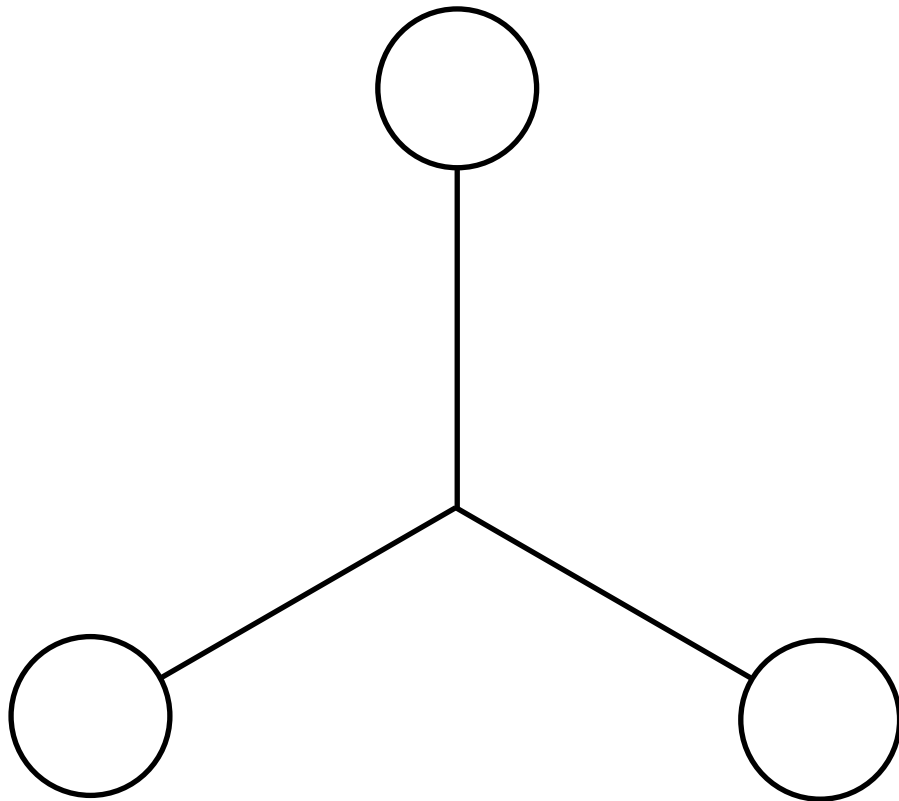


POLICY PAPER

How to make your cultural institution an inclusive place for disabled people!





The publication is available as a barrier-free download on the website of the INKuLtur-programme www.inkultur.org

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1. Aim and target group – Who is this policy paper for?

The main target group of this policy paper is employees working in a range of cultural institutions located in any country.

The aim of this policy paper is to show you how you can involve and include disabled people as experts at all levels of your cultural institution. We would like to encourage and inspire you to promote inclusion by outlining measures for successful collaboration and cooperation that can be implemented in all countries.

Although national cultural policies need to be adapted to facilitate inclusion and accessibility, this paper does not seek to address this issue due to the substantial differences between country-specific cultural policies.

Instead, we are focussing on you as cultural professionals and would like to begin by asking you a few questions:

- **Who works behind the scenes at your cultural institution?** As the director? Curator? Educator? Dramaturg? **Who is missing?**
- **Whose perspectives are represented on the public side your cultural institution?** In the museum exhibition or memorial centre? The dance performance? The reading? In the play? In the books of the library? **Whose perspectives are missing?**
- **Who comes to your artistic and cultural productions and events? Who does not come to them?**

If you as an employee have realised from these questions that there are no disabled people either behind the scenes or on the public side of your cultural institution, or if so only very few, then this realisation and acceptance is the first important step towards changing something.

Let's fill in the missing perspectives together!

2. Introduction to the topic – How are personnel, programming and audiences interrelated in cultural institutions?

The following diagram shows how the areas behind the scenes and on the public side of a cultural institution are interrelated.

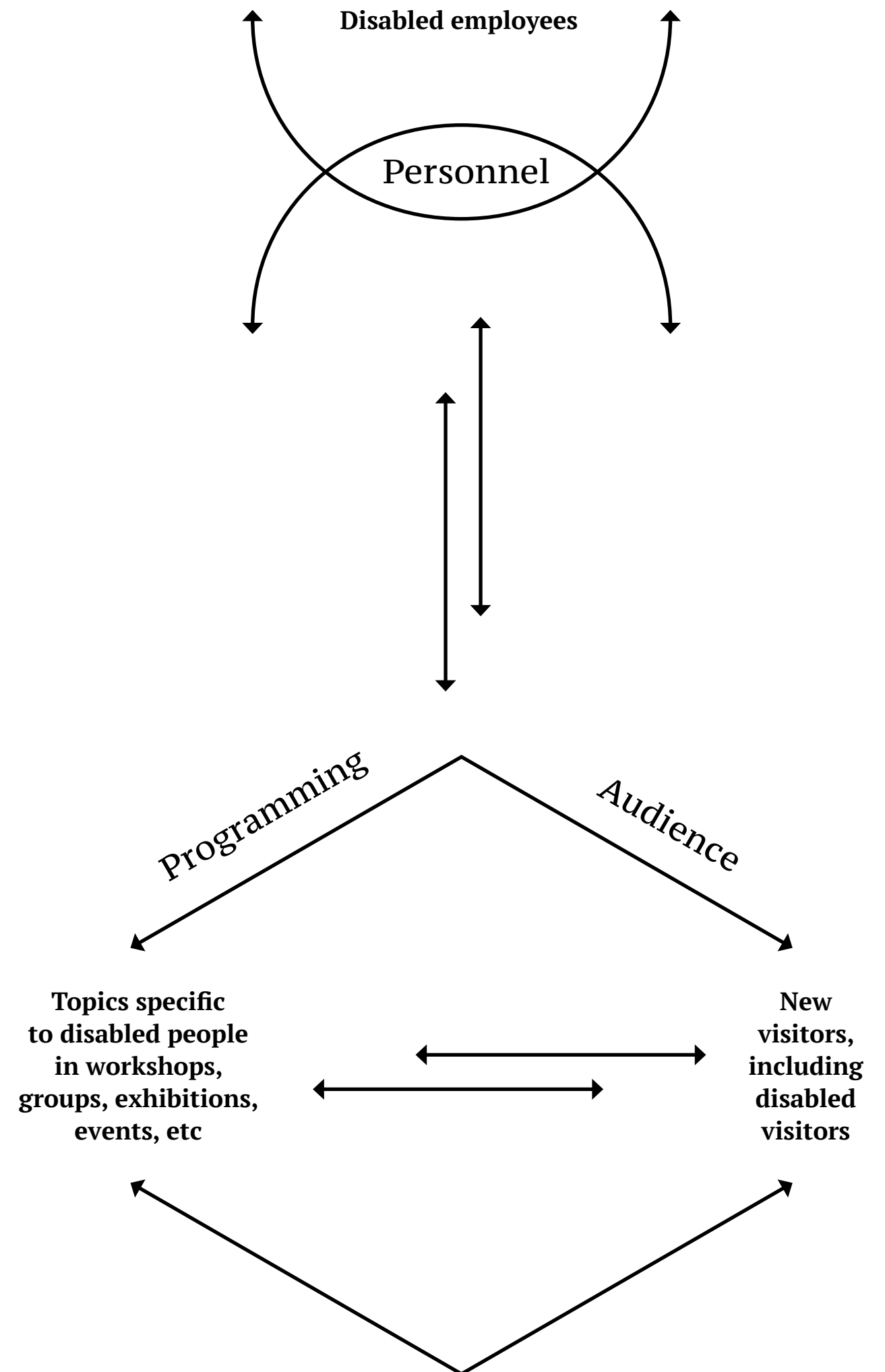
A variety of employees – the **personnel** of the cultural institution – work behind the scenes. They are responsible for the **programming** that is presented to the public, i.e. the exhibitions in museums or the plays in theatres. This is what visitors come to (or do come not to). Visitors are the **audience** and, like the programming, the audience is also on the public side of the cultural institution. As you can clearly see from the two arrows running from the personnel behind the scenes to the programming and audience on the public side of the cultural institution: **It is the (lack of) diversity of the employees behind the scenes of a (cultural) institution that determines the programming and the audience on the public side!**

Building on this logic, the measures presented in the following focus on the aspect of personnel, as it is disabled employees who bring their perspectives to the programming and thus diversify the audience, i.e. help the cultural institution to reach disabled visitors. The question to you at this point is:

- **Why should disabled people visit your cultural institution if their topics of interest and perspectives are not represented and they do not see themselves and their topics of interest reflected there?**

One factor that all of the following measures have in common is that time plays a key role, since inclusion and accessibility need time – and that applies to the personnel, programming and audience. In order to implement the presented measures, the first step is to write a mission statement on accessibility and inclusion, or to add these aspects to your existing mission statement.

- **To provide clarity for all employees, put it in writing in your mission statement that accessibility and inclusion are goals of your cultural institution, what they mean for you and how they are to be achieved.**



3. Personnel measures – How can you recruit disabled employees?

Consider the following aspects of your job advertisements:

- **The language used**

Some people need language that is easy to understand or sign language videos in order to understand the job advertisement.

- **The job requirements**

Disabled people often do not have access to the relevant training institutions and may be unable to provide the qualification required in the job advertisement.

- **The channels used**

Potential disabled applicants may not be reached via the channels that you usually use to publish your job advertisements.

- **Addressing potential applicants**

Instead of the wording often used in job advertisements “Preference will be given to disabled applicants with equal qualifications,” write for example “We especially encourage applications from people who have been affected by discrimination and can bring insights to this role grounded in lived experience.”

- **How you describe your cultural institution**

Often, information that is relevant for potential applicants is forgotten when describing your cultural institution in job advertisements: transparent information about accessibility in terms of visual, hearing, learning and mobility barriers. It is also important to state how discrimination is dealt with in the workplace.

