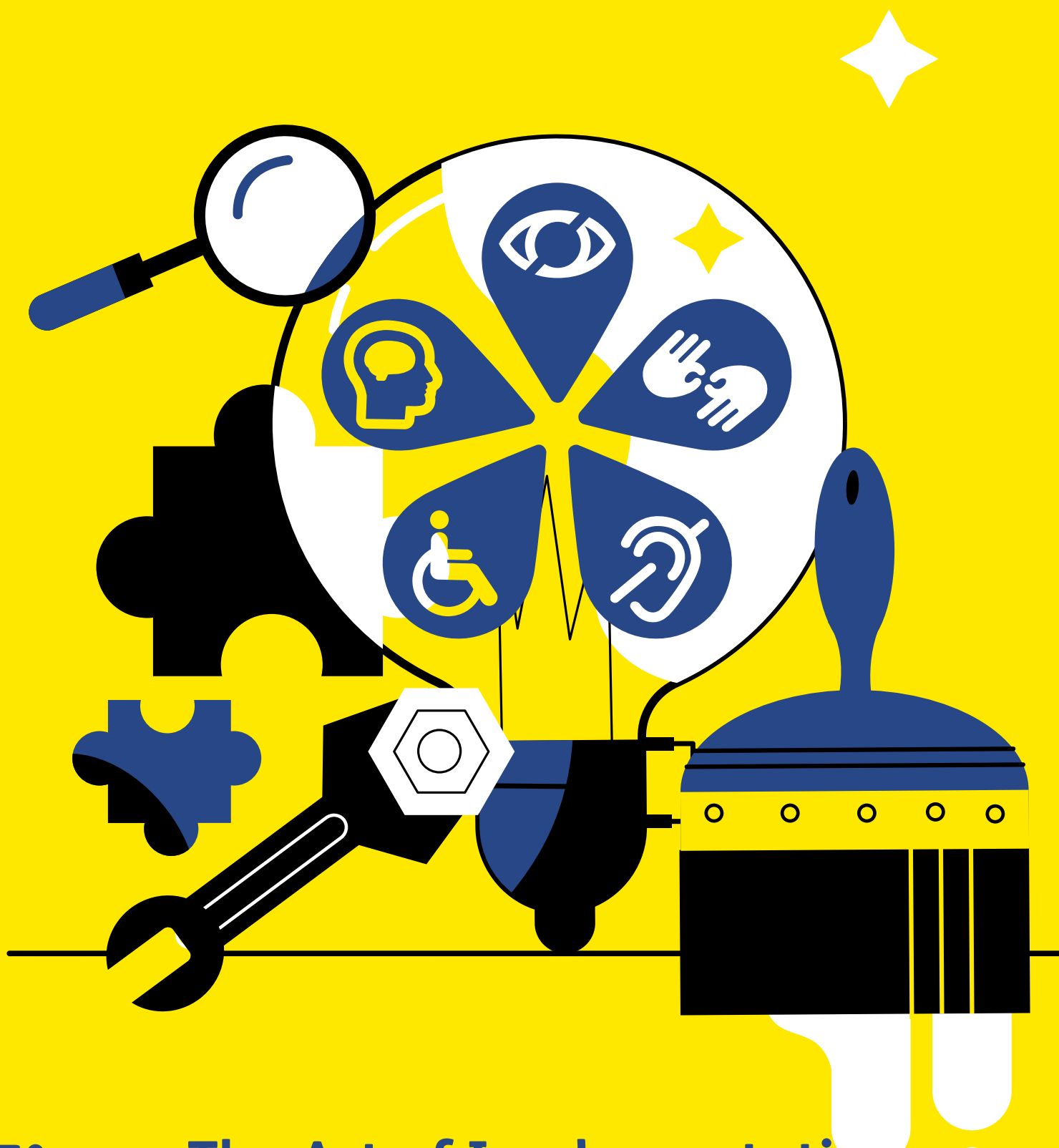Agnieszka Zielonka-Mitura

The Art of Implementation

Accessibility Measures in Cultural Institutions of Small Towns and Villages

MAŁOPOLSKA
EMPATHETIC CULTURE

Our goal is to increase the presence of people with disabilities in cultural institutions. We support institutions in making their programs accessible to anyone who is interested. Together with experts, we advise, offer trainings, and promote good practices.

The project was initiated by the Management Board of the Malopolska Region back in 2016. The Malopolska Institute of Culture in Krakow is in charge of all activities related to the project in cooperation with the Department of Culture and National Heritage of the Marshal's Office of Malopolska. The cultural institutions of Malopolska and partner non-governmental organizations are some of the participants in the project.

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Agnieszka Zielonka-Mitura

The Art
of Implementation

ACCESSIBILITY MEASURES
IN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS
OF SMALL TOWNS AND VILLAGES

Contents

Introduction

Jakub Studziński

Dear readers!

I am pleased to present you with a publication which can serve as a practical guide for people involved in the implementation and coordination of accessibility in the cultural sector in small towns and villages. Its author, Agnieszka Zielonka-Mitura, confronts the challenges faced by institutions operating in the cultural sector in small towns and villages, all the while relying on her own experience working with various institutions in small towns and villages. Despite the widespread legal awareness of how essential accessibility is, we often lack tried and true methods of its implementation under limited budgets and human resources shortages.

This publication offers a fresh look at accessibility. It points out that in order to successfully implement accessibility measures, something more than just compliance with applicable regulations is required. Most importantly, what you need is a change of perspective and your entire team's commitment. Furthermore, the author focuses on the potential of small communities and resources that may be crucial to effectively building a culture accessible to all, i.e., not only to people with disabilities or the elderly but to the entire local community as well.

She presents methods and guidelines that aim to help people who are professionally responsible for implementing accessibility as well as those who work on it out of an inner calling and a sense of mission. Finally, she provides advice on dealing with some typical concerns, challenges and inhibitions that you might encounter and explains how to build real relationships with audiences at cultural institutions. *The Art of Implementation. Accessibility Measures in Cultural Institutions of Small Towns and Villages* is not simply a collection of theories, but rather a set of practical exercises and ideas which can help cultural institutions

to transform accessibility challenges into real opportunities for development and greater social engagement.

This publication indicates the direction taken in the program *Małopolska. Empathetic Culture* this year. Its focus is on supporting the implementation and coordination of accessibility in cultural institutions located in small towns and villages. We are aware that this topic is not an easy one to tackle due to very low funding, and that we approach it from the perspective of a "major city." However, it's impossible to deny the following fact: Small towns make an enormous contribution to building sustainable local communities where everyone can benefit from educational and cultural offerings on equal terms.

Małopolska. Empathetic Culture is a program encompassing a wide range of activities aimed at educating and sensitizing cultural audiences to the issues that people with different needs face. It was initiated in 2016 by the Marshal's Office of the Małopolska Region. Since then, it's been coordinated by Małopolski Instytut Kultury (the Małopolska Institute of Culture) in Kraków and implemented by twenty-four cultural institutions of the Małopolska Region. We've been promoting accessibility, empathy and inclusivity as well as looking for a space to make these ideas come to life for eight years now. In this endeavor, we've been supported by our strategic partners, the accessibility coordinators of the cultural institutions of Małopolska, the Department of Culture and National Heritage of the Marshal's Office of the Małopolska Region and the people who feel personally drawn to the mission of the *Małopolska. Empathetic Culture* program.
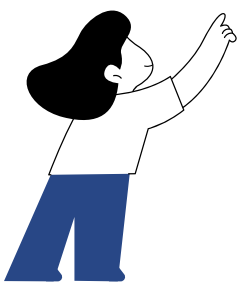
The Art of Implementation.
Accessibility Measures in Cultural Institutions of Small Towns and Villages

Agnieszka Zielonka-Mitura

INTRODUCTION

Much has been said and written about accessibility in cultural institutions. Although six years have gone by since the act on it was passed[1] and some people have been claiming that the topic had started to produce unintended results due to its alleged ubiquity, those in charge of implementing and managing accessibility measures still face many challenges. They do not look for available legal solutions all that much. Rather, they seek practical, tried and true guidelines which would allow them to implement the principles of accessibility in a relatively painless manner. These principles are an enormous challenge, in particular for small cultural institutions located in small towns and villages. These institutions work with very limited budgets and a small staff. Consequently, there are often many more responsibilities than jobs and the resulting fatigue and burnout may outweigh job satisfaction and a sense of calling. In small institutions, the question of how to effectively implement accessibility measures often turns into the question of how to survive this process. We will go back to the topic of employee well-being at a later stage. After all, it is difficult to conceive of a friendly cultural institution without taking into account the people who make it what it is every day.

