Cinema without Barriers

Accessible Cinema Toolbox

Contents:

Introduction

Jakub
Walczyk

“We find accessibility important, but unfortunately we don’t have the funds for it.” This sentence is most likely known to anyone who has been involved in the field of social inclusion as part of their professional activities. It is very convenient —after all, by saying so, we show ourselves to be socially sensitive, albeit sadly lacking the financial resources. Such a declaration quickly mitigates cognitive dissonance and the issue of accessibility is settled once and for all. With less frequency, although still regularly, one asks rhetorical questions such as: “Why do we need a lift in this place if

wheelchair users don't come anyway?" They demonstrate that the declared empathy is only ostensible and at the same time expose the ignorance of building relationships with the audience. If the infrastructure of our cinema is an insurmountable barrier, how was a given group supposed to come to the venue before?

Such a state of affairs is anything but surprising. We function in a social reality where the visibility of persons with disabilities is generally very poor while accessibility tends to be considered a fad or an add-on to a performance, film screening or exhibition (although fortunately this is changing). On the other hand, the needs of particular groups are wrongly described as special or additional, as if being able to watch a film, read a book or browse TikTok were some extraordinary, super-normative activities. And yet, with the development of new technologies, cultural practices have significantly expanded and democratized, though not for persons with non-normative abilities, regrettably.

The issues outlined above are just a drop in the ocean of challenges that the leaders of change confront every day in their organizations. Indeed, implementing accessible solutions at workplaces is very difficult. Admittedly, they are expensive—sign language translation or developing audiodescription require not only the work of a numerous team, but also technological tools, as discussed later on in this publication. Accessibility cannot be accomplished through so-called "quick-wins", i.e. straightforward, one-

off measures that yield an immediate effect. Having an induction loop installed in a cinema auditorium and providing audiodescription will not immediately draw persons with hearing or visual impairments to join our audience. Also, one should transition from the standard promotional activities to a philosophy of building relationships with the audience. Typical promotional measures, such as posting information on social media or a website, will not ensure reaching our chosen target audience easily. The chapter concerned with promotion will offer many tips on how to nurture a long-lasting relationship with our audiences. In addition, we often feel alone as we seek to implement changes, since accessibility efforts demand the support of many people across our organization, but are often treated as an additional, unpleasant duty. Consequently, it is easy to become demotivated, as we do not see the point of organizing cultural events that feature plenty of accessibility solutions but are not attended by those for whom they have been arranged. At that point, the conclusion “we spend a lot of money on it and nobody takes advantage of it” is heard more often than “accessibility is expensive”. For many, this will be yet another excuse to discontinue such endeavours.

The reality facing change leaders is therefore fraught with challenges.

However, if we accept that practicing accessibility is a process of learning (or even unlearning conventional ways of delivering events), in which mistakes do not evoke a sense of shame but become valuable lessons and bring us closer to genuine social innovation, we will get on the road to doing things that are really important and needed.

Meanwhile, culture will become a tool to initiate change and include groups that have been systemically discriminated against for years.

That was precisely our mindset when we embarked on delivering accessible film screenings at ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań. Since 2018, our Public Programme Department prepared 18 screenings with audiodescription and SDH subtitles (for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing) as part of the three-year *Sensitive Images* series.[1] Subsequently, the project evolved into a full-blown initiative called Cinema Without Barriers, which I have delivered jointly with Joanna Stankiewicz. The undertaking pursues the ideas of universal design and adopts a broad and inclusive understanding of accessibility.

1 At the time, the Department's team was composed of Ewelina Banaszek, Katarzyna Chajbos-Walczak, Bartek Lis, Adrianna Sołtysiak and myself.

Cinema Without Barriers consists in permanent, regular screenings of the latest European motion pictures with sign language translation, SDH subtitles and audiodescription. Individual titles are screened in rooms which are accessible to persons with alternative mobility and equipped with induction loops. The screenings are not free of charge, but the ticket costs PLN 5, the equivalent of EUR 1.5. They have an integrative dimension, welcoming people with sensory and motor disabilities, as well as those at risk of economic exclusion or persons with limited reading skills. In fact, anyone who wishes to see a particular film or find out what an accessible screening is may attend.

Cinema Without Barries is also about bringing worlds together. The impetus for the series did not originate with the cinema staff, but with cultural animators: cultural scholars and sociologists who, as part of their practices, design activities informed by the needs of particular groups.

Only by combining their knowledge with the competences of cinema professionals was it possible to deliver an initiative tailored to the needs of various audiences. Finally, Cinema Without Barriers is ultimately shaped by

the mistakes we have made and the lessons we have thus learned. The less-than-satisfactory turnout at some of the instalments of *Sensitive Images* prompted us to evaluate our screenings and ask what could be done better.

Hence, this publication is the outcome of learning. It is intended as a kind of toolbox that may be used to prepare a film screening that is as accessible as possible, in that it responds to the needs of different groups and seeks to eliminate the difficulties and barriers to their participation in culture. Here, accessibility itself is approached in a broad sense, spanning infrastructural and technological solutions, research into needs, building relationships with audiences and collecting feedback. On the other hand, our notions of the participation process go beyond accommodating the screening itself, but takes into account all stages of the so-called audience journey, outlined in the diagram below:

Source: Model dostępnej kultury, Warsaw 2023

The successive sections of this publication will introduce you to the characteristics of the essential audience groups, show you how to conceptualize promotion so as to effectively disseminate information about screenings, discuss the advantages of research into needs and offer

inspiring options for making cultural events accessible. The texts are designed to convey specific information concisely. You will also find links to a number of recorded lectures. We hope that you will find this publication helpful in your accessibility adventure, whether it is already underway or has only just begun. :)

Jakub Walczyk is a cultural scholar with a doctoral degree in Humanities (his dissertation concerned community-oriented shift in art institutions), cultural animator and educator. Graduate of Film Production at the Łódź Film School. Currently deputy director at Gdański Archipelag Kultury. From 2014 to 2024 Walczyk was associated with ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań, where he was involved in public projects focusing on civic education, social inclusion, diversity and accessibility.

1

Insights on audiences and areas of accessibility

In this chapter, we will share our knowledge concerning particular areas of accessibility that need to be taken care of with a view to organizing screenings for the broadest possible audience. To this end, we have given the floor to professionals who discuss the categories of accessibility issues, characterize potential audiences and suggest specific solutions that may be implemented to make cinema offerings accessible. The authors are experts in the field of accessible culture—practitioners and trainers—as well as simply recipients of culture.

The following contributions will introduce you to the potential barriers facing audiences in terms of:

- **Seeing**, i.e. being able to access key visual information in a film, such as the appearance and movement of the characters, the setting of the action, the type of environment.
- **Hearing**, i.e. being able to access important words and sound-related cues—e.g. the dialogue or the nature of the music—that are necessary for the meaning of a film to be understood.
- **Sensory experience**, i.e. being able to attend a screening in conditions that ensure cognitive comfort and a sense of security.
- **Mobility**, i.e. being able to reach the venues where the screenings take place and participate in comfortable conditions.

However, we underline that the above list is not exhaustive and that the areas of accessibility may multiply. Differences are encountered even within particular audience groups, whose members may articulate distinct needs.

The authors focus on the methods of eliminating barriers as well as on alternative modes of responding to the needs of audiences, so as to ultimately enable their full participation in screenings. As the texts are practically oriented, you will have the opportunity to find out about solutions that are tried, tested and guarantee satisfying screenings that may be enjoyed by individuals, groups of friends, peers, couples and families alike.

Want to know more about the various dimensions of accessibility? Watch “The ABC of Accessibility”, a lecture by Justyna Mańkowska and Anna Żórawska on our YouTube channel

Seeing:

Cinema-goers with visual impairments

Robert Więckowski

They will come in, watch the film, leave the building and the cinema staff will often be unaware that a visually impaired person has attended the screening. That disability is easy to miss, especially when there is a larger group of people or when you are focused on a task, such as selling or scanning tickets, rather than on the people.

However, people with visual impairments do go to the cinema and see films. There are cinema-goers among the visually impaired and those who are blind. Most simply enjoy the cinema, but the group also includes die-hard film aficionados, who follow the latest news from the world of “the Tenth Muse”, watch the works of their favourite directors and actors, as well as attend the meetings of film clubs. Moreover, members of that community also contribute to the programmes of film festivals which take into account the expectations and capabilities of viewers with disabilities. And, as in every social group, a number of blind and visually impaired persons are not interested in film at all. However, they are far fewer.

Blind persons and persons with visual impairment

The visually impaired community can be divided in two ways, each of which is relevant in terms of how they watch a film, how they move around the cinema, and how they get to the screening. Thus, first of all, there are the blind and the visually impaired, a distinction based on their ability to use their sight. To simplify the matter somewhat, it may be assumed that blind persons do not use their vision during a film showing, even if they are still capable of seeing a little. The visually impaired, on the other hand, will always use their sight to some extent.

