



What does the film sector in Poland know about accessibility?

Research report

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Context, scope and objectives of the study

At the ZAMEK Culture Centre (CK Zamek) in Poznań, the Social Programs Department team has been implementing a project called “Cinema without Barriers” since 2022. This is a continuation and extension of the series called “Sensitive Images”. After reformulating the nature of activities and changing the emphasis, it was decided to create a new initiative at the Pałacowe Cinema (being a part of the ZAMEK Culture Centre), the core of which consisted in regular screenings of new films with all necessary adaptations, organized every Tuesday and Thursday. From then on, the Poznań audience experiencing, for example, difficulties in seeing or hearing, has been able to participate in the same screenings as persons without disabilities. By ensuring films are screened with necessary add-ons (including subtitles for the hearing impaired and audio description) and providing Polish sign language translations for one screening a week, the capital of Greater Poland managed to significantly expand the offer of events accessible to audiences with sensory disabilities. This development relied on previous experience and partial social research conducted with the participation of people with visual and hearing disabilities. In 2023, the above-mentioned Social Programs Department received further funding, this time from the EU Collaborate to Innovate Europa Cinemas initiative!, and developed the “Cinema without Barriers” project, organizing screenings also at the “Echo” cinema in Jarocin and “Kino Nowe Horyzonty” in Wrocław. Here, too, an important element of the project development and implementation was social research conducted

among people with sensory disabilities, residents of the two cities. Proof of consistent improvement and exploration of the issues of accessible film screenings was the decision that CK Zamek organize in February this year a “Forum without Barriers” where issues related to accessible cinema would be discussed. The key objective for this industry meeting, hosting representatives of cinemas and distribution and production companies from all over Poland, was to create a space for education and discussion about the idea of accessible cinema. From the very beginning, an important part of this initiative, co-financed by the Polish Film Institute, was to attempt to diagnose the most important concerns and difficulties identified by the audio-visual sector in Poland in the context of creating accessible cinema. The accumulated knowledge, be it from previous independent research or conducted by other entities and individuals, clearly demonstrated that the situation of people with sensory disabilities who want to enjoy cinema repertoire on a basis equal with people without disabilities is definitely bad and, without exaggerating, they describe their status in discriminatory terms. Given the implementation of Polish law, including the Act of 19 July 2019 on ensuring accessibility for people with special needs, it is crucial to map the situation: the current knowledge of the audio-visual sector about the idea of accessibility and the related requirements; to identify the greatest concerns and difficulties that may be important to explain the delay in the implementation of legal standards and regulations; also to hear what kind of support is necessary to proceed with this case.

When defining the research scope, the research team: Bartek Lis, Ph. D. (research process manager) and Bogna Kietlińska, Ph. D., adopted the following framework:

- # accessibility and disability – how do we understand them,
- # the current level of knowledge about the audience, including the audience with sensory disabilities,
- # own experiences in the area of (in)accessible cinema,
- # the current level of knowledge regarding accessibility solutions in the cinema sector,
- # good (domestic and foreign) examples of implementation of accessible film projects (in terms of production, but also in the area of distribution/presentation/film education/cinema repertoire),
- # the greatest production/operational barriers/difficulties for accessible cinema,
- # boundary conditions for the creation of an accessible film/cinematography offer in Poland.

The idea for the research, its nature, the methods used and course throughout

The research was exploratory in nature. We wanted to collect as many opinions and ways of thinking and defining situations as possible, as well as interpretative clues that we could use to draw a map of problems and issues that may prove important in the context of facing the task of developing the idea of cinema that is accessible and open to the needs of people with sensory disabilities (below we provide a short definition of both concepts that defined the scope of our research explorations). The research, using qualitative methods, is, of course, not representative: the team concluded that the discussed problem area is still insufficiently saturated in the Polish context and a semi-ethnographic approach, open to the definitions and interpretations of the problem presented by both male and female respondents included in the sample, is still more appropriate.

It was decided to deliberately select people for the sample. We wanted to reach representatives of the community of people working in three areas of the Polish film industry: film producers, film distributors and people involved in the promotion of film culture and education in this area in cinemas. We received suggestions regarding specific entities and people representing a relatively diverse group (primarily in terms of the size of the entities, as well as the content and nature of the films

they use) from people whom we know and who are part of this sector, as well as from the representatives of the Program Council of the Forum to be held (including a research worker carrying out his own research and projects in this area). Contrary to the original assumptions and several attempts to reach potential respondents via e-mail and people in contact with potential respondents, we had to limit the initially larger sample to 16 people. Despite efforts and numerous multi-channel attempts to reach out, it was not possible to include all planned people/entities in the study, especially representatives of multiplexes. However, we have concluded that the lack of data resulting from the lack of consent to an interview or from a person's avoidance of contact is also information subject to interpretation. Ultimately, the sample included 16 people:

- representatives of smaller film producers (3),
- representatives of smaller film distributors (3),
- representatives of arthouse cinemas (7),
- representatives of organizations/institutions (co-) organizing accessible film screenings and experts (3).

We used the following research techniques:

in-depth individual interviews (IDI), dyads (interview with two people), focus group interviews (FGI). The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then coded.

We supplemented the research with the analysis of content of selected studies and post-research reports¹.

The research was carried out from 4 to 30 January 2024.

Research team:

Bartek Lis, Ph. D. (research project manager, researcher),
Bogna Kietlińska, Ph. D. (researcher).

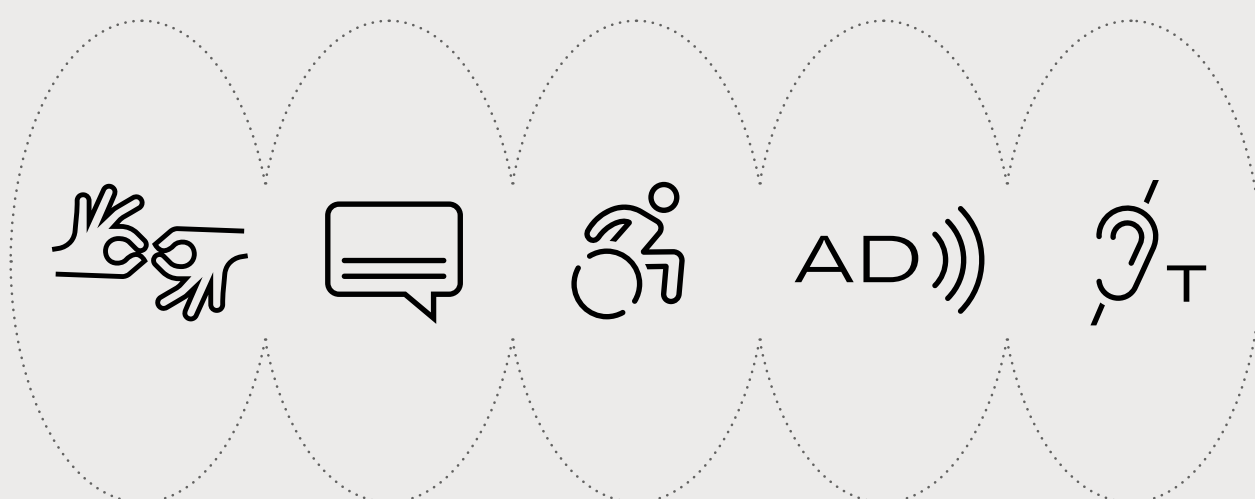
1 Expert opinion on the accessibility of cinematography for people with disabilities in Poland and the methods used in other countries to ensure equal access to cinematography for people with disabilities by Kamil Kowalski, Anna Żórawska, Fundacja Integracja, 2021. The document was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture, National Heritage and Sport and is not accessible in official circulation.

The condition of the Polish independent audiovisual production sector by Dionizy Smoleń et al., National Chamber of Audiovisual Producers, PwC Polska, 2023, <https://kipa.pl/raport-pwc-i-kipa-o-kondycji-polskiego-sektora-av/>, access date: 04/01/2024.