Dear reader, the publication that you see in front of you will give you some insight into implementing and coordinating accessibility based on my own

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[1]   Ustawa o zapewnieniu dostępności osobom ze szczególnymi potrzebami (the Act on Ensuring Accessibility to People with Special Needs): https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20240001411 (accessed 29 July 2025).

experiences. That said, it also includes thoughts and ideas resulting from the practices of people and institutions that I work with. These experiences are accompanied by other, perhaps more reliable sources of knowledge. You will find those listed under 'References' at the end of this publication. Obviously, they are a very valuable (even priceless, in fact!) source of knowledge on the subject matter. On top of this, they are available for free on the Internet, so I honestly encourage you to read them.

Although the above introduction does not seem all too optimistic, I hope that this publication will help you find solutions to accessibility challenges or give you ideas how to implement broadly understood accessibility in your own institution. It is particularly important to me that what you find on the following pages helps people who practice accessibility – both those who have been randomly "nominated" to serve the honorable function of accessibility coordinators and those who "deal with" accessibility because their heart is in it.

Apart from a brief study of the issues discussed, the publication contains different exercises – to be done individually by you, dear coordinators, as well as collectively by your teams. I will present you with a few practical solutions that will allow you to initiate and expand activities promoting accessibility, give you power and knowledge to get started, and make your teams more familiar with the concept of accessibility. I encourage you to read the entire publication first, give yourself a few days to let the new information sink in, and then approach the publication one more time, doing step-by-step exercises in the suggested order. Why should you do it this way? Why not just do an exercise here and there? And why should you write everything down? The exercises were arranged in such a way that one results from the other and each subsequent one complements the previous one. I might refer to the results of exercises completed a dozen pages prior – this is the first reason why you should write everything down and do it in the prescribed order instead of just discussing it without any notes. Moreover, you can return to the information you've written down after a short while or a long time. The notes will show you how your perception of accessibility has changed and what huge steps forward you have taken – both individually and as a team. Sometimes they will remind you of

ideas that for different reasons have not seen the light of day, and yet still have a great potential for implementation.

(IN)ACCESSIBLE CULTURE?

The fact that small towns and rural communes differ from cities on almost every level needs no reinforcement. Significant differences can be observed in terms of infrastructure, transportation and the labor market as well as mentality and cultural or social aspects. **So why do we follow the idea and belief that accessibility should be implemented everywhere in the same way, at the same time, by the same rules?** It is difficult for me to find an answer to this question. However, I know that it is problematic to apply the same standard to everyone irrespective of their needs, or rather, to demand the same things from everyone regardless of the actual needs and capabilities of the institution and those who work in it. It often results in actions that are performative rather than genuine.

Cultural institutions, no matter their location, strive to meet the needs of their audiences in terms of access to broadly understood culture and art. They want to improve the quality of life in their communities. This is an important part of their mission. This ties in with the idea of implementing accessibility principles – even if the cultural institution's team does not see it this way. After all, acting in the spirit of accessibility serves not just senior citizens or people with disabilities but the entire community.

A few years ago, when I joined the first edition of the project establishing the Network of Accessibility Leaders run by Fundacja Kultury Bez Barier (the Culture Without Barriers Foundation), I was probably the only representative of a community center located in the countryside. And while city people considered us too focused on architectural accessibility, which they believed had already been established "everywhere" to a great extent, I thought about our building from the early nineties (in the public consciousness, it was still built as part of the community service inspired by communism) in the context of our budget, knowing how far removed it was from the idea of architectural

accessibility. Therefore, it was difficult for me to focus on designing fully accessible events. I was wondering how people with different needs were supposed to reach us, overcome tall curbs or the driveway that required considerable maneuvers, not to mention using the toilet which was only seemingly accessible... The list of what we had was definitely shorter than that of what we didn't have. Despite all this, our facilities were excellent compared to other cultural institutions in rural areas! And although my main career paths have gone in a slightly different direction, I still frequently visit small towns in different regions of Poland and their community centers. Owing to this, I know that my dilemmas from a few years ago are still relevant in many places.

Despite the social aspect of participation in culture constantly changing and the quality of local cultural offerings improving, the residents of small towns and villages (especially the latter):

- are less likely to participate in local culture, perceiving it as less attractive than in surrounding cities;

- experience the feeling of living in a "cultural void" because they look at culture mainly from the perspective of so-called high culture and large, specialized institutions (such as theaters, cinemas, operas) which are scarce where they live;

- often don't see valuable cultural potential in themselves and others, nor do they treat their hobbies or interests as cultural practices[2];

- have problems reaching cultural institutions due to few bus/train connections or a complete lack of public transportation;

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2   Such a point of view is often encountered in the reports from field studies conducted all over Poland as part of the program *Dom Kultury + Inicjatywy lokalne* (Community Center + Local Initiatives) carried out by Narodowe Centrum Kultury (the National Center for Culture). Reports are published on the websites of participating institutions (https://nck.pl/dotacje-i-stypendia/dotacje/programy-dotacyjne-nck/dom-kultury/edycje-programu-dom-kultury-/dom-kultury-inicjatywy-lokalne, accessed 29 July 2025).

- have much more severe economic limitations in some regions of Poland and cannot always afford to pay to participate in culture.

We can add the following to the list above:

- local governments rarely decide to raise new buildings for cultural institutions and instead renovate or adapt those that already exist, but it is not always possible to ensure full architectural accessibility there – especially if these are buildings under conservation protection; finally, preserving the building in a relatively good condition is seen as the priority of these renovations, not ensuring accessibility;

- in small towns and villages, access to professionals (including those who deal with accessibility, inclusivity and obtaining external resources) is difficult;

- in rural or urban-rural communes, which consist of several or even a dozen small towns and villages, there is often just one central community center and/or library that does not have branches, so residents of peripheral areas cannot reach them;

- usually, local governments in small towns and villages are not able to dedicate a larger chunk of their budget to culture, and the institutions themselves are unable to increase their revenue while external or project-based financing is not only uncertain, but it also requires hiring people who can obtain such financing to implement the project and do the accounting work around it;

- insufficient staffing leads to employees having to multi-task, which contributes to increasing fatigue, burnout and reluctance to try out anything new.

Is this all that we have to consider in the context of barriers to participation and accessibility implementation in small towns and villages? Of course not!

These issues, as indicated in different reports and studies[3], are shared by many entities. However, each institution operates within its own set of circumstances which it can add to this list. You should also remember that some of the problems described are familiar to small cultural institutions located in the suburban parts of large cities – there is still a tendency among organizers to primarily look after large, representative, centrally-located institutions and to disregard the small ones, which in the long run often leads to their closure.

