

The cultural participation of people with disabilities or impairments: how to create an accessibility plan

Technical Information

Title

The Cultural Participation of People with Disabilities or impairments: How to Create an Accessibility Plan

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Introduction

Context, Purpose and Structure of this Manual

"Generosity
is not justice.
And inclusion
is not equality."

Madani Younis, British Cultural Programmer

Increasingly, the words diversity and inclusion are part of the discourse of those working in the cultural sector and in cultural organisations. Moving on from the democratisation of culture (still very much demanded) to a more democratic culture, the sector has become more aware of the absences, the lack of voices and opportunities, in other words, of the lack of access to cultural participation at various levels – for audiences, teams, artists and everyone who collaborates with organisations.

Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits." This right is also enshrined in the Portuguese Constitution, which states in Article 73 that

"The State promotes the democratisation of culture, namely by encouraging and ensuring that all citizens have access to cultural enjoyment and creation, in collaboration with the media, cultural associations and foundations, cultural and recreational collectivities, associations for the safeguarding of cultural heritage, dwellers' organisations and other cultural agents."

O direito de acesso, de participação, traduz-se em responsabilidades e obrigações para o setor cultural. Este manual centra-se nos direitos e necessidades das pessoas com deficiência ou incapacidade.

It is estimated that there are more than 1,700,000 people with at least one disability¹ in Portugal, and more than 2,200,000

¹ Data included in a Diário de Notícias [daily newspaper] article: "One million and 700 thousand Portuguese have some disability. Are we an inclusive society? ", Published on December 2, 2018: <https://www.dn.pt/edicao-do-dia/02-dez-2018/-um-milhao-e-700-mil-portugueses-tem-incapacidade-somos-uma-sociedade-inclusiva-10264748.html>

over 65 years old². Many of these people are prevented from freely participating in the country's cultural life due to poor access conditions. That is, they are not among our audience, they are not our colleagues and employees, they do not consider the possibility of an artistic career or, when they do consider it, they are not included in the programme.

True equality of opportunities requires access that is direct, immediate, permanent, and as autonomous as possible.

It requires the development of public policies, and, also, at management level, the awareness that all areas of a cultural organisation must be articulated and must contribute to fulfilling the objective of creating access conditions: from the artistic and executive direction, to production, including also the technical areas, communication, and education.

The aim of this manual is to:

- present an integrated vision of what it means to create access conditions for cultural participation;
- help cultural organisations build their accessibility plans so that they can respond to the needs of people with disabilities or impairments, in order to fulfil their mission and respect those peoples' rights.

Throughout the manual, readers may find guidelines and general rules relating to any type of cultural venue, such as theatres, concert halls, cinemas, museums, art galleries, libraries, and archives. Whenever there are issues that specifically concern a particular type of venue, they are considered and highlighted.

² Data referring to 2018, and available on the website of National Institute of Statistics on Estimated Resident Population / Decrease in the resident population in 2018 less than that of 2017 - 2018 / June 14, 2019. https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_destaques&DESTAQUESdest_boui=354227526&DESTAQUESmodo=2&xlang=pt

This manual is structured as follows:

> 1st part: Access to cultural participation – an integrated approach

We introduce the issue of access as something that affects a cultural organisation as a whole. Access is not the responsibility of a single person or department. It is a commitment, defined at central level, by management, which requires teams to be prepared, and depends on the contribution of all people and all departments that make up the organisation.

> 2nd part: Intervention areas

We define the intervention areas: communication, physical access to buildings, reception, access to the programme, ticketing policies, and collaboration with people with disabilities. In this way, we try to follow a route from the moment a person comes into contact with a cultural organisation, still at a distance (for instance, through the website or advertising), until he/she crosses the door of the building, either as an audience member, a team member or as a collaborator.

> 3rd part: From diagnosis to organisational change

We seek to identify the necessary steps for an organisation to create its own orientation and ensure access to cultural participation, in a cross-cutting, continuous way.

> **4th part: Testimonies**

Reúnem-se aqui cinco testemunhos na primeira pessoa: profissionais da cultura e público – todas pessoas com deficiência ou necessidades específicas – e, ainda, uma mãe e cuidadora. Pessoas que se relacionam de múltiplas formas com o setor cultural e que partilham as suas experiências, positivas e negativas, os seus sentimentos, desejos e necessidades.

> **Attachments**

Their purpose is to help cultural organisations build their accessibility plan, namely:

- the glossary of technical terms used in this manual
- a checklist for an elementary diagnosis
- suggestions for formulating the accessibility policy statement
- options for describing the functions of the accessibility coordinator within the organisation.

> **References**

Those interested in deepening their knowledge can find here, in addition to legislation related to accessibility, a selection of texts, videos and websites to consult.

1

Access to Cultural Participation: An Integrated Approach

Types of Barriers

Access is not an exclusive issue for people with disabilities or impairments. Nor is it limited to the absence of architectural barriers, although many still exist and are still being created. It is a more comprehensive concept, which integrates three general dimensions: physical, social and intellectual access.

Physical barriers are natural or artificial obstacles (structural) that prevent people with reduced mobility from circulating, approaching and being transferred, in venues and facilities. They mainly, but not exclusively, affect people using a wheelchair (either manual or electric), and also, people who can walk but who have difficulty in walking long distances or in overcoming obstacles such as stairs or sidewalks – for example, pregnant women and elderly people, paraplegic people, those with multiple sclerosis, those who suffered a stroke, among others.

Social barriers refer to situations that prevent or hinder access to cultural participation. They include factors such as one's level of education, illiteracy or low literacy, unemployment, social or geographic isolation, the scarcity of cultural offer in the area of residence, the serving of a judicial sentence, among others.

Intellectual barriers prevent or hinder access to cultural participation by people who are illiterate, who have low literacy, who do not have specialised technical and / or scientific knowledge on a given subject, who do not have Portuguese as their first language or who have a sensory disability, impairment or challenge – for instance, people who are blind, D/deaf, have a hearing impaired, attention deficit, intellectual disabilities or with an autism spectrum disorder, among others.

The conditions of physical access are regulated by law and must be complied with both by the State and the private sector. Regarding social and intellectual barriers, there is no specific regulation. However, Portuguese Law 46/2006 prohibits and punishes any discrimination based on disability. In addition, it obliges cultural organisations to review various practices or omissions that result in barriers to the cultural participation of people with disabilities. Cultural organisations must take the initiative to identify and remove such barriers.

Cultural Participation and Disability

People with disabilities or impairments face several barriers in their life in society and not just in what concerns access to cultural participation. These barriers, which could be avoided, are not caused by their disability. They exist because the way society and the physical environment are organised imposes a set of restrictions on them – excluding and marginalising them.

This approach, known as the “social model of disability”, is opposed to the approach of the “medical model of disability”, which mistakenly attributes the difficulties experienced by people on their disability. The medical model of disability prevailed for quite a long time, and still affects our mentality around these issues, disregarding the oppressive role of social organisation.

The Medical Model of Disability

The problem lies in the disability

People with disabilities are passively receiving help from services to manage or cure their situation

- Special schools
- Occupational therapy
- Speech therapy
- Medical doctors
- Specialists
- Social workers
- Social support
- Special transports
- Special educational activities

The Social Model of Disability

The problem lies in society

People with disabilities are actively fighting for equality, in partnership with people who are their allies

- Prejudice
- Depreciation
- Insistence on the medical model
- Inaccessible environment
- Inaccessible information
- Lack of access to education
- Employment discrimination
- Special services (segregation)
- Inaccessible transports

Image 1. Mindset according to the Medical Model and the Social Model of Disability

With regard to access to cultural participation, people with disabilities or impairments face all kinds of barriers. Although physical barriers are the most obvious, and those on which there is greater awareness in society, social and intellectual barriers are equally significant and limiting.

According to the annual reports of the Disability and Human Rights Observatory³, over the last ten years (2009-2019), there has been a positive global scenario of change in Portugal. However, progress has been quite weak and, in some areas, non-existent.

³ Portugal ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009. <http://oddh.iscsp.ulisboa.pt/index.php/pt/2013-04-24-18-50-23/publicacoes-dos-investigadores-oddh>

In the fields of education and professional training, for instance, there has been greater participation, but little allocation, or even decline, of resources. This means that people with disabilities or impairments have very limited conditions for accessing education at all levels, and are more likely to being unemployed. The number has increased by 41% in the last decade, while for the general population it has decreased by 38%.

These factors limit the opportunities of people with disabilities or impairments to freely, actively, equally participate in the community's cultural life. Therefore, cultural organisations must be aware of physical, social and intellectual barriers, and actually look into them in the development of their accessibility plans.

An important note: although people with disabilities or impairments are severely affected by the lack or non-existence of access conditions, they are not the only ones to see their right to cultural participation called into question. By ensuring conditions for people with disabilities to access their facilities and programming – as members of the audience and as cultural professionals –, cultural organisations are also becoming more inclusive for society in general.

An Integrated Approach

People working in cultural organisations have different levels of awareness, interest and experience regarding accessibility issues. Sometimes, some of them are informally “responsible for accessibility”. Very often, when these people leave the organisation, concerns with accessibility are over.

The existence of a person responsible for coordinating accessibility is essential to ensure access conditions in a permanent, consistent, effective, and continuous manner. However, accessibility is a central issue, in terms of management, in any cultural organisation.