Accessibility of cinema for people with special needs by Marta Materska-Samek, Małgorzata Kotlińska, Monika Hapek, Wydawnictwo Attyka, Cracow, 2023, <https://ruj.uj.edu.pl/server/api/core/bitstreams/c9af6d4d-777e-4222-9bef-d7bb68c9910a/content>, access date: 10/01/2024.

Accessible cinema:

this term covers all activities related to infrastructure and tool adaptations (e.g. equipping screening rooms with induction loops, projectors enabling the display of audiovisual materials with subtitles for the hearing impaired, audio description receiver sets etc.), as well as education and communication and information (an extensive agenda of events accompanying the main program, adapted to the needs and capabilities of people with sensory disabilities, e.g. translations into Polish sign language; additional activities involving representatives of the community of people with sensory disabilities to co-create, consult and produce accessible film events). The term “cinema” therefore refers not only to a specific space, but to a comprehensive idea, a socio-cultural phenomenon related to screening sound films and the culture emerging around them.



People with sensory disabilities:

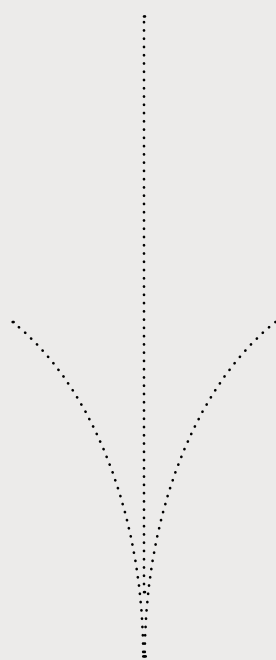
this is a very wide group of people with various demographic and social characteristics (including gender, age, level of education) who will experience a certain disability related to the sense of sight or hearing. This is an internally very heterogeneous community, but in the context of the discussion undertaken in the summarized research, it is important to distinguish six subgroups of people with sensory disabilities:

- hard of hearing,
- people who lost their hearing but were still growing up in the Polish language culture,
- deaf from birth or from a very early stage of life, who grew up outside the Polish language culture (including the cultural minority of deaf people),
- visually impaired,
- people who lost their sight but were still growing up in visual culture,
- blind from birth, growing up outside the visual culture.

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An event is accessible when we don't have to create any separate events. Everything is for everyone and we can enjoy it together.

Below we present the most important threads/problem categories appearing in the study on the knowledge of the audiovisual sector in Poland about the needs of people with sensory disabilities in the context of their participation in film culture. It is also an attempt to outline the most important difficulties and challenges that the research participants self-diagnose in connection with expanding the accessibility of film productions (and their distribution and promotion). The opinions we have collected are not representative. Qualitative research (with a limited scope) is primarily exploratory in nature.



How people included in the study understand accessibility

Each person who agreed to take part in the study declared their openness and interest in the subject of accessibility. It should be noted that a rather deep understanding of accessibility revealed the question of what it is – which would not necessarily have been answered if a larger number of people took part in the study, and not only those who were known from the very beginning to have some experience or knowledge on the subject. The definition most frequently provided referred to “realizable potentiality”, i.e. the state in which anyone who wants to participate in a given event or enjoy a specific work can do so, regardless of their own possible limitations.

“An event is accessible when we don’t have to create any separate events. Everything is for everyone and we can enjoy it together.” (FGI_1_KS_3)

When talking about these “features” or circumstances that stand in the way to full participation, we were thinking not only about physical limitations (concerning both motor skills and the senses of hearing and sight), but also about other “non-normativities” (e.g. neuroatypical people). However, it is worth noting that the reason or pretext brought up when looking for ways to include people with disabilities in the mainstream of cultural life is personal “limitation” and not the limitation of space, format or resource. This nuance is not just a matter of linguistic inattentiveness, but rather corresponds to

the dominant way of perceiving disability as a certain personal characteristic: something immanent, innate, and not a construct created by normative, majoritarian discourse. From this perspective, accessibility...

“(...) is a bow towards people who need something more than hearing, seeing and able-bodied people.” (R_DKS_2)

In addition to the most obvious aspects of accessibility allowing them to participate in an event despite architectural barriers, our interlocutors also mentioned its economic, transportation and information aspects, defined as, respectively, taking organizational measures so that financial issues are not an excessive obstacle, paying attention to the distance from the event venue where the lack of satisfactory transportation solutions would result in the participation in an event being perceived as burdensome, and making the event repertoire easy to come by and learn about by minimizing inconvenience and barriers relating to poor eyesight or neurocognitive disorders. The issue of people with lower cultural capital, level of education or with intellectual disabilities was also discussed here. The presented titles will not be accessible to all potential viewers (even though adjustments are made to eliminate barriers for the blind or deaf). For some of them, the so-called ‘New Horizons’ intellectual European cinema will prove too demanding. The definitions provided will also be concluded by the need to pay attention to the ideological threads relating to films depicting a world that is diverse in terms of ethnicity, psychosexuality, lifestyle and gender. Here, accessibility is understood as openness to a multitude of

views and ways of life (including the world of non-human animals).

To conclude this section, let us talk about three more opinions and/or perceptions of accessibility that we have heard. The first is the view that “[the lack of (BL)] accessibility applies only to provinces. There is no problem with it in Warsaw” (R1) – which is a stereotype not confirmed in reality. The discussion about cinemas reveals that even in the capital city there are few places completely free of barriers for people with disabilities. The distinguishing feature of an accessible space will be the fact that every person, regardless of their individual diversity, may watch a film by selecting any repertoire screening or enjoy an event accompanying the screening. This way of thinking is still largely postulative. For some respondents, it is the azimuth and direction of action.

“I see openness and accessibility as a certain uncompromising nature. Not as something that is an additional element, but as part of the mainstream, an obvious thing.” (FGI_1_KS_4)

One of the respondents explained his attachment to the subject of accessibility in a more mercantile way, i.e. not necessarily referring to solidarity or ideological arguments. For him, accessibility fits into capitalist assumptions: every potential viewer is important because to include them means to increase profits.

“We are interested in every viewer we can reach.” (R4)

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[What do you think disability is?]

I don't know. I don't know how to verbalize this... I would appreciate another question. Because I don't think I'd like to be incorrect here, and, damn, the times we live in...

Understanding disability

Throughout the research, the subject of disability was obviously important. During the interviews, as noted in the previous section, there was a very normative, essentializing way of thinking and talking about this aspect of human subjectivity. We cannot expect everyone to discursify this concept and, as a result, come to believe that this term (and the entire concept of identity it evokes, a “disabled person”) is a social construct. We coined it to describe and explain the world, overlooking the moment when the created objects and ideas, right at their very inception, assumed exclusion, not inclusion, of people with non-normative abilities. A few steps in front of the entrance to a cultural institution or no subtitles for the hearing impaired along a film screening create a disability that we would probably not notice if the world were designed differently. Fortunately, our awareness is also changing:

“Disability (...) is an accident that has set you on a certain path and a certain difficulty in your life, but which should not exclude you in any way from everyday life in 2023 or 2024, and you should not be feeling that you are missing something or that you are inferior in any way, because it seems to me that at the level we are at as humanity, we should do everything to make these boundaries as blurry as possible, and so that we can simply participate to the same extent, either in culture, or just in everyday life.” (R_DKS_1)

For some respondents, however, disability is still a problematic topic that is difficult to relate to. We admit our own ignorance and clumsiness:

“[What do you think disability is? ^(BL)] I don’t know. I don’t know how to verbalize this... I would appreciate another question. Because I don’t think I’d like to be incorrect here, and, damn, the times we live in...” (R_DKS_2)

Like most of Polish society, representatives of the film industry tend to essentialize people with disabilities and perceive them as a homogeneous group. They are perceived through the prism of “health” and illness (with the following threat of infantilizing them and showing them pity). Additionally, some of the interlocutors believed that people with disabilities had specific tastes and preferences and that they would be interested primarily in films about disabilities.