In addition to a job advertisement that is as accessible as possible, which will hopefully attract applications from disabled people, it is very important to raise awareness among all existing employees and give them the confidence to meet (potential) new disabled employees.

You can set a good example by asking applicants: “What do you require in order to work well with us here?” **Asking respectful questions and obtaining information from the people themselves is always good!**

4. Programming measures – How can the perspectives of disabled people be incorporated into your cultural productions?

For many disabled people, accessibility is the key to enabling them to contribute their own perspective, i.e. the accessibility and usability of the cultural institution for all people. Accessibility is thus a prerequisite for participation and representation. Only disabled people who have access to cultural institutions can help to shape these institutions and feel represented with their topics of interest. Therefore:

- **Find out about accessibility costs and present them to your funders**

For example, the costs for structural measures such as ramps or lifts, Braille lettering for people with visual impairments, induction loops for people with hearing impairments or accessible language for people with learning difficulties. Funders are often not familiar with such measures or the costs involved.

- **Invite disabled artists and cultural professionals to enrich your productions with their perspectives**

Ask what is required for successful collaboration – even if not everything is 100% accessible. Leave the (de-)thematization of disability and representation entirely to the disabled artists and cultural professionals. Together, break new ground beyond the conventional portrayal as hero or victim.

- **Develop tandem guided tours**

One educator in your cultural institution and one disabled expert together give a guided tour of your cultural institution and provide information about the presented content.

5. Audience measures – How can you attract disabled people as visitors?

To reach audiences who are confronted with visual, hearing, learning or mobility barriers, you need:

○ **Radical transparency about the (removal of) barriers in your cultural institution**

Explain on your website what is already accessible for who and what is not accessible. The last point is just as important as the first, as it is precisely the barriers that still exist which help potential visitors to decide whether they (can) visit you or not.

○ **Accessible feedback management in your cultural institution**

Offer your (disabled) visitors a variety of ways to give you feedback on what can be improved with regard to accessibility. Clarify in advance who will respond to the feedback when and what will happen with it.

○ **Training for all employees in your cultural institution**

In particular employees with visitor contact need to be trained in dealing with visitors who are confronted with visual, hearing, learning and mobility barriers. It is important to teach them general skills (offering help, asking questions, directly addressing visitors, not their companions) and specific knowledge (for example, guiding blind visitors).

This is where the measures come full circle: More disabled audiences, attracted to more diverse programming that has been designed by disabled personnel, which in turn leads to changes in programming and personnel based on the feedback provided on your programming and the behaviour of your personnel. You've done it! Congratulations on being a cultural institution that is on the path to becoming accessible and inclusive!

6. Final statement – Why is the aspect of time linked to personnel, programming and audience, and is therefore so important?

If we look at the accessibility and inclusion measures in the areas of personnel, programming and audience, the common aspect in all of them is the factor of “time”. It takes time to make the job application process more accessible and to find disabled staff. The changes behind the scenes require nothing less than adapting your institution's culture. This adaptation process also involves an aspect of time, specifically slowing down.

On the public side, it also takes time to diversify your programming. Besides establishing collaboration with disabled artists and cultural professionals, the programme elements themselves also take time. For example, tandem tours and workshops often require time adjustments – depending on the disabled experts involved, they may be shorter or longer than usual.

Last but not least, it takes time to reach a diverse audience with these new offerings because they first need to become known to disabled visitors. Accessible feedback options also first need to be established. The process of continuous adjustment, improvement and shared learning that begins through feedback likewise takes time.

To summarise: Making it possible for disabled visitors to visit your cultural institution by ensuring accessibility is the key. Becoming a relevant place in the lives of disabled people through diverse programming developed by disabled employees that is aimed at all visitors – that's the gold standard!

We hope we have been able to inspire and encourage you to take up this inclusion challenge!

If you have any questions, suggestions or criticisms, please do not hesitate to contact us: platzda@mailbox.org and inkultur@dialogue4u.org.

Stefanie Wiens and Katrin Dinges from the <Platz da!> team on behalf of INKuLtur-Programme.

Authors – Who wrote this policy paper and from which perspective?



Stefanie Wiens: I am the founder of <Platz da!> consultancy for inclusion and accessible cultural education (<https://platzda.berlin>). I am chronically ill and therefore, being invisible to those around me, I am confronted with various barriers. I conduct theoretical research on the topic of «inclusive museums» and implement inclusion in practice. **Passing on my art education grant to disabled artists has been crucial for my work.** Working together with them, I now advise (cultural) institutions as part of a continuously growing inclusive team.

Photo credit: Photo by Anna Hantschke



Katrin Dinges: I am an inclusive cultural creator, educator and artist. Since 2017 I have been working for <Platz da!>. My expertise is in overcoming visual and hearing barriers, as I am blind and have a severe hearing impairment. I also live with a chronic illness and am faced with communication and orientation barriers. As I have an academic background, I am working on reducing my own discrimination in the area of accessible language. In addition, I always try to think about all perspectives, including those of people with physical impairments and learning difficulties, but the best experts are the people themselves. **Inclusion means to include, to involve and to welcome.**

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