It would therefore be a mistake to think that the issue is solved just with the existence of an accessibility coordinator. It is the organisation as a whole that must ensure accessibility, and this responsibility must be shared by all members of the team, by all departments, and, of course, by leadership. All departments – management, education, production, communication, technical – have a contribution to make in order to fulfil the desire and obligation for accessibility.

Suggested Videos

[The social model of disability](#)

[I am not your inspiration, thank you very much](#)

2

Intervention Areas

2a. Communication with the Audience

People with disabilities or impairments are one of the target groups of cultural organisations. With regard specifically to communication, and as with any target group, their specificities and needs must be considered, in order to create adequate, effective access conditions. This concerns both the content and the language, as well as the communication channels used to reach people.

In this sense, some of the aspects to consider are the following:

Clear language

The vast majority of people are not experts in the subjects cultural organisations deal with. However, it is very common when communicating with them in writing (namely in emails, websites, exhibit labels, texts for audio guides, programme notes) to use a very technical language, that should only be used among peers within a professional context. In addition, even when there are no technical terms, there are situations in which the construction of a text and the concepts used are also quite complex, making it difficult to understand.

When using clear language, readers can easily find what they are looking for, they understand what they find, and they are able to use that information.

Some basic techniques for a clear language are the following:

- writing short, straightforward sentences and paragraphs
- using familiar words
- writing in a manner close to oral speech
- (reading aloud helps identify weaknesses)
- using verbs in the active voice
- structuring the contents in logical blocks
- avoiding the use of technical terms and acronyms
- (or explaining them, if necessary)
- using formatting and design that make reading easier.

However, the clear language used in communicating with the general public may not respond to the specific needs of people with intellectual disabilities. In this case, we should use Alternative and Augmentative Communication techniques (such as guides with pictograms).

At this point, we should make a reference to the language used to speak to and about people with disabilities:

Naturally, the language related to disability or impairment evolves, following the transformation of society and mentalities. We have to be aware of these developments, at the same time that we have to be aware that it will be hard to reach a consensus on language, even among people with disabilities. Therefore, we would recommend an active, sensitive listening, in the sense of choosing the words and expressions commonly used by the person whom we are addressing.

The same care must be taken when promoting the work of artists with disabilities. Sometimes, it is thought that disability can be a powerful marketing or attraction tool. The result is usually the opposite: people may even be impressed, but they also think that this is a lesser type of art, of lesser quality. Artists with disabilities want, in general and above all, to be recognised just as that: as artists.

Thus, it is advisable to use a language focused on people, and not on the disability⁴. This does not mean to hide or cover that reality. It is important that disability is referred to whenever necessary. For example, to publicise accessibility services and resources. It is important to use informed language, avoiding, above all, expressions that have fallen out of use or that are wrongly considered to be politically correct.

⁴ The debate around "person-first" and "identity-first" language is very much present in English-speaking countries. Despite not having a direct impact on the Portuguese language, it helps us understand how differently people see themselves and want to be referred to. There are articles in the References section that provide a better understanding of this issue.

Use	Do not use
Person with disability Disabled person Person with impairment Person with neurodiversity Neurodiverse person Person with specific needs	(The) Handicapped (The) Disabled Person suffering from disability Challenged person Person with special needs
Person with physical disabilities Physically disabled Person with reduced conditioned mobility Person using a wheelchair Wheelchair user	Physically challenged Person confined to a wheelchair The wheelchair
Visually impaired person Person with visual impairment Blind person Partially sighted person	The blind Amblyopic
D/deaf person Person with a hearing impairment	Deaf and dumb Deaf-mute Person with a hearing impairment (when referring to Deaf people)
Person with intellectual or learning disabilities Intellectually or learning disabled person	Mentally disabled
Person with Down Syndrome / Trisomy 21	Mongoloid
Person of short stature	Dwarf
Accessible toilet	

Image 4. What should I say?

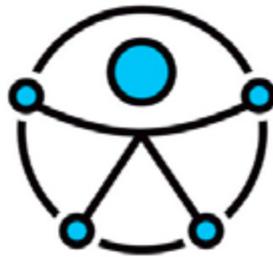
Suggested Reading

Forber-Pratt, A.J. (2019). *Yes, you can call me disabled*

Digital Platforms

- The websites of cultural organisations must comply with web accessibility guidelines.
- In the same way, applications, online digital documents, newsletters and online ticket purchasing platforms – although not always managed directly by the cultural organisation – must comply with web accessibility guidelines.
- Audio-visual content, as for example advertising spots, must include the use of audio description, interpretation in Sign Language, and subtitling.
- In the case of accessible programming, the creation of specific e-cards / newsletters for people with visual impairments or for D/deaf people should be considered, so that the contents can be accessible and respond to their specific needs.
- The website menu must include the item "Accessibility", which must include detailed information on:
 - the conditions of physical access, outside and inside the venue, including available transports and parking
 - accessibility and support services on site (e.g. pricing policy, entry of personal assistants, availability of wheelchairs, accommodation for assistance dogs)
 - accessible programming (information which must also appear on the specific webpages of the performances, exhibitions, activities and accessible events)
 - contacts available for answering any questions related to accessibility.

The use of accessibility-related pictograms helps signal the existence of services in a clear, immediate manner. These symbols can be found in the References section (Manuals).



Accessibility

Image 2. Universal accessibility symbol

Printed materials

- > Printed materials must follow the standards of accessible graphic design, namely by considering the type of paper or other materials, font type and size, colours and contrasts, line spacing, density between letters, text alignment, and paragraph width.
- > Alternative formats, such as Braille and large print, should also be considered. For example, in exhibition brochures, texts on panels and labels, and programme notes. Alternatively, audio files can also be considered. However, priority should be given to written content, as for the rest of the public.
- > In the specific case of Deaf people, it should not be forgotten that their mother tongue is Sign Language and not the spoken language of the country. For this reason, printed materials must identify – using the sign language symbol – in a clear, brief and immediate way, the contents that are addressed to or that are accessible for Deaf people.

- > In the specific case of people with intellectual disabilities, there should be alternative materials with pictograms.



The Castle of Leiria is an important monument in the history of the Town of Leiria.



It was a palace and a military fortress.

Image 3. Tour guide with pictograms, Castle of Leiria, CRID - Digital Inclusion Resource Centre / Polytechnic Institute of Leiria.

As with websites, printed promotional materials (such as brochures, programming leaflets or newspapers ads) should include information on general accessibility conditions, accessibility services and accessible programming. This information needs, of course, to be adapted to the format and space available, and may refer to the website for further information. The use of accessibility-related pictograms helps to signal, in a clear and immediate way, the existence of services.

Public relations

- > Once having taken on an accessibility policy, it is important that it is regularly communicated to the public. In addition to using the organisation's various communication channels – either digital or printed – the person responsible for the communications must include relevant information in the press releases related to the programming. He/she should also seek to periodically promote interviews on the organisation's philosophy and work in this field.
- > It is important to establish contact with organisations representing people with disabilities and let them know about accessible programming.
- > At the same time, it is also important to be able to keep the individual contacts of people with disabilities who attend the cultural organisation, in order to keep them informed in a more direct and immediate way.

2b. Access to Buildings

In Portugal, all public venues must comply with Decree Law 163/2006 in order to guarantee direct, immediate, permanent and as much autonomous access as possible. Some historic buildings can present additional, and sometimes insurmountable, challenges. However, before giving up, we must consult professionals with specialised knowledge in order to identify and assess possible solutions. No person should be excluded from any venue with the excuse that it is a historic building.

A building's renovation plan is an opportunity to make the necessary adaptations for accessibility. According to Portuguese law, in order for the renovation project to be licensed, it must include the accessibility plan. Often times, public organisations – supervised by the State or by Municipalities – ignore this requirement, since the responsibility for licensing lies with the Municipalities themselves. This results in the reopening of venues that, having undergone renovation works, remain inaccessible. That is, they continue to exclude several people.

Physical accessibility audits consider factors such as:

- **The public space** – access to the venue: transports, parking, sidewalks and pedestrian crossings, stairways and ramps, pavements
- **Circulation inside the building** – doors, counters, pavements, stairways, handrails, ramps, toilets, exhibition and reading rooms, auditoriums, rehearsal rooms, dressing rooms, signage, visual and sound alarms

- **Access to information and content** – accessibility to the website and printed materials, alternative materials and means of communication, information on accessibility, display cases, panels, labels, magnetic rings in the auditoriums and also at ticket desks with glass
- **Evacuation Plan**

It is very common for cultural organisations to only consider the accessibility conditions in the public areas of their buildings, ignoring the private areas (namely offices, workshops, rehearsal rooms, dressing rooms, toilets, changing rooms / locker rooms, or pantries). This means that people with disabilities or temporary impairments – such as team members, collaborators and artists – are prevented from working. It also means that these people are prevented from answering to job advertisements for those venues or that their applications are not considered.

Suggested Reading

Jorge Falcato, *Sou discriminado todos os dias. Não podemos viver de jeitinhos*
[I am discriminated against every day. We can't just live from favours]

2c. Reception

The lack of interaction with people with disabilities – the fact that we do not usually share the same spaces for leisure, education, work, etc. – creates feelings of insecurity, fear and anguish among front-of-house staff. What should I do? What should I say? Do I offer help or it would be offensive?