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This knowledge is inaccessible to us, producers, and when it comes to the viewer in general, the perspective we receive is more about the quantity: how many people watched a given title, how many people decided to watch it, rather than the specifics of the audience, this knowledge. So, sometimes, we even go to see our own films just to sit with our backs to the screen and see who is sitting with us at the screening.

Research on people with disabilities as recipients of/ participants in cultural events (incl. films)

The difficulty in speaking freely about disability and people experiencing it also results from a lack of knowledge. This is an invisible categorical group that has only recently become more visible the public space (also due to the developed idea of accessibility). Although as a society we are becoming more and more aware of the diversity of our national community, issues related to the specific functioning of people with sensory disabilities in the cultural space still remain a great unknown. The respondents openly said that not only did they not know anything about people with sensory disabilities as audiences of film productions, but they even indicated that they knew little about viewers in general. Film producers openly spoke about their own insufficient knowledge, which they derive only from standard statistical data from the distributors. In turn, the data collected quite regularly by the Polish Film Institute (based on commissioned research) remains, unfortunately, mostly unknown. The distribution of the data is apparently insufficient, as is the incentive to get familiar with the results. Regardless of these difficulties, there is a common belief among film producers, distributors and cinema operators that there is no in-depth research on the audience, and people with sensory disabilities in particular. Only gradual and consequent implementation of such research can lead to

a useful audience segmentation. The marketing research we have been told about is limited to information about the “click-rate” of ads and is merely correlated with basic demographic data. It says nothing or little about the profile of the cinema audience, including its possible (dis)ability.

The interlocutors admitted that they did not commission research, mainly justifying it with a lack of money. There were few opinions questioning the reasons to carry it out, and when the research was carried out, the interlocutors argued that its results would soon become outdated (“everything changes so quickly”) or that they know the market best and the application of research results will not bring any new values to their work (on other occasions, the same people wondered why they did not see any viewers with sensory disabilities attending their screenings). Others pointed out that distribution companies should primarily commission audience tests, including people with sensory disabilities, but they probably do not see any economic sense in doing so.

“Perhaps the results of specific research would not be enough for the distributors, speaking business-wise, to invest large amounts of money on such comprehensive studies.” (R_DKS_1)

Impatience and the desire to learn the results of conducted analyses as quickly as possible and translate the conclusions drawn into an increase in ticket sales also do not encourage the decision to start research. Some respondents accustomed to “survey sociology” would like to know specific numbers: how many people with sensory disabilities will appear at the next screening and under

what conditions. They are not interested in carrying out non-representative research, but only in research that would help them better understand the specificity of the communities in question.

We also noticed that the main purpose of carrying out research is for consultation (examining opinions on a given idea) or answering simple questions, e.g.: “What should we do to make blind people visit us?” Research is not perceived as an opportunity to expand one’s own reflection in the context of analysing current trends, changing styles of consumption of visual materials (e.g. young people absent from cinemas and watching videos on smartphones etc.) or the needs of an aging society.

To be fair, based on the voices we have heard, we must admit that the film industry in Poland generally does without in-depth audience research:

“This knowledge is inaccessible to us, producers, and when it comes to the viewers in general, the perspective we receive is more about the quantity: how many people watched a given title, how many people decided to watch it, rather than the specifics of the audience, the knowledge. So, sometimes, we even go to see our own films just to sit with our backs to the screen and see who is sitting with us at the screening.” (R8)

We learn more about the profile of viewers, or rather female viewers, from cinema representatives. However, they have more opportunities to be in contact with visitors, talk to them, determine their motivations and be able to provide at least their basic characteristics. We may conclude, based on responses from some of them, that the cinema offer is mainly enjoyed by people over 35 years of age (although this limit is systematically moving up):

“We used to target 35+ and mainly women, now we target 40, 45+. Mainly women, because they are also getting a little older.” (R7)

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People with sensory disabilities as “invisible audience”

Knowledge about people with sensory disabilities, the specificity of the difficulties they experience, the characteristics and scale of the phenomenon (both in the statistical and socio-cultural sense) is scarce. Therefore, it cannot be different for audiences with sensory disabilities.

“Honestly... I say this with some embarrassment or some sadness, when you contacted me, I had the impression that these people were invisible to me. I mean, their participation in culture, at least in the paths that I follow, is so small that I cannot comment on it at all.” (R4)

Those people remain invisible: on the one hand, because their experience of disability is difficult for others to notice (e.g. hearing loss), and on the other, because they are ignored even in the research commissioned (e.g. by the Polish Film Institute²).

The visibility of audiences with sensory disabilities may additionally involve an unwanted aspect of “disclosure”, which stigmatizes the person as disabled and requiring assistance. For example, using an audio description receiver is, unfortunately, not always associated with independence: in order to use one, you need to report such a need to a cinema employee (of course, first

² See: Polish Film Institute, Research and analysis, <https://pisf.pl/badania-i-analizy/>, access date: 05/01/2024

assuming that the screening is adapted and the cinema is prepared for this technical eventuality).

The lack of knowledge about the needs of and difficulties faced by people with sensory disabilities is stimulated by the lack of direct contacts. If the respondents had any contact with people with sensory disabilities (apart from family members or distant friends), it was usually through some industry organizations (e.g. gathering blind people). Even if representatives of this categorical group appeared in the cinema from time to time, it is difficult to talk about any relationship here. Few took the trouble to meet those people, talk to them, and learn something about them.

Not only do people with sensory disabilities remain invisible (and largely absent) as cinema audiences, but they also do not work in the industry as employees of cinemas or film distribution companies. The fact that they remain outside the expert group additionally reproduces a situation in which people with sensory disabilities are at best potential recipients, and not co-creators, “insiders” with an impact on changes in the area of accessibility.

“We are not getting direct advice from such people, so meeting them is very important.” (R2_KS)

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Special events and integration events. A film watched alone versus as part of a collective experience

The lack of knowledge about viewers with sensory disabilities (knowledge of their specificity, difficulties they experience and barriers to overcome), the inability to reach them and encourage them to enjoy film culture translates partly into their resignation from further efforts. Many people remain convinced that the only chance to interest people with sensory disabilities in a film screening are sporadically organized special screenings. “Special”, meaning where the audience comes as a group organized by an association or foundation that is friends with a given cinema. People usually arrive at the venue by some shared transport, and although the shows may be declared open, in practice they gather almost exclusively members and supporters of the organizing institution. Meanwhile, such a meeting, even the most successful one, perpetuates the extraordinary nature of the experience, while the people participating in it still remain strangers to us.

“There are foundations or associations with which we work, but rarely does it translate to those people coming back to us. And as I say, I don’t want to do anything special, like an exclusive show for you, come; please, do come, I just want the viewers to come and follow our repertoire.”

(FGI_1_KS_3)

Another respondent associated special shows with a ghetto³:

“Ghettos for people with disabilities... I mean, I don’t think special shows should be organized. (...) Culture or the use of culture is great when it is also communal.” (R4)

People with disabilities speak in a similar spirit, as evidenced by another research we have conducted⁴.

Our interlocutor also drew attention to the important role of leaving the house, meeting other people in one space, and the potential for intergroup integration:

“I believe that cinema is strong when we enjoy it together. And that it takes on a different tone than the same film on your TV or watched alone. (R8)

3 In her statement, this respondent drew attention to another aspect of organizing shows accessible to a group of people with visual disabilities. Sometimes, if you want to prepare an accessible screening (with fewer formalities and restrictions), you use “(...) Article 33’ of the Copyright Law, which generally allows the creation of adaptations to films without the issue of copyright being resolved, as long as no financial benefits are derived from it”, i.e. it is not made commercially, and then it is a show... as if this adaptation was used in a show closed only to people with disabilities. And this is a great way out, used by various organizations, but it is creating a ghetto, because we have to make an exclusive show only to people with a specific disability. (D_2

4 See: Cinema without Barriers – Polish edition. Research report, Bartek Lis, ZAMEK Culture Centre, Poznań 2024, https://ckzamek.pl/media/files/Kino_bez_barier_-_edycja_polska_6T5ly5g.pdf, access date: 20/04/2024.

