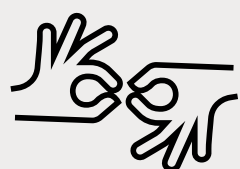
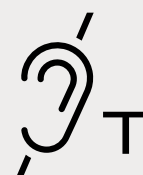


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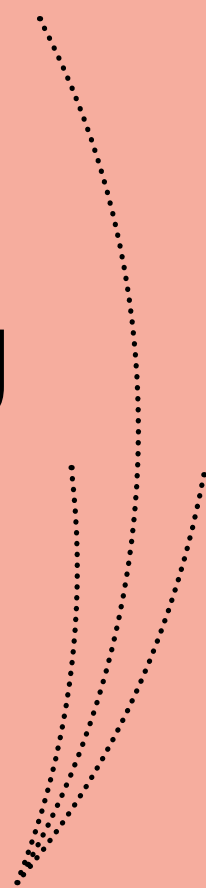


Accessible Cinema Toolbox

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As we work towards an accessible cultural event, we want to ensure that diverse people with various needs can meet on equal terms and in an inclusive space—without them having to make special announcements or extra effort.



Introduction



Joanna Stankiewicz

Ewelina Banaszek

We are delighted to present the second instalment of our *Accessible Cinema Toolbox*. We believe that the endeavours to include diverse audiences are the future of culture, which is why we have teamed up with European experts in accessible cinema to create a follow-up to the first part we released a year ago. This volume includes texts by representatives of institutions, organizations and initiatives dedicated to promoting and nurturing accessible cinema. We wish to share our knowledge, experiences and ideas, as well as inspire Readers with stories about the daily practice of accessible culture, with all its successes and challenges.

The first part of the *Toolbox* was largely based on the accessible culture model.¹ The model is both an incentive and a useful tool for us in designing and programming accessible cultural events. At the same time, it changes how we perceive participation in culture, showing that audiences start taking advantage of what institutions have to offer long before the event, when they need to obtain information about it or plan their travel. Above all, however, the model shifts the focus from specific disabilities to areas of accessibility, such as seeing, hearing, mobility, understanding and feeling. Thus, the tool moves away from a medical approach to disability and suggests how culture may be made accessible by removing barriers that are created by the system and often unknowingly perpetuated by its participants. So if you are just starting your adventure with accessible film screenings, it may be worthwhile to become acquainted with the *Toolbox's* first part.² There, you will find many useful tips and recommendations that are certain to dispel your doubts and enable you to get your bearings in inclusive culture.

In this part of the *Toolbox*, we continue to explore the practices and organizational aspects that translate into a friendly space where everyone can feel welcome. The model of accessible culture remains our lodestar, as we appreciate its flexibility and ease of being updated in line with the experiences, observations and practices of the authors of this volume.

1 https://kultura-bez-barier.pfron.org.pl/fileadmin/Projekty_UE/kultura-bez-barier/2023-11-27_Model/Model_Doste__pnej_Kultury_2023..pdf?utm_campaign=pfron&utm_source=df&utm_medium=download

2 https://ckzamek.pl/media/files/Accessible_Cinema_Toolbox.pdf

These texts readily demonstrate that our notions of accessibility are characterized by a broad perspective, which sometimes takes us beyond the context of audiences with disabilities.

Gosia Kuzdra, an event organizer associated with the Migrant Info Point foundation in Poznań, outlines her original ideas for including migrants in national film culture, while simultaneously supporting foreign language learning. Barbora Andor Tóthová engages with a similar theme, sharing tips on organizing an accessible film festival, based on the example of an event held in Košice (Slovakia). Another example of the comprehensive approach to accessibility is a text concerned with mental well-being and the needs of people in mental distress. Such issues are discussed by the artistic director of the Millennium Docs Against Gravity festival, Karol Piekarczyk, who shows that meeting diverse needs begins already at the programming stage, and that the festival programme itself may reveal paths for building an inclusive offer.

As we work towards an accessible cultural event, we want to ensure that diverse people with various needs can meet on equal terms and in an inclusive space—without them having to make special announcements or extra effort. You can find out how we do this in the case study of the Cinema Without Barriers Festival, by Joanna Stankiewicz and Maria Trzeciak.

As we rely on the model of accessible culture, ensure various accommodations and seek to remove barriers in the areas of accessibility, we are mindful not to lose sight of our actual audience who, often enough, happen to be persons experiencing disability. Here, Jakub Walczyk's text may offer inspiration as regards cinema offering for d/Deaf people, developed in cooperation with a representative of this community. The Gdańsk-based Signing Film Club organizes screenings with discussions and, besides an opportunity to discover films, it also creates a space for meetings, conversations and building relationships. Ligia Soare, an expert from Bucharest, proves that film can be a great tool in the education of the youngest d/Deaf viewers, as long as we decide to provide certain accessibility features. The author highlights what deserves particular attention when using cinema for educational purposes. The text by Bartek Lis, who conducted research on audio description with audiences and representatives of the film industry, presents several variants of the tool, showing that it may benefit not only persons with visual impairments.

Accessibility solutions are supported by specific “hard” technologies and “soft” tools. Adam Jodko's easy-to-follow tutorial introduces you to certain aspects of the cinema equipment. Meanwhile, Agnieszka Wojciechowska-Sej explains what ETR and simple language are and shows how to use both. Non-exclusive communication is also discussed by Justyna Mańkowska-Kaczmarek, who explores the means

to describe sensitive content in accessible communication and promotion prior to our event.

In order to deliver an accessible film programme, it is of course necessary for a favourable environment to be there: an institution or a cinema that is willing to launch programmes which prioritize accessibility or a social agenda. If such events are to get through and reach their audience, cooperation between different departments within such organizations is essential. To the staff, inclusive activities may seem yet another obligation they have to fulfil. This is understandable, especially when such a programme is just starting out while accessibility means the effort to acquire a set of additional skills. This can be counterbalanced by treating accessibility as an attitude, a perspective on what is involved in daily work: designing, programming, promoting and organizing events. Thus framed, accessibility becomes more a way of thinking and acting rather than a specific skill one has to master.

Running an inclusive programme is a process and a continuous learning experience, but it also requires an awareness that it is impossible to eliminate all barriers and respond to everyone's needs.

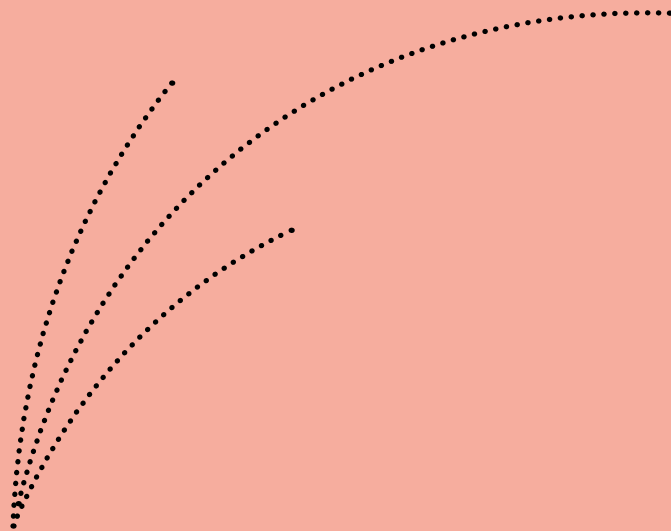
However, if we approach the issue with openness, sensitivity and reflection, we can make specific decisions and subsequently evaluate them so that our accessible programme is continuously improved.

Also, treating accessibility as a process also reveals its living tissue: the people as opposed to procedures alone. This element of working together with others and for others is greatly important. As the authors of the *Toolbox* repeatedly emphasize, it gives efforts to make culture accessible the power to create communities.

Ewelina Banaszek is cultural education specialist and head of the Department for Social Programmes at ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań. Promoter of the idea of cultural education, understood as conscious, active and critical participation in culture. Coordinator of inclusive and animation-educational projects, cultural studies expert, culture researcher, educator. Member of the CK ZAMEK accessibility team for persons with disabilities.

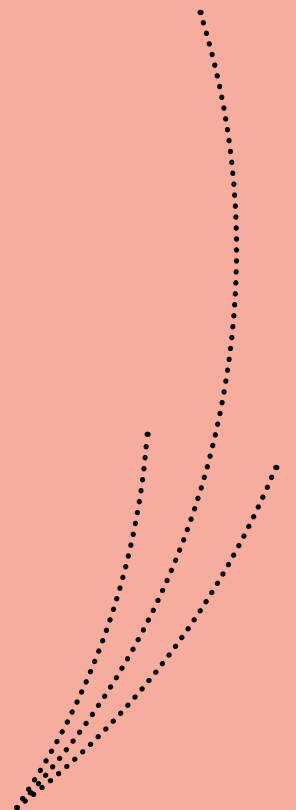
Joanna Stankiewicz has been involved in the film industry since 2012, and has worked with e.g. Animator and Ale Kino! festivals. She is the leader of development, promotion and relationship building in the Kino bez barier / Cinema Without Barriers project, co-initiator of the Forum bez barier / Forum Without Barriers, member of the Film for All Initiative, Accessibility Team at Polish Film Institute and the Working Group on Accessible Cinematography at the Accessibility Council, Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy.

chapter one



Accessible festival

After one of the family showings, a father and his daughter approached us and said: “I’m very glad we came here—I wish to raise my children in a diverse environment, I want them to know that people have various needs and communicate in different languages, including PSL.



Accessible film festival. Cinema Without Barriers Festival: a case study



In 2025, Zamek Culture Centre in Poznań saw a five-day film review combined with the Forum Without Barriers, a sector-specific conference on accessibility. The programme included thirteen films with audio description, SDH subtitles and translation into Polish Sign Language (PSL). The review was accompanied by meetings with filmmakers, discussion panels translated into PSL, a DJ set with haptic vests that allowed the rhythm and bass to be felt in the body, an awards gala and a concert with audio description. What worked, what did not, and what are we going to

improve next year? We share our advice on how to organize an accessible film festival. In doing so, we draw on our experience, observations made during the preparations and throughout the festival itself, as well as focus group research conducted among the viewers. We do not cover Forum Without Barriers in this text, but if you want to learn how to hold an accessible conference, we recommend the guide compiled by the Zero Project initiative.¹

Programme accessibility

The idea behind Cinema Without Barriers is to enable different viewers to meet in one auditorium, regardless of their health or ability. After one of the family showings, a father and his daughter approached us and said: “I’m very glad we came here—I wish to raise my children in a diverse environment, I want them to know that people have various needs and communicate in different languages, including PSL.”

During the festival, we presented a range of motion pictures with accessibility features, such as SDH subtitles, audio description and PSL translation, both live and embedded (thus enabling further distribution of the fully accessible copy). In order to raise awareness among viewers who do not use such accommodations, we encouraged them to use audio description receivers.