Quality front-of-house services are not a matter of common sense and good manners. It is not enough to raise awareness or to occasionally reprimand. Front-of-house staff – such as ticket desk assistants, guards, ushers, mediators and tour guides, shop assistants, waiters/waitresses, and staff answering phone calls –, wish to feel prepared (and should be prepared) to perform their duties well, with knowledge and respect for the needs of the public. The same is true of any other member of the team, considering that people with disabilities or impairments can be colleagues or collaborators.

On-job training is essential in preparing team members. It helps to better understand the needs of different people, namely of people with mobility issues, with intellectual disabilities, D/deaf, visually impaired, and a wide range of people who are considered neurodiverse or who have hidden disabilities. It also provides the necessary tools to welcome them in a natural way and with dignity – whether they are members of the audience or colleagues and collaborators –, overcoming the barriers caused by ignorance, fear and discomfort.

Suggested Video

Lo incorrecto: Una nueva mirada hacia la discapacidad
[The incorrect: A new approach to disability]

2d. Access to Programming

Taking into account the diversity of cultural organisations, the programming considered herein includes performances (theatre, dance, music), cinema, exhibitions, and various educational activities (workshops, lectures, and conferences, among others).

Before considering the access to programming, we would like to highlight two main points:

- For true equality in the right to cultural participation, people with disabilities or impairments must be able to decide which activities they want to attend, without their choices being limited to special days or sessions. In Portugal, and in most countries, this is not a reality yet. The fact that people with disabilities are not connected to cultural organisations means that the former are still not aware of the accessible offer or that such offer, when it does exist, is still limited to specific days and times. It is up to both parties to create a different supply and demand dynamics, so that we can come closer to the desired conditions of equality.
- Programming specifically aimed at people with disabilities – although very much necessary and also critical for human development – should be the exception and not the rule. What is meant by this is that the first concern should be to consider all aspects of accessibility in the programming proposed to the general public, so that people can enjoy the same offer and attend the same venues.

However, there may be circumstances that justify activities exclusively prepared for certain audiences. We can give as an example the project EU no MusEU [ME in the MuseUM], of the Machado de Castro National Museum in Coimbra. Now also replicated by the Grão Vasco Museum and the Misericórdia Museum in Viseu. It is an initiative especially aimed at Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers, guaranteeing the necessary, specific conditions they need to enjoy an activity of this kind.

Below, we present the various services and resources that should be considered in order to create access conditions to programming:

Performing arts, live shows and cinema

- > **Audio description:** The script is prepared by an audio describer, who must have early and timely access to the script, when available, and to the rehearsals. On the day of the performance, an hour before it actually starts, the visually impaired audience takes a tour of the stage. Thus, they can get to know the performers and their voices, touch the scenery and the costumes, and so on. During the show, the audio describer communicates with the audience from a booth and through an earpiece, provided by the cultural organisation. In the case of cinema, the audio description can be recorded and the cinema halls must have the necessary equipment.
- > **Interpretation in Sign Language:** Interpreters must have early and timely access to the script, when available, and to the general rehearsal. On the day of the show, it should be ensured that they are in a central and well-lit place. Many halls place interpreters in a corner of the stage. This forces Deaf people to turn their heads and are, thus, unable to follow the action on stage. It should be ensured

that the spectator, the interpreter and the stage are in a straight line. In the case of cinema, interpretation in Sign Language can be recorded and the cinema halls must have the necessary equipment.

- > **Subtitling:** Whenever subtitling is possible, it is useful to use it, even for films and shows in the country's language. Thus, we may guarantee access for deaf people (who do not speak Sign Language), people who do not hear well or of people whose first language is not that of the country.
- > **Relaxed sessions:** Sessions prepared with the help of a psychologist / autism specialist, which guarantee a more relaxed and welcoming atmosphere, allowing access to people with attention deficit, intellectual disability, autism spectrum conditions, sensory or communication disabilities, among others. They include the preparation of a visual story, a document that is made available before the session, so that people with disability and impairments and those who accompany them can get an idea of the space and of the narrative of the show.
- > **Programme notes:** If they exist, we should consider a version in Braille and large print.

Museums and exhibitions

- > **Audio description (guided tour):** The script is prepared by an audio describer, who must have early and timely access to pictures and information on the objects. The audio describer must also pay a visit to get to know the objects in the space in which they are integrated. The audio description can be done live, during a guided tour, or else be recorded on an audio guide.

- > **Interpretation in Sign Language (guided tour):** Interpreters must have early and timely access to information about the objects. Interpretation in Sign Language can be done live, during a guided tour, or else be recorded in a video guide.
- > **Audio-visual content (films and videos):** They must include audio description, interpretation in Sign Language and subtitling.
- > **Tactile materials:** Models, raised prints or 3D prints – sometimes also original objects that can be touched – make the visit more complete for visually impaired people.
- > **Braille and large print:** The texts displayed on panels and the captions should have Braille and large print versions. Given the space taken up by these texts, in cases where it is not feasible to place them on the same type of medium as the other panels and captions, brochures can be distributed.
- > **Guides with pictograms:** An alternative medium, to present the contents of the visit in an accessible way for people with intellectual disabilities. They can be used during guided tours.
- > **Relaxed sessions:** Sessions that guarantee a more relaxed and welcoming atmosphere, prepared with the help of a psychologist / autism specialist, giving access to people with attention deficit, intellectual disability, autism spectrum conditions, sensory or communication disabilities, among others.

Workshops

- > **Prior registration:** In the case of initiatives that require prior registration, the registration form should include a field for people to mention if they have any specific needs.
- > **Audio description and tactile materials:** The script is prepared by an audio describer, who must have early and timely access to the workshop contents, including to the audio-visual contents. The use of tactile materials, Braille and large print should also be considered.
- > **Interpretation in Sign Language:** Interpreters must have early and timely access to the workshop contents, including to the audio-visual contents.
- > **Guides with pictograms:** An alternative medium, to present workshop contents in an accessible way for people with intellectual disabilities.
- > **Relaxed sessions:** Sessions that guarantee a more relaxed and welcoming atmosphere, prepared with the help of a psychologist / autism specialist, giving access to people with attention deficit, intellectual disability, autism spectrum conditions, sensory or communication disabilities, among others.

Conferences, lectures and debates

- > **Prior registration:** In the case of events that require prior registration, the registration form should include a field for people to mention if they have any specific needs.
- > **Interpretation in Sign Language:** Whenever possible, interpreters must have early and timely access to the contents of the presentations. On the day of the event, they should not be too far away from the panel, forcing Deaf people to turn their heads. For deaf people, who do not speak sign language, or people with a hearing impairment, a speech-to-text subtitling service should be used, even if the transcription is not very accurate.
- > **Printed materials:** They should also be made available in Braille and large print.
- > **Raising awareness with speakers:** Speakers should receive information about the needs of people with visual impairments or D/deaf people (both the public and colleagues on the panel). They should not speak too fast; they must follow the rules of accessible graphic design in their presentations (namely font type and size, amount of text, contrasts); they must also be aware that not everyone in the audience can see the images.
- > **Access to speakers with disabilities:** It is common to think that people with disabilities are only on the side of the audience, but not on the side of those who make the presentation or take part in the conversation. For this reason, and although this point concerns access to the physical space, we would like to remind that access conditions to speakers with disabilities should also be guaranteed.

2e. Ticket Sales and Pricing Policy

It is still a common practice to offer free admission to people with disabilities, which is sometimes extended to their companions, and this is also what some people with disabilities expect from cultural organisations. It makes sense that this is the case, when conditions for accessing the content and programming are not provided, with consideration and respect for the audience's specific needs. However, the goal is not to perpetuate this situation, but to create conditions that allow for access that is direct, immediate, permanent and as autonomous as possible.

When a cultural organisation offers access services to its programming – such as those referred to in the previous section of the manual –, the ticketing policy should consider:

- Discount on the purchase of tickets, considering the so-called “extra costs of disability”. For example, it is likely that a person with a disability will not be able to use public transports or will not be able to go out alone. We must also take into account that a person with a disability is more likely to be unemployed, to live on low income, or to have no income at all. The discount can also be extended to the accompanying person.
- Free admission for personal assistants: professionals supporting a person with a disability so that the latter can perform certain tasks or activities, such as going to a museum or show. Without the support of a personal assistant, the person with a disability would not be able to participate or attend the activity or event⁵.

⁵ Since in Portugal there is still no identification card such as the Access Card (United Kingdom), cultural organisations can create their own databases, where a person with a disability can register by submitting the necessary proof. The process, thus, becomes easier and more convenient.

With regard to seats for people with disabilities, and among the various specifications defined in Decree-Law 163/2006, the following should be recalled:

- Section 3.6.1 sets the number of seats that should be allocated to people in wheelchairs, according to the hall capacity.
- Section 3.6.2, mentions that those seats should be distributed over several areas of the hall and provide comfort, safety, visibility and good acoustics at least similar to those of the other spectators.
- Section 3.6.4 further establishes that every seat specifically designated for a person in a wheelchair must be next to at least one seat for a companion without mobility limitations.

With regard to ticket sales:

- In the case of auditoriums and concert halls, people with disabilities must have access to all price ranges available for the rest of the public. If accessible seats are found only in a certain area – and if this is the most expensive area –, we recommend that the lowest tier price be applied.
- The sale of discounted tickets or of seats available for people in a wheelchair should be made through the same channels and under the same conditions as for the remaining public. For example, people with disabilities should not have to call to book their tickets.