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We also need to be inquisitive: if you want to get something from those large distributors, unfortunately, you have to pull their tongue and ask them if they have it. Because they often do not provide such information themselves, because it is extra work for them.

Difficulties / problems / challenges / concerns related to creating accessible cinema in Poland

An important element of the research process was mapping the most important concerns, problems and difficulties that our respondents identify as hindering the development of the idea of accessible cinema in Poland. Of course, the interlocutors placed emphasis in different places: we must remember that although the sample included representatives of the audiovisual sector, it is important not only if they represent cinemas, distribution companies or production companies, but also how large these entities are. As a reminder: none of the “big players” (cinema multiplexes, large distributors and producers) were represented in the research sample. The simplest explanation for it may be to refer to an economic argument. An invitation to participate in research focusing on the issue of accessibility (including the issue of improvements for people with sensory disabilities) could be interpreted as referring to such a niche problem that, as a result of the profit-and-loss analysis, participation was considered not very useful. Of course, we cannot rule out other reasons: the unfortunate timing of the research, the lack of competent people who we could interview or us being ineffective with invitations; however, we have made every effort to eliminate such circumstances.

The most important topics are presented below, grouped into thematic blocks:

- Our interlocutors representing cinemas were only people working in arthouse, usually single-screen cinemas, showing primarily (but not only) ambitious arthouse cinematography. For reasons we will come back to further in the report, they decided to embark on the path of creating a program/offer also addressed to people with disabilities (including sensory ones), which does not change the fact that they still face dilemmas regarding the economic (though not exclusively) correctness of such a decision. When asked, they listed their most important concerns:

“Small cinemas may feel discouraged by the multitude of things they need to learn at the beginning to start an accessible cinema.” (R_DKS_2)

On this occasion, the limitations that make building accessible cinema difficult were mentioned: staff shortages, spatial shortages (one cinema hall), technical shortages (lack of specialized equipment), and educational shortages (lack of knowledge and skills to implement accessible screenings and knowledge of the specificity of the social and cultural functioning of people with sensory disabilities in Poland). The latter are crucial for promotion, which involves creating a network of relationships and partnerships with organizations and people working for people with sensory disabilities. Training would stimulate improvement, but time and resources are usually an issue.

- Another concern were financial issues. Cinema owners and employees, the so-called cinema operators, directly spoke about the lack of financial resources (or knowledge of funding sources) which they could use either to purchase the necessary infrastructure or to eliminate barriers (including architectural ones).

Economic dilemmas were common to all groups represented in the research (apart from the professional group of cinema operators, it affected small distributors the most). The latter mentioned that arthouse (small) cinemas appeal to a small group of moviegoers, so the expenses related to creating accessible cinema are too high for them (they do not pay off because there are few viewers with sensory disabilities).

“One person pointed out to me that if she has a film that cost “X”, which she has to promote, then release it somewhere, reach the cinemas with it, convince them to screen it and then five people come to see the film, she will simply not be reimbursed for the entire cost of making an accessible screening, because if two thousand people all over Poland come to see her film, how many of those two thousand people will be people with disabilities who will want to enjoy the accessibility measures? So this is also an issue: is there any point in doing everything and simply, is it a good solution to say “we need to provide everything”? Or, as it is now, there is no message, so we also have to balance it somewhere at the stage we are at now, whether it has any sense at all? (R_DKS_1)

The topic of the lack of viewers (people with sensory disabilities) was continued by many interlocutors:

“There weren’t many (...) I guess we don’t have any viewers who’d want to see it.” (R_DKS_2)

“(...) it’s financially not viable.” (R_1)

The same interlocutor noted elsewhere that you need to be quick when distributing films. Title follows title, so the time and resources that would have to be spent on preparation and promotion (reaching target groups, in this case people with sensory disabilities) simply do not pay off, and even so, the effectiveness is very doubtful.

“We are focusing initially on large cinemas and large cities. Here you need to act quickly. The first week, the first weekend is the most important moment when we want to reach as many people as possible.” (R_1)

Meanwhile, as many of our interlocutors sadly observed, if the show is not a special one, viewers are unlikely to use the solutions accessible in the cinema. If so, enthusiasm is lost or the owners abandon the direction chosen. Unfortunately, in the absence of well-planned, coordinated and time-sensitive action, people and entities may abandon their efforts. We are dealing with a vicious circle: films in cinemas are inaccessible → few viewers with disabilities in cinemas → invisibility of this group → failure to take action to promote accessible film productions and promote them in a way

accessible to people with disabilities. And we are back to square one.

There are many reasons for the absence of viewers with sensory disabilities in Polish cinemas. One of them, apart from the inability to reach them and the lack of resources to create lasting relationships with them, is the almost complete omission of young viewers (deaf and/or blind children). Since we agree that education, i.e. developing a habit and willingness to participate in film culture, is crucial for later participation in the cinema repertoire, it is worth investing in contacts with the youngest viewers. Unfortunately, one respondent pointed out the lack of an extensive offer of films for the youngest audiences would be equipped with accessibility measures for children with disabilities:

“(...) we organize these educational programs in partnership with the cinema-school and they mostly obtain films from distributor “X”. I also contacted this distributor to see if it was possible to obtain audio descriptions or subtitles for children, and they replied very briefly that none of our films had such additions.

(R_DKS_2)

- Large screen cinemas (multiplexes) showing primarily American entertainment cinema do not contribute to the creation of an accessible cinema offer for people with disabilities (especially with sensory ones). If we take into account the knowledge from other research that viewers with sensory disabilities do not differ much from non-disabled viewers, why do we expect the former to be more interested in the New

Horizons cinema and not in mainstream Hollywood productions? However, reception of highly intellectual cinematography requires developed cultural capital, and this is distributed differently throughout Polish society. Unfortunately, some categorical and social groups have more barriers to overcome in order to obtain higher education in humanities. We also mean the dysfunctional system of special education. Nevertheless, it would be worth including large cinemas in showing accessible films. Large American production companies could be more friendly and cooperative in responding to requests for high-profile productions to be made accessible (at the moment, this is practically impossible). A viewer with a disability prefers to stay at home and watch films that are more accessible (intellectually) on streaming platforms than to look for reasons to attend perhaps a high quality screening, yet one which does not correspond to his or her interests, sensitivity or needs.

“Multiplexes make money, true, so they focus on quantity, not quality. And arthouse cinemas are doing something a little bit opposite and they’re trying to go against the grain a little bit on this topic.” (R2_KS)

- A separate block consisted of comments relating to difficulties in contacts between all participants in the production, distribution and screening process. Most often, attention was drawn to problems in contacts with large distributors who, according to the interlocutors, see the idea of “accessible cinema” as

more work than potential benefits. If they distribute domestic films financed by the Polish Film Institute, they should develop the habit of sending copies with all accessible extras to cinemas.