Blind people, wanting to experience a film and ensure themselves comfort and independence, will take advantage

of audiodescription, if it is available. At present, this is the most popular and effective form of support that helps blind persons become competent viewers. They watch the film while being fully informed of what is happening on the screen from the beginning to the end of the show. If there is no audiodescription, blind viewers will rely on clues or explanations from a sighted person, or watch the film with the awareness that not everything may be clear to them, that they will miss out on certain information. Blind people are also most likely not to come to a film on their own, nearly always opting for the assistance of a sighted person. The latter will help them get to the screening, find the ticket office, then the auditorium where the film will be shown, and the right row and seat in the auditorium. Should audiodescription be unavailable, such a person will sometimes describe scenes that might be unclear to a blind viewer. Having such assistance, blind persons will often dispense with the white cane on the way to the screening or when navigating the cinema. It will be carried folded in their hand, bag or backpack.

Persons with visual impairment will rely on their sight and, in most cases, will not use the white cane. They may arrive to the screening on their own, even if they have to get to a location where they have never been before. For them, navigating an unfamiliar space is not as challenging as it is for blind persons. High-contrast signage is very helpful in that respect, and the fact is worth bearing in mind when putting up various information such as cinema listings, room

markings or seat and row numbering in the auditorium. When entering a screening, many—though not all—visually impaired people will reach for the audiodescription receivers. Some will not require the additional description despite their disability. Subtitles which translate the dialogue into Polish may present a problem for these persons but, in the case of a film with voiceover, such viewers are able to partake in the screening without additional support. Visually impaired viewers will often prefer taking seats in the rows located as close to the screen as possible. For them, this is the most advantageous location, as it enables them to use their sight to the fullest.

Persons blind from birth and persons with later blindness

This distinction is informed by the moment when sight loss occurred. People who were born blind or visually impaired, or who lost their vision within the early years of life, are considered blind from birth. The others, affected later on in their life, are commonly referred to as the blind (or "ociemniały" in Polish) The latter group is much more numerous, as it is much more likely for people to lose their sight due to age, medical condition or accident than to be born with a disability. Cinema experts are most often found in this very group. Such viewers tend to draw on the knowledge and experience they gained when they were able to see and developed attachment to cinema and film. Those unable to see or affected by severe visual impairment

from birth do not have such experiences. In consequence, representatives of the two groups often differ in their skill to correctly identify visual codes or the formal language of cinema. What may be obvious for some due to personal experience becomes a challenge for others, forcing them to make a cognitive effort and ask additional questions. It is therefore an excellent idea to create spaces in which such questions can be articulated.

There is one more thing that the visually impaired audiences badly need, namely information about a barrier-free screening which is both accessible to such viewers and published sufficiently in advance. The information should be released two weeks before the screening date at the latest, as that time frame is most often indicated by blind and visually impaired persons. Even so, the best and most desirable solution is simply regularity. Once a month, once every two weeks and at the same location—that makes getting to the cinema the easiest.

Robert Więckowski is an editor, journalist and co-founder of the Culture Without Barriers Foundation. Author of articles and publications dedicated to accessibility for visually impaired persons, including *Guidelines for Audiodescription* for audiovisual and visual arts and *The Accessible Culture Model*. Więckowski also conducts trainings on providing of service to visually impaired audiences as well as on creating audiodescription and alternative texts. Originator of the Rock'AD'Roll project and enthusiast of accessible music.

Hearing:

Can cinema and its spaces be welcoming to people with hearing disabilities?

Aleksandra Szorc, Alicja Szurkiewicz

Film is not just the action on the screen. It also involves building a certain culture we then bring into everyday life—through words, dialogue and music we have been exposed to in the cinema. Who among us has never cited a line from a favourite TV series in conversation?

Never quoted a protagonist when joking around? And how many times have we hummed movie tunes under our breath?

We estimate that in Poland, where we live, there are approximately half a million people with hearing impairments, an appreciable proportion of our population. Let us now imagine that so many people are excluded from the world of film. They are unable to hear the music or understand the dialogues. Absence of subtitles and sign language translation presents them with a genuine challenge.

We are now able to name the needs of d/Deaf and hard of hearing persons in daily life. Also, we are capable of addressing such needs in the domain of cinema.

In order to better understand the hearing impaired community, we will briefly discuss the differences in communication and the needs of that particular group.

Definitions of persons with hearing impairment

Based on the varying degrees of hearing loss and modes of functioning, we can distinguish the following definitions of people with hearing disabilities:

- **Person with hearing impairment** is a person who has been affected by any kind of hearing loss. They may communicate using verbal speech, sign language or take advantage of other systems that

support hearing. This group includes d/Deaf and hard of hearing people.

- **Deaf/non-hearing person** has a limited ability to perceive sounds and speech naturally. They receive information primarily by visual means. A deaf person cannot master verbal speech by imitating the spoken language used in their surroundings, which translates into difficulties in communicating with hearing people.
- **Hard of hearing person** has a limited ability to perceive sounds naturally. They may choose to use assistive devices such as hearing aids or cochlear implants, which support rather than substitute for hearing.

Persons with hearing disabilities, for whom sign language is their first, natural language, consider themselves a cultural minority. In this case, we speak of the **Deaf** community and Culture, both of which are capitalized to emphasize the distinctiveness of the group, which has its own language, history and traditions. For Deaf people, the national phonic language is a foreign language.

Communication modes

People with hearing disabilities use a number of means to communicate, depending on individual preferences and abilities.

- Sign Language is the natural language of communication for Deaf people. It is a visual-spatial language whose grammatical structure differs from the phonic counterpart. Expression of the entire body, facial expressions as well as eye contact with the speaker play a paramount role in sign language.
- Sign Language System is an artificial communication system, in which the grammatical structure of phonic language has been retained. It is rarely used in the Deaf community.
- Lip reading consists in visual perception of information by a Deaf person. Among people with hearing impairments, only a proportion may engage in lip reading while the degree of proficiency in that respect varies.

Accessible cinema space

The above information should be borne in mind when seeking to provide accessible cinema for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing. It will be useful when planning accessibility in three main areas:

- **Film**
  It is vital for the screened material include accessibility solutions that meet to the needs of this group, i.e. subtitles for the deaf and sign language translation. Subtitles tailored for the deaf are important for two

reasons: they enable such viewers to access the verbal content visually as well as provide a description of the sounds and music in the film.
Translation into SL is particularly important for Deaf people, who may thus enjoy films by way of a language they naturally understand. Also, it is a major modality of content reception for the children of Deaf adults, who are not yet fluent in reading and phonic language.

- **The cinema space**
  The cinema is not just film showings. Considering that it is usually dark in the auditorium, one should ensure that the stage or screen are clearly visible when any meetings or lectures are held. The speakers need to be sufficiently illuminated as well. Whenever SL translation is provided at such events, the interpreter(s) must also remain visible. Further advisable solutions include good acoustics in the auditorium, as well as an induction loop and adequate related signage.

- **Audience services**
  When organizing a screening, effective communication with the audience needs to be taken care of in the first place. This applies to both the information posted on the institution's website and the service at the ticket office. The point is not that every member of staff should be familiar with SL, but that they should not be afraid to communicate with the patrons and be able to use alternative forms of communication,

such as writing on a piece of paper or live transcription. It is good practice to provide for **online** ticket purchasing and alternative contact channels with the cinema, e.g. via text messaging or email. Another important measure is to hold regular trainings for the cinema staff to raise their awareness of the needs of persons with hearing disabilities.

Conclusions

Ensuring accessibility at cinemas is never aimed at individuals. Accessible cinema and accessible film make it possible for people with different needs to participate in the same showings. After all, cinemas are readily attended by groups of friends, families or couples, and it may happen that one person in a group has a hearing impairment while the rest are hearing. Alternatively, there may be e.g. one person who takes advantage of the induction loop and another who relies on sign language translation.

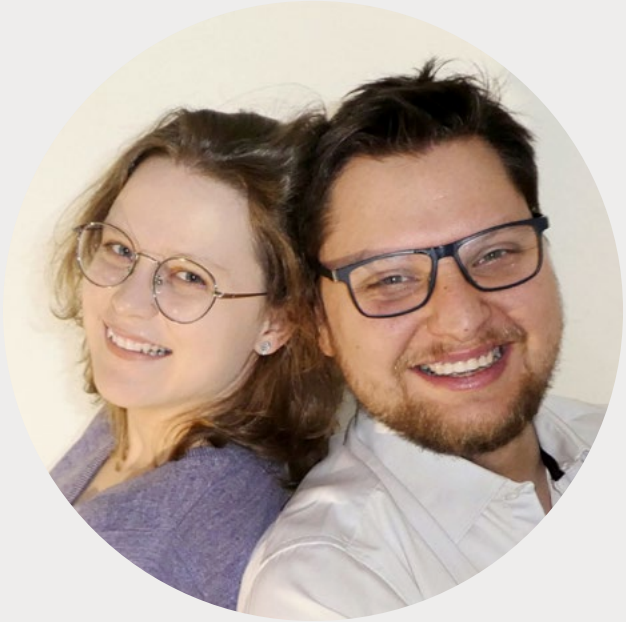
Accessibility in cinema is about universality and subjectivity. And, above all, choice.