- Presenting a proof of the degree of disability should not be a condition to have access to purchasing tickets for people with disabilities. We recommend that the proof be only requested if doubts arise when the person enters the space, as with those who have discount tickets for young people or seniors.

The team must have a good grasp of the ticketing policy, in order to guarantee a smooth and pleasant procedure.

2f. Working with People with Disabilities

There are very few people with disabilities or impairments who are part of the teams of cultural organisations in Portugal or who have a professional relationship with them, either as service providers or as artists. Thus, everything that has been said so far about relations with the audience with disabilities or impairments also applies to colleagues and other collaborators.

Accessibility audits usually focus on the public areas of cultural venues. However, they must include private working spaces like offices, toilets, pantries, workshops, storage and rehearsal rooms, among others.

The means used to carry out the various tasks within a cultural organisation must also consider the specific needs of people with disabilities or impairments (namely computer equipment, internal communication channels, digital or paper documents, etc.)

3

From Diagnosis to Organisational Change

3a. Defining the Mission and Goals

Ensuring access conditions for people with disabilities or impairments – whether they are members of the audience, staff, artists or other people who collaborate with the organisation – should be a responsibility and an objective taken up in writing by cultural organisations. It must also be made clear how this commitment contributes to the fulfilment of the organisation's mission.

With a clear and committed accessibility policy, team members become more aware of their responsibilities and of the importance of their contribution. In addition, the relations with other cultural and artistic organisations, with artists, with collaborators and with the general public become clearer and more fluid.

3b. Appointing a Team Member as Accessibility Coordinator

It is essential that there is someone on the team responsible for coordinating accessibility issues. With means that:

- accessibility will be considered in every initiative;
- there is coordination among the various areas of the organisation; and
- there is continuity in this work, regardless of changes in terms of supervision, direction or composition of the team.

The existence of this person in the team also facilitates communication with the outside world, namely with other cultural organisations, associations and the general public.

The person responsible for accessibility must have up-to-date knowledge and experience in this field as he/she must ensure compliance with the law and regulations, the fulfilment of the mission and objectives of the cultural organisation, and the implementation of existing and new services. In addition, he/she must be given training so that he/she can remain up-to-date and perform his/her duties well.

In Portugal, there are still few cultural organisations that assign this specific position to a member of the team. The designation of the position is Accessibility Coordinator, Responsible for Accessibility (São Luiz Municipal Theatre) or Access and Public Programmes (Alcantara). In other cases, the responsibility is taken up by those working in communications, public relations or in the educational department. For example, at the D. Maria II National Theatre, the person

responsible for accessibility is from the Director of External Relations and Front-of-House; at the São João National Theatre, the accessibility officer is the Coordination of the Educational Centre.

3c. Setting Up an Advisory Group

The advisory group must include people with experience and knowledge who can contribute to the internal reflection on policies, actions and services. They can also help test ideas.

The group should include consultants familiar with these matters, including people with disabilities or impairments.

3d. Making a Diagnosis /Audit

(see Annex 2)

This diagnosis identifies the strengths and weaknesses of accessibility. It helps assess how accessible is the venue, its programs and its communication, as well as the existing policies, procedures and practices. Based on the diagnosis, the cultural organisation can develop an accessibility plan and set its priorities.

This diagnosis can be made, in part, by the team itself, as a basic survey on the situations of compliance and non-compliance. There are parts, however, that require the involvement of professionals with specialised knowledge and experience, for example, in assessing physical accessibility.

3e. Preparing the Accessibility Plan

(see Annexes 2, 3, 4)

This plan is made based on the diagnosis/audit. It must identify:

- the mission of the cultural organisation
- its philosophy with regard to accessibility
- the responsibilities of the person responsible for coordinating the accessibility area
- short-, medium- and long-term priorities
- specific goals
- specific actions to fulfil each goal
- the budget for carrying out each action
- the timeframe for each action
- the communications plan to announce accessibility services and improvements
- the training plans for team members, either permanent, temporary or on a voluntary basis.

4

Testimonies

Irina Francisco

Teacher

Although many victories have been achieved with regard to the rights of people with disabilities, access to the arts is still somewhat neglected, perhaps because it is considered a minor issue or not a priority. It is absolutely essential to guarantee equal opportunities in access to education, employment, housing, autonomous voting, and many other essential aspects of our daily lives. Leisure and access to various forms of art are, however, no less important. Not giving people with disabilities the opportunity to watch a play, a movie or visit an exhibition, for example, is to deny them access to a very significant part of active citizenship.

For me, a visually impaired person, it is especially important to be able to watch shows without any limitations, either in what concerns access and freedom of movement within the physical space, or in fully understanding what is happening on stage.

I would highlight the pioneering work of the São Luiz Theatre – which is probably the most attentive institution to the needs of visually impaired citizens that I know – and the effort that has been made by the Dona Maria II National Theatre – whose path has been slower, but that shows openness to keep growing.

Being able to get out of home by myself, take the underground, get out in Chiado or Rossio, walk a few steps and enter the theatre, being welcomed almost like at home and accompanied to my seat, and then watch a play with audio description, gives me an indescribable feeling of freedom and control over my own life and my will. Being dependent

on another person to move within the space of the theatre or to understand what is going on on stage beyond the words of the actors is not true autonomy, because they do for me what I could do alone, if provided with the needed conditions.

Watching performances at São Luiz or Dona Maria – please allow me to refer to these theatres in this short and familiar way – on Sunday afternoon became, for me, an important and indispensable ritual, which brings me immense joy and pleasure! Of course, I sometimes choose not to attend certain shows, because they are not in my interest. And that freedom, of being able to choose to go to a show or not, is one of the main benefits of audio description. Because it – I mean audio description – should not be a bonus given to us, almost out of charity, only in certain shows that someone has decided that they may be of greater interest to blind people and those with impaired vision.

The community of people with visual impairments is as vast and heterogeneous as any other: we are all different, with different tastes and interests. Choosing which shows may be of interest to us is, once again, limiting our freedom. Being able to choose not to go to a show – even if it has audio description and is totally accessible – is the greatest symbol of our freedom, because we don't go to the theatre because of the existence of a certain resource, but simply because that play interests us. That's what everyone else does: they watch certain plays because they are interested in them.

In an ideal or inclusive world – which I hope we will come closer to – all shows should have audio description, so that we could freely choose which one we would like to watch. This would probably mean that, in many of them, there would be no blind people or people with visual impairments in the audience, because, despite everything, we are a minority. But if that were the case, it would mean that, in that

moment, we would have chosen not to go to the theatre; an inaccessibility to the venue and show would not have been imposed upon us. That is absolute freedom! I only mention the universe of theatre because it is the one I know best, and the one that, despite everything, is showing some capacity to respond. But this assumption is valid for exhibitions, movies, concerts, dance performances...

I recall performances that touched me, such as "Actors", the operetta "A Filha do Tambor-Mor" [The Daughter of the Main Drum], and the performance "The Night Watchman", at São Luiz. As well as the plays "Sopro" [Blow], "Montanha Russa" [Roller Coaster] and "Frei Luís de Sousa", at Dona Maria, which were all accessible, naturally. I watched other shows with audio description in these two theatre halls, but these were the ones that marked me the most. It was not, therefore, the fact that they had this resource that made them special shows – because audio description is only a resource that enables accessibility, it is not, in itself, the show. But I can highlight these examples today because I had the opportunity to fully understand the movements, the gestures, the details of the scenario.

I would specifically like to highlight the initiative carried out by São Luiz when celebrating its 125th anniversary, in which all sessions of the aforementioned operetta were accessible. And for several consecutive days. I chose to attend the Saturday night session. That day I felt truly free, in my choice and artistic enjoyment. That night, I was the only visually impaired person in the audience and, therefore, an economic logic would dictate that this financial effort would not be worth it just for one spectator. But that was, precisely, the magic of that Saturday evening: among various sessions, I chose the one which was most suitable for me; I went to the theatre; I watched an operetta (which I loved!); and then I left the hall, went to the Chiado underground station and I returned home. It seems so ordinary to most people,

but for us, it is the exception. It is still an exception!

I have already lost count of the number of plays, of opera performances, of classical music concerts, of movies that I did not watch because I knew, from the outset, that they had no audio description or because I imagined the difficulties in getting to my seat. Because access to art involves not only the perception of the settings, gestures and movements, but also the ease of movement, the openness and availability of those who work in theatre halls, cultural centres, cinema halls, to guide and direct those who do not have the required ability and resourcefulness to move about autonomously.

I believe that it is our duty to make cultural and government managers aware of the importance of responding to our needs, because we are the ones who, better than anyone else, know what we are missing, and thus we have the obligation to claim the filling of those gaps. I often remember that, about two or three years ago, I wrote an email to the artistic director of a theatre hall in Lisbon that I especially like, and whose artistic programme I would often like to attend. In my e-mail, I expressed the need for them to have audio description, and I expressed my desire to watch several of the plays. I received a quick, friendly and promising response, but with no results so far. I went there a few times to watch shows and I had the opportunity to watch excellent plays which I will not mention, because it seems more pedagogical to raise awareness by highlighting examples of good practice. However, I confess that I do feel sad for not seeing these examples replicated in other contexts, namely in theatres like this one, where I really love to go.