“We also need to be inquisitive: if you want to get something from those large distributors, unfortunately, you have to pull their tongue and ask them if they have it. Because they often do not provide such information themselves, because it is extra work for them.” (R2_KS)

“Our activities are aimed at accessibility: we have an induction loop, we have the AudioMovie system, but we all know that here it depends on what the distributor provides. That is, on whether the films have audio description.” (FGI_KS_1)

Unfortunately, according to some interlocutors representing cinemas, accessibility, ensuring appropriate supplements and additions, is treated as a last resort or an unwanted “cuckoo’s egg”:

“Cinemas are not simply considered a credible entity, it’s hard to say for sure, they have their own beliefs, it’s their policy, and the questions were: ‘Okay, I’ll give you audio description, but how many people will come to see it?’ Yes, these are also... I think this is a big problem. It is quite often that audio description has been developed because the producer has to do it, by law, if they receive funding from the Polish Film Institute, and they do develop it for most films, but it just gets lost somewhere between the distributor

and the producer. Sometimes it happened that the producer developed audio description in the wrong format, or the distributor re-edited the film, adding some promotional elements, and the producer's audio description fell apart completely. I also think that, to a large extent, audio description is treated as something that they just have to do, tick off, and it just goes on the shelf, goodbye.” (FGI_1_KS_2)

- Part of this problem are legal issues: the lack of a clear system of cooperation and rules of conduct that could help all parties communicate better and prepare accessible film copies. It is possible that additional legal regulations would also be necessary so that, for example, entities providing audio descriptions are not treated as a potential source of leaking film copies for illegal distribution. And the level of trust is not very good at the moment, as one of the interlocutors mentioned:

“So I think that the film sector in general has a problem in terms of providing materials, and “X” will certainly agree with that, because they had their way with it. It's just very... I wouldn't say it's related to law, but it's related to some legal difficulties, and also to copyright law, so that films simply don't get pirated. This often makes it difficult to work on audio description or work on the finished supplement itself.” (D_2)

The above also involves legal doubts and ambiguities which, if regulated in some way (with the conclusion efficiently conveyed to all entities involved), could help,

for example, interest deaf people who do not know the Polish language in film screenings. Here, the key issues seem to be related to copyright infringement through interference with the work or image (e.g. Polish sign language translators “pasted into the image” or even creating audio descriptions for a film).

“Distributors have pointed out to me that distribution agreements often restrict them in this respect, but I cannot verify whether it is true or false, whether it was simply omitted, not included in the contract, or whether there are such prohibitions. Sometimes it even happened that in such productions as “X” or “Y”, there was even a ban on introducing new content, which they considered audio description to be. This may also be a problem, I think. I don’t know, I don’t know the details, but I think so.” (FGI_1_KS_3)

The issues of imperfections of the existing law were also of concern to the respondent representing a cultural institution that is very active in creating a regular, accessible cinema repertoire. The regularity of shows (their number) forces the institution to comply with public procurement law, which does not always translate into the quality of prepared supplements, as pointed out by another interviewee:

“It’s great for concrete, it’s great when you need to renovate your bathroom and buy appropriate tiles, even order a catalogue or some publication, but it doesn’t work at all in the context of the quality of audio description, because, for example, we already raise funds that exceed 130 thousand for audio

description, so when making inquiries we cannot ask for a sample, in accordance with the Act, because a sample is something repeatable, i.e. you can ask for a sample of one catalogue, but if you want audio description for 30 different films, you would have to ask for a sample for each film, so here, for example, we went a long way in the law, in the sense that we went too far. And this is something that, for example, we were not aware of, I don't know about you, whether being in the third sector you were aware of it, but for us, for example, it is something that completely surprised us, that the procurement law actually does not work or works to the detriment of quality.” (D_1)

Issues of legal regulations, their imperfections, ambiguity or the lack of the same, were also of interest to distributors, especially smaller ones. At the time of the research, and especially in the few months preceding its commencement, there was a lot of talk in the community about one of the Senate projects (summer/autumn 2023) purporting to impose on distribution companies the obligation to prepare (order) audio descriptions of all foreign titles introduced to the market. This would significantly increase the operating costs for those companies.

“There are a lot of films, several hundred films a year, with less potential. When these budgets are, let's say, even around PLN 100,000, for example, but there may also be, and there certainly are, those that are at the level of PLN 30K or 40K or 50K. And now, when audio description, subtitles and a special supplement that is then attached to the copy all together cost, say, eight

thousand or nine thousand zlotys, it means that it is almost 30-40% of the entire budget. And it all simply stops being profitable if it's the responsibility of the distributor. And this was the main bone of contention, because with this draft law the legislator planned to burden distributors with the responsibility for ensuring that every film has such a version at the time of its first screening in Poland, under a penalty.” (R1)

During the “Forum without Barriers. On accessible cinema”, organized by the ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań, the then director of the Polish Film Institute was said to have denied similar opinions by specifying the provisions included in the proposed bill (which, eventually was not adopted in the face of the upcoming parliamentary elections). However, the quoted opinion, shared by other respondents, proved insufficient communication and cooperation with the community on such an important issue.

Anticipating the situation which, as we already know, has not been resolved, one of the interlocutors drew attention to the threats that could stem from a legal regulation requiring distributors to prepare accessible copies of all distributed titles. In his opinion, this may create a risk of mass production, and therefore reduce the costs and quality of the developed materials, which, of course, will not serve to keep the viewers (people with sensory disabilities) in cinemas.

“In a situation where [state (BL)] institutions force distributors to prepare audio description without a quality framework, it may lead to a situation where

any person will simply record what they see in the film, simply on the screen, without any preparation, the invoice comes in, the file comes in and it is checked off. But is that what it's all about? Oh no.” (R3)

- Among difficulties in creating accessible cinema in Poland, respondents drew attention to communication and knowledge flow. For example, they mentioned the lack of a database of information on all audio descriptions and other accessibility additions (a kind of a library, perhaps centrally archived and made accessible to all interested parties). Others said that they lacked space, forums, communication channels and dialogue of all parties involved in the work (especially between the distributor and the producer):

“Generally, relations with distributors are limited to sales reports within a few months after the premiere, then every six months, and then annually. And actually, these reports are very, uh... modest.” (R8)

- The interlocutors are also aware that it is still a challenge to ensure the accessibility of outdoor film screenings and film festivals (at last year's New Horizons International Film Festival⁵, one of the largest in Poland, less than 1% of screenings were accessible to people with sensory disabilities).
- The respondents also shared their concerns that the use of all facilities for people with sensory disabilities in one integrated show may significantly affect the legibility of the experience, and in this way, they advocate for the comfort of the normative viewer:

“I am happy with initiatives that allow people with disabilities to enjoy the screening along people without disabilities, as an audience, together. But it turns out that it is not easy, because, for example, subtitles for deaf people, when there are two rows of subtitles, it is distracting for both people using them, those who require them and those who do not.” (R5)

The problem raised above is therefore related to a technical challenge and the search for new tools (requiring time and financial resources) to be fully inclusive (at this moment, it is not possible to meet all needs in one show):

“If I take an overlay with English subtitles, I can’t take an overlay with audio description, so I can either make an inclusive screening or a non-inclusive one.” (FGI_1_KS_2)

The respondents were also aware, as regards the topic discussed earlier, that an area that has not yet been fully explored (with a high potential for good solutions in terms of accessibility) is the use of artificial intelligence.

What facilitates and promotes the accessibility-oriented sector attentiveness?

With a goal to create a catalogue of activities, conditions or circumstances that may support the creation of inclusivity within the audiovisual space, we asked our interlocutors what, in their opinion, favours the sector's attentiveness in terms of accessibility adjustments. Here are the most important proposals:

- the size of the cinema: smaller entities with a small team can foster more direct relationships with the audience, involving openness and curiosity to get to know and understand them, including their needs and the difficulties they face;
- known and shared organizational culture effectively shared with new employees: we are talking about a mission and vision that should be shared, containing values other than those related to the understandable desire to generate income, and about the concept of “socially sensitive cinema”;
- empathetic management driving change.
- one of the respondents drew attention to random circumstances that could make an institution care about being inclusive (e.g. a cinema employee has appropriate experience or contacts with people with disabilities, or the sensitivity acquired during some previous events);

- education: openness and readiness to continue training in a cyclical and orderly manner;
- external stimulus, such as the appearance of additional funding for accessibility-sensitive activities (e.g. the “Accessible Culture” priority in the subsidy programs of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage or the “Culture without Barriers” competition initiated by the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons).
- accessibility coordinators in cinemas/cinema chains:

“I’m very happy; we have a person who only deals with coordination and watches over everything, reminds us of what is required and nudges us”; (FGI_1_KS_2)

- being a public institution, not a strictly commercial one, although there are small private cinemas, sometimes run by families, that break away from this rule;
- cooperation with non-governmental organizations working for people with sensory disabilities.