Aleksandra Szorc is a deaf person. Graduate in Psychology and Deaf Education, coordinator of accessibility projects for d/Deaf and hard of hearing persons, including Tu Możesz—an initiative dedicated to access to information and events. As a participant of events and addressee of solutions for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing, she works to raise awareness of the needs of this group, introduces people to the world of silence during trainings and acts as a consultant on accessibility solutions.

Alicja Szurkiewicz is a Polish Sign Language interpreter, associated with the Deaf community since childhood as a daughter of Deaf parents. Interpreting coordinator at the Culture Without Barriers Foundation. Alicja translates multimedia, spots, training materials, motion pictures, as well as theatre plays, musicals and music videos. She also works live, interpreting songs at music concerts. Since 2020, she has coordinated collaboration between Culture Without Barriers Foundation and Disney Poland.

Sensory experience:

Needs of persons with sensory processing disorder: a characterization



Weronika Janiak

Jerzy Janiak

Sensory processing disorder involves difficulties in receiving and interpreting stimuli from the surroundings. It is commonly experienced by persons within the autism spectrum, although it can also occur in non-autistic people.

Challenges include **hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity to sensory stimuli**, whose processing follows an individual sensory profile.

It is assumed that there are five essential types of sensory stimuli: **visual, auditory, tactile (touch), olfactory (smell), and gustatory (taste)**. However, the human body uses additional senses and, according to some classifications, we have as many as twelve. Besides the basic ones, there is the **sense of heat, balance, movement, language, thought, life and... self**. Certain sources also mention nociception, or the sensation of pain. It is important to remember that both excessively responsive senses and those whose response has been dulled are **susceptible to discomfort**.

Attending regular screenings presents a number of challenges:

- lack of control over distracting stimuli;
- limited knowledge of how the screening will proceed;
- risk of overstimulation: a state in which processing further stimuli becomes impossible;
- fear of being exposed to a hostile reaction from viewers (when attending a screening with an assistant);
- and others...

In the case of persons within the autism spectrum and those with sensory integration disorder, the degree of sensitivity involved is impossible to assess at a glance. For instance, for each viewer with auditory hypersensitivity who requires earplugs or hearing protection, there is another for whom sound intensity in the cinema will present no issue. The same principle applies to the other aforementioned senses.

Sometimes, hypersensitivity varies even within a single sense: a person who has no problem with a loud volume of the film may be sensitive to conversations or the sound of crunching snacks. Given that each person has their own sensory profile, organizing a show for such a diverse group becomes a real challenge.

However, there are **universal solutions** to be considered that will benefit both neurotypical and autistic persons.

How to organize a sensory-friendly screening?

- **Get to know your target group.**
  Usually, sensory-friendly screenings are tailored to the needs of a specific group. Find out what hypersensitive stimuli the participants may be exposed to and whether there are elements of the screening that may trigger violent reactions. This will help you to focus on the most important elements and mitigate the negative impact of distractions on the viewers.

- **Create a list of stimuli that can be managed in the cinema.**
  Is it possible to change the lighting? Select a particular screening time? Opt out of commercials? Adjust the temperature or the sound volume? Reduce the number of participants to ensure comfort of the audience? Limit snacks, especially strong-smelling ones? Reducing the intensity of any of these elements will greatly improve the accessibility of the screening not only for that group, but also for other participants.

- **Take care to communicate with your audience.**
  State clearly what accommodations you can provide at the screening and encourage participants to use their own means of self-regulation during the screening (hearing protection, tinted spectacles, sensory chews and plushies, body expression during the film, odourless snacks, etc.).

- **Do not be afraid to ask.**
  If you lack knowledge about sensory integration disorder, consult with local NGOs working for people within the autism spectrum or organizations which have experience in organizing such screenings. By acting locally, you will get directly in touch with the potential audience, who will be happy to specify their needs and help you utilize your or the organizer's resources effectively.

Benefits of sensory-friendly screenings

Adapting film screenings to the needs of various groups has a number of benefits. First, efforts oriented towards inclusiveness increase interest in the cinema as a sensory-friendly cultural centre. This is important not only for people with sensory processing disorder themselves, but also for their carers, who often face unpleasant reactions in venues where sensory accommodations are not in place. Widespread availability of such screenings nurtures an atmosphere of understanding and empathy, while the organizers benefit from the increasing knowledge among further audiences. Holding sensory-friendly screenings provides an opportunity to make them a permanent feature in the cinema repertoire and enables developing good practices to be applied to regular screenings. Finally, contacts with NGOs established in connection with such events offer a sound footing for collaboration in future projects and, consequently, for building positive relations.

Journalist **Weronika Janiak** and pedagogue **Jerzy Janiak** are both educators involved in raising awareness about the varied natures of the autism spectrum. They are the authors of *Książka o człowieku w spektrum autyzmu [A Book a Person Within the Autism Spectrum]* (Natuli, 2022). They draw on long-standing experience of working with people within the autism spectrum, their parents and professionals (teachers, therapists, scholars), as well as on their own neurodiversity. Weronika and Jerzy are affiliated with the FIONA Foundation and the FURIA Foundation.

Mobility:

Accessible cinema and the perspective of persons with reduced mobility

Anna Rutz

Persons with disabilities, or persons with reduced mobility according to the Polish Constitution as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, are in theory guaranteed the right of equal access to all areas of private and social life, including the right of access to culture. I say “in theory”, because Poland

saw more intense undertakings relating to accessibility only after the Act of 19 July 2019 on Ensuring Accessibility for Persons with Special Needs had entered into force. I very much dislike the term “special needs”, because our needs as human beings are the same, whereas it is only the way of responding to such needs that may be called alternative (or special). And these ways is what I want to explore further.

Persons with reduced mobility—meaning who?

Persons with mobility impairments, or people with reduced mobility, are not just users of active, orthopaedic or electric wheelchairs, although these are the first associations that come to mind when we think of mobility issues. The person in question may have back problems, finds it difficult to maintain balance (and therefore uses a walker, crutches or a cane), their arm and hand movement may be impaired or their joints may be affected. At first, we may fail to notice that such problems exist. What, then, is important from the standpoint of cinema-goers with mobility issues? It is simpler than you might think.

Accessibility is information

As a potential viewer of a particular cinema, I pay attention first and foremost to the listing, both in terms of the films screened and the accessibility of relevant information online. People with manual difficulties need a website or mobile

app that is as intuitive and easily “clickable” as possible, so that the interface can be operated **using a keyboard** rather than a computer mouse, because this may be problematic for someone whose hands tremble, for example. Clarity of information and ease of use are some of the principles of universal design. An intuitive system for purchasing tickets online is important as well. Some people may require the support of an assistant (not a carer!), which is why the option of tickets for persons who accompany a spectator with a disability is well worth considering.

As someone who needs to plan what means of transport (public or private) I will use to get to the cinema, I am keen to find out on the website what the entrance to the building is like: is it possible to have a taxi stop close to the main entrance, to park a car nearby, or is it better to choose another way of getting there. From my perspective, it is also important to know where I will find an accessible entrance, i.e. equipped with a ramp and/or a lift, whether I will be able to operate the lift or platform by myself or require the assistance of the staff, which will significantly increase the time to reach the cinema auditorium. **Literally and figuratively, a “smooth” entrance** is one of the chief assets of a cultural institution. Smooth in terms of the surface leading into the building (pavers are the bane of many people with mobility issues, just as ramps made of openwork metal, eugh...), but also “smooth” in terms of the number of devices I have to deal with to get inside. Ideally,

of course, I choose places where I can be as independent as possible, because—like many people—I do not like to make a fuss around myself, waiting for a staff member to operate the lift can take very long and, on the purely human side of things, I like to enter a venue with my friends without us splitting if it is not necessary.

Sometimes we go to a place for the first time and enter it fairly spontaneously, without preparing ourselves in advance. In such cases, it is very helpful to have **legible and visible** (also from the perspective of a wheelchair user or a person with short stature) **signage** indicating where the ramp, the ticket office, the auditorium or the adapted toilet are to be found. This applies to both outdoor and indoor venues.