¹ A free guide in English can be downloaded at: https://zeroproject.org/fileadmin/root_zeroproject/Downloads/Publications/2025_Zero-Project-Guide_Conference-Accessibility_accessible.pdf.

The programme included both cult titles and premieres that were not previously available to our audiences. We focused on making the programme diverse so that everyone would find something for themselves.

Where we succeeded

- Accommodations were developed for 13 feature films. A fully accessible copy of one motion picture (with a recorded voiceover track, audio description, SDH subtitles and recorded PSL translation) took between four and five weeks to make. Due to time constraints, we decided that some of the films would be shown with live PSL interpreters.
- We established cooperation with distributors who had no previous experience in creating accessible film copies. We introduced the distributors to the idea of the festival, explained and coordinated the entire process of creating copies with accessibility features. We found it important that accessible copies of films be made available for broader distribution.
- We organized meetings with filmmakers, which added variety to the film screenings. The meetings were interpreted live into PSL.
- After the screenings, we talked to the audience and collected their comments and thoughts.

- Before the screenings, the viewers were informed that they may discuss and consult the content with PSL interpreters afterwards.

What we are going improve

- We are going to consult viewers about a practicable film programme and study their needs in this regard.
- When planning screening times, we focused on individual viewers, which excluded potentially interested groups. Next year, we are going to consult the scheduling at the initial stage of programming to avoid such situations.
- Next year, we are going to prepare a programme in English, indicating the films with the English soundtrack or subtitles.
- We are going to include other formats in the programme, such as sensory-friendly screenings, thus responding to the needs of neurodiverse persons, people with dementia and parents with little children.
- We are going to consider the running times, as classic 90-minute films work better than long films lasting several hours. We are going to feature a variety of genres and focus on valuable motion pictures that are comprehensible to persons with different levels of knowledge and educational backgrounds.

- We are going to discontinue the Festival Club, which started and ended too late and, as a mode of animation, proved unknown to our audience. Instead, we will opt for other solutions—perhaps a café with a space for integration, open during the screening hours.
- We will complete the programme earlier and start preparing accessibility features well in advance so that the projectionists can freely test the files, spot any errors and correct them.²

Inclusive communication

With respect to accessible communication, it is worthwhile to start by reflecting on the language. We should try to use inclusive forms as well as find out how our audience wants to be addressed. Let us not forget about accessibility: for example, we do not use forms such as “wiedz_ka [male_ female viewer]” in our communications, as this can hamper understanding and prevent the word from being rendered correctly by a screen reader. The full form, “wiedzowie i widzki [male and female viewers]” is to be used instead.

Our communications should emphasize the accessibility services we offer as opposed to defining for whom it is intended. As Dr Bartek Lis observes later in this *Toolbox*, it may turn out that audio description will be used not only

2 We encountered several technical problems with the files supplied by the distributor. For example, due to an audio track assigned to the wrong channel, we were unable to use the induction loop in hearing aids. The distributor was advised of the fault and what it entailed. It is important to communicate clearly to distributors what accommodations are needed and to try to obtain the material well in advance.

by blind persons, but also by people with other needs. When referring to those accompanying persons with disabilities, we should speak of assistants, not carers.

Using friendly, neutral language will help avoid stigmatization and perpetuating stereotypes, while our viewers will feel welcome. You may find out more about inclusive language in *Guidelines for Writing about People with Disabilities*.³

Where we succeeded

- We opted for accessibility in our graphic design. The principles of accessible design were discussed in the first part of *Toolbox*.⁴
- In the programme, we highlighted the types of accessibility services provided while a printed leaflet also explained the nature of those accommodations as well as stated who might benefit from them. This information was included in the pre-guide, on the website next to film descriptions and in the leaflets.
- We designated a person to run the Audience Service Desk. Julia supported viewers in choosing films and purchasing tickets and was their first point of contact. We introduced Julia on social media

3 The free guide can be downloaded at: [https://adata.org/sites/adata.org/files/files/Writing%20about%20People%20with%20Disabilities%2C%20final%202018\(2\).pdf](https://adata.org/sites/adata.org/files/files/Writing%20about%20People%20with%20Disabilities%2C%20final%202018(2).pdf).

4 J. Stankiewicz, *Promotion = relationship. On accessible communication*, [in:] *Accessible Cinema Toolbox*, Zamek Culture Centre, Poznań 2024, pp. 49–64, https://ckzamek.pl/media/files/Accessible_Cinema_Toolbox.pdf.

and in the pre-guide in easy-to-read and easy-to-understand text (ETR). Viewers could contact her by phone, text message and email, as well as—during the festival—in person at the information desk.

- Our texts were written using simple language, understandable to persons with various educational backgrounds and life experience. An ETR text about the festival was also released.

What we are going improve

- We printed the leaflets too late, and they turned out to be the key form of communication with our potential audiences. Next year, this is going to be our priority mode of communication.
- In our materials, we are going to state clearly that audio description is transmitted via headphones, so as not to discourage viewers who do not use this solution. Otherwise, they may choose not to attend screenings in the belief that they are going to hear the AD voiceover through the speakers in addition to the film's soundtrack. Also, the viewers will be informed where they can collect the receivers.

Accessibility of space

The space in our institution is not universally designed. Therefore, honesty in communication is essential.

We describe architectural barriers so that everyone can decide for themselves whether to visit us. For us, this is an element of accessibility.

Where we succeeded

- We have created a pre-guide describing the route from the nearest stop and parking spaces for persons with disabilities to ZAMEK Culture Center and its particular spaces.
- To indicate the directions on the premises, we used both floor stickers and B1-size posters guiding visitors to e.g. accessible toilets.
- We provided a quiet room with minimized stimuli (smells, sounds, etc.).
- We organized evacuation training for the volunteers and festival staff.

Volunteer assistance

All screenings were supported by volunteers. They helped distribute audio description receivers, encouraged patrons to take advantage of the devices and answered questions. During showings, they were present in the auditorium and assisted our audience members in case of any problems. The volunteer team also helped visitors navigate the Castle and reach the auditorium; for instance, it was possible for

visitors to arrange to be collected from the tram stop in front of the building. When recruiting volunteers, we looked for people who expressed interest in accessibility and were available for the duration of the event. As we wanted the volunteers to feel confident and competent during the festival, we organized various trainings for the team.

Where we succeeded

- We built an active and committed team of volunteers who regularly attended events and offered assistance to our audience.
- In collaboration with organizations working with persons with disabilities, we ran trainings on assisting wheelchair users, operating audio description devices and on etiquette towards patrons with disabilities.
- We increased the comfort of our viewers thanks to constant presence of volunteers at the screenings.

What we are going to improve

- We are going to enhance volunteer independence during film screenings, so that they may be fully responsible for the process of handing out and collecting audio description receivers (without the need for ongoing supervision by the promoter staff).
- Since we informed viewers that they may receive assistance in reaching the cinema, certain patrons

assumed that volunteers would act as professional assistants of persons with disabilities. We are aware that providing professional assistance and the availability of assistants is a widespread issue. However, volunteers are not professionals and do not have the appropriate qualifications to provide such support. Therefore, we are going to specify the scope of responsibilities of the volunteer team and communicate clearly enough for the viewers to know what to expect.

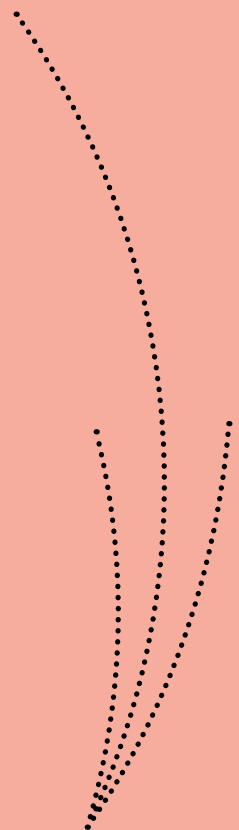
- Information about the assistance offered by volunteers will be included in the programme leaflets and on information boards accompanying regular film screenings. Moreover, this information will be communicated at the meetings of Cinema Without Barriers to raise audience awareness in this respect and encourage them to take advantage of the assistance offered during the festival.

Accessibility is a process—we do need to learn, change and listen to our audience. We hope that our experiences will inspire you to action.

Joanna Stankiewicz has been involved in the film industry since 2012, and has worked with e.g. Animator and Ale Kino! festivals. She is the leader of development, promotion and relationship building in the Kino bez barier / Cinema Without Barriers project, co-initiator of the Forum bez barier/Forum Without Barriers, member of the Film for All Initiative, Accessibility Team at Polish Film Institute and the Working Group on Accessible Cinematography at the Accessibility Council, Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy.

Maria Trzeciak is a producer of cultural projects and co-founder of the Czas Letni Festival. Currently on the team of the international Cinema Without Barriers project, Maria has previously worked with Animator, Ale Kino! and Short Waves Festival, among others.

Each human experience is distinct and not everything can be taken care of in advance. So, the most important thing for us is for a person leaving the auditorium to know that if they need assistance or a moment of peace, we are able to ensure it.



Accessible festival: the mental health context



Conversation with
Karol Piekarczyk,
artistic director of
the Millennium Docs
Against Gravity festival

How did it happen that mental well-being of the viewers became a major topic at a documentary film festival where you are the artistic director?

It did not happen all at once. As part of Millennium Docs Against Gravity and the Doc Alliance festival network, I work with documentary cinema that shows what is happening in the world or in the society, but at the same time reflects what the audience is looking for. For many years, we have seen growing interest in psychological issues among the

audience, whereby this is not limited to festivals. I am also involved in cinema distribution. Nine years ago, when we released Paweł Łoziński's *You Have No Idea How Much I Love You*—a film I would describe as therapeutic—we noticed a huge interest in films with psychological themes. The film ran in cinemas for a very long time, but there were also discussions organized around it and meetings with the director. It made us realize that people need to talk about psychological issues. We started inviting viewers to meetings after the screenings, which developed in such a way as to enable approaching the medium of film in a therapeutic sense. This has become increasingly clear in recent years. In addition, the pandemic showed that people want to be together, talk about various topics, and partake in the safe space that can be created at the cinema. This was evident, for example, after the screenings of Anna Hints' *Smoke Sauna Sisterhood*, when people readily shared their experiences. The director of the film told me—without going into details, of course—that at the post-screening meetings women would approach her, hugged her sometimes and confessed that *Sisterhood...* gave them the strength to talk to their loved ones about difficult experiences, such as sexual abuse.

You mention a safe cinema space—what other emotional needs of the audience do you try to meet during the festival?

In 2025, our festival attracted a total of over 180,000 viewers, so these needs are certainly very diverse, but I think that our audience is united by a need for community. For example, it is more important for the audience that everyone who wishes to can actually attend a screening than whether the subtitles are colourful [editor's note: SDH subtitles may feature various fonts and colours].