”

It has some additional utility. (...) from my perspective, it is an activity for the common good, and not just an activity motivated economically.

Motivations for creating accessible cinema / reasons why we do it

Another side of the same issue is the question of motivation, i.e. why we should deal with the issue of sector accessibility at all. Seemingly, this is the same issue as the one discussed above, but here it is primarily about an important justification, without which (if it is not clear, understandable and distributed within the organization) it is difficult to achieve reliable, consistent action. Let us list the most important ones:

- “Because it is the 21st century and you cannot do otherwise.” Sensitivity and attentiveness to a diverse world as part of the mission and vision and a quality around which employees and audiences alike gather. They can be called ideologists (often these are small cinemas, arthouse cinemas, as well as small production and distribution companies);
- “Because you can’t do otherwise if it comes to public money.” Once again, it is about sharing a certain mission, typical especially for less commercial entities financed from local government budgets and externally obtained targeted subsidies;
- “Because it is an important, potentially reachable part of the market/audience.” This is where the financial argument comes into play, but if the effect is to be beneficial for people with sensory disabilities, this motivation should not be omitted (which is referred to by another sober reflection);

- “Because there’s future in it.” This is proof of a forward-looking view of the aging society and the fact that many more people will soon benefit from accessibility adjustments than may seem at the moment;
- “Because we want to be in trend, to be up to date.” We are involved in this topic for reputational reasons (but also for promotional reasons, which translates into better attendance results, also among normative people, who see value in going to “places that care”).
- one of our interlocutors mentioned a very important motivation for creating accessibility supplements: the belief that it is an expression of care for the completeness of the film work:

“It has some additional utility. (...) from my perspective, it is an activity for the common good, and not just an activity motivated economically.” (R6)

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Films for people with disabilities are accessible on all major online platforms, and it is certainly important that at this point going to the cinema is no longer just going to the cinema: it is an experience of simply going out together, one that is shared together as a group. It's more than that.

Accessibility and film culture. Not just a film

To be complete, the discussion on (the absence) of people with sensory disabilities among cinema audiences in Poland must also cover other events and socio-cultural circumstances around the films. We are talking here not only about film as a medium (it might seem basic, and for many the only one worth talking about), but about “cinema” as a place, a space for education, free time animation, integration and emancipation.

“We show the cinema from the inside, camera cabins, poster rooms and all our corridors, bridges that are suspended (...), and this is also something that we did for people with disabilities, I think in November. Of course, these were not trips for people who, for example, use a wheelchair, because we cannot overcome this disability, but the head of the cinema engineering conducted such a walk with elements of audio description, with elements of physically touching the equipment, so that one could get as much into this world and imagine what it all looks like. So, apart from the fact that we have these film screenings as a cinema, we also try to show cinematography from the inside (...) if we have this projector and we invite someone, we invite an able-bodied person and simply show it to them, we can also invite a disabled person to the same cabin projection, you can show this projector in a different way, maybe just let them hear it, because, for example, the sound

is also important, considering how loud it works. So, apart from being a cinema, we can also show other things.” (R_DKS_1)

Those of our interlocutors who noticed the above-mentioned aspect were most often employees of these institutions. However, one thing is to be aware of the bond-forming function of cinema and the willingness to animate the community around it (e.g. by programming accompanying events: meetings, workshops etc.), and another thing is to remember that this element should also be accessible. However, there are difficulties here (financial, human resources), because, for example, how can you ensure translation into Polish sign language of a conversation with creators during a live meeting when you operate in a small town where there is no access to an interpreter?

Regardless of the difficulties experienced, it is worth thinking about the participation of people with sensory disabilities as an important and comprehensive experience which, in order to be satisfying and result in repeated visits to the cinema, in addition to a good film (popular and accessible), should also provide comfort at other stages. We are talking here about a specific “participation path” including all the requirements to be met in order for the audience to reach the institution (how do we communicate the offer, is it formulated in an understandable language, do we reach places frequented by potential participants?). The next step is to take care of the event venue: it’s not about the screening room, but about the corridors, hall, toilets, cafe or bookstore; a visit to those spaces is also part of the experience. Finally, purchasing a ticket – is it simple and intuitive for

a blind person? Can deaf people do it on their own? If you think about it, the screening itself is only an element of a larger whole, and attentive cinema will not end this meeting with the final credits, but will take care to foster the relationship (e.g. by collecting opinions about the film). The research sample included respondents who sensed the cultural and social role and the value of cinema. However, in order to fully use it, it is necessary to put a lot of work into building relationships with recipients and taking care of every element of their visit to the cinema:

“Films for people with disabilities are accessible on all major online platforms, and it is certainly important that at this point going to the cinema is no longer just going to the cinema: it is an experience of simply going out together, one that is shared together as a group. It’s more than that.”

(R1)

At the end of this part, it is worth paying attention to something that the respondents (people with sensory disabilities) told us about in another study, which concerned the unaccessibility of press and promotional materials in the cinema⁶. This includes, for example, the lack of alternative text (film posters, illustrations, photos and frames placed next to the description) or messages formulated in a language that is easy to read and understand. Almost no attention is paid to audio description of premiere trailers. This element may be an unobvious aspect of thinking about the sensory participation of children: how could they be willing to see another film if they are excluded from this part of the visit to the cinema?

6 See: Cinema without Barriers..., op. cit.

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**We worked
with the »X«
foundation back
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And we didn't
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this audience.**

The role of partnerships in reaching groups of people with sensory disabilities

As someone once said, “accessibility is a team game.” In order for it to be successful (implemented), the involvement of all actors present in the field is required. In the case in question, these will be, on the one hand, cinemas (small and large ones, including the currently absent multiplexes), film producers and distributors, and on the other non-governmental (industry) organizations, cultural centres (with the ambition and willingness to support the idea of accessible culture) and activist communities of people with disabilities. So far, unfortunately, the latter are relatively small and hardly noticeable.

Partnerships remain a key way to attract viewers with sensory disabilities. Until the problem of unfamiliarity with the sensory environment has been solved (lack of research, knowledge of their results and established relationships), many existing initiatives (e.g. “special film screenings once a quarter”) will take place thanks to cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

„ Carrying out this type of screenings without meaningful contact with foundations and associations that are in the centre of interest of this target group may be pointless. I mean, we will do it, we will actually complete our task in the program, it will be entered, but then we will find

out, for example, that we didn't necessarily get it right. So here I also see the problem of reaching a target without a partner who actually has direct contact with the audience beyond some standard means of communication.” (FGI_1_KS_3)

You should be aware that a trap resulting from excessive reliance on non-governmental organizations cooperating with the entity is excessively placing the responsibility for acquiring disabled viewers on them.

“We worked with the “X” foundation back then, which provided us with the audience. And we didn't know much about this audience.” (D_1)

To sum up, it is worth considering whether those partnerships are real partnerships? What attitude and relationships arise within them? Is this a type of outsourcing justified as part of business relations, or is it cooperation? And is cooperation (assuming an ideological approach on the part of distributors, producers and cinema operators) necessary? Maybe it is a fair division of tasks between individual actors?

”

I think we have serious work ahead of us on the awareness of the entire environment. And this is still ahead of us and I think it's not even going the way it should be yet. Today, we are at the beginning of the road – absolutely.

Expected support or recommendations: what should happen to make “accessible cinema” a reality in Poland?

An important part of the research was an attempt to collect proposals for solutions that, according to people from the film community, could help develop the idea of “accessible cinema” in our country (both short and long term). They have been grouped into several categories and briefly presented below.