Accessibility is infrastructure

Given that not everyone buys tickets online, a ticket office and staff properly equipped to deal with customers “with special needs” are the key points on an institution’s accessibility map. If I have direct eye contact with the person selling the ticket, we can both see each other well, and I can reach the seat selection screen **because the counter is at the right height**, then buying a ticket is easy for me and for the clerk. I have unpleasant recollections of situations where the counter was positioned so high that I could not be seen and I had to wave my hand at the cashier to get him to notice me. I did feel infantilized and

objectified. Similarly, the height of the counter matters when it comes to snack vendors. We really like to interact with the people who serve us.

I realize that the location of screening room seats intended for persons with mobility issues is quite a controversial topic. For architectural reasons, it is sometimes difficult to have them installed in the upper rows of the auditorium. Still, whenever possible, the solution is worth considering, as sitting at the very bottom directly in front of the screen is tiresome and uncomfortable, sometimes even hazardous to the health of people with cervical spine conditions. When assisted, many people can access the upper tiers of the auditorium and leave their devices—such as a wheelchair or walker—in a safe place that does not block the aisle or escape routes. What is essential is a handrail, so as to support oneself when ascending/descending the stairs, and... the lighting. When I have trouble going up, I often look at the steps to avoid tripping. Light sources on the stairs or in the floor blind me and make it difficult to climb. Lights mounted on the wall, for example, could make it easier to negotiate the stairs. Another detail worth mentioning is the surface in the hallways and in the auditorium. A lobby floor that is too slippery (and shiny) can cause a person on crutches to fall over, while too fluffy or dense carpets in the auditorium severely restrict the movement of e.g. the front wheels in an active wheelchair (the same goes for protruding or sunken doormats at the entrance to the building).

These are details, of course, but the devil is in the detail after all.

Accessibility is people

Finally, let me address the most important aspect of accessibility: the people. Even if we provide exemplary accessible information and infrastructure, but our staff do not interact well with the patrons, all accessibility efforts will be in vain. And conversely: facilities with architectural impediments, such as lifts which can only be operated by the personnel, may be more viewed more positively because of their friendly manner. I remember a story from a dear friend of mine who had been brought into a concert hall in London using a stairclimber (a solution I definitely do not recommend), but she recalled it with a big smile because a member of staff assisted her with a joy and sense of humour that she had never encountered before. This is not about a particularly accommodating approach to patrons with disabilities, but about treating one as an equal and a partner.

If I had to put in a nutshell, I would say that information, infrastructure and people—these three well-arranged and dovetailed components are fundamental to making visitors with disabilities feel not only comfortable but also welcome at any venue.

Anna Rutz is a Rector's Plenipotentiary heading the Support Office for Persons with Disabilities at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Manager and coordinator of accessibility-focused projects in higher education. As a facilitator and trainer, Rutz conducts trainings for higher education and public institutions—including cultural establishments—dedicated to accessibility, its development, as well as the principles of communicating with people with various needs.

2

The accessible screening - how to prepare and promote it?

Accessible screenings: practical and technical aspects

Przemysław Węglarz

The technical facet of accessible screenings may at first appear a complex undertaking, requiring a combination of multiple elements and the application of specific procedures. Not only technological resources, but also

sound cooperation of the entire team and a general attitude of openness will certainly be an advantage here. However, it is an adventure worth embarking on, as evinced by the continually increasing turnout at Cinema Without Barriers screenings and the community emerging around them.

The screenings of Cinema Without Barriers, which I have been involved in as projectionist since the beginning of the project, feature a number of accommodations that make the shows as accessible as possible for the audience. I will discuss them below in an attempt to highlight the issues which are relevant from the standpoint of the person responsible for technical side of the project.

Induction loop

Our “invisible friend” in the cinema auditorium is a device installed in the cinema space to enhance sound perception for persons with hearing aids and cochlear implants, whose induction coil acts as a signal receiver. The induction loop sends the signal straight to such devices and, by eliminating interference, helps one hear the soundtrack and dialogue in the film clearly. It is necessary to have specialized contractors install the induction loop in the auditorium.

At ZAMEK Culture Centre’s Pałacowe Cinema, where Cinema Without Barriers screenings take place, the induction loop covers all rows of seats. In rooms without an induction loop or outdoors, a portable device may be used, but its range

is limited. The areas covered by the portable induction loop should be properly marked so that the audience know where to use it. During an event, the loop not only channels the film soundtrack, but also sound from a microphone (or any sound transmitting device). Thus, the loop also serves a purpose during lectures and discussions accompanying a show.

SDH subtitles

Subtitles for the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing are a type of timecoded subtitles displayed simultaneously with the film. Characteristically, besides the dialogue and commentary, they also provide a description of sounds that may be crucial for the meanings conveyed in a motion picture. Such subtitles have a number of advantages: apart from being prepared for d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, they are also helpful for foreign language learners, children learning to read and anyone else who for some reason may need this kind of textual support. Subtitles of the kind are usually provided by the distributor.

Audiodescription

This is a tool which serves to deliver verbal description of visual and audiovisual content. It is one of the basic and increasingly popular techniques for making films accessible. Information recorded by voiceover artists is played with the picture in a way that does not interfere with the dialogue.

Additional audiodescription material is provided with some titles as an introduction to the screening, as it enables better understanding of more complex and dynamic plots, which preclude extensive accounts of scenes in real time. Such an introduction proves useful when the visual layer is particularly important for the overall reception of a motion picture and the audiodescription authors need additional time to describe it in greater detail.

Audiodescription is listened to through headphones with adjustable volume, which are available to all those interested during screenings of Cinema Without Barriers. In the digital package, audiodescription is a separate stream sent through a transmitter directly to the headphones provided to the audience.

Increasingly often, an accessible screening does not require commissioning studios to develop audiodescription, as it is prepared and shared on request by the film distributor.

Tips:

- **Become acquainted with the material before the scheduled screening.**
  The quality of audiodescription is not uniform: although studios do their best to develop as comprehensive a description as possible, it may happen that the material does not contain some essential information. During one of our screenings, the audiodescription did not include foreign-language interjections translated in the subtitles, which is why it is always worthwhile for the projectionist to become acquainted with the material before the scheduled screening and, if possible, address the matter, if only by advising the audience of the situation.
- **Adjust the volume on the headphones before handing them out to the participants.**
  The volume in audiodescription devices provided to the viewers should be set at a medium level so that the sound does not “explode” directly into their ears.

- **Use DCP format whenever possible.**
  DCP (Digital Cinema Package) files are best suited to accessible film screenings. This particular format is the cinema standard, offering the highest quality of data recording and fail-proof performance as it integrates image, sound, subtitles and audiodescription, ensuring perfect synchronization of all elements. The distribution of films using DCP certainly contributes to an ever increasing popularity of accessible cinema screenings, since it is easy to use and malfunction-free.

- **If you do not have a DCP file, try to ensure that the audiodescription consists of the voiceover only**
  We do not always have access to such integrated files. In such cases, the ideal audiodescription is one that does not include any elements from the film's soundtrack, but consists of the voiceover only. Consequently, there is no risk that the two tracks—from the cinema sound system and from the headphones—will overlap, generating a confusing reverberation, for example.

[QR code] Want to know more about audiodescription? Watch "Audiodescription: what you need to know", a lecture by Justyna Mańkowska on our YouTube channel

Sign language translation

Another method of eliminating barriers is to provide translation into SL. One should realize that for d/Deaf persons who come to the screenings, SDH subtitles are by no means the optimal solution, because their primary language is SL, whose spatial and visual grammar is quite distinct from phonic language.

Translations into SL are commissioned to professional interpreters. Occasionally, screenings are interpreted live but, as a rule, the interpreter records it in advance and delivers it as a digital file.

First and foremost, care must be taken to ensure that the viewers have a clear view of the interpreter's entire body. When the translation is displayed on a TV set next to the cinema screen, the glare of the monitor may interfere to some extent with the viewing experience. For this reason, the optimal solution is to add the translation recording to the picture displayed on the cinema screen. Naturally, this requires the screening to be properly planned, while extra time has to be allocated to integrate various layers of the picture.

Sensory-friendly screenings

The general principles of sensory-friendly screenings are that they should take place in an environment which ensures

cognitive comfort and a sense of safety. It is assumed that in practice this means no crowds, dimmed lighting, no flashing images, muted sound. However, since we are all distinct, comfort and safety are likely to mean something different for individual members of the audience. Hence, from the standpoint of the projectionist and the person who attends to the screening, the most important thing is not to confine oneself to a routine established once-and-for-all. Instead, one should listen to the audience and be open to their needs. A sense of safety is nurtured primarily by the circumstances in which the viewer is able to communicate their individual needs directly. For instance, during one of the screenings, an audience member with a high sensitivity to smells asked for the door to be left slightly ajar so that the room could be better ventilated.

Therefore, it is vital for the projectionist and the audience attendants to be on their toes during screenings. At the beginning of an event, even before the lights are dimmed, it is a good idea to encourage the viewers to call for an attendant by e.g. raising their hand, should a technical failure or any other problem occur. Although it is not part of the projectionist's official duties, it may be advisable to leave the box after the screening to lend a hand if needed, see if anyone needs assistance when leaving the room or simply to exchange impressions about the film the audience have just seen.

Also, it is important to realize that blunders and slip-ups are part and parcel of the job. It may happen that the solutions to eliminate barriers do not blend in perfectly with the screening, sometimes the equipment fails and people make mistakes, which in extreme cases can result in the screening being cancelled or discontinued. The first scheduled screening of Cinema Without Barriers, during which I debuted as a projectionist at such an event, did not take place due to an error for which I was responsible. The audience was informed of the fact and apologized to for the situation. However, since the audience turned out to be friendly and extremely understanding, that did not affect the overall reception of the series. I would like to leave readers with the thought that slip-ups do happen, while peace of mind comes with experience.

Przemysław Węglarz is a projection specialist at ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań. Holding a Master's in Cultural Studies obtained after an electronic technical secondary, he has been wired to the projection box since 2007. Following the digital revolution in the cinema industry, he abandoned multiplexes in favour of studio cinemas. Since 2022, he has contributed to numerous film festivals and audiovisual projects—including accessible film screenings as part of Cinema Without Barriers—from his booth in the Pałacowe Cinema.

Promotion = relationship. On accessible communication

Joanna Stankiewicz

Wondering how to reach a diverse audience without excluding anyone?

Remember that all-round accessibility or, more broadly, inclusiveness, may be impossible, but it is worth striving for. Why? Because we all should enjoy access to culture on an equal basis.

The accessible culture model: stages of the journey

Before you start working on an event as a team, it may be worthwhile to take advantage of the audience journey model. In this model, you step into the shoes of a person partaking in your activities, so as to have a close look at the interactions and relationships that take place between your institution and audience members before, during and after the event. This is a good exercise because it enables you to understand the behaviour of particular persons, while repeating it every once in a while is sure to reap you benefits as well! A diagram showing the audience journey in a graphic form is included in the Introduction to this Toolkit.

The crucial stages of the journey are as follows:

Step 1: Obtaining information about the event

- Think how the people you want to reach find information about the events they are interested in, what communication channels they use and what forms of contact work best in their case (I will elaborate on this later on, so do not worry if answering such questions is difficult at this point).

Step 2: Buying the ticket

- Imagine the experience of persons with different needs as they purchase the ticket. Will a person relying on a screen reader be able to use your website? Is the ticket office equipped with an induction loop and does its staff use a microphone so that a person with a hearing aid can use it and communicate more easily? Is the screen at the ticket kiosk positioned at the right height so that it is readily accessible to a person in a wheelchair? And so on.

Step 3: Getting to and from the event

- Think about various audience groups and their particular needs in terms of transportation. Does public transport reach your institution? Is it available during the hours you have scheduled the event for? Is the route to and from the stop free of architectural obstacles? Is there a parking space for persons with disabilities close to your institution? Is it easy to get from there to the venue? And so on.

Step 4: Navigating the venue

- Think about the infrastructure at your premises. Is the way to the venue free of architectural obstacles? Are the stairs contrast-enhanced and the venue adequately lit? Can you provide assistance from the stop, car park or at least from the ticket office? Is there an adapted

toilet near the venue? Are the café and gift shop accessible to persons with different needs? And so on.

Step 5: Experience at the event

- Think about the conveniences or accommodations that you can provide. Will sign language translation be available at the event? Is there an induction loop installed in the auditorium? Is the venue and the route leading there ensory-friendly? And so on.

Step 6: Keeping in touch with the audience

- Think about how to keep in touch with the people who have visited your institution. Do you plan to publish any material from the event? Can you prepare an evaluation survey or simply talk to the audience after the show, enabling persons with special needs to assess the event in terms of the range, quality and adequacy of the accessibility solutions in place, among other things? And so on.

Promotion strategy: step-by-step

How to make promotion inclusive with respect to persons with various needs?

Step 1: Embrace learning

First of all, we need to find out about and understand the needs of our audiences, which is why we should start by gaining knowledge.

- Search for information about potential audiences, their needs and preferences.
- Read research reports, consult target groups, always keeping your knowledge up to date.

Step 2: Get to know one another

The title of this section equates between promotion and relationship, as we believe it is crucial to get to know the milieu, establish a relationship with the leaders and maintain such contact at all times.

- Create a database of organizations and media outlets that target potential audiences in the city, region or nationwide.
- Establish contact with local NGOs, join Facebook groups for persons with disabilities, find out if there is a centre for children with hearing or visual impairments in your town or if there is an office dedicated to students with disabilities at the university.
- Look for publications specializing in cultural accessibility or aimed at senior citizens

- Write an e-mail, call, arrange to meet and consult your ideas with the people you want to invite to your event.

Step 3: Open up to various modes of communication

We are different and communicate in different ways in our daily lives.

- Use diverse channels of communication and adapt the way you communicate to specific audience groups. Use social media, post information on your website, send newsletters, make sure to be in direct contact with your audiences and organizations working for and with them, make your phone number and email address available; blind or elderly persons are likely to use the former, while persons with visual and hearing impairments may opt for the latter.

Step 4: Develop accessible visual identity

When planning graphic design, try to find the golden mean that will render it accessible to the possibly most diverse group of people.

- Use the knowledge you have acquired and adapt visual identity to the needs and preferences of various audiences, but do not give up on attractive format! Remember the basics: key information, simple language, right font, contrast and so on.

Step 5: Assess feasibility and plan your actions.

You will not be able to do everything at once; also, you are by no means expected to do everything in any case. Adopt the small steps approach.

- Assess the feasibility of your promotional schedule and budget; think about what you can start with and what may be addressed later
- Remember that your institution will never be thoroughly accessible to everyone. With your team, consider what resources you have at your disposal, which group you want to target first and what you can do within the constraints of the schedule, budget and personnel assets.

Communication adapted to various needs

Each and every one of us has different needs and preferences. When communicating, strive to satisfy as many of them as possible. Remember that a solution recommended for communication involving a particular group will very often be well received by others as well. In addition, after a while you will discover that accessibility pays off: it will improve SEO performance of your website, while social media algorithms will prioritize your posts over others because your photos and other visuals are accompanied by alternative descriptions.

Communication adapted to the needs and preferences of d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons

- Focus on visual information. Add accessibility icons. If you plan sign language translation, be sure to make the SL icon highly visible in the graphic material.
- Integrate graphic elements in posters and flyers, preferably illustrating the type of event or supplementing the content (e.g. a clock icon next to the time) and provide specific information: what?, where?, when?, how much?, contact details of the promoter (mobile phone including texting option and/or email address).
- Including SL translation into in your material should not mean dispensing with the written text.
- Always add subtitles to the multimedia you share. You can use free software to do this.
- If you have the option, include SL translation in the multimedia or/and create an invitation to an event in SL and add subtitles to it.
- Use simple, uncomplicated language.

Communication adapted to the needs and preferences of the elderly and persons with mobility impairments

- Prepare an invitation which provides comprehensive information concerning architectural accessibility,

including the route leading to the institution and the venue, the location of toilets and ticket offices, also mentioning such details as strobe lights (strobe lighting can increase the risk of epileptic seizures). Specify what obstacles members of the audience may encounter on their way.

- Ensure assistance and state how to obtain it.

Communication adapted to the needs and preferences of blind and partially sighted persons

- Describe photographs and other major graphic elements featured in promotional materials (this does not apply to typically decorative elements). Picture descriptions should be concise, not exceeding two to three sentences.
- Use oral communication—i.e. telephone—and/or electronic channels of conveying information, e.g. email, website, social media posts, newsletter, but prepare them accordingly.

Tip:

If you want to find out how a person who does not recognize some or all colours sees, use the Colorblindly plug-in for Chrome.

How to write in order for screen readers to read what we wanted to communicate correctly?

- Format files and use built-in styles: Heading 1, Heading 2 etc. Headings enable people who use keyboards and screen readers to comfortably navigate through a document, make it easier to identify its structure and thus move smoothly to the information one is looking for in your text.
- Do not use document scans, because the reader is not able to process the contents of such files.
- Write using large, sans-serif font (minimum 14 pts), apply appropriate contrast and line spacing: 1.15 or 1.5 pts; this ensures better text readability for persons with visual impairments.
- Avoid vertical captions, because screen readers read text line by line from left to right. Consequently, vertical captions can disrupt the order in which a text is read.
- Create alternative descriptions for relevant images and graphic elements (omit descriptions for typically decorative elements); the screen reader will then read out the content to the user.
- Use link labels: instead of using whole addresses (as the screen reader will read the entire sequence of letters and numbers), provide them with plain and descriptive names that make their purpose clear

(e.g. replace https://kinopalacowe.pl/podstrony/8487-kino-bez-barier/ with the screen label “Cinema Without Barriers website”).

- Use accessible tools. Numerous programs have built-in accessibility options; this is a standard for giants like Microsoft, Apple and Adobe (which, interestingly enough, is most likely profitable for those companies). For example, in Microsoft Word, verify your text by running the Accessibility Checker, whereas in Acrobat Reader use the Prepare for Accessibility option.

Tip:

If you want to know how screen readers work, install NVDA (Non-Visual Desktop Access) or use browser plug-ins (e.g. Screen Reader for Chrome).

Making the message clear and understandable

ETR, or Easy-to-Read text offers a solution catering to the needs of persons with intellectual disabilities. Others who might benefit from it include persons within the autism spectrum, d/Deaf persons, the elderly as well as children and foreign nationals. If you use ETR descriptions, be sure to mark them with an icon and a description.

As we do not use ETR as part of Cinema Without Barriers, we cannot claim to be experts on the subject. Even so, we make the effort to write clearly, simply and understandably. Also, we always keep a few ETR principles in mind and apply them in our daily work (some of those overlap with the advice above. You may notice that accessibility encompasses a broad set of principles and laws that often coincide with and complement one another):

- **Use simple words.**
  Use comprehensible words, employing the same vocabulary to describe the same things. Avoid complicated terms and borrowings.
- **Use examples from everyday life.**
  Illustrate information with examples from everyday life that will be easy to understand for everyone.
- **Avoid metaphors, abbreviations and large figures.**
  Do not use metaphors or abbreviations that may be difficult to understand. Instead, explain things directly.
- **Use short and affirmative sentences.**
  Use short, lucid sentences in the active voice to make them easy to digest. Avoid complex and negative sentences.
- **Organize information.**
  Organize text clearly, using headings and sub-headings to facilitate reading and understanding.

- **Avoid dark backgrounds and complex designs.**
  Use light backgrounds and adequate contrast to make texts legible. Avoid complex designs that may hamper reading.

- **Use suitable fonts.**
  Choose sans-serif fonts of appropriate size (at least 14 pts) that are easy to read.

- **Avoid writing in uppercase and italics.**
  Do not write whole words in uppercase or italics as this may hamper reading.

- **Avoid coloured text, underlining and abbreviations.**
  Use uniform text colour, avoid underlining and abbreviations that may make reading difficult.

- **Keep text layout legible.**
  Begin new sentences on a new line, without moving words to the next line.

- **Include relevant information only.**
  Highlight important information and avoid excessive detail that may be overwhelming for the reader.

- **Include illustrations to facilitate understanding.**
  Add drawings, pictures and symbols that help reader understand the content of the text.

- **Use full dates.**
  Provide full dates in a format that is easy to understand, e.g. “Tuesday, 12 October 2022”.

- **Consult the text with readers with intellectual disabilities**
  Before publishing an ETR text, consult it with persons with intellectual disabilities to make sure it is understood by all.

Tip:

If there is no app/software in your language that would enable you check that the text is simple and understandable, you can use ChatGPT: just paste the text you are working on into the chat window and give the following prompt: “rephrase the text in line with ETR principles” with a description of such principles and then compare the original version with the one generated by AI.

Available social media

If your institution has a profile on Instagram and/or Facebook remember a few key principles:

- **Accessibility information:**
  Share accessibility information relating to your event both through graphic material and text. Start with that information instead of hiding it at the end of the

post—d/Deaf people who are looking for SL-translated events will click on your post quicker if they see the SL icon in the visuals.

- **Alternative texts:**
  Add alternative texts to images and other visual content so that people using screen readers can easily understand them. Good news: such content is better positioned!

- **Hashtags:**
  Add a capitalized word to follow the #symbol; with several words, have each one start with a capital letter, for example #CinemaWithoutBarriers.

- **Avoid overusing emoticons:**
  Limit the use of emoticons, as they may hamper understanding for persons who find it difficult to interpret such symbols or use screen readers (did you know that each emoticon has a name, and a screen reader will read them all, before the user gets to the information you want to communicate to them?).

- **Adding subtitles to videos:**
  Always add subtitles to videos so that the d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing can easily follow the content. Other users will benefit from such a convenience as well.

Remember, accessible communication will benefit us all!

Joanna Stankiewicz is a co-ordinator as well as promotion and relationship-building leader in the Cinema Without Barriers project. Previously associated with the Animator IFFA as Press Officer; subsequently, Joanna worked as Director and curator of the Animator PRO industry conference and head of the promotion department at Ale Kino! Festival.

3

Inspirations

Dementia-Friendly or ‘Relaxed’ Screenings

James Connor

Introduction

People with dementia—sometimes referred to as Alzheimer’s disease—often experience social exclusion and isolation due to their condition, therefore the provision of meaningful activities is crucial to their mental and emotional well-being. This increasing issue requires the wider society

to think and act more creatively in the kind of support that can be offered to a growing demographic of older cinemagoers.

Besides their obvious value, the arts—including cinemagoing—can make a difference to people with dementia. Activities such as watching a film in a cinema do not necessarily rely on the kind of memory and understanding the condition impacts and therefore offer other ways of communicating and providing enjoyment when engaging with others becomes more difficult.

Dementia-friendly screenings (DFS) or 'relaxed' screenings enable people living with dementia, their families and carers to attend the cinema in a safe and welcoming environment. Holding dementia friendly screenings is not just socially responsible—it can also bring economic benefits to your cinema when developed successfully.

What is dementia?

Dementia is caused when the brain is damaged by diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease or a series of strokes. It is progressive, which means it begins with mild symptoms that get worse over time and is not a natural part of the ageing process.

Different types of dementia tend to affect people in different ways: a person with dementia might have difficulties with

memory loss, understanding communication and language, visual and verbal perception, and even their mood or behaviour.

Understanding the audience

One of the first steps any cinema operator should take is to establish connections within their local communities. Working on a local level with service providers, charities, care homes, and local organisations that already support people with dementia can help you create a support network, identify a potential audience, and grow it.

You will also be able to consult with these organisations to find a suitable time for your screening(s) and they can offer support with any specific local challenges and requirements facing that audience.

How to make your cinema dementia-friendly

Making your cinema dementia-friendly will make it better for everyone, both the audience and the staff. While there may be things that you cannot influence, such as the venue's overall layout, small changes can make a big difference.

Making sure the staff and volunteers are dementia-aware and trained can also compensate for any challenges created by your cinema's design. Think about the following key areas:

- Making signage clear and easy to understand
- Ensuring access to the venue is as simple as possible and the staff are on hand to support where appropriate
- Removing any ‘barriers’ and making the physical environment accessible
- Think about the access and use of wash facilities and disabled toilets where available
- Providing a quiet space and/or seating, particularly if the cinema is busy and customers may need to queue for extended periods

Delivering Dementia-Friendly Screenings (DFS)

As there are many ways in which a screening and the customer journey can be made more accessible and comfortable to audiences who have dementia, it is worth considering the following:

Arriving at the cinema

- Assign staff to welcome and wait with people who are being dropped off at the venue
- Front of house staff are often the first point of contact, so they should be provided with a list of FAQs to ensure they have all relevant information ready to share with the customers

- If possible, provide additional space for storing mobility aids and have staff on hand to reunite the aid with the person who needs it throughout their visit

In the auditorium

- If available, the staff supporting the screening should have access to the seating plan to ensure groups can be supported effectively and it might even be worth assigning a member of staff to support individual groups throughout their visit.
- Allow more time for people to take their seats by providing access to the screen earlier
- Where possible, increase wheelchair spaces and capacity for those with mobility issues
- Only use 70% of the auditorium capacity as this will allow people to move around and will avoid the feeling of overcrowding
- Staff should be well-spaced around the screen throughout the show to assist if people need to leave or use the washrooms

Lighting and Sound

- Lights are left at a low level (higher than usual) as this helps reduce any anxiety about identifying exits and/or locating the way out if anyone wants to go to the toilet

- Generally, try to create a softer, more relaxed feel—lamps can be very effective
- Typically lower the sounds levels of the soundtrack, but also be conscious of not lowering them too much as some of the audience may also have some form of hearing loss
- Consider whether the film has any loud bangs or higher-pitched sounds which might be distressing

The preshow

- Provide an introduction informing guests about the cinema, the key staff on hand to help, and the film they are about to see to provide context for everyone attending
- Be relaxed about the start time to enable everyone to settle
- Where you are not contravening an agreement with your advertising agency, do not show adverts (and trailers) before your dementia-friendly screening
- Encourage people to engage with the film—whether by singing, clapping, talking, or laughing—where appropriate
- Provide break-out/quiet spaces if people need to leave the screening

Little extras can often make a big difference. Consider providing an opportunity to socialise with one another as it elevates the experience, even if it is just offering coffee, tea, cakes, and sandwiches.

Film programming

Selecting an appropriate and enjoyable film is key to the success of these screenings, with ‘classic’ films that are audience friendly often tending to resonate and work best with this audience.

The musical genre works particularly well as evidence suggests that the brain processes music differently to other functions, allowing people with dementia to enjoy songs and music long after other abilities are impacted. If showing a musical, you could also consider providing song sheets or even holding a sing-a-long screening or choir before, during or after the screening.

It is also worth considering asking your audience what they might like to see at the cinema, as this can help with audience engagement, development, and the success of these screenings.

Final thoughts

By developing an understanding of dementia with these screenings, cinemas can make a huge difference to people living with the condition, their families who often are unable to enjoy leisure activities in the community with their loved ones, and perhaps more importantly raising awareness, understanding and acceptance with the wider public and other cinemagoers.

James Connor is the Senior Policy and Projects Manager at UK Cinema Association. James has gained an Honours degree in Film Studies and a Masters in Film Producing and Business Management. Having joined the Association in 2017, he leads on a number of key policy areas, including access and inclusion, education and training, cinema security/safety and environmental management and sustainability.

Accessible screenings for young audiences

Joanna Żak

When, several years ago, I was opening a cinema with the help of my friends, I came up with the idea that we would offer tea to the audience to break the ice and lay the groundwork for the relationships we would hopefully build. There was no way I could create a magical cinema

atmosphere based on the architecture of the premises—it was the total opposite of an accessible picture-house.

Over time, patrons started to bring their own teas, which we drank together before or during screenings. And when the works on the nearby street and tram route made it much more difficult to reach the venue, the teas—as we joked—became a reward for the labours of getting there.

This story reflects one of the many meanings of accessible cinema: one based on openness to another human and empathy, on imagining what the journey to the cinema might be like for each member of the audience and how we can make the experience more enjoyable or easier.

> **I have recently heard from a person on the autism spectrum that it would be enough for the box office staff to assume that potentially each viewer is on the spectrum. It is all about kind approach and making one feel welcome at a particular place.**

This is borne out by research I carried out several years ago among persons aged 15 – 18. Young people clearly articulated that they were looking for safe spaces for themselves from which they would not be chased away. They need events intended for them, events to which they feel invited.

This sounds like something easy to do, and yet the issue of the presence or absence of children and young people in cinemas keeps many people in the film industry up at night. Somewhat perversely, I think this is a good thing.

> **Working with and for young audiences is anything but boring, it requires one to constantly look for answers and test various solutions. Meanwhile, we make this job harder for ourselves by trying to find a recipe for success, demonizing the differences of experience due to the different times in which we grew up.**

Still, there is some good news for us because one thing does not change: for today's youth, as well as for all generations, cinema screenings translate into an experience of community that they sorely need.

Regardless of the multiple viewing modes today, cinema invariably functions as a venue of collective experience, where people jointly experience feelings and somewhat surreptitiously observe the reactions of others. Film is still considered a medium that can be shared. It is a source of entertainment, pleasure and emotion. It transports us into different worlds conveyed through various languages,

so that we can see our life experiences mirrored in the lives of others, broaden the perspective of how we see and understand the world.

When thinking about accessible screenings for young audiences, it is impossible to avoid questions concerning the economic aspect. Is cinema, known as the most democratic of arts, affordable for every wallet? Does our offering reach every person that may be interested?

As a sector, do we strive to decentralize programming and level the playing field? Do we appreciate the particular characteristics of small centres and support them?

We certainly need universal solutions and infrastructure accessible to every young person. This is the essence of education, including film education. But where can we start, working from the grassroots? From taking advantage of what we already have.

Screenings with audiodescription can be an option for all young people who are not fluent readers, and therefore prefer voiceover or dubbing to subtitles.

Subtitles, on the other hand, could benefit persons with migration experience who are better at reading than at

listening comprehension. In effect, they may have an opportunity to integrate more easily with their peers and to take part in the heated “you gotta see it” debates.

Many cinemas offer sensory-friendly film mornings for the youngest audiences, with the lights dimmed and the sound turned down in the auditorium. At such screenings, conversation is thoroughly acceptable whereas the need to move and, not infrequently, eat meets with general understanding. A number of cinemas provide sitting cushions, and blankets are offered in some as well. In addition, twenty to thirty per cent of seats may be excluded from sale to ensure comfort of the audience.

What if we took it a step further and cleared the cinema lobby of visual distractions and excessive information, turned off the music (silence is perhaps the most rarely experienced phenomenon in public spaces), clearly marked where the toilets are and where the quiet spaces may be found? What if such screenings were also organized for slightly older children?

I also associate accessible screenings with “live cinema”, i.e. screenings which seek to overcome the formula of traditional, passive reception, offering viewers a different, sometimes more engaging experience instead. Such screenings take place in freer venues and rely on less conventional formats.

And so, instead of grumbling about the light of mobile phones used by young people during screenings, how about we organize special screenings where the use of phones is even encouraged, enabling the viewers to comment on what is happening on the screen, to speak of their emotions in real time, to answer questions in a special quiz prepared by the organizer?

How about allowing young people to sing their favourite songs aloud by way of the so-called sing-along shows, where people can sing together? Why not allow our audience to experience the ups and downs of the film's characters out loud, so that they can contribute to an authorial commentary or recite excerpts from the films (in so-called quote-along shows)?

Young people highlight the ability to use the space as they need at a particular time. Perhaps it would be a reasonable solution to leave portable poufs in the auditorium, to be arranged freely (safely) in front of the rows of seats?

And when a screening is followed by a meeting with the filmmakers or special guests, how about giving the audience the opportunity to ask an anonymous question via an instant messenger or chat room displayed on the cinema screen?

From the interviews with young people I conducted a few years ago, I learned that they spend time at shopping centres because they have a place to sit and "do nothing"

there, free Wi-Fi and access to toilets. Several months ago, I heard their explicit appeal to the organizers of a film festival that they wanted to talk about films but lacked the opportunities. And this is a good place to start: ask young people what kind of cinema they need and what accessible cinema means to them. In line with the incontrovertible principle of “nothing about us without us”.

Joanna Żak is a programmer and producer of film events, currently associated with Ale Kino! Festival in Poznań. For years, she worked for the New Horizons Association. Graduate of the NEXT WAVE programme at the DFFB in Berlin, lecturer at the Film School in Katowice, selector at Filmschoolfest Munich, juror, speaker, and cultural animator.

Let’s do research! A brief introduction to social research

Bartek Lis

At a conference held some time ago in Poznań, representatives of institutions in Greater Poland shared their experiences in the field of social research. Some discussed their long-standing practice, others admitted that they still did not fully understand the idea of audience research. The statements from a number of directors evinced an

erroneous—too narrow, too elitist—understanding of culture, as well as considerably superiority-based approach to cultural practices (regrettably, the old division into high and low culture still persists). Even so, the number of seminars and workshops proved that, despite everything, the awareness that a good cultural programme cannot be delivered today without consistent social research is growing. It does pay off to be in constant dialogue with our surroundings: to learn about the motivations, be aware of the barriers to and difficulties in participation, and become more aware of the diversity of audiences. Moreover, one should actively develop their audience, also by paying increasing attention to less normative participants (e.g. with disabilities). In that respect, research can be tremendously useful!

Why is research worth doing?

It is worthwhile to conduct research for a variety of reasons, but the most important of those involves understanding the functions of our organization. If we consider ourselves to be a major actor which engages in socially and culturally relevant activities (e.g. through culture, we contribute to solving selected social problems: we prevent social exclusion, enable participation of persons whose access to culture has been hampered, educate the public on social justice, non-discrimination, acceptance), it is impossible to confront all those issues without talking to people.

We need to listen to them, ask them questions, deepen our understanding of affairs. One should explore the needs for participation and the related obstacles. Social research can be helpful in this respect, aligning simultaneously with our animation efforts which consist in creating/building relationships with the community.

When is research worth doing?

Below are only some of the situations in which our institution would benefit from conducting social research:

- when we do not know something, we have just embarked on an activity and we do not want to make our way in the dark. The old rule says: “when in doubt, ask!”. By talking to people, we can obtain information and data that will have a significant impact on the project we are carrying out;
- when we would like our target group to visit us more often, but we have no idea why they are not doing so. Again: we could try to change things randomly, but we are more likely to hit the jackpot if we are better prepared and informed;
- when the knowledge we have becomes obsolete and needs to be updated. Times change, new habits, trends or circumstances emerge. Once acquired, knowledge about senior citizens will not apply indefinitely! For

this reason, research should be repeated every once in a while to see if there has been any change in the behaviour or motivations of our audiences;

- when we want to test something, to verify our intuitions or assumptions. Although our intuition may often be right, it might be better to have “your hand shown” before ploughing “millions of coins” into an initiative;
- when we want to test the outcome/effectiveness of an action. To ensure that lesson has been learned, it is always worthwhile to establish what we have managed to do, what results we have achieved, what the public thinks about a project. There is definitely too little evaluation, while the “after-action” study should always be the baseline for the next phase of our project.