The transforming power of art, which encourages us to reflect on the world and on ourselves; that brings us happiness, or concerns, or indifference, or disgust, or comfort, in short, that causes something in us... it is something that everyone should have access to, regardless of our physical

condition. As an active citizen, who pays taxes and performs all my social roles, I have – like anyone else – the right to art, to choose to attend shows that meet my interests, without constraints. I believe that, in the last few years, a lot has been done, and that more and more cultural institutions are showing a concern to reach out to all types of audiences. However, much remains to be done. I understand that financial limitations dictate, in most cases, a lack of accessibility resources for minority audiences, but I am convinced that this reality can and will change soon!

Paula and Manuel

Mother and Son

I consulted my agenda to see what “events” we have been to recently... very few. It all starts with an effort to articulate the cultural offer and a large set of constraints. The barriers in Manuel's case are not physical barriers, however, they do exist and they are many.

What seems to me to have been decisive in the development of the close bond that Manuel keeps with some cultural venues is based on the regularity and continuity of the relationship that is established with the place and the people. This relationship is at least as decisive as the one that is established with the various activities proposed.

Manuel's connection to the venues he attends more often has also developed through the various aspects of mediation, namely, the educational offer aimed at various age groups, non-formal initiatives developed by these organisations, workshops, his conversations with artists, the guided tours – if they were to happen more often, it would help us be more present. It is important that the relationship is built in a continuous and consistent manner. This process translates into participation.

I am aware that many of the activities and shows in which we participate happen outdoors, where everyone is more relaxed, where rules are not so strict, and body postures or attitudes are not defined by established normative behaviours. In these events we can be in the way each one manages to be.

We like venues that allow us to be a spectator or a visitor without the imposition of what is expected of a spectator.

And we also prefer small shows, short in duration and with few people. It is important that the sessions are short or that they can be interrupted, because one may need to take breaks.

We choose shows that do not favour verbal communication, and that do not rely on too much visual, verbal and sound communication at the same time.

Information has to be objective, in clear, accessible language. Attending a given event may require prior preparation, and therefore prior access to information is quite useful, not least because those details allow us to “come back” to the event later.

I remember several shows that we wanted to watch, but we ended up not being able to. It is demanding and often frustrating to try to reconcile Manuel's personal agenda and his emotional availability with the fragmented cultural offer.

An occasional offer does not help build proximity or even regular attendance. It seems to me that specific or occasional moments within an organisation's programme dedicated to filling gaps of an inclusive offer, when disconnected and sporadic, do not serve the purpose of establishing the relationship of participation with people.

One must also go beyond the cultural offer dedicated to special audiences in special moments.

From organisations we expect a structured, thoughtful, regular offer, with programming throughout the whole year.

We also hope that individuals with disabilities and groups or companies that include artists with disabilities are called to participate in their programmes.

And also, that, within organisations, those responsible for programming listen to these communities, as this will inevitably have consequences in the implementation of their programmes.

One has to think these places, which belong to everyone, as truly accessible to all. Those are the venues, the shows, the visits, where we like to be the most.

Tony Weaver

Actor, director, trainer

My name is António Pedro Sebastião Mendes, but those who know me call me Tony Weaver. Tony because it's the nickname for António, and Weaver because it's the surname of my favourite actress, Sigourney Weaver. I'm an actor, director and trainer in Drama. I'm a responsible, creative person, and with team spirit. I am Deaf and every day I am forced to be very creative in order to overcome the barriers I encounter.

I was asked about my experience in cultural venues as an actor, spectator and visitor. First of all, a cultural venue – regardless of the type – is a place whose main objective should be that of communicating, making itself known, relating to those who visit it. Knowing how to relate and knowing how to communicate should be the priorities of any venue that defines itself as “cultural.”

I'm 40 years old and I grew up in a continuous struggle to gain access to those places that were supposed to relate to me, but which, in fact, gave me very little or nothing. These are the questions that still don't let me sleep peacefully today – just try putting yourself in my shoes:

- I am Deaf: why can't I choose freely when to go to the theatre and which play to watch? Because I have to choose the day when interpretation in Portuguese Sign Language (PSL) is planned, and most shows do not even have sessions with interpretation in PSL.
- I am Deaf: why do I have to wait for a guided tour with PSL in order to visit a museum?

Because museums in general don't have tour guides with a knowledge of PSL, and the devices that provide guided tours have a range of oral languages, but never sign language. So, I have to look for an interpreter to accompany me.

- I am Deaf: why can't I attend a conference on a topic that interests me? Because having interpretation in PSL is seen as a service in a foreign language, although it was recognised as an official language in the fourth constitutional revision, Law 1/97, of September 20, 1997, Article 74.2 h): "Protecting and valuing Portuguese Sign Language as a cultural expression, and an instrument of access to education and equal opportunities."
- I am Deaf: why can't I have access to training in areas that interest me, namely in the performing arts? Because academic or professional training in Portugal are not prepared to train deaf people; and if I want to take part in training, I have to bear the costs of an interpreter out of my pocket.

As an actor, I have participated in theatre projects that brought together Deaf and hearing actors. I was fortunate enough to meet people who realised the richness of deaf identity, and who realised that being Deaf does not mean being handicapped, but rather it means having other abilities, having another way of "listening" to what surrounds us, and of relating to the Other. I learned a lot because each project was different from the other, either the type of show or the audience for which it was intended. Each stage director or choreographer had his own way of working and of relating to me. I noticed, for example, that some were more curious than others about me, and about the difference

between being deaf and not hearing. In fact, there is a huge difference. The perspective of not hearing is an approach that focuses on something that is missing. The perspective of "being deaf" focuses on one's deaf identity, on the perception that a Deaf person has of the world around him.

The most recent experience was the one that marked me the most, in the sense that I felt that there was a real common language at the time of the performance, a real integration between the actors, in which the audience could fully enjoy the play. That is exactly what the deaf people who watched the play "Aldebarã", written by Alex Cassal and staged by Marco Paiva, told me.

In fact, during the rehearsals, Marco Paiva managed to put together certain aspects of me and of my way of being, even going so far as to change the sequences of the play. I remember that in one of the rehearsals he invited some of my deaf friends and wanted to know their opinion, and changed some sequences in order to meet their perspective after having "heard" them.

So, "hearing", and here we come to the role of the interpreter throughout each project, and I would like to share my thoughts. As an actor myself, I realised the difference between working on a project always accompanied by the same interpreter or by several. In fact, the link that is created between the interpreter and the Deaf actor is critical for the development of the project. When the bond between the two is strong, a look is enough to understand each other, to know in advance what issues need to be clarified.

Perhaps it could be an advice I would give to anyone who would want to try projects with Deaf actors: never forget the importance of the presence of the interpreter because, after all, it is someone that we both need.

Diana Niepce

Artist, Audience Member

Reflecting on my experience with accessibility in Portuguese cultural venues is something that makes me feel quite uncomfortable. I would like to discuss only good practices, but they are quite insufficient, and are diluted in the absurd amount of bad practices that most organisations still replicate.

In Portugal we are still discussing ramps. In Portugal, organisations keep looking at me and apologising, just to then say "Our budget includes a ramp", or even "We will have a toilet for reduced mobility." As a member of the audience, I would like to answer that it makes no difference to me, not least because I can get up from my wheelchair and take a few steps; or else I end up doing a piggyback performance on the steps of the theatre. Also, I don't need a toilet for reduced mobility because I can use a normal toilet. But I'm forced to answer with a smile, to say thank you for thinking about the ramp and for adapting the toilet.

Being part of an audience that society says has "special needs" means having to plan my outings in a complete way, and this whole process almost has the complexity of a performance: Where is the parking space for reduced mobility? What is the most accessible entrance? How is the street? Which is the seat for reduced mobility in the audience? Can I transfer myself from the wheelchair to a theatre chair? Do they have an accessible toilet? If the show is on stage, how do I access it?

In addition to the practical problems, which form an important part of this testimony, it is also important to clarify that the true concept of accessibility must ensure that the programming itself is able to contemplate an ideal of diversity, without it being translated into just a quota. If this does not happen, we run the risk of continuing to negate the relevance of the work of artists with disabilities, and of further discriminating against them as citizens. We cannot allow this to keep happening.

Thinking of best practices in terms of accessibility still makes me talk about people, instead of organisations. In my experience, best practices come from people who believe and fight for the cause. The fact that they are heading organisations becomes secondary. And although this does reflect a best practice, it is also a problem. What happens when these people leave their positions?

I understand the difficulty organisations have in implementing physical accessibility measures, intellectual accessibility measures, or using audio description tools, Braille, Portuguese Sign Language, and so on. I understand that these structures have other concerns. And, as an artistic director told me the other day, that "priorities keep emerging, and it seems like accessibility ends up being forgotten with the urgency of all the rest." I believe that thinking and planning is a part of best practices, but 80% of the organisations are not willing to do so.

I feel lost in a whirlwind of bad experiences, and I wish I didn't have to talk about them. As an artist I often feel discriminated against. Some time ago, a technician from the Castelo Branco theatre had to open the back door to make me climb up to the stage in the freight elevator. The theatre had no other way of taking me to the stage. The technician asked me why I didn't tell him I was coming. Assuming that I am part of the play, and that as an interpreter I have to

be present at rehearsals, I don't have to warn them. Who is responsible for the continuous discrimination against artists with disabilities?