Financial support

In the context of many reported difficulties, the simplest (?) solution seems to be cash transfers enabling cinemas to be provided with the latest equipment (for listening to audio description, induction loops, modern projectors and the elimination of architectural barriers):

“(...) the key thing is to leave the possibility of co-financing equipment for cinema operators under the Polish Film Institute programs, because now it is out of the question, because the director is counting very heavily on the application project, but he threw the baby out with the bathwater and you can’t co-finance an induction loop, i.e. a completely different facility. The possibility of simply co-financing the purchase of equipment for cinema operators should be considered. (D_2)

Additional resources were also discussed in connection with the development of supplements themselves (subtitles for the hearing impaired, comprehensively prepared audio descriptions) and the use of other facilities, e.g. providing Polish sign language interpreters for live events. The main recipients of such subsidies were the distributors:

“The Polish Film Institute should provide subsidies for smaller distributors and it should be their responsibility to order audio description and take care of it, so that we can only order audio-described films and organize screenings.” (D_1)

Systemic solutions (legal regulations and creation of a transparent system of conduct)

The respondents, regardless of which part of the audiovisual sector they represented, drew attention to the need to organize the entire procedure in the case of creating accessible film copies. Temporarily, it works with some momentum and mainly thanks to enthusiasts. However, there is an increasing expectation of some form of systemic regulation that would assume, on the one hand, the introduction of comprehensive actions resulting from an intensive process of environmental deliberation and consultation, and, on the other hand, a demand for urgent central coordination. As a result of the activities, assuming the option of state co-financing, it would be possible to clearly divide tasks and not rely only on the initiative of non-governmental organizations or larger cultural centres.

Key aspects of the issue:

- Support is due to all actors in this process: film producers, distributors, cinemas, non-governmental organizations and cultural centres, as well as representatives of the communities of people with sensory disabilities.
- The adoption of legal solutions should also reassure large film distributors who are afraid of copyright infringement and uncontrolled circulation of copies (security). It is necessary to regulate the cooperation between the distributors and the entity developing the audio description by means of a confidentiality agreement. Proposed solutions should be prepared by the Polish Film Institute.
- Film producers, and subsequently distributors, should be legally obliged to provide developed supplements:

“There is only a requirement to develop... without the requirement to share, for example. So, in fact, you can put them in a drawer for no-one to use and nothing will happen, which is absurd.” (R5)

“If we are talking about films that are first distributed in cinemas, both these materials should be delivered as part of the so-called mandatory copy to the National Film Archive and handed over to the distributor, if the film has a distributor. However, I must admit that the use of these materials by the distributor is not verified in any way.” (R6)

On this occasion, one of the respondents used the term “zamordism”, which in her opinion translates as the missing stick in the commonly known carrot and stick method.

“We’re back to my zamordism again. I don’t know, I think it would be the easiest way, unfortunately. Well, if it is a matter of voluntariness, it will look a bit like it does now. One will do it, the other won’t. It’s as if certain things come easier if you have to do them, because if you don’t need them, you delay them.” (R2_KS)

“(…) The programs by the Polish Film Institute did a great job. It took some time, but these producers simply comply with the requirements set before them [regarding the requirement to prepare audio description and extended subtitles for Polish productions that received funding from the Polish Film Institute (BL)].” (D_2)

In connection with this, there is an expectation that the Polish Film Institute also require the preparation of a translation of the dialogue track into Polish sign language.

Cooperation

Some of the interlocutors drew attention to the need to expand the group of entities involved in creating accessible cinema, understanding that only then will the community have a chance to reach out to new (?) viewers, whose presence is still unsatisfactory. At this point, some of them mentioned large streaming platforms that are already working to a large extent to

ensure the accessibility of the content they offer. Some respondents perceive cooperation with them as an opportunity to reach people with sensory disabilities temporarily choosing TV shows rather than cinema screenings.

Key topics discussed:

- According to the respondents, a big challenge, although worth taking up, is to convince large distribution companies (Hollywood, American films) to be more willing to provide materials for the development of accessibility supplements. Bearing in mind the remarks about the diverse cultural capitals that Polish society has at its disposal, it will be very difficult to include people with sensory disabilities into common experience in the area of film culture if we mainly use difficult, ambitious cinema. Additionally, such cooperation is needed to bring the latest productions to people with sensory disabilities as quickly as possible. Today, these people are largely excluded from this (if they cannot afford streaming platforms and do not speak English, and this is usually the case).

„The biggest problem is with the mainstream [distributors (BL)], because they don't really pay attention to it, because American studios... they haven't pushed it over here in Poland.” (R2_KS)

- Judging by the fact that it was impossible to invite their representatives to take part in the research, an equally difficult task for the time being is to include large cinema complexes. We could convince them to the idea of accessible cinema by showing the results of numerous studies and reasonable lobbying

(e.g. engaging celebrities). It is important to try to invite them to conceptual work and to co-develop solutions (sector education). Individual contacts and presence at industry meeting places (“Forum Around Cinema”) should be strengthened again by the activities of central institutions.

- At the same time, there were voices about the need for an environmental, more critical reflection on the issue of (in)accessibility of film repertoire and cinemas. This reflection should be animated from within by industry organizations and included in some rational agenda and work schedule.

“I think we have serious work ahead of us on the awareness of the entire environment. And this is still ahead of us and I think it’s not even going the way it should be yet. Today we are at the beginning of the road – absolutely.” (FGI_1_KS_3)

“In fact, environmentally speaking, we don’t talk about it much. These are some sporadic situations. Even though we often meet and talk, this topic is actually an optional topic.” (FGI_1_KS_4)

Education

Varied educational activities took an important place among the recommendations formulated for the respondents’ own environment. Some of them, considering that their level of knowledge (both regarding the broader issue of disability and accessibility, and in terms of tools, regarding the preparation of specific solutions) was insufficient, recommended (to themselves) further training. Part of this process should include

learning about good solutions already implemented in Poland or abroad.

The following additional suggestions have been made:

- Development of an information and educational campaign for people with sensory disabilities regarding solutions, facilities, rights and opportunities. As we know (also from our research), not all people with sensory disabilities know a wide spectrum of accessibility activities⁷. Part of this would be to encourage self-advocates to further self-organize and put pressure on, for example, large corporations and companies that distribute and screen films in multiplexes.

„An information campaign for people with these disabilities that cinema is accessible to them, to simply mobilize or motivate them more, or invite them to participate in culture, because, as I said, I think it is so closed..., a closed circle. If these people go to cinema more often, they will become such an important viewer.” (R4)

- Educating viewers without disabilities (creating alliances) about the needs of viewers with sensory disabilities and about existing tools and solutions that allow them to participate in film culture (“hey! you don’t have to be afraid of audio description!”). For example, social advertisements displayed before film screenings were proposed.

“When we put a film with audio description on our repertoire, the number of viewers automatically drops

⁷ Ibid.

because of, like, what you say, you know, viewers' education and so on; and then, like, I don't know, like, recently, you know, because we had this audio description for a long time, and even the accountant asks me, like the head accountant, what is it anyway? I say "Gosh", you know what I mean, that you know, like, awareness is important. Because if we announce that something goes with audio description, then, like, no one comes to the show." (FGI_1_KS_2)

- Creating a guide (a comprehensive tutorial for beginners), i.e. a publication containing the most important information about how people with sensory disabilities function in society, about their needs and difficulties and how those specificities can or should be answered by creating accessible cinema. This publication should be appropriately distributed, mainly among film distributors and producers.

At this point, it is worth emphasizing that a number of changes in the context of greater internal control of the environment of people with sensory disabilities, their greater mass interest in participating in public cultural events, including film screenings, will be more likely to happen if, in addition to these important, but locally oriented activities, systemic education reform takes place. Education aimed at people with sensory disabilities should support the idea of their independent participation in culture. Systematic work consisting in showing non-obvious advantages of using films by the deaf, hard of hearing, visually impaired or blind may result in greater interest in cinema in later stages of

their lives. To make this possible, it is necessary to demand more accessible films for children and young people.