The above list can be supplemented with further reasons and benefits for conducting social research. Below, I will discuss two of those.

Research as animation

Think of research as a good opportunity to establish and develop relationships with the community. It is not just a dispassionate tool for providing hard, dry data and information. The very research process may be an engaging and interesting challenge for the respondents. If the process is well designed, it is likely that the members

of the audience will become our allies. I can recall research processes in which seniors themselves became the researchers, supporting us with the observations and conducting surveys among their peers.

Research and presentation of results as an event

When engaging in research processes, we must not forget that we are collecting a considerable amount of interesting information and that the participants in the research are eager to know the outcomes. Occasionally the research itself can provide the basis for a separate event. In addition to supplying information about how a particular group of people function, the narratives one listens to can be shared with other audiences through an audio play or exhibition, for instance. Examples include the projects I co-produced with Joanna Morawiecka: The *(Un)known Oliwa* (Narracje Festival, 2018) and *Total Love* (ZAMEK Culture Centre, 2021). The former attempted to capture the contemporary identity of the residents of a district in Gdańsk, while the latter explored the transformations of the notion of "family and intimacy that are taking place in Polish society". Although both undertakings involved valuable sociological yield, they were primarily cultural and artistic events. The people who came to the exhibitions had the opportunity to talk and get to know one another.

Research within the Cinema Without Barriers project

When we were developing the concept of a cinema whose regular screenings are accessible to a demographically and socially diverse audience, it was crucial from the outset to understand the key needs of persons with sensory disabilities. Conducting research proved indispensable as we were faced with the challenge of providing a welcoming space where d/Deaf or visually impaired persons as well as wheelchair users may meet those who (for the time being) are within the ability standard. For the reports and summaries of our activities to date, as well as our plans in that field, visit the website of ZAMEK Culture Centre: www.ckzamek.pl. In 2024, we are launching a study of audiences with sensory disabilities in four European countries (Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary), which will vitally contribute to the idea of Cinema Without Barriers.

Bartek Lis is a sociologist, social researcher (with a doctoral degree in Social Sciences), cultural animator, educator and curator of social and research programmes. Bartek has been involved at ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań (2017-2024) and Wrocław Contemporary Museum (2012-2017). His work focuses on issues relating to old age and social inclusion, critical analysis of disability and dependency discourse, as well as on using art and culture to nurture civil communities.

4

Conclusions

Culture of independence

Bartek Lis

It seems that our everyday language—the way we communicate and narrate the world—is increasingly attentive. We take care to describe reality accurately, being mindful of feminatives and appropriate pronouns. Words can support groups that seek emancipation as much as they can hurt them. This is why it is becoming a standard to speak of a “person with a disability” instead of a “disabled person”—one additional preposition completely changes the context,

while we no longer think of someone as permanently disabled. In so doing, we do not consent for that attribute to be the ultimate and comprehensive description of the individual. Able-bodiedness is merely one of the characteristics (whose degrees may vary) that may be used to describe a person, but no description gives us the right to confine them within the stereotype of a “disabled person”.

Well, fine, but have you ever wondered what that “disability” even means? I feel that despite our attention to language, we lack the time to consider the very nature of the concept. It may be worthwhile to examine it critically, as it may yield some valuable (practical) conclusions.

Disability—construed as a certain identity that may be easily illustrated by a depiction of a lame person, who most likely uses a wheelchair, a cane or some other orthopaedic device—is a social construct. It is crucial to be able to separate our bodily, medical limitations, which may be due an illness or distinct (non-normative) body structure, from the kind of person that we are. Sadness, suffering, dependence on the assistance of others, the need for institutional support should in no way be linked to motor, bodily or sensory otherness (i.e. standing out from the normative majority). Pitying another, who unlike us apparently cannot go trekking in the mountains, listen to the music of The Beatles or admire the beauty of an expressionist painting by Edward Munch, is part of that “identity-based” approach to those we consider disabled.

Instead, why not think of the "disability" construct as a fitting description of the reality around us (objects, places, services, ideas) rather than people? Such a "disability" becomes conspicuous and embarrassing for many, precisely because we continue to create a world in which it is upheld and underscored.

If a person in a wheelchair, who wants to get into a cultural institution (located, for example, in a historic building), were not compelled to announce their arrival in advance, call on other people to help operate the lift, and then take the most prominent place in the auditorium—right in the centre, right in front of the screen—maybe we would not even notice it then. "It" meaning a different ability, not a person.

Ability is a certain spectrum which encompasses us all. It affects many areas and aspects of how we function in the world. Starting from how we travel between point A and point B, through the ability to look and listen to the intellectual/cognitive perception of the world. I may have a down day, get into an accident or my birthdate will grow more and more remote from the present day. It does not matter. The key is not to let myself to be dominated by such

non-normativities (i.e. deviations from the prevalent vision of the human being: young, strong, omnipotent). Weaker eyesight in some people does not make them a distinct species.

That being said, it may be beneficial to demystify another term that we seem to use all too often without a second thought, namely “dependency”. We most often employ it to describe elderly people who, in our opinion, definitely fail to keep up with the changing world. Most likely, they include the residents of nursing homes or the neighbour who hardly ever steps out of her flat. It is a well-known fact: old age equals disability. Still, have we even considered that maybe that person’s "dependency" on the staff of a Social Welfare Centre is partly due to the fact that she lives in a block of flats without a lift? Perhaps, if spaces had been built and constructed to accommodate various modalities and stages of human life from the outset, Krysia—the neighbour mentioned above—would be able to go the local marketplace unaided for longer? Dependency is a disliked, undesirable term. Who would want to be described by a word which denotes that one is “other-directed”, reliant on other people and/or institutions?

Dependency can and should be fought against whilst promoting “co-dependency” instead, which means working together, being

supportive of one another. Culture and its spaces can offer a splendid venue where the uncomfortable and unnecessary dependency may be “suspended”.

If we make a little effort to look critically at all those “special” events, “dedicated shows”, “assisted projects” (which have to lower the bar and launch additional services), it may turn out that “disability” will also cease to be such an inconvenient, embarrassing aspect of how some of us live and function.

The *OPEN Castle* project which I have run at ZAMEK Culture Centre since 2018 consists in reintegrating the elderly into mainstream social and cultural life. They may be somewhat less independent now, but they still have the knowledge or competences that need to be recognized and taken advantage of. Ninety-year-old Kazimierz lives in a nursing home but his knowledge of the 1970s music is second to none. He plays BONEY-M hits, mixing them with the more classic songs by Polish diva Edyta Geppert. “So what?”, one might ask. Well, just as his colleague—a few decades his junior—Kazimierz can co-lead a DJ workshop. In a different situation and in a different place, Ola, not much younger than Kazimierz, runs a course in sewing handy purses out of felt. The workplaces, designed with their individual needs

in mind, have allowed such persons to “break out” of their homes, become involved in socio-cultural undertakings and showed them for who they are: exceedingly interesting individuals as opposed to just “disabled old people”.

Autonomy—the ability to decide for oneself, to make one’s own choices, to share one’s observations and talents—is crucial to people’s comfortable functioning in the world. Therefore, it is particularly worthwhile to take a critical look at our institutions and initiatives to see whether, despite our linguistic correctness, we are not perpetuating a world in which the smiling able-bodied and independent live side by side with the sad... disabled and dependent. Culture—an area of cinematic experience—may be a vital domain were such unnecessary, bothersome categories are suspended.

Enjoy your screenings!

Accessible Cinema Toolbox

Concept by
Joanna Stankiewicz, Jakub Walczyk

Edited by
Iwona Ostrowska

Proofread by
Daria Nowicka-Leśniak

Final proofread:
Justyna Knieć

English translation by
Szymon Nowak

Graphic design + typesetting (WCAG 2.2):
Dominik Boberski / Minimum Studio

Typeface: Atkinson Hyperlegible
(recommended by Braille Institute)

The team of Cinema Without Barriers:
Anna Gruszczyńska, Bartek Lis, Dawid Skórzybut,
Joanna Stankiewicz, Jakub Walczyk

This publication was developed as part of the project Cinema Without Barriers – Polish Edition, running from July 2023 to June 2024.

ZAMEK Culture Centre
ul. Św. Marcin 80/82, 61-809 Poznań

Poznań 2024

ISBN 978-83-960974-9-1

Project leader:

Funding:

The project was co-financed under the "Collaborate to Innovate" initiative launched by Europa Cinemas (Creative Europa MEDIA) and by the City of Poznań through funding at the disposal of ZAMEK Culture Centre.