It is very serious that we keep seeing municipal theatres and national theatres ignoring and underestimating accessibility for artists with disabilities. Last year I asked for a plastic chair to take a shower, as when the show was over I was covered in glitter. The theatre decided to look for another theatre that could lend the appropriate chair. As there are few shows with artists with disabilities, it was considered that lending the chair wouldn't be a big deal, but we concluded that no theatre has one. Worse than this was to realise that, in the last decades, no artist with a disability has had the chance to have a shower in a Portuguese theatre, because they don't have adapted shower facilities, and they never thought about it.

I would like to be treated neither as a hero nor as an inspiration. My job without an assistant means that I have to fight an entire battle to plan my days. Not having the money to pay for an assistant forces me to ask for help from strangers to carry things or to climb ramps with absurd inclinations or to answer phone calls while I'm in an inaccessible toilet. I also have to be the one thinking about ways to communicate my art, raising awareness among communication officers and also journalists, who still don't know how to do it. I have to figure out ways of supporting artists with reduced mobility that work with me. I have to be their psychologist, and have endless (unpaid) meetings, lectures and conferences to try to change an inefficient system, which clearly only changes when I go to the venues to present my work and demand what I believe is fair for my team.

Tiago Fortuna

Press officer

Music has always been a main pillar of my life. Over time, I developed a growing interest for culture, and realised this was the area that I wanted to work in. In 2015, I finished my degree in Communication Sciences at the Human and Social Sciences School of the Nova University of Lisbon. I started to work in press relations in that same year and until 2020 at LiveCom, a cultural communications agency specialised in the music industry. Before that, I collaborated with Talkfest and joined the APORFEST Foundation, a Portuguese Association of Music Festivals.

Motor disability is part of my life. When our mobility is conditioned, all our experiences are, to some extent, modelled by wheelchair access, including, as they are not an exception, all cultural experiences as a professional and a spectator.

Over the past few years, I have worked in a business – and in a sector – with a high sense of freedom, autonomy and responsibility – factors that reduce immediate barriers to professional performance. In addition, I have always been treated with dignity, equality, and encouraged to develop my full potential and new skills. It is a positive scenario, in which one must be aware that its viability was the result of the setting of and respect for principles on the part of the employer. The core team I worked with was available not only to deal with but also to confront the obstacles we faced in our daily life, making the division and optimisation of tasks quite fluid.

The scenario described contrasts with the sector's infrastructures, which are physically not really accessible, and the need for mobility and adjustment to unexpected circumstances required when working in the music industry. Often, there are not the conditions for the performance of my duties in equitable terms, the most common obstacles being the following: service / artists entrance; access to the ticket office and counter; access to the production team's designated area; accessible toilet in the production area; possibility of circulating with the least possible obstacles in the working area for artists / production and among the public.

No venue I worked in Lisbon has all the conditions for me to work autonomously on a performance night. There are significant inequalities in terms of infrastructure and the organisation of the physical space, which needs planning and the implementation of certain measures. It is important to highlight that everyone with whom I have worked directly were impeccable in their availability and support – within the limits allowed by their positions. Even so, their readiness and willingness can be considered inglorious when there is a need for a systemic response and equipment. One has to transform personal or individual action – considering in this case a micro company – into collective action, all across the board, capable of giving greater autonomy to workers with disabilities when they perform their duties.

As an audience member and a visitor, over the past 12 years, I was able to notice some progress in welcoming the public, an initiative of all cultural sectors, in which theatre and museums lead the way with more comprehensive, inclusive experiences. Music, cinema or private exhibitions have also been providing access. Nowadays we have more parking places, priority access in large agglomerations, designated and secure areas with nearby toilets, pricing

policies, and a growing accessible programming.

These are basic conditions, which have, for the most part, already been implemented, but which keep failing. Starting from the concrete example of live music, in my experience during these years, I was present in dozens of events. In all too many of them, I just got there to conclude that it was impossible for me to enjoy a similar experience to that of the audience without disabilities. A disappointment shared with other people who showed the same interest, who were present, but for whom the experience ended up being blocked by the lack of conditions.

I enumerate below a set of situations I have experienced, and which should be urgently resolved in order to guarantee access to all spectators:

- Security forces, production and welcoming teams that lack adequate information and training
- events with ramps that do not meet the legal requirements
- lack of information on possible broken elevators or elevating platforms
- high ticket counters
- eating areas and ATM machines that are impossible to use without the support of another person
- pricing policies that do not include the caregiver / personal assistant
- conditioned mobility areas too distant from the stages, often overcrowded, not complying with legal capacity requirements and without ensuring that the disabled person's companion can sit next to him/her
- quick and easy access to toilets

- lack of clear, standard information in the usual communication channels regarding programming, ticket conditions, seats, and physical access conditions.

It is a list of points that, I believe, once implemented, or just optimised, will redefine the experience of people with disabilities, make it more equal. It is also a list that does not forget the efforts implemented over the last 15 years, which have already changed the face of access, or, in fact, have given it a face. Before guaranteeing the conditions we currently have, the truth is that most people with disabilities did not have access to culture at all. I clearly remember, as a child, an international music event that took place in Lisbon. I asked my parents to go, but when they went to buy the tickets we were informed that there was no area for conditioned mobility, only for a standing audience. Given this scenario, they realised that it would not be safe to take me. This is no longer the case, and one must acknowledge that the paradigm has changed. Cultural access in Portugal has been given a face.

Now, it is time to listen more and better to the public that invests in the offer of the cultural sector. It is within our power to optimise the points described above, and to create new measures. At the same time, we need a labour sector that allows the integration of people with disabilities, who are not just motivated, but who are also qualified to perform their duties and to contribute to its development – they lack the systemic response and equipment. Let us remember that art and culture are spaces of freedom, associated with a strong sense of justice. So, let us keep working together, for a culture and society with greater equality.

Attachments

Annex 1

Glossary

3D printing

A technology for creating three-dimensional objects through successive layers of material – also known as additive manufacturing. It has some advantages, as it does not require the use of moulds and enables the production of shapes that are not viable through other production methods (for example, it is faster and cheaper for manufacturing short runs).

Attitudinal barriers

Barriers created by conscious or unconscious attitudes that hinder or prevent access for people with disabilities to different locations. They promote exclusion, since they consider that people with disabilities are incapable and need to be tutored.

Audio description (AD)

An additional narrative track for visually impaired persons, used in television, cinema, theatre, dance, opera, and in visual arts. The service is provided by a professional who orally presents, during the natural pauses of the audio or dialogues, elements which cannot be perceived through hearing. It can be recorded (for instance, in cinema or in audio guides), or narrated in real time (for example, on a guided tour or in a live show).

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

A set of tools and strategies used to solve everyday communication challenges. Augmentative communication promotes and supports speech.

It benefits people who have a level of understanding higher than their reduced ability to express themselves or who do not make themselves understood (for instance, people with cerebral palsy). Alternative communication includes any forms of communications other than speech, as for example, guides with pictograms. It benefits people who need an alternative language as a means of communication (for example, people with autism or profound intellectual disabilities).

Blindness

Total or almost total loss of vision.

Braille writing

Information written in a system with raised dots (Braille), which people with visual impairments use to read with their fingers and write.

D/deaf people

People who cannot hear. "Deaf people" (with a capital D) refers to those who embrace a culture defined by the use of sign language; thus, they do not consider that they have a disability, they identify as a linguistic minority. And "deaf people" (with a lowercase d) refers to those who do not speak sign language.

Disability

A lasting impairment – physical, mental, intellectual or sensory – which, in interaction with various barriers, can prevent the full and effective participation of a person in society on an equal basis with others.

Functional diversity

An alternative term to disability, proposed at the Independent Life Forum in 2005. It is used by people with disabilities to avoid pejorative semantics.

Hearing disability

An impairment in a person's hearing capabilities, whose most frequent causes are noise and aging. It is usually treated with the use of hearing aids.

Note: Deaf people do not consider themselves to have a hearing impairment. They identify as a linguistic minority, since they speak Sign Language.

Impairment

A term that refers to the different levels of dysfunctionality: disabilities, limitations in activity and restrictions on participation. According to the World Health Organization, an impairment is the restriction or limitation to perform an activity within the limits considered normal for a human being. Impairments may be temporary or permanent, reversible or irreversible, progressive or regressive.

Intellectual or cognitive disability

A condition in which a person has certain limitations in his/her cognitive functioning and in the performance of certain tasks, such as communication, personal care and social relationships. It is characterised by a cognitive functioning that does not correspond to the expected average, that is, which is below what is considered normal.

International Sign

An international auxiliary language, often used by the Deaf community in international contexts. It is not considered a language, as it does not have a grammar. Signs are used with the grammar of any of the existing sign languages.

Invisible disabilities

A term used to describe conditions that are not always obvious, such as debilitating pain, fatigue, dizziness, cognitive dysfunction, brain damage and mental health disorders. These conditions can limit – temporarily or permanently, and with varying degrees of intensity – a person's daily activities.

Law vision

A partial loss of vision, the effects of which can be mitigated, in many cases, by using vision aids and devices.