Other

It is also worth noting several other issues raised by the interviewees, which can be treated as advice or ideas for solutions supporting the idea for a comprehensive development of accessible cinema:

- Seeing the cultural, bond-forming and social value in cinema (the idea of public screenings in a specific institution/place). That is a question that has been asked for a long time, only understood differently: “Do you go to the cinema or to a movie?” In this approach, the cinema is an important platform for integration, meetings and emancipation also for people with sensory disabilities and as such should not be omitted in a broader discussion about social inclusion.
- Following the principle of “relevance” (importance of images, topics, content) for the audience. In practice, this means, for example, greater openness of arthouse cinemas to mass and popular productions if they contribute to the discussions vital for the community or if they facilitate broader reach to new viewers:

„Well, I guess every cinema presents important cinematography and, first of all, we have to resist the impression that, I don’t know, I don’t want to use distributors’ names, say, that if something comes from “X” or “Y” [names of large American producers (BL)], let’s put it aside and think about it later (...).

So I think it's intuitively simple, and this division should never exist, that we get offended by something just because it's less arthouse. If something is important, it should be in the cinema.” (FGI_1_KS_2)

- Reminding ourselves that the recipients of each cultural offer are an internally diverse group (including people with sensory disabilities), and this requires us to be very careful in using language and formulating messages, using different languages in communication and referring in the content to different needs, different people and groups,
- Paying attention to the various aspects that audience research (among people with sensory disabilities) can bring to the process of preparing, shooting and producing films. Producers would not only want (as some people think) to indicate topics or problems that could be of interest to people with disabilities (since they do not exist), but to share technical comments (e.g. regarding the film sound or lighting).

“There are really so many factors involved in film production that the producer pushes this element, I think, more into the next stage, i.e. to distribution and cinemas, so that people with physical disabilities can participate. And I think that such an issue would arise at the stage of film production if a person with disabilities took part in one of our films, e.g. as a director or as an actor. However, this has not happened so far.” (R9)

→ Experimenting with the idea of cinema. Launching “listening cinema” (for everyone, not only in the context of people with visual disabilities), but also for sighted people. Returning to screening selected silent films, expansion of formats:

“Some kind of adjustment of possibilities, so that actually watching a film would no longer be, for example, just watching it, but opening up to the possibility that it could be listening to it, or that sometimes it would be just an image without sound.”

(R9)

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Even if for one person, it's worth it. And that sometimes some nihilistic moods pop up, that no one is there, that despite how it is advertised, communicated in online spaces and elsewhere, there is no audience; but it turns out that someone unexpectedly appears.

Is accessible cinema profitable?

One question recurred throughout the research, and related considerations could be heard on various occasions: taking into account the scope of work related to the preparation of accessible film screenings (requiring the mobilization of not only financial, infrastructural, technical, but also personal and competence resources): is accessible cinema profitable at all? The question is even more fundamental because so far, despite efforts to change this state of affairs, we cannot say there are too many people with sensory disabilities who participate in shows tailored to their needs. An important aspect of this discussion is also to determine how this profitability should be understood and measured? Is it only in terms of profitability (additional profit from ticket sales), or also using other aspects: educational, cultural, social, or even civilizational?

For some of the interlocutors, let us call them “ideologists”, the outlined dilemma is easy to solve: accessible cinema is worth making due to purely human sensitivity. Sometimes, it can be frustrating (when our efforts are not positively received), but on other occasions we achieve small successes that prove that it is a processual activity, extended over time, perhaps not very spectacular at the beginning, but important and necessary.

“Even if for one person, it’s worth it. And that sometimes some nihilistic moods pop up, that

no one is there, that despite how it is advertised, communicated in online spaces and elsewhere, there is no audience; but it turns out that someone unexpectedly appears.” (R_DKS_2)

In the discussion about opening the cinema audience to new recipients – people with sensory disabilities – there is a sceptical argument that even if it were possible to convince new people to visit cinemas more often, the numbers would not be significant. Distributors (unlike representatives of “mission-oriented” arthouse cinemas) doubt the forecast increase in revenues due to the greater accessibility of cinemas/films. In this way, they point out that the success of this action may be influenced by a number of variables, including education and time, and “business has no time”. (R1).

The constant inclusion of economic issues in this reflection should be understandable to us, after all, film screening is not a philanthropic activity. It is worth accepting and opening to this argument, and perhaps – for the sake of success – pointing to financial profitability more often than just referring to social solidarity. As a result of rethinking (expanding the understanding) of the concept of accessibility and taking it beyond the category of disability (with all its stereotypical approaches and semantic weight), it will be possible to notice its more universal character, which translates more into profits. Financially and economically, accessibility should therefore pay off if we manage not only to reach and include a larger number of viewers (people with sensory disabilities), but also if we broaden our perspective (develop the understanding of disability and what an aging society means). All data, including forecasts from

the Central Statistical Office⁸, show that our society is aging. At the end of 2022, there were approximately 9.7 million people aged 65 or older in Poland. By 2030, there will be over 10.8 million seniors, and by the end of the next decade this number is expected to increase by another 1.5 million. At the same time, people working in cinemas are already observing an increase in the average age of the audience. If we combine this with the information that approximately 50% of people aged 65 and over have sight problems⁹, it is possible that we will look at ensuring accessibility of film culture with greater imagination and care.

“It seems to me that because it is done reactively, a little half-heartedly, it is not implemented with such a strong line, it is not profitable, because the energy is dispersed, each of us is just trying to work their hands off on this topic. Sometimes someone tries to open an open door and they waste both energy and resources on trying different things. (...) I think that at the moment it is not profitable yet, but that does not mean that it cannot be profitable. All the more so because we are becoming an aging society, because we will all soon lose some of our hearing and sight, so... I will do it for myself.” (FGI_1_KS_1)

8 See Central Statistical Office, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/osoby-starsze/>, access date: 10/02/2024.

9 See Polsenior 2. Research on individual areas of the health of older people, including health-related quality of life, Piotr Błędowski, Tomasz Grodzicki, Małgorzata Mossakowska, Tomasz Zdrojewski (ed.), Medical University of Gdańsk, Gdańsk 2021, https://polsenior2.gumed.edu.pl/attachment/attachment/82370/Polsenior_2.pdf, access date: 20/04/2024.

Is fully accessible cinema a dream?

People expressing their willingness to take part in the research clearly signalled that they recognized the importance of the problem of (in)accessibility of film culture in Poland. They recognize that it is an important challenge which is becoming more and more vital. During the conversations, they often declared hope that thanks to similar initiatives it would be possible not only to diagnose the most important difficulties and barriers faced by the creators of film culture, but also that it would be possible to interest the representatives of state institutions in it. As noted previously, creating accessible culture is a team effort. It requires legal and financial solutions that organize and facilitate operations, but also more intensive integration of the environment (inclusion of further entities and organizations) and activation of self-advocacy people (people with sensory disabilities). Only further down the road, judging by the enthusiasm of many of our interlocutors, will it be possible to acknowledge that “accessible cinema” becomes a fact in Poland.

“A person with a disability simply wants to come to watch a movie on a Thursday afternoon and there is no problem with whether the cinema is offering such an event next month or in three months, I just come up with an idea that tonight I want to go out and watch or hear a film, but I am deaf, for example, and I just go to the cinema of my choice and watch a film or participate in such an event.” (R_DKS_2)

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We will be the generation that will need it, that will be able to afford it. This means that there will no longer be financial barriers to going to the cinema. Cities will no longer have so many architectural barriers, it will be a regular thing for any cinema to be physically accessible.

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The study was carried out thanks to funding
from the Polish Film Institute.

Project leader: ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań
Poznań, 2024

..... Project leader: Funding:

