participants. Second, operating in austerity times, DPOs become more focused on the activities that are perceived as most important for inclusion and participation. This may shape attitudes toward studies addressing other topics. As an example, one organisation sent an email saying that 'there are more important issues to look at than shopping'. Another DPO required me to participate in fund-raising activities as an exchange for access to its members. Since this 'exchange offer' contradicted my researcher's ethical standpoint, the proposal was rejected. Third, since online communication means was the dominant channel for approaching potential participants, individuals, who do not have access to the Internet, were excluded from the study. Finally, a relatively limited number of British

participants could also be influenced by the fact that in city B there is one of the biggest disability study centres in the country and various researches are constantly being carried out.

At the other end of the spectrum was the experience of accessing disabled customers in Lithuania. With an exception of two organisations of/for people with hearing impairments, five contacted DPOs agreed to act as gatekeepers. Two organisations for and of people with mobility and vision impairments informed their members about the research and organised meetings. Then I introduced myself to the interested individuals and provided more details about the study. This allowed the potential informants to decide about their participation, ask questions, discuss the aim and process of the research, and findings dissemination (Barnes, 1992, Barnes and Mercer, 1997, Stone and Priestley, 1996). Persons who could not attend the meeting but were interested in the study allowed the DPOs to share their contact details and I contacted them personally. A few Lithuanian participants directed me to other potential informants. They as well as all British informants were provided with identical information in their native language and if needed, in different accessible formats.

A slightly different approach was used to access people with cognitive impairments and mental health conditions. Meetings with DPOs who provide particular services were organised similarly in both countries. The initial contact with the gatekeepers was established and all the details were pre-coordinated in advance via e-mail or telephone. As a result, in two organisations in Lithuania and one organisation in the UK I have attended several sessions and participated with potential participants in activities such as handicraft production, table games, etc. Informal interaction allowed me to provide people with information about the research in an accessible manner and to inquire whether they would like to share their experiences. Although due to time constraints I was able to attend only a few meetings, unbiased involvement and interaction ensured that individuals' will to take part in the study is free and informed. In addition, the engagement in common activities enabled us to become more familiar with each other and helped to build trust.

In both countries voluntary agreement, confidentiality and free will to participate in the research was emphasised several times during the accessing process. Similarly, the research process, aims, and data dissemination practicalities were explained to all participants in an accessible language during the initial stage as well as later on in the research.

4.3.2.2. Mystery shopping and disability research

While the process of accessing research participants contained some elements of the first stage of the three-stages approach introduced by Barnes (1992), mystery shopping constituted the practice. Regarding the first stage, as noted, the preliminary discussion with the potential participants about the research was implemented either in person or via email and telephone. They were contacted in advance and the information was provided in formats most accessible for each individual. For instance, large font or electronic documents were used when designing information sheets and consent forms for people with vision impairments, and pictures and plain language for people with cognitive impairments. Prior to each mystery shopping event, information provided at the initial stage was repeated and when needed, sign interpreter's service was used. Despite the differences in the communication medium, participants were introduced to the purpose of the study, and the form and objectives of mystery shopping and interviews. In addition, research-related travel expenses were covered and the reward for taking part in the study (£10 in the UK and 50LT in Lithuania) was presented before engaging into research activities. Possible benefits for the disabled people and the gain for me as a researcher were also explained. Most importantly, the focus of the inquiry on barriers and potentials in the public environment, transport infrastructure and retail premises and not on individuals' 'performance' was highlighted. The meeting location, time, visited shops and the location for the interview were decided by the informants. This provided them with more control over the research process and shifted the balance of power between the researcher and the informants (Barnes, 1992). With all but three participants we met either outside their home or in public places and travelled to their chosen shop together. Vakare (LT, age 41-64), Povile (LT, age 41-64) and Chris (UK, age 18-40) expressed the preference to visit shops individually and to meet straight after that for the interview.

The duration of the trip to the shop and of the mystery shopping varied. While some participants reached the shop in five or seven minutes, others spent from ten to forty-five minutes travelling. Similarly, while some informants spent five to ten minutes in the shop and looked around without communicating with shop assistants, others spent more than an hour and interacted with the salespeople. It is important to note that around half of the informants expressed the will to visit grocery or cloth shops, instead of ICT sellers. They were motivated by the preference due to limited interest in or no need for technologies. The majority of the participants possessed some products. Four disabled customers bought different ICTs and others bought food, clothes, presents or home appliances. It is important to highlight that all informants who have bought

the items perceived me as an assistance source in the shopping process. To illustrate, Ramune (LT, age 18-40) asked me to describe a coat colour; Katrina (LT, age 18-40) asked me to reach some products in the pharmacy; Rolandas (LT, age 41-64) – to accompany him to a bank and the ICT shop; Hilda (LT, age 65+), Barbora (LT, age 41-64) and Daphne (UK, 18-40) asked me for some assistance in grocery shopping, and Rachel (UK, age 41-64), Alison (UK, age 18-40), Jack (UK, age 41-64) and Peter (UK, age 18-40) asked me to assist in other shopping process stages. None of the participants asked for assistance in making actual customer choices. On the contrary, my role was to assist in overcoming barriers such as climbing steps, finding products, reading information about products, describing colours and shapes, etc. While such experiences and their implications will be discussed in Chapter Five, it is important to underline the value provided by flexibility of the activity and the researcher, and the participants' control in the activity.

Mystery shopping also involved shop assistants, who neither knew about the research, nor were interviewed. While one can question the ethics of the covert observation (Herrera, 1999, Homan, 1980), the method enabled me to observe salespeople's natural behaviour (Gray, 2009) and to collect objective data (Petticrew et al., 2007) about their interaction with disabled customers. Being aware of the existing ethical challenges, professionals' confidentiality is respected. Neither professionals' names, shop locations nor any other information that could break the principle of confidentiality and have a harmful impact on them are identified. Additionally, although some of their phrases said during the mystery shopping are used in forthcoming chapters, the same principle and practice of ensuring confidentiality and anonymity have been used when presenting the accounts (see 4.3.5).

4.3.3. Interviews with disabled customers

Semi-structured interviews followed the mystery shopping. Since Habermas' theory of communicative action and the social model of disability are related with interactional, contextual or situational factors, it was decided to conduct interviews in the context of the private market realm. According to Mason (2002), such an approach enables detecting and linking social experiences and processes that affect the researched phenomenon. With an exception of Lisa (UK, age 18-40), who was interviewed in the day care centre, Herbertas (LT, age 65+), who was interviewed at his home, and Chris (UK, age 18-40) and Lukas (LT, age 18-40) who were interviewed via Skype, the interviews were usually conducted in coffee-houses and pizzerias. The continuity of research

activities in the private market had several benefits. First, it enabled expanding on customer experience related issues that may have been neglected if the interviews were conducted in participants' home or meeting rooms. Second, whilst conducting interviews in a non-business place would save the researcher's funds, it may prevent participants from comparing this type of private service delivery with retail customer experience and to reflect while experiencing. As mentioned earlier, Lisa (UK, age 41-64) was interviewed in the day care centre and Herbertas (LT, age 65+) at his home. Although this eliminated a possibility for the two informants to reflect on customer experience within the private market space, the interviews were conducted right after their shopping outings, so the reflection of the experience would be as fresh as possible.

All participants were offered to have either face-to-face interview or to communicate via telephone, Skype, emails or other means accessible to them. As a result, all participants preferred to have a face-to-face interview, except Lukas (LT, age 18-40) and Chris (UK, age 18-40) who chose to be interviewed via Skype. The methodological decision to interview via Skype might be criticised as lacking non-verbal information, reducing social cues and spontaneity (Mann and Stewart, 2000). In addition, since Chris (UK, age 18-40) did not want to use video call and preferred texting, the opportunity to see the interviewee (Deakin and Wakefield, 2013) and thus to have virtual interaction (Bertrand and Bourdeau, 2010) was suspended. However, recalling the nature of the research, the method provided the two participants with the control in the research process (Rappaport, 1997) and enabled them to take part in the study, share experiences and contribute to narrowing down this knowledge gap. The two interviews were prearranged in advance; one consent form was sent by post and another via email. The two interviews lasted around 70 minutes each.

The decision to provide participants with control over the interview process introduced more equal power relations (Barnes, 1992) and reflected some principles of emancipatory research (Barnes, 1992, Barnes and Mercer, 1997, Kitchin, 2000, Stone and Priestley, 1996). However, due to my limited experience in communicating with people with cognitive impairments via technological means, this group of participants was invited to take part in face-to-face interviews. A great care was taken to use accessible research tools and communication means. For example, interviewing techniques such as simple words and pictures, short sentences, asking one question at a time, and rephrasing questions were used and enabled achieving accuracy (Finlay and Lyons, 2001). Self-directed reflections by the interviewee (Rodgers, 1999) were also encouraged. As a result, some participants with cognitive impairments changed the path and the format of the interview. For instance, Andrius (LT, age 18-49) talked

about customer experiences while showing some pictures on the mobile phone. Ignas (LT, age 18-40) shared shopping experiences linking these to his personal experience of selling illegal cigarettes. The greatest example of the benefits brought by self-directed reflections was demonstrated in the interview with Sarunas (LT, age 41-64). Specifically, during the mystery shopping he collected leaflets from the majority of shops in the visited shopping mall. While the person collected the material aiming to prove to his family members that he visited a shop without them, during the interview the leaflets served as a stimulation to tell shopping- and products usage-related stories. Although it was difficult to follow the interview schedule, leaflets-related stories answered most questions and provided unique information.

Despite the discussed differences in the interview format, the logic of semi-structured interviews dominated and provided several methodological and conceptual benefits. First, it captured participants' opinions about customer experience not only in the visited ICT shop, but also revealed general shopping-related experiences and insights. Narrating the experiences right after the visit to the shop allowed identifying meanings that people ascribe to the shopping process and outcomes (Gray, 2009). Opportunity to articulate and reflect on recent events allowed the gathering of more detailed responses, clarifications, perceptions, feelings (Arksey and Knight, 1999), knowledge and attitudes (Cohen and Manion, 2000) that occur in the private market. Recalling discussion on communicative action (see Chapter Three), this research acknowledges that 'people's knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality' (Mason, 2002:63). Thus, this methodological approach is the most suitable and appropriate for generating the data.

Unstructured interviews would be a useful tool providing a detailed picture of people's shopping experiences and dedicating participants with more control over the direction of the interview (Ruane, 2005). However, the aim to reveal disabled customers' experiences, and perspectives toward accessibility demanded structure that could be achieved only by using semi-structured interviews. Structured interviews were also regarded as unsuitable. They would minimise the flexibility and variation of the perspectives (Punch, 2005), and would only shed light on standardised behaviour of and quantified information about the population (Ruane, 2005). This would erase people's unique and diverse experiences and perspectives. As a result, it was decided to use interview schedules rather than interview guides or crafted pre-structured questionnaires.

The interview schedule included a number of questions addressing key stages of an accessible shopping chain (see Chapter One). The questions were followed by a list of probes and observation data from the mystery shopping. This allowed explaining the questions (Bryman, 2012) and ensured further elaboration and clarity of the provided accounts (Gray, 2009, Ruane, 2005). The main attention was dedicated to customer experience, when market expands beyond the exchange process in the shop, positioning technical product accessibility as a secondary issue. Seeking to ensure more complete participants' accounts representation, all interviews but one via Skype were recorded. I have transcribed the first twelve interviews, while others were delegated to the contractor approved by the University of Leeds and the supervisors, before reading and coding them. Recalling Barnes' (1992) discussion on the three-stage approach, it was intended to send the transcripts to the participants for changes and comments. However, due to time and resource constraints this fell by the wayside.

Having detected disabled customers' experiences at the empirical level (Bhaskar, 1975) and having provided an adequate description of these experiences (Blaikie, 2010), the research shifted towards the identification of market practices and events that not necessarily can be observed, but play a part in shaping accessibility of the EU single market. With this in mind, the following discussion addresses methods and data generation strategies employed to gather accounts of the EU ICT industry and civil society.

4.3.4. Interviews with the stakeholders

The third stage of the research aimed to explore social, political and market structures, shaping the stakeholders' lifeworld and the patterns of their involvement in communication and collaborative innovation regarding markets accessibility. Recalling discussion in Chapter Three, light was shed on the lifeworld, access to the discourse and power relations. The enquiry included semi-structured interviews with ICT manufacturers, IBR, IDPOs, DPOs as well as ICT product shops in Lithuania and the UK. The content of the questionnaires for each group was founded on the analysis of global, regional and national instruments (see Chapter Two) and insights from the literature review (see Chapter One), and were framed within the three key dimensions of Habermas' theory of CA (see Chapter Three). Despite the ideological unity, questionnaires for each group were constructed to fit the informants' professional experiences and contexts within which they operate. Hence, as advocated by Niemann (2004), the interviews employed a similar protocol of asking questions concerning stakeholders' lifeworld,

access to the discourse and power relations, but the provided questions were not identical and paralleled one another. Such approach revealed disparities and similarities among the informants (Pahl, 1995) and increased validity of the analysed phenomenon (Huffcutt and Arthur, 1994). The wording and the contexts were adjusted to specific stakeholders. The employment of conceptually and technically similar questionnaires, which are sensitive in the used language, contexts, translational differences and ethics (Turner, 2010, Bryman, 2012, Mason, 2002), enabled indirectly bringing all actors into one room. It provided them with a possibility to express positions toward the same issues in the most familiar language.

Similarly to disabled customers, in aiming to gauge stakeholders' perspectives, positions and experiences, semi-structured interviews were adopted. Being relatively informal and interactional exchange of dialog (Mason, 2002) this type of interviewing allowed addressing a range of themes, issues and perspectives without rigidity and a sense of being official (Mason, 2002, Blaikie, 2010). It enabled gauging informants' meanings and interpretations of disabled customers and accessibility (Blaikie, 2010), experiences of operating under various legal requirements and communicating with actors involved in the process.

4.3.4.1. Access to and interviews with ICT manufacturers

Access to ICT manufacturers was gained through the IBR, where I have spent three months as an intern. Before starting the internship, I provided the association with the proposal outlining research design, aims, and the way these fit with the IBR's activities and position towards accessibility. The proposal was shared with the members of the accessibility group, including manufacturers. This pre-accessing interaction was further continued in several other meetings, and enabled establishing direct interaction, gaining trust and building a rapport with potential elite research participants (Harvey, 2011, Ostrander, 1993).

After starting the internship, I presented initial findings on ICTs accessibility. This helped to continue building trust and rapport, shaped a framework for collaborative relationships to emerge, and provided producers with information that may be used when creating accessible technologies. After spending six weeks working and familiarising with professional contexts and language, the questionnaires for ICT manufacturers and regional ICT industry actors were polished with the help of my mentor at the IBR. Potential research participants were approached via an emailing list of the accessibility group. Invitations to participate in the research, an information sheet, and the consent form and interview schedule were

circulated by the director of the department. On the one hand, the fact that potential informants were approached by a senior member of staff may raise concerns about power relations and confidentiality. However, as suggested by some scholars (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002, Goldstein, 2002), all possible connections should be used when approaching elite participants, as access to them is one of the main challenges in social research (Hertz and Imber, 1993, Thomas, 1993, Welch et al., 2002). After the first attempt, only one company agreed to take part in the research. While the interview with this manufacturer was arranged and conducted a few days after the positive response, a second invitation was sent two weeks after the first attempt. However, no response was received. Being aware of existing tensions brought by the debates on the European Accessibility Act, at the third attempt only the most active members were contacted. However, only short explanations of their refusals were received. They usually addressed internal policies that regulated communication with external actors.

With regard to the company that agreed to take part in the study, the date for the interview was arranged the same day the person expressed the interest. The information sheet, consent form and interview schedule were sent to the informant. Although I gave a preference to face-to-face interview, I also suggested such communication means as telephone and Skype. Due to the busy schedule and location in another country, the informant preferred to have an interview via Skype. On the one hand, one may argue that this decision may suspend benefits of face-to-face interview such as observing individual's body language and gestures (Tellier, 2009), behaviour (Buchwald et al., 2009) and facial expressions (Ekman and Rosenberg, 1997). However, since both the interviewee and I used video, it was possible to see each other in real time and personal interaction was not expelled (Bertrand and Bourdeau, 2010, Deakin and Wakefield, 2013). I was able to track the informant's facial expressions and the synergy between their posture and pauses. This enabled adjusting my behaviour, voice and asked questions. Conducting this elite interview via Skype provided additional benefits such as an opportunity to overcome geographical challenges and high travelling costs (Hanna, 2012), and to ensure higher confidentiality due to intractability of the data (Bertrand and Bourdeau, 2010). Instead of conducting the interview in the open-space office or at home, I booked a meeting room in my internship organisation. This eliminated external distractions, provided a sense of professional environment and situated the process into business 'frames' (Bertrand and Bourdeau, 2010). Similarly, the informant was in the office, used a computer, and there were no external interruptions.

Alongside general advice not to ask elite informants close-ended questions (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002, Harvey, 2011), the questionnaire employed open-ended questions. This allowed articulating views ensuring informant's receptivity that increased validity of the responses (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002). Likewise, asking questions related to different areas and not focusing too much on continual questions provided higher reliability of the gauged accounts (Dexter, 2006). The interview lasted one hour, as it was arranged in advance. While scholars' opinions about the recording of elite interviews differ, the participant was asked whether they agreed for the interview to be recorded. There being no objections, the interview was audio recorded, transcribed a few days after the event and the recording was erased.

It is important to note that while power relations in elite interviews are often debated by scholars (Cochrane, 1998, Harvey, 2011, Smith, 2006), the informant was approachable, treated me as an equal and was open and willing to share the information. Most importantly, several times the participant emphasised that there are many things that the company do not know about disabled people and their expectations towards technologies. Thus, interviews like this may impact on future developments. Even though the interview was classified as 'elite' and has employed particular techniques, the actual process significantly differed from those described in literature. It reminded of thematic discussion between two professionals interested in the same area, but representing different professional backgrounds.

4.3.4.2. Access to and interviews with regional representatives of the ICT industry and civil society

Regional representatives of the ICT industry and civil society were approached during the internship. The key informants were identified in respect to their professional activities and responsibilities related with accessibility. It is important to note that participants representing the two stakeholder groups worked in my internship organisations. Although in such a context dynamics of power relations, and validity and reliability of provided data can be questioned, three months spent in both organisations enabled me to establish trust and rapport (Harvey, 2011, Ostrander, 1993).

Aiming to secure a date, the interviews were pre-arranged (Goldstein, 2002). Despite the informants being familiar with my research, the information sheet, consent forms and interview schedules were sent in advance. Identically to the interview with the ICT Company, at the beginning of the interviews a consent form was read out, and all questions

about the research were answered. A list of questions was used in order to ensure that all planned issues are addressed. As in the interviews with disabled customers and the manufacturing company, these were flexible and were used as prompts. The interviews ranged from seventy-five to ninety minutes. While the interview with the IBR was conducted in the pre-booked meeting room, the interview with the IDPO was held in the informant's office. Both interviews were audio-recorded, fully transcribed, and the recordings were deleted. Similarly to the interview with the Company X, power relations were relatively equal, the informants were approachable, used accessible language, provided examples, and were willing to provide explanations if the answers were unclear.

4.3.4.3. Access to and interviews with national DPOs and representatives of the ICT products industry

National DPOs were accessed with the help of the IDPO. Keeping in mind the novelty of retail markets accessibility within disability policy and practice, it was important to select the most relevant DPOs. Initially it was decided to approach organisations that are members of the IDPO and have experience regarding retail markets accessibility. Selected British and Lithuanian organisations were approached by the director of the IDPO, who sent introducing emails. Further communication was continued without including the IDPO director in the communication; consent forms, information sheets and interview schedules were sent and both organisations agreed to take part in the research. The documents and communication with each organisation were held in their native language.

The interview with the two representatives of the Lithuanian DPO was conducted three weeks after the initial contact. The situation with the British DPO was more complicated. To begin with, initially the approached organisation agreed to participate in the research. Since the DPO employee working on accessibility preferred to have a face-to-face interview and I at that moment was doing my internship in Belgium, it was agreed to postpone the meeting until I had come back to the UK. This, however, was not a good decision as by that time due to financial cuts the organisation experienced major human resource decrease. As a result, when approached regarding the interview, the person explained the situation, apologised and cancelled the interview. Therefore, using the initial selection criteria, four other organisations were approached. While one of them based their refusal to participate on the same reasons as the first British organisation, another two noted that retail market accessibility is not a priority of their activities. An individual working on accessibility in the fourth organisation was keen to participate in the research. However, the

informant acknowledged that the organisation has more experience in working on accessibility of the public environment, transport and labour market, compared to accessibility of the private retail markets. Representatives of the Lithuanian DPO also emphasised limited expertise in markets accessibility and customer rights. However, compared to other Lithuanian and British DPOs these two organisations have more experience in the subject of interest.

As with other stakeholder groups, national DPO representatives were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. The interview schedule was framed within Habermas' theory of communicative action and founded on policy documents and secondary data analysis. The major difference between this and the aforementioned interview schedules was an emphasis on national, rather than on global and regional policies and market relations. Questions were used as prompts, were flexible and at the same time addressed pre-determined issues (Bryman, 2012). The interviews ranged from sixty to seventy-five minutes. While the interview with the British DPO representative was held in the organisation, Lithuanian DPO advocates were interviewed over a conference breakfast, as because of informants' busy schedule this was the only time they were available. Conducting an interview in an informal environment was an advantage, since the atmosphere of breakfast and small chats about food and service, enabled to 'break the ice' and to build rapport. While the British DPO did not object to the interview being recorded, the Lithuanian participants expressed the will not to use a digital recorder. As a result, the notes were taken very fast, writing down the key words and phrases (Gray, 2009) but at the same time eye contact with the interviewees was maintained leading to more detailed responses (Dexter, 2006). While the interview with the UK representative was transcribed, comprehensive notes summarising the interview with Lithuanian participants were taken down right after the interview.

Initially, it was aimed to interview national representatives of the ICT industry. However, this target was not achieved. This group of potential participants was approached in the same way as manufacturers. Similarly, they did not express interest to take part in the research. The motives for the refusal were based either on political or on internal policy related reasons.

4.3.4.4. Access to and interviews with shop managers and assistants

Responding to the accounts shared by the disabled customers, it was decided to involve two types of shop: brand-specific ICT shops (BSH) that

sell products produced by one company and retailers selling ICTs produced by different manufacturers (NBSH). While the goal was identical for both countries, the process of accessing potential participants differed. With regard to Lithuania, one BSH and four NBSH in city A were approached via emails and telephone. While the BSH agreed to participate in the research, all NBSH were resistant to have an interview. The main reasons for the rejections were either a busy schedule or limited experience in serving disabled customers. Since disabled customers often mentioned one of the approached NBSH as a physically accessible shop in the city centre, this knowledge was shared with the shop manager during the second attempt to invite to participate in the research. The manager became interested and agreed to take part in the study.

Four BSH and twelve NBSH in city B (UK) were invited to take part in the research. However, none of the approached shop assistants or managers could provide me either with the acceptance or with the refusal. Instead, with some of them I had small chats 'off the record' (Goldstein, 2002). The majority noted that it is an emerging area and they would like to talk more, but have no power to take such decisions and senior staff members should be contacted. While some of them provided me with an e-mail address of the general office, others promised to hand in the information sheet, consent form, ethics approval and interview schedule to their bosses. Either way, no response was received. One BSH manager noted that only the regional office of the global supplier may provide permission to participate in any research or interview. With regard to this, the responsible department was approached twice via emails. However, no response was received. Then another department within the same company was contacted, but the result was the same.

The manager of the Lithuanian BSH was interviewed in a restaurant over the lunch break. This created a sense of informal conversation rather than academic interview and enabled to narrate product selling experiences in the realm of the private market. The interview with the NBSH manager (LT) was conducted in the informant's office. The process of this interview was unique in terms of manifestation of power relations. First, the manager was the only participant, who noted that they 'did a little research about me and the DREAM network'. While the person was happy with the DREAM concept, the exertion of power was explicit. Specifically, at the beginning of the interview the informant took the interview schedule and started answering the questions in a row, without letting me interrupt, clarify or ask additional questions. Later on the situation became 'softer' and I was able to manage the process. While this illustrates how different modalities of power can be confused, it also shows how individuals potentially having authoritarian characteristics may reshape the interview

process. Although some of the questions were not answered deeply enough, a precise compliance with the sequence of the questionnaire provided necessary data, including attitudes, perspectives and experiences. Both interviews were recorded, transcribed and the recording were deleted.

Table 3 – Participants – ICT industry and civil society

Type of informant	Abbreviation	Representation	Number of organisations	Number of informants
Manufacturers	Company X	Global	1	1
Representatives of the EU ICT industry	IBR	EU	1	2
International representatives of the EU disabled people’s civil society	IDPO	EU	1	1
National representatives of disabled people’s civil society	DPO (LT)	Lithuania	1	2
	DPO (UK)	United Kingdom	1	1
Shops, selling ICTs		Lithuania	2	2
		United Kingdom	-	-
Total			7	9

4.3.5. Observations of the stakeholders

Informal chats with and observations of industry players, civil society and policy makers were of two types. First, three months internship at the IBR and three months at the IDPO, gave an opportunity to gain background knowledge that allowed better understanding of the accounts provided during the interviews. While being at the IBR, I attended meetings where the majority of the participants were industry players and policy makers, discussing different EU single market, accessibility and technology related issues. As an IDPO intern, I participated in seminars and working groups’ events that dealt with similar issues, but were attended mainly by policy makers and civil society. Both kinds of participation enabled observing and

learning about ongoing discussions, familiarising with differences in the discourse and establishing rapport with the stakeholders.

Observations conducted during these meetings were naturalistic (Punch, 2005) and non-intrusive in nature (Adler and Adler, 1994). I neither stimulated nor manipulated individuals' behaviour. In addition, initially I aimed only to observe, but being involved in a setting, I was in a context of 'highly charged encounters suffused with meaning' (Belk et al., 1989:1) and not to exploit the gained knowledge would be academically irresponsible. Direct experience of discussing and shaping EU accessibility policies and positions provided deeper insights into the phenomenon. Hence, it was decided to employ this knowledge as a framework, ensuring thicker and deeper description and analysis. It is important to highlight that the object of the observations was not particular individuals, their behaviour or actions, but the dynamics of positions, knowledge, access to the discourse and power relations among different stakeholders. While the research hypothetically aims to bring all the informants into 'one room', translate their accounts into a common language and to bring them closer to the communicative action, participation in and observation of such meetings enabled observing processes and structures that are impossible to identify through interviews.

At the other end of the spectrum were observations of shop assistants during the mystery shopping. It was deliberately aimed to gather information about the salespeople's role in an accessible shopping chain not only through the interviews with disabled customers, but also through the observation of professionals' natural behaviour (Ford et al., 2010) in the work place. While literature on covert observation tend to shed light either on intense involvement of the researcher in the process (Lauder, 2003, Humphreys, 1970), or on the non-participative approach (Van de Mortel and Murgu, 2006, Hinshaw, 2005), this research locates itself in the middle of the two approaches. Specifically, while during the mystery shopping I neither encouraged shop assistants' activities or behaviour, nor interviewed them and acted as a 'fly-on-the-wall' (Petticrew et al., 2007:2), during informal chats when inviting to participate in stakeholder interviews I invigorated them to informally and 'not for attribution' (Goldstein, 2002) share experiences on accessibility and disabled customer service. The notes after the interaction were taken as suggested by Gray (2009) and key phrases were written down aiming to document the accounts. While such an approach may be criticised and its ethical standpoint questioned, informants' identity, location and type of shop, or any other information that could reveal their identity, shop name or have negative consequences for the person are not identified.

4.4. Research challenges

Several obstacles emerged during the research process and led to the adjustment of methods and strategies. Key challenges were related with the access to informants, their involvement in the research, as well as juggling the research process in two countries and a six-month internship in a third. With regard to access to disabled customers, due to peculiarities discussed in 4.3.2, informant numbers in the two countries were uneven (11 in the UK and 27 in Lithuania). While this could be treated as a limitation, it is important to note that participants in both Member States were treated as one group of informants, representing different social, economic, personal and situational contexts of the EU. The emphasis was on data saturation instead of the achievement of a statistically representative number of the informants.

Some challenges related with accessing and involving European industry stakeholders were shaped by ongoing regional policy processes. Specifically, while informally the majority of the IBR members were interested in my research, engaged in discussions and shared their experiences, concerns and expectations, their position changed after officially inviting them to take part in the study. They either ignored the invitation or refused to participate. One of the reasons, suggested by several approached companies, was the suspicion about the research intentions and its links with the then ongoing consideration of the EU policy processes. Specifically, at the same time when my research was undertaken, debates on the European Accessibility Act were present and several studies, initiated by the EC were carried out. Several companies emailed the IBR asking if my research is a part of these studies emphasising its similarities with some parts of the research carried out by the Deloitte Company. Member organisations were either concerned about discussing their positions and practices, or were legally obliged not to share information, provided to the Deloitte research. As a result of this, the consent forms and information sheets were adjusted, as explanation and clarification of the research background and intentions became particularly important.

One could argue that since the study draws on the accounts only of one manufacturer, the provided data can be influenced by the rules and policies of the company and may question the validity and reliability of the results. It is also possible that since the company is a leader in producing accessible ICT products in the EU, the responses toward accessibility and disability were biased and positive rather than negative. While this may present the practices in a relatively positive light, the counterweight was achieved by using data gathered during observations and informal chats

with other ICT industry players. Hence, such nature of the findings should not be treated as a deficiency and its value, validity and reliability should be recognised.

Additional challenges were related with geographical peculiarities. The research was undertaken in four countries and involved a great number of different stakeholders. The organisation and implementation of the fieldwork was time-demanding, requiring good organisation, time management skills and flexibility in dealing with cultural and organisational differences. Furthermore, aiming to gain more experience and to become more familiar with the realities and structures of industry and civil society, I spent six months as an intern in Belgium. Although this opportunity added weight to knowledge, skills and insights, it was time-demanding. PhD related work was put aside with the central focus being on the work for the two organisations. In addition, alongside being a PhD student, I was an early stage researcher at the DREAM project, where I had to meet various additional requirements and obligations.

4.5. Transcription and data analysis

With consent, all interviews but two (one written interview via Skype and one face-to-face interview were not recorded due to the informants' objection) were audio recorded. I have fully transcribed twelve interviews and others, with the permission of the supervisors, were delegated to the contractor approved by the University of Leeds.

Data analysis was thematic. With regard to disabled customers, it was related to their experiences throughout the shopping chain (see Chapter One). In terms of industry accounts, the analysis related primarily to three dimensions of Habermas' theory of communicative action (see Chapter Three). In both cases the data analysis process involved 'careful reading and re-reading' (Rice and Ezzy, 1999:258) of research material aiming to identify the main themes. Alongside the pattern identification within the data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2008), individual or unique cases were noted down. The interviews were repeatedly read, aiming to find commonalities or contradictions among these unique cases. Although the analysis started by looking either at shopping stages or communicative action dimensions, the analysis process over-stepped the initial themes and have developed additional themes, that were coded prior the interpretation (Boyatzis, 1998). For instance, one of the anticipated themes was accessibility of the home environment and its relations with customer experience. The analysis of industry players' accounts revealed additional

factors shaping their knowledge about and lifeworld regarding disabled customers and accessibility (see Chapter Six). Differences in experiencing accessibility were also identified, showing that while some artefacts and relations within the private market can be experienced as barriers by informants with certain impairments, for individuals with other types of impairment the same objects may be treated as accessible (see Chapter Five).

Initially carried out manual coding was followed by NVivo coding. The use of the software was useful as it allowed storing and sorting the material and the analysed results (Welsh, 2002), browsing and editing the codes at any stage of the process (Bryman, 2012) as well as linking the data and ideas (Richards, 1999), among others. Combination of using manual coding and the software allowed arriving at deeper insights and analysis. The data was linked to 'outside variables' (Robson, 2002) such as type of impairment, age group and country. It was also compared with, supplemented and contradicted by policy documents. Initially, at this stage it was aimed to offer the transcripts to the participants. However, since time was not on my side, the transcripts were sent to none of the informants. Instead, exhaustive summaries were provided to the organisations.

4.6. Ethical considerations

The ethical challenges were dealt with by adopting key principles of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Framework for Ethics (ESRC 2010), the British Sociological Association (BSA) Statement of Ethical Practice (2002), the Ethical guidelines of the University of Leeds (Megone 2004), and ethical requirements of the organizations involved in the research. Before the fieldwork, the approval from the University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee was obtained with no need for corrections.

Anonymity and confidentiality were important ethical issues faced during this research. While the ESRC (2010) notes that the informants' anonymity should be respected, the BSA (2002) highlights that the participants should be introduced to anonymity related issues. With this in mind, I clearly and accessibly reassured the participants that they have a right to withdraw at any stage of the research (Gray, 2009) and are free to decide whether they wanted or not recording devices to be used (BSA, 2002). Additionally, the informants were assured that in order to protect their identity, pseudonyms will be used (Wiles et al., 2008) and information which is confidential or sensitive in nature will not be revealed at any stage of the research or after it (Henn et al., 2006).

Aiming to protect unique industry actors' confidentiality and anonymity, their gender was not revealed. Instead, the pronouns 'they and their' were used. Otherwise, their identity could be revealed by experts in the field, who are familiar with the EU ICT products industry and debate surrounding the issue. Although some confidentiality related issues may arise for the industry and civil society informants (Henn et al., 2006, Bryman, 2012), all the participants were aware of the fact that they are unique players in the field and there is a possibility for their identity to be identified. Nevertheless, neither names of companies and associations, nor informants' professional roles and names are identified in this thesis. Instead, the field of their activities is used.

With regard to disabled customers' representation in the thesis, aiming to reflect personal, social and situational realities, they were ascribed with alternative names: Lithuanian participants with Lithuanian names, British informants with British names. For the purpose of clarity and context, belonging to one of the countries and age group were identified. All these issues were addressed in the initial stages of the mystery shopping and interviews as well as throughout the research process (Gray, 2009) in formats accessible for each individual. While this did not cause any challenges regarding disabled customers, it took significantly more time to assure industry informants about their anonymity and confidentiality.

Assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of industry players and shop assistants, who shared the information informally or were observed covertly, was equally important. Although such research activities are often escorted by ethics-related criticism (Bryman, 2012, Gray, 2009, Henn et al., 2006), their anonymity and confidentiality is ensured by using pseudonyms (Wiles et al., 2008), not identifying informants' positions, names of shops and companies, or their location (Bryman, 2012). In addition, some bits of provided information, which may indirectly intrude the principles of anonymity and confidentiality, are not presented in this thesis.