Lip reading

A technique adopted to complement the communication of D/deaf people through the reading of lips. Lip reading works as a facilitating agent; however, studies show that even the most experienced people can capture only about 50% of what is said.

Magnetic ring

A system installed in theatres or conference halls to improve access conditions for people using hearing aids, overcoming factors such as distance from the sound source and background noise.

Neurodiversity

A concept that states that neurological development considered atypical (neurodivergent) – taking into account current and conventional standards of normality – is an expected biological event. Thus, human neurological diversity, instead of being stigmatised, could be seen as part of the species and taken into account in social organisation.

Oralism

A method that focuses on teaching deaf children to read speech cues and deaf people to speak instead of sign.

Pictogram

A symbol that represents an object or concept through drawings / images. A combination of pictograms can be used to communicate ideas and information.

Raised representation

Two-dimensional, high relief, simple, schematic representation of objects, such as paintings or photographs. It is an essential complement, however, it always poses challenges, such as the representation of the perspective or of different plans that define various levels of proximity and depth. Thus, it is always better used if accompanied by audio description. One can also use various textures to represent different colours, materials or shapes.

Relaxed sessions

Theatre, dance, cinema or other cultural expressions (for example, exhibitions) that take place in a more relaxed and welcoming atmosphere, with more tolerant rules regarding movement and noise in the room. They may also involve minor adjustments to a show, namely in terms of lighting, sound, etc., and in welcoming the audience, in order to better adapt to their needs. They are aimed at all people and families who prefer or benefit from a more relaxed environment in a cultural venue (for instance, people with attention deficit, people with intellectual disabilities, people with a condition in the autism spectrum, people with sensory or communication disabilities). They are complemented by a visual story.

Scripts with pictographic symbols

A way for people with intellectual disabilities, with difficulties in oral expression or without oral expression to be able to access content and communicate with other people. It is one of the Augmentative and Alternative Communication methods.

Sign Language

The mother tongue of a large part of the deaf community. Sign languages are languages that arise and develop naturally, like oral languages. This language is produced by movements of the hands, the body and facial expressions, and its reception is visual. It has its own vocabulary and grammar. A Deaf person (with a capital D) is a person who embraces a culture defined by the use of Sign Language.

Speech-to-text

A software that transforms oral speech into text, in real time. It has about 80% accuracy. It enables subtitling of activities that do not have a pre-defined script, such as conversations or lectures.

Subtitling for deaf and hard-of-hearing

It consists of subtitles designed to allow deaf and hard-of-hearing people to access audio-visual content. They may contain audio descriptions that are important for understanding these contents, such as knocking on the door, steps, music, etc. This feature is useful to help understand the audio in places with a lot of noise or where one would want to avoid excessive sound (for example, museums). It can be permanently visible (open caption) or activated by whoever wants to see it (closed caption).

In live activities that do not have a pre-defined script, such as conferences or conversations, speech-to-text software can be used to transform what is being said into subtitles, in real time.

Tactile materials

Models, raised materials and 3D prints that can be touched by people with visual impairment.

Tactile paving

A system of textured ground surface indicators. They help guide people with visual impairments while walking, allowing for greater autonomy.

Universal design

The design of products, services and environments that can be used by as many people as possible – regardless of age, abilities or condition. It ensures equitable, flexible, simple and intuitive use; it includes error tolerance; it reduces energy expenditure, that is, the force that a person will have to use to manipulate a certain object or piece of equipment.

Visual disability

Severe and irreversible loss or impairment in a person's vision, which cannot be corrected with lenses or surgery, and that interferes with his/her daily tasks. It includes conditions such as blindness or low vision.

Visual story

It is a document created as a complement to relaxed sessions. By resorting to pictures and short texts, it describes the space and the narrative of a show, film or visit. It is available online before the event and there may be printed copies on site.

Annex 2

Diagnosis/Audit Checklist⁶

⁶ Baseado no formulário de diagnóstico do Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts/VSA.

Organisation name:

Diagnosis date:

Conducted by:

a. Management

1. Is there an approved accessibility policy?

Yes / No

Where can it be found?

Notes:

2. Is there a person in the team responsible for accessibility?

Yes / No

Name:

Designation:

Notes:

3. Is there an advisory group on accessibility that includes people with disabilities or impairments?

Yes / No

Notes:

4. Is there a plan for training in various aspects related to accessibility?

Yes / No

- Cultural management
- Communication: graphic design
- Communication: clear language
- Communication: accessible websites and digital documents
- Alternative and augmentative communication
- Front-of-House services
- Emergency and evacuation plans

Notes:

5. Do members of the team, lease holders (cafeteria, shop, etc.), and volunteers have training on the organisation's access policy, procedures and services provided to people with disabilities or impairments?

Yes / No

Notes:

6. Is there accessibility training for artists working with the organisation?

Yes / No

Notes:

7. Do contracts and agreements with other organisations, producers and artists who use or rent the organisation's venue address accessibility issues, namely compliance with the law, and respect for the organisation's accessibility policy?

Yes / No

Notes:

Ask for legal support so that contracts and agreements ensure that the parties understand their specific responsibilities with regard to compliance with the accessibility policy.

b. Physical access

In Portugal, all venues, including cultural venues, must comply with Decree-Law 163/2006, and accessible routes.

We recommend conducting a diagnosis / audit made by specialists, in order to identify gaps and non-compliances, and to define the accessible routes. This audit should include:

1. Public space: access to the venue

- Public and private transports, temporary stops, parking spaces
- Sidewalks and pedestrian crossings
- Stairways and ramps; handrails
- Type of pavement

2. Interior: accessible route and access to contents

- Doors
- Lobbies and foyers
- Desks (ticket office, shop / bookstore, cafeteria / restaurant, cloakroom)
- Self-service equipment (ticket dispensers, parking payment, vending machines)
- Corridors, rooms and galleries
- Stairways and ramps; handrails
- Lifts and elevating platforms; controls
- Wheelchairs available to the public

- Seats
- Toilets, changing rooms, locker rooms
- Floors; tactile routes
- Concert halls
- Exhibition rooms; display cases; tables and panels
- Auditoriums
- Offices and workshops
- Rehearsal rooms and dressing rooms
- Canteen
- Signage
- Magnetic ring (especially in concert and conference halls, ticket office)
- Audio description equipment (cinemas / theatres)
- Sign Language interpretation equipment (cinemas / theatres)
- Audio guides / video guides
- Visual and sound alarms
- Emergency and evacuation plan

c. Access to information

1. Is there detailed information, on paper and online, on the access conditions and services available for people with disabilities or impairments?

Yes / No

- Contact details of the person responsible for accessibility
- Parking and transports
- Accessible routes and other conditions regarding

physical access

- Reception
- On-site support
- Wheelchairs available
- Magnetic ring
- Braille and large print materials
- Tactile materials
- Guides with pictograms
- Interpretation in Sign Language
- Subtitling
- Audio description
- Relaxed sessions
- Discounts

Notes:

2. Does the website comply with the web accessibility guidelines?

Yes / No

Notes:

3. Do clear language guidelines apply to written communications?

Yes / No

Notes:

4. Do all promotional materials follow accessibility standards in terms of graphic design (for example, font type and size, contrasts, spacing, density, alignment)?

Yes / No

Notes:

5. Are accessibility pictograms used to indicate the available services?

Yes / No

Notes:

d. Communications plan and Front-of-House services

1. Does the communications plan include specific initiatives to reach out to people with disabilities?

Yes / No

Notes:

2. Is promotion made in Sign Language?

Yes / No

Notes:

3. Are there associations representing people with disabilities on the mailing list?

Yes / No

Notes:

4. Do press releases include a note on the physical accessibility of the venue and accessible programming?

Yes / No

Notes:

5. Is there signage or information near the main entrance or in the lobby / foyer indicating accessibility services?

Yes / No

Notes:

6. Is there detailed information on the website related to accessibility? Is it easy to find?

Yes / No

Notes:

7. Is alternative and accessible transportation offered to people who cannot move about by themselves?

Yes / No

Notes:

8. Is there a policy regarding the entry of companions and personal assistants?

Yes / No

Notes:

9. Is there a policy for people with disabilities who use medical equipment that can make noise (for example, oxygen)?

Yes / No

Notes:

10. Is there a policy for people with disabilities who can make involuntary noises (for instance, people with Tourette's Syndrome)?

Yes / No

Notes:

11. Is there a complaint resolution procedure currently in place?

Yes / No

Notes:

12. Do members the team, lease holders (cafeteria, shop, etc.), and volunteers have training in assisting people with disabilities or impairments?

Yes / No

Notes:

13. Are there members of the Front-of-House staff who speak Sign Language?

Yes / No

Notes:

14. Are there alternative methods of communication for people with intellectual disabilities or mental health issues and, in general, for people with cognitive challenges?

Yes / No

Notes:

e. Ticket sales and pricing policy

1. Is there a pricing policy with respect to people with disabilities?

Yes / No

Notes:

2. Does the pricing policy include companions of people with disabilities and personal assistants?

Yes / No

Notes:

Consider creating a database, where people with disabilities can register, in order to facilitate the process of obtaining a free entry for their personal assistants.

3. Are there seats available for people with disabilities within all price ranges?

Yes / No

If not, how do you guarantee that people with disabilities will not be forced to pay for the most expensive seats?