For us—the promoters—the priority is to make sure that everyone feels comfortable at our festival. And, above all, to provide a space where help is available if any problems or discomfort arise. Also, it is about creating an atmosphere that allows people to feel comfortable enough to say it out loud. It is impossible to completely eliminate situations that trigger negative emotions, particularly with documentary cinema that often tackles difficult, mentally burdensome topics. One of the conclusions from this year's edition is that sensitive content should be marked [trigger warnings], but we will never be able to cover all of them. Each human experience is distinct and not everything can be taken care of in advance. So, the most important thing for us is for a person leaving the auditorium to know that if they need assistance or a moment of peace, we are able to ensure it.

Who in the festival team is responsible for accessibility, also mental health-wise?

Until now, we have shared accessibility-related matters within the team. They were handled from different angles

by various departments: programming, production, promotion and partnerships. The latter, for example, would find people and organizations you can consult accessibility with and learn a lot from. However, this year we have hired an accessibility coordinator, and I believe that was a very important step forward. This person helped communication going smoothly between the various departments, coordinated different activities and kept reminding us of the issue. Importantly, the coordinator was available by phone throughout the festival, so we were able to actually help various people and provide them with the information they needed. Previously, it would sometimes happen that information about their needs did not reach us and we did not know that they needed help.

In terms of mental health, what solutions you implemented proved effective and were well received?

As regards the line-up of films, we try to respond to people's needs; we want to be up to date with topics that are important and move the audience. Apart from that, these are strictly practical solutions. For several years now, psychological support has been available at the festival for those who need it. I am speaking both of our audience as well as the people working at the festival, volunteers.

The festival is a very intense time, there is a lot of adrenaline and unpleasant situations also occur. Therefore, everyone who is part of the festival, from the audience to the team, has the opportunity to receive psychological support.

We started with psychological drop-in hours, but we realized that due to the nature of the cinema space, it is difficult to find a place for a comfortable conversation with a therapist. Naturally, we are not talking about thorough therapy—the point is that if someone leaves a screening distressed, they can talk about it right away. In subsequent years, together with our festival partner, we introduced a free helpline for the entire duration of the festival. We publicize this widely: in festival newspapers, on posters, in our social media, on our website and in the programme leaflets, because the very knowledge that such help can be obtained is vital for the festival-goers.

We have also introduced small-scale solutions. For instance, bearing in mind people with different needs—including neurodiverse persons—we have made noise-cancelling headphones available at each festival cinema. Since 2025, we have been conducting training for volunteers and the festival team to raise awareness and prepare festival staff for various situations. They are run by mental health

specialists who instruct how to help a severely upset person as well as how to respond to conflict situations or even aggression, because this also occurs—we have heated debates at the festival, and with such a large number of participants, tensions run high. Volunteers are trained in how to mediate and how to solve problems.

What are the biggest accessibility challenges and what could stand in its way?

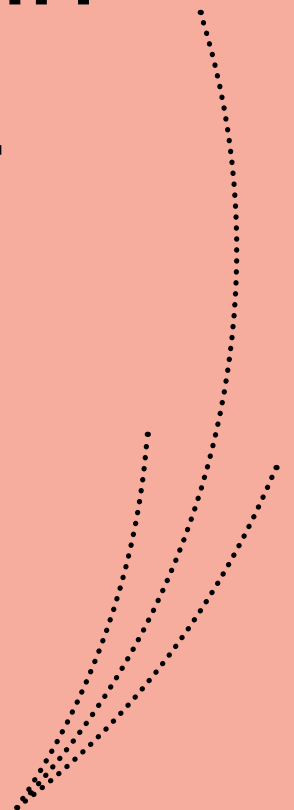
Lack of information is definitely a major obstacle. We still do not have complete knowledge of the needs, even though we are constantly trying to train and educate ourselves, and launch audience research. Another challenge in expanding accessibility is the matter of unpredictability: we are not able to foresee all the situations that may come about. In the last edition of the festival, the director of one of the films agreed, long before the event, to a screening with audio description and subtitles for the deaf. We received a copy thus configured from the filmmakers. However, it turned out that the director only saw it fifteen minutes before the screening and demanded that it be cancelled or the film withdrawn from the festival. For us, it was a surreal situation, we could not have anticipated that. The screening took place without any accessibility features. After something like that, there comes a moment when you have to decide what to do about it next. We could have said nothing

about it, and the situation probably would not have caused such a stir. However, we decided to tell the story of what happened. Obviously, it is the filmmaker who is responsible for the situation, but we as a team admitted that a different decision should have been made that day. The feedback I received afterwards from many non-governmental organizations dedicated to accessibility was very supportive.

We need this kind of openness instead of PR damage control, sweeping things under the rug or looking for excuses. Talking about these issues is more valuable than keeping quiet and enables us to actually change things.

Karol Piekarczyk is the artistic director of Millennium Docs Against Gravity, one of the largest documentary film festivals in the world. Involved with documentary films and film festivals for over 15 years. Graduate from the University of Glasgow, where he majored in film studies and sociology. Previously, he worked at the WATCH DOCS festival in Warsaw and was the artistic director of the Document Festival in Glasgow. Currently, in addition to Millennium Docs Against Gravity, Karol is engaged in film distribution and, in recent years, has been responsible for the distribution of over 30 documentary titles to cinemas. Member of the European Film Academy since 2023.

For several days,
the cinema in the
city centre becomes
a welcoming space
for the communities
who often feel
excluded from
public life. The main
goal of the festival
is to highlight and
challenge unequal
access to culture.



How to include diverse audiences? Tips from Inclusive Film Festival in Košice (Slovakia)



Barbora Andor
Tóthová

Background:

Kino Úsmev, an arthouse cinema in Košice (Slovakia), began incorporating inclusive film formats into its regular programming in 2019. The formats evolved from baby-friendly screenings and screenings for seniors to more specific formats such as dementia-friendly, autism-friendly, as well as screenings for deaf and blind audiences. These formats require higher technical and promotional standards.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and extended lockdowns, the cinema decided to launch the Inclusive Film Festival. The festival showcases all inclusive formats and offers new ways to engage communities who do not usually attend cultural events. In addition to films, the festival features an abundant accompanying programme of concerts, workshops, discussions, performances, and meetings. For several days, the cinema in the city centre becomes a welcoming space for the communities who often feel excluded from public life. The main goal of the festival is to highlight and challenge unequal access to culture. In 2025, the festival will celebrate its fifth edition.

Where to start:

If you want to engage communities in your city, begin by mapping marginalized groups in your area. The needs in your city will differ from those in Košice. Here, our first inclusive programs emerged from cooperation with an organization working with the Roma in segregated neighbourhoods. Since 2022, a large Ukrainian refugee community has also settled in Košice. For these communities, presence in the public space and visibility (through space made available for their meetings or performances) during the festival has proved to have a major impact.

Also, including themes relevant for the Roma in the programme (such as representation in film) and showings with Ukrainian subtitles effectively increase their willingness to come.

Since the first edition of the festival, we have worked with the Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union to integrate audio description in the majority of films in the programme. We have experimented with audio description playing out loud in the cinema, which has proved popular even with audiences without visual impairments. Moreover, audio description—also delivered live—features in screenings held in public spaces, such as the main street. With that particular community, dedicated promotion is also needed: adjusting visual material in terms of contrast and content; in fact, we have even translated the entire programme into Braille.

Working with the hard-of-hearing community means including closed captions for as many screenings as possible and deploying sign language ads for screenings.

Residing in your city, there may be various communities facing a range of challenges. Focus on how to serve them: what interests them, and what barriers they confront in accessing culture or film events. Enlist the collaboration of organizations that support such groups and have the people themselves involved. Form an

accessibility advisory board—an organizational body of the festival composed of representatives from different communities or organizations that support the latter.

Ask what their current needs and expectations are. What would help them feel welcome and involved? Build a sense of ownership and inclusion from the start. Discuss all aspects of organizing the festival with them: budget, programme, accessibility, and promotion.

Funding:

Culture-related schemes at the municipal or regional level, national audiovisual/cultural funds, or foundations are usually the best sources. If your budget is very limited, involve local businesses or ask partner organizations—cultural centers, cinemas, distributors—if they can help with the programme or contribute through their own grants or projects. Even a small, one-day event with accessible films and diverse communities is a valuable start.

Programme and formats:

Choose formats based on the needs of your target groups. At a minimum, include subtitles for the hard-of-hearing

and audio description for the blind audiences in as many screenings as possible. Ideally, have an induction loop installed and use specialized technology to transmit audio description via headphones.

If your budget is tight, take small steps. Even minimal adjustments can have a big impact.

Talk with the communities—ask how many showings they are able to attend and adjust the programme and budget as needed. If you cannot afford professional SDH subtitles, regular ones might still help—just consult the hard-of-hearing community in advance. Audio description can also be played aloud, which might even open up new perspectives for all viewers and raise awareness. Be bold and experiment. At Kino Úsmev, we have tried the **“Cinema for All”** format: with subtitles, audio description, dimmed lights for free movement, toys and blankets for babies, and a supervised outdoor workshop space for kids.

Be creative—but always check with your target group to make sure your ideas match their needs. New formats and experiments require time.

For example, our “Cinema for All” format did not draw a huge audience, but the feedback from those who attended was very positive.

Space:

Kino Úsmev has a large staircase in the middle, which severely hampers access. However, through constant communication and soft activities, our communities understand the limitations of a 100-year-old venue and cooperate in finding creative solutions to overcome physical barriers without extra funding or tension.

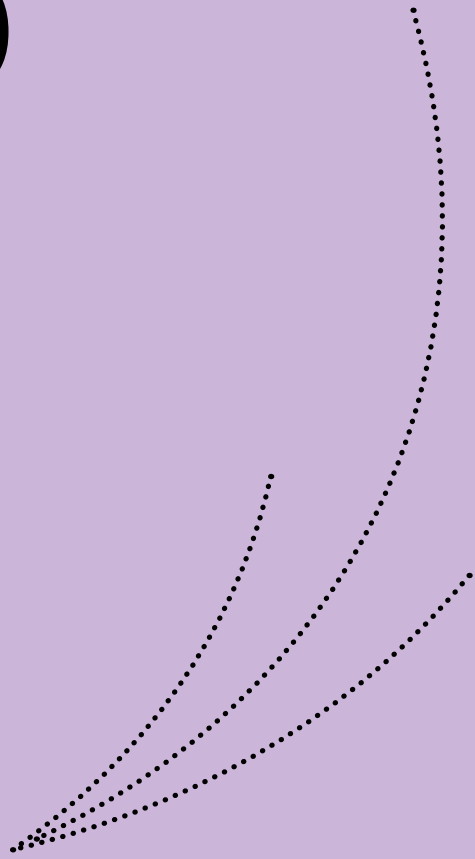
Advance information is essential, as are signs and on-site assistance. Staff from marginalized communities help make everyone feel welcome and represented, working as ushers and waiting personnel. We also offer a **sensory room**—our smallest screening hall, showing calming films (like deep-sea imagery) and sensory objects for anyone who needs a break. When possible, host shared meals, such as brunches or grill parties, for informal discussions and community building.

Feedback:

Gathering feedback from partners is essential. The shape of the festival may evolve each year, and feedback is invaluable. Use focus groups or surveys to learn what worked and what did not, as well as find out how to improve. Constructive feedback helps the festival grow, especially where community-based events are concerned.

Barbora Andor Tóthová is a culture manager with over ten years of experience. Co-founder of Kino Úsmev where, starting in 2019, she has launched multiple accessible cinema programmes, including a festival and summer camp. She recently obtained a PhD in regional economics, with her doctoral thesis focusing on grassroots cultural centres and their impact on urban life. In 2024, Barbora became a Creative Impact Research Centre Europe Fellow and founded the Caring Culture online platform.

chapter two



Practical solutions

How to write so that our audiences understand? ETR and simplified language



Agnieszka
Wojciechowska-Sej

How to plan a cinema screening so that patrons with cognitive challenges (e.g. on the autism spectrum) can enjoy the film, feeling safe from discomfort? The first step is simple: the organizers should carefully watch the film themselves. The second step is to develop a pre-guide. It is worth preparing a general pre-guide for the institution, so that the audiences may become familiar with what the

institution does, discover the events it organizes as well as find out where it is located and how to get there.¹

A more detailed pre-guide, dedicated to a specific film in a particular location, should be compiled for each screening and answer the following questions:

- How big is the room where the film will be screened?
How many people can the room accommodate?
- Are there toilets in the immediate vicinity of the room?
- How long is the film?
- Will there be commercials before the film? If so, how long will they last?
- Will there be an intermission during the film?
- Will the film have a muted soundtrack?
- What genre of film will be screened? (adventure, crime, romance, comedy...)
- What is the film about? (description in ETR, the rules of which can be found below)
- Does the film contain scenes with flashing lights and dynamic editing? You can specify at which minute this occurs.

¹ Good examples of pre-guides to an institution include those published by the Museum of Literature in Warsaw (*Przedprzewodnik Muzeum Literatury w Warszawie*), <https://muzeumliteratury.pl/przedprzewodnik-w-etr-muzeum-literatury/>; The Royal Łazienki Museum https://www.lazienki-krolewskie.pl/public/upload/download/Lazienki%20Kr%C3%B3lewskie_przedprzewodnik.pdf; Krakow Philharmonic <https://filharmoniakrakow.pl/public/dostepnosc/etr-tekst-latwy-do-czytania/>, last access: 21 July 2025.

- Are there any scenes with high noise levels in the film?
You can specify at which minute this occurs.
- Is there a talk or discussion planned after the film?
If so, how long will it last?

It is good practice for the entire pre-guide to be written in ETR, i.e. easy-to-read and easily comprehensible language. ETR is a modality of communication dedicated for persons on the autism spectrum, persons with intellectual disabilities and persons with neurological injuries. ETR also facilitates understanding of text by people in mental crisis or foreign nationals learning the language. Inclusion Europe, the European Association of Societies of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families, has developed European standards for the preparation of easy-to-read texts. The Polish version, entitled *Informacja dla wszystkich* [*Information for Everyone*], was developed by the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Disabled People.² ETR texts can be marked with an icon so that audiences know that they can expect communication formulated in a language that is easy to read and understand.³

The essential principles of ETR:

- Use simple sentences, e.g. “Raiders of the Lost Ark” is an adventure film.
- One sentence should convey one piece of information.

2 <https://www.power.gov.pl/media/13597/informacja-dla-wszystkich.pdf>, last access: 21 July 2025.

3 The relevant graphic symbol can be downloaded from www.inclusion-europe.eu/easy-to-read/.

- Use “love dots”. Place a love dot where you would normally place a comma and expand the sentence. This will help readers follow the story step by step. For instance:
The main character in the film “Raiders of the Lost Ark” is Indiana Jones. Indiana Jones is the pseudonym of the main character. Indiana Jones’ real name is Henry Walton Jones Junior. Indiana Jones is an archaeologist.
- Limit synonyms. Indiana Jones is Henry Walton Jones Jr., a man, the main character, an archaeologist, a traveler, an explorer, a lecturer, a treasure hunter... However, synonyms may be confusing for the reader.
- Avoid pronouns (he, she, they, it). Use nouns and proper names. For example:
Indiana Jones is an archaeologist. Indiana Jones teaches archaeology at the university instead of
Indiana Jones is an archaeologist. He teaches archaeology at the university.
- Avoid domain-specific vocabulary. If you must use specialist terms, explain their meaning. For example:
Indiana Jones is an archaeologist. An archaeologist is a researcher of the past. An archaeologist studies old objects. An archaeologist looks for old objects or fragments of such objects. An archaeologist can explain the history of old objects. Old objects are often found

in the ground. The place where old objects are dug out of the ground is called an excavation site.

- Use the subject-predicate structure, i.e. who/what? – what is it doing? or what is happening to someone/ something. For example:
Indiana Jones went to Egypt.
- Use active voice instead of the passive. For example:
German soldiers kidnapped Marion
instead of
Marion was kidnapped by German soldiers.
- Do not use metaphors. The sentence “Indiana Jones broke Marion’s heart” can be read literally, when it is actually refers to unrequited feeling, not a catastrophic injury to a body organ.⁴
- Avoid participles. We often use them in complex sentences. A bad example of a complicated sentence:
Rushing through the market in Cairo, with a whip and a pistol at his belt, Indiana Jones escapes from the attackers who are trying to kill him, while looking around for Marion.
A simpler version:
Indiana Jones and Marion were walking through the market in Cairo. Unknown bandits attacked Marion and Indiana Jones. Indiana Jones separates from Marion.

4 A humorous illustration of how often we use metaphors in everyday communication may be found on the Facebook page of popular photographer James Fridman. Fridman uses graphic design software to “correct” photos, literally fulfilling the requests of viewers who are dissatisfied with the pictures they had made. <https://www.facebook.com/jamesfridmanpage>, last access: 16 July 2025.

Marion runs away. Jones fights the bandits. Jones has a gun and a whip. Then Jones also runs away. The bandits chase Indiana Jones through the market. Jones escapes and looks around for Marion.

- Use bullet points or arrows in your text. They will structure the text and emphasize the cause-and-effect sequence.
- Make sure that your paragraphs are easy to read. Clearly separate paragraphs devoted to different topics. For example, do not combine information about the size of the room with directions to the cinema or a description of the film's plot. Put each piece of information in a separate paragraph, even if the paragraphs consist of only one sentence.

While it is easy to apply ETR to logistics and information, then descriptions are more complicated. The authors of descriptions, summaries and teasers often let their imagination run wild and pepper their texts with complicated vocabulary and metaphors or construct long, complex sentences that aim to convey the sequence of events. When creating an ETR text, Charles Key Ogden's dictionary *Basic English* may come in handy.⁵ Ogden compiled a very basic set of words and simplified grammar to help people learning English as a second language. He wanted to achieve the most intelligible and clear communication, without

5 <https://ia802309.us.archive.org/27/items/ogdens-basic-english-words-list-alphabetic/Ogden%27s%20Basic%20English%20Words%20List%20alphabetic.pdf> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basic_English, last access: 21 July 2025.

embellishments, synonyms or elaborate phrasing. Following Ogden's example, it is useful to adopt a limited set of words intended for film descriptions. You can take advantage of the lexicon in Ogden's dictionary and the rules he proposed.

In the case of Indiana Jones films, it would be appropriate to warn viewers about the long sequences of explosions and gunfire. The description does not need to reveal who is shooting at whom or who is attacking and who is defending themselves. Viewers have the right to follow the plot on their own. It will suffice to provide the following information: "from 2'15" to 2'40", there are loud sounds of fighting and flashes of gunfire and explosions."

As regards pre-guides, pictograms can also prove helpful. These simple black and white drawings, pictures arranged in groups, sequences or logical chains, can benefit not only people on the spectrum. They will also help foreigners and children.

If you find pictograms useful, you can create simple icons yourself or use a professional set, such as the one designed by Centrum Metod Alternatywnych. The pictograms were originally designed in Umeå, Sweden, and CMA is based on that concept. Another set of symbols is available under a free licence from ARASAAC.

In their book *Pictologies*, Matteo Civaschi and Gianmarco Milesi address film themes in a very humorous take. Do take

a look at their simplified cartoon versions of *Avatar*, *Alien*, *The Matrix* and *Spiderman*. I recommend this book as a guide to the pictogram method and composition following a cause-and-effect sequence. The humour, metaphorical thinking or mental shortcuts at the core of that book do not make it a pictogramming primer to be used in ETR communication. However, sense of humour should be ready at hand when embarking on important tasks.

Agnieszka Wojciechowska-Sej is the director of the Academic Design Centre in Łódź, art historian, postgraduate teacher, educator and academic lecturer. From 2008 to 2023, she worked at the Museum of Art in Łódź in the Education Department, programming and delivering educational activities for all groups of visitors, including those with disabilities. Curator of exhibitions at the Museum of Art in Łódź, the Central Museum of Textiles and the Academic Design Centre. As a project leader, Agnieszka worked with the Łódź edition of the *Bardzo Młoda Kultura – Koalicje Kultury* [Very Young Culture – Culture Coalitions] programme, as well as headed the education and accessibility team in the project *Cyfrowe udostępnienie zasobów MSŁ* [Digital Access to the Resources of the Museum of Art in Łódź].

Describing sensitive content gives audience members the opportunity to decide whether they have the resources, are in the condition or mood to watch difficult scenes and imagery on a given day.



Sensitive content in accessible screenings



Justyna
Mańkowska-Kaczmarek

As a medium, film has an impact on the mind and emotions. If you want to design inclusive events, you need to ensure their accessibility in terms of mental health. Try to create conditions of comfort and emotional safety to enable the audience to participate in the screening and fully engage with the film.

Sensitive content

Such content includes images, scenes, sounds, as well as narratives or themes in the film that may elicit difficult emotions and have an adverse impact on mental health.

Who may need information about sensitive content?

- Audience members who have experienced mental health crises, anxiety or phobias.
- People taking medication, e.g. psychotropic drugs, and persons with dementia.
- Neuroatypical persons, for whom accessibility means a sense of safety and predictability, which are vital for mental health and comfort.

Why should we communicate about sensitive content at the cinema?

Every filmmaker has the right to create emotional images that move the audience. However, each and every viewer comes to the cinema with different experiences, while a film screening may trigger strong, negative emotions associated with those experiences. Describing sensitive content gives audience members the opportunity to decide whether they have the resources, are in the condition or mood to watch difficult scenes and imagery on a given day. Being surprised by shocking content at the cinema is not conducive to a sense of comfort and safety. On the other hand, not everyone is determined enough to leave the cinema when they experience discomfort.

How to communicate about sensitive content?

Describe the content. Explain how it is presented and define its intensity. Indicate the scenes in which the audience can expect such content. Here is an example from the British BBFC website:

- **nudity:** During a stage show, a woman briefly exposes her breast. In another scene, a woman expresses breast milk. There are scenes of natural nudity in a bath-house.
- **suicide and self-harm:** In one scene containing moderate visual detail, a person attempts to take their own life.
- **themes:** Distressing scenes of infanticide are harrowing but undetailed. A woman attempts an abortion, and there is blood in the aftermath.

Where to find information about sensitive content?

- **www.bbfc.co.uk:** website of the British Board of Film Classification, a non-profit expert organization established over a century ago by the British film industry. Originally, the organization was responsible for censorship, but today the BBFC sets the standards and guidelines for age ratings of motion pictures released

for cinemas, television and VOD in the United Kingdom. The database contains all films released in the United Kingdom, not only those in English. The BBFC determines their age ratings and provides detailed descriptions of sensitive content.

- **www.imdb.com:** a database with information on films, series, shows, podcasts, video games, etc. Originally created entirely by the online community, the website is now owned by Amazon. A proportion of films have their Parents Guide section which offers information on sensitive content. Such information is added by the users themselves, while the Imdb community votes on whether their descriptions are adequate.
- **www.doesthedogdie.com:** a website created entirely by the online community, dedicated to sensitive content. Since it relies on democratic user contributions, the catalogue of content is very extensive.

Where and when to publish information on sensitive content?

- **On the website:** the information should accompany the description of the film, but in a separate paragraph. Using website management tools, you can hide the paragraph so that its content is only displayed when clicked on by people looking for the description of

sensitive content. Keywords relating to sensitive content (e.g. violence, war) may also be included in the listings.

- **On social media:** if you are holding an event and publish a post about a premiere showing, include information about sensitive content at the bottom of the page. You can precede the information with the abbreviation CW (Content Warning), which is increasingly used in social media. You can also place the abbreviation and information on a separate tile in your Instagram carousel. Occasionally, a pictogram with a crossed-out eye is employed as well. Unfortunately, it tends to be confused with the symbol of accessibility for persons with visual impairments. Therefore, it is better to use it as a supplement to the “sensitive content” label.
- **Before the screening:** with screenings for schoolchildren, inform teachers or chaperones in advance about sensitive content. If you are organizing a screening with a discussion or workshops, inform the audience about sensitive content in the film before it screens and assure them that they are free to leave at any time and return to the auditorium later.

Accessible screenings and mental health

- **Establish relationships:** if you want to open your cinema to persons with mental health needs, establish relationships with local organizations working with such communities, open psychiatric wards or therapy centres. Find out how their community like to spend their free time and become their cultural partner. Cinema and culture promote recovery and well-being. The professionals at those institutions can also provide you with expert support with respect to programming.
- **Consult the programme/film:** consult the films you intend to show with an occupational therapist or psychotherapist. Let them know how long the screening lasts. Prepare a list of sensitive content that will appear in the film and share it with the therapist.
- **Get the venue ready:** map out locations that may elicit anxiety or be difficult and overwhelming, e.g. heavy doors; narrow, dark corridors; crowded hallways with no places to rest. Organize a safe space where people can calm down or catch their breath. Visibly mark the route to the toilet and the exit from the auditorium, so that anyone who needs to leave quickly does not have to wander around and feel lost. Before the screening, let the audience know that they may freely leave and return to the auditorium during the screening.

- **Organize a tour of the cinema:** this will help reduce unease among the patrons and make them feel welcome. Show them not only how to get to the toilet or the designated safe space, but also show them the projection room or workshop.
- **Choose a good time for the screening:** midday usually works best. This is when your audience attend therapy. In addition, some people may be disinclined to leave their homes in the evening. Some may also be tired or sleepy due to medication.
- **Consider breaks during the screening:** your audience may become distracted, need to go to the toilet or have a cigarette. Breaks are a frequent request from mental health centres.
- **Take care of emotions after the screening:** audiences are eager to talk about the emotions evoked by the film. Give them space to share their impressions and feelings.

Justyna Mańkowska-Kaczmarek is an expert on cultural accessibility for persons with diverse needs. Vice-president and founder of the Katarynka Foundation. She supports cultural professionals through trainings and networking as well as works to expand the field of cultural accessibility to include mental health. With a fellowship from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, she has explored the topic of culture and mental health. Justyna conducts training courses and teaches others how to provide for mental health in culture. She is closely involved in supporting teams and communicating sensitive content. Author of the blog “Czuj się dobrze w kulturze [Feel good in culture].”

How to turn it on, or technology for cinema operators



Adam
Jodko

Disclaimer:

the following information and advice concern the most common cinema equipment configurations, but it may happen that the equipment in a particular cinema is configured differently. Fortunately, cinemas are usually serviced by the companies that installed the equipment, and if you encounter any problems, you can always ask a service technician for help.

Starting point

You work at a cinema, you usually play films in DCP format and, occasionally, from a file on your computer or from a Blu-ray disc. You also have audio description equipment and an induction loop (or portable loop). Moreover, you know that the abbreviation **HI** stands for Hearing Impaired,

meaning a soundtrack for persons with hearing impairments, while **VI** is an abbreviation for Visually Impaired, meaning an audio description track. It is time for the first screening for viewers with special needs: you receive a film prepared for such audiences, and now you need to connect everything and start the showing. Let's do it!

Playing films in DCP format

How can you tell if a film contains audio tracks for persons who are hard of hearing and/or blind? This will be indicated in the file name: these tracks are marked with the abbreviations **HI** and/or **VI**, e.g. Film_FTR_F_PL_PL_**HI-VI**-51_2K_ST_20250720_SMPTE_OV.

How to play such tracks?

With relatively recent sound processors, such as Dolby CP950 or CP750, connecting the equipment to read these tracks is quite easy. These processors have two dedicated cinch connectors on the rear panel, marked **HI** and **VI** (CP950) or **7** and **8** (CP750). Using appropriate cables, connect the induction loop amplifier (or a transmitter for portable loops) to the **HI / 7** connector and the audio description transmitter to the **VI / 8** connector. Switch the processor to mode 7.1 and, very importantly, check that in the cinema server settings the HI track is assigned to output channel 7 and the VI track to channel 8. This setting can

be verified using movie playback software (e.g. Cinelister for Dolby servers) in Cinema audio / Channel mapping (to access this section, you may need to switch to admin mode; the password will be provided by the service technician). If other tracks are assigned to channels 7 and 8, change this setting by selecting HI for channel 7 and VI for channel 8 from the drop-down list, confirm with the SAVE button, then reload the playlist and start the film. At this point, you should be able to hear both tracks in your receivers.

A side note for the curious: the HI track—unlike the specially prepared audio description track—is simply the sum of three audio channels: left, centre and right (L, C, R). Sound processors are designed in such a way that when playing sound in the default 5.1 mode, they feed the combined LCR channels to the HI connector, which is why the induction loop does not require a special HI track in the film. So why do we need this separate track, which is a combination of three, and why do we assign it to channel 7 in the DCP server? Because, for example, when Dolby CP950 processor is switched to 7.1 mode, it stops outputting the sum of the LCR channels to the HI connector and starts outputting channel 7 instead.

What about sound processors that do not have a special output with an audio description channel? Here, the issue is more complex and can be tackled in two ways.

The first solution is more expensive: you can purchase a special digital-to-analogue sound converter and connect it to the projector or media server to the second sound output. Looking at the projector, you will notice that the basic eight audio channels of the film are output from the projector to the sound processor via an RJ45 connector marked “1-8”. Next to it there is a second RJ45 port, marked “9-16”, which outputs precisely these channels. The converter will take the digital audio coming out of this port and convert it to analogue, allowing it to be connected to the audio description transmitter. In this situation, however, you need to map the channels in the server in the Channel mapping section, assigning tracks HI and VI to one of the channels from 9 to 16.

The second, much cheaper solution is to “pick up” the sound from the correct power amplifier. However, this often requires the use of a cable with a cut-off end so that the bare wires can be inserted into the appropriate connector. In addition, it may also be necessary to map the channels in such a way that the VI and/or HI tracks are played through the left and right surround channels. A detailed description of this essentially straightforward solution is beyond the scope of this guide; if necessary, consult a cinema service technician or a more experienced cinema operator.

Playing films from a computer or Blu-ray player

If you have a sound processor with dedicated HI and VI outputs, as well as a disc or file with a film in which the HI and VI tracks are on channels 7 and 8, you can connect your computer or Blu-ray player to the projector via an HDMI connection and obtain sound as in the case of a DCP film (see description above).

If your processor does not have a VI output, playing the film from a disc or file may be a way to get around this problem. In this case, however, you will need to output the sound via an analogue connector, regardless of the image you are sending to the projector via HDMI.

Since computers send stereo sound (i.e. two channels) via an analogue mini-jack connector, and our film has at least three (additional VI track) or four (VI+HI) channels, in order to output the VI and HI tracks to separate transmitters, we need to purchase an external multi-channel sound card (preferably 7.1). Connect its L and R outputs (i.e. the left and right channels that contain the film's sound) to the sound processor or sound mixer connected to the speakers in the cinema, and the outputs feeding the VI and/or HI tracks to the transmitters. If the film does not have a separate HI track, we should obtain it from the HI connector on the sound processor (if we have connected the L and R channels to the processor). If we have connected the L and

R channels to the audio mixer, in addition to sending them to the theatre speakers, we have to feed them to the mixer's AUX output and connect the transmitter to the latter.

In order to use a Blu-ray player to screen our film, it must have analogue outputs for all channels (available in more expensive models); subsequently, the player has to be connected to the audio system in the same way as a computer sound card. If you do not have such a player, you can copy the contents of the disc to your computer using, for example, an external Blu-ray drive with a USB connector.

How can you check which channel the tracks are on? The easiest way is to ask the distributor. Another solution is to check this in a good video editor that allows you to listen to individual audio channels, for example in the free DaVinci Resolve.

How do you know which output of your sound card or Blu-ray player will give you the track you need? The outputs of the card or player are labelled with channel names: L, R, C, Lfe, Ls, Rs, BLs, BRs (respectively: Left, Right, Center, Low frequency, Left surround, Right surround, Back left surround, Back right surround). This is the commonly adopted sequence of audio channels in a film. So if you are told that the audio description is on the third channel, it is easy to calculate that it will be available in the C output. If it is on channel 8, it will be in the BRs output, and so on.

Good luck with your screenings!

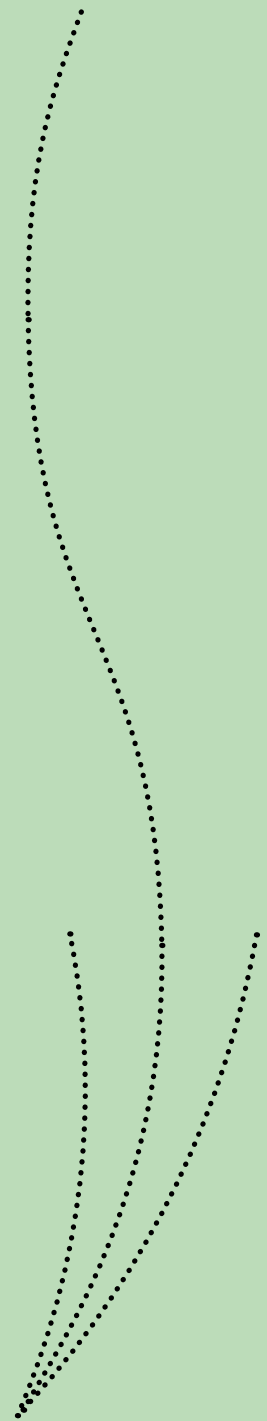
Adam Jodko has been active in the culture industry for 25 years, having collaborated with multiple institutions (including the Children's Art Centre in Poznań, Ad Arte Foundation, Barak Kultury, and the Art Fraction Foundation), mainly contributing to theatre and film festivals. For a decade, Adam worked at Zamek Culture Centre in Poznań as a projection specialist, and currently contributes at the Children's Art Centre in Poznań as a stage technician. Adam specializes in audiovisual technology.

chapter three



Inspirations and good practices

It is really
about building
relationships and
creating a space of
encounter. That is
why we come to
the screening,
stay for a chat
over tea and cake,
and share our
emotions. There
are no judgments,
no one delivers
a lecture.



Signing Film Club: How it works in practice



Jakub Walczyk

In collaboration with
Agnieszka Haponiuk,
Honorata Dzikowska-
Rostkowska, Agnieszka
Szymańska

At Gdański Archipelag Kultury (GAK), we strive to implement initiatives in the spirit of reflective accessibility¹, i.e. accessibility that does not focus solely on technological solutions, but also creates conditions for integration, conversation and relationship building. This is the core idea behind Migający Klub Filmowy (Signing Film Club):

1 This is accessibility whose pursuit goes beyond purely technical aspects. It means being mindful of who may feel invited, who co-creates the event and who has a real impact on its nature. It is a learning process, not a set of ready-made solutions. See B. Lis, J. Walczyk (eds.), *(Nie)dostępność kultury w Polsce – syntetyczne omówienie najważniejszych zagadnień*, National Centre for Culture, Warsaw 2024, <https://nck.pl/upload/2024/11/-nie-doste-pnos-c-kultury-w-polsce-syntetyczne-omo-wienie-najwaz-niejszych-zagadnien-.pdf>.

an initiative that may inspire anyone who is just starting their journey with accessibility. It is a space for the d/Deaf and hearing persons, where film screenings go hand in hand with conversation. The meetings are held regularly, following the formula of an open, inclusive discussion club. Importantly, **you do not need a state-of-the-art auditorium, a large budget or a DCP projector.** A small screening room, a decent projector, coffee, a bit of cake and... the ability to listen is just what you need.

What is the Signing Film Club?

The Signing Film Club involves monthly film screenings with an audio track (dialogue, sounds) and translation into Polish Sign Language (PSL). The showings take place at GAK's Winda, a cultural centre in Wrzeszcz, and are adapted to our technical capabilities. As we do not have access to DCP files or professional infrastructure, we use Blu-ray copies of the film with embedded translation into PSL (often thanks to cooperation with ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań and the Cinema Without Barriers project) and SDH subtitles.² The venue is equipped with an induction loop.

Each screening is planned together with the group. We vote on which film to watch, and afterwards engage in

2 If you are interested in a specific title but no version with sign language translation is available, you may consider having the film translated live by a sign language interpreter. In such a case, invite two interpreters who will be able to take turns during the screening. Importantly enough, they should have time to familiarize themselves with the film in advance and, during the showing, they need to be clearly visible and well lit, as well as be able to see the subtitled version, especially if the film is not in the national phonetic language. This solution is slightly more expensive than using ready-made material, but it will enable you to enrich the programme with rarer titles.

a discussion in sign language. It is simultaneously translated into spoken language in a space with an induction loop, so that persons who are not familiar with PSL—whether hearing or hard-of-hearing patrons who use the induction loop³ — can also participate. The meetings are all about integration and inclusion, bringing together diverse individuals.

From meeting to joint action

We set out with a consultation meeting during which we asked the d/Deaf community in the Tri-City the following question: “How would you rate our cultural offering?”

It turned out that many people do not just want to take advantage of cultural events, but also contribute as co-creators: run workshops, share their passions, co-organize events.

One of the most frequently mentioned needs was the opportunity to discuss films in sign language. This is how the idea for the Signing Film Club—a cinema-centred meeting space—came about. However, we did not wish for the conversations to be dominated by film experts and resemble lectures on the lives of filmmakers, translated from spoken language into PSL. In line with the idea

3 We are aware that at this stage, discussions are not accessible to persons who rely on SDH subtitles exclusively. Prospectively, we would like to feature live subtitles in the discussions, but for now this is beyond our technological capabilities.

of self-advocacy⁴, we envisaged the meetings led by someone for whom PSL is their first language.

How does the Signing Film Club work?

It is best to start the conversation right after the screening. At the Signing Film Club, we do not usually rely on a ready-made script but leave room for spontaneity and let ourselves be surprised. A straightforward question, such as “how did you feel after seeing the film?”, is a perfectly natural and effective conversation starter.

Still, a more structured approach is also possible. If you feel more confident, you can watch the film in advance and prepare a few questions to help guide the conversation, especially if the group is new or less open.

In any case, it is important to be aware that such meetings require to be moderated. Sometimes someone talks too long, goes off topic or dominates the discussion. If this happens, it would be worthwhile to steer the conversation back to the main topic or encourage others to speak. Well-set boundaries promote the comfort of the entire group.

Technical conditions are equally important. Preferably, one should ensure that the interpreter is clearly visible, that the

4 Starting collaboration between cultural institutions and self-advocates is based on listening attentively to the needs they communicate; also, their perspectives need to be incorporated already at the planning stage of cultural, educational and artistic undertakings. See K. Żeglicka, Sojusznictwo i samorzecznictwo – wspólna sprawa, in: J. Studziński (ed.), *Współtworzenie w instytucjach kultury: Partnerstwo, samorzecznictwo i sojusznictwo*, Culture Institution of the Małopolska Region in Krakow, 2004, <https://kulturawrazliwa.pl/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Wspoltworzenie-w-instytucjach-kultury.pdf>, last access: 23.07.2025.

sound level is adequate and that vibrations are perceptible. For those with hearing impairments or d/Deaf persons, the arrangement of chairs may also play a significant role, i.e. if they are arranged on a flat surface, an alternating pattern or raised screen are well worth considering, so that the sign language translation could reach everyone without any problems.

Every meeting can be different, and that is the most valuable thing. One should strive to create an atmosphere of openness and mutual respect. The crucial interactions take place between people, with the film being just a pretext.

According to Honorata, who hosts such events: “Every meeting is different. People are open, curious, they want to talk. As for myself, I really like films, and I like watching them with others.”

How to animate the community?

- **Allow yourself and others to make mistakes.**
Hearing persons often worry that they will say something “wrong” or that they will not understand others, but things need not be always perfect at the Signing Film Club. It is not perfection, but the intention that counts. Participants sense this, and it translates into trust.

- **Let the relationship work both ways.**
D/Deaf participants often ask how they are perceived, which demonstrates willingness to engage in dialogue and mutual curiosity. A space for this question to be asked is very much called for, since it changes the perspective.
- **Try to build a community.** The club already has its regulars, including people who come from other cities. The relationships that develop here are just as important as the film. Many people come to the meetings because they feel part of the group.
- **Create a safe space for various emotions.**
Conversations can be moving, sometimes funny, sometimes reflective, and each of those reactions is valuable. This is not an academic seminar, but a shared presence.

Implementing the project in practice

Although the Signing Film Club may seem like a large project, its foundations are simple and can be replicated in almost any institution. Here is what works:

- **List of films with sign language**—we use titles with translations and SDH subtitles available on Blu-ray. We consult distributors if they are available.
- **Contact with participants**—we do not assume what is needed, but ask instead. After each screening, we choose the next film together.

- **Community and local promotion**—we communicate through posters, associations, groups and social media.
- **Word-of-mouth marketing**—recommendations shared by one person with another are often the most effective. People who feel comfortable at the meetings invite others.
- **Openness to diverse groups**—we also invite hearing people to make the meetings foster integration.

How to reach d/Deaf persons?⁵

Promoting events for d/Deaf persons requires attention and patience. We start with a short invitation in sign language with subtitles, which we then publish across available channels. We pass on the information through people who are already involved, our network of contacts and partner organizations.

This is a step-by-step process that consists in building relationships rather than a one-off campaign. It is worth noting that not every d/Deaf person is interested in the film as such, as many come to be together with others. The film is only a starting point for what counts the most: the conversation and the meeting.

5 Issues involved in accessible promotion and building relationships with audiences are discussed in detail by Joanna Stankiewicz in the first volume of *Toolbox*. See J. Stankiewicz, *Promotion = relationship. On accessible communication*, in: *Accessible Cinema Toolbox*, ZAMEK Culture Centre, Poznań 2024, pp. 49–64, https://ckzamek.pl/media/files/Accessible_Cinema_Toolbox.pdf.

What is the point of all this?

For us, the film is just a pretext. It is really about building relationships and creating a space of encounter. That is why we come to the screening, stay for a chat over tea and cake, and share our emotions. There are no judgments, no one delivers a lecture. In contrast, feelings, reflections and shared presence are there by all means.

How to get started?

If you want to launch a similar initiative at your organization, community centre or club:

1. **Seek consultation:** invite the local d/Deaf community and ask about their needs.
2. **Make sure you have accessible copies:** find out if you can use sign language film database.
3. **Find a moderator.**
4. **Invite everyone:** create a space for diverse languages and experiences.
5. **Do not treat mistakes as failures:** accessibility is a process.

Accessibility does not have to be perfect. But it has to be honest. The Signing Film Club is an example of how you can start small and create something really big: a culture that does not merely shows films, but builds bridges.

Production team:

Agnieszka Haponiuk is an accessibility coordinator and promotion specialist at Gdański Archipelag Kultury. At the Signing Klub Filmowy, she is responsible for communication, promotion and building relationships with participants.

Honorata Dzidowska-Rostkowska is a film buff and moderator of the Signing Film Club. She conducts meetings in Polish Sign Language, creating a space for conversation, exchange and shared experience of cinema.

Agnieszka Szymańska is the manager of GAK's Winda and animator of the Wrzeszcz district. She coordinates the Signing Film Club, cooperates with distributors, prepares the venue for screenings and takes care of the atmosphere of the events.

Tytus Skiba is a community project specialist at Gdański Archipelag Kultury. Assists with the screenings, trailer showings and induction loop operation.

Jakub Walczyk is a deputy director of Gdański Archipelag Kultury, cultural studies expert, social researcher, doctor of humanities. Originator of the Signing Film Club. Active at the Film for All Initiative and the Working Group on Accessibility of Cinematography at the Accessibility Council at the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy. Previously, he was one of the leaders of the Cinema Without Barriers initiative and the Forum Without Barriers (2022–2024) at ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań.

with: **Zbigniew Wymysłowski, Natalia Dobkowska**
and **the team at Gdański Archipelag Kultury.**

Local cinemas and their managers can do a lot to help persons with migration experience in terms of integration. The most important thing, it seems, is to notice that such an excluded group is there and show some goodwill. The rest can be arranged in one way or another.



Cinema brings people together. On including migrants in film culture



Gosia Kuzdra

When we think about marginalized groups with limited access to film culture, we must not forget about the new residents of our countries and cities. Persons with the experience of migration and refugeeship can become participants in local culture and benefit from its wealth, but special measures need to be taken to help them access film screenings and enjoy comfortable viewing.

Cinema is not a primary need for migrants, that is clear. People who have changed their place of residence due

to economic or family circumstances, or as a result of a threat to their health or life, first and foremost require support with everyday, practical issues. However, once they have sorted out the matters of legal stay, gainful employment and education for their children, it is time to start learning the language of the country where they live. This also creates opportunities to meet new people and build social networks in a new location.

First: conversation

Cinema brings people together.
Film is an excellent opportunity
for conversations to start.

Cinema brings people together. Film is an excellent opportunity for conversations to start. While developing integration events at the Migrant Info Point Foundation in Poznań (Poland), I decided to organize screenings of Polish films with English subtitles. I deliberately looked for a solution that would enable the participants to engage in deeper conversations, get to know each other and go beyond the rules of classic small talk: where are you from, what do you do, why did you come here? We invited the clients of Migrant Info Point to participate in regular screenings (once a month, on a particular day of the week) and immediately introduced post-screening discussions as a key element of those events: in small groups of six to eight

people, in Polish or English, with a moderator for each group. We wanted to avoid situations where people learning Polish, still lacking confidence in that respect, would have to speak in front of dozens of other viewers.

Most people from Slavic countries choose to participate in discussions in Polish, while the rest join English-speaking groups. Polish viewers also take advantage of this arrangement as they wish to practice their English and are open to meeting new people. The role of the moderator seemed essential at the beginning to encourage a diverse group of participants to speak.

Volunteer moderators are given a set of suggested topics and questions to ask so that the threshold for joining the conversation is adequate for people who are not film buffs. The aim was to have conversations for people about people and their issues.

Moderators also ensure that the discussion is balanced, so that everyone (if they wish) has a chance to contribute. The film watched together is a starting point for a conversation about the characters' behaviours, values or specific topics (e.g. competitive sport, folk beliefs, relationship between sisters).

How does it work?

It is crucial that information about the event is published in multiple languages, includes clear instructions on how to get to the screening venue and states what the rules of participation are. Our screenings are free of charge, intended for adult audiences and require prior registration. The meetings are held in an audiovisual room provided by a partner company, where architectural barriers have been removed. As a result, a migrant from Ukraine who uses a wheelchair—for instance—could easily participate in the event.

Cinemas know how to organize screenings. But if you represent a non-governmental organization with no experience in this field, remember that it is very important for your activities to be lawful as far as copyright is concerned. Therefore, choose such titles for your programme for which you can obtain licences from film distributors. It is often possible to obtain them free of charge due to the inclusive and non-commercial nature of the event. However, it is good practice to set aside funds in your budget for licence fees. If you are unfamiliar with the rules for organizing film screenings, you can ask your local cinema for assistance and invite them to collaborate. Fees due to collective copyright management organizations should also be taken into account, as they may be required regardless of whether you obtain a licence from the distributor.

The film is a pretext to meet

We surround the film screening with other activities that give participants the opportunity to integrate. This could be an hour of language clubs before the screening—so as to improve one’s skills—or “slow friending”, i.e. one-on-one conversations with a time limit. In our case, one pair talks for ten minutes, after which the participants move on to a new conversation partner. Our viewers loved this format.

Film education and education through film

People who regularly attended Watch & Talk meetings have broadened their knowledge of film.

On several occasions, we managed to hold several meetings with directors, who attended online or in person. This demonstrated that viewers are interested in the backstage of film-making and keen to talk about it.

At the same time, watching Polish films can be an accessible modality of learning about the culture and history of a new country.

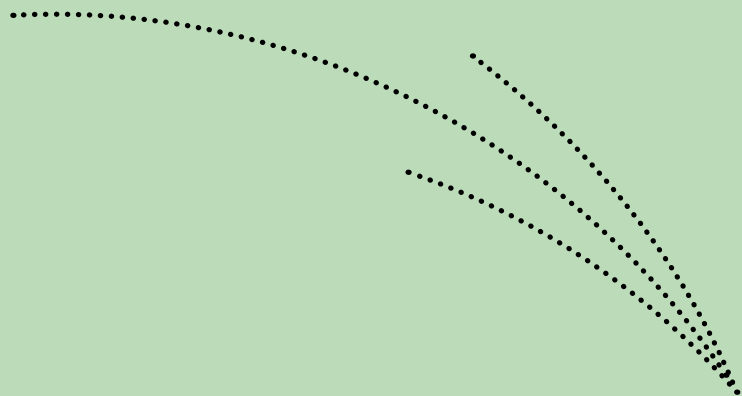
Attention to needs

In 2024, it turned out that Colombians were becoming a substantial migrant group in Poland. They often come to Europe without knowing any foreign languages. That is why we organize *Sábados en español* (Saturdays in Spanish) for this particular group, in collaboration with a local cinema in Jarocin (50 km from Poznań), where many Colombians reside. As part of the series, we screen films in Spanish with Polish subtitles. Reaching potential viewers was much more difficult in this case. The solution was to find leaders of the community and set up a group dedicated to the series on a messaging platform. However, this still was not enough to call it a complete success. It turned out that getting to Jarocin from the surrounding small towns was another difficulty that had to be overcome. Now, to help people get to the screenings, we use a minibus owned by the cinema. Colombians living in Poland respond with great joy and satisfaction to the opportunity of taking part in a film event. The film-related meetings are conducted by people who speak Polish and Spanish. As Latin Americans have limited access to information about the formalities of staying in Poland, we also include this information in the discussions before and after the screenings.

Local cinemas and their managers can do a lot to help persons with migration experience in terms of integration. The most important thing, it seems, is to notice that such an excluded group is there and show some goodwill. The rest can be arranged in one way or another.

Gosia Kuzdra has a background in philosophy (specializing in social communication) and film studies. She is an activist, film educator, initiator of cultural events. Gosia organizes screenings of Polish films with English subtitles for Migrant Info Point in Poznań and runs the Sábados en español project with the Echo cinema in Jarocin. She spreads her love of films and arthouse cinemas on her blog @cinemap_gosiakuzdra.

For d/Deaf children who are native in sign language but not in the spoken language of the country where they live, reading subtitles becomes a means of foreign language acquisition.



Accessible Film Education for Deaf Children



Ligia Soare

It takes a village to raise a child, and an enthusiastic accessibility team to make a d/Deaf child fall in love with cinema.

Children of all ages enjoy films, and the use of cinema for educational purposes has increased in the last decade. The production of films with an educational aspect in mind is an important part of film industry in Europe, both for short

and feature films, especially animation and documentary.

Yet, teachers of children with hearing impairments do not consider audiovisual resources as their first go-to tools because of lack of accessibility.

“Audio-visual” connotes “inaccessible” to the d/Deaf because of the audio part, but there are many alternative methods of ensuring access to film. The great advantage of working with films for people who mainly or exclusively rely on the visual component is the freedom of being able to augment visual input through a range of techniques, used individually or in combination.

Adapting accessibility tools to the needs of child audiences

The two main accessibility tools that can be used for d/Deaf audiences are adapted subtitles and sign language. Where children are concerned, these tools need to be tailored to such viewers and, ideally, accompanied by a pedagogical kit, in order to make them easy to use and enhance their educational role.

Accessibilised **subtitles**, otherwise known as closed captions or SDH (subtitles for the d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing) have more recently been called enriched or even inclusive subtitles. Their chief asset is that they immediately

turn any film into an educational tool, boosting reading skills and language acquisition. Children are exposed to simultaneous visual and textual information on screen. For d/Deaf children who are native in sign language but not in the spoken language of the country where they live, reading subtitles becomes a means of foreign language acquisition.

However, in order to make the reading of the subtitles effective and engaging for as many children as possible, we need to pay close attention to several aspects:

- **the choice of vocabulary:** depending on the children's age and their command of language, we may need simplified language, familiar vocabulary, and a limited number of new words that always remain linked to the elements on the screen (the child sees the image and the word naming it);
- **easy-to-read text:** simplified syntax, clear sentences, minimal presence/absence of words whose multiple meanings prevent accurate interpretation in a particular context, correct and double-checked spelling and punctuation;
- **font size, colour and contrast:** the subtitles should be large and clear enough to read; also, use of capital letters / colours may be recommended particularly when new words are introduced, so as to make them more conspicuous on screen;

- **reading speed:** always adapted to the abilities of the children, depending on their age and their previous use of written language; going below the reading speed recommended by domestic guidelines will help us include more children, especially when our audiences have mixed needs (various ages, different levels of hearing impairment and command of the spoken language of the country).

Sign language is another powerful tool of making films accessible to d/Deaf children. The benefits are tremendous for children whose mother tongue is sign language, but also for those who are currently learning it. Since audiences are often mixed, it is preferable to provide both inclusive subtitles and sign language or at least offer access to films in either format. However, at the cinema, we need to choose the version screened for the entire audience, therefore the film needs to feature both open subtitles and sign language. Below are a few elements that make an accessible screening with sign language interpretation enjoyable for young audiences:

- the visibility of the interpreter on the screen: ideally, the interpreter is recorded prior to the screening and embedded into the film, becoming part of it; the inset should have an appropriate size, so as not to obscure too much of the screen but remain visible nonetheless;

- if prior recording and editing is not possible, then live interpretation may be an option; it needs to be adapted to the configuration of the auditorium, so that the spotlight on the interpreter does not interfere with the viewing of the film;
- good cooperation between the subtitler and the sign language interpreter, so that the two elements dovetail; spoken languages and sign languages have distinct syntax and cannot be perfectly aligned, but well-synchronised subtitles, especially featuring new vocabulary, will be easier to remember if the child sees the sign language interpretation and the written word or phrase at the same time, adding to the visual layer of the film itself.

State-of-the-art technologies offer new methods of adding sign language interpretation to a film, for example using a mobile phone app, but for the moment there is little data about how practical that is for d/Deaf audiences, let alone young audiences in educational contexts, where the idea is to have them focused exclusively on the film screen.

Another way of ensuring that d/Deaf children have effective access to films is offering **multiple formats**: screenings at the cinema, screenings at school, online access to films. It takes little effort, but the benefits are substantial if many versions of the same film are made available: with inclusive subtitles only, with sign language only, with both subtitles

and sign language. Online platforms enable us to offer the three versions, with each user choosing their preferred one. A hearing sibling or a hearing parent may also benefit directly when watching SL-interpreted films at home, for example.

Moreover, creating **a context** around the films will make their viewing memorable. Introductory talks about the themes in the film are useful, while teachers will appreciate materials about the films in order to prepare their students. Educational materials, pedagogical kits are also good to have but—ideally—they should be adapted to d/Deaf audiences, so that any activities involved are suited to children who cannot read or who natively use sign language.

Ideas for tailoring film-related educational materials to the needs of d/Deaf pupils:

- Visual materials: stills of the characters shown before the film screening, with a few details which will make it easy to recognize them in the film (name, physical traits, an object or an action that highlights their individuality);
- a short synopsis: a sentence or two which outline the premise of the film or a brief summary; its interpretation in sign language can be pre-recorded and uploaded online, with the link included in the educational materials;

- accessible film trailers: the children watch the trailer before going to the cinema, familiarize themselves with the atmosphere and the accessibility solutions; teachers can use the trailers to introduce the theme, the genre and the filmmaking techniques;
- pertinent post-screening activities: drawing a character or the favourite scene from the film, acting out a dialogue in sign language, associating new words with signs or images (printable sign language flash cards), interactive quizzes that encourage repetition and rephrasing of the words that appeared in the subtitles, small fragments of the film without subtitles or sign language, for which the children will write their own subtitles and formulate their own interpretation;
- still of a certain scene, in order for the educators to start a conversation around it, linking it to real-life experiences or certain school subjects.

Adaptation to the children's needs and permanent feedback from the children and the teachers are indispensable. By offering audiovisual content with both inclusive subtitles and sign language interpretation, we support **bilingualism**, and support acquisition of both sign language and spoken or phonic language. d/Deaf students from diverse backgrounds will feel included and respected. Accessible films are reliable means in activities oriented towards education rather than entertainment alone.

Ligia Soare is a culture manager, associated for the past two decades with the world of film festivals. She is the founder of Animest, an international animated film festival held in Bucharest. Focusing on young audiences in her work, she is also a professional audiovisual translator and recently completed her studies in cultural accessibility. Ligia is the coordinator of the Cinema Without Barriers project in Romania and the initiator of a number of accessible cinema events.

As the European societies age, audio description may become a key element of audiovisual culture. Eyesight may fail, mental focus may become problematic, but the need for participation, closeness and shared experience remains.



Audio description: the future of accessible culture



Bartek Lis

Our collective notions about the various ways of how people function in public and private spaces—particularly where they concern persons who perceive the world differently due to their abilities, senses or perception—are only developing. We are gradually learning to recognize diversity, not only in terms of one's skin colour, ethnicity or lifestyle, but also the diversity associated with disability.

Thanks to education, affirmative action and infrastructural changes, we have

begun to notice persons with disabilities in public spaces, including those who are visually impaired and blind.

Their presence, evident thanks to attributes such as a white cane or a guide dog, is becoming not only part of the social landscape, but also serves as a reminder of the need for inclusion and respect for diversity.

Personal experience of discovering audio description

I remember the first film screenings during which I sat next to blind persons. I was surprised that cinema, visual arts and images could be accessible to such persons and wondered how it worked. Over time, I gained knowledge, skills and practical experience in the field of cultural accessibility. I learned about the tools and applications that enable people with visual impairments to partake in cinema, and finally understood what audio description is.

Audio description is a modality of conveying visual content through verbal description. A narrator, usually a male or female voiceover artist, describes what is shown on the screen during breaks in the dialogue: gestures, facial expressions, characters' actions, as well as changes in the set design, the nature and colour of the space.

For Blind persons, listening is like seeing, just as one of my friends put it: “blind people see by listening.”

Thus, audio description is not merely an aid of sorts, but also a mode of experiencing art and participating in culture.

The history of audio description

The origins of audio description go back to the 1970s in the United States. Gregory Frazier of San Francisco State University created visual descriptions of films for his blind colleague.¹ In the 1980s, Dr Margaret Pfanstiehl began developing audio description for theatre performances in Washington², , while 1986 saw testing of the DVS (Descriptive Video Service) in Boston. In 1990, the system was adopted by the American public broadcaster PBS.³

Styles of audio description: technique vs. subjectivity

Like any form of communication, audio description can be better or worse, more interesting or more tedious.

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- 1 J. Snyder, *The Visual Made Verbal, A Comprehensive Training Manual and Guide to the History and Applications of Audio Description*, American Council of the Blind, 2014, https://books.google.pl/books?id=WHorEAAAQBAJ&dq=%22Gregory+T.+Frazier%22&pg=PA20&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=%22Gregory%20T.%20Frazier%22&f=false.
 - 2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Audio_description, last access: 23 July 2025.
 - 3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Descriptive_Video_Service, last access: 23 July 2025.

Just as there are bland podcasts and radio plays, so too can one encounter unengaging, “wooden” audio description.

In practice, two main styles have emerged in Poland, and their merits continue to be discussed among creators and audiences alike:

- **The Białystok school**—earlier, originating with the audio description centre in Białystok. It is characterized by precise, technical and objective descriptions. It focuses on facts and details, leaving interpretation to the audience.
- **The Warsaw school**—newer, more interpretative. Here, audio description not only describes, but also hints at and suggests meaning, emotions and context. It is denser, more subjective, immersive and provocative, which is why many viewers find it more engaging.

In the **Cinema Without Barriers** project, we have always preferred the Warsaw approach, as have most of the viewers we have met. Still, this does not mean that other styles are inferior, because the possibility of having a choice is what matters. I dream of a future in which a blind person will be able to switch between two audio description channels during a screening: “Warsaw” on the left, “Białystok” on the right.

Audio description as a tool of education and empathy

Audio description can also be an educational tool. I have participated in screenings where everyone, regardless of their visual ability, watched a film with audio description played through speakers. We often closed our eyes to get a deeper sense of what it is like to experience an image through sound and description alone. It is an exercise in mindfulness and empathy, but also a new mode of engaging with a work of art.

The manner in which audio description is created and produced is tremendously important. This is not just the text, but also its interpretation: the timbre of the narrator's voice, the pacing and the dynamics, the rhythm. A good description not only skilfully names what is happening, but also builds tension, dramaturgy and emotion. Increasingly often, well-known writers, actors and journalists become involved in describing films, but even though their comments may be interesting, they do not always meet the needs of blind persons. An overly authorial, subjective interpretation can be annoying or, conversely, captivating. This is more of an artistic experiment than classic audio description.

Audio description as a tool of inclusion

One should not forget that audio description is not a solution which benefits blind persons alone. It also successfully helps the elderly, children and persons with neurocognitive disorders or intellectual disabilities. In some residential care homes, for example in Slovakia, films with AD are employed in screenings for persons with dementia. The additional description makes it easier for them to understand the plot, follow the narrative and enjoy the experience more.

As the European societies age, audio description may become a key element of audiovisual culture. Eyesight may fail, mental focus may become problematic, but the need for participation, closeness and shared experience remains. Cinema is not just a screen, but also a relationship. Audio description can strengthen it.

An investment in the future of cinema

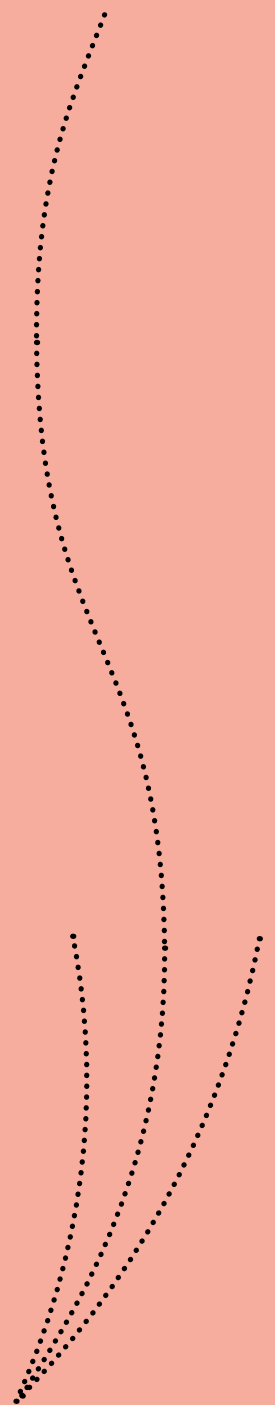
Audio description is not an add-on. It is part of the work. During research into the audiovisual sector in Poland, one film producer stated that he wanted to look at a film as a whole: the script, the acting, the direction, the image, the sound and the audio description—from the very start of production, and not as an “extra option”. If we wish people to return to cinemas instead of watching films alone at

home, we must create accessible, communal experiences. Especially since streaming platforms already offer AD as standard.

Well-made, audio description does not just stand for accessibility but quality. By investing in it, we invest in the future of cinema. A cinema where no one is excluded. A cinema that hears and sees everyone.

Bartek Lis, PhD is a sociologist, social researcher, cultural animator and educator. Head of the Research and Development Department at the City Culture Institute in Gdańsk. He specializes in projects which combine theoretical reflection with action in the field of social inclusion, audience development, senior “dependence”, social construction of disability and discourses on illness, civic education, as well as gender, queer and crip studies. Accessibility, understood broadly as a practice, value and goal, is one of the key dimensions of the research and animation projects in which Bartek is involved. The results of his studies are used for specific implementations and inform changes in the programmes, strategies and methods of operation of institutions.

Accessibility
is a process—
we do need to
learn, change
and listen to
our audience.
We hope that
our experiences
will inspire you
to action.



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This publication has been developed as part of the Cinema Without Barriers project, co-financed by Creative Europe Programme (CREA), sub-programme MEDIA: Audience Development & Film Education, implemented in 2024 – 2026.

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Partners:

Cinema Elvire Popesco (Romania), ASFK – Asociácia Slovenských Filmových Klubov (Slovakia), Kulturni dom Cerknica (Slovenia), TISZPart MOZI (Hungary)

ISBN 978-83-974649-1-9 Poznań 2025

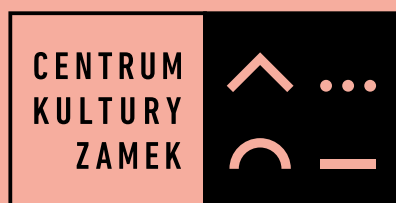


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Poznań 2025