Gaining informed consent was another ethical consideration. According to Gray (2009:75), informants should be 'provided with sufficient and accessible information about a project so that they can make an informed decision as to whether to become involved, or not'. With this in mind, information provided in information sheets and consent forms for people with cognitive impairments was designed in an accessible way, using short, simple sentences, pictures and other techniques. Information for informants with vision impairments was provided in large print or digital format, sent in advance and read out during the initial meeting. Consent-related issues were addressed in the information sheet and several times during the research process, not simply at the beginning of the mystery

shopping or interviews. This ensured that the informants actually understand what they are consenting to. Names, places, participant responses and other data which may reveal informants or companies' identity was anonymised. All data derived in this research was stored and processed in line with the Data Protection Act 1998.

4.7. Dissemination of the findings

Research findings dissemination strategies were developed keeping in mind different informant groups, potential audiences and the idea of providing them with equal access to information. Consequently, additionally to communicating the findings to the public via the thesis, it was decided to use additional formats and employ various strategies. To begin with, bits of the results were presented in ten conferences focusing on disability, design, human rights, social policy, social work or sociology. The presentations were delivered in accessible formats, so that people with various impairments would be included. Second, work in progress and initial research findings have been presented in six DREAM events, where the audience consisted of disabled people, industry players, civil society, policy makers and academics. Aiming to influence business and civil society's knowledge, positions and developments (Barnes, 1992), the stakeholders were provided with several presentations and summary reports, describing the situation and identifying potential actions and recommendations, leading toward more accessible practices. It is important to note that even though the project has finished, communication with the IBR and the IDPO continues. As an example, I presented at the IBR annual meeting in May 2015 and was invited to attend forthcoming meetings and working group events. In addition, Mobile Manufacturers' Forum, with whom collaborative relations are maintained was also provided with the summary of research results and which communicated these to the members. Since this research is perceived as a starting point of making shopping more accessible for disabled customers and several follow-up projects directly targeting retailers' knowledge and awareness are being developed, it was decided to incorporate the results of the study into forthcoming information packages and training programmes. Furthermore, a book chapter in English and one article in Lithuanian on the issue have been published, with another two being forthcoming. It is intended that this thesis will be transformed into a few more articles and a book, all of which will be shared with Disability Archive UK, at the University of Leeds. Finally, I consider this PhD project to be the beginning of my professional activities in the field, as I intend to

continue as a Postdoc fellow and an academic, maintaining innovative and equal cooperation and communication with disabled people, civil society, industry, and policy makers.

4.8. Concluding comments

This research holds a position that one way of understanding the discussed contradictions in the public discourse surrounding disability, accessibility and retail customers, and creating effective customer policies for disabled people in the EU single market is by bringing all the stakeholders into 'one room' and providing them with a space to share, communicate and express their experiences, concerns and positions. Habermas' theory of communicative action provided a useful framework for enquiring about disabled customers and stakeholders' realities, and the selected methods seemed to be appropriate for gauging their experiences and practices.

Aiming to investigate the initial question on disabled customers, EU industry and civil society's perspectives and experiences that should be considered, and aiming to create effective customer policies for disabled people in the mainstream private market, the research involved several informant groups. These were: customers with different types of impairment (LT, UK); manufacturers of ICT products; regional and national ICT industry and civil society representatives; and ICTs shop assistants and managers (LT, UK).

Seeking to explore empirical level of reality (Bhaskar, 1975) of markets accessibility, the disabled customers' experiences, faced barriers, coping strategies and resilience practices were documented. Shopping experience was approached in a holistic way and perceived as a chain of certain stages. It was investigated by employing mystery shopping and semi-structured interviews. This was followed by discovery of underlying structures and processes (Proctor, 1998, Bhaskar, 1975, Blaikie, 2010) that may shape markets accessibility and disabled customers' experience. Hence, manufacturers, international and national business representatives and civil society actors, and shop assistants' (LT and the UK) lifeworld regarding an accessible EU single market and disabled customers was addressed. Their access to the discourse on markets accessibility and the manifestation of power relations were also investigated. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews and covert observations were employed. Since the research is underpinned by the social model of disability, the framework and the content of the investigated aspects addressed social rather than biological aspects of customer experience and markets

accessibility. Aiming to respond to the focus of the CRPD on ICTs, ICT products initially were employed as a case study of a product, representing broader shopping experiences. However, this changed during the research as a great number of disabled customers expressed the preference to do different kinds of shopping.

The following chapter starts the discussion of the gathered findings. It sheds light on empirical disabled customers' shopping process experiences in the UK and Lithuania.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE CHAIN OF ACCESSIBLE SHOPPING

The discussion on empirical accessibility of the EU single market starts by exploring the micro level of customer experience. This chapter, therefore, aims to describe the experiences of disabled customers shopping for ICT products in a holistic way, and to show how disability/ ableism and barriers/ accessibility become manifest in that experience. This raises questions for thinking more deeply about an accessible EU single market. This is then explored in the following two chapters using a theoretical frame provided by Habermas. As suggested in Chapter One, shopping is approached as a chain, consisting of four identified stages. The discussion focuses on shopping in the retail market for ICT products, although with wider implications for other markets. The sections draw on findings from mystery shopping and customer interviews described in Chapter Four. Aiming to provide deeper insights, sales people's accounts are used.

Disabled customers' experiences suggest that people with impairments usually go through all the shopping chain stages, but the order, individual experience and faced obstacles differ. While some of them are more common than others, they impede customer participation and shape exclusion and vulnerability. It seems that discourse of ableism is rooted in the mindset of the state and the private market, with ableist assumptions being the driving force behind the practice. Despite the faced barriers, customers with impairments are not passive and some evidence of customer resilience is provided, as well as positive and enabling practices are discussed.

The chapter starts by examining disabled participants' experiences of acquiring customer information. This is followed by a discussion on customer journey to a shop, shedding light on home and public environments, and public and private transport. Then, navigation in retail premises is addressed followed by the examination of disabled customers' interaction with informal shop assistants and sales people.

5.1. Customer information

As shown in Chapter One, customer information is an inextricable part of participation in the market. This section suggests that while customers are rarely fully informed (Dick et al., 1990), due to insufficient provision of

customer information in accessible formats, shoppers with impairments experience additional exclusion. It is evident that the focus of legal instruments and business practice on non-disabled citizens and customers create information acquisition and shopping contexts that shape vulnerability, exclusion and inequality. The discussion begins with an overview of how informants acquire information about shops and links it with spatial isolation in the market. It then gives an overview of how product information provision practices may exclude disabled people from informed customer choice. Finally, information delusion about product accessibility is addressed.

Disabled people's experiences regarding acquiring customer information is an under-researched topic in disability, marketing and other disciplines. This section provides a modest contribution to narrowing down this knowledge lacuna. It also challenges disabled customers' vulnerability as a static position (see Chapters One and Two) and offers some insights into the de-construction of vulnerability experiences caused by inaccessible information.

5.1.1. Information about shops

Two kinds of barriers regarding information about shops were reported. These include limited information about shops provided in accessible formats and lack of information about accessibility of retail premises.

With regard to accessible information about shops, disabled customers from both countries discussed how business' practice of providing this kind of information may limit the number of discovered shops, cause dependency on others and encourage employing of coping strategies. To begin with, with an exception of people with mobility impairments, many informants addressed barriers in different information channels and means. With regard to information provided in the media, participants noted that usually it is provided only in a 'standard format', ignoring Braille, large print, audio information and easy to read text and symbols among others. In this respect, while people with mobility impairments are usually free to access information about shops via radio, TV, Internet, newspapers, promotional flyers, and other channels, people with hearing impairments seem to gain this information via the Internet and in particular, shop-related reviews and discussion forums. Informants with vision impairments noted that usually they find out about shops via the Internet, radio and TV, with other information sources often being inaccessible. To illustrate, Ramune (LT, age 18-40) provided an example of how promotional flyers

and information provision techniques such as paper glossiness and font size shape her customer knowledge:

I find all these promotional flyers in my post-box and I believe they are informative and provide more options in terms of products and price. But they are printed on the glossy paper and letters are small. Although I could use my magnifying glasses, the glossiness of the paper makes it impossible to see and read the information. Even though all these papers come to my house, they do not come to my brain and do not expand my knowledge either about products or about shops.

In contrast, some participants with cognitive impairments identified promotional flyers as an important and accessible source of information about shops:

It is very good that I get brochures. I like pictures and also I like that they draw the name of the shop in the same way as they hang it above the entrance. It is much easier not to get confused (Maryte, LT, age 65+).

Hence, while traditional information sources about shops are available to disabled customers, their accessibility for people with certain impairments differs. However, despite the differences the exclusion practice is more common than accessibility and is typical across the board. This suggests that accessibility of customer information should not be linked with one particular format. Indeed, aiming to ensure customer equality, business should consider differences in customer segment and ensure that shoppers can choose from different accessible formats.

Research data suggest that information means used in high streets and public spaces to communicate about a shop may exclude customers with vision impairments. The majority of the participants representing this group identified a lack of accessible information about shops as a barrier preventing free and independent customer experience. For instance, Jack (UK, age 41-64) said:

It is always difficult finding a specific shop along the street. If I am looking for HMV, then probably I will walk in two or three different shops, before I find HMV.

In a similar vein, Ramune (LT, age 18-40) noted that she visits new coffee-houses or pizzerias only when she is accompanied by her daughter. According to the woman, an important reason behind this dependency is the chosen information provision strategies, oriented to non-disabled customers. Due to limited information provision in accessible formats, the woman struggles to find a place or gets lost. Other informants with vision impairments echoed Jack and Ramune and noted that their shopping is

faster and includes more shops if they are accompanied by people who are able to access standard information formats. These and other experiences suggest that, while retailers invest in shop name branding strategies to communicate with non-disabled clientele (Birtwistle and Freathy, 1998, Bridge and Dowling, 2001), accessibility is usually not considered. As a result, some disabled people and especially those with vision impairments' freedom to choose where to purchase may be reduced. Rolandas (LT, age 41-64) illustrates how this affects his shopping place decisions:

I go only to few shops that I really know and know where they are, because there are lots of other shops that I even cannot think about or imagine.

Additionally to assistance provided by other individuals, some participants with vision impairments noted that if they go shopping alone, they often use the senses of smell or hearing, learnt routes or intuition, as a means to find a way to the shop. To illustrate, Jack (UK, age 41-64) said:

I find myself using a sense of touch and a sense of smell and sounds. So there's a shop called Lush, and you can smell that from several shops away. And I hardly ever go into that shop, but it serves as a sort of landmark for the shops around it. HMV I would usually find by the sound because they'll usually be playing music. But I guess the difficulty is, it's not the only shop that plays loud music. So there are a couple of clothes shops nearby. If I'm trying to find a shoe shop, I can usually do that by smell. So you step inside the shop, breathe in, and if I can smell leather, then I'm probably in a shoe shop.

On the one hand, the narrative demonstrates that disabled customers are not passive and employ various coping strategies for finding shops and remaining independent. On the other hand, together with other studies of this research, the examples insinuate that while non-disabled customers are overloaded with information (Bettman et al., 1991), due to limited availability of accessible information, disabled people often are not free to choose shops. The manner and format of branding and communicating shops' names may cause dependency practices and prohibit disabled customers' choice and control. Such practice may divide non-disabled and disabled people as information-consumers and isolate the latter in particular niches of the market. In other words, having internalised the ideology of ableism and having a great control over the content and the manner of the provided information (Kivetz and Simonson, 2000), business may shape the 'composition' of their clientele, and create consumption context, which contributes to transforming disabled people into vulnerable customers.

With regard to information about accessibility of retail premises, research data suggest that insufficiency of such information may isolate some disabled customer groups, cause inconvenience and stress. To begin with, while participants with hearing and cognitive impairments did not find this topic relevant, a great number of people with vision and mobility impairments reflected on their experiences when after a journey to a shop they were either unable to enter retail premises or faced various barriers. As an example, Kristupas, who is using a wheelchair (LT, age 18-40) said:

After the accident it used to happen very often that I actually come to the shop, but I can't get in, because there are steps and no ramp. Now it doesn't happen, because I know which shops are accessible, but back then I had to turn around and look for another shop.

In this respect, Pranciska (LT, age 41-64) echoing experiences of other informants with vision impairments noted that the provision of this kind of information would allow choosing accessible shops and avoiding unpleasant experiences:

They could find a little niche... A niche where they say whether the shop has stairs, lift, mirrors, day lighting and so on. It would be so much better. Then I could choose if I can go to that shop. Because for me personally to go to the shop with bad lighting, mirrors and steps is a tragedy. I would never go. Yes, it happens that I go to such shops, because there is no way to find out.

In addition to physical impediments, inability to obtain information about accessibility of retail premises may cause emotional and psychological tensions. For instance, Daphne (UK, age 18-40) and some other participants with mobility impairments addressed 'the feeling of uncertainty accompanying during the whole trip to the shop', especially when travelling to an unknown shopping site.

Being aware of such practices and possible effects, disabled customers look for a solution. Some participants noted that before the trip to an unfamiliar shop they ask for other disabled people's advice, while others browse for information in online forums or shop websites. Karolis (LT, age 41-64) was the only participant who noted that before a trip to new retailers he calls to the shop and enquires about its accessibility for wheelchair users. Although a considerable number of interviewees said that despite the absence of such information they take a risk and travel to the chosen shop, the majority of the participants and especially those with severe impairments and older people noted that they prefer going to familiar and 'checked' shops. As an example, Hilda (LT, age 65+) said:

Oh no, I don't go to new shops alone. I have my own shops where I usually go. Well, there are few shops that I am familiar with, so I go only there. It's complicated enough.

It is important to mention that while accessibility of retail premises is addressed in national instruments in both countries (see Chapter Two), accessibility of information about the shop and its premises is not explicitly addressed either in EU or in national instruments (see Chapter Two). As a result, synergy between the focus on non-disabled customers and limited provision of accessible information about shops may exclude disabled customers from informed choice, increase the risk of barriers, cause stress, inconvenience, dependency on others and customer segregation.

5.1.2. Information about products

Insufficient emphasis on accessibility of customer information in legal instruments (see Chapter Two) accompanied by business' focus on non-disabled customers (see Chapter One) plays a role in excluding shoppers with impairments from informed choice for products. To begin with, a majority of the participants with hearing impairments revealed their exclusion from information provided via radio. With regard to TV, while British participants did not refer to barriers related to this information channel, Lithuanians addressed frequent elimination from accessing customer information via TV. For instance, Justas (LT, 18-40), representing experiences of other informants with vision impairments said:

I am not a big fan of TV, but sometimes I think it would be nice if they captioned not only news, but also different programmes, including ads. Although they [advertisements] are the fish-hook of the devil, sometimes they may provide you with useful information.

Similarly, Herbertas (LT, age 65+) noted that he finds out about advertised products only at home, where he is using his home-made speakers:

Sometimes there are great advertisements on TV, but if I am not at home and thus I do not have my special speakers, I am excluded from what other people in the room hear. It is annoying. Once I visited my son and saw an advertisement about a special offer for quite rare flowers. I did not hear and my son was not in the room at that moment, so he could not re-say what was on that advertisement. Then I came back home and watched TV for almost two days while finally saw the same advertisement and finally could hear it. This was very tiring, but worth it.

Although the Lithuanian Government legally recognises that captioning, notes, sound recording and sign language are important means for providing more access to participation in cultural life, recreation and different leisure activities (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, 2012), legal requirements are applied only to the adjustment of information in the field of education (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, 2005). In addition, although the possibility to increase accessibility of TV and to fill missing gaps existed before the switch from analogue terrestrial to digital television in 2012, none of the related legislations were amended. A consequence is that, since broadcasters are free to choose which programmes and movies should be captioned, only a minority of TV programmes and none of the advertisements are accessible for people with hearing impairments. The situation in the UK differs. Here the requirements for subtitling, sign language and audio description that apply to television services are outlined in the Code of Television Access Service (Ofcom, 2010). In this respect, although British research participants noted that captioning *'is not always available'*, the majority shared positive experiences and identified services as *'good'*.

People with vision impairments complemented examples of the detachment of personal control when accessing product information. They noted that sources such as promotional leaflets, advertisements in newspapers, public spaces and shop windows often do not fulfil their function, as usually they are shiny and glossy. As an example, Pranciska (LT, age 41-64) noted that advertisements in newspaper back pages often are too colourful and tire her eyes. This was echoed by Christine (UK, age 18-40), who noted that the only way she can find out about this kind of information is through the assistance provided either by the PA or by other individuals without vision impairments. These and other similar narratives echo the discussion on accessible information about shops, and illustrate how non-disabled customers oriented information presentation may transform available customer information into being unusable, limit disabled customers' choice and exclude them from making informed decisions.

While the majority of the participants found promotional text messages or emails intrusive and annoying, several informants with cognitive impairments and mental health conditions noted that they prefer this source of information. A great part of their shopping decisions are founded on promotional text messages and emails sent by retailers. As an example, Maryte (LT, age 65+) said:

I leave my telephone number and then I get a text message about discounts and where I should go to get these discounts.

Albinas (LT, age 41-64) echoed:

They send [information] to my email. Many shops have my email address and then they send me information and I know where and what can be found.

Research data suggest that pictures, with concrete and not overloaded information about a product may be some of the factors shaping the participant group's preference for this information source. However, incompatibility between customer attraction in the pre-shopping stage and actual customer service in some of the shop in Lithuania was a concern. Specifically, Ignas (LT, age 18-40), Andrius (LT, age 18-40), Salomeja (LT, age 65+) and some other participant with cognitive impairments' choice of which shop to go for mystery shopping was based on the received promotional text messages. Contrary to attractive information in text messages, shop assistants' behaviour was unwelcoming and excluding. A few salespeople tried to avoid serving two participants, used many technical terms and jargons, and the overall atmosphere was distant and patronising. Thus, while an attractive format of the promotional message provided the individuals with accessible information, the service provision was excluding and discriminating. It is believed that such practice may be shaped by the hierarchy of disabled people as customers as well as limited shop assistants' training on disability, accessibility and customer equality (see Chapter Six).

As a contrast, people with mobility impairments seemed to have access to the majority of information sources that are targeting non-disabled customers. Their shared experiences may be illustrated by statements such as: *'usually there are no problems'* (Vakare, LT, age 61-64), *'no, I do not face any problems'* (Pranas, LT, age 18-40), or *'I have no problem with this'* (Rachel, UK, age 41-64).

Despite faced obstacles, disabled customers are not passive receivers of inaccessible information and often employ various coping strategies. To begin with, some participants with vision impairments said that they use magnifying glasses and others referred to accessible software. Christine (UK, age 18-40) noted that her partner reads her emails and describes products. Herbertas (LT, age 65+) showed his special 'home made' speakers, allowing him to listen to the radio and to watch TV, and Justas (LT, age 18-40) and Chris (UK, age 18-40) noted that they download movies or series subtitles from the Internet. Overall, informants' narratives suggest that past experiences and informal interpersonal communication are important sources, enabling them to gain accessible customer information. Discussed experiences of people with vision and hearing impairments can be illustrated by Juozas's (LT, age 41-64) statement:

We get information in the same way as you, non-disabled people, get. The only thing is that not all information is accessible for us. However, what is inaccessible via official channels is accessible via own and informal channels and ways.

These informal channels usually are disabled peers in different disabled people's clubs, DPOs, day care centres, online forums and discussion groups, as well as family members and friends. Juozas's experiences implicitly demonstrates that even though the EU and national governments are moving towards more accessible customer information, the actions that have been taken are neither sufficient nor efficient for providing customer equality. As a result, people with different impairments often are excluded from information that is taken for granted by non-disabled customers. Under such circumstances, disabled people do not exercise real customer choice. Their decisions on products and shops are shaped by the list of options provided in information sources, accessible to them. In other words, dominant information provision practice may impede the purchase and draw boundaries within the private market inhabited by shoppers with impairments.

5.1.3. Information about product accessibility

Information about product accessibility seemed to be a concerning issue particularly for people with vision and hearing impairments. Experienced challenges can be divided into three areas: pre-shopping information; product description in shops; and information provided by shop assistants. Their sum causes information delusion that may limit access to accessible items, cause financial loss and unpleasant customer experiences. To begin with, research data demonstrate that while information on ICT producers' websites is the most exhaustive and provide detailed description of general and accessibility features of a product, trade networks are not so picky. For example, while Company X on the website identifies around 100 general product characteristics, Lithuanian retailers describe the same products using around 30 features. Although the UK's ICT sellers are more exhaustive and provide more details, product accessibility features are rarely included, with an identical practice being present in Lithuania. Mystery shopping revealed that usually 12-20 characteristics are used to describe the product in the shop in both countries, with accessibility features being rarely included. As a result, the majority of the participants who are concerned with product accessibility noted that before the visit to a shop, they usually browse for information in different online forums or chat groups. However, technical jargons and overload of general product information were identified as barriers preventing from accessing relevant

information in a time efficient way. Some informants with vision and hearing impairments noted that the situation could be improved by a better quality of service from shop assistants. As an example, Jack (UK, age 41-64) identified shop assistants as a potential information filter that may enable selecting the most accessible technology:

Then it would have thrown ten, twenty, fifty responses to say, which one is any good which one is not? Which is useful, having a member of staff in the shop, hopefully they can filter that information better than I can.

However, this expectation often is unmet, as shop personnel lack knowledge on product accessibility (see Chapter Six). Hence, compared with information provided on manufacturers' websites, product accessibility information significantly decreases in the shop. Firstly through product description, and then through salespeople's limited knowledge.

However, the distinction should be made between practices in brand-specific shops (BSH) and non-brand-specific shops (NBSH). With regard to information provided by shop assistants in BSH visited by mystery shoppers, salespeople provided technically exhaustive information. However, some disabled shoppers noted that provided information reminded them of 'a well learned poesy' (Nick, UK, age 41-64), as shop assistants did not know how this knowledge could be applied in practice and which product features are accessible or inaccessible for customers. As an example, Nick (UK, age 41-64) reflected:

Yeah, although I think she was out of her depth, to be honest. You know, she didn't understand really how well it worked. She did her best. She made a lot of effort, but really didn't understand how all the – how VoiceOver versus Siri worked in combination with one another. So I think it was a training issue. She hadn't been sufficiently made familiar. I also think, you know, there were a number of things she could have tried. Like we could have put a headphone splitter in there and both had headphones to actually hear what was happening, because a lot of the problems she was having in showing me was that neither of us could actually hear the thing in that environment really.

Other participants with vision impairments echoed Nick's experience and identified two types of product accessibility knowledge hold by shop assistants in BSH: information for service performance and actual information. Specifically, while salespeople were well familiar with officially provided product accessibility information, their knowledge did not completely concur with disabled users' accessibility expectations. Potential reasons behind the practice are discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

Mystery shopping revealed some differences between information provision about product accessibility in small and large BSH. Specifically, in small size shops where the average number of salespeople is five to seven, all shop assistants were usually able to serve customers with impairments. Meanwhile, in large size BSH in the UK most shop assistants were not able to provide accessibility-related information. Such shops have one or two employees trained in product accessibility and thus responsible for serving disabled customers. Indeed, these shop assistants were called when mystery shoppers enquired about accessible products. Some informants noted that such practice labels them and creates a sense of being different customers. As an example, Elisabeth (UK, age 41-64) who has multiple impairments noted:

In my opinion, it is a strange practice. I cannot choose to which shop assistant I would like to talk with. For me it is important. If I come to a wrong one, he prescribes me with a new one, who knows more than he does. And then I have to wait.

While such practice may provide disabled customers with more exhaustive technical information about product features, the prescription with special shop assistants may create alienating practices, unpleasant customer experience and strengthen disabled people's portrayal as 'different' or 'special' shoppers.

With regard to information about product accessibility provided by shop assistants in NBSH, research data revealed potential extinction of the information. Mystery shopping and customer interviews revealed that sales people often lack knowledge on whether products are accessible and what accessibility features they have. As an example, few shop assistants in both countries printed product descriptions out or browsed online; others tried products together with disabled customers. As an example, a shop assistant who served Jack (UK, age 41-64) spent around 10-15 minutes looking for information online about the laptop features that would make it accessible to Jack. Later he thanked Jack for teaching him new things about the product and noted that prior serving him, he had no knowledge about accessibility of this product and now is keen on expanding the knowledge. Even though this was a unique case, it suggests that shop assistants' behaviour is not necessarily biased against disabled people and their limited knowledge is not always an outcome of ignorance or discrimination. Indeed, alongside some factors discussed in Chapter Six, it may be shaped by information provided by manufacturers and received training.

While the majority of shop assistants were helpful, although lacking relevant knowledge, three sales people in Lithuania were more excluding.

They advised the participants to check for more specific information about the products and then come back to the shop. In addition, in two small-size shops the sellers stated that mobile phones that are accessible for people with vision or hearing impairments do not exist. Interestingly, in both shops accessible technologies were in stock and in some cases were located next to or in front of the shop assistants. Recalling the paragraph above, such practices demonstrate that limited sales personnel's training and lack of knowledge are important factors moulding disabled peoples' exclusion and vulnerability when obtaining customer information and making an informed choice. This can be supported by the cognitive sales paradigm perspective (Leong et al., 1989, Sujana et al., 1988). Specifically, since disabled people are a new group of customers (see Chapter One), shop assistants may have limited or no knowledge about their needs, preferences or behaviour models. As a result, their selling practices may be unsuccessful, discriminating and excluding. Additionally, the requirement to provide non-disabled customers with basic information about all products that are in stock may dominate information about their accessibility (see Chapter Six). Furthermore, while usually NBSH personnel have to attend professional training, product accessibility is usually not addressed. To illustrate, the manager of the NBSH (LT) noted:

Twice per year all my shop assistants have to attend special training on products that we sell. Then suppliers come to us and provide my people with information, organise different demonstrations of new products. Accessibility and disability? I can't remember that we have ever discussed such topics. You see, business care about slightly different topics.

The results support the argument made in literature that disabled people as customers are not the priority for the private market (see Chapter One). Accessibility and customer equality are often dominated by the orientation to profit. Hence, business' actions that are shaped around non-disabled customers (Knights et al., 1994), not only portray people with impairments as undesirable or different shoppers, but also contribute to information delusion about product accessibility. This may lead to restricted consumer choice, alienation, vulnerability and inequality.

After people make a decision about the product or the retail place, or simply want to go shopping, their journey to the shop begins. In respect of this, the following section addresses disabled customers' experiences on the way to the shop, and demonstrates how state and the private market's focus on non-disabled citizens and customers may assist in shaping disabled people's exclusion from and isolation in the market.

5.2. The journey to the shop

Discussing the trip to the shop, the participants mainly referred to the public environment and transport infrastructure. Karolis (LT, age 41-64), Vakare (LT, age 18-40), Kristupas (LT, age 18-40), Barbora (LT, age 41-64) with mobility impairments and Lisa (UK, age 18-40) with multiple impairments also addressed the home environment and linked its accessibility either to smoothness of the trip or to the complete exclusion from customer experience. While only five informants addressed this dimension of the shopping chain, all participants identified that the public environment and transport infrastructure, designed by and for non-disabled individuals is littered with various barriers and obstacles that prevent them from free and smooth customer choice, control and equal experience.

5.2.1. Home environment

Identification of the home environment as an element of a shopping chain was an anticipated finding. Although it seems to be more an exception than a rule, five wheelchair users addressed its role in shaping customer experience. To begin with, three of them referred to single barriers in the home environment such as sills and curbs. Although these obstacles do not prevent them from shopping, they disturb the smoothness of the journey. As Karolis (LT, age 41-64) said:

Well, I live in a newly built apartment and it is completely accessible, even the bathroom. But when I need to take my car from the underground garage, I need to jump from one step. And it is fine, I can do that with no problems, but sometimes I think why they could not make it completely accessible? Well, it is ok, but could be better.

Similar experiences were addressed by Vakare (LT, age 41-64) and Kristupas (LT, age 18-40), who noted that although their flats have been adjusted, some bits remain inaccessible or inconvenient, even though they meet technical requirements.

In contrast, one Lithuanian and one British participant revealed more extreme experiences. Barbora (LT, age 41-64), who has two young children and takes care of a severely disabled husband, noted that often her trip to a shop or any other place outside her home ends before starting:

We live on the second floor, and the stairs are very steep. So, if there is no one, who could take me down, I just have to stay at home, even though I want or need to go somewhere.

Although the woman is an independent person, managing the family's life, due to physical barriers in the home environment as a customer she becomes dependent on her children. The participant noted that usually she goes shopping either during the weekend or in the afternoon when children are at home and have finished their homework. Mystery shopping and interviews with her were also arranged in the evening, as it is the time when her kids can assist her in leaving the house. Similarly, Lisa (UK, age 18-40) revealed how her shopping time is determined by her mother's schedule:

I cannot leave home alone, so it [shopping time] depends on my mum. [...] I need help with doors and handles, so usually we go to X shopping mall on Sundays.

While the findings are in line with the literature depicting that dwellings are not well suited to people with mobility impairments (Haywood et al., 2001, Imrie, 2004a, 2004b), research data demonstrate that the home environment may be a factor shaping the shopping process. Although experienced not directly in the market realm, living space accessibility may shape customer dependency, limit the possibility for spontaneous consumption, and locate participation in the private market within a particular time frame, which usually does not depend on disabled customers.

After leaving the home environment, individuals enter the second stage of the shopping chain discussed in Chapter One and start their journey to the shop. With this in mind, the following discussion sheds light on their experiences in the public environment.

5.2.2. Public environment

Research data echo some insights discussed in Chapter One and suggest that accessibility of the public environment is an important factor and often shapes disabled people's choice of route to the shop. To begin with, while informants with cognitive and hearing impairments did not address this element of the shopping chain, informants with vision and mobility impairments shared opposite experiences. They reported that due to different obstacles in the city, they are only partly free to choose the route to the shop. As an example, Lisa (UK, age 18-40) with multiple impairments said:

There are some bits of the city that I have never visited. You know... It is just impossible, because of accessibility. So I have never been to the shops that are there.

In a similar vein, Ramune (LT, age 18-40) who has vision impairment noted:

Wherever I go, I have my itineraries, which are secure and I know that they will not put me in trouble.

While the narratives above mirror other participants with vision and mobility impairments' experiences, research data suggest that individuals are not passive victims. They look for solutions on how to overcome the obstacles. To illustrate, Karina (LT, age 18-40) shared her memories of moving to another city and noted:

Few night journeys counting curbs and looking to see which I can overcome. Now I know which way is the most accessible for me.

Thus while non-disabled customers' choice of route usually depends on directness (Hoogendoorn and Bovy, 2004), noise levels and overall pleasantness (Bovy and Stern, 1990), important criteria for disabled customers' decisions are accessibility and safety. In this regard, research data suggest that the choice of an inaccessible and 'untested' route may result in stress, injuries, and misdemeanours of traffic rules or getting lost. Participants' accounts evidence that externally determined decisions often prevent them from discovering new shops and from inhabiting a broader map of the retail market.

Different impact of the public environment on disabled and non-disabled customers' experience was revealed by Pranas (LT, age 18-40). He compared how some elements of the shopping chain were experienced before and after he became a wheelchair user. He told how obstacles in urban design forced him to change and adapt his customer likes, preferences and choices:

In X city I used to curse pavements, because of potholes and curbs, but compared to this city... Streets are cruel here. You need aerobatics here. Frankly speaking, there are some shops that I liked before the accident, but now I do not go there only because of pavements, curbs, pits and other nonsenses.

For somebody like Pranas, the issue here is not simply physical inaccessibility of the city, but the changes in his customer identity, shaped by barriers in the public environment. While as a non-disabled customer he was free to visit chosen shops, the transition into a disabled person deteriorated his customer choice and independency. He is not free anymore to purchase where he wants, as his choices now seem to be partly shaped by an inaccessible public environment. Thus, the informant had to renegotiate not only changes of his position in society, but also new customer patterns in the market.

An inaccessible public environment and barriers discussed in Chapter One may eliminate some people, especially older and with severe impairments, from shopping. A great number of Lithuanian and British participants noted that crumbled pavements, curbs, and similar colour of streets and sidewalks are some of the barriers, causing stress on the way to shops. Some informants deal with the situation by using public or private transport, and not engaging with the public environment as pedestrians. However, the majority noted that they prefer either being accompanied by non-disabled people or delegate shopping to them. For instance, Pranciska (LT, age 41-64) said that she feels better and safer when her son goes together with her. In a similar vein, Christine (UK, age 18-40) noted that she is usually accompanied by her PA:

I do not do shopping alone. I usually go with my assistant. So, they will drive me to the shops, or we'll just walk to town together with my assistant.

While Pranciska (LT, age 41-64) and Christine (UK, age 18-40) engage in market relations, Hilda's (LT, age 65+) customer pattern is dim, especially in autumn and winter time:

I give her the list of products that I need and she buys. It is so great that she lives not far away from my home, so I do not need to struggle in the street.

The discussion above challenges legally entrenched position that disabled people are 'vulnerable' consumers because of their impairments (see Chapter Two). It demonstrates how state's focus on non-disabled citizens, expressed through particular practices in the public environment, may restrict disabled customers' independency and freedom. Urban design elements that usually do not affect non-disabled citizens, may convert some shoppers with impairments into dependent actors, whose shopping time, place and well-being on the way to the shop depend on support sources and social networks. This raises the concern that individuals having less access to aforementioned assistance may be eliminated from shopping and so from passive or active socialising (Graham et al., 1991), embedment into social networks and communities (Miller et al., 1998), and the experience of shopping as a leisure activity (Miller and Kim, 1999). In addition, inaccessibility of the city may convert some disabled people, especially older ones, into indirect and passive choosers, when only the 'list' of products depends on personal choice, with the brand and package choosing process being decided and experienced by others. According to Kishi (1988), choice made under such circumstances should not be interpreted as choice, since it diminishes personal control and provides an illusion that the purchase is an outcome of a person's own decision.

Improper maintenance of the public environment may contribute to customers with certain impairments' exclusion and segregation. While none of the British participants referred to this factor, the topic was common in interviews with the Lithuanian informants. A great number of participants with mobility and vision impairments referred to the maintenance of the public environment in the winter season. As an example, people with vision impairments noted that a proper maintenance of public spaces provides more control over the situation, as the snow changes *'the scenery of pavement'* (Juozas, LT, age 41-64) and then it is easier to get lost. In addition, informants with mobility impairments, and especially wheelchair users, identified untrimmed or covered with ice sidewalks and snowdrifts separating street and sidewalk, as factors limiting their independency. To illustrate, Katrina (LT, age 18-40) said:

I cannot complain about the place, where I live. It is fully accessible. Except in winter. If there was a heavy snow during the night and cleaning services had not cleaned it before I leave, I just do not leave. My wheels get tied up in snow and I have to stay at home.

Pranas (LT, age 18-40) echoed:

It is good that my dad lives here. Otherwise, sometimes it would be impossible for me. They clean streets early in the morning, but sometimes they do not clean sidewalks, or make them as wide as the spade is. And then I am in trouble, well actually not in trouble. I am overreacting, because my dad comes and spades the space between the staircase and my car.

Such practices not only limit physical mobility in the city, but also may change shopping and consumption practices. All Lithuanian participants using wheelchairs revealed that at some point in their life, due to improper maintenance of the public environment, in the winter season they were temporarily imprisoned at home. As a result, a great part of them noted that under such circumstances they either ask neighbours or friends to buy food and basic supplies, or order food online. This questions the role of social networks and community support in overcoming disabling situations. People who do have strong social networks and/ or access to the Internet are more likely to deal with customer vulnerability more effectively. However, those who have weaker support networks or limited access to online retailers, may have less resilience sources and thus may become more vulnerable as customers.

Additionally to physical barriers in and improper maintenance of the public environment, the land use of the city may exclude disabled people from shopping and actuate their customer vulnerability. First, echoing discussion in Chapter One, the density of public spaces was identified as a potential

factor, shaping shopping time and overall pleasantness of the shopping trip. As an example, some participants with mobility impairments said that crowded pavements are a challenge on the way to the shop. Additionally, some people with vision and cognitive impairments noted that high pedestrian density burdens and complicates finding the way to a chosen retailer. As a result, the majority of British and Lithuanian participants noted that they prefer doing grocery or other types of shopping during weekdays, usually in the morning. This may be linked to and explained by other studies, revealing that the most popular days of non-disabled people's shopping are Fridays and weekends (Kahn and Schmittlein, 1989, Kumar and Levinson, 1996, Boedeker, 1995). This is the time when in order to attract more customers retailers apply more intense marketing strategies and as well as offer more special promotions (Kuo et al., 2003), and in such a way indirectly cause barriers for disabled people's shopping.

Disabled customers travel to shops not only as pedestrians. Many of them also use public or private transport. With this in mind, the following discussion sheds light on how the two types of transport means may shape their shopping experience.

5.2.3. Public and private transport

Public and private transport shapes customers with impairments' participation in the market. With regard to public transport, debates among participants in the UK and Lithuania vary and cover several areas. To begin with, as people with vision and mobility impairments suggested, public transport may have an enabling as well as disabling effect on their customer experience. On the one hand, it may serve in overcoming the discussed barriers in the public environment and reaching shops faster. On the other hand, limited information provision in accessible formats may cause challenges, stress, and financial loss, getting lost and other uncomfortable situations. As an example, Alison (UK, age 18-40) shared her experience, which was common in other participants' with vision impairments' narratives:

In terms of – well, the buses here, like you're getting a bus from wherever to wherever, there's no – like the buses don't stop unless you flag them down. But if you can't really see the bus coming, you kind of are – you don't know where the bus is going and things like that. And you think you're on the right bus and then you're not and you're somewhere else, so that's another issue. Whereas taxis, in terms of you say you want to go to a shop, they take you to that

shop. It's just more of a safety and kind of a thing where you know you're going to get to that place.

Ramune (LT, age 18-40) narrated similar experience and noted that since information about and in public transport is usually provided only in a written format, she has to prepare for the trip in advance and to seek other passengers' assistance during the journey:

If I need to go to the shop, that I haven't been before, I google and check the itinerary. All information is on the website, so I count stops and then I know where to get off. Sometimes I ask for other passengers or driver's help. People are helpful nowadays and I always find someone, who lets me know that the next stop is mine. Otherwise, I may end up in the opposite side of the city - I could tell you a million stories like that.

The examples echo experiences shared by other participants with vision impairments and suggest that due to inaccessibility of information about and in public transport, people with vision impairments' shopping trip may be accompanied by stress, uncertainty and insecurity, and may create dependency on strangers. In addition, in some cases this may transform them from being public service users into becoming clients of private providers. Although this introduces additional form of participation in the private market, the choice is not freely made and may negatively impact on a person's budget, as taxi services in both countries seem to be more expensive than public transport. As a result, a great part of the participants with vision and mobility impairments noted that usually they visit new or distant shops together with a PA or informal assistants such as family members, friends or partners. Although support networks may assist in managing the challenges and barriers better, they may also create customer dependency, as shopping time is usually adapted to other's schedules and the process itself is not experienced independently.

Contrary to the participants with vision impairments who do use public transport, all informants with mobility impairments, with an exception of one British informant, noted that they avoid using public transport for shopping purposes. The most commonly identified reasons echoed the discussion in Chapter One and addressed limited number of low-ground buses, ramps, potholes, curbs, and accessible seats, among others. Consequently, this group of informants usually travel either by personal transport or are given a lift by others. However, a shopping trip by this kind of transport means is not barrier-free, the most common barriers being related to parking. Specifically, although Lithuanian and British legislations require designing and projecting public spaces, including car parking areas, in a way they are accessible for and usable by disabled people (see Chapter

Two), research data demonstrate opposite experiences. In terms of physical accessibility, many participants who are using wheelchairs noted that the parking of small shops often is less accessible than the parking of big shopping malls. As an example, Kristupas (LT, age 18-40) noted:

Disabled parking spots... Whole parking area there [talking about X shop] is designed and laid out in a wrong way. Parking spaces are made in a way that if I squeeze the car in, there is no room for me to take my wheelchair out of the car. So this is one of the reasons, why I do not go to that shop.

While some parking spots are manageable in terms of room, such obstacles as potholes, curbs and rugged sidewalks, which do not impact non-disabled drivers and purchasers' shopping, may prevent wheelchair users from barrier-free and safe access to the shop. As Katrina (LT, age 18-40) said:

I am very good in managing my wheelchair, so usually I don't have major problems, but I know that one of my friends, whose arms are weaker got stuck in the pothole in the parking of the Z shop. It may sound funny, but actually it is terrible, because you are able to drive and to come to the shop, you are able to manage your wheelchair and to take it out of the car, and you would be able to enter that shop and to bring profit to them. But because of the damned potholes you can't do that and you have to ask other's for help. It is absurd...

Hence, shop parking may impact customers' independency and change people with mobility impairments' shopping experience. As a result, wheelchair users noted that although they would like to purchase in small local shops, one of the reasons they prioritise purchasing in big shopping malls is better accessibility of parking facilities.

Insufficient number of accessible parking spots was identified as another factor causing shopping discomfort. This practice is more common with big shopping malls. For instance, Barbora (LT, age 41-64) said:

Quite often parking spots [accessible] are occupied, so I have to drive in circles while find a free space. This happens very often.

Pranas (LT, age 18-40) echoed:

I do not drive, but if I go to the shopping mall with my friends, it happens quite often that there are no accessible spots left.

Similarly, two British research participants were late to their mystery shopping because they could not find free accessible parking spot. This was addressed by a few other informants and questions the relevance of existing quantitative requirements for accessible parking. The increasing

number of older and disabled people (WHO, 2011) consequently requires increasing the number of accessible parking spots. It is important to highlight that while Statybos Techninių Reikalavimų Reglamentas (2001) in Lithuania determines not only the measurement but also the specific number of accessible parking spots, research data demonstrate that not all shops follow these requirements. Some of them provide fewer accessible parking spaces than is required. As an example, while in the X shopping centre which opened after the adoption of the instrument there are 2400 parking spots, only 35 of them are accessible. Indeed, according to legal requirements, this shopping centre should provide no less than 96 accessible spots.

By the end of this section we have seen that the home and public environment, and public and private transport compose the second stage of the shopping chain and contribute to shaping disabled customers' experience in the mainstream private market. While accessibility of the home environment affects mainly wheelchair users, different barriers in the public environment and transportation often shape the map of shops visited by people with different impairments; limit their choice and freedom; and cause customer dependency, stress, financial loss and isolation.

5.3. Navigation in retail premises

This section suggests that the third stage of the shopping chain (navigation in the shop) usually consists of entering the shop and operating in retail premises. Research participants reported a number of physical constraints and some enabling elements in external and internal shop environments. Informants' accounts suggest that while people with different impairments interact in and engage with these dimensions in different and unique ways, disabling practices share similar patterns and are common across the board. It is evident that behind the excluding experience stands business' orientation to non-disabled customers. While design of retail premises and product marketing strategies are oriented to attract this customer group and to generate profit (see Chapter One), they often act as factors shaping disabled customers' exclusion, segregation and vulnerability.

5.3.1. Entering the shop

Entering the shop is one of the tasks that has to be performed by a customer. However, research data suggest that physical entrance into the

retail premises is often accompanied by barriers that may cause customer exclusion and vulnerability. To begin with, Ramune (LT, age 18-40) discussed the extent that different decorations often shape the way she performs in the dominions of the shop:

You saw all these different flowerpots and signs. For some people they are beauty and they need them, and for some disabled people they are interferences. To some of them I hit with my head, to others with something else. There are such obstacles.

Although she was the only participant with vision impairment who explicitly referred to such practices, the mystery shopping suggests that elements such as flowerpots and statues are not only elements of aesthetics. Indeed, located in consideration to attract non-disabled customers and to create an aesthetically pleasant environment, the artefacts may become barriers, preventing people with certain impairments from barrier-free entrance to the shop, causing challenges and risks for their health and safety. Although the participants attempt to avoid such elements, they cannot eliminate their possibility and existence. As an example, Ramune (LT, age 18-40) continued:

You measure, learn the route... It takes time to learn the route and the exact location of all these pots, and after few visits I am fine. Of course, I have to be careful and aware that they can place something new, and of course I can be more relaxed only until they decide to replace these decorations with something new. And then 'catch the ribbon' and start from the beginning.

While the above customer attraction elements may be interpreted as barriers caused by thoughtless and aesthetics-oriented design, and were identified only by one participant, shop doors received more attention. Although the discussion was broad and detailed, the message beyond the experiences was that limited business' awareness of accessible decisions and practices often shape disabled customers' dependency and vulnerability when entering retail premises. First, British and Lithuanian participants with mobility impairments identified the sliding door as an accessible solution, providing potentially barrier-free entrance. However, people with vision impairments and older participants with different impairments noted that often such doors do not have visual signs but are decorated with advertisements and promotional leaflets. This does not distinguish them from glass walls and in such a way may restrict entering the shop or cause physical injuries. However, if properly marked, this type of door seems to be the most accessible. Hence, by prioritising non-disabled customers' attraction-oriented means over accessibility solutions,

business prevents disabled people from smooth and pleasant first customer steps in retail premises.

Second, while many informants with hearing impairments identified revolving doors as accessible, the majority of the participants with mobility and vision impairments shared opposite experiences. As an example, Ramune (LT, age 18-40) noted:

It is impossible to get through such doors alone. If there are such doors, 'vsio' everything is closed.

This was echoed by Lisa (UK, age 18-40):

Revolving doors often are too small... Even if I go with my mum, we need to look for another entrance, cause my wheelchair is too big.

Evidences provided by other participants echoed the statements above adding fear to be injured. However, being one of the best solutions for regulating customer movement volume and for optimising the containment of the heating inside the shop (Sandling, 1985), the revolving door was common in visited shops in both countries. As a result, three participants with vision impairments and one wheelchair user said that they try to avoid shops that have to be entered through such a door. Often the visited shops that use a revolving door had 'traditional door' next to it. However, while such shops in the UK keep these doors unlocked, two visited Lithuanian shopping malls usually keep them locked and unlock only when the revolving door jams or breaks down. Hence, although an accessible solution exists, it is not used to provide barrier-free access. This may exclude people with certain impairments from entering and exploring shops, that according to Gabriel and Lang (1995) is one of the main roles performed and identities exercised by people in the market. In such a context, an inaccessible door may become a symbol, signalling limited acceptance of those who do not share characteristics typical to non-disabled customers. In other words, doors may become a symbol of non-disabled customers' space, which should not be inhabited by people with impairments. This draws the boundaries, symbolising customer division into 'average' and 'vulnerable', and respectively constructs disabled customers' realities.

Implicit and thoughtless shops' external design may further maintain disabled customers' exclusion. To begin with, almost all research participants with mobility impairments shared their experiences of being deprived from entering the shop because of steps and podiums with no ramps. While these experiences confirm Matthews and Vujakovic's (1995) point that the rationale of the built environment is founded on the assumption that all people are non-disabled, few research participants in

Lithuania revealed 'parasitic' practices directly showing that disabled customers are not welcomed. The informants referred to provision of ramps leading to the wall, steep ramps which are hard or impossible to use, and sills among others. Karolis (LT, age 41-64) named such practices as 'inaccessible accessibility' that can be illustrated by Katrina's (LT, age 18-40) experience:

There is a book-shop in X city where they put railing next to the entrance. One of them is leaned to the wall and another one to the door, and next to them there are steps. So basically, one (wheelchair user) can neither straddle them nor climb onto them. It is written that they are, but it is impossible to use them.

Pranas (LT, age 18-40) echoed:

There is a requirement that everything in shops and coffee-houses needs to be adjusted, but these adjustments are meaningless. There is a ramp, but it is impossible to 'climb onto' it.

While one of the dominant arguments explaining the lack of accessibility provisions is a misleading assumption of high cost (Russell, 2002), research data demonstrate that even though in some cases private retailers have certain means to provide accessibility, their implication in practice may be controversial or excluding. On the one hand, this may be linked to unwillingness and unpreparedness to welcome disabled shoppers. Hence, legal minimum requirements are met officially but not practically. On the other hand, lack of accessibility considerations in architecture studies curriculum (Evcil, 2010, Imrie, 2003), political repudiation of disabled people as customers (Waddington, 2009) and lack of disability- and accessibility-related awareness among industry players may be some of the deeper reasons shaping customer exclusion that are discussed in the following two chapters.

After entering the shop, customers start their shopping activity in the retail premises. However, non-disabled shoppers-oriented design and product marketing decisions often cause barriers for customers with impairments. The following discussion, therefore, sheds light on some of the practices and provides some insights into the potential roots.

5.3.2. Operating in retail premises

Marketing and consumerism studies often discuss the way shop design and product marketing strategies shape non-disabled shoppers' emotions, feelings, body comfort and consumer behaviour in general (see Chapter One). The present discussion employs this knowledge set and

demonstrates how these elements may affect disabled customers' choice, control, and vulnerability and exclude them from participation in the private market.

To begin with, while finding their way is the first task that has to be performed by purchasers in the shop (Dogu and Erkip, 2000), research data suggest that a lack of accessible information about the shop layout may create a variety of barriers for people with certain impairments. For instance, a great number of British and Lithuanian participants with mobility impairments noted that often it is difficult and sometimes impossible to see mall-maps on vertical displays, especially the information which is on the top of the map. Although some of the informants noticed that a few shopping malls also use horizontal displays, for wheelchair users they often are too high and so part of the information remains inaccessible. To illustrate, during the mystery shopping, Karolis (LT, age 18-40) and Rachel (UK, age 41-64) could not obtain information provided on a horizontally displayed map, since the surface was smooth and not oblique; and it was installed in the 'box' instead of the stanchion. This echoes the discussion on sliding doors, and highlights that limited designers' awareness of accessibility and absence of disabled people's inclusion as co-designers (see Chapter One) may lead to limited exploitation of the existing means, and exclude some people from acquiring customer information. A few wheelchair users said that due to limited possibilities to use such maps, in new or unfamiliar shopping malls they have to 'cruise around' and find shops or service providers individually.

Some participants with vision impairments noted that the font of the information in the maps is often too small, scheme lines are blurry and obscure, and the colours in and lighting of the map often decrease the visibility of the provided information. As an example, Gitana (LT, age 65+) said:

Maps are a waste of money: they pay for all the designers, then for the installation, for electricity... And what is the point of wasting all this money if people can't see what is written there? For me... I don't care, they can remove them, I will not care, because even when they are I have to walk around or ask for security guards' help. So what's the point?

Beyond questioning technical accessibility, the account suggests that for some people inaccessible shopping mall maps cause stress, anxiety and may make the individuals dependent on others' availability and time. Similarly to Gitana (LT, age 65+), Herbertas (LT, age 65+) questioned the complexity of the maps and the potential way to make them more accessible:

Maps as maps, but they are impossible to see. Although I do not have vision impairment and wear only regular glasses, they are too tiny for me, plus all the lights. They do not help. They should make a regular map on a regular piece of paper and it would be much better. And now they try to do everything fancy and plummy.

Some informants with mental health conditions and cognitive impairments shared similar accounts, suggesting inaccessible practices. For example, Dovile (LT, age 41-64) noted that shopping mall maps often are difficult to understand and are confusing:

These maps are like schemes – no chance to understand what is where: only lines and numbers.

Similarly, Peter (UK, age 18-40) said that he does not use mall maps to find a particular shop. If needed, his mother assists him with this task:

No, I don't understand, it's too complicated. My mum helps me.

While the above accounts reveal that people with mobility, vision and cognitive impairments and mental health conditions partly access the information, blind research participants noted that none of their visited shopping malls provide information about the layout of a shop in audible format.

Information format was questioned and experiences of exclusion, stress and dependency featured prominently in the interviews but often were opposed by narratives of resilience and coping practices. For example, Albinas (LT, age 41-64), who has mental health condition said that before he goes to the shopping mall he prints out the map of the setting and marks the shops that he wants to visit. Similarly, Agne (LT, age 41-64) with cognitive impairment noted that when she gets lost in the shopping mall, she finds the nearest exist, leaves the building and 'inspects' it from the outside. Some other participants said that when they get confused, they look around and in worst case scenario, ask either for other customers, or shop assistants and security guards' help. Others develop memory maps (Allen et al., 2002), enabling them to independently operate in retail premises. To illustrate, Katrina (LT, age 18-40) said:

You need time to get to know the place, especially if it is a big shopping mall like this one. It took some time to figure out where the lift is, which shops are accessible for me, which places are covered with carpets, in which shops shop assistants are nice. So now I do not have any problems.

Thus, despite inaccessibility of shop maps, disabled customers are not passive. On the contrary, although discussed information provision practices may exclude and signalise that this customer group is not always

welcomed and desired, individuals find ways to overcome the obstacles and develop strategies, enabling them to be more active shoppers. This suggests that some people may unconsciously accept the role of 'de jure' customers, which through symbolic interaction and processes is ascribed to them by social and market practices. As a result, gradually internalised personal responsibility of customer performance leads to different resilience practices, enabling them to 'survive' in the shopping realm.

The kinds of excluding practices outlined so far were accompanied by concerns that internal shop design elements may foster disabled customers' segregation and vulnerability. To begin with, mirrors and reflective glass, which serve to multiply the supply and extend the space of the setting (Fiske et al., 1987) may cause health and safety-related insecurity for people with vision impairments. For instance, Pranciska (LT, age 41-64) said:

There is that shoe shop. And the entire wall is of mirror. And that mirror reflects the opened space. Once I was walking and thought that there are other premises and almost slammed down. And only then saw that it is a mirror. It may sound funny, but that mirror reflects other premises, I saw people going, so thought there are other premises. I almost banged with my head. I was so frightened.

Although Alison (UK, age 18-40) did not provide explicit explanation, similarly to Pranciska (LT, age 41-64), the woman identified mirrors as a questionable design decision:

Mirrors. Sometimes they – it's actually one of the problems. They have like a side mirror, so the main thing and two side mirrors.

Older research participants and some informants with vision and cognitive impairments hinted at music. They noted that sometimes music is too loud, distracts them and may cause anxiety and stress:

All this music distracts me. I need to be very focused in order to see where I go. So sometimes, especially when I am tired, it becomes very difficult to find the shop and especially the product in the shop or on the shelf (Pranciska, LT, age 41-64).

Sarunas (LT, age 41-64) echoed:

I like music. I listen to it on my phone, but in the shop they play it very loud, so I cannot hear myself and this annoys me.

Hence, a settled template of one group of shoppers and limited consideration of variety of customers prevent retailers from meeting diverse shoppers' needs and wants. Insufficient social sensitivity in marketing strategies may lead to practices that exclude and threaten those

purchasers who do not share characteristics typical to non-disabled purchasers.

Chapter One exhaustively illustrated how ableism and business' focus on the healthy, working, middle class male as a target client shapes product layout decisions that may shape disabled customers' vulnerability. This research contributes to the ongoing discussion and provides a number of examples of common as well as unique experience, supporting the position. To begin with, the dominant practice to horizontally layout products often exclude wheelchair users from possible choice options and provide them with a predetermined choice or a displayed 'list' of products that can be reached and purchased:

Sometimes, if I am alone and there is no one, who could reach the product, I just need to go with what I can reach (Kristupas, LT, age 18-40).

Similarly, Daphne (UK, age 18-40) addressed how horizontal items display eliminates her from buying wanted and needed products and shapes her choice of retail place:

So I often find things high up or really low down, and because I can't really bend down to look at things low down, that frustrates me. So then I just usually don't look in that shop. I just get really annoyed. I just leave it.

Meanwhile, Katrina (LT, age 18-40) shared an example of indirect wheelchair users' infantilisation and ascription with lower quality and cheaper products:

Spices are on the top shelf, the cheapest goods or products for children are placed down. In the middle all average-quality products are. But all spices and expensive products or products that I like, like curd, are placed on the top shelves. And curd cheeses are on the bottom shelves, because they are for children, and sellers want children to see all these curd cheeses. I, for example, can't reach meat or sausage.

In a similar vein, some older informants and those with vision impairments criticised products and product information location under glass. The participants noted that such practices often are misleading, limit their choice and may embarrass them. As an example, Ramune (LT, age 18-40) shared her experience:

In the X shop I would like more independency in gastronomy section. I can see that there is cake or rissoles, but you actually don't know what is actually is there. I miss a list or something similar and not under the glass, but somewhere where I could use it. Of course, I

come and ask whether you have pork or chicken, and then they list me these three things and nothing more. But if I could see what they have, I could choose something else. It is quite unpleasant to point a finger to each of the items and ask 'what's this? What's that?'. They will say: 'stupid you, this is a rissole or something else'. Well, of course they will not say so, but it is quite uncomfortable. They disrupt my dignity.

Fortunately, not all product layout-related experiences are excluding. According to the participants, layout providing an opportunity to try items enables them to independently choose products, test their accessibility and avoid financial loss. As an example, Herbertas (LT, age 65+) noted that such practice allows him to check if the device is compatible with his home-made speakers:

I always go to X shop, because all the products are visible, so I take my speaker and test whether it works with the item.

Constant replacement of goods was identified as another disruption. Such practice confuses people, causes stress and anxiety, as well as requires spending more time to find items. In this respect, the majority of the informants noted that they prefer going to the same shops, as this enables developing 'memory maps' (Allen et al., 2002) of the shops and their products location. To illustrate, Gitana (LT, age 65+), representing experiences of other participants with vision impairments, said:

In shops where I usually go, I already know where different products are placed. In shops where I don't go so often, it is much more difficult to orient, because I don't know where products are and I can't see properly, and it is so hard for me then.

In a similar vein, Daphne (UK, age 18-40), who has mobility impairment, noted that familiarity with products location in a shop shapes her loyalty to particular retailers and eliminates the 'struggle':

I have my favourite shops, where I usually go. And I don't need to struggle there as everything is so familiar to me.

Although the stability of products location in a shop may serve as a means providing more independency, due to product marketing purposes shops constantly change an item's location (see Chapter One). This means that people have to re-develop or re-create 'memory maps', and this often lengthens time spent looking for articles. To illustrate, Rolandas (LT, age 41-64) shared his wife's, who also has vision impairment, experience:

When they opened X shop, which is close to our home, my wife went there few times just to look around and to 'spy' where what is. When she became familiar with shop's environment and was

already able to do shopping alone and faster, they changed products display, and again she couldn't find products that she wanted and needed.

In a similar vein, Herbertas (LT, age 65+) said:

Business plays its own game. And this is a part of that game. I am too old to think I can change that practice, but what I can do is to dedicate more time for my trip to a shop when I know that they have replaced the products again.

For some participants such practice causes intense negative feelings. As an example, Daphne (UK, age 18-40) said:

I hate that... Why do they think it is a right thing to do?

Despite differences in participants' experiences, it seems that non-disabled customers-oriented retail premise design and product-marketing strategies often manifest as obstacles for shoppers with impairments. A focus on non-disabled people as the main customer group and insufficient acknowledgement of changing customer segment create unequal, excluding and discriminatory shopping practice. This may create a symbolic universe that holds disabled customers individually responsible for their experience in retail premises, and symbolises non-disabled people's superiority in the market.

Additionally to the physical environment, interaction with shoppers or shop assistants seems to play a part in shaping disabled customers' shopping experience. The following discussion, therefore, positions these interactions as the fourth stage of an accessible shopping chain and sheds light on disabling and enabling factors.

5.4. Interaction in the shop

Research data suggest that disabled customers in retail premises usually interact with informal assistants and staff members. While other shoppers, family members, friends and PAs usually provide informal assistance, salespeople and 'special' shop assistants' assistance is also important. The most common reason behind the interaction is the need for assistance in overcoming barriers outlined in Chapter Two and section 5.3. Research data suggest that other shoppers usually are willing to help and assist in different customer tasks. However, while some disabled customers do not mind to be supported by strangers, others may withdraw from the shopping process. With regard to salespeople's assistance, it seems that

limited disability awareness, training on accessibility and reasonable accommodation and disablist attitudes may shape particular shop assistants behaviour that excludes, discriminates, infantilises and causes disabled shoppers' vulnerability in retail premises.

5.4.1. Interaction with informal assistants

With regard to informal assistance sources, other shoppers, family members or friends usually assist disabled customers. To begin with, due to inaccessible product layout, wheelchair users who travel to the shop independently often have to seek other customers' assistance. Povile's (LT, age 41-64) example was common in other wheelchair users' narratives:

For me everything is ok, except if products are located higher – then I can't reach them. I ask people's help (in such a case).

However, while people like Polive may feel confident and comfortable to ask to and be assisted by strangers, individuals who are shy may find such practice intrusive and unpleasant. To illustrate, Pranciska (LT, age 41-64), who has vision impairment noted that she rather leaves the shop than engage in such a kind of interaction:

If I see that I can't see, I better leave than ask for others help. Once I tried to read the consistency of the bread and one woman noticed that I can't read, so she came and ask whether she could help. But she was older than I am, so I became ashamed, thanked her and left the shop.

While research data suggest that usually disabled customers' experiences with other shoppers are positive and they receive needed assistance, the majority of the informants noted that they prefer assistance provided by close and familiar people. As an example, Katrina (LT, age 18-40) noted that she feels more relaxed when she is shopping together with her boyfriend:

Other people come, unhook the sausage, read and if don't like, can hook it back. And here the person [shop assistant] has to wait while one reads whether that sausage consists E elements. Now all my problems disappeared, because I am with my boyfriend now. He comes, unhooks the sausage, I read, he waits and 'dreams' if it is not interesting for him. So at this point, my all problems are solved.

Similarly, Ramune (LT, age 18-40) noted that her daughter usually accompanies her in interacting in the shop. Her daughter's assistance in manoeuvring in retail premises and acquiring information is important and makes shopping faster and more pleasant:

I usually do [shopping] with my daughter. She sees a little bit better than I do and orients in the environment better than I do. So it is faster. I just say her 'take me to this, take me to that', so it is faster. If I go alone, it takes longer to pass all the obstacles, so she drags me.

Other informants with vision impairments shared similar accounts. They noted that assistance by family members or friends enables them to avoid physical barriers, injuries, to find needed products easier and not to get lost in the shop among others.

It seems that additionally to informal assistants, salespeople also assist customers with impairments in overcoming excluding and segregating practices in the shop. The following discussion, therefore, sheds light on this kind of interaction in the shop.

5.4.2. Interaction with shop assistants

Informants' accounts suggest negative and positive experiences when interacting with shop assistants. With regard to negative practices, a few participants noted that even though salespeople assist them in overcoming barriers, their behaviour might be devaluing. As an example, Katrina (LT, age 18-40) noted that while shop assistants often assist her in reaching high located items, sometimes the practice may be infantilising or implying dependency to lower economic class:

When I ask to hand me spices, usually they [shop assistants] take the cheapest. So only because I am disabled, I am pressed to the lower level, and it is automatically assumed that I have less money. Even if I have less money, I do not need to buy the cheapest spices or curd... Although often I choose the cheaper products. But it does not mean that I have to buy the cheapest things only because I am disabled.

While some other participants recalled that it is a frequent experience to be offered cheaper and lower quality products, Pranas (LT, age 18-40) and Alison (UK, age 18-40) noted that several times shop assistants offered them to go directly to the 'sales' section. Girenas (LT, age 18-40) said that sometimes shop assistants 'are very suspicious and unhappy' if he asks to be shown or demonstrated more expensive products. Looking at the evidence from the interviews, it is easy to trace historically entrenched societal and market practices viewing disabled people as poor and unbeneficial market players (see Chapter One). The stories suggest that despite changes in the economy, labour market and policy, at the empirical level disabled people often remain excluded and segregated as equal

customers. Current forms are subtler and less violent, but still signalise that people with impairments are only 'good' for certain markets.

Many participants, especially with vision or mobility impairments addressed depersonalisation by shop assistants when non-disabled people accompany them. Specifically, the informants noted that often salespeople approach informal assistants, instead of communicating with them. For instance, Christine (UK, age 18-40) said:

They are even talking to my assistant instead of me. This is a very common thing; they talk to my PA and not to me.

Depersonalisation was also evidenced in a few of the mystery shoppings, when instead of approaching the person, shop assistants asked me 'what does he/ she [disabled person] want or need', or tried to have eye contact with me and not with the disabled customer. Drawing on Brisenden's (1986) discussion on the depersonalisation, such behaviour may contribute to the construction of people with impairments' customer vulnerability and exclusion. Specifically, in refusing to accept disabled people as individual customers who have unique and personal taste, preferences, needs and desires, shop assistants position them as passive instead of active market actors. They characterise people with impairments' customer life as legitimately open to 'active' non-disabled people's choices, decisions and judgements.

Some participants noted that shop assistants might start signalling unwelcoming behaviour immediately after entering retail premises. For instance, Girenas (LT, age 18-40) said:

I notice their (shop assistants') apathy quite often. If they see that there is a blind person with a white stick in the shop, who is looking for a technology, they stay aside. I don't know if they are afraid of disabled people.

Alison (UK, age 18-40) echoed identical experiences in the UK and linked them with negative and lazy attitude:

Well it's kind of like they're not sort of willing to help. I think they think that because you're disabled, either physical or whatever impairment it might be, that like it's almost like they have to go out of their way. They have a lazy attitude: "Oh, I have to do something." It's almost like something else you've asked them to do rather than them wanting to help the customer. So that's kind of – I kind of feel as if I would be a burden on them if I was to ask them for help. That's the kind of attitude that I get from them.

In a similar vein, Christine (UK, age 18-40) said:

Some staff members actually can be rude with a challenging attitude towards disability issues. Well, I mean, often in the shop you get real patronising or ignorance of the disability issues.

The accounts suggest that equally to physical barriers in retail premises, shop assistants' attitudes may be a factor determining customer experience. Although served, people with impairments do not feel equally treated to non-disabled purchasers. Discussed practices often create a sense of being a different or a 'second class' customer, treated with less respect and dignity.

While so far discussed experiences are likely to be shaped by insufficient shop assistants' training and awareness, a few participants with cognitive and vision impairments referred to unfair financial practices. To begin with, Maryte (LT, age 65+), whose experience was also recalled by a few other informants with cognitive impairments, noted that sometimes shop assistants may use her impairment to justify their unfair professional behaviour:

Very often they over-calculate me. It happens very often that the change is 50 cents or 1 Litas less than it should be. And then it is impossible to prove that they are lying. They say that I either lost my money or made up the story.

Similarly, Rolandas (LT, age 41-64) echoed Maryte (LT, age 65+) and provided an example, representing other blind research participants' experiences:

There were many different shop assistants. As everywhere. And cheaters, who used to give a wrong change. Some very cheeky and immodest. I usually do not like to check and I trust people, but then I started to notice that they defraud me. They say the amount then give the change and when I check I realise that I lack money. It is not enough that they dis-weight products, but even defraud in returning the change.

None of the British participants referred to similar practices. It can be argued that limited disabled customer protection and the absence of particular representative organisations in Lithuania may be some of the reasons behind the experiences. While both countries do not sufficiently recognise disabled people as equal customers, the UK's general system of customer protection has longer traditions than the Lithuanian system. In addition, having a longer history, UK's disability movement has fragmentally included some bits of customer rights and protection in their activities and this is not the case in Lithuanian DPOs' practices (see Chapter Six). In addition, the accounts suggest that customer financial vulnerability

does not directly correlate with individuals' impairment or dependency to the category of disability. Indeed, external factors, including salespeople's unfair commercial practice, may be some of the factors behind customer vulnerability.

Alongside 'general' shop assistants and the discussion in 5.1.3 suggesting that some BSH may have salespeople who are responsible for serving disabled customers, similar practices seem to be common in some grocery shops in the UK. However, the practice is often time-restricted and limits spontaneous shopping. Specifically, two British informants noted that it is preferable to ring the shop in advance before the visit. While small shops usually are more flexible and able to provide assistance whenever disabled customers turn up, big shops are not that 'disability-friendly'. For instance, Jack (UK, age 41-64) said:

Some bigger stores, they've got a bit shirty, a bit – they've not been very friendly when you've just turned up unannounced more recently. So we've tended to ring the night before and say, 'I want to do some shopping tomorrow. Could I book an assisted shop at half past nine tomorrow morning?' That seems to work well.

Contrary to this, if customers only give short notice before they come to big shops, or pop-in without notice, they risk not to receive assistance. Nick (UK, age 41-64) said:

And I have had occasion where I've been told, 'Well there's nobody who can help you at the moment. Can you come back?' or, 'Can't you bring somebody with you?' And as I say, after having been there for years, and only because I'm stroppy have I said, 'No. It's a reasonable adjustment. It's law. You've got to find somebody. I will wait'. And now they've got the hang of that, we're getting on better.

Hence, although assistance sources exist, service arrangement may locate disabled customers into shopping time frames, convenient for the shop and not for the customer. This may restrict customers' freedom and eliminate them from spontaneous shopping. It is important to note that while people like Nick, who are active in the disability movement and familiar with particular legal instruments, are aware of and demand customer rights, those individuals who are at the opposite end of the spectrum may be excluded from getting the assistance.

Although shops, offering such services, state that staff members have undertaken disability training (Morrisons, 2015, Sainsbury, 2015), research data suggest that the assistants often lack knowledge about reasonable accommodation. For instance, Christine (UK, age 18-40) said:

So she (shop assistant) didn't know what she supposed to do. She was giving me different products, I can't see it, you have to be aware of this. You should read labels to me. So, we haven't checked the prices or validity. She came round with me and she was trying to be helpful but she didn't know how to be helpful. So she was pointing me to that shelf and that shelf, but I can't see. I need more description than that. That's the whole reason for you being with me.

In a similar vein, Nick (UK, age 41-64) addressed some tensions caused by 'special' shop assistants' personal willingness to assist and limited professional training:

So I think now there's a lot of willingness there, but not systems. It very much depends upon who's on. So, some weeks I can get a really efficient person who tries to join in. Yes, tries to understand what it is I'm looking for, what I want to buy, helps me find it, draws the sort of thing to my attention that they think I might be interested in because I'm asking about those sort of things, etc. Other weeks, I can get people who I'm sure perform very variable roles, whatever that is, but whose strength isn't customer service, or, for that matter, reading and writing, which, when you're accessing products for me where I can't read or write them, can't see them myself, is kind of quite important really.

The account suggests that presence of this assistance source does not ensure informed customer choice or pleasant shopping experience. Indeed, due to insufficient training and awareness it may become a barrier, causing customer dissatisfaction, unpleasantness and exclusion.

Barriers outlined so far and salespeople's disablist attitudes may encourage some of the disabled participants to start online shopping. For instance, Alison (UK, age 18-40) said:

So that's kind of – I kind of feel as if I would be a burden on them if I was to ask them for help. That's the kind of attitude that I get from them. So in terms of online, you don't have to deal with staff attitudes in that kind of respect.

All British participants, but only five Lithuanians, mentioned online shopping. On the one hand, the difference between experiences in the two countries might be explained by differences in accessing the Internet and purchasing online. Specifically, 65.1% of Lithuanians compared with 84.1% of Britons had access to the Internet in 2012 (European Travel Commission, 2012b). While 66% of Britons used the Internet as a shopping source in 2011, only 14% of Lithuanians participated in e-commerce in the same year

(European Travel Commission, 2012a). In addition, while Lithuania does not have clear guidance for accessible websites, the Equality Act (2010) in the UK determines an anticipatory requirement to provide web-based services in a way that they do not discriminate disabled people. On the other hand, research data suggest that people are looking for the substitution for a disabling and excluding customer experience in shops. Hence, while online shopping might be interpreted as a customer coping strategy, such practice may create a new form of customer exclusion. Specifically, people with impairments may withdraw from shopping in shops, and transfer to the online environment.

It would be misleading to state that shop assistants hold only disabling and discriminatory attitudes and that all their practices cause customer vulnerability and exclusion. On the contrary, disabled customers shared numerous examples of positive interactions with salespeople. Some participants referred to approachability and complaisance, saying that shop assistants show where products are located, hand to them products that are inaccessibly displayed, read information about items or prices, etc. Personalisation of customer service was a broadly appreciated feature. For instance, Pranciska (LT, age 41-64), representing other customers with vision impairments' experiences, said:

It is so much better when they ask what I want. These young people are so great. Each time I want to buy something, they describe me the colour, show clothes that I may like. And they also tell me if the clothes look good on me; and if the colour goes well with my face.

Individual attention and service provision without prejudice may provide disabled people with a sense of shopping pleasure, satisfaction and shape loyalty to a particular retailer. Furthermore, Alison (UK, age 18-40) noted that such practices introduce her to more options and create positive customer experience:

But another thing, they were willing to help and wanted to – maybe if I had wanted a different size, they would go get it. I tried maybe different items that I would not have picked myself. So in terms of that, it was a really good experience.

Other participants also noted that they value if shop assistants see them as individual clients and not as disabled people. As an example, Povile (LT, age 41-63) who is a wheelchair user said that in a few shoe shops, salespeople offered her lower quality shoes which do not look nice. The woman assumed that such behaviour was influenced by the fact that she is using the wheelchair and thus does not 'use' shoes. As a result, she stopped going to these shops and instead chooses shops where shop assistants inquire about her personal taste and preference, and only then offer

possible options. However, mystery shopping and customer interviews revealed that individualised services are mainly provided in small shops, and in shops where shop assistants are familiar with particular clients. In other words, they know that a disabled person is a potential client, are familiar with reasonable accommodation provisions and thus are more likely to provide higher quality service. This implies that disability awareness training of sales people may be an important factor in shifting from treating disabled people as 'vulnerable' to equal customers.

5.5. Concluding comments

This chapter explored a range of concerns related with disabled people's shopping and customer experience in the mainstream private market. While previous literature focused mainly on the experiences of people with mobility and vision impairments in retail premises, the chapter shed light on the experiences of individuals with different impairments and positioned shopping as a chain, consisting of four main stages: customer information, journey to the shop, navigation in retail premises and interaction with informal shopping assistants and members of staff. While each stage and its elements are experienced differently by each individual, the practice of exclusion, segregation and inequality are common across the board. With regard to acquisition of customer information, it proved to be important in providing individuals with a possibility to make an informed customer choice, explore more options in terms of shops and products, and act more independently and free. However, usually customer information is provided having non-disabled customers in mind. Such practices are founded on ableism and usually have a disabling effect on disabled people's customer experience. They may restrict individual's freedom when deciding where and what to purchase, spatially isolate them within particular market niches and estrange them from non-disabled shoppers.

The journey to the shop is the second stage of the shopping chain and usually consists of the home environment, public environment, and public and private transport. The role played by an accessible home environment in shaping shopping accessibility was an anticipated finding. While only five participants addressed this, it was evident that single barriers in the home environment may prevent a pleasant and smooth journey to the shop. In some cases it may eliminate people with certain impairments from having a customer experience or convert shoppers into being dependent on other's assistance, time, activities and social obligations. It was suggested

that accessibility of the public environment often shape disabled people's decisions on the shop and the route to it, especially those mobility and vision impairments. It was evident that obstacles in the public environment might cause stress and injuries, prevent from discovering new shops and facilities, and make people with impairments dependent on non-disabled individuals. A few older participants noted that due to certain barriers sometimes they are either converted into indirect customers or are eliminated from shopping.

Additionally to such impact on customer experience and identity, one participant ascribed the nature and the roots of differences between his past experience as a non-disabled shopper, and present practices as a wheelchair user, to barriers in the public environment. He noted that while some of them may cause challenges and inconvenience, others may completely eliminate him from the past customer interaction. With regard to public transport, non-disabled passengers-oriented information provision about and in transport means, routes, timetable and other services, as well as physical inaccessibility of vehicles often have a negative impact on a person's budget, safety and comfort, and shape various dependency practices. This may restrict shopping time, place choice and independency. With regard to private transport, it was evident that inaccessibility of parking and insufficient number of accessible parking spots are important factors, causing challenges for customers travelling to the shop by private transport.

The third stage of the shopping chain is navigation in the shop. It consists of two elements: entering the shop and operating in the retail premises. It was suggested that various non-disabled customers-oriented retail premise design and product marketing strategies shape customers with certain impairments' dependency, exclusion, minimise choice and control, and cause stress and a fear to be injured. Market practices that shape such experiences are premised on ableism and limited business' awareness of changing customer segment. It was suggested that even though some means that could provide more accessibility are present and available in shops, due to limited business' awareness of the disabled customer group and accessibility, they often are not exploited. In some cases they are transformed into artefacts, signalling that disabled customers are not desired shoppers.

The final stage of the shopping chain is interaction in the shop. It is tightly linked with the previous stage as often disabled shoppers' interaction with informal and shop assistants is sparked by inaccessible retail premises and products layout. While both assistance types usually provide more customer choice and control, make shopping faster, more pleasant and

efficient, the informants prefer assistance provided by family members, friends or PAs. Additionally to the personal familiarity factor, limited awareness of disability and training on reasonable accommodation are potential factors behind the preference. Research data suggest that often shop assistants neither meet disabled customers' needs and preferences, nor provide them with an equal and quality service. Indeed, depersonalisation, special treatment, infantilisation, unfair financial practices and similar behaviour are common during service delivery. This may locate disabled people within particular shopping time frames, cause financial challenges, a feeling of being a 'different' customer and lead to withdrawal from customer practice in particular sites, or lead to looking for substitutions such as e-commerce.

The discussed disabled customers' empirical realities in Lithuania and the UK suggest that state and private market's focus on non-disabled citizens and customers, complemented by ableism, create disabled customers' exclusion and segregation, and convert them into 'vulnerable' customers, who are prevented from equal and barrier-free participation in the EU single market. This thesis argues that the outlined experiences and practices are shaped by business and civil society's lifeworld regarding disabled customers and market accessibility and their access to the formulation of the public discourse. The following chapter, therefore, starts untangling some of the underlying factors and concerns, and sheds light on international and national ICT industry and civil society's norms, values, knowledge and positions toward markets accessibility and disabled customers.

CHAPTER SIX: THE LIFEWORLD OF ACCESSIBLE MARKETS

Having examined the experiences of disabled customers shopping for ICT products and describing how disability/ ableism and barriers/ accessibility become manifest in that experience, the current chapter starts the examination of some structures, potentially shaping the observed customer realities. It adapts a Habermasian concept of lifeworld (see Chapter Three) and suggests that industry and civil society's notions, positions, values and other elements, constituting their lifeworld toward disabled customers and accessibility are shaped by policy instruments and professional practice, and impact disabled people's shopping experience. Such an approach assisted in providing under-researched insights into empirically unobservable structures, potentially shaping accessibility of the EU single market.

The provided evidence has been gauged through observations of and semi-structured interviews with ICT manufacturers, regional representatives of the ICT industry, international and national DPOs, shop managers and assistants working in BSH and NBSH in Lithuania and the UK. In aiming to provide thicker descriptions, data from internships, mystery shopping and customer interviews are used.

Shedding light on the way the stakeholders discursively construct disabled people as customers and markets accessibility via their use of language and customer service, enabled identifying that the actors acknowledge the need for more accessibility in the EU mainstream private market. However, their lifeworld regarding disabled customers and accessibility differ and some tensions are present. It was suggested that while some stakeholders premise ontological positions more on the social model of disability, others' lifeworld is informed by the individual model. It was evident that such positions are not consciously chosen. Indeed, the factors shaping particular understandings include: policy framework, within which the actors operate; and different business' practices. It was evident that variance in stakeholders' relationship with the two factors may create differences in the used language, ascribed meanings and values, produce specific knowledge sets and prevent a more accessible and equal disabled customer experience.

The chapter begins with an overview of the stakeholders' discursive construction of disabled customers and accessibility. This is followed by the examination of the role played by global, regional and national policy instruments in shaping the discussed notions and stakeholders' lifeworld.

Then light is shed on business practice and the way different approaches toward and processes in providing accessibility may shape manufacturers, IBR and national retailers' lifeworld.

6.1. Notions of disabled customers and accessibility

This section provides an overview of how the EU ICT retail market and civil society position disabled people as customers of ICT products, and accessibility of the ICT market, although with wider implications for other markets. It draws on differences and similarities across the two stakeholder groups and provides some insights into whether disabled people are perceived as vulnerable consumers or bearers of customer rights. Since language plays a role in creating disability (Barnes, 1991) and engaging in communicative action (Habermas, 1981), the section examines business and civil society's notions used to describe their positions toward disabled customers and accessibility. It was important to reveal whether terminology is premised on the individual or social model of disability and how this may locate people with impairments in the mainstream private market. Instead of asking the informants to define disabled customers and accessibility, it was decided to tackle the narratives of the whole interview and to extract the accounts, illustrating common and unique patterns. Firstly, business and civil society's notions of disabled people as customers are addressed. Then light is shed on how association of impairment with 'needs' construct 'accessibility needs' and may create division between non-disabled and disabled customers.

6.1.1. International business and civil society's perspectives on disabled customers

International business and civil society actors share similarities and differences regarding disabled customers and users of ICT. To begin with, the two stakeholder groups perceive people with impairments as one customer group, whose members are not identical but differ from each other. For instance, the IBR noted:

Every user has maybe a different experience and a person with disability is not necessarily, has the same disability. There are some identical, but it's not a very homogeneous group.

While the IBR's reference is generic, with no specific implication for undertaken activities, Company X described disabled people as a 'very

fragmented group' and divided it into several subgroups. The division is based on impairment types and guides the company in developing products accessible for individuals with particular impairments:

As for now, we have got, I think, maybe four customer groups that could be identified. The first one is people with hearing impairments. Then the second one is people with partial sight that have certain needs in how to read the screen, basically, but having some visual capacities. And then the third one is then, let's say, totally blind people with severe visual impairment that would need different ways of accessing the device. And then the fourth group is the group, who pretty much, all their senses are starting to be drained, and then also having maybe motor challenges (Company X).

Similarly to the business, the IDPO acknowledged the versatility among disabled ICT users:

There are different issues of course, for different groups of persons with disabilities.

A practice to divide customers into different groups is well known and documented (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001, Wang et al., 2004, Guilding and McManus, 2002). Likewise, the tendency to see disabled people as one group experiencing similar challenges is common (Woodhams and Danieli, 2000), as well as their categorisation into separate impairment groups is prevalent in policy and service provision practices as suggested in Chapter Two. Alike, the focus on different impairments and technology development has been documented elsewhere, for example, in research on cognitive impairments and education (Williams et al., 2006), or shopping and hearing (Chinithorn et al., 2012) and vision (López-de-Ipiña et al., 2011) impairments. On the one hand, it can be argued that such division may enable designers to engage into deeper analysis and to come up with results guiding towards more accessible design decisions. On the other hand, this may divide disabled people as ICT users and customers, as accessibility provisions, as discussed in Chapter One, often focus on some impairment types and not on others. In this respect, the informants tended to focus on certain impairments, leaving others aside.

While the IBR mainly referred to vision and hearing impairments, Company X expanded on this and included mobility impairments. These groups were also dominant in the IDPO's narratives, who only twice referred to people with cognitive impairments. This suggests that focus on certain impairments and potential hierarchy among them in public discourse is present not only in public attitudes (Thomas, 2000, Tringo, 1970), health-care service provision (Janicki, 1970) or labour market (Stevenage and McKay, 1999), but also may manifest regarding product accessibility and

customer participation. Technical and standard peculiarities of product development seem to play a part in creating hierarchy among the impairments in the context of accessible ICT products. To illustrate, asked about the IDPO's position towards technology users with cognitive impairments, the informant noted that one of the reasons behind limited focus on this user group is incomplete knowledge of how product standards for a non-disabled customer should be transformed into a format accessible for people with cognitive impairments:

On one hand it is true that there is less access [to people with cognitive impairments] also because there is – sometimes I think the challenge is the way and that the content is built and the information is provided that makes it difficult.

It seems that current standard requirements and data coding manner in ICTs may act as a barrier, preventing industry from providing products accessible to users who do not share features typical to non-disabled customers, especially for people with cognitive impairments. Alongside the technical peculiarities, limited people with cognitive impairments' recognition as customers (see Chapter One) and insufficient designers' training on accessible communication may be additional factors excluding this customer group. Specifically, in Z working group meeting in the EP I asked producing companies why they usually seek to develop products accessible for users with vision and hearing impairments, but do not aim for the same regarding people with cognitive impairments. The representative of one of the participating companies replied that they *'would not know where and how to start communicating with these people'*. Informal chats with EU ICT industry actors support reflect such a position and suggest that limited knowledge about accessible communication formats may act as an additional factor, preventing industry from developing products accessible for customers with cognitive impairments.

International business and civil society do not prioritise disabled customers and accessibility. The informants unambiguously noted that despite their interest in and work toward a more accessible EU single market, in the context of their activities, neither customer rights, nor product accessibility are at the top of the list. For instance, with regard to accessibility, the IDPO dedicates attention to web accessibility, access to education, labour market, public environment and transport. As a result, when asked about activity areas, the informant referred to market accessibility and customer rights in the end of the narrative. Such IDPO's position is potentially shaped by a limited focus on these issues within the EU's policies and legal instruments (see Chapter Two) in which context the organisation operates. Meanwhile, relatively low industry's interest in producing accessible

technologies may be constructed by its focus on and prioritisation of non-disabled customers:

So I would be lying if I said that it's easy and we get things very well done, but in many cases, other priorities are more important than this accessibility thing (Company X).

Although the informant did not identify the nature of 'other priorities', data gathered during the internship suggest that the primacy is usually given to 'cool' and novel features, that are popular among non-disabled customers. As the IBR informant noted, such actions are founded on the orientation to higher profits:

If you look from a company point of view, it is all about your turnover and loss and profit. If you sell a Smart phone it is all about the margins, i.e. how much you have earned, what's selling it. Is it that it's basic phone or is it a top-end product that costs 700€? A company doesn't continue to produce properly an accessible phone if it doesn't generate enough turnover.

Hence, it seems that even though some ICT industry players perceive disabled people as potential product users, the general practice is to focus on non-disabled customers as they are associated with higher profit, compared to customers with impairments. In other words, operating in a capitalist market, the ICT industry prioritises financial success brought by non-disabled customers over the assurance of customer equality for different user groups.

6.1.2. National business' perspectives on disabled customers

The present discussion draws on semi-structured interviews with and observations of shop assistants and managers as discussed in Chapter Four. The informants from Lithuanian and British BSH and NBSH noted that disabled people are present but not frequent customers. While a Lithuanian BSH manager said that people with impairments visit the shop or purchase the products 'once or twice in two weeks', the NBSH (LT) manager could not provide an exact answer:

I don't know. I have never talked about this with my people. This topic has never snagged.

The informant explained limited knowledge by a lack of 'memorable incidents' with this customer group:

I could not say how often they visit us, because as I already have said, this topic has never snagged and we have never had any memorable incidents, so I can't answer this question (NBSH, LT).

The account is important for several reasons. First, it demonstrates the mismatch between disabled customers and retailers' knowledge about each other. Specifically, shoppers with impairments noted that due to the central location and accessibility of the premises, they frequently visit this particular shop. Meanwhile, despite disabled shoppers being potentially active in the shop, the manager is at the opposite end of the spectrum and has acquired minimal knowledge about this customer group. Uneven division of knowledge about and between customer and retailer prevent the two actor groups from creating common language, sharing similar interpretations and norms. This results in restricted opportunity to share and create a common lifeworld (Habermas, 1984, 1985). Second, and most importantly, it suggests that disabled customers may be associated with incidents and events that are perceived as negative. The discourse of deviance was further advanced by juxtaposing disabled shoppers with foreigners, strangers and drunken customers:

Of course, we meet different clients, including more strange customers: those, whose Lithuanian language is not fluent, sometimes it happens to have drunk people, also, disabled. But not very often (NBSH, LT).

Although the manager did not directly identify disabled people as 'strange' customers, a repetitive reference to 'drunk', 'strange' and 'disabled' in the answers to the same questions suggest that the professional may perceive people with impairments as unusual clients, differing from non-disabled shoppers. Shop assistants working in NBSH in the UK and in BSH in Lithuania shared opposite positions. As an example, two salespeople in British NBSH noted that despite the impairment, they treat all customers equally. One of them said:

Well, they all are customers, and the physical condition doesn't matter (X NBSH, UK).

In a similar vein, the BSH manager (LT) positioned disabled people as shoppers, whose customer satisfaction and loyalty is important to the shop's financial performance:

Our aim is a happy person, despite whether he is disabled or not, who would come back, be interested in, buy and use our products.

Similarly, one shop assistant working in a small BSH (UK) noted that despite the need for accessible product features, there is no major difference between disabled and non-disabled customers. According to the informant, while serving disabled people may require additional knowledge, the impairment does not determine the status of the customer. This was echoed by other participants, who similarly to manufacturers, positioned

different impairment types as a factor that may influence the service delivery process. As an example, BSH manager (LT) noted, that although they treat customers equally and *'do not distinguish the clients'*, the actual serving process may differ and depend on the shopper's impairment. The informant provided an example of serving blind customers:

When blind people come we usually describe the product and how the product works; usually we spend much more time with the person, because we give him time to try and test everything. Sometimes we recommend to take some time and think and to come back the next day, so the person could check how he feels the product (BSH, LT).

Hence, impairment type may shape practical aspects of service delivery. As the informant's further narrative suggests, such an approach may assist in identifying reasonable accommodation means that should be provided, aiming to ensure service equality for customers with impairments. To illustrate, the BSH manager (LT) provided an example of serving deaf shoppers:

Then we communicate in writing, they write what they want. Basically we take a pen and a piece of paper and write and communicate about what they want. Sometimes they come-in with the sign-interpreter. They communicate in sign language, say what they want and need and then we solve the problem.

While the discussed practices seem to be informed by the social model of disability and reflect some principles of personalised service, and position impairment as guidance toward a more equal service delivery process, the NBSH manager (LT) identified impairments as a source of challenges:

Maybe one of the main challenges would be... I think it depends on person's impairment and on the level of invalidity. For example, if the person is in a wheelchair, so it is ok, you need only to hand and carry the products; but my people do this either way to all clients, thus this would not be an exceptional practice. I think there would be more problems with deaf and hard of hearing people as there is no way how to communicate with them. Of course, in such a case, shop assistants communicate with them by writing down on the paper. I don't think there are more challenges.

The individual model founded position was echoed later on in the interview:

There are no major problems with people in wheelchairs. I think it would be much more difficult with people with severe impairments. I would say that they are those who hardly speak, hardly walk,

maybe those, who have cognitive impairments. But you cannot condemn them – they are also people, they also need things – they also need to watch television, to listen to the radio or do something else, like for example, to play with computer (NBSH, LT).

While these accounts are important for many reasons, for the purpose of this thesis it is worth shedding light on two of them. First, the NBSH's understanding of disabled people as customers seems to be founded on an individual model of disability. While this echoes the discussion in Chapters One, Two and Three, the usage of words and expressions such as 'invalidity', 'problems', 'they are also people' suggest conceptual and empirical alienation and estrangement of disabled customers in the shop and wider retail market. Second, similarly to manufacturers, the NBSH locate disabled customers within clearly undefined, but still present hierarchy. While wheelchair users are seen as not causing 'major challenges' and being 'ok', customers with hearing impairments are perceived as causing more problems. Meanwhile, people with cognitive and severe impairments were identified as the most 'complicated' groups and people with vision impairments were not mentioned throughout the interview with the NBSH manager. This calls into question the causes of such categorisation and more in depth research is necessary. While the informant addressed few practices that can be linked with the provision of reasonable accommodation, the logic behind it seems to be founded on the idea of 'fixing' impairment, rather than overcoming inaccessibility of the retail place.

Additionally to the impact of national business perspectives on shaping disabled customers' experiences as discussed in Chapter Five, national civil society position is equally important. With this in mind, the following discussion sheds light on the way national DPOs perceive disabled people as customers and address their rights in the market in their everyday activities.

6.1.3. National civil society's perspectives on disabled customers

Similarly to the international stakeholders and national retailers, national DPOs identified disabled people as one group of ICT users and customers, who are not identical but differ from each other. While UK representatives' references to 'many different conditions', 'different severities', 'different adaptations to severities' were common, Lithuanian participants several times repeated that disabled people are not a homogeneous group and different policies should address the needs of different groups more explicitly.

Informants' accounts seem to be founded on the social model of disability. However, similarly to business, they mainly referred to people with mobility and vision impairments, leaving aside individuals with hearing and cognitive impairments. Such practice seems to be in line with current and recent studies, focusing on disabled people's shopping as discussed in Chapter One. Complying with this academic discourse and framing activities within the context of the two impairment types, civil society respectively construct and define knowledge that is later exchanged in communication with other stakeholders. On the one hand, by addressing the same impairments, the stakeholders may create a scene for deeper communication, potentially introducing more accessibility. On the other hand, by leaving aside other impairments, the actors risk limiting the possibility to introduce and create new sets of knowledge, norms and values, leading toward broader accessibility practice.

With regard to DPOs' position towards disabled people as customers, the informants usually shed light on various restrictions. For instance, the UK participant linked being a disabled customer with some barriers addressed in Chapter One and emphasised their interconnectivity throughout the shopping process:

So do you have the money? So do you go online to buy or do you go to the shops? Or if you go to the shops, can you get to them? If you get to the shops, are they accessible? If you talk to the people who work in those shops, do they understand your needs? Can they give you good advice? Are they responsive to you with your impairment, the severity of your impairment and the adaptation to it that you are able to make? (DPO, UK).

Having the same rationale in mind, the Lithuanian DPO addressed more specific barriers such as inaccessible ATMs, sills, steps, lack of elevators, inaccessible public transport, lack of accessible information and limited shop assistants' awareness, among others. Interestingly, in outlining the barriers, Lithuanian informants referred only to people with mobility and vision impairments. This, indeed, is a narrower position than held by other stakeholders, including business players (see Chapter Six).

In the eyes of the Lithuanian DPO, disabled people often lack self-recognition as customers:

People do not understand yet that they have rights as customers and that they can demand those rights.

According to the informants, this may result in shame or avoidance to complain if service or a product is of low quality or shop personnel are discriminating. To some extent this was indirectly evident in the mystery

shopping interviews with Pranciska (LT, age 41-64), Rolandas (LT, age 41-64) and Jack (UK, age 41-64) who have vision impairments, as well as with Daphne (UK, age 18-40) who has mobility impairment and Dovile (LT, age 41-64) who has mental health condition. Disabled shoppers pointed to experiences when instead of requiring reasonable accommodation, they either withdraw from the customer experience or employed individual coping strategies to deal with the barriers independently.

Similarly to international business and civil society, national DPOs noted that customer-related issues are not the top priority of their activities. As an example, the UK DPO identified the area as not a priority:

But it isn't a current priority for our organisation (UK DPO).

This was echoed by the Lithuanian DPO:

No, we do not pursue activities oriented specifically to customers.

Despite that the two organisations share similar experiences, their positions differ with regard to locating accessibility and customer rights either in the context of non-discrimination or rights. Specifically, while the LT DPO conceptualise customer participation as a matter of non-discrimination, the UK DPO informant linked it with equality and rights:

We want disabled people to see themselves firstly as citizens but also as consumers, able to purchase and obtain the same services and goods as other people. So we are concerned about consumer rights and consumer protection, and we're concerned about people being able to obtain, as I say, the goods and services they need at a price they can afford (UK DPO).

However, it seems that despite some differences in used vocabularies, the two organisations share some elements regarding markets accessibility, as discussed in Chapter Two.

The majority of the informants linked accessibility with disabled customers' impairments. They positioned impairment as a factor, for identifying either product or service provision 'accessibility needs'. The following discussion, therefore, sheds light on how 'accessibility needs' are perceived by regional and national business and civil society.

6.1.4. International stakeholders' perspectives on accessibility

Positioning disabled people as one, albeit heterogeneous, group may enable the stakeholders to come up with accessibility solutions faster and more efficiently. However, such practice may conceptually transform accessibility provisions from means to overcome barriers in the

environment into means to fix people's impairments. Specifically, discussing disabled customer groups and accessibility, the informants often framed the accounts within the discourse of 'need' and ascribed it to an individual. As an example, in Company X's narrative, expressions such as 'people with accessibility needs', 'specific needs', 'certain needs', 'need different ways of accessing the device', 'for special people with special needs' were common. The following IBR quotation illustrates how such focus may divide non-disabled and disabled customers in business practice and public discourse:

Because again, it's not only having a new feature and seeing if it really takes off, it actually should address the need, it's really need space, it's not like a – we all can live without Smart-phones because we don't want any more. But if you have a disability and you have a need to contact someone, if they need to purchase something, if they need to get a service, because it is very important for your life, then you need to find appropriate solutions.

International business' focus on needs raises several concerns. First, in product development, the focus on 'needs' and the elimination of 'wants' may impact the aesthetics of an item. While wanted and desired things usually are aesthetically pleasant, things that are 'needed' 'do not have the same requirement to be beautiful as their functionality is considered to be of utmost importance' (Newell, 2003:175). Second, the perception of technologies as a solution for impairments, recalls controversial discussions on technologies' role in 'improving', 'liberating' and 'empowering' disabled students (Poplin, 1995, Raskid 1993). Third, customer needs and wants may become a marker conceptually and empirically dividing disabled and non-disabled people as users of mainstream goods and services. In such a context, non-disabled people are those who want and desire products and disabled people who need them because of their impairments.

The IDPO also referred to 'accessibility needs'. However, contrary to business, the organisation interpreted accessibility not only through the lens of the 'need' because of impairments, but also linked it to equality. To illustrate, the informant said:

So the position is in terms of ensuring that there is equal access for persons with disabilities to the different services, for instance in the area of transport or in other areas. It could be banking services, for instance, as well as different goods on one hand (IDPO).

The difference in the international stakeholders' positions is not without some foundation. While the following sections provide deeper insights, at this point it is evident that having to comply with technical requirements and standards, and principles of competitiveness, ICT producers and the

IBR have internalised particular understanding of impairments and accessibility. For this stakeholder group an impairment seems to be a factor, going alongside specific 'needs' and acting as a technical guidance for meeting minimum standards and developing accessible products. Contrary to this, the IDPO, premising the activities on the CRPD, positions accessibility in the light of equality. It also sees it as a general principle of and a prerequisite for exercising substantial human rights and for engagement in civic participation. In addition, addressing a broader range of everyday life dimensions and not only technology usage, the IDPO's understanding of accessibility is broader than product technical features and interlinks various service types.

6.1.5. National stakeholders' perspectives on accessibility

Similarly to international players, national business and DPOs seemed to construct notions of accessibility around needs, and some of them addressed wants. The strongest emphasis on needs was in the NBSH manager's narratives. To describe shop personnel's assistance for non-disabled shoppers the informant used words such as 'want' and 'prefer'. To contrast, while 'want' was used only once when talking about disabled people's technology purchase, 'need' was the dominant verb for the process description. Similarly, some shop assistants in British NBSH also focused on customer needs and questions such as 'what exactly do you need' followed the general phrase 'how can I help you today?'; and were common in the mystery shopping. While Lithuanian NBSH manager often addressed price or quality when speaking about non-disabled customers, they were not addressed when talking about customers with impairments. To illustrate, the informant described the product offering process for non-disabled customers:

It depends on several factors. First and the most important is client's requests. The second factor on the list is the price that the person is able to spend on a product. I think these are two main factors that determine shop assistants' suggestions. In terms of wants, it is important to ask about the purposes of using the product, what are client's expectations and so on. It depends very much on the product as well, because what suits to find out about the preferences for the TV set, not always suits to find out about which PC would meet individual's preferences (NBSH, LT).

Contrary to this, talking about disabled customers' choice for articles, the informant referred to 'needs' and ascribed the responsibility of choice to individuals:

In terms of deciding on technologies, such people should come clearly knowing what they need and what is suitable for them (NBSH, LT).

The NBSH assistants, who served mystery shoppers in the UK, did not ignore questions about price and general product features. However, these used to follow 'need' related enquiries. Hence, similarly to international businesses, who seem to treat non-disabled people as wanting and disabled people as needing users, national sellers may adopt the same rationale for grouping the shoppers and constructing the division between them. Shop assistants' expectation and preparedness to communicate with non-disabled and disabled customers about factors such as price, purpose of use, and expectations may introduce a scene for seller-customer interaction and communication that may challenge current prejudice toward shoppers with impairments. In addition, the mystery shopping and customer interviews suggest that such interaction may allow for finding a product of higher quality and value or more accessible for a person. Meanwhile, while disabled customers are 'locked' in a notion of 'needing', they are not provided with an opportunity to engage in this kind of interaction and customer experience. In shops, where such customer categorisation and service delivery practice is present, they may be perceived as the only agents, responsible for their customer experience and participation, whose performance and the results of the performance are their individual responsibility (see Chapter Five).

Examples of customer division were strengthened by narratives on alienation and estrangement. Specifically, expressions such as 'their capabilities' and 'what they need' were not isolated cases and were frequently mentioned by the NBSH manager (LT) when talking about disabled customers. In addition, although the informant used the word 'people' when talking about disabled shoppers, it was dominated by narratives such as 'they', 'such people' and 'disabled'. This suggests that customers' physical and cognitive features may become a marker, shaping their position and activities in the shop. In such a context, the distinction between disabled and non-disabled customers, accompanied by a focus on 'wants' and 'needs' respectively, may also introduce a discourse of 'we' and 'they' as citizens as, as suggested by Gabriel and Lang (1995), links between being a customer and a citizen get more intense.

Fortunately, not all practices were disabling and discriminating. Research data suggest that in BSH, positions toward disabled customers share some features of the social model rather than the individual model of disability. The Lithuanian BSH manager addressed 'needs' for a product only once. Shared position towards serving disabled people might be illustrated by

expressions such as ‘wants and expectations for the product’, and ‘we need to know what the person actually wants’. In a similar vein, some salespeople in British BSH also enquired about disabled customers’ expectations; and questions such as ‘what features would you like it to have’ were common. Recalling the discussion on manufacturers’ limited knowledge on accessible communication, the Lithuanian BSH manager addressed ‘communication needs’ when serving customers with hearing or speech impairments:

We meet deaf people, we meet people with speech impairments, and then we have some problems with communication. Then we usually communicate in written format, they write what they want. Well we take a piece of paper, a pen, write and communicate in a way they need to communicate.

While at first sight the account locates ‘communication needs’ within an individual model perspective and links it to a person’s impairment, later on the informant acknowledged staff’s unpreparedness to communicate in different accessible formats:

Simply speaking, we try to find a solution in each situation when we can’t communicate in these people’s language (BSH, LT).

Although the discourse of ‘we’ and ‘they’ was also present in the narrative, the shift from individual toward social model of disability may be observed as diversity and some reasonable accommodation means are recognised as a part of the process. This suggests that disabled customers’ ‘needs’ may be associated not only with a product, but also with other elements of the shopping chain. This was confirmed by the UK DPO, who entwined product and service delivery-related ‘needs’:

If you get to the shops, are they accessible? If you talk to the people who work in those shops, do they understand your needs? Can they give you good advice? Are they responsive to you with your impairment, the severity of your impairment and the adaptation to it that you are able to make?

Contrary to industry players, the UK DPO addressed ‘needs’ not as an inextricable feature of an individual, but as a litmus to indicate whether the retail sector is able and ready to provide reasonable accommodation and serve disabled people as equal customers.

In summary, this section has demonstrated how international and national business and civil society actors perceive disabled people as customers and the accessibility of the EU single market. It was detected that even though the positions share some differences, the stakeholders identify disabled people as one group of customers, who are not identical but differ. The

division seems to be premised on individuals' impairments, may lead to hierarchical relationships among disabled customers and uneven development of accessible products. It was also detected that disabled customers and market accessibility are often linked with 'accessibility needs' that are perceived by the stakeholders differently. Their ontological positions seem to be shaped by professional activities and the policy framework within which they operate. Manufacturers, for instance, perceive 'accessibility needs' as guidance, enabling to better meet technical standards. Some retailers may adopt the same logic for shaping service delivery. Such practice divides non-disabled and disabled customers and positions them as wanting and needing users respectively. While a majority of the accounts seemed to be premised on the social model of disability, positions based on the individual model are also present. The following section, therefore, sheds light on how policy instruments may shape the discussed perspectives and positions.

6.2. The role of policy discourse

As suggested in Chapter Three, policy discourse shapes business and civil society's lifeworld regarding the EU single market and in such a way may indirectly influence disabled customers' participation. With this in mind, this section aims to explore the way global, regional and national policy instruments mould international and national stakeholders' lifeworld regarding markets accessibility and disabled customers. It draws on empirical data from the interviews with the two stakeholder groups and sheds light on the way legal instruments may shape their positions, knowledge, values and norms. With regard to global instruments, since the internship experience has revealed that ICT manufacturers and the IBR employ US legislations and standards as key instruments for operating in global markets, they are approached as global, as is the CRPD. The discussion then focuses on regional instruments, discussed in Chapter Two. The section concludes by addressing national policies' role in either increasing or decreasing the potential of an accessible market.

6.2.2. Global regulations

With regard to global instruments, all informants except national retailers addressed either the CRPD or some of the US legislations. While none of the business players mentioned the Convention, the IDPO identified it as an instrument framing the content and the outline of the activities:

Things developed over time. So, for instance, at the beginning accessibility was addressed through the area of non-discrimination so the first step there was really to have the possibility to address issues relating to persons with disability so there was inclusion of non-discrimination in the treaties and then legislation and initially IDPO wanted to have legislation on all areas, but we had only on employment and training. Then there was work which was done on transport, which led to having specific, because there were a lot of cases of discrimination for people travelling in air transport, so we managed to have legislation there and then this ended up including persons with disability in all passenger's rights issues in different modes. Then, with the UN Convention also, this became broader, so little by little in ICT and other areas, it was possible to include issues relating to persons with disability and the access. One thing was also to promote legislation on accessibility of goods and services, which was then taken up with the Commission who included it in their work programme and they are now trying to have this legislation proposed.

It seems that alongside providing the framework for professional activities, the Treaty enabled the organisation to expand initial activities on accessibility, and shift the focus from non-discrimination to non-discrimination and rights. While the quotation above suggests that, being a globally recognised human rights instrument, the Convention provided the IDPO with a legal argument to influence regional policies and the Commission's agenda, it seems that the organisation uses the Treaty as a tool to shape national DPOs' understanding of accessibility:

I think it's a big challenge still that we have because the organisations of persons with disabilities they are, okay, more and more evolved with time and also a bit was non-discrimination legislation, now a lot with the convention in looking at the issue from an angle of right. So, to be able to participate, to whole of society including the access to goods and services. This has taken some times also in the disability movement.

Interestingly, while section 6.1.3 suggests that the UK DPO links participation in the market with rights and equality, the UK DPO informant did not refer to the Convention at any point of the interview. Contrary to this, while Lithuanian DPO representatives located accessibility and customer equality in the context of non-discrimination, they several times noted that the Convention enables the organisation 'to push things forward at the political level'. This suggests that national DPOs do not use the Convention as heavily as the IDPO does. In addition, even though both

organisations have internalised some values and positions entrenched in the CRPD, at an empirical level their perspectives are fragmented and confused.

Contrary to civil society, business players did not refer to the CRPD and instead addressed the importance of some of the US accessibility regulations. As an example, the informant from the Company X noted that the US accessibility requirements were a keystone that shaped the manufacturer's interest in ICT accessibility:

It has originally been driven by the legislation. In part of a review, there was this hearing aid compatibility requirement already something like one year ago. And after that, there has been legislation. And now, again, the US is at the moment leading in legislation with this Obama act in communication media, an accessibility act coming into force next October (Company X).

Clear and coherent US instruments on accessibility shaped not only manufacturers' but also the IBR's interest in accessibility. The informant noted that the requirements provided activity directions for one of the groups of the organisation:

Then you have, as you know, in the US, for a long time and we – standard are being developed and guidelines and things like this. So we are – I think that's why it's in TFGP group because we looked at it more from a standardisation point of view (IBR).

It seems that even though Company X and the IBR are based in Europe and operate under EU law, they equally value and in some cases prioritise US requirements. On the one hand, it can be argued that the US, offering a high number of customers, dictate rules which, if infringed, may have a direct impact on a possibility to access the market, sell products and gain profit. On the other hand, it can be argued that globally recognised and used technical requirements may introduce similar vocabularies and positions that are not bounded to a particular geographical location, but are recognised by all actors engaged in the global ICT market.

US regulations provide manufacturers not only with technical requirements that may introduce common language among different companies, but also with some decision making procedures that may encourage similar practices within separate companies. The Company X informant provided an example of the requirement to take minutes and how this may ensure that disabled customers and accessibility related issues are not ignored in internal company meetings:

We write the minutes of those so that there's a record of what we discussed. In this US legislation, actually, there is a requirement that

we take the needs of disabled people into account and actually keep records. So [this is] a requirement as well. But we don't do that only because of the legislation; we want to know their priorities.

Although at first sight it may seem that professionals are forced to adopt new models of working and documenting the meetings, such practices may incentivise internal collaboration (Andreoni et al., 2003) and create an environment for exchanging knowledge and experience. In such a context, professionals may question their ontologies on accessibility and potentially engage in the creation of a common language and knowledge across the departments.

Incompatibility between US and EU requirements may prevent creating accessible products and developing common language and norms regarding accessibility and disabled customers. The IBR informant explained:

I think it all becomes a bit more tricky when you have different national requirements or different European from the US or, I don't know, elsewhere. So if you stick to a global level, as a company that makes your life so much easier because you know what you're dealing with, you know exactly what the requirements are and you don't have to re-negotiate things or make changes in the way that you operate or how you decide to develop. So I think lots of the company that I'm involved in, have experience of accessibility in other regions and they'd rather have it harmonised at the global level if possible, i.e. at least have European legislation to some extent, wellbeing at least close to the requirements that we have elsewhere. Because otherwise every region would require a new, well a tailor-made product in relation to accessibility and again, I think we don't believe that impairments are really different in the US and Europe (IBR).

The Company X informant echoed the IBR and noted that incompatibility between global and regional legislations may compound the company's activities. Referring to longer US experience in accessibility, the informant noted that future EU legislations, and especially the forthcoming EAA, should take into account current US practices and avoid introducing significantly different regulations:

It will become interesting in Europe with European accessibility act whenever it comes. We are a global company, so it becomes a nightmare to us if there's a very different legislation in all market areas. So, here, US legislation is in place, so we do want that there's not too much difference to Europe on this type of – it would be good

if something is not so variable in the US so that we can comply (Company X).

Contrary to international business, the IDPO identified incompatibility between US and EU regulations as a potential ‘tool’ to shape lagging manufacturers’ understanding of and activities when developing accessible products:

So there is, I would say it’s more and more interest because for some of them, accessibility is becoming also sales component of the products. There is also – some of – in the area of ICT also because of the legislation in the US, some companies develop certain things and then other companies found themselves a little bit maybe in a more difficult situation because they had not reacted so promptly to this. Now they are trying to catch up so there is interest on that and we have to take advantage of that in a positive way.

In order to achieve this goal, the organisation actively participates in stakeholder meetings, is a member of several working groups and has employed other strategies to be recognised and valued by business and policy makers. Hence, even though the IDPO’s activities are premised on human rights instruments, the organisation is aware of market relations and is ready to accept the rules of the game. In other words, being aware that accessibility is becoming a factor, providing access to larger markets, making higher sales and gaining customers’ loyalty, the organisation avails the policy gap between global and regional instruments to shape some market players’ knowledge, positions and actions.

6.2.3. EU instruments

Additionally to global instruments, EU policies and legislations seem to play a role in shaping business and civil society’s knowledge about, and positions and actions toward, accessibility and disabled customers. As an example, while the Company X informant referred only to the forthcoming EAA, the IBR addressed standardisation documents. The IDPO referred to the majority of instruments identified by manufacturers and the IBR. Although the instruments shaping the actors’ activities are not identical, they overlap. The Company X informant, representing other international stakeholders’ accounts, noted that the EU requirements ‘made it possible to proceed with these accessibility things’. Similarly, the IDPO identified EU instruments as an important mechanism, providing the framework for the activities in the field. When asked about their significance on ICT accessibility, the informant noted:

I think they do impact a lot.

International stakeholders acknowledge the importance of EU instruments, but their practical application differs and depends on professional activities. Despite the differences, it seems that their application is related with the provision of more accessibility and may provide a platform for common language, norms and values to emerge. For example, Company X treats EU legislations as guidance in the accessible product development process:

In our company, and I also think in other companies, this EU regulation and legislation is a language that is very well understood inside product development. So, we just implement those, and that's a very good thing.

It seems that manufacturers translate legislations into a language, identifying accessibility features, and guiding product development and production process. Even though requirements and standards for product development may be a risky proposition and intrude into some companies' activities (Fomin et al., 2003), it seems that lacking expertise in accessible product development, some manufacturers are positive toward the standards and treat them as a starting point in the process. For the IBR, EU instruments provide a framework for communication and interaction with the ICT industry, policy makers and other partners such as the IDPO. Working with the instruments applicable to other stakeholders' activities, allows the IBR to be familiar with others' realities, faced constrains and obligations (see Chapter Seven), and identify actions needed for complying with the instruments. In such a context, EU instruments may provide the IBR with a framework for interaction with the member organisations, and may become a unifying element, which summons the partners for collaboration and cooperation:

Every time we have a legal proposal being talked about, and suggested and drafted, this is where the association obviously, unless it's not an important one, which doesn't happen usually, becomes active. Let's say the most usual thing where we certainly will have to look at it because then it becomes concrete and then it's about, again, specific requirements and then it's about often framework within which the companies have to operate and then maybe different from the current situation (IBR).

Similarly, the IDPO employs EU instruments as a premise for initiating communication with national members and as a tool to shape changes of national policies:

Now we have, for example, this proposal for legislation on accessibility of websites, public bodies' websites. If it is adopted, and hopefully it is, the scope is a bit enlarged, can have a really important impact because now there are on one hand, still a few

countries, who do not have any rules on what accessibility, some that they have, but they do not really apply them and you have also a difference of requirements. So this legislation could uniform requirements and make it much easier than to really have accessible websites and for public authorities and hopefully also at least the providers of services which are used by the majority of people. We hope that there will also be some enforcement mechanisms so I think it can have an impact (IDPO).

It seems that similarly to manufacturers' experience, EU instruments may serve in unifying MS's provisions and practices regarding accessibility. As suggested in Chapter Three, regional policies may introduce similar language, values and practices, and tackle global, regional and national businesses and civil society actors as well as policy rhetoric.

Research data suggest that the regulative power of voluntary and binding EU legislations has different impact on the stakeholders' engagement in accessibility debate and practice. With regard to voluntary EU agreements, the IBR noted that industry usually either partly complies with this type of legislation or ignores it:

A voluntary agreement is something else in reaction to legislation. It can prevent legislation, can substitute legislation, but it only goes this far because it's based on voluntary engagement and not everyone may want to engage. Not all TV manufacturers engage.

Similarly, the internship experience suggests that manufacturers' position towards voluntary agreements differ. As an example, while some companies are more proactive and ready to engage with this type of law and if needed to sacrifice in terms of the company's self-interests, others are less open and shape the actions in a way they do not intrude their business strategy and profit maximisation. Such fragmentation suggests that business' interests and values regarding accessibility are not strong enough to produce and to follow voluntary agreements. Drawing on the discussion in Chapter Three and Habermasian thought, it can be argued that voluntary instruments do not create interaction patterns within which common language, norms and values among business would emerge, leading toward the lifeworld of accessible EU markets.

Contrary to this, binding EU instruments seem to have greater potential to provide international stakeholders with a framework, structuring their activities and involvement in accessibility debate and practice. The IBR noted that while hard law obliges manufacturers to comply with accessibility requirements and so introduces common language and shapes the lifeworld, they do not stop companies from overstepping the boundary of law, if it may lead to more or better accessibility provision:

Again, each company has to make its own decision, unless you have legislation and then there is no choice; you have to do it and they will do it [...]. While, if you have legislation, now we are looking at a suitability act, that's a different sort of animal because then it is binding for everyone and then obviously the attention is there. [...] So I think it's important to just say once, if you are still in the voluntary area, then the approach may be very, very fragmented, while once you move into legislation obviously there's a certain level of harmonisation by default, but it doesn't mean you can't do more than that. Not everyone does it, but it could be a policy.

The importance of binding regulations was acknowledged by Company X. Although the informant did not refer to specific binding EU instruments, the examples of integrating EU directives and US legislations into the company's activities (see 6.1. and 6.2.) suggest that binding rules have stronger potential to shape business' activities, commitments and a lifeworld.

6.2.4. National policies

While global and regional instruments affect mainly international business and civil society actors' positions and activities, national policies do not have a major impact on any stakeholder's position. In some cases, they may potentially cause more challenges than provide opportunities. It seems that limited national DPOs' interest in disabled people as customers and market accessibility, discussed in 6.1.3, may be shaped by the way the state distributes national funds to DPOs. As an example, asked about the factors shaping the Lithuanian DPO's interests and activities, the informant said:

Everything leans on money.

Similarly, the UK DPO informant reasoned limited focus on customer rights protection and market accessibility by limited financial resources:

So that's where the focus is because we only have so much limited resources.

The accounts echo discussion in Chapter Four, suggesting that funds provided by the State may become a medium, shaping DPOs' priorities and activities and in such a way colonising their lifeworld. Specifically, having to comply with governments' eligibility criteria for financial support, DPOs may not be free creators of their own visions, missions and the way promoted values should be implemented. On the contrary, by providing funds, the State may introduce a framework within which civil society

should operate. Through such restriction it may limit the process of creating and sharing common language and knowledge and engaging in wider initiatives. Being locked within the knowledge, positions and values of the system of the State, DPOs may be prevented from creating their own lifeworld, and from introducing and sharing values and knowledge that would contribute to the expansion of other society members' norms, knowledge and positions toward disabled people's participation as equal customers.

Additionally to funds distribution, the UK DPO noted that austerity measures shape national DPOs' activities and may erode their focus on disabled customers:

The priority for most disabled organisations, or organisations of disabled people is to resist those cuts to benefits because that's where the majority of disabled people are and that's the issue that's affecting them most, and if you haven't got very much money to spend, you're not going to be going to the shops anyway. So the focus is not on disabled people – the focus of our UK society is not on disabled people as consumer, but is on disabled people as participants, and resisting so-called welfare reform changes that affect the level of benefits and their entitlement to benefits.

The narratives suggest that the State's finance-related decisions mould disabled citizens and DPOs' positions and experiences. Having to resist the cuts, individuals and organisations seem to focus on the activities directly related to their 'survival' and participation in society. In such a context, customer participation in the market remains at the end of the list.

Contrary to the DPOs, national policies seem to have no impact on international actors' lifeworld and activities. To begin with, the Company X informant could not remember legislation of any MS that would influence the company's activities. Similarly, the IBR did not address national legislations' positive impact on the organisation's activities. On the contrary, the informant noted that under some circumstances national instruments on ICT may cause incompatibility and close particular market niches. To illustrate, it is worth referring back to the IBR's account on the incompatibility of the US and EU instruments:

I think it all becomes a bit more tricky when you have different national requirements or different European from the US or, I don't know, elsewhere. So if you stick to a global level, as a company that makes your life so much easier because you know what you're dealing with, you know exactly what the requirements are and you don't have to re-negotiate things or make changes in the way that

you operate or how you decide to develop. So I think lots of the company that I'm involved in, have experience of accessibility in other regions and they'd rather have it harmonised at the global level if possible, i.e. at least have European legislation to some extent, wellbeing at least close to the requirements that we have elsewhere. Because otherwise every region would require a new, well a tailor-made product in relation to accessibility and again, I think we don't believe that impairments are really different in the US and Europe.

It seems that for global and regional business, national legislations neither serve as a tool, ensuring accessible ICT provision to national markets, nor contribute to the creation and amplification of their accessibility-related knowledge, actions and lifeworld. On the contrary, if incompatible with international and global standards, national instruments may serve as a barrier, preventing higher supply of accessible products. This highlights the importance of harmonisation of global, international and national instruments, and their potential power in unifying the language used in different political and empirical levels.

While international business perceives limited national product accessibility requirements as positive, the UK DPO identified the practice as potentially decreasing accessibility of the shopping chain and of accessible product availability:

There is some consumer protection rights under the Single Equality Act, particularly as I say around reasonable adjustments, but what's missing is a requirement on manufacturers to produce accessible goods. I understand there's going to be a procurement directive from the EU and that there's going to be consultation around a procurement directive. And if I'm correct, then that will mean that manufacturers have to start building-in accessibility in their products. At the moment, they have no obligation to do that, or very little requirements for them to do that. So people, as consumers, have got some protection in visiting shops and the treatment they can expect in those shops, but there's a big problem with what is the goods that are sold in those shops. Are they accessible? And can they get the accessible products in those shops? Most of the time, the answer is no.

Although the informant is aware that regional instruments play a key role in shaping product accessibility requirements, the necessity to address it in national policies seem to also be perceived as important. Similarly to international business, the IDPO did not identify national instruments as an

important source for creating accessibility-related knowledge and practice. On the contrary, the participant positioned national legislation as an object for changes by applying international policies:

As this legislation [EU level] is actually somehow our source of the national legislation, if you don't manage to influence the new level, you do not have an impact at national level. It's much more difficult (IDPO).

With regard to national instruments' positive impact on market accessibility, the UK DPO provided an example of how the DDA encouraged service providers to consider accessibility provisions for disabled customers:

In the UK, there are rights that people have got under the Disability Discrimination Act, which then became part of the two thousand and ten Single Equality Act. So there are requirements, for example, for retailers to provide reasonable adjustments and there are some good examples of reasonable adjustments that have been made. Some of the – I think Weatherspoon's, for example, pubs have made it easier for people in wheelchairs to visit their pubs. And as people in wheelchairs visit their pubs with their carers or family, the pub benefits from more people being able to exercise their spending power in the pub. Some shoppers are – like Intercontinental Hotel Group, some of the providers in the hospitality and leisure industry, like the Intercontinental Hotel Group have trained their staff in the needs of disabled customers.

This suggests that with regard to markets accessibility, national policy provisions and the market's initiative and willingness to provide accessibility should not be disconnected. Indeed, synchronised legal rhetoric and empirical practice oriented toward the same outcome, may introduce practices premising disabled and non-disabled customers equal participation as users and customers of goods and services that are open or provided to the public.

In summary, it was suggested that policy discourse shapes accessibility of the EU single market and indirectly influences disabled customers' participation. It is evident that due to stakeholders' operation in different policy frameworks, their knowledge about, ascribed values to, and position and lifeworld regarding accessibility and disabled customers differ. Manufacturers' lifeworld seem to be shaped mainly by technical accessibility requirements. This leads to positioning impairments as guidance of how to comply with technical requirements. Such practice seems to be a key reason behind positioning product accessibility as 'accessibility needs', determined by and linked to individual's impairment

as discussed in 6.1.4. Meanwhile, the CRPD seems to be a key instrument, shaping the IDPO's position that, as discussed in 6.1.1 and 6.1.4, links accessibility and customer participation with equality and non-discrimination. With regard to EU policies, it was suggested that regional instruments are recognised by all international actors and shape the way they position accessibility and take particular actions in the area. While incompatibility between global, regional and national policies may corrupt accessibility, EU instruments seem to have internal power and potential, enabling the stakeholders to share and create common language, knowledge, positions and other features essential for creating a common lifeworld of an accessible EU single market. With regard to national instruments, it was revealed that apart from some separate cases, they do not play a role in either shaping international actors' lifeworld or ensuring free access to goods and services for the citizens.

6.3. The role of business practice

This section continues the discussion on the factors potentially shaping stakeholders' lifeworld. It sheds light on the way certain business' practices may shape industry actors' notions of and ascribed values to disabled customers and accessibility. The discussion starts by looking at the relation between expenditures for and received profit from producing accessible products. This is followed by brief examination of manufacturers' CSR and product accessibility information available to shop assistants. Finally, the way training provided to shop assistants may shape their positions toward disabled shoppers and knowledge about accessible products is addressed.

6.3.1 Accessibility, expenditures and profit

Research data suggest that expenditures for product production and received profit are important factors, shaping ICT industry's lifeworld toward accessibility. With regard to expenditures, as all decisions, the incorporation of accessibility features is well thought-through and calculated. Despite the general tendency to estimate potential expenditures, it seems that positions and practices among the manufacturers differ. To illustrate, the IBR noted that companies' positions are fragmented and usually depend on different factors:

But it's like every person, you have different preferences, you make your choices accordingly and it will add cost, you will have to

dedicate resources, you will have to follow the tune of course, that's if your policy is a medium, long-term process.

Additionally to company-related factors, funds allocation to accessible features may be shaped by legal instruments. To illustrate, Company X provided an example of how US accessibility requirements impact manufacturers' spending:

The hearing aid requirement in the US means that when you sell a mobile phone, in one third of the products you need to have one component here on the back that connects to the hearing aid device. It costs about \$1, this component.

Hence, even though legal instruments do not explicitly intend to coordinate business' expenditures, some legislation may indirectly shape company's funds allocation. While product quantity-oriented requirements may increase product availability, accessibility regulation via financial measures may become a medium, positioning accessibility as a forcible element, instead of as a provision ensuring barrier-free technology use.

Additionally to expenditures, potentially received profit seems to play a role in deciding what features and for which user group should be installed into forthcoming products. Although the Company X informant did not specifically refer to profit as the premise for accessibility decisions, references to the 'biggest' user groups, requiring similar instalments confirm the hypothesis. As an example, the informant noted:

So I guess we have been looking at somehow, the biggest user groups in that sense. If there is a big group of people with very similar needs, than it's clear that it becomes kind of a company like us who can serve those customers. If it's a very specific need and totally a need that requires something very, let's say, costly or special, then I think it's more of a company with assistive technologies that should provide that (Company X).

While 'specific needs' may be associated with a smaller customer group, higher expenditures, lower profit and ascribed to 'disability' markets (see Chapter One), the impression that profit is one of the drivers determining whose 'needs' will be met was confirmed by the discussion on technologies for older consumers:

It's for the elderly people that we have been providing these types of classical devices for a longer time and not moving only to this type of work with touch smartphones. So I think we have a good share of elderly people that rely on us (Company X).

The increasing number of older EU citizens (European Commission, 2011,

Coleman and Lebbon, 2010) consequently boosts this customer group and shapes the company's product development decisions. To illustrate, although touch-screen features are becoming an inextricable part of ICT products, the account suggests that some companies are ready to develop less fashionable features in order to meet growing customer groups' 'accessibility needs' and gain higher profit. In other words, potentially higher profit reshapes the company's position toward a customer and the lifeworld on markets accessibility. This was confirmed by the IBR:

If you look at it from a company point of view, it is about your turnover and loss and profit. If you sell a Smart phone it is also about the margins, i.e. how much have you earned, what's selling it? Is it that it's a basic phone or is it a top-end product that costs 700€? I think it's all about this. A company doesn't continue to produce properly an accessible phone if it doesn't generate enough turnover.

Hence, it seems that potentially higher profit may shape companies' position toward customers and accessibility. In such a context, the ratio between expenditures and profit may become a steering media (see Chapter Three) that coordinates manufacturers' positions, actions and lifeworld on accessible markets.

Product accessibility may lead to superiority in competitiveness and this may be a factor shaping companies' positions and actions. The Company X informant tracked some changes over time and the way they structured business' position toward accessibility:

Although I feel that it hasn't probably been so big a competitive advantage so far, especially with the smart devices, it has become very, let's say, competitive than what the situation was ten years ago. Now it's a very simple competitive field. So there's pretty much four different alternatives for people to choose. And when somebody has something in accessibility, it becomes clear that everybody knows that that's the best category. So it has become this type of real kind of business competition. Also, when you know somebody has something, others need to follow. And the consumer groups are not that small and are a more ageing population in the western world. So, although it has been more social corporate responsibility, I feel it's becoming more real business competitiveness. That's maybe one message that I have had that there is a strong business element here.

It seems that a limited number of providers, increasing customer group and changes in public discourse redefine industry's position. Initially being an object for complying with policies and standards, accessibility has gradually

become a feature, shaping manufacturers' actions in the market. This indirectly suggests that a competitive nature of a small and emerging market may contribute to value creation of a disabled customer and product accessibility.

The IBR echoed the shift from positioning accessibility as a legal compliance issue to a demanded feature and marketing element, attracting customers:

Then you build in accessibility features because you believe that's why people will maybe buy this product.

In addition, some industry players recognise accessibility as an element, ensuring customers' loyalty. According to Company X, product accessibility features are starting to be communicated to the public alongside general product characteristics, and often are associated with CSR:

We want to also make this a kind of visible element in our brand promise that Company X is designing products for all. [...] But other than that, I think it comes indirectly through our brand that our brand is seen as the very best responsible company taking people into account and giving a trusted brand as well.

It seems that potentially due to the processes and practices, as outlined in this discussion, more proactive ICT manufacturers redraw their lifeworld on an accessible market. They overstep the association of accessibility with legal compliance and position it as an important product feature.

6.3.2. Corporate social responsibility and product accessibility information

Manufacturers' commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and their practice in providing national retailers with product information seem to be additional factors shaping markets accessibility and customer experience discussed in Chapter Five. With regard to CSR, the IBR noted that although CSR may serve as a positive framework encouraging more accessible practices, business' interest in and commitments to it are fragmented:

So the company is very market-focused I would say and companies can take decisions on something like corporate social responsibility and you would ask yourself again, 'Why do some companies put such an emphasis on it and develop a programme and a policy and have audits and all these things, and others don't?' In some way it's a company choice unless it's legally binding to have a policy on it, or some aspects of it.

Company X echoed the link between CSR and legislation. The informant noted that while technical requirements premised their activities, consideration of CSR enabled the company to advance and provide products that are more accessible than is legally required:

So these are the things [legal] that made it possible to proceed with these things, but then as part of this corporate responsibility, we want to do more than just the legal. But we don't do that only because of the legislation; we want to know their [users'] priorities.

The relation between CSR and non-disabled customers' satisfaction has been highlighted elsewhere, for example, in research done on banking (McDonald and Rundle-Thiele, 2008), tourism (Henderson, 2007) and shopping (Mohr et al., 2001). Giving its impact on benefits, such as customer loyalty, profit increase and positive public attitudes towards the company (Brown and Dacin, 1997, Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001), CSR is often considered in various business' activities. However, the Company X informant noted that CSR with regard to accessibility is relatively new in public discourse and manufacturers' practice:

In other areas of this corporate responsibility, we have a much longer history in discussing it with the commission in legislation and so on. So this is a rather new area and, in this area, we have mainly been involved in the US legislation that has been somehow showing the way.

On the one hand, the application of CSR on ICT accessibility may be seen as a strategic action, providing an advantage over the competitors and having a positive impact on customers' loyalty. On the other hand, the account suggests that while legislations act as an initial foundation for accessible product development, manufacturers, who have strong CSR, recognise and acknowledge differences in customer segment, and constructively assess changes in product design, may redefine the accessibility concept and encourage specific practice.

With regard to product accessibility information, it seems that manufacturers' communication with national retailers and information provision practice may play a role in shaping salespeople's lifeworld toward disabled customers and accessibility. To begin with, research data demonstrate some differences between product accessibility information acquisition practices in NBSH and BSH. The practices seem to shape disabled customers' experience and service delivery as discussed in Chapter Five. Specifically, the interview with the NBSH manager (LT) and observations of NBSH shop assistants (UK, LT) indicated that catalogues, Internet and training are the main sources providing professionals working in this type of shops with information about products in stock. As indicated

in Chapter Five, asked about accessible product features, the shop assistants searched for information on instructions leaflets, and others checked e-data bases. Contrary to this, research data suggests that BSH personnel are provided with information directly by the manufacturer. As the BSH manager (LT) noted, the information includes product accessibility, is provided in different formats and is the main source used by salespeople:

There is manufacturer's information that is used. There is Internet training base that has all the descriptions, you can find really big presentations with video material; many things, including accessibility, are addressed there.

The NBSH manager (LT) noted that salespeople use the Internet in 'emergency' cases that also include serving customers with impairments:

If something very urgent comes up, then the Internet is the main source. They look for information there.

It seems that the main information sources available to and used by NBSH personnel provide them with information intended for non-disabled customers and, in this respect, shape their knowledge set. This may create particular understanding of a customer and their interest in the product and its usage. In other words, product information oriented to non-disabled customers may prevent disabled people existing as customers within shop assistants' knowledge. Such practice threatens to position service delivery as a 'special' event, and disabled customers as 'different' shoppers.

At the other end of the spectrum were the experiences in BSH. For instance, the BSH manager (LT) hinted to shop assistants' personal initiatives to acquire more information:

We read additional information as well. Then we deepen the knowledge individually, because it is interesting job and the process itself is interesting.

The difference in service delivery in the two types of shop suggests that in having access to comprehensive information that does not distinguish product accessibility as a special dimension, BSH assistants may perceive information about accessibility as *one of* the features, get interested into its novelty and gain more knowledge, leading to 'mainstreamed' interaction with disabled customers.

Additionally to acquisition of theoretical information about a product, BSH shop assistants (LT) seek for practical skills:

When we get a product, we test it, because then we will have what to tell to our customers – and they will definitely ask, so we are

interested to know. We try all these functions, like sound, text zoom, voice-over, it is possible to convert colours. We try everything, so we could answer all the questions.

While none of the NBSH representatives identified similar practices, the BSH manager (LT) added that ICT users' expertise and knowledge is an important and valued source:

I would say that in terms of accessibility, the main source of practical information is disabled people. We introduce ourselves with technical features pretty well, but together with people we understand how they actually work, how they work in different cases and they can be used or not used by different people. So I would say that we acquire theoretical information from the literature and practical – from people.

While the quotation recalls the discussion on information for service performance and actual information (see Chapter Five), it highlights the importance of disabled customers' participation in bridging the gap between the two knowledge dimensions.

6.3.3. Trainings

Trainings provided to salespeople seem to contribute to shaping their perspectives on disabled customers and product accessibility. Interviews with Lithuanian BSH and NBSH managers, and informal chats with shop assistants in the UK, identified that sales personnel are regularly provided with professional training. However, similarly to dominant practices in product information provision, the focus is on general product features that are usually associated with non-disabled users. The NBSH manager (LT) said:

It is very important that once per year, in spring, the suppliers come and organise trainings for my employees. Then they present new products, demonstrate their features. This is very good, because then my people see 'from close' how the products work. Then such information becomes more familiar to them and in such a way they are able to introduce, describe and suggest the product that meets customers' wants and needs at the highest possible level. Such trainings last few days, so that all employees could attend and become familiar with new products.

This was echoed by the BSH manager (LT), who added focus on non-disabled customers' service techniques:

General trainings, specifically, selling techniques. So the main attention is paid to the general principles of customer service: what, how, why and so on.

It seems that business is aware that shop assistants' knowledge and professionalism are important factors, potentially leading to customer loyalty, service quality and higher profit. However, service and product accessibility for disabled customers often are either absent or limited. As an example, the NBSH manager (LT) noted that this is not a priority and thus is not addressed in staff training:

Accessibility and disability? I can't remember that we have ever discussed such topics. You see, business care about slightly different things'.

While informal chats with shop assistants in NBSH in the UK echo the account, it seems that practice in BSH differs. Describing the training content, the Lithuanian BSH manager said:

One of these things is communication and interaction with people with impairments.

Research data suggest that differences in training in NBSH and BSH may be shaped by different conception of and practice in the two shop types. Specifically, the Lithuanian BSH manager noted that being a part of an international network of one manufacturer, the shop is obliged to address accessibility in the organised trainings. Meanwhile, it seems that due to a high number of producers, whose products are sold in the NBSH, product accessibility gets lost in the process and is dominated by non-disabled customers-oriented features. Despite the focus on product accessibility, training techniques and product accessibility information delivery methods in Lithuanian BSH should be called into question. Specifically, the BSH manager (LT) described the training process:

On the general basis we discuss the situations that we have already had [serving disabled customers], discuss how we solved them and how we can improve the situation in the future. We have prepared situations, introduce ourselves to them, analyse, and share the experience. We are four shops in the country, so we use our common experience to decide how to do things. It is our own initiative. When it comes to training about disabled people, again, there is nothing very strict or written, because everything depends on the type of impairments. Overall, this is only additional dimension of service delivery.

Despite that product accessibility and disabled customers' service are addressed in training, the chosen methods raise several concerns. First,

disabled shoppers' experiences are perceived, sensed and interpreted through the lens of non-disabled shop assistants' positions and experiences. Such representation and imitation may not reflect disabled customers' realities and prevent the identification of barriers and potentials in the service delivery process. The second concern emerges from the first one. By deciding what and how is experienced by disabled customers, salespeople introduce a space for unequal power relations to emerge between shop assistants and customers with impairments. The ascribed power to decide how some of the shopping chain elements are experienced by disabled customers strengthens their exclusion, segregation and portrayal as vulnerable, and eliminates them from common knowledge creation about markets accessibility.

In summary, it was suggested that business practices contribute to shaping the lifeworld of accessible markets. It seems that the ratio between expenditures for accessible product production and received profit seem to be an important factor, shaping manufacturers' positions toward accessibility and user groups on which they decide to focus. It was evident that while legal instruments are an initial impetus for developing accessible products, engagement with CSR with regard to accessibility shape the way producers move forward with accessibility and ascribe values to disabled people as a customer segment. In other words, competition in the capitalist market and the need to comply with norms that have public acknowledgement and are perceived as good business practice, may contribute to reshaping manufacturers' lifeworld and re-defining notions of product accessibility.

It was also suggested that product information provided by manufacturers to sellers shape the latter's work environment, and professional practice sources that may lead either to disabled customers' exclusion and labelling as 'different' clients, or to positioning them as equal shoppers. Likewise, non-disabled customers-oriented training provision for shop assistants may erase people with impairments from salespeople's knowledge set about a customer. It was evident that disabled people are not involved in professionals' training development and delivery, this potentially leading to unequal power relations between the two actors. Overall, it was suggested that even though disabled people are present actors in the market, business practices shapes different and contradicting perspectives to and knowledge about this customer group. This, respectively, shapes service provision and the lifeworld of accessible markets.

6.4. Concluding comments

The present chapter is the first out of the two chapters, examining some structures that may shape disabled customers' exclusion, marginalisation and vulnerability, discussed in Chapter Five. It adapted a Habermasian concept of lifeworld (see Chapter Three) and explored manufacturers, IBR, national retailers of ICT products and civil society's views, understandings and positions toward disabled people as customers and accessibility of the EU single market. It suggested that stakeholders' lifeworld may shape disabled people's shopping experience. It addressed policy discourse and business practice as two potential factors shaping the positions. Previous literature has shown relatively little investigation in the way EU single market actors perceive people with impairments as market participants. The present chapter, therefore, aimed to narrow down this knowledge lacuna. Evidently, specific issues emerged.

To begin with, it seems that all stakeholders perceive disabled people as one group of ICT users and customers, sharing differences within the group because of their impairments. The categorisation seems to be partly shaped by policy instruments and market practices. For instance, ICT manufacturers find the classification useful as it helps in responding to standard requirements, and so to achieve legal compliance. The IDPO disaggregates attention to separate impairment groups as this may enable to ensure that barriers are communicated to the stakeholders and addressed in policy instruments. National retailers also tend to classify disabled shoppers. Here the categorisation seems to be premised on the frequency of serving shoppers with certain impairments. It was evident that all stakeholders tend to focus on some types of impairment, leaving others aside. Such practice mirrors policy rhetoric discussed in Chapter Two and may create hierarchical relationships among disabled people as ICT customers.

The present chapter has also shown that product accessibility and customer service are often linked with 'accessibility needs' that are usually associated with an individual's impairment. On the one hand, this may enable identifying product or service delivery features, preventing a barrier-free experience. On the other hand, such practice may divide disabled and non-disabled customers. For instance, people with impairments are often perceived as 'needing' technologies and this may lead to poorer product aesthetics, prevention from choosing a product of the highest quality and value, as well as ascribing the responsibility of finding a 'needed' item to a disabled shopper. Meanwhile non-disabled people are seen as 'wanting' customers, who are free and independent

agents in making shopping choices. The focus on disabled people's needs and the linkage of product features with impairment may transform accessibility solutions from means to overcome disabling product design into means 'fixing' an individual's impairment. It was also evident that national retailers, selling products produced by different manufacturers, are more likely to emphasise the 'need' than the retailers selling products of one provider. It was also suggested that manufacturers' CSR and provided information to national retailers may play a role in shaping shop assistants' perspectives and responses to disabled customers and service delivery patterns.

The chapter positioned policy discourse and certain business practices as two potential factors, shaping the discussed positions, and locating them in the context of the social or individual model of disability. As an example, civil society that shapes their activities around human rights instruments seem to have internalised the social model perspective more than the informants, whose professional activities are framed by technical requirements. The IDPO mainly referred to the CRPD, and values established in the Treaty were best articulated by this organisation. While conceptual perspectives of the Convention were detected in national DPOs' lifeworld and activities but were not articulated in the interviews, they were absent in business' perspectives. Indeed, US and EU legal instruments seem to play a key role in shaping their lifeworld and activities. The fact that EU business follows US legislations even though they are not legally obliged to do this suggests that legal instruments, that may provide access to larger customer groups, can be employed as a tool to shape business' lifeworld and practices toward the issue.

With regard to EU policies, international stakeholders identified them as having a positive impact on their activities but addressed the difference between voluntary and binding instruments. While soft legislations are usually considered by stakeholders who are more committed to accessibility and include it into CSR, they are often ignored by actors prioritising profit-oriented goals. Nevertheless, EU instruments seem to have a potential to provide the actors with a common language and a framework within which common values, positions, norms and lifeworld may be shaped. However, to fully achieve this, compatibility between US and EU instruments, as well as all stakeholders and disabled customers' involvement in the policy development process, is essential.

National instruments seem to be at the other end of the spectrum. While they do not impact international stakeholders' agendas or activities, national DPOs provided some evidence suggesting that national governments' focus on 'disability' issues, social service provision and

current funds allocation system may erase markets accessibility and customer rights from their lifeworld and professional activities. Similarly, the IDPO acknowledged insufficient focus on markets accessibility in national policies and positioned them as an object for change by international and global instruments. It was evident that harmonisation and compatibility across global, regional and national policies concerns international informants as this may either introduce a framework for employing similar language and creating common knowledge and practice, or diminishes business' activities in some parts of the EU single market.

Additionally to policy instruments, certain business practices may play a part in shaping industry's understanding of disabled customers, accessibility and related lifeworld. With regard to manufacturers, the ratio between expenditures for and received profit from the production of accessible items is an important factor in making business decisions about which features and for which user group will be considered. Likewise, superiority in competitiveness and higher customer loyalty may increase producers' interest in accessibility and respectively shape design decisions. Furthermore, the inclusion of accessibility into CSR commitments and cooperation with end-users are important factors leading toward the overstepping of legal standards, and providing greater accessibility than is legally required.

With regard to national sellers, it was evident that actors like BSH, who receive clear information about product accessibility that is not distinguished as special but is provided alongside general product features, seem to position individuals' customer role before their impairments and treat them as equal shoppers, who may need personalised service delivery. Meanwhile, NBSH shop assistants, who usually are not provided with information about and training on disability and accessibility, seem to be less aware of disabled customers and accessibility, and often have stronger disablist attitudes.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ACCESS TO THE DISCOURSE AND POWER RELATIONS

Having established differences and similarities in stakeholders' lifeworld toward markets accessibility and disabled customers, the current chapter argues that even though sometimes actors inhabit the same lifeworld, their access to the formulation of the discourse in the public sphere may differ, as one may be oppressed by the other. Misbalanced power and elimination from equal contribution to shape the discourse prevent stakeholders from creating comprehensive and quality knowledge about markets accessibility, and manifests in disabled customers' exclusion and vulnerability discussed in Chapter Five. Drawing on Habermas' theory of communicative action, this chapter sheds light on the way international and national ICT business and civil society may access the discourse, what their interactions, communication strategies and barriers are, preventing from or leading to reconciliation.

Provided evidences have been gauged through semi-structured interviews with and covert observations of regional and national business and civil society, and have suggested two stages of the process. First, stakeholders shape an internally unified position, and second, communicate it to and with others. It seems that actors' unified positions reflect their lifeworld, norms, perspectives, values and the nature of their activities. The State, policy framework within which they operate, decision making culture and practice, power relations within a setting, and position towards accessibility mould access to the discourse and a process of shaping a unified stakeholder position.

Having shaped a unified position, actors engage in interaction and communication with each other. Even though Chapter Six suggested that they recognise the need for more accessibility in the EU single market, often the interest in the interaction is premised on strategic goals. While the chapter addresses some of the underlying strategic reasons and suggests that at an empirical level, stakeholders' actions provide a certain degree of accessibility, the provisions usually do not meet disabled customers' realities (see Chapter Five) and their ontology is shaped by the actors' lifeworld on accessibility. Hence, it seems that democratisation of the process by which the discourse is shaped may change the horizons of the lifeworld and enable national governments and the EU to create more effective customer policies for disabled people in the mainstream private market.

The first part of the chapter explicates internal processes within the settings when shaping stakeholder position on accessibility. The second part examines the way actors communicate an internally agreed position to and with other stakeholders.

7.1. Formulating the discourse: internal processes

The process of accessing the formulation of the public discourse starts by shaping a unified position on the issue within a setting. Before engaging in interaction and communication with other stakeholders, actors have to create and use common language; understand the external world and environment in a similar way; share the same social norms and conventions; and understand each other's self-expressions (Habermas, 1979, 1984, 1985). While common understanding in general is difficult to achieve, to do this in the private market is even more complicated (see Chapter Three), and the aforementioned processes manifest in different forms and are of different content. One way to facilitate the process is to have a clearly defined position regarding a specific issue. Research data suggest that the actors are aware of this condition and aim to construct a position that reflects their lifeworld, and represents norms, conventions and goals. While a stakeholder's lifeworld plays a crucial role in the process of formulating a unified position, it seems that even though the actors within a setting inhabit the same lifeworld, some of them are dominated and oppressed by others. This leads to diversity of positions within a setting, introduces unequal power relations and may limit availability of accessible products. Thus, looking at the stakeholder position building process has assisted in providing evidence on the nature of the position, the balance between strategic and common goal oriented intentions, differences and similarities and on strengths and weaknesses of the processes.

Firstly, light is shed on international perspectives. The discussion looks at how ICT manufacturers, the IBR and the IDPO shape unified positions, and considers the similarities and differences of the process among the actors. Later on, experiences of national retailers and civil society in Lithuania and the UK are addressed. This is followed by a brief reflection on the disabled users and customers' role in the position shaping process. The practice of building a stakeholder position is linked with power relations and the way this may impact the content of the position.

7.1.1. Stakeholder position: international stakeholders

International stakeholders' lifeworld and position in the public sphere regarding markets accessibility is not monolithic, and its content depends on who and how is provided with the access to its formation. With regard to manufacturers, the Company X informant noted that product accessibility is firstly discussed between accessibility designers and disabled users. However, their knowledge of intersubjective realms of everyday life is not treated as fully suitable for business realms. It is usually translated into language of costs and benefits, and in discussion of forthcoming technologies is transmitted as a quantitative argument. However, even after this reconstruction of the commonly created knowledge and position, usually it is not accepted as matter-of-course or valuable. It has to be presented and communicated within the company as an attractive and potentially beneficial factor. To illustrate, the Company X informant noted:

I am representing accessibility in the Company X and they note that down and I start to push that if there's a clear message coming that I think there is a huge amount of people behind that need. So we try to make the different needs coming from different directions so we may then start a priority list, a top ten. Then my job is to negotiate that internally and try to get that to happen.

Focus on financial reasoning and unequal power relations in the decision-making process was echoed by the IBR. The informant noted that although business' position towards accessibility is fragmented (see Chapter Six), profit oriented aims and unequal access to shaping the company's lifeworld and position are typical and dominant across the board:

There's people deciding at the top and then they have different products, they have different positions in the market, they are in different markets. So the company is very market-focused I would say.

While cost-benefit analysis is an inextricable part of accessible product development (de Assunção et al., 2010, Sey, 2008, Vimarlund and Olve, 2005), the accounts suggest that power relations in the company may play a role in providing professionals with an access to the discourse regarding the position on accessibility. While the Company X informant did not specifically identify misbalanced power, used words such as 'they', 'I start to push', 'to try that to happen' suggest existing tensions in and a particular culture of arguing and reasoning the professional position within the company. On the one hand, such practice and professional tensions may assist in crystallising and sharing knowledge, identifying barriers and potentials (Niemann, 2004). On the other hand, the IBR informant's reference to 'people deciding at the top' suggests that individuals,

occupying higher position in the company's administrative hierarchy, may have better access to the process of shaping the company's position, than professionals directly engaged with users and knowing their experiences. This creates a risk that knowledge created by users and designers may be minimised by more powerful actors and business' focus on the ratio between costs and benefits.

The assumption that accessibility designers' access to the discourse is often restricted was furthered by the IBR:

And also, keeping in mind that some of these companies have many people that are involved in accessibility and we're dealing primarily with the engineers, the technical people that do the behind-the-scenes work. So we might see all the work that they're doing, but they don't have a communications type of role to play and promote their own agendas.

IBR's reference to designers' 'own agendas' was echoed by the IDPO, who noted that 'people, who are working on accessibility issues want to have their own agendas – to show that they have done as well, to have a bit of work recognised'. While this confirms presence of unequal power relations, it also suggests that such practice may lead to diversity of positions on accessibility within a company. Specifically, designers may own separate positions, reflecting their professional lifeworld that is shaped together with disabled users. In such a context, their positions do not entirely match with the company's position, which often seems to be founded on the ratio between expenditures and received profit. Hence, financial calculations become a medium, via which designers and users' lifeworlds are colonised not in the sense of destroying them, but through instrumentalising their participation and contribution, and measuring a 'better argument' in financial terms.

Unequal opportunities to access the discourse and the mismatch between professionals' positions may limit the consideration of disabled users' perspectives in the product development process. This and inability to 'communicate own agendas' suggest that knowledge about accessibility and potential accessibility solutions may be more developed and thicker, than are available to the public. In other words, being excluded from fully communicating gathered knowledge, professionals may be prevented from effectively translating it into practice. If this is the case, then ICT manufacturers that are characterised by such or similar processes, are at risk of making not fully informed product development decisions that decrease availability of accessible items.

While the manufacturers' position on accessibility is reflected in product features but does not equally reflect all professionals' lifeworld, IBR aims to

involve all member organisations and to construct a position representing a general standpoint of the EU ICT industry:

Well, many times it's just a group trying to create a unified position. So we might have a subject, a different piece of legislation or an approach to different use of standards, for example, and we'll dialogue together and discuss the issue and see if we can find a common approach that represents industry. So we always try to have more of a consensus-based approach.

Internship experience suggests that one of the factors shaping IBR's aim to involve all members is the legal obligations. Specifically, members pay an annual membership fee and their obligations to the IBR as well as received benefits from the IBR, including representation in broader EU policy debate, are established in a contract. Hence, IBR is legally obliged to approach each member organisation and to equally consider their position. It seems that interaction that is founded on contractual obligation may enable the stakeholder to provide an institutionalised framework for sharing and creating knowledge and values. Shaping such practice within the EU policy framework that is an initial springboard for the interaction (see Chapter Six) may introduce clarity and commonality among the members and shape similar identity, common values and norms, leading toward the emergence of a common lifeworld on and communicative action regarding accessibility (Niemann, 2004). Involving members, operating in different regions and market sectors, listening to and considering their perspectives may enable the IBR to reflect on individual and group positions and actions, and to justify them in policy debates (Fields, 1991). Equality of all members' involvement in shaping the unified position introduces common language, enabling to establish a common ground among EU ICT business and to communicate it to other actors. In addition, a jointly shaped position may serve as a 'bumper', taking away a part of the responsibility when separate companies communicate with customers, policy makers or other stakeholders. To illustrate, the IBR said:

So we really need also internally to mediate positions to reconcile it as much as possible. So internally we really try to then speak on behalf of industry and present the position. If you wouldn't do that, I think how would you talk to industry, ever? You have national members and they all have different markets and they all have different experiences, they have different levels of experience and accessibility, but then again, if they want to talk to us they also need to have a position because it is just simply true that you can't speak to 200 people, you're going to need maybe two or three weeks in a debate and we are one of the key stakeholders to do that. That

makes it also easier for our members because they don't feel they're, they only want to be talked to. In some way we provide a platform, which also gives it a certain amount of neutrality and objectivity to the debate.

All members' involvement and consideration of their positions and experiences enables the IBR to synthesise separate ideologies, knowledge and strategic goals. This allows constructing positions that reflect the EU ICT business's dominant perspectives but are not too specific or focused on unique cases. On the one hand, the practice when the EU ICT industry holds a unified position as one stakeholder and 'takes off' responsibility from separate members may open a scene for a dialog. It provides a medium within which companies are freer to share experiences and positions, than they would be as independent actors in public or policy debate. In such a context, industry is more likely to become more open and interested in communication with other stakeholders within and outside the ICT industry. On the other hand, such practice may foster de-personalisation, alienating companies from public matters (Amalric and Banuri, 1994) and disabled customers' realities.

Similarly to the IBR, while direction of the IDPO position is informed by policy instruments (see Chapter Six), the organisation aims that its content would represent disabled Europeans' experiences and perspectives, and would be shaped together with national member organisations. Whilst the informant did not explicitly address cooperation with national DPOs, internship observations suggest that in order to shape a unified position, the organisation organises regular meetings and events, constantly consults with the members, has set up various working groups, and has ascribed roles for member organisations and specific individuals. These means are employed as a space, within which national representatives share experiences, concerns and expectations. Similarly to the IBR, the IDPO synthesises gained knowledge and transforms it into a unified position that reflects different national realities but is not too specific to a particular MS.

Research data suggest that international stakeholders' experience of shaping a position and its content might be affected by imposed time frame by the EC. To illustrate, the IBR and IDPO several times referred to time pressure and a need to react and contribute to ongoing policy discussions quickly and within a limited time. As an example, accounts such as 'try to come up with a reasonable answer within a reasonable time frame' or 'sometimes it's very short notice and again, it's very complex' were common in the IBR's narratives. Likewise, the IDPO noted that in

seeking to equally participate in meetings with policy makers and ICT business, ability to react fast is important:

And also you have to react fast and in an efficient way. For business time is money and we are aware of this.

Similarly, internship experience suggests that ICT manufacturers often face the need to be maximally efficient in a minimal time period. For instance, in the attended meetings at the EP, individuals representing ICT companies often emphasised that policy makers have 'no clue about manufacturers' experiences, as the provided time frame to react to the proposals is too short' or 'do not consider business practice'. Under such circumstances, international stakeholders risk to shape a position that incompletely reflects national members' realities and lifeworlds. This echoes the discussion in Chapter Three and suggests that by imposing insensible time frames to react to policy instruments, the EC and the Parliament may act as a system which, through a technicisation of the process, may intrude in international and national actors' realities, colonise their lifeworlds and prevent from engagement in communicative practice.

7.1.2. Stakeholder position: national stakeholders

Stakeholder position building and access to the formulation of the discourse in the public sphere at national level differs from the discussed international practices. Echoing discussion in Chapters One and Six, it is worth reiterating that one of the potential reasons behind a vaguely established national DPOs' position toward market accessibility and their limited access to the discourse is historically, socially and politically formed perspective of 'disability issues', and respective distribution of funds by the state. With regard to 'disability issues' the UK informant said:

There are eighty thousand charities in the United Kingdom. A lot of those charities are concerned with health and disability issues. Some of them will be concerned with disabled people's ability to participate as consumers in society. Some of them will have even people working on those issues, but not very many.

Lithuanian DPO informants, who added areas such as employment, vocational training and access to education, echoed this. Participants representing both countries noted that activity areas are not independently chosen, but are informed by national governments and funds distribution. The current state's practice to identify priorities for funding the third sector and limited recognition of disabled people as equal customers (see Chapter Two) respectively shape DPOs' agendas and lifeworld (see Chapter Six). Having weak lifeworld towards the issue, DPOs

do not have formed norms, values and positions that could be represented to the public or initiate the engagement with other stakeholders. This suggests that using funds allocation as a medium, the state may act as a system colonising civil society's lifeworld (see Chapter Three) and regulating their access to the public discourse on market accessibility.

With regard to national ICT sellers, it seems that their experiences of accessing the discourse on market accessibility are similar to those of national DPOs, and are shaped by the system within which they operate. To begin with, research data suggest that the product-ordering system and practice impact shop managers and assistants' autonomy and mould the expression and communication of accessibility- and disabled customer service-related knowledge. NBSH and BSH shop assistants' narratives suggest that pre-determined lists for ordering products often dominate their empirical knowledge, accumulated during direct interaction with disabled customers. To illustrate, the NBSH (LT) manager noted that only products' quantity and ordering time depend on the shop personnel, actual product selection decisions being made by the main corporation:

We have catalogues and then we decide what and when to order. Actually, it is important to note that the final word when ordering the products depends not on us but on the central office. We coordinate with them only the supply and demand, what people buy the most, what we have already sold out, what we need. In other words, customer related tendencies depend on us, but the product-line itself on the main office, because all our shops offer identical products. So this is how we find out – we coordinate everything with the central office but also adjust to our clients demand and wishes.

The BSH manager (LT) echoed such practice. The informant noted that all orders are done via the online system, providing a list of products that are or soon will be out of stock. On the one hand, such practice introduces consistency among the same branch shops and assists shop personnel in making commerce decisions. On the other hand, by framing customer needs and preferences within provided products list, business may deny users' realities and prevent shop personnel from expressing knowledge about the demand of accessible technologies gathered from disabled customers. Being restricted from ordering items that are not on the list but may have features enquired about by disabled shoppers, sales people are eliminated from contributing to the discourse. This colonises bits of their lifeworld, prevents sharing gathered knowledge and decreases availability of accessible products.

Furthermore, shop assistants are excluded from the discourse on accessible retail premises. Informants' accounts suggest that despite

knowledge gathered from disabled customers about disabling and enabling elements of retail premises, they are not involved in planning the shops' layout or service delivery practice. As an example, the Lithuanian NBSH manager listed several accessible elements:

There are no sills in the shop; the lighting is good; the products are located low; the space between shelves is big; some of the products are hung on the wall, so that customers could see a full picture from far; the entrance is wide; the gates open automatically.

However, the informant noted that none of these decisions depend on shop personnel. Indeed, the participant addressed the conception of the retail network that aims to create comfortable and pleasant experience for non-disabled customers:

Everything comes back to the conception of the shop: we are located only on one floor; the space between shelves is big, because some of our trolleys are bigger than traditional; the layout of products in all shops is the same, so there is no big difference for the client, because he feels everywhere the same (NBSH, LT).

The Lithuanian BSH manager and two shop assistants in the UK echoed the logic of macdonalisation (Ritzer, 2004). They noted that retail premise design and product layout depend on the network and are oriented toward the provision of an identical and recognisable environment and customer service across all branches. However, the same informants noted that some of the shop furniture causes disruptions for disabled shoppers. To illustrate, the Lithuanian NBSH manager noted that sometimes desks and vertical displays are too high for wheelchair users, and shiny surfaces often cause trouble for some shoppers with vision impairments. However, even though shop personnel are aware of some enabling and disabling design decisions, they have no opportunities to comment on the forthcoming furnishing. In other words, having empirically generated knowledge on accessibility, salespeople do not have access to the discourse and an opportunity to share gauged information with other stakeholders.

7.1.3. Stakeholder position and disabled customers

Despite different and contradicting practices and lifeworlds (see Chapter Six), business and civil society seek to gain information about disabled customers' experiences and realities, and to incorporate it in a unified position. This, via user groups and DPOs, provides disabled customers with indirect access to public discourse. Nevertheless, involvement level differs, and international stakeholders seem to be more active in including disabled customers than are national actors. With regard to international

practices, Company X and the IDPO seem to be the most proactive and in acknowledging disabled people's expertise and knowledge regarding accessibility. However, the underlying interests behind the practice of the two parties differ. Company X noted that usually they approach user organisations aiming to identify accessibility features that should be incorporated in forthcoming technologies. The informant said that seeking to achieve this goal, accessibility designers aim to provide an unbiased platform where users could share their experiences and accounts, and treats the received knowledge as valid:

I think we try to avoid saying to them what they need, and whatever they need, it's a fairly reasonable (Company X).

While such user involvement reminds of inclusive design discussed in Chapter One, the practice questions accessibility of communication and the interaction process. Internship experience suggests that even though some manufacturers are interested in and willing to include disabled customers' accounts into a unified position, they often lack accessible communication skills. While this calls into question professionals' training discussed in Chapter Six, it also suggests that lack of such skills may leave certain knowledge unrevealed or misinterpretation of shared accounts.

Since non-disabled customer-oriented features dominate over product accessibility (see Chapters One and Six), the quantitative dimension of disabled users involvement becomes important in internal company discussions. Specifically, the Company X participant revealed that a high number of disabled informants is often used as a supporting argument in the internal negotiations on accessibility. While such practice provides better possibilities for designers to succeed in the internal discussions, it also enables disabled customers to access the public discourse and to contribute to creating accessible markets. To illustrate, the informant said:

They [consumer groups and organisations] give a lot of feedback and we do have a constant dialog with them. Based on those discussions, we have a very clear priority list of what are the things from an accessibility perspective that need to be done. And then when we have that, that's then what we negotiate internally in our company, in our business, and they do the business priorities based on this something that we can do or we can do something more. So I would be lying if I said that it's easy and we get things very well done, but in many cases, other priorities are more important than this accessibility thing (Company X).

While user involvement assists in identifying demanded accessibility features, it also enables the company to foresee an approximate number of potential buyers. In other words, while designers and users engage in

interaction seeking to construct common language and knowledge about accessibility, the capitalistic nature of the company exploits the process for the profit-oriented purposes. It intrudes into designers and users' interaction and realities, and erases some of the bits. Most importantly, this interferes in accessibility as a precondition for equally participating in society, and introduces a financial dimension that seems to play an important role in product development.

Similarly to the manufacturers, the IDPO aims to be aware of different accessibility-related realities (see Chapter Six). Accounts such as 'different groups of persons with disabilities', 'different needs', 'the approach to accessibility is really widening' suggest that the organisation aims to cover the widest possible range of experiences. Such an approach may provide people with different kinds of impairment with a possibility to share their accounts and to indirectly participate in public discourse on accessible markets.

Research data suggest that manufacturers and the IDPO prioritise collective disabled customers' experiences rather than individual cases. As a result, national DPOs that are interested in accessibility and have relevant expertise become valued partners in the IDPO's position building process. Meanwhile, Company X prioritises collaboration and knowledge exchange with regional and global organisations, which represent people with impairment types that are targeted by the company:

So, naturally, we have very close collaboration with organisations in X country, just because the majority of the accessibility people, are there not many in our company, are now located here in X country. So we discuss what we're planning with the A organisation of disabled people and B organisation of disabled people, and so on. Then there's one in the UK that's the RNIB. It is also somehow hosting the World Blind Union. So I feel that through them we get a very global view of the needs of both blind people and partially sighted people. So they are a very good partner. And it's also a big organisation, which means that they do have special people that are assigned to these types of high-end projects. So then the discussion becomes very fruitful and both sides are talking kind of the same language.

A 'global view on needs' is important for the company as well as for the IDPO, because arguments based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data are more valued in policy debates (Mays et al., 2005, Head, 2010, Veltri et al., 2014). On the one hand, such practice provides some potential for communicative action to emerge as a high number of diverse actors are involved. This leads to the revelation of unknown knowledge

domains (Risse, 1999, 2000, Habermas, 1984, 1985). On the other hand, a strategic interest or common goal achievement-oriented premise of such actions should be questioned. Specifically, qualitative and quantitative data founded arguments provide the highest possibility to succeed in debates (Mays et al., 2005) and hence to achieve strategic interests.

7.2. Formulating the discourse: public sphere

Having internally shaped a unified position, stakeholders get involved in public communication and interaction with other actors. In holding multiple, sometimes conflicting and changing lifeworlds and positions, participating agents are aware of the differences but seek to engage in a communication process that would create a platform for achieving 1) a common goal of a more accessible private market, 2) strategic stakeholder's goals, 3) and the raising of awareness of accessibility. The present section, therefore, firstly sheds light on stakeholders' interaction, aimed towards providing more accessible practice to disabled customers. It then moves on and suggests that additionally to achieving this common goal, the stakeholders engage in interaction aiming to attain certain strategic goals that are usually related with their professional activities and policy framework, within which they operate. The section concludes with discussion on how the interaction may be employed as a tool to raise actors' awareness of accessibility and own alertness of other stakeholders' realities.

7.2.1. Communication and a common goal

Acknowledging the need for more accessibility in the EU single market (see Chapter Six), international and national business and civil society position it as a common goal and engage in communication with each other in order to achieve it. Despite this ideological commonality, the reasons why the actors engage in the communication differ. With regard to international perspectives, the IBR defined communication with other stakeholders as an 'exchange of views', enabling to identify overlapping and differing positions and activities that would lead toward more accessibility:

However, we do lots of exchange of views, not necessarily with regulators but also with consumer groups, user groups, looking at how we can both work together to make sure that our manufactured products are accessible.

Meanwhile, the IDPO noted that one of the goals behind the communication with other stakeholders, and especially with the industry is the possibility to test validity of the position as this helps to know 'if what we are proposing is feasible'.

Additionally, constant communication with other stakeholders may enable gathering insights into the context, within which other parties operate. To illustrate, the IBR noted:

I think, for organisations like the IDPO, not easy to come up with general recommendations of how. You can take it so far and then you run into the problem that you have to be probably more specific than what you're used to and I think that's where the user feedback is probably this, for this group, harder to capture than for other groups. So I think they have actually a tough job to provide us with relevant feedback that then actually can be taken into consideration.

The narrative and internship experience suggest that common goal-oriented communication between the IBR and the IDPO may overstep the need to gather facts and information on specific issues. Indeed, it often goes beyond the exchange of facts and the employment of language as a medium to coordinate actions (see Chapter Three), and addresses deeper communication structures. Such interaction between the two stakeholders reminds of the shift from using language as a tool for reaching understanding to language as a medium for engaging in communicative action (Habermas, 1984). According to Habermas (1985), such interaction enables actors to mediate their relations, actions and behaviour and to engage in social relationships with each other that provide more potential for achieving a common goal.

National stakeholders' participation in and input to the public discourse on accessibility differs from the international actors. To begin with, research data suggest that while international stakeholders usually perceive each other as equally important and competent actors, interaction and communication between international and national stakeholders are framed within certain power relations. To begin with, as suggested in Chapter Six, international retail networks do not provide salespeople with a platform for sharing their knowledge about product and retail premise accessibility. As an example, the Lithuanian BSH manager noted that although the new furniture in the shop is more accessible than the previous one, it still causes barriers for and exclusion of customers with impairments. However, the informant noted that even if shop personnel have suggestions on how to change disabling practices, there are neither established practice nor available channels for communicating this

knowledge to the actors responsible for retail premise design and furniture:

The network decides on the furniture, we have no personal influence upon it. We got all this furniture one year ago, they are lower, more accessible. And I believe, they are more comfortable and convenient for the customer. Well, maybe only a cash-desk is a little bit too high, so then we bring the chip and pin device personally to the person. And the mounts are too high for shorter customers, or those, who sit in a wheelchair (BSH, LT).

It seems that due to inter-sectorial communication and decision making practice, the process of achieving a common goal is fragmented and remains unrealised. In other words, even though manufacturers and national sellers seek to provide more accessible practice, absent communication and knowledge sharing practice between the two actors may cause some of the barriers faced by disabled customers (see Chapter Five). In addition, since two UK shop managers said that they are not allowed to participate in research and only specific departments of the global network can provide the permission, suggests that salespeople's professional realities and communicative potential may be suppressed by more powerful actors, operating at regional or global level.

In addition, power relations among national actors may shape common goal-related communication. With regard to civil society, while the UK DPO did not explicitly address relations with the policy bodies, the Lithuanian DPO shared opposite experience. The informants noted that the organisation is rarely involved in the development of legal instruments and that the discussions with the government usually start when the final decisions are drafted. Such practice provides limited space for civil society's participation in the public discourse. It also limits the opportunity to influence the policy framework, discussed in Chapter Two, within which the organisation builds the lifeworld and activities regarding markets accessibility. This suggests that even though it is commonly believed that the role of the third sector has increased during the last forty-five years (Haque, 2002) and its contribution to shaping the political-economic landscape and business' agendas (Teegen et al., 2004) is recognised at international and global levels, some national governments may have opposite practices in recognising the DPOs' role and in regulating access to the public discourse. The discussed Lithuanian practice may prevent civil society from sharing and creating knowledge that would enable the government to shape effective policies on accessibility. In addition, it may 'deactivate' civil society and turn it into an object of governance. Such interactions potentially position the two actors in opposition and may

eliminate the third sector's right to 'seek to identify their rationality as governmental practices' (Sending and Neumann, 2006:652).

Engaging in communication with each other, stakeholders seek not only to introduce more accessibility to the EU single market, but also to achieve strategic goals. The following discussion, therefore, sheds light on such intentions and practices, as well as on some potential reasons behind them.

7.2.2. Communication and strategic goals

Engagement in communication often is strategically planned, aiming to gather information related with separate stakeholder's activities. To begin with, the IDPO noted that communication with business enables the organisation to gather information that would support certain positions, presented to other stakeholders. The informant provided an example of how knowing about good experiences in the market may be used to strengthen the position and to back it up by cost-benefit related arguments:

I mean, in the sense that it's always good – we can use things that are good experiences, for instance, to show that it is possible that there is, for example, a market potential for certain goods, if they are accessible.

Finance-related reasoning seems to play a part in manufacturers' will to communicate with user organisations. Recalling discussion in section 7.1, it seems that information gathered through this interaction enables the company to identify accessibility needs and preferences, excluding and accessible practices, users' preferences, and foreseeing potential risks of investing into the development of certain features. This may assist the company to manage expenditures and receive maximum profit. To illustrate, it is worth looking back at the account shared by Company X in 7.1.4:

They [consumer groups and user organisations] give a lot of feedback and we do have a constant dialog with them. Based on those discussions, we have a very clear priority list of what are the things from an accessibility perspective that need to be done.

The IBR maintains constant communication with the IDPO. It treats the organisation as an important source of synthesised information about disabled users and their accessibility experiences. The interaction provides the IBR with information that the association would not be able to gather by itself. To illustrate, it is worth recalling the account used in 7.2.1:

I think, for organisations like the IDPO, not easy to come up with general recommendations on how. You can take it so far and then you run into the problem that you have to be probably more specific that what you're used to and I think that's where the user feedback is probably this, for this group, harder to capture than for other groups. So I think they have actually a tough job to provide us with relevant feedback that then actually can be taken into consideration (IBR).

It seems that international stakeholders engage in communication with each other aiming to gather information that is unavailable in their natural settings, but is important for successful operation.

In addition, international stakeholders may position communication as a means for shaping a common ground on an issue among the actors. The common ground is a conditionally negotiated and agreed position that is recognised by the involved parties. Usually it is considered in public or policy discussion, especially at the EP and EC. Due to complexity and diversity in stakeholders' interests and activities, the common ground is not a definite, static or documented agreement. Indeed, it is fluid and flexible. It depends on stakeholders' interpretations, constantly changes, and the participating agents may enter and exit it at different stages. Research data suggests that the dominant reason behind international stakeholders' interest in shaping common ground is to identify and negotiate issues and perspectives that in public or EU policy discussions may either challenge and contradict their positions, or support and back them up. To illustrate, the IDPO provided an example of how the organisation has strengthened an internally shaped position (see 7.1) in the discussions on web accessibility:

At the same time we can use them, because, for example, we had an event we organised with them on the available accessibility to public websites and we actually used them to say that this legislation was positive. So for them, okay, they use us, but we also have a benefit because we can say, 'Okay, industry is in favour.' You see and that helps us and at the same time they can bring some expertise which is also useful in a debate for us. So, I may be a bit cynical, but [laughs] you have to use this opportunity.

While other stakeholders did not explicitly address such practice, internship experience suggests that such an approach is also typical for the IBR and some manufacturers. To illustrate, some IBR members noted that it is important to know 'what and where civil society is going to say'. This enables adjusting and strengthening a company's position. In a similar vein, the IBR aims to maintain interaction with the IDPO as this enables to

strengthen a unified position that is presented in EU policy debates. Hence, it seems that international players perceive each other as knowledgeable and competent partners in the EU accessibility debate and recognise opportunities provided by the cooperation. In addition, business actors seem to acknowledge civil society's expertise and role played in broadening and adapting activities in a way they would meet actual needs of wider populations (Teegen et al., 2004). Even though the underlying reason behind the interaction seem to be founded on strategic goals, some business actors acknowledge and are aware that operating in the context of current instrumental policy procedures, and having limited knowledge about accessibility, they cannot be successful alone (Lindenberg, 2001). This suggests that operating in a relatively new area, stakeholders may not be internally self-sufficient (Aldrich and Pfeffer, 1976) and have to interact with the actors, who access and manage accessibility-related information that is unknown or unreachable without their intervention (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). According to Bouwen (2002), such interactions make the actors interdependent from each other and encourage them to develop 'inter-organizational influence' (Bouwen, 2002:368) regarding accessibility and to exploit it in EU policy discussions. Hence, it seems that to some extent, strategic goals-oriented communication may play a role in reshaping power relations between business and civil society, and to reveal knowledge sets important for more accessible practice in the EU single market.

Common past experience and well established cooperative relationships lead to stakeholders' interdependence and minimise withdrawal possibility. To illustrate, the IDPO provided an example of how the organisation agreed to support the Z consumer organisation's position and expected the same in return. However, the exchange process did not work, one of potential reasons being the short time of professional interaction:

But I think it takes time and there are some things that do not work well at the beginning so, for instance, we had, we tried, for example, to reform our foreign issue that we are going to have a hearing at the European Parliament, the consumers' organisation and how to support that position. We said that we would take on board their position on certain issues and we ask, 'Can you please also refer to this issue when you will speak because we have not the possibility and then, in the end, they didn't do it.

While no legitimate explanations can be made as more research is necessary, it is worth shedding light on the exchange theories and models, analysing EU business and public actors' interactions (Greenwood et al., 1992, Blau, 1964, Pappi and Henning, 1999). They suggest that before

engaging into any exchange practice, the actors measure and calculate costs and benefits of such interaction and respectively shape their decisions. The exchange process among the organisations will be robust and reliable only when all participating actors benefit from the interaction. Hence, it can be assumed that, since accessibility and disabled customer rights is a relatively new area that is yet undiscovered by non-disabled customer rights protection bodies (see Chapter Two), consumer organisations do not value knowledge exchange with the IDPO, as the nature of benefits remains unrecognised.

Research data suggest that international stakeholders are aware that other actors may exploit the communicative interaction for the achievement of strategic goals. As an example, the IDPO seems to be aware that business may perceive the organisation not only as a partner, but also as a marketing element:

I think they see us in many cases as a way to get information, sometimes yeah and we may be asked information about certain things. Not always we are able to provide this information. But mainly as a way of also of improving the image sometimes. So no, I know that there is a certain use that they can make of us, but at the same time, we can also make use of them.

Internship experience suggests that the IBR and some manufacturers are in a similar position and are aware that the engagement in communication is closely linked with the achievement of strategic goals. As an example, some IBR members noted that they are willing to share information with the IDPO, if this assists the organisation to succeed in its everyday practice. However, provided information should not contradict with the company's internal policy and should not have a negative impact on its position in the market. In this respect, aiming to keep the balance between provided information that may lead either to more accessibility and knowledge, or to the invasion in business practice, international business is not completely open to external actors. To illustrate, although the IBR organises regular meetings for accessibility partners, each meeting is usually divided into two parts: public and private. While information exchange about stakeholders' internal and external experiences, perspectives and positions takes place in the public part and various actors, including the IDPO and EU policy makers, can attend it, the private part of the meeting involves only IBR members. Then, information gathered in the public part of the meeting is discussed and light is shed on business' perspectives that may be contradicted or challenged by other stakeholders in public or policy discussions.

Stakeholders' communication and interaction is related not only with the achievement of common and strategic goals, but also with awareness raising of accessibility. The following discussion, therefore, focuses on the link between stakeholders' interaction and awareness of markets accessibility and disabled customers across the EU.

7.2.3. Communication and awareness

International stakeholders may perceive communication as a means to increase other actors' awareness of accessibility and their own awareness of other's experiences. With regard to increasing other actors' awareness of accessibility, the IDPO noted that the organisation uses communication as a 'reminder', which does not allow other actors to forget about markets accessibility and disabled customers:

So, the goal for us is to ensure that we did the work and that they also don't forget persons with disabilities.

Using such strategy, the IDPO aims to ensure gradual inclusion of disabled customers-related issues into agendas of organisations representing non-disabled customers' rights. Indeed, by interacting with such organisations the IDPO aims to achieve two goals. First, to inform that different provisions for non-disabled customers may benefit market participants with impairments. Second, certain adjustments have to be anticipated in order to ensure equal customer service:

They have a goal which is to define the interest of consumers and which is a goal which we can also share. Of course we have specific issues within that that we want to ensure that also consumers with disabilities are on board. But there are a lot of issues on which they work which can have a very positive impact for persons with disabilities even though they might not be affected directly, the issue that they are disabled or not, but they have a positive impact (IDPO).

The IBR acknowledged gaps in manufacturers' knowledge about accessibility and addressed awareness raising of users' needs and preferences:

But I think it is also a process of awareness raising and I wouldn't always claim that manufacturers are the first ones to know everything that helps in society. They know probably what the customers like in terms of features, but also on issues like accessibility I think there is [a lack of knowledge].

In a similar vein, the IDPO addressed retailers' awareness raising of accessible products and service delivery:

You also need a good awareness of the sales sector. Not only how products are developed and built, but also how products are sold and how consumer service is developed, this consumer service is open to consider all the different needs and requires, I think, yeah, a change.

The narrative recalls discussion in Chapter One on an accessible shopping chain. Alongside addressing technical product accessibility, the informant addressed accessible service delivery and the shop assistants' role. The hint to required change suggests that current practice in the retail sector does not comply with the IDPO's position and should be changed in order to ensure equal customer practice for disabled people.

With regard to increasing own awareness of other stakeholders' experiences, research data suggests that some informants acknowledge the importance of being alert to other's realities, concerns and experiences. Specifically, the IDPO noted that awareness of difficulties and challenges experienced by business is important and may allow identifying potential solutions, leading to more accessibility. It seems that sometimes the IDPO is willing to support the stakeholders and contribute to overcoming the obstacles:

If there is some difficulty, we can try to understand them. I think it's very difficult for industry to say that they maybe have a difficulty. I mean, if it's – especially if it's a sincere thing, is not to say, 'Okay, but it's not possible', and, you know. But if they say, 'Okay, we have made this feature available in a product but we have the difficulty'. This is a very useful thing to know and it's also useful to know, okay, maybe we have to try to see what we can do with the podcasters and see how to overcome this. So this kind of contribution is very useful.

While none of the other informants verbally expressed similar perspectives, internship experience suggests a similar IBR position towards the IDPO. Specifically, some IBR members several times noted that they care not only about the IDPO's positions but also about their experiences of operating in the field. In this regard, such questions as 'how can we help you' or informal meetings focused on practical aspects of everyday professional activities were common between the IDPO and the IBR. While one can argue that such actions are oriented toward achievement of strategic goals, research data suggest that the two actors are also willing to understand [verstehen] each other's realities (see Chapter Three).

Stakeholders' communication and raised awareness seem to have enduring value. To illustrate, the IDPO provided an example of a partnership with a consumer organisation working in the standardisation area:

We had a partnership with an organisation of consumers in the area of standardisation which is now discontinued, but that means, in any case, we have got to know each other and they are more aware of issues regarding persons with disabilities and that was also helpful for us, because in the end it opened up, for us, the possibility to cooperate directly, which is somehow maybe more effective with the organisations of standardisation in general (IDPO).

It seems that sometimes after the official collaborative interaction is finished, shared and created knowledge about and raised awareness of each other's realities and positions continue being considered. Hence, common goal oriented communication is elastic and its results are present and being employed after the actors' direct interaction is over.

7.3. Concluding comments

The present chapter was the second of two chapters examining the structures potentially shaping disabled customers' experience. It has suggested that even though stakeholders may inhabit the same lifeworld on markets accessibility as suggested in Chapter Six, one may be oppressed by the other and have limited access to the formulation of the discourse in the public sphere, on what needs to be done to make private market more accessible to disabled customers. It seems that the process of shaping the public discourse consists of two stages: first – shaping a unified position within a setting, and second – communicating it to and with other stakeholders. With regard to the first stage, international business and civil society form separate unified positions that reflect their professional activities, policy framework within which they operate and internally negotiated lifeworld. Although the process varies from stakeholder to stakeholder, it is often linked with power relations and money. For instance, manufacturers' orientation to profit maximisation often oppresses the designers' lifeworld that is usually shaped together with disabled users. Unequal distribution of power and insufficient opportunities to access and equally participate in shaping a unified position lead to diversity of positions within a company, and prevent from sharing knowledge that could potentially lead to more accessible and better available technologies. Likewise, even though shop personnel, through the direct interaction with disabled customers, have acquired knowledge about

accessible products and retail premises, due to unequal power relations and insufficient or absent communication between manufacturers, trade networks and shop assistants are often positioned as voiceless service deliverers and are prevented from sharing gathered knowledge on what works and what does not work in the retail sector.

It seems that contrary to the outlined experiences, the IBR and IDPO provide their members with a better platform for creating a unified position on accessible markets. It can be argued that one of the potential reasons shaping equal opportunities to develop a unified position is an official status of being a member of an organisation. While in the context of society's traditional norms, institutionalised norms and procedures detach the basis for cooperation (see Chapter Three), in an international business and civil society context it, in the form of official membership, may serve as encouragement or a framework to engage in professional relations toward the issue. Furthermore, in the IBR case, membership is tightly linked with financial obligations. In other words, while actions mediated through money often replace communicative forms of social interaction (Habermas, 1984, 1985), business' financial obligations to each other may create a framework within which one actor is committed to create a platform for interaction and equal access to it, and another actor is aware of the gained right to share knowledge and to contribute to creating a unified position. With regard to national civil society, it was suggested that national governments not only shape DPOs' lifeworld (see Chapter Six) but, through introduction of certain institutionalised procedures in the policy making process, regulate their access to the discourse and may position them as an object of governance instead of a competent partner in shaping the political-economic landscape.

Research data suggested that an internally shaped unified position introduces common language and to a certain degree removes responsibility. While common language enables the actors to express themselves, make sense of the actions and others' utterances, and to act meaningfully, the division of responsibility may either enable them to be more open and involved in shaping a unified position, or alienate them from public matters and disabled customers' realities.

After shaping a unified position, stakeholders, especially operating at international level, engage in the second stage of shaping the discourse in the public sphere. They communicate unified position to and with other actors. The interaction is usually founded on the interest to achieve common and strategic goals, and is accompanied by the intention to increase other stakeholders' awareness of accessibility and become more alert to others' realities. With regard to stakeholders' interest in achieving

common and strategic goals, it seems that while at an ideological level clear distinction between the ontological reasoning can be made, at an empirical level the boundary is faded. With regard to underlying reasons for engaging in communication with other stakeholders, it seems that they are usually premised on strategic interests. As an example, while business seeks to gather information that would enable increasing customer volume and profit, civil society seeks to gather knowledge leading toward the realisation of the agenda and compliance with duties outlined in the CRPD. Despite these and other differences and strategic intensions behind the actions, at an empirical level, stakeholders provide a certain degree of accessibility. This suggests the tension between actors' inhabitation of the same lifeworld and recognition of the need for a more accessible EU single market, and their strategic calculations aimed to achieve strategic goals.

The present chapter has demonstrated that operating in a relatively new field, stakeholders are not self-sufficient knowledge owners and aim to engage in communication with others in order to gain knowledge, which is unreachable within the setting. Such interaction provides an opportunity to have an inter-organisation influence on the EU policy processes and public discussions on accessibility. However, revealed limited platform for national retailers to share gathered knowledge and to contribute to changing the practice, questions the strength of the inter-organisational influence and the content of the ideas promoted by employing that influence. Limited salespeople's involvement and absent communication between national civil society actors, manufacturers and national retailers should be called into question. The current practice of limited interaction prevents from fully exploiting the potential for more accessibility and may have an excluding effect on disabled customers' experience, as suggested in Chapter Five.

Stakeholders' accounts suggest that the process by which the public discourse is moulded is transfused with unequal power relations and should be democratised. This may minimise certain oppression practice and power manifestation that shape ontological differences in actors' understanding of accessibility and its expression in practice. Most importantly, democratisation of the process by which the discourse is shaped may change the horizons of the lifeworld and position it more as a matter of equal rights rather than as a determinant for customer loyalty and higher profit.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

This thesis set out to understand perspectives and interactions of disabled customers, private sector industry and civil society, and the potential to create more effective customer policies for disabled people in the European single market for accessible ICT products. This was because, as Chapter One illustrated, disabled people have never been recognised as equal market participants, and their agency of making customer choices and decisions have been often deprived by the state and the market that positioned them as vulnerable citizens and consumers. In 2006, the CRPD introduced and legally justified a discourse of rights, accessibility and equality that should also be applied to the EU mainstream private market. However, the EU and Member States do not provide the needed framework, within which private providers of mainstream goods and services would take into account all aspects of accessibility for disabled people. Indeed, while some instruments legally construct disabled people as ‘vulnerable’ customers, others shape provided measures for markets accessibility around the individual model of disability (see Chapter Two). Yet Chapter Three argued that the EU may provide a framework within which more effective customer policies for disabled people could be shaped. However, unequal institutional density at regional and national level, unequal power relations among the EU, Member States, business and disabled customers, and limited focus on the OMC and the principles of deliberate democracy may convert the Union into a system, colonizing national and individual lifeworlds and limiting the possibility for more accessibility to emerge. Hence, this research aimed to inquire on the disabled customers, EU industry and civil society’s perspectives and experiences that should be considered in aiming to create effective customer policies for disabled people in the mainstream private market. In order to answer this question, three secondary questions were outlined in the introductory chapter, these being:

- What are the experiences of disabled people as customers in the mainstream private retail markets and their perspectives toward accessibility?
- How do stakeholders of the European single market for information and communication technology products (ICTs) perceive disabled people as customers, and what factors shape their knowledge and positions?
- How do private business and civil society engage into communication and collaborative innovation to create more accessible markets and more effective customer policies in the EU?

After providing a thesis overview, the discussion takes each question in turn and so aims to provide a detailed response to the main research question. In each instance, the discussion addresses empirical findings and provides a brief discussion on potential results of the observed processes and perspectives. Aiming to provide better understanding, the chapter starts the discussion by addressing methodological insights and contributions.

8.1. Thesis overview

Chapter One started framing disabled people as customers' experiences in the mainstream private market and their perspectives toward accessibility. It suggested that in different kinds of market, disabled people's agency, independency and freedom were restricted or suspended either by the state or by the market. They were excluded from equal participation and constructed as 'vulnerable' consumers. The chapter then adapted the concept of a 'travel chain' from Scandinavian disability and transport studies and introduced the notion 'accessible shopping chain'. It demonstrated that ableism and state and markets' focus on non-disabled citizens and customers create a variety of obstacles, excluding people with impairments from equal and barrier-free participation and cause their customer vulnerability. It then was suggested that the discussed physical and attitudinal barriers are partly shaped by differences in professionals' ontologies and their insufficient awareness of and knowledge about accessibility, reasonable accommodation and universal design, as well as limited disabled people's involvement as co-designers in all accessible shopping chain stages. It was argued that in aiming to create equal customer experience, UD should be the founding conception potentially able to transform disabled customers from 'special' or 'different' shoppers to one of the customer groups.

Chapter Two suggested that public movements and the development of public policy in the area of accessibility and rights via social claims brought the private market into the public sphere. It therefore demonstrated how law and public policy frames public discourse on private market as they relate to disabled customers in the EU, and so provides a platform for business to introduce an 'accessible shopping chain'. It was suggested that the new public discourse aims to reconstruct disabled people from 'vulnerable' consumers to customers. However, such practice and position towards markets accessibility is not consistent across global, regional and national levels and this creates tensions between these policy discourses.

Reacting to the discussion in the first two chapters, Chapter Three advocated for a need for a cooperative action. It suggested that Habermas' theory of communicative action can provide useful insight and understanding to inform the way customer rights and market accessibility can be ensured. It shed light on three elements of the theory: lifeworld, access to the discourse and power relations; these later being used as a framework for a discussion in Chapters Six and Seven. It suggested that the EU may either provide a framework for more accessibility to emerge or may act as a system preventing Member States and business from creating common language and a more accessible and equal customer experience. It concluded that OMC, located within the deliberative democracy framework, may be used as a tool providing relevant stakeholders with access to the formation of the discourse on the accessible private market.

Integral to the whole of the thesis was retroductive perspective to discover underlying mechanisms and structures that shape people with impairments' customer exclusion in and inaccessibility of the EU single market. Chapter Four explained how this project was designed and implemented. Sampling strategies (locations and participants) and data collection methods (mystery shopping, interviews and observations) were justified. It explained how regional and national policy processes may shape social research and constrain business, civil society and disabled customers' access to the discourse and contribution to creating knowledge. This was followed by the discussion on research challenges, process of transcription and data analysis, as well as faced ethical challenges and relevant considerations. Finally, strategies for disseminating the findings were addressed. Although this research was premised on a relatively small amount of data and was initially concerned with the ICT market, the gathered knowledge can be applied to other retail markets, although further investigation into disabled people's access to different kinds of retail market, including online shopping, is essential.

Chapter Five explored the micro level of disabled customers' experience and was premised on mystery shopping and interviews with shoppers with impairments in Lithuania and the UK. It was framed within the concept of an 'accessible shopping chain', identified in Chapter One. It suggested that despite differences in individual experiences, customers with impairments usually go through all stages and face different obstacles in each of them. Faced physical and attitudinal barriers impede customer participation, and shape their exclusion and vulnerability in the EU single market. It was suggested that ableism, manifested through state and business' practice, is the driving force behind the exclusion and customer inequality. Alongside the discussion of barriers, disabled customers' coping practices were addressed. This suggested that people with impairments are not passive

victims of markets inaccessibility, and that their customer vulnerability should be detached from impairments and addressed in the context of external factors.

Following the retroductive research strategy, Chapter Six started the examination of potential structures shaping the discussed disabled customers' realities. It adapted a Habermasian concept of lifeworld and suggested that international and national business and civil society's lifeworld toward disabled customers and accessible markets, impact disabled people's shopping experience. It proposed that policy instruments and business practice often shape stakeholders' notions, positions, values, norms and other elements, constituting their lifeworld. Such an approach assisted in providing unique and under-researched insights into empirically unobservable structures potentially shaping accessibility of the EU single market.

Chapter Seven suggested that even though sometimes the actors inhabit the same lifeworld, their access to the formulation of the discourse in the public sphere might differ, as one may be oppressed by the other. Unequal power relations and elimination from equal contribution to shape the discourse, forbid stakeholders from creating comprehensive and quality knowledge about markets accessibility and manifests in disabled customers' exclusion and vulnerability. Drawing on Habermas' theory of communicative action, this chapter shed light on how international and national ICT business and civil society may access the discourse on markets accessibility, what their interactions, communication strategies and barriers are, preventing from or leading to reconciliation.

8.2. How have applied methods contributed to revealing the actions that should be taken for creating a more accessible private market and equal customer rights?

Alongside the discussed theoretical and empirical contributions, this research has generated some methodological insights. To begin with, the decision to focus on customer experience outside retail premises and to adopt a broader approach treating shopping as a chain, highlighted complexity of the practice and how the state and the market construct disabled customers' exclusion and vulnerability. If light was shed only on disabled people's experience in shops, the role played by accessibility of the home and public environments, and public and private transport in shaping customers' experience would remain hidden. This would prevent from detecting deeper roots of the phenomenon and from questioning the

actions that have to be taken in order to make the customer experience more accessible and equal.

In addition, conducting customer interviews on shopping experience in cafes or pizzerias provided informants with a possibility to remain involved in the customer role, connect the two settings, and compare and reflect on the experience. This led to thicker descriptions, suggested unique insights into experience of disabled customers of goods and services available to the general public, and provided data on how accessibility of private providers may shape disabled customers' choice, sense of the market and spatial customer experience.

Regarding to business and civil society, the research challenged the principle of data saturation in qualitative research and selection of a 'right number' of informants. It has suggested that in conducting social enquiry in a relatively new area, where the number of active stakeholders is limited, the involvement of one key actor may be sufficient and provide rich information. Instead of interviewing everyone who has any kind of experience in accessibility, the study employed a number of selection criteria, used different triangulation techniques and had a clear theoretical frame, within which research instruments and procedures were shaped. These were key factors, enabling gauging rich, valid and reliable information about how ongoing policy and market processes within the EU effect business and civil society and what needs to be done to make the EU market more accessible.

8.3. What are the experiences of disabled people as customers in the mainstream private retail markets and their perspectives toward accessibility?

Disabled people as customers' experience in the EU single market is tightly linked with exclusion, segregation and inequality; is premised on ableism and shaped by commensurate state and business' actions. Discussion in Chapters One and Five provided a number of examples proving the statement and identified four accessible shopping chain stages, namely acquisition of customer information, the journey to the shop, navigation in retail premises, and interaction in the shop. It suggested that each stage consists of certain elements that are experienced by individuals in a different and unique way. Although some of them may be faced as barriers by people with one type of impairment and as enablers by people with another type of impairment, the experience of disablement and exclusion is present across the board and in all stages.

With regard to customer information, it was suggested that business' focus on communication with non-disabled shoppers and limited information provision in alternative formats about accessible products and accessibility of retail premises, often limit availability of accessible items, prevent people with certain impairments from making informed customer choice, and bound them to the providers who accidently choose accessible communication means. It was then suggested that having acquired customer information, disabled shoppers engage in the second stage of the accessible shopping chain and start their journey to the shop. While academic literature does not dedicate enough attention to the link between the journey to the shop and customer experience, this research suggested that accessibility of the home and public environment and of public and private transport plays an important role in shaping disabled customers participation in the market.

It was suggested that the state's focus on non-disabled citizens often factors the emergence of barriers, preventing disabled individuals from customer freedom and choice, and spatially isolating them in particular market settings. While people with different impairments experience the three elements of the stage differently, they all are at risk to be prohibited from choosing the shopping time, route to the shop, transport means, as well as the shop. Faced inaccessibility and barriers are shaped by ableism and may cause stress, uncertainty, insecurity, financial loss and dependency on others; re-shape customer identity, convert into indirect shoppers or may fully eliminate from shopping process. Disabled customers tackle socially and collectively shaped barriers individually. Different coping strategies and support provided by social networks are often employed and may indirectly convert disabled people into customers *de jure* (Bauman, 2000), who are individually responsible for overcoming the barriers that are common to and experienced by the masses.

Having reached the shop, disabled customers engage in the third stage of the shopping chain and start the navigation in the retail premises. Chapter One suggested that business' key aim to attract non-disabled customers and to generate profit usually leads to design decisions focused on aesthetics, form and customer seduction, rather than on function and universality. Chapter Five advocated that such practices often prevent disabled people from barrier-free interaction in retail premises, may cause injuries, stress, disgrace, dependency on others, financial loss, infantilisation and a sense of being 'different' or 'special' customers. While Chapters Six and Seven confirmed that business prioritise non-disabled customers and accordingly develop their products, environments and service delivery, such practices may signalise that people with impairments are not wanted and desired shoppers. Additionally, due to limited

awareness of accessibility and disabled customers, some shops may completely eliminate people with certain impairments from entering and navigating in retail premises. For instance, while shops that use only revolving doors may be impossible to enter for blind people, small shops often have steps and no ramps and become unreachable to wheelchair users. Even though disabled individuals are not passive and adopt various coping strategies, they usually visit shops that are known as accessible from past experience. Hence, the market's focus on non-disabled customers, limited recognition of changes in clientele segment and limited awareness of accessibility may create disabled customers' exclusion, vulnerability and spatial segregation in the EU private market.

Aiming to overcome barriers and to avoid the outlined customer exclusion, disabled people may seek other individuals' assistance that can be divided into formal or informal and employed before or after entering retail premises. However, assistance and interaction in retail premises is the most important. It was indicated that while other customers usually are willing to assist, such interaction may not be acceptable to all disabled shoppers. Indeed, assistance provided by close people was the most preferred. It ensures feeling comfortable about reasonable accommodation and is continuous instead of fragmented, as is the case with assistance provided by other customers. Participants often contrasted interaction with informal assistants with the interaction with shop personnel. They addressed experiences such as limited choice, unequal treatment, financial disadvantage, depersonalisation, infantilisation and attribution to a lower social and economic class, among others. A few informants referred to 'special' shop assistants who are responsible for serving shoppers with impairments and noted that due to limited knowledge about and awareness of accessibility, disability and reasonable accommodation, this group of professionals is usually not able to provide them with equal choice and full control over the process, position them as different shoppers and promote a discourse of 'otherness' in the private market. With regard to the service provided by such shop assistants in ICT shops, the outlined practice was augmented by reference to knowledge duality. It often prevents disabled customers from choosing the most accessible devices and prohibits professionals and customers with impairments from creating common language and knowledge about accessibility.

Overall, the discussion on the experiences of disabled people as customers and their perspectives toward accessibility, has suggested that accessibility of the private market should not be perceived in a vacuum of a shop. Indeed, it has to be analysed as a holistic process, overstepping market exchange practice in retail premises. Such an approach allowed identifying

stages of an accessible shopping chain, gaps in literature and professional practice as well as challenged socially and legally constructed disabled people's customer vulnerability and untied it from individual's impairment. Indeed, it provided substantial evidence that the driving force behind disabled shoppers' exclusion, segregation and customer vulnerability in the EU single market is the synergy between the state and the market's focus on non-disabled citizens and customers.

8.4. How do stakeholders of the European single market for information and communication technology products (ICTs) perceive disabled people as customers, and what factors shape their knowledge and positions?

Regional and national EU ICT industry and civil society stakeholders recognise the need for a more accessible EU single market for disabled customers. The content and the sparks of this recognition differ, including the policy framework within which the stakeholders operate as well as certain business practices playing key roles in shaping these understandings and variations.

It was suggested that the stakeholders perceive disabled people as one customer group, whose members vary from each other. Impairments type was identified as an important factor for the differentiation. These empirical findings reflected discussion in Chapter Two, addressing legal construction of impairment as one of the reasons for becoming a 'vulnerable' customer. On the one hand, at an empirical level such an individual model perspective may enable actors to introduce specific policy and product development decisions, addressing gaps in previous practices. On the other hand, it may intrude into actual and real reality domains, as such praxis may introduce to the public discourse certain elements, preventing the shift from treating disabled people as 'special' or 'different' consumers toward positioning them as equal rights bearers. The conceptual and empirical differentiation threatens to create hierarchical relationships among disabled people as customers. Particularly, current policy instruments, business and civil society seem to prioritise some types of impairment over others (see Chapters Two and Six). Positioning impairment as a central factor may create a division among disabled customers and assist in fragmenting the accessible market as some parts of it may receive more attention than others.

While disabled customers division into groups was typical to both business and civil society, the policy framework within which they operate seemed to be an important factor for locating their understanding and positions in the context of either the social or individual model. Specifically, international and national civil society actors, premising professional activities on the CRPD, seemed to have internalised approach, similar to the social model of disability and recognised values entrenched in the Treaty. However, while this was strongly articulated by the IDPO, national DPOs verbally were more passive, but demonstrated awareness of the Convention. The intra-sectorial difference seemed to be shaped by a different kind of engagement with the Convention. Specifically, the IDPO, being involved in macro level activities at which the Convention is usually used as an argumentative tool (see Chapter Six), have better skills in articulating the norms established in the Treaty. Meanwhile, national DPOs, focusing on the implementation of the Convention at the micro level, referred less to the document, but shared various empirical experiences.

Echoing the discussion in Chapter One, research data suggested that business tends to perceive disabled customers mainly through the lens of an individual model, this being shaped by policy instruments within whichever framework they operate. Specifically, treating product development standards as a key reference, manufacturers and the IBR perceived individual's impairment as guidance of how to comply with the requirements. Likewise, lacking awareness of accessibility and disability, national retailers often followed a similar approach and perceived impairment either as factors marking customers' 'specificity' or as guidance to provide reasonable accommodation. However, sellers, who communicate with manufacturers and disabled customers, are provided with clear information about product accessibility and receive training on accessibility and disabled customers service, demonstrated more social mode-oriented perspectives.

Industry's positions, premised on the individual model, may negatively affect accessibility features, product design, availability of accessible items, service delivery and maintain negative perceptions, supporting society's disablist attitudes toward disability. Hence, operation in different policy frameworks seems to shape differences and certain tensions in stakeholders' knowledge and positions. This questions industry and civil society's possibilities to create common language and knowledge on accessibility and to engage in communicative action aiming to create a more accessible EU single market.

Focus on impairments may position disabled people as 'needing' and non-disabled people as 'wanting' users and customers. While the synergy

between ableism and the need to comply with standards shaped manufacturers' portrayal of disabled people as 'needing' users, the focus on non-disabled customers and limited awareness of accessibility moulded sellers' perceptions of disabled people as 'needing' shoppers, who require 'special' service. It was suggested that provision of information and training on accessibility, and a safe professional environment for shop assistants may assist in de-constructing the concept of 'accessibility needs' and disabled people as 'needing' customers. Some signs of focusing on 'needs' were also evident in civil society's accounts. However, the focus here was on the identification of different needs and their presence in areas identified in the CRPD, aiming to ensure they are addressed in regional and national policy instruments. The focus on 'needs' in the context of markets accessibility and customer equality may position 'need' as a factor, marking conceptual and practical division between disabled and non-disabled customers. This may prevent re-conceptualisation of disabled people as 'vulnerable' consumers, entrench their otherness in the private market and assist in maintaining unequal power relations between disabled and non-disabled market participants.

Additionally to policy instruments, certain business practices may assist in moulding industry's perspectives. Specifically, needed expenditures, received profit and the volume of potential user groups are likely to form manufacturers' decisions toward development of accessible items. Likewise, customer loyalty and superiority in competitiveness brought by accessible features were identified as additional factors why some of the producers position disabled people as a potential users group and are ready to be less fashionable in terms of product design. It was indicated that growing disabled and older customer volume and received profit from producing accessible devices encourage manufacturers to perceive them not only as a reason why certain legal requirements should be met, but also as a valuable and profitable customer group. It seemed that producers, who have strong CSR history and include disability and accessibility into it and cooperate with disabled users, are more likely to follow such a position. Hence, it was argued that certain practices and processes, including competition among a small number of providers of accessible devices, contribute to redrawing accessibility practices within the EU single market.

It was indicated that disabled people's involvement in shaping policies and business practices plays an important role in moulding stakeholders' lifeworld and positions. However, business and civil society insufficiently involve people with impairments in market accessibility-related processes, and so prevent them from accessing the formulation of the public discourse and an introduction of more accessible products and market practice. Actors, who do acknowledge people's knowledge and expertise,

seemed to play a leading role in the field and contributed to the deconstruction of disabled people's portrayal as 'vulnerable' or 'different' customers, and positioned them as active society members. It was evident that cooperation between business, civil society and disabled customers may assist in creating common language and knowledge about accessibility and in re-shifting power relations towards more equality. In such a context, customers with impairments seemed to be perceived as experts and co-producers of accessibility and active agents of society.

8.5. How do private business and civil society engage into communication and collaborative innovation to create more accessible markets and more effective customer policies in the EU?

Inhabitation of the same lifeworld does not ensure equal engagement in communication and collaborative innovation to create more accessible markets. Even though the actors may inhabit the same lifeworld, one may be oppressed by the other and excluded from the formulation of public discourse. Indeed, aiming to create a more accessible EU single market, democratisation of the process by which the discourse is shaped is essential. It was suggested that usually the process of stakeholders' engagement in communication and collaborative innovation consists of two stages: formulating an internally unified position and communicating it to/ with other stakeholders.

It was evident that the process of shaping an internally unified position differs among the stakeholders and depends on the nature of professional activities and policy framework within which they operate. With regard to manufacturers, it was revealed that capitalistic priorities and dynamics of power within the company often intrude into knowledge innovation and its manifestation in practice. It seemed that designers and disabled users having the most intense cooperative relations and sharing the most similar lifeworlds, knowledge and perspectives, create the densest knowledge sets that may introduce more accessible products. Even though, due to the impairments hierarchy discussed in Chapter Six, created knowledge may not cover all disabled people's experiences, it may identify lacking product accessibility features for customers with certain impairments. However, research data suggested that decisions on accessibility as with other company decisions are usually made by individuals, occupying high positions but having limited or no contact with end-users. On the one hand, such decision making practice may 'de-specialise' or 'normalise' disabled

users and accessibility, and position it as an equally important issue for consideration. On the other hand, such practice may reduce rationally informed knowledge, values and language, decrease availability of accessible products and prevent knowledge, created together by designers and users, to be communicated to the public and used in shaping public discourse.

It was revealed that financial calculations, that are used as a measure in making decisions on product features, may have a similar effect and dislodge accessibility to the end of a company's 'to do' list and prevent the translation of created knowledge into accessible products. Hence, it was evident that even though designers, disabled users and the company as a business setting acknowledges the need for more accessibility in the market and takes certain actions, the first two actors are often oppressed by the company. Their created knowledge about accessible product features is silenced and not translated into practice. This divides the company's position into two parts. First– a position shaped by designers and disabled users. Second– a position shaped and presented by the company as one setting. Inconsistency of and tensions between the two positions seemed to create a mismatch between actual possibilities to produce accessible items and their availability in the market. In addition, being shaped by and managed through money and power as a medium, the presence of two positions and disablement of the knowledge created together by designers and disabled users, prevent the company from communicating full and comprehensive knowledge and information to other parties and from qualitatively engaging in the public discourse.

Research data suggested that one way national business and civil society access the formulation of the discourse in the public sphere is through membership of international organisations and associations. Indeed, it was evident that in aiming to shape a position, the IBR and IDPO seek to involve the greatest possible number of national members and in such a way provide them with a platform to express their experiences and positions. Despite uneven national members' interest and participation, broadness and comprehension is prioritised by the two stakeholders when shaping an internally unified position. It was evident that the IBR may avoid addressing issues that may discredit or intrude members' activities in the market. Furthermore, if their positions and experiences are too controversial or too different, the IBR may withdraw from shaping a unified position of the EU ICT industry.

Prioritisation of capitalistic business' interests results in the EU ICT industry as a unit having no position towards the issue. In this regard, experiences and perspectives remain uncommunicated to other stakeholders. Such

practice prevents actors from acquiring information, unavailable in natural settings, but important for introducing more accessibility. In such a context, separate companies seemed to be unable to form a common ground and common language, this weakening the possibility to reveal actual experiences and actions that should be considered by other stakeholders in order to innovate knowledge. Due to the absence of a unified position, separate industry players become the only responsible agents when communicating with other actors, policy makers or the public. The loss of the removal of responsibility assurance (see Chapter Seven) prevents business from being open and sharing certain information, knowledge and perspectives, this minimising the overall knowledge about practice in accessible markets.

Meanwhile, it was suggested that additionally to focusing on most common experiences and positions, the IDPO sheds light also on unique issues and usually locates them in the context of reasonable accommodation. However, impairments hierarchy and unequal involvement of national DPOs representing different impairments may impact in that in the IDPO's final position, people with certain impairments' experiences are addressed more coherently than others. It was evident that the IDPO's position and national DPOs' opportunities to access the formulation of the public discourse are indirectly formed by national governments' policies. Specifically, it was evident that the states' focus on social welfare and disability related issues and provisions, and insufficient emphasis on customer equality and markets accessibility, may respectively shape national DPOs' activities that later feed into the IDPO's position. In other words, the way national governments perceive disability and portray it via legislations may construct national DPOs' lifeworld and activities, as well as their interest level to communicate it to the IDPO and so to contribute to the public discourse on markets accessibility.

While research data suggested that national private business and civil society's engagement in communication and collaborative innovation is more passive, it was suggested that one of the possible reasons behind the practice is poor density of national legal requirements and institutionalisation (see Chapter Two). While international stakeholders constantly referred to legal instruments and in some cases identified them as a springboard for starting working on accessibility, national informants had less reference points. Having limited experience of working on customers' rights and markets accessibility and operating in a legal context, within which disabled people are perceived as 'vulnerable' customers and markets accessibility is intertwined with the individual model, national stakeholders lack legal guidance that would enable them to fill in knowledge gaps and encourage related activities. In other words, an

insufficient national legal basis on disabled customers' rights and market accessibility do not provide the needed framework for the national actors' lifeworld to emerge (see Chapter Six) and to be communicated to the public.

It was suggested that similarly to national business and civil society, disabled customers may contribute to shaping the discourse in the public sphere by being involved in business and civil society activities. It was indicated that manufacturers and the IDPO have the most intense cooperative relations with customers with impairments. The two stakeholders seemed to employ different strategies and channels for the communication and translate provided accounts into language recognisable in a specific context. For instance, designers usually convert expressed needs and expectations into technical language as this enables them to more easily communicate with other professionals and departments in the company. Similarly, the IDPO translates people's accounts into language recognisable in the EU policy shaping processes. This suggests that knowledge and positions received from disabled customers is interpreted and used differently, and is often translated into language recognisable in certain contexts of the public sphere. On the one hand, this suggests division and fragmentation of a unique set of knowledge and potential usage of disabled customers' accounts for strategic stakeholders' purposes. On the other hand, operating in different contexts and employing different language, the stakeholders may reconstruct and communicate users' knowledge in a way that it is understandable and recognisable in certain contexts and by different actors. Such practice provides a stronger framework for engaging in meaningful communication, enabling to address the same issue from different perspectives, ensuring their versatile implementation and highlighting the importance of disabled people's involvement in the policy and product development process.

It was revealed that having shaped an internally unified position, stakeholders communicate it to and with each other and so engage in communication and knowledge innovation outside the setting. It was suggested that the process can be characterised by three main goals: achieving a common goal, achieving strategic goals, and awareness raising. Achievement of a common goal of more accessibility in the EU single market seemed to be linked with power distribution. Specifically, the IDPO and IBR, occupying similar positions in certain areas at regional level, seemed to be the only actors who treat each other as equals and employ language and communication not only as a medium to coordinate actions, but also as enablers for exchanging views, positions, experiences and perspectives and so identifying overlapping and differing matters that may

either prevent or lead toward more accessibility. It seemed that the two stakeholders seek to get familiar with each other's realities and experiences, understand them and support each other in overcoming them. It was argued that having a dense set of knowledge and understanding about accessibility, being legally obliged to a great number of members and policy actors, operating within a heavily regulated area, and having an opportunity to directly communicate with each other, the two stakeholders may be more able to coordinate common goal-oriented activities and to engage in social relationships. This, according to Habermas, is an important factor for achieving a common goal and engaging in communicative action. Despite this trigger, the actors did not get closer to communicative action, as strategic goals often dominated over the common goal-oriented activities.

The opposite situation was observed at national level. Stakeholders' interest in and actions aiming to provide more accessibility were often diminished by unequal power relations, introduced either by the market or the state. With regard to the role played by the market, shop assistants, having the most intense interaction with disabled customers were neither provided with a possibility to communicate gained knowledge, nor were able to make decisions that would provide more customer equality. Limited or absent communication between manufacturers and sellers, mobilization of power exclusively in the hands of sales managers and shop assistants' elimination from shaping service delivery, seemed to be important factors preventing the EU and Member States from innovating knowledge and providing accessibility at an empirical level. In terms of the state's actions, it was revealed that the way civil society is involved in developing legal instruments may prevent governments from shaping policies that respond to disabled customers' realities. Current involvement and decision making strategies often 'de-activate' civil society's voice and prevent the involved parties from a possibility to engage in communicative rationality that aims to achieve more accessibility.

It was revealed that alongside communication oriented to introduce more accessibility to the EU retail markets, stakeholders interact with each other aiming to achieve certain strategic goals. First, operating within a particular setting and legal context, they often could access only certain bits of information. Indeed, engagement in communication with other actors seemed to provide them with information that is unavailable in their initial settings, but is important for building a comprehensive and reliable internally unified position, and succeeding in professional activities. To illustrate, manufacturers addressed cooperation with user organisations in aiming to gather information about missing product accessibility features and potential customer volume. Additionally to common goal

achievement-oriented intensions, it was evident that one of the reasons behind this interaction is the company's financial success and leadership in the market. In a similar vein, the IDPO was willing to know about business' experiences. One way the organisation aimed to use this knowledge was in strengthening a position that product accessibility is a financially beneficial investment. Second, being aware of limited knowledge about accessibility, dynamics and challenges in policy shaping processes, international stakeholders aimed to cooperate with each other in order to shape a common ground on different issues. Being a conditionally negotiated and agreed position, a common ground seemed to provide stakeholders with some assurance that their position in public and policy discussions is not challenged or discredited by other actors, but instead may be supported or backed up. Even though it is not a definite, static or documented agreement, it allows stakeholders to more easily implement strategic goals and succeed in professional activities.

It was evident that while unequal power relations may prevent from creating and sharing a common lifeworld and accessing the formulation of the discourse in the public sphere, regional stakeholders' interaction aiming to achieve strategic goals may introduce more equal power relations between business and civil society. The exchange of knowledge that is unavailable to others seemed to convert the stakeholders into partners, valuing and positioning each other as important information sources. Although this shift in power distribution was not premised on the achievement of actors' equality and may encourage the employment of cooperative strategies based on reciprocity (Lewis, 1998), it may contribute to softening the dynamics of power between the market and the third sector. Likewise, strategic goal-related interaction may create stakeholders' inter-dependency and unify them for having an inter-organisational influence that is availed in accessibility discussions in the EP and EC.

Additionally to achieving common and strategic goals, communication seemed to play a role in raising stakeholders' awareness of accessibility and alertness to other actors' realities. Professional interaction and views exchange seemed to be important for smooth inclusion of different perspectives of accessibility and disability issues in actors' knowledge sets and agendas. However, it was suggested that past experience and foreseen benefits of the interaction are important factors, shaping some stakeholders' decision to engage into cooperative relations. While actors like manufacturers, the IDPO and IBR, having more experience in accessibility and having received benefits from communication with each other, were more open and willing to engage in cooperative relations, stakeholders, such as consumer organisations, who often lack such experience and knowledge seemed to be more resistant and passive.

Indeed, the EU and Member States should incentivise different actors' communication and cooperation and provide means, meeting national and sectorial contexts.

Discussion on business and civil society's engagement in communication and collaborative innovation to create more accessible markets and more effective customer policies in the EU suggested that, despite it is unlikely that the capitalistic nature of the private market and neoliberal agenda of current policies can be reshaped easily, certain processes may be exploited for introducing more accessibility in the EU single market. Hence, regional and national policy bodies should employ various incentivising measures, premised on the CRPD and encouraging the engagement in trans-regional and trans-sectorial communicative practices where disabled customers are treated as equally important stakeholders. In other words, even though the ideal speech situation remains utopic, stakeholders, including disabled people, should continue their present communication practice, and the EU and national governments should provide a stronger framework for such interactions to occur.

8.6. Way forward

Having identified the barriers that prevent people with different impairments from barrier-free and equal participation in the EU single market as customers as well as describing some of the structures shaping this exclusion and inequality, this section raises questions regarding potential steps for addressing some of these restrictions.

Improving disabled people's customer participation and shopping experience appears to involve two key factors: connectivity of shopping chain stages and elements within them and challenging the retail industry's attitudes. The retail industry is required to comply with a number of regional and national building regulations, so minimal access is (or should be) now provided in new buildings as well as some adjustments made (or should be) to old developments. However, while this creates greater accessibility compared to past practices, often the provisions lack connectivity and so intrude into an otherwise pleasant and barrier-free shopping experience. While this has been addressed and advocated by many scholars, it seems that international and national policy instruments do not sufficiently recognise and address this issue. Indeed, including accessibility professionals in developing policy instruments or urban design plans representing different disciplines and areas would not only ensure connectivity between different accessible elements or environments but would also challenge their professional ontologies.

While current policy discourse encourages design and development practices allowing certain access needs to be met, the approach assumes accessibility exclusively for people with impairments and thus fosters customer segmentation, segregation and stigmatisation. The separation of disabled and non-disabled people's needs does not appear to be the long-term answer or strategies for how to overcome inequality in retail markets and society in general as discussed in Chapter One. While individual differences have to be recognised and assistive technologies or accommodations provided, policy instruments and practical developments have to address and achieve this in a way that does not relegate disabled customers to only certain localities or niches of the retail market. Hence, the trend towards approaching designing environments, buildings and products not as accessible to or usable by certain individuals or groups, but as equally used and shared by the whole population or the greatest number possible may provide some needed improvements (Mace, 1988, Vanderheiden, 1998). International and national design and development standards and requirements should be founded on universal design principles as this may 'unlock' shops and society for a more diverse group than just a 'normal' or 'traditional' customer and citizen.

The move towards design and development standards shaped around universal design would need to occur alongside the pursuit of a change in retail industry attitudes so that, rather than perceiving accessibility of retail premises and provision of more accessible services and products as a financial harm and added cost, the industry would recognise and acknowledge the attractiveness and benefits of serving for a larger and more diverse customer group. As discussed in Chapter One, unification of disabled and non-disabled people as customers boosts customer volume (Office for Disability Issues, 2010), increases their loyalty (Cheng, 2002) and increases profits (Heskett and Schlesinger, 1994, Kim et al., 2013). More proactive product developers are recognising disabled people as an important and profitable customer segment. Hence, as the Company X informant noted in the narrative about producing accessible ICT technologies:

Although I feel that it hasn't probably been so big a competitive advantage so far, especially with the smart devices, it has become very, let's say, competitive than what the situation was ten years ago. Now it's a very simple competitive field.

The perception that making retail outlets accessible and providing accessible customer service is costly should also be challenged. As stated in Chapter One, the increasing number of older and disabled people as well as their growing spending power reshapes their customer role and

contribution to a capitalist economy. This respectively suggests the need to make retail outlets accessible and to provide information about their accessibility as well as mainstream and accessible products in alternative formats. While the provision of this kind of information has been implemented by some retailers and producers, it should be required to be implemented nationally, ensuring a certain amount of consistency across the EU Member States.

There would appear to be a strong case for informing and training designers and developers of public environments and transport systems as well as providers within the product development and retail industries to ensure that discriminatory prevailing attitudes are changed and commonly used terminology that may enforce discrimination is altered. In addition, as Chapters One and Six have demonstrated, providers that acknowledge the diversity of this customer segment are aware of accessibility, improve the service without major additional cost and place individuals' customer participation before their impairments. Thus, improving understanding through education and training may not only improve accessibility and equality of customer experience, but also address wider social discrimination and prejudice. Incorporating disability and accessibility issues from a social model perspective into the mandatory designer, developer and retail sector actor qualification exams might be one of the measures to directly challenge discriminating attitudes and to ensure social change. Promotion of social understanding of disability would reshape professionals' ontological positions and practices that would potentially lead to connectivity of the shopping chain stages and elements within them, highlight the necessity of moving away from individual or medical understanding of disability and disabled people as 'vulnerable' consumers, and provide the actors with knowledge and skills essential for providing equal and quality service and experience. Such mandatory qualifications should also be extended to manufacturers and shop assistants, aiming to ensure accessibility is being approached in all its complexity as suggested in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. While some design and product development programmes and retail outlets have incorporated accessibility training into their programmes, such actions should be required to be expanded regionally and nationally.

Another potential way to increase awareness of and knowledge about disability and to make shopping more accessible for disabled people is to promote communication within different retail industry sectors as well as between different professionals. While some manufacturers already provide shop assistants with support, training and information on product accessibility and service delivery to shoppers with impairments, such practice is still an exception and not a rule. Indeed, national governments,

reacting to global and regional retail market dynamics and reflecting on national cultural and business peculiarities, should find ways to encourage and incentivise closer communication between international providers and national sellers. In addition to this, national governments should provide a framework within which retail networks and disabled people organisations would be interested in and willing to collaborate with each other as equal partners. Such collaboration could include disabled people's involvement in developing training programmes for shop assistants, deciding on the most accessible shop layout, and provision of accessible customer information. Considering the example shared by Company X about weaving accessibility into meeting agendas and documenting relevant discussions, it might be useful to encourage such practices between sellers and disabled people organisations.

Altering the stakeholders of the European single market for information communication technology products' positions involves changes in two key areas: policy rhetoric and professional practice. Positioning disabled people as 'vulnerable' consumers and so contradicting the position established in the CRPD, regional and national policy instruments prevent the actors' ontological shift from perceiving disability in a social rather than individual context. The separation of disabled and non-disabled people as customers is unlikely to be the long-term answer. As suggested in Chapters One and Two, whilst reasonable accommodation and assistive devices have to be provided where needed, this should be achieved in a way that does not categorise disabled customers. The development, then, of customer rights assurance and protection instruments which go further than those that are currently in place may create some positive changes. Indeed, the focus of the relevant policy instruments should be on distortive market practices that cause customers' vulnerability, not on individuals' impairments as one of the factors for justifying the experienced inequality and exclusion. In addition to this, national and international consumer rights organisations should include disabled customer rights into their agendas as currently their rights are insufficiently recognised and represented by such bodies. Another change in policy rhetoric should tackle policy instruments surrounding design and development of accessible products and environments. Instead of being tightly linked with impairments and the necessity to comply with minimum requirements, accessibility standards should be uncoupled from disability, while aiming to address needs and wants to 'the greatest extent possible by the broadest spectrum of people' Imrie and Hall (2001:14).

The move towards accessibility standards shaped around Universal Design principles rather simply focused on meeting the needs formed by impairment should go hand-in-hand with all stakeholders and disabled

people's involvement in shaping policy instruments and business practice. Technical requirements, customer rights protection legislations and human rights treaties currently seem to be ontologically disconnected, raising a number of tensions on an empirical level. Tackling the situation directly might involve developing new strategies and practices that would provide an opportunity for all the actors to directly and preferably physically participate in public discussions or policy instruments moulding procedures. Such interaction would not only ensure that all perspectives are considered and addressed in forthcoming instruments, but would also encourage the shift in the actors' ontologies, realities and used vocabularies as well as introducing the possibility of creating a common language to be used during and after the process.

While the discussion above does not aim to criticise either the retail industry for their profit-oriented practices, or regional and national governments for insufficient focus on social aspect of disability, it does intend to highlight potential ways in which the barriers that are partly created by the industry and policy rhetoric may be reduced. This research provided some evidence, suggesting that addressing the obstacles requires legislation, education and institutional action. Education and training shaped around the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and including disabled people and their organisations as experts or advisory bodies may help to reduce the barriers. While legislation may be required to guarantee enforcement, policy instruments should be also developed by involving all relevant parties and basing the process and content on the Convention.

While changes in policy rhetoric, provision of training and awareness raising are important factors in creating change, it is essential to recognise the role played by the capitalist economy within which businesses operate. Being profit-oriented and needing to constantly identify and quantify customers (Vaivio, 1999) to successfully function within the market, retail markets tend to focus on the 'general' population whose customer needs are not only satisfied but also shaped by businesses and capitalism. Having to constantly compete, companies seek growth and security (Harrison, 1979), which may prevent them from shedding light on customer groups who do not fit the 'average' customer characteristics and so may threaten their position in the capitalist or market-led economy. Despite these structural forces being difficult to challenge, current discriminatory processes and practices have to be identified, understood and changed, if the aim is the assurance and provision of equal opportunities to all EU customers and members of society.

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Appendix I: Participants – customers

Number	Group	Name	Country	Impairment type	Age group	Gender	Ethnicity
1.	Shopper	Katrina	Lithuania	Mobility imp.	18-40	Female	White Lithuanian
2.	Shopper	Pranas	Lithuania	Mobility imp.	18-40	Male	White Lithuanian
3.	Shopper	Kristupas	Lithuania	Mobility imp.	18-40	Male	White Lithuanian
4.	Shopper	Konstantinas	Lithuania	Mobility imp.	18-40	Male	White Lithuanian
5.	Shopper	Barbora	Lithuania	Mobility imp.	41-64	Female	White Lithuanian
6.	Shopper	Povile	Lithuania	Mobility imp.	41-64	Female	White Lithuanian
7.	Shopper	Vakare	Lithuania	Mobility imp.	41-64	Female	White Lithuanian
8.	Shopper	Karolis	Lithuania	Mobility imp.	41-64	Male	White Lithuanian
9.	Shopper	Girenas	Lithuania	Vision imp.	18-40	Male	White Lithuanian
10.	Shopper	Ramune	Lithuania	Vision imp.	18-40	Female	White Lithuanian
11.	Shopper	Pranciska	Lithuania	Vision imp.	41-64	Female	White Lithuanian
12.	Shopper	Juozas	Lithuania	Vision imp.	41-64	Male	White Lithuanian
13.	Shopper	Gitana	Lithuania	Vision imp.	65+	Female	White Lithuanian

14.	Shopper	Hilda	Lithuania	Vision imp.	65+	Female	White Lithuanian
15.	Shopper	Rolandas	Lithuania	Vision imp.	41-64	Male	White Lithuanian
16.	Shopper	Andrius	Lithuania	Cognitive imp.	18-40	Male	White Lithuanian
17.	Shopper	Ignas	Lithuania	Cognitive imp.	18-40	Male	White Lithuanian
18.	Shopper	Albinas	Lithuania	Mental health con.	41-64	Male	White Lithuanian
19.	Shopper	Agne	Lithuania	Cognitive imp.	41-64	Female	White Lithuanian
20.	Shopper	Sarunas	Lithuania	Cognitive imp.	41-64	Male	White Lithuanian
21.	Shopper	Dovile	Lithuania	Mental health con.	41-64	Female	White Lithuanian
22.	Shopper	Salomeja	Lithuania	Cognitive imp.	65+	Female	White Lithuanian
23.	Shopper	Maryte	Lithuania	Cognitive imp.	65+	Female	White Lithuanian
24.	Shopper	Lukas	Lithuania	Hearing imp.	18-40	Male	White Lithuanian
25.	Shopper	Justas	Lithuania	Hearing imp.	18-40	Male	White Lithuanian
26.	Shopper	Herbertas	Lithuania	Hearing imp.	65+	Male	White Lithuanian
27.	Shopper	Eugenija	Lithuania	Hearing imp.	65+	Female	White Lithuanian
28.	Shopper	Daphne	United Kingdom	Mobility imp.	18-40	Female	White British
29.	Shopper	Rachel	United Kingdom	Mobility imp.	41-64	Female	White British
30.	Shopper	Alison	United Kingdom	Vision imp.	18-40	Female	White British

31.	Shopper	Jack	United Kingdom	Vision imp.	41-64	Male	White British
32.	Shopper	Nick	United Kingdom	Vision	41-64	Male	White British
33.	Shopper	James	United Kingdom	Cognitive imp.	18-40	Male	Black African
34.	Shopper	Peter	United Kingdom	Cognitive imp.	18-40	Male	White British
35.	Shopper	Chris	United Kingdom	Hearing	18-40	Female	White British
36.	Shopper	Lisa	United Kingdom	Multiple imp.	18-40	Female	White British
37.	Shopper	Christine	United Kingdom	Multiple imp.	18-40	Female	Indian
38.	Shopper	Elisabeth	United Kingdom	Multiple	41-64	Female	White British

Appendix II: Shops visited during mystery shopping

Type of shop	Urban/ rural	Number
Pharmacy	Urban	4
Food shop	Urban	19
ICT shop	Urban	13
Stationery shop	Urban	3
Photography shop	Urban	1
Bank	Urban	3
Clothes shop	Urban	9
Shoe shop	Urban	5
Gift shop	Urban	4
Charity shop	Urban	3
Post office	Urban	1
Video rental store	Urban	2
Florist	Urban	1
Bakery	Urban	4
Total		72

Appendix III: Participants - Civil society

Type of informant	Abbreviation	Geographical representation	Representation	Number of organisations	Number of interviewed informants
International representatives of the EU disabled people's civil society	IDPO	European Union	Run by disabled people and their families	1	1
National representatives of disabled people's civil society	DPO (LT)	Lithuania	Non-government organisation for and of disabled people	1	2
	DPO (UK)	United Kingdom	Led by disabled people	1	1

Appendix IV: participants – ICT industry

Type of informant	Abbreviation	Geographical representation	Number of industry actors	Number of interviewed informants
Manufacturers	Company X	Global	1	1
Representatives of the EU ICT industry	IBR	European Union	1	2
ICT shops		Lithuania	2	2
		United Kingdom	-	-

Appendix V: Interview schedule for customers

Creating Effective Customer Policies for Disabled People in the Mainstream Private Market



- Do you like shopping?
- What shops do you like?
- Tell me more about your shopping practice and experience? How does your 'traditional' or every-day shopping look like?

Customer information

- How do you find out about products, and particularly about accessible products (ICTs)?
- What about information provision formats? What are the main/most common challenges and positive experiences?
- How does the information impact your decision to buy?
- What information do you usually look for and what information do you usually get?
- What are your experiences when accessing/ getting information about ICTs? What kind of information is lacking?
- What are your experiences in gauging information about accessible ICTs and other products? How is it provided? How it should be provided?

The journey to the shop

- How do you usually travel to the shop?
 - What transport means do you use? Why?
 - How do you decide which itinerary to take? Why?
 - When do you usually do your shopping? Why?
- What are the main challenges and positive experiences when travelling to the shop?

Navigation in retail premises

- What types of shop do you usually go to?
- What shops do you usually go to when you need ICTs?
- What shops do you prefer? Big or small? Why?
- What is important for you in the environment outside the shop?
 - What are the main barriers/ challenges?
 - What are positive aspects?
 - If you were an owner of a shop, what and how would you do?
- What about environment inside the shop?
 - What are the main barriers/ challenges?
 - What are positive aspects?
 - How does internal shop environment affect your shopping process and experience?
 - If you were an owner of a shop, what and how would you do?

Interaction in the shop

- What is your experience with shop assistants?
 - Do you notice/ have you ever noticed any differences in their behaviour or service delivery practice regarding disabled and non-disabled shoppers?
 - Are they more a source or a barrier in/ for your shopping? Why?

- What are your experiences with other customers?
- Do you need assistance in the shop? What kind of assistance?
- What are the main/ most common assistance sources?

Accessible ICT

- How important are technologies in your life?
- What about technical accessibility?
 - What is an accessible ICT for you/
 - How do you decide which technology to buy? How does it go in reality/
 - How free are you in choosing accessible ICTs?
 - When you go to the shop, how easy so you find ICT that you want?
 - If you need certain provisions and adaptations in order to make ICT fully accessible, how does this process look like?
 - What do you have to do to make ICT fully accessible? What are the main challenges and positive experiences in the process? How/ does it affect the price?
 - In your opinion, what is needed in order to improve the situation?
- Are accessible technologies affordable?
 - There is a group of products that can be purchased with a special reduction of price or taxes. Usually these products are directly related with impairments. Have you ever experienced that such reductions would be applied for mainstream ICT? What about hire-purchase price?
 - How important is the price when you buy ICTs?
 - When you need special equipment or software in order to use ICT, does it affect the price? If yes, how?

Prompts

- Print size of prices, labels, receipts, etc.
- Reaching shelves and products
- Parking
- Trolleys
- Payment
- The Chip and Pin devices

- Paying in cash/ by card
 - Warranty
 - Special offers for disabled people
 - Service priority
-
- What makes your shopping excellent?
 - Let's imagine that you have a power to create an ideal private market for disabled customers. What and how would you do?

Appendix VI: Interview schedule for national disabled people's organisations

Creating Effective Customer Policies for Disabled People in the Mainstream Private Market

Disabled consumers and accessibility

- What are the main areas of interest of your organisation?
- Do you have consumer-related policy?
 - What were the main drivers/ reasons that caused your organisation to start thinking about consumers?
 - What were the main challenges in the process?
 - How/ do the EU and national policies impact on your activities in this area?
 - What are your relations/ links with the private sector?
- What do you think are the main and the most important factors, seeking to ensure equal and quality participation in the mainstream private market for disabled people?
 - Do they (these factors) exist/ are available in practice? Why yes? Why no?
 - What are the main barriers?
 - What, in your opinion, is needed in order to improve disabled customers' participation in the mainstream private market?
- Do you have accessibility-related policy? Please, provide more details.
 - What were the main drivers/ reasons that caused your organisation to start thinking about accessibility?
 - What were the main challenges in the process?
 - How/ do the EU and national policies impact on your activities in this area?
- Do you have ICT-related policy? Please, provide more details.
 - What were the main drivers/ reasons that caused your organisation to start thinking about accessibility?
 - What were the main challenges in the process?
 - How/ do the EU and national policies impact on your activities in this area?

Co-operation/ collaboration with partners

- Who are your main external partner organisations with regard to disabled customers and accessibility?
 - Why do you cooperate with these partners?
 - What are the main goals of this collaboration/ co-operation?
- What is the role of your external partners in co-operation process?
 - How important is their input in the process?
- How do you negotiate your position?
 - What happens if positions do not match?
 - How do you enforce your agreements with partners?
 - How do you make sure that partners live up to the agreements and their commitments in terms of accessibility?
- Are there any external factors that limit or incentivise the collaboration?
 - How do the EU and national policies determine collaboration process and goals?
- How could the cooperation/collaboration be improved?

Communication with partners

- How do you communicate with partners and member organisations?
 - What are the main challenges/ strengths of this communication?
 - Are there any external factors that limit or incentivise your communication?
- How/ do the EU and national policies impact on communication process and goals?
- How could the communication process be improved?

Awareness of member organisations and partners' position

- What do you know about your member organisations' experiences, when encouraging the accessibility of the private market and mainstream products for disabled people?
 - What are the main challenges?
 - What are the main benefits?
 - How does it affect their activities and relations with other organisations and governmental bodies?
- What do you know about your partners' position in accessibility debate?

- Are you informed about your partners in terms of accessibility?
 - Why yes? Why not?
 - If you are informed, how do you use the knowledge?
 - How do you build lasting relationships?
- How do the relationships with these parties affect your organisation's activities and actions in terms of accessibility?
- In your opinion, why do all these member organisations and partners collaborate with you?

Appendix VII: Interview schedule for international civil society representatives

Creating Effective Customer Policies for Disabled People in the Private Market

Disabled ICT user and accessibility

- What are the main areas of interest of your organisation?
- Do you have accessibility related policy? Please, provide more details.
 - What were the main drivers/ reasons that caused your organisation to start thinking about accessibility?
 - What were the main challenges in the process?
 - How EU and national policies impact on your activities in this area?
- Do you have ICT related policy? Please, provide more details.
 - What were the main drivers/ reasons that caused your organisation to start thinking about accessibility?
 - What were the main challenges in the process?
 - How/ do the EU and national policies impact on your activities in this area?
- Do you have consumer related policy?
 - What were the main drivers/ reasons that caused your organisation to start thinking about consumers?
 - What were the main challenges in the process?
 - How EU and national policies impact on your activities in this area?
- What do you think are the main and the most important factors, seeking to ensure equal and quality participation in the mainstream private market for disabled people?
 - Do they (these factors) exist/ are available in practice? Why yes? Why no?
 - What are the main barriers?
 - What, in your opinion, is needed in order to improve disabled customers' participation in the mainstream private market?

Co-operation/ collaboration with partners

- Who are your main external partner organisations with regard to accessibility and disabled customers?
 - Why do you cooperate with these partners?
 - What are the main goals of this collaboration/ co-operation?
- What is the role of your external partners in co-operation process?
 - How important is their input in the process?
- How do you negotiate your position?
 - What happens if positions do not match?
 - How do you enforce your agreements with partners?
 - How do you make sure that partners live up to the agreements and their commitments in terms of accessibility?
- Are there any external factors that limit or incentivise the collaboration?
 - How do the EU and national policies determine collaboration process and goals?
- How could the cooperation/collaboration be improved?

Communication with partners

- How do you communicate with partners and member organisations?
 - What are the main challenges/ strengths of this communication?
 - Are there any external factors that limit or incentivise your communication?
- How do EU and national policies impact on communication process and goals?
- How could the communication process be improved?

Awareness of member organisations and partners' position

- What do you know about your member organisations' experiences, when encouraging the accessibility of the private market and mainstream products for disabled people?
 - What are the main challenges?
 - What are the main benefits?
 - How does it affect their activities and relations with other organisations and governmental bodies?
- What do you know about your partners' position in accessibility debate?

- Are you informed about your partners in terms of accessibility?
- Why yes, why not?
- If you are informed, how do you use the knowledge?
- How do you build lasting relationships?
- How do the relationships with these parties affect your organisation's activities and actions in terms of accessibility?

In your opinion, why do all these member organisations and partners collaborate with you?

Appendix VIII: Interview schedule for shop assistants and/ or managers

Creating Effective Customer Policies for Disabled People in the Private Market

Disabled customers

- Who are your main customers/ clients?
- How often do you come across disabled customers (every day, every week, every month, and occasionally)?
- What are your experiences in providing services for disabled shoppers?
 - What are the main challenges?
 - What are the main positive aspects?
 - What could improve your experience in providing services for disabled customers (product information, training)?

Accessible ICT for disabled people

- What are your experiences in assisting disabled people to choose accessible and usable products?
 - What are the main challenges?
 - What are positive aspects?
 - What could improve your experience in assisting for disabled customers to choose accessible and usable products?
- How would you describe the 'introduction of a new product' process in the shop?
 - How do you find out about new products, which are on stock?
 - How do you find out about their technical features?
 - How do you decide which product to offer for the customer?
- How do you find out about products or their features that are accessible for disabled people?
 - How and where do you get this information?
 - Do you receive enough information?
 - How could the information and the process of receiving the information be improved?

- Can you use the received information when assisting for disabled customers to choose the product?

Service development possibilities

- What do you think are the main and most important factors, seeking to provide quality services for disabled customers?
 - Do they (these factors) exist/ are they available in practice? Why yes? Why no?
 - What, in your opinion, is needed in order to improve disabled people's purchase and usage of ICTs?
- How does the physical environment of the shop and service provision practices affect disabled people's experiences in the shop?
 - What are the positive aspects?
 - What are the negative aspects?
 - What improvements could be made?

Is there anything else you would like to say that I haven't ask and we haven't discussed?

Appendix IX: Interview schedule for ICT manufacturers

Creating Effective Customer Policies for Disabled People in the Mainstream Private Market

Disabled customers and accessibility

- Who are the customers/ users of your company's products?
- Talking about accessible technologies, the participants often referred to your company. I wonder, what is your position toward this customer group?
- Do you have disability oriented policy? Please, provide more details.
- How does this policy affect your company's activities and competitiveness?
- Do you have specific policy for placing accessible products on the market?
- How do you know what is accessible for disabled people?
- How does your company decide which accessibility features should be integrated into new technologies?
- Your company is the leading company in the world in the field of accessibility. What were the main drivers/ reasons that caused you start thinking about and producing products that are more accessible?
- What is the role of the EU policy instruments in terms of ICTs accessibility?
 - What about national policies?
 - How do you combine your company's goals and accessibility requirements?
 - How does it affect the profitability and competitiveness?
- What are the main challenges in providing more/ new accessibility functions in new ICT products?
- What are the main benefits of providing accessible ICTs?
- What would improve the situation and make it better for you?

Cooperation/ collaboration with partners

- Who are your main external partner organizations with regard to accessibility? (retailers, DPOs, associations like DE or national representatives of ICTs, DP)
 - How would you describe your company's relationship with these partners?
 - Why do you co-operate with them?
 - What are the main goals of this collaboration/ co-operation?
- What is the role of your external partners in co-operation process?
 - How important is their input in the process?
- How do you negotiate your position?
 - What happens if positions do not match?
 - How do you enforce your agreements with partners?
 - How do you make sure that the partners live up to the agreements and their commitments in terms of accessibility?
 - How do you adjust/ harmonize different organizational goals and styles?
- Are there any external factors that limit or incentivise your collaboration?
 - How does the collaboration differ in different countries?
 - How do you deal with them? How/ do the EU and national policies determine collaboration process and goals?
- How could the co-operation/ collaboration with regard to ICT accessibility be improved?

Communication with partners

- How do you communicate with partners?
 - What are the main channels?
 - What are the main goals of this communication?
 - What are the main challenges/ strengths of this communication?
 - Are there any external factors that limit or incentivise your communication?

- How/ do the EU and national policies determine communication process and goals?
- How could the communication process be improved?

Awareness of partners' positions

- In your opinion, why do all these partners collaborate with you?
- What do you know about your partners' position in accessibility debate?
 - Are you informed about your partners in terms of accessibility?
 - Why yes? Why not?
 - If you are informed, how do you use the knowledge?
 - Do you put yourself in their shoes?
 - How do you build lasting relationships?
- How do the relations with these parties affect your company's activities and actions in terms of accessibility?
- How do you think, what are the main components/ ingredients, when creating accessible ICTs for disabled people?

Is there anything that I did not ask and you would like to say?

Appendix X: Interview schedule for international ICT business representatives

Creating Effective Customer Policies for Disabled People in the Mainstream Private Market

Disabled customers and accessibility

- Who are the customers/ users of your company's products?
- Do you have disability oriented policy? Please, provide more details.
- Do you have specific policy for placing accessible products on the market?
- What were the main drivers/ reasons that caused your company to start thinking about and producing products that are more accessible?
- What is the role of the EU's policy in this process?
 - How do you combine your company's goals and accessibility requirements?
 - How does it affect the profitability and competitiveness?
- What are the main challenges in providing more/ new accessibility functions in your ICT products?
- What are the main benefits for your company of providing accessible ICTs?

Cooperation/ collaboration with partners

- Who are your main external partner organizations with regard to accessibility?
 - Why do you co-operate with these partners?
 - What are the main goals of this collaboration/ co-operation?
- What is the role of your external partners in co-operation process?
 - How important is their input in the process?
- How do you negotiate your position?

- What happens if positions don't match?
- How do you enforce your agreements with partners?
- How do you make sure that the partners live up to the agreements and their commitments in terms of accessibility?
- Are there any external factors that limit or incentivise your collaboration?
 - How does the collaboration differ in different countries?
 - What are the main reasons for these differences?
 - How do the EU and national policies determine collaboration process and goals?
- How could the co-operation/ collaboration be improved?

Communication with partners

- How do you communicate with partners?
 - What are the main goals of this communication?
 - What are the main challenges/ strengths of this communication?
 - Are there any external factors that limit or incentivise your communication?
- How do the EU and national policies determine communication process and goals?
- How could the communication process be improved?

Awareness of partners' position

- In your opinion, why do all these partners collaborate with you?
- What do you know about your partners' position in accessibility debate?
 - Are you informed about your partners in terms of accessibility?
 - Why yes, why not?
 - If you are informed, how do you use the knowledge?
 - Do you put yourself in their shoes?
 - How do you build lasting relationships?
- How do the relations with these parties affect your company's activities and actions in terms of accessibility?