Notes:

4. Are there guaranteed seats for accompanying persons next to the seats reserved for people with disabilities?

Yes / No

Notes:

5. Are tickets available for sale through all channels available to the general public (namely telephone, email, website, ticketing platforms)?

Yes / No

Notes:

6. Is the ticket office staff trained to better meet the needs of people with disabilities?

Yes / No

Notes:

f. Performing arts, live shows and cinema

1. Are there sessions with interpretation in Sign Language?

Yes / No

Is advance booking required?

Is there a specific contact number?

Notes:

2. Is the location of the Sign Language interpreter and the seats for the Deaf people defined in such a way that the latter can see the interpreter and the performance/film at the same time, without having to turn their heads?

Yes / No

Notes:

3. Is there an appropriate seat defined for a person using a wheelchair and who also needs to follow the Sign Language interpretation?

Yes / No

Notes:

4. Are there sessions with subtitling?

Yes / No

Notes:

5. Is the location defined for displaying the subtitles and the seats for D/deaf people or those with hearing impairments set in such a way that the latter can see the subtitles and the performance/film at the same time, without having to turn their heads?

Yes / No

Notes:

6. Is there an appropriate seat defined for a person using a wheelchair and who also needs to follow the subtitling?

Yes / No

Notes:

7. Are there sessions with audio description?

Yes / No

Notes:

8. Do audio description sessions include stage recognition before the show?

Yes / No

Notes:

9. Are there programme notes a Braille and large print?

Yes / No

Notes:

10. Are there relaxed sessions?

Yes / No

Notes:

11. Are visual stories available before relaxed sessions?

Yes / No

Notes:

12. Is there a guide with pictograms?

Yes / No

Notes:

13. Are ticket officers and front-of-house staff trained in assisting people with specific needs (including people who are accompanied by an assistance dog)?

Yes / No

Notes:

g. Museums and exhibitions

1. Is there content in Sign Language?

- Live (guided tours)
 - Is advance booking required?
 - Is there a specific contact number?
- In video guides
- In the videos that are part of the exhibition

Notes:

2. Are the videos included in the exhibition subtitled?

- Yes / No

Notes:

3. Do touch screens include sound information?

- Yes / No

Notes:

4. Does the visit include audio description?

Yes / No

Live (guided tours)

- Is advance booking required?
- Is there a specific contact number?

In audio guides

Notes:

5. Does the visit include tactile materials (copies of objects, models, objects that can be touched)?

Yes / No

Notes:

6. Does the cultural mediation team have training in assisting people with visual impairment (including people accompanied by an assistance dog)?

Yes / No

Notes:

7. Does the cultural mediation team include people who speak Sign Language?

Yes / No

Notes:

8. Are there relaxed sessions?

Yes / No

Notes:

9. Are texts on panels and labels available in Braille and large print?

Yes / No

Notes:

10. Are there guides with pictograms?

Yes / No

Notes:

h. Workshops

1. If prior registration is required, either in writing or by phone, are people asked if they have any specific needs?

Yes / No

Notes:

2. Are the visual elements of the activity audio described?

Yes / No

Notes:

3. Do workshops include tactile materials (copies of objects, models, objects that can be touched)?

Yes / No

Notes:

4. Are there texts available in Braille or large print?

Yes / No

Notes:

5. Is there interpretation in Sign Language?

Yes / No

Notes:

6. Are there guides with pictograms?

Yes / No

Notes:

7. Are there relaxed sessions?

Yes / No

Notes:

i. Conferences, lectures and debates

1. If prior registration is required, either in writing or by phone, are people asked if they have any specific needs?

Yes / No

Notes:

2. Is there interpretation in Sign Language?

Yes / No

Notes:

3. Is there speech-to-text subtitling software?

Yes / No

Notes:

4. Are printed materials made available in Braille and large print?

Yes / No

Notes:

5. Are the speakers aware of the needs of people with visual impairments or of D/deaf people, either in the audience or colleagues on the panel?

Yes / No

Notes:

6. If there is a stage, is physical access guaranteed to a speaker with disability?

Yes / No

Notes:

Annex 3

Accessibility Policy Statement ⁷

⁷ Based on the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts / VSA audit form.

Here are some suggestions for a an accessibility policy statement. Each cultural organisation can adopt the one that best reflects its philosophy and positioning, or come up with a formulation that combines more than one of these options:

- [organization name] is accessible to people with disabilities.
- [organization name] is committed to making its venue, programmes and services accessible to people with disabilities.
- [organization name] does not discriminate on the basis of a person's disability when accessing its venue, programmes and services.
- [organization name] is accessible to people with disabilities. We will make every effort to welcome you. For any question, please contact [accessibility coordinator – name and position] via [telephone and email].

Use this checklist to define your organisation's access philosophy regarding people with disabilities or impairments. Check the items you agree with or intend to include in your organisation's ethics and way of working.

- Access is a matter of civil rights, a moral imperative. Access to the cultural offer is a legal requirement.
- Access is a matter of diversity. It aims to promote diversity and inclusion, ensuring broader access to cultural participation by all people, regardless of their abilities. Disability is something that crosses economic, ethnic and cultural barriers.
- "For all" does not exist. What does exist is "more accessible".
- "Better than nothing" does not exist. What does exist is "the best possible".
- Universal, accessible design, taken into account from beginning to end, reduces physical and attitudinal barriers, and reinforces the inclusion of people with disabilities, creating accessible environments and programs.
- Access benefits the general population.
- Adapting to one person's needs may prove convenient and useful for many others. Many people experience temporary disabilities, and most go through the natural aging process.

- ❑ Access must be integrated into all areas and activities in our organisation, from daily operations to long-term goals and objectives. In fact, every member of an organisation is responsible for access.
- ❑ Adaptations and access services are a priority and are included in the budget.
- ❑ Access brings economic benefits.
- ❑ People with disabilities and older people make up a significant part of the country's population and are potentially a vast market for the arts. Access is related to the development of audiences in the broadest sense: it offers opportunities for people to get involved, as much as possible, and for longer.
- ❑ Cultural organisations must set an example, not only by complying with the law, but rather by seeking to go beyond what is legally required.
- ❑ Access is a dynamic work in constant development, as we consider new initiatives and adopt new technologies.

Annex 4

Accessibility Coordinator Job Description⁸

⁸ Based on the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts / VSA audit form.

Here are some examples. Whoever holds this specific position may not perform all listed tasks. At the same time, other tasks may be missing.

- 1.** Have an up-to-date knowledge of current legislation and best practices promoted by other cultural organisations.
- 2.** Set-up and coordinate an advisory group.
- 3.** Work together with management to create an accessibility plan and make sure it is implemented.
- 4.** Conduct consultations for purchasing equipment, materials and products that can ensure good access conditions for people with disabilities or impairments.
- 5.** Prepare the accessibility budget.
- 6.** Develop and maintain good working relationships with people and artists with disabilities, as well as with organisations representing people with disabilities.
- 7.** Prepare the annual training plan for team members, volunteers and the board of directors.
- 8.** Provide technical information and advice to team members, colleagues and management.
- 9.** Recommend solutions in case of claims and complaints.
- 10.** Supervise plans for special events to ensure they are accessible.

Specific requirements

- 1.** Appropriate knowledge of the relevant legislation.
- 2.** Knowledge and experience to assess public access to the building, services and programmes.
- 3.** Knowledge of training principles and techniques.
- 4.** Good communication skills to articulate with other areas of the organisation and to relate to people with disabilities.

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- [Portuguese Constitution](#) (in Portuguese)
- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
- [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Decree-Law 163/2006](#) (in Portuguese)
It approves the accessibility regime for buildings and facilities that welcome the public, public roads and residential buildings.
- [Law 46/2006, of August 28](#) (in Portuguese)
It prohibits and punishes discrimination based on disability and on the existence of an aggravated health risk.
- [Decree-Law 129/2017](#) (in Portuguese)
It establishes the programme 'Model to Support Independent Living.'
- [Decree-Law 83/2018](#) (in Portuguese)
It defines accessibility requirements for websites and mobile applications of public organisations, based on [EU Directive 2016/2102](#).
- [Normative Instruction No. 128, of September 13, 2016](#)
(Brazil, in Portuguese)
It defines the general rules and basic criteria for visual and hearing accessibility to be observed in cinema distribution and exhibition.

Portuguese organisations

- State Secretariat for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities
- National Institute for Rehabilitation
The mission of the National Institute for Rehabilitation is to ensure the planning, execution and coordination of national policies aimed at promoting the rights of people with disabilities. It is a public institute that carries out tasks entrusted by the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security.
- Disability and Human Rights Observatory
It monitors the implementation of disability policies in Portugal and in Portuguese-speaking countries and promotes participatory processes for monitoring and developing the human rights of people with disabilities.
- Non-governmental organisations of people with disabilities
- Access Unit - Foundation for Science and Technology

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Acesso Cultura, Associação Cultural

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Mission

Acesso Cultura is a not-for-profit cultural association promoting physical, social and intellectual access to cultural participation.

Vision

Make difference mainstream.

Principles

Avoid "for all" and "special."

Promote autonomy.

Guarantee quality.

Initiatives and Services

- Training courses
- Annual conference
- Seminars
- Public debates
- Accessibility consulting and audits
- Studies and publications
- Acesso Cultura Awards

**The cultural
participation
of people with
disabilities or
impairments:
how to create
an accessibility
plan**