Although all the above issues should be kept in mind when considering the possibilities of making culture more accessible in small towns and villages, you should focus in particular on the potentials and opportunities which characterize small communities, and there are quite a few. When we've realized what we already have, what resources we can use, what positives we can find around us, what our source of pride may be, it gives us more motivation, energy and a sense of meaning in what we are working on – and that is the point!

Resources in small towns and villages:

- community – the residents of small towns and villages are much better integrated, know each other, often have varying degrees of kinship. Especially in rural areas, it is said that "everyone knows each other" there, which provides the opportunity to gain knowledge and reach different members of the community relatively quickly, including people with different needs and those with disabilities. Furthermore, it is worth noting that we are more eager to work with people that we know and less likely to tell them off as well, which is the reason why groups, institutions and people in small communities tend to cooperate more frequently;

- the sense of responsibility and local identity is stronger in small towns and villages – this is the case mainly because if the community wants to do, preserve or have something, it usually has to take care of it itself; there are no public services and employees who can take charge of things or be

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3   See: References.

held accountable for deficiencies, and therefore, the community is more active;

- grassroots activity in social and cultural matters – local organizations and groups (both formal and informal ones), such as country housewives' associations, volunteer fire brigades, village councils or parochial charities often come up with their own ideas, are willing to assist in the implementation of different measures and whenever there is a need, they are capable of organizing help very quickly. Moreover, they are a natural link to the rest of the community and can provide excellent support to institutions in terms of discovering local needs and resources;

- facilitated "fieldwork" on events – in small towns and villages, people often just work together and thus reduce formalities to a minimum, while the space to carry out activities is provided free of charge by the residents themselves. Obtaining necessary approvals or accepting applications tends to take much less time there than in cities, and many things can be arranged almost immediately;

- young people residing in small towns and villages, despite limited local offerings and transportation difficulties, are more likely to be involved in organizing cultural events if they receive the support of cultural animators or instructors alongside a bit of independence in terms of what they can do;

- a lot of the time, even if it is not said explicitly, the volunteering model works well in small communities. If you ask for help, you are almost guaranteed to find honest and committed people there who will be eager to provide it;

- the ability to make the most of their material resources – small cultural institutions, who often have to work with very modest budgets, have mastered the skill of recycling, upcycling and reusing entire cultural products as well as individual materials or objects. This fosters the ability to think outside the box, boosts creativity and makes the teams within institutions

capable of facing challenges, which is very valuable in the context of looking for accessibility solutions that are possible to implement. And while this is usually due to finances more so than environmental reasons or a sustainability-focused approach to resources, such skills and practices are definitely worth pointing out;

- cultural institutions operating in small towns and villages often don't have any competitors in their immediate environment, so they don't have to "fight" for their audiences.

Another cause for optimism is that no matter how small a town or village is:

- there are kind, empathetic and open-minded people with a genuine calling working in most cultural institutions;

- cultural workers are increasingly aware and knowledgeable about what accessibility is and why it should be implemented;

- there are really large (and free) knowledge bases on the topic of accessibility – ranging from book publications to webinars, seminars and conferences;

- there are support networks for accessibility professionals, with new ones in the making;

- financial resources dedicated to accessibility are increasing – a major priority of programs financed by the state, the European Union and even by various foundations is to improve accessibility. A project may not receive funding if ensuring accessibility is not part of the project plan. On one hand, this requirement should "force" the unconvinced to craft projects with accessibility in mind. On the other hand, it gives people who are involved in the topic of accessibility a chance to implement its principles even if the budget of the institution is barely sufficient to cover employee salaries and facility maintenance;

- many grant programs are aimed at rural areas and towns with a population of 20 to 50 thousand inhabitants, which means that small institutions can raise funds without having to compete with powerful city-based entities. That said, they are not excluded from competitions dedicated to all institutions regardless of their size and location.

The above list could be longer, of course, especially since the particular characteristics of small towns and villages may vary significantly depending on the region and distance separating them from large urban centers. That said, I hope that it's constructive and gets you to approach working in a small town or village from the perspective of its resources, not its shortcomings.

ACCESSIBILITY IS EASIER SAID THAN DONE...

Usually, as we dive deeper into the vast sea of knowledge about accessibility, we tend to feel more and more overwhelmed the further we get. This is because accessibility encompasses an enormous range of measures and issues. Reading the Act on Ensuring Accessibility to People with Special Needs[4] is enough as a warm-up, and by the time we have started to think about what we need and don't have, we will have started sweating and gasping for air. Then we start looking for interpretations, bits of information, good practices, tips, self-advocates' opinions... And by doing this, we discover a whole lot of mutually exclusive guidelines. Usually, this is the moment when we feel like leaving it all behind and moving to the mountains. How do I know all this? From my own and other people's experience! Still, I was lucky to have spent most of my professional life surrounded by people who, like me, often felt – very intuitively, I might add – that culture and social life should be available to everyone without exception. In fact, I started working on promoting accessibility and inclusivity before I even knew that such things existed and what they were called... When I realized that what I was doing was improving accessibility (more or less effectively – after

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4   The content of the act can be found here: https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails. xsp?id=WDU20240001411 (accessed 29 July 2025).

all, I did not really know much about it!), I immediately decided to learn **EVERYTHING** about it. I started reading. First, it warmed me up, then I broke a sweat, then my breathing got faster, and then... You know the rest of the story. I was scared as well, and I definitely thought that I wouldn't succeed. Not in this institution. Not with this team. Not in this building. Not with this audience. Not in this town. Not with this little money. I would say "no" to myself many times. In fact, this huge, bright, blinking, high-voltage neon light screaming "NO" at me was mostly just in my head. I just didn't know where to start, and I found everything that I learned overwhelming. Sounds familiar?

So, let's think for a moment: **Where do we start?**

If a good few years ago I had known where to start and that others who deliberately chose to get involved in the issue of accessibility were experiencing emotions similar to my own, it definitely would have been faster, easier and less painful... If you – as people in charge of implementing accessibility – are now at the beginning of this journey or, after reading EVERYTHING you could find, all that you want is to move to the mountains and live there as a bear, then maybe my tips will be useful to you. And if you are trying to implement or already implementing accessibility, then some of the ideas here may make it easier for you to continue. Throughout this process, you should keep in mind that **accessibility is a team sport, and you cannot do it alone**.

What I want to offer you is a very convenient method of implementing accessibility and managing it. It certainly has a better chance of working out in teams of few people and small towns or villages as opposed to large, formalized institutions with a multi-level structure.

At this point, I suggest that we consider the resources and challenges in your community and institution. Not only will it enable you to analyze these things from the perspective of accessibility, but it will also help you pinpoint other aspects of your work and thus let you take more informed and effective measures. Have you done such an exercise before? No

problem! If it was more than half a year ago, you might want to do it again. A lot might have changed during this time!

WARM-UP EXERCISE

As accessibility managers in your institution, prepare a list of opportunities, threats and things to examine in your institution and in the community in which you work based on the text above. You don't need to prepare a full SWOT analysis.

Part I

I'd like you to start by discussing these issues on your own. How should you go about this? Take a flipchart page and divide it into three sections:

1. **Problems, challenges, deficiencies** – in this section, write down everything that you know about the "shortcomings" related to your jobs/duties, the institution and the community in which you work. You do not have to list those things in a hierarchy of what is more or less important. Write down even those things that seem insignificant or inconsequential to you. If something comes to your mind, it means that it may be more important than it seems.

2. **Resources, opportunities, untapped potential** – do the same thing you did above, but with respect to the positive aspects of your work and community.

3. **What don't we know that is worth knowing?** How many times have you pondered some issues related to your job? Perhaps you lacked data, information, statistics? Or maybe it was impossible to find a person to work with in a specific area or one who had knowledge about a specific topic? Write it down, even if it seems insignificant at the moment. Believe me, such issues love to resurface!

When is the task completed? When you believe that you have already written everything down. Keep this list, and if you remember something more, feel free to add it there.

Part II

Invite all of your colleagues to participate in part I, starting with cleaning staff up to the management. Tell everyone why you are doing it. If the management is resistant, you can turn to Małopolski Instytut Kultury (the Małopolska Institute of Culture) in Kraków to receive support, recommendations and arguments to use in discussions with your institution's management. This applies particularly to cultural institutions in Małopolska.

VERSION I

If you are a bonded and friendly team, prepare the above list during a joint meeting. As accessibility coordinators, write down everything but say as little as possible. Add your previous thoughts to the list only after the group has finished working. Let everyone know that if they remember anything else, you'll be happy to write it down as well. Do not comment on other people's statements (especially negatively) because if someone has noticed something, it means that it's important to them!

VERSION II

If the atmosphere in your team is unpleasant, you find it difficult to open up to each other a bit more or there are colleagues there who could say a lot but for some reason stay quiet, ask everyone to complete the exercise individually. They can do it on a sheet of paper, via e-mail or in subgroups. If there are people on your team whose resistance cannot be broken, do not force them to cooperate – there is a chance that they will join the activity themselves if they notice that the topic is important to your institution and other employees are actively involved. Set a deadline by which the information is to be collected.

Part III

What's next? Once you have all the information, try to group and organize it. For each of the three topics, extract data that pertains to accessibility either directly or indirectly, the part of it that pertains to infrastructure, your activities, employee affairs, communities... You decide how many subgroups you can create. However, it is not worth splitting the responses into more than six or seven groups because they will be difficult to use later. Once your list is ready, present/pass it on to everyone on the team – including those who for whatever reason didn't participate in the task.

By completing this task, you will have a map of sorts that will support you in making decisions and implementing measures – not just for the sake of accessibility and your community. At the same time, you will find out what's important to you as a team, what your priorities should be (e.g., in the process of applying for grant programs), where your potential and challenges lie. We will return to the results of this exercise later in this publication.

IMPLEMENTING AND COORDINATING ACCESSIBILITY IN SMALL INSTITUTIONS AND TEAMS

1. It starts with you, accessibility coordinators!

Why is that the case? Let me answer: If you are to be the driving force behind accessibility in your institutions, you must have the strength, knowledge and awareness of your own abilities, motivations and limitations. Not much can be done when you find yourself on the verge of burnout, depression or in a state of chronic stress. However, these phenomena are unfortunately very common among cultural workers[5].

The situation in your team may vary considerably – from one where most or even all employees show full understanding and a great desire to be involved in implementing accessibility to one in which only the person responsible for accessibility recognizes that these measures are meaningful and valuable. Before you start "convincing" the team or even just a part of it that accessibility matters, negotiating with the management or organizing funds for everything that has to be provided due to the Accessibility Act, invading local institutions, entities and organizations in search of potential audiences that would benefit from accessible activities, just give yourselves time.

Get a coffee, find a spot where no one will bother you, and think about what accessibility means to you. How do you define it? Put aside all the theoretical knowledge that you have just acquired, all definitions and manifestos. Focus on what you think and how you feel about it. Why is it something worth doing? Because **how we understand the meaning of words and concepts affects our perception of the world** and all phenomena related to particular issues. It's difficult to convince the unconvinced about the importance of something if we

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5   I wholeheartedly recommend that you read Rafał Lis's report entitled *Co Ci powie o kulturze koordynator_ka dostępności?* [What Will an Accessibility Coordinator Tell You About Culture?]. It's available on this website: https://epale.ec.europa.eu/pl/resource-centre/content/raport-co-ci-powie-o-kulturze-koordynatorka-dostepnosci (accessed 3 September 2025).

ourselves don't fully understand or believe in it, if it feels artificial or doesn't resonate with us.

In my opinion, **accessibility shows us the way and gives us the key to building real relationships** with our current and potential audiences. When I worked in a community center, we used the term "roommates" because we wanted people who visited us to feel as if they were in a real home: safe, wanted, able to be themselves. But there are cultural institutions in which the words "client" or – to my horror – "interested party" are still in use! I think that the difference between the individual and community-oriented meanings of the words "roommate" and "interested party," the difference in terms of how they resonate with you and what energy they give off, is truly staggering. This is the time for me to ask: Who visits your institution?

My definition of "visitor" has become very helpful to me, as it has allowed me to adopt a perspective based on coexistence, cooperation, empathy and a genuine liking for people. Indeed, I like people a lot, which is why building relationships, being mindful of the other person and discovering who they are matters to me in everything that I do.

At one point, I suddenly realized that (to me) accessibility was not just about constructing a driveway, installing an induction loop or putting up a bulletin board with information about what we offered and where the front office was. It wasn't about processing a pile of documents. It was about preparing to welcome others just as I would at a party at my own home. I'll give you an example: Kasia doesn't like olives, Magda is often cold and will definitely need a blanket, and Jarek has to take a balcony break from the party every once in a while, because even his close friends are too much for him at times. Knowing all this, what can I do to make our guests or roommates feel welcome? We'll get back to what you can do and how you can find out what your guests need. Now it's the time to ask yourselves more questions about accessibility and what you think about it.

What resonates with you the most? What do you feel best doing? Think about what makes you happy at work, what you feel at ease doing. Which of your

own experiences are **valuable to you** (as opposed to your employers)? And what is the biggest problem for you? What is your weak point or something that you don't like? For instance, I have found great joy and my professional calling in working with people of senior age, whereas digital accessibility with respect to websites has caused me most difficulty from the get-go. This is because I don't understand many issues related to it, starting with specialized vocabulary. And yes, **there is no shame** in admitting that you can't do, don't know or don't understand something. What it shows is that you are aware of your own capabilities and limitations and that each of us needs support in certain areas because you can't be an expert in everything.

Alright. Once you have been armed with this knowledge of yourselves, your resources and your weak points, it's time to move on to the second point, which is THE TEAM.

2. THE TEAM

In small institutions in villages or towns, the team usually consists of a few to a dozen people, including janitors and the management. I know some community centers and libraries relying on just 1 or 1.5 full-time jobs, which is an extreme situation that calls for individual solutions. That said, assuming that there are teams (however small) in your institutions, it's worth taking the following steps.

Step 1

Invite your closest teams or people that you enjoy working with for a coffee or breakfast together since a pleasant atmosphere is important here. Tell them to reflect on and ask themselves the same questions you have answered before. Discuss this for a moment.

I know that spending time drinking coffee or eating together is treated as an unnecessary luxury in many cultural institutions. If this is the case with yours – go crazy, because that is what you need right now. Why am I encouraging you

to meet in a small group? At the very beginning, accessibility is not exactly a topic for an official gathering of the whole team, with tables, graphs and artificially divided responsibilities. *You* are the beginning – you, the people involved in accessibility, with your thoughts on the topic and the allies that you find in your team. You will feel safer then and there is a chance that some-one will actually support you on this path.

Step 2 a

If you work in a friendly environment where people like each other and are kind to each other, organize an official meeting for all those working at your institution. Tell them why you care about accessibility, what you think about it, why it may be crucial for your institution, what it can give you. Don't start by talking about the Accessibility Act. In my experience, this is usually where resistance sets in. Ask the rest for their opinion. Let all voices for and against be heard. Listen to all fears, suggestions and claims that it doesn't make sense. This participatory process is critical if you want to involve everyone in the sub-ject matter. No one will be able to say that they haven't heard anything about it or don't know about a topic such as accessibility being discussed at your cultural institution. Write everything down as you would at a brainstorming session, and once you sit down at your computers, try to group the responses into favorable and negative ones. They are all important, and the people who gave them will feel that you care about their opinion.

Step 2 b

If the atmosphere in your team is tense and you know that any attempts to call such a meeting would end in an argument which you would have to recov-er from for a week afterwards, you could try to convince the management to invite a third party, e.g., from the Małopolska Institute of Culture in Kraków, to conduct a meeting or a workshop for you so that everyone understands why accessibility needs to be taken seriously.

It's ideal when supervisors agree to the idea and allow you to invite an ex-pert on this topic in particular. You will usually find them in associations and

foundations that deal with accessibility, but also among accessibility coordinators. If the paid option is out of the question, try asking these entities for free assistance, and if this does not work out, seek the help of an accessibility coordinator, e.g., from a local government office, cultural institute or another local cultural institution. Before you do this, make sure that these places are doing well in terms of accessibility. I understand that you may have concerns and objections when it comes to asking for help free of charge. If this is the case, you can ask the management for permission to issue free vouchers for events at your institution or simply offer assistance within the scope of your expertise as soon as the other party needs it. Accessibility professionals are usually happy to support others in this endeavor. By doing this, you can build a network of mutual contacts, experts and kind gestures in the process.

Step 3

Sensitization is key. I suggest that you invite experts and/or self-advocates to a sensitizing meeting or workshop. They will confront your team with a different perspective, explain the subject matter, and it will be difficult to challenge their points. Awareness-raising workshops are an important part of the whole process. Speaking of which: **Sensitization is a process, like all things related to accessibility**, so it's worth talking about it in your inner circles, bringing up your experiences or observations, sharing what touched or raised your concern. Oftentimes, in order to understand why accessibility should be implemented, people need to first empathize with others and their situation, relate it to something in their own lives. Accessibility is correlated with vulnerability, and vulnerability is correlated with emotion. I can't do it in sanitized conditions, although I know people who think it's possible.

Each of us has a story that has made us protective of people with individual needs, who in turn have made us see why certain improvements or amenities are needed. These are the moments that you can tactfully, empathically and delicately allude to as you try to sensitize your team. At this point, I would like to emphasize that I am referring to all people employed by the institution – we do not get to decide who may benefit from the knowledge of accessibility

more than others. Everyone needs it to the same extent. What can you allude to in such conversations? There are as many examples as there are people:

- A broken limb? "What caused you the greatest difficulty when you had to go to a doctor or run an errand?" … "At our community center, there are such tall doorsteps…"

- A walk with a kid stroller? "How did you manage to overcome issues such as curbs, narrow passages, missing elevators or not having anyone to help you carry the stroller up the stairs?" … "Maybe we could install a book return container on the ground floor so that people in wheelchairs don't have to struggle to get upstairs to reach us?"

- Someone's grandfather suffering from dementia? "What gives him joy, helps him function well, how do you spend time together?" … "Do you think that you could find something interesting to do at our institution?"

- A child with autism spectrum disorder? "Where do you feel most comfortable? What is the most difficult thing for you to use?" … "Do you think that if we created such a calming sensory room in our center, other people whose kids are on the spectrum would be more willing to visit us?"

- An eye examination with atropine drops at an ophthalmologist's practice? "How did you manage to get home with hypersensitivity to light?" … "Do you think that people with vision problems would cope with navigating the space we have here?"

Following such conversations, it suddenly turns out that your colleagues know a lot about (in)accessibility from their own experience but never thought of it this way. By bringing up real issues that your institution deals with in these discussions, you indicate that accessibility is quite an everyday matter, not a luxury or anything sophisticated.

Furthermore, you may find it useful to test and try out a few things as part of a get-together, a workshop or even an employee meeting. I usually perform the

following activities in sensitization workshops and introductory workshops on accessibility. These ideas can be applied without the help of external experts, but before you implement them, ask a self-advocate or search the Internet to find out how it is done correctly and test the suggested exercises on someone close to you so that you know what to do and how to do it in an actual workshop at your institution.

As a way of sensitizing your team to people with different needs, you can:

- try using a wheelchair – you can rent a wheelchair free of charge from various places or even from private individuals[6]. Then you can invite the team for a ride together, e.g., from the parking lot to the front office of your institution. Each time, you should only overcome the distance of up to thirty feet, but do not seek the help of others. You can have each other's back, but do not help each other. You should try to make it to the restroom dedicated to people with disabilities, turn on the lights in a room or in a hallway, buy a ticket to an event, open a door yourselves (while seated in a wheelchair), use the elevator... How was it? Get together and discuss what you found easy and what was difficult. Maybe there were some insurmountable obstacles along the way? Can using a wheelchair be tiring? Did you feel safe? Did anything physically stand in your way, block the passage? May people with strollers also have to face these challenges?

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6 Wheelchairs are often available at medical centers, local government offices, organizations that support people with disabilities, occupational therapy facilities, Caritas offices and even churches. There are businesses where you can rent assistive devices and rehabilitation equipment as well. If you rent a wheelchair, make sure that it has a footrest!

- guiding a blind person – split into pairs. Play
a video or show your team how to guide a per-
son with a visual impairment. Then one person is
blindfolded, and the other one has to guide them
to a designated place but without telling them
where they are going. At the end of the tour, you
ask the people who were blindfolded what place
they reached. Then you swap roles. Discuss how
you felt in this task. What did you find difficult?
What made you nervous? What can be improved
so that people with visual impairments are more
likely to take advantage of your offerings?

- the concentration exercise – in this one, you form
pairs once more. One person starts counting
down from 100 (out loud), while the other is try-
ing to distract them in every possible verbal and
non-verbal manner. Of course, you're not allowed
to touch, tug at or insult the person counting or
to affect their mental well-being in any way. And
how was it? Discuss it in your team. Think about
how you can make it easier to contact you, e.g.,
for people with intellectual disabilities, neuro-
divergent people or individuals with memory
problems? What would have helped you in the
situation you were in?

- active listening – buy or borrow headphones
or earplugs (you can go for the most ordinary
ones, construction earmuffs or those which you
normally use to mow the lawn). Get in pairs. One
person has to wear the headphones/earplugs,
while the other tells them any story and at the
same time moves and turns around, speaks
louder, slower, faster, makes rustling noises,

drinks water, eats a cookie... Keep doing this for 5 minutes. Then the person wearing the headphones takes them off and you have to ask them to summarize the story. What came out of this? What could you have done to make it easier for the person with a hearing impairment to understand what you were talking about? What would have given them some comfort?

I would like to stress that talking about what you felt, thought and believe you could have done to enable people facing similar challenges to take advantage of your institution's offerings and participate in its events is a very important part of all these exercises. After the sensitization stage, which often turns out to be very emotional, most people on the team usually see the point of it all and a need to act in a more accessible mode. Each team should go through this sensitization stage.

Step 4

The power of competence. Do you remember when you were thinking about your competences, what you could do, what you liked, what came naturally to you and what caused you difficulty? Now is the time for everyone to talk about this. Alternatively, you can prepare a short survey in which everyone will write down what resonates with them the most, what group of people feels easy for them to be in contact with and which one is difficult, and what they could do differently while performing their tasks to make sure that the activities that they work on are more accessible. Depending on how open all of you are, you can do it in a group, send out an online survey or hand out a printed one. The idea is to find out how to distribute accessibility tasks. The more you make use of your natural competencies, interests, things that you like and those which are consistent with your positions, the easier it will be for you to implement and carry out accessibility measures.

Now you are ready (although you may feel differently about it) to implement accessibility.

3. LESSON LEARNED: Time for a test!

It is difficult to introduce any changes, novelties, principles, procedures or measures if you lack knowledge about the current state of affairs, about what is (and what isn't!) the case here and now. The first task that I proposed in this publication allowed you to partially map your resources, opportunities, short-comings and areas in which you lack knowledge. This simple tool let you take the first look at all this from the perspective of the team in your institution. Furthermore, it showed you what the employees were focused on and what they gravitated toward in their thoughts. Such knowledge is a good starting point to consider the direction of measures that need to be taken and to adopt a correct perspective, but it is not enough to implement accessibility (and not just accessibility!) in your institution in a thoughtful manner. Therefore, it is now time for some extended mapping using various more or less standardized methods.

Step 1. Assessment and self-assessment

It is a good idea to analyze and evaluate the accessibility of the building in which your institution is located as well as your website, social media, activities, means of communication and ways of sharing information. Of course, it would be best if the assessment was carried out by professional auditors, but if your institution cannot afford it for financial reasons, you can carry out a so-called self-assessment as well as invite some representatives of the local community to work on it with you.

On the Internet, you will find plenty of documents, standards and checklists to assess whether your institution is accessible. Some of the documents are longer, others are very short, but I recommend that you look at the lengthier ones. Why? Because each institution is different, and the multitude of ques-tions might make you pay attention to more things than if you had just a short list. Of course, you answer questions/analyze issues that are strictly related to your situation, so not all questions which are a part of ready-made tools will fit in with your reality. I encourage you to have the self-assessment carried out by at least two or three people because everyone will notice something different.

Moreover, it is worth it to involve the team at every stage of accessibility implementation.

For an independent and at the same time a team-based assessment (preferably), you can rely on:

- Karta dostępności obiektów zgodna z zasadami projektowania uniwersalnego (the Building Accessibility Card Aligned with the Principles of Universal Design – applies to existing or planned buildings) prepared by Regionalne Centrum Polityki Społecznej (the Regional Center for Social Policy) in Łódź[7];

- Standardy zapewnienia dostępności (the Standards of Providing Accessibility) – a huge but very intelligible set of data, analysis cards and descriptions of all accessibility types, developed and updated by the City of Warsaw[8];

- Guidelines prepared by the Małopolska Institute of Culture in Kraków as part of the *Małopolska. Empathetic Culture* program – they are brief but specific and clear[9].

The next stage of the analysis should be inviting self-advocates (i.e., people with different disabilities, seniors, parents with baby strollers, etc.) who live in your area and take advantage of your offerings to have a look at your space, the content of your website or social media, the activities you organize, or how transparently you communicate and share information. Ask what needs to be changed or improved and what works well. Such tips are very valuable because they provide insight into the actual needs of your audience, viewers, your

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7   You can download the card here: https://rcpslodz.pl/content/artykuly/files/2021-12-31-karta-dostepnosci-obiektow.pdf (accessed 29 July 2025).

8   You can read the entire article here: https://wsparcie.um.warszawa.pl/standardy-zapewnienia-dostepnosci (accessed 29 July 2025).

9   You can find the guidelines developed as part of the program *Małopolska. Empathetic Culture* here: https://kulturawrazliwa.pl/wytyczne/ (accessed 13 October 2025).

roommates. If you ask these questions, you will have to face the feeling of be-
ing judged or criticized. However, remember that you are not attacked. Do not
explain yourselves and do not defend your institution – after all, you're there
to discuss people's needs and ask for advice in order to implement accessibility
and improve what you already have!

Now combine all the data obtained. Group them into what you have and what
works well – this is the current extent of accessibility in your institution with
respect to architecture, communication, information and digitalization. Then
list what you don't have or what needs improvement. All of this will be useful
to you when you update or prepare the Accessibility Declaration and the Ac-
tion Plan to Improve Accessibility.

Step 2. Who makes up your community?

According to the provisions of the Accessibility Act, cultural institutions should
be accessible in every respect or able to implement accessibility quickly and ef-
fectively. Practically speaking, however, you have to start somewhere, because
you simply cannot provide everything to everyone right away. You may find it
worthwhile to consider who makes up the community of your town, commune
or village and what needs these people have. A bit of research will come to
your aid.

To start off, list all institutions and non-governmental organizations from your
town or commune, e.g., parochial charities, parishes, country/town housewives'
associations, volunteer fire brigades, local action groups, offices (communes,
towns, the county office), village councils, community councils, community
centers, social welfare centers and county family support centers, schools, sen-
ior centers, sports and recreation centers, other cultural institutions. Schedule
a date (or preferably two or three, at different times, because there will always
be someone who can't make it) and invite the representatives of these entities
to have coffee with you at your institution. At the same time, ask them to help
you identify residents with individual needs and to share their observations
about the socio-cultural needs of the local community.

Ask your guests about people with different needs, including people with disabilities. Maybe there are deaf and hearing-impaired people in the commune but no blind people? Maybe a lot of older people in the community suffer from severe limitations in movement or hearing loss due to the particular characteristics of the jobs that they used to do? Maybe there is an integrated classroom with neurodivergent kids in one of the local schools? You should find out who you can turn into your audience in a short period of time and start introducing necessary solutions in this field. The more detailed the map of your community is, the greater the chance that you will not burn out while implementing solutions for a group that has not shown up yet. Of course, it is possible that nothing will surprise you in a small village. However, in a commune with a few or a dozen thousand inhabitants, it might just turn out that you never knew about some of the people that live there. Elderly people often have to deal with mobility issues or poor mental health, which is why some of them rarely leave their homes, whereas children, adolescents and adults with disabilities are driven to specialized schools or day centers in larger towns. These people are often invisible to the community.

Make sure that such a meeting takes no longer than an hour (an hour and a half at most) and that it takes place in a cordial atmosphere. Take notes or (preferably) record the core part of the meeting so that you don't miss anything. Remember that in addition to acquiring specific knowledge on the questions asked, this will be an opportunity for you to find long-term collaborators as well as to communicate to local institutions and organizations – and thus to the entire community – that accessibility is important to you and that you approach this topic responsibly.

Step 3. Analyze the data

Just collecting data is not enough. Now you need to group them and figure out what your priority should be considering everything that you have discovered, which measures resonate with you and your team the most and which ones are easiest to implement. Your starting point is at the intersection of these three answers. This is the moment to use your notes from the previous exercises!

4. Time to act!

Do your conclusions intersect at one or more points? That's great! Now take some time to prepare or update the Accessibility Declaration and the Action Plan to Improve Accessibility. Take a look at the rules and documents that apply to you as well. If you plan measures one by one and assign people to assume ownership of them, it will be easier for you to implement them. If you need help preparing the above documents (which every institution is legally bound to have developed), some free and simple tools might be useful, e.g., the website prepared by Fundacja Wspierania Zrównoważonego Rozwoju (the Foundation for Sustainable Development)[10], where you can generate the Accessibility Declaration and the Action Plan to Improve Accessibility, validate your Accessibility Declaration, monitor websites to find out whether they have published their own Accessibility Declarations, or make use of the so-called koREKtor – a tool to implement accessible recruitment with.

You might want to use them. Decide (preferably together) who can do what on your team. Divide responsibilities. **Just because you are an accessibility coordinator, it doesn't mean that you have to do it all by yourself**. Do you remember the exercise where you considered what resonated with you the most and the least? This is the time to make use of its results. Obviously, you will implement some things yourselves, but coordinating accessibility involves making sure that the implementation stage goes correctly and as planned. It's best if you (as coordinators) encourage, support and correct others or reassure them that what they are doing is right. People often need positive reinforcement due to fear that they are doing something wrong, and this in turn keeps them from taking further steps. Do not lose sight of deadlines and milestones, i.e., the next steps that you have planned. Screen your website and documents for contact information to reach you (or another person responsible for accessibility coordination). It should include your full name so that recipients know who to contact in all matters related to accessibility.

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10   You will find all tools and a lot more interesting information on the following website:
     https://deklaracja-dostepnosci.info/ (accessed 29 July 2025).

As a team, remember that small steps are more effective than grand visions. Thanks to these small steps, you will see bullet points disappear from your list upon their completion – and mind you, few things are as motivating as visible results.

If you have room for this, you can create an accessibility board (for your team, not for outsiders). Hang a list of things to do there, but do not stop at this. Use the board for ideas, inspirations, interesting solutions, enlightening sentences and thoughts, information about interesting trainings or webinars. To put it simply, use it for anything that can support and inspire you in the process of implementing accessibility and developing your action standards.

Model Dostępnej Kultury (the Accessible Culture Model) may definitely help you to analyze, plan and take measures well-tailored to the needs of your community[11]. This is an innovative approach to implementing accessibility in cultural institutions, developed as part of the project "Kultura bez barier" (Culture Without Barriers). The concept takes into account the conclusions resulting from the experience of many cultural institutions in the country who have tried it out in practice.

The Accessible Culture Model is based on three key concepts:

1. **accessibility areas** – a concept that expands the understanding of barriers beyond disabilities, focusing on potential obstacles that different people may encounter in everyday situations. It does not require you to name all disabilities. Instead, it encourages you to analyze such barriers in the context of mobility and the senses. These areas include seeing, hearing, moving, understanding and feeling;

2. **the audience's journey** – this model analyzes a whole chain of events involved in taking advantage of cultural offerings, with barriers identified

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11   You can download the model for free here: https://www.pfron.org.pl/o-funduszu/publikac-je-wypracowane-w-ramach-projektow-ue/model-dostepnej-kultury-publikacja/ (accessed 29 July 2025).

at each stage. It's a holistic view of the user experience. The stages of this journey are as follows: obtaining information about a cultural offering, finding your way to the event, the experience itself, the evaluation stage and the going back home stage;

3. **accessibility implementation steps** – the model outlines the methodical steps that cultural institutions can take to remove barriers. It's based on the assumption that implementing accessibility is an undertaking that requires patience and an entire team of people; a change which can be implemented step by step.

In my opinion, these concepts are well-suited to the way cultural institutions work. They present a valuable source of knowledge on how to plan and implement events so that different audiences can take advantage of them. You should take a close look at this perspective and consider introducing it to a greater or lesser extent in your workplace. You may find it helpful to watch free webinars on the practical use of this model, which are organized by the Małopolska Institute of Culture in Kraków as part of the *Małopolska. Empathetic Culture*[12] program or read about a number of solutions developed and proposed as part of the project carried out by Narodowe Centrum Kultury (the National Center for Culture – NCK) in cooperation with PFRON (the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled People). It is called *Projektowanie uniwersalne kultury – dostępność w instytucjach kultury* (The Universal Design of Culture. Accessibility in Cultural Institutions). You can find out more about it on NCK's website[13].

Evaluation

To me, this seems to be the part of the process which institutions overlook most frequently; perhaps because it's considered boring and tedious or believed to require complicated tools and extra commitment at a point where

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12 https://mik.krakow.pl/szkolenia/?tag=webinar/ (accessed 13 October 2025).

13 https://nck.pl/szkolenia-i-rozwoj/projektowanie-uniwersalne-kultury (accessed 29 July 2025).

you are already tired after an event. Not in the slightest! Throughout my career, I have tried to study audiences in different ways. And let me tell you: You should not do surveys, although sometimes they seem like the easiest and best solution. Instead, take 15 minutes to talk to participants after each event. You don't have to ask any direct questions. Actually, if you do, people might become shy and try to come up with the only correct response. Rather than do that, engage in gossip, laugh, talk about what you thought of the event, ask if anyone would be willing to come again, and if not, what would they want to participate in?

Such conversations held backstage, next to the cloakroom, while getting a coffee or even lining up for the bathroom are a great evaluation tool. Striking up small talk is not your strong suit? No worries. Just stand among people and listen to what they say. Do not record or write down anything – just listen. It will give you an idea about people's actual impressions and suggestions that you can use to organize and improve following events. Ask your colleagues who are present at the event to do exactly the same – to talk or at least listen to people's impressions of what has just taken place. You can discuss the information you have collected while you have breakfast, make coffee, plan upcoming activities or have a meeting. If something seems particularly important to you, write it down so that you don't forget it.

5. A few words on finances

I know that many of you reading this publication will keep wondering where to get money for all this. And once you're finished with all the analyses and lists of requirements, it will turn out that you need quite a lot of money. While reading different articles and training materials, you'll find out that institutions should allocate funds for accessibility and the accessibility coordinator should have access to them. However, in the lives of small institutions with even smaller resources (which are often barely enough to cover salaries and facility maintenance), allocating additional funds seems like a mission impossible. What should you rely on in such a case?

1. Creativity – you might recall that this is one of the greatest assets of cultural workers? There are a lot of things that you can do yourself or using your own resources, e.g., rearrange your space to make it more friendly and remove some barriers, mark windows and stairs with high visibility tape, screw in stronger or weaker light bulbs as well as prepare and print new markings for your space on an ordinary printer or use swell paper to produce materials for people with visual impairments. An interesting solution would be, for instance, to prepare tactile sensory aids at workshops with your community, make audio descriptions or write some texts in plain language. You can find a lot of inspiration on the Internet!

2. Sponsors – I know that asking for support is difficult and time-consuming. Still, it's necessary sometimes. On the other hand, many different companies are happy to support their local communities. This kind of support is not always financial in nature, but it is often material. And so local entrepreneurs or even large businesses, shops, supermarkets may be able to provide you with different things to help you organize your activities. Sometimes you will get two buckets of paint, sometimes a box of candy bars, prizes to use at competitions, arts or haberdashery supplies, new light switches or an opportunity to print some leaflets. Sometimes a business will offer to send its employees to you for a few hours to help you with things which are beyond your competence or require too much time. Will all this directly support the fight for accessibility? Not necessarily. But it will help you save on multiple other expenses and move at least small amounts into measures meant to improve the accessibility of your institution.

3. Grants and subsidies. Many cultural institutions take advantage of them. This is because no matter how demanding it is to prepare applications, carry out projects and settle them, they make it possible to implement things that lie completely outside the standard financial capabilities of many entities. If you have never executed projects before, then first of all, it is worth learning how to draft them and implement them in a training instead of wasting time, energy and enthusiasm for not knowing how to do it but hoping that it might work. Secondly, I encourage you to start with simple

grants that do not cost too much, e.g., those organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage or the National Center for Culture. Thirdly, projects may include hiring (based on civil law contracts as opposed to employment contracts – unless it's an additional task or secondment for existing employees) animators, experts and creators as well as people who will support you in ensuring accessibility within the projects, including sign language interpreters, audio description specialists, specialists for the development of digitally accessible materials written in plain language, which are easy to read and understand, assistants, caregivers or even accessibility coordinators assigned to particular projects (as opposed to the institution as a whole). You can gradually equip yourselves with gear as well.

In the pool of grants for the following years, you will find a lot of programs to implement soft measures (organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the National Center for Culture, the Ministry of Education, different foundations, etc.), but also those dedicated to improving infrastructure (organized by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the National Center for Culture and the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled People) as well as large programs financed by the EU, e.g., Krajowy Plan Odbudowy (KPO – the National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Poland) and its part dedicated to cultural measures or the programs to aid the development and modernization of infrastructure. You can either apply for them yourselves or your town or commune can do it, subsequently implementing measures included in the project at your institution. Sometimes such programs don't explicitly mention spending money to increase accessibility. For instance, you will usually be able to use the funds obtained as part of the programs intended for the thermal modernization of buildings to replace doors with new level-access ones which open automatically, and so on.

Dom Kultury + Inicjatywy lokalne (Community Center + Local Initiatives) is an interesting program by the National Center for Culture which you can use to analyze your local community (in terms of, e.g., people with special needs) and then implement socio-cultural initiatives to benefit the residents of your neighborhood, village, commune, town, or even city together with the local community. The advantage of this program is that you will be supported by a cultural

animator assigned to you by the National Center for Culture. Additionally, you can hire some researchers to prepare or conduct the analysis.

4. As an institution, you can also organize fundraisers and fairs or sell products and use the income for a specific accessible activity or event. You should remember this in order to act fast in the context of budget planning and your situation.

6. How not to burn in the fire of action

Implementing and managing accessibility is a long-term, time-consuming process that requires some discipline from the entire team. It can also be stress-ful, and it often requires people to be involved in it intensively and to constantly acquire new knowledge. Finally, it can be a considerable challenge as well – depending on the facility and those who manage it. That is why it's so important that the person in charge of accessibility in each institution remembers about themselves, their needs and well-being and that they know how to fight for these things at times.

I have already written a lot about the implementation of accessibility, and I encourage you to read other studies, tips, good practices, etc., in order to get to know different perspectives or implementation models. To put it simply: From all this knowl-edge, choose what may work best for you, what resonates with your institution, the team and the community. What about accessibility management or coordination? In addition to what you can read on the previous pages, I suggest using several tools that organize what needs to be done and what has already been done, allowing you to oversee the accessibility of your events on a regular basis as well.

Coordinating accessibility will be much easier if:

•   you use virtual platforms for project management – they will work especially well if your team is scattered, if you work shifts and do not always meet at

work, or if you work remotely sometimes. Although the idea of these tools sounds complicated, they are often simple and intuitive to use, offer free knowledge bases on how to use them, and are free in their basic versions designed for smaller teams. For small teams, the following tools will prove particularly useful: Google, Asana, Trello, Slack or ClickUp;

- you organize team meetings – it might sound obvious, but they are not practiced everywhere. Once in a while, you might want to gather and discuss different issues, check if everything is going according to plan, if someone needs support or is willing to help others, or if something important has come up that can change the course of action that you have planned. It is also a good time to talk about the results of the evaluation that you perform after your events;

- you find time for individual conversations with the employees of your institution. Firstly, you will know how the implementation is going, and secondly, you will find out whether particular people know and understand what to do and why. Remember that things which are self-explanatory to some people are often very complicated to others!

- arrange that, for instance, you always check important dates, update the Accessibility Declaration (if necessary) and tick off what you have done in the plan on the first day of every month;

- you plan substantial trainings or workshops at least three months in advance. At the same time, you should regularly send information about and links to webinars, online meetings, materials, conferences, etc., to your colleagues. Moreover, you can agree to meet once in a while and watch a webinar together on a big screen;

- you stay up to date on what is happening locally in terms of accessibility – maybe there are new people or entities working on accessibility and it's worth contacting them? Maybe they can support you in your undertakings?

And now I will give you a few heartfelt tips, which have also helped me.

- Give yourself enough time for implementation. Move slowly. Don't do everything at once because you will fail before you have finished the first task. It's often the case that as soon as we know that we should do something, we believe that it should happen immediately. Otherwise... Well, what could possibly happen?

- Have your team celebrate small successes and implementations. Was this the first time that you have ever held an event translated into Polish Sign Language? Go get a pizza. Have you received congratulations in writing from the local association of pensioners for organizing excellent classes for them? Frame them and hang them on the wall. Don't disparage yourselves, don't point out mistakes. Appreciate yourselves for taking up this accessibility challenge and giving as much of yourselves into it as you can right now.

- Get to know other accessibility people. I am convinced that it's a supportive community that you can always count on. Seriously. I mean the "top" and "well-known" specialists too! Engage in networking.

- Increase your knowledge – there are plenty of free trainings, conferences, workshops, webinars and other resources that you can use. After all, knowledge is a weapon in the fight against fear and ignorance.

- The words "I don't know, but I'll find out," that an excellent colleague of mine says a lot, should be your motto. My motto is: "I don't know, but I know someone who knows." If you're not sure about something and don't know where to start, consult someone who specializes in a given topic or has relevant experience which they concluded with at least some success.

- Every once in a while, drop everything and go to the mountains! Nothing is going to happen if you don't work on accessibility for two weeks. Seriously. I've checked! Just rest, take care of yourselves and your well-being. Neither your phones, nor your laptops, nor you will be able to work with your batteries depleted. I've checked that too.

A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS

We have discussed at length what some possible difficulties, potentials and resources of small towns and villages are as well as the consecutive steps of accessibility implementation – from the team preparation stage, through executing measures, their evaluation and financing accessibility, to useful tools you can employ to manage accessibility and how accessibility coordinators can take care of themselves.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to two issues: establishing accessibility based on local resources and accessibility as part of the local community's development. And although both of these issues have already been talked about here, it's worth dedicating another moment to them, if only because they provide arguments in favor of accessibility if someone hesitates whether this topic is important. The objective is not just to change the minds of some ignorant procrastinators, but also to possibly negotiate a better operational grant or have an earmarked subsidy for the implementation of accessibility allocated to you by the organizer. It's not just the activity of cultural institutions that should matter to a town or commune. Most of all, what matters is how much it benefits society considering its long-term impact and a real, positive change that it brings to the region over a few or even a dozen years.

Developing accessibility in cultural institutions in small towns and villages, if based on local resources, has great potential and brings many opportunities. It relies on taking advantage of the particular characteristics of a given community, its social activity and human capital so that culture becomes fully inclusive and accessible to all residents. This ties in with the concept of a social culture model, which is of particular importance in the context of cultural institutions in small towns and villages, as these areas often struggle with limited access to culture for various reasons. The objective of this model is not just to provide physical access, but also to encourage people to actively participate and co-create culture, which develops social relationships and strengthens local identity by naturally involving different groups in the process and organizing them around the common good.

Developing accessibility based on local resources is crucial to effectively implementing changes in cultural institutions and ensuring that they respond to the actual needs of the audience. Some key aspects of this approach include:

- working with local communities and non-governmental organizations with respect to discussing and recognizing potentials, resources and challenges – this allows for the implementation of measures which are both necessary and substantiated in order to spend public money in a rational manner;

- organizing volunteering activities as well as developing and strengthening mutual support networks – this has a positive influence on social awareness, self-organization skills and the skill of taking conscious grassroots action for different purposes. This often frees local governments and institutions of some of their tasks, thus allowing them to put their energy into other areas;

- activating and integrating groups at risk of exclusion, including people with disabilities and the elderly, contributes to their greater and/or longer-lasting independence, helps them maintain a sense of self-determination and agency and increases their desire to enrich the social life of their town or village. This in turn helps relieve the social security and healthcare systems and thus the budget of the commune, town or county;

- improving the knowledge, competencies and practical skills of people employed in cultural institutions and others working for the common good provides small towns and villages with qualified workers and experts, which increases their social and developmental capital.

Accessibility can also be seen as an element of community development. Not only does it give all citizens a chance to participate equitably in public, social and cultural life, but it also affects other areas of how communities function. These include:

- increased social activity and strengthened local identity – investments in culture and heritage play an invaluable role in shaping attitudes and encouraging real action for the improvement of accessibility. It is estimated that every third project co-financed by the EU increases the social activity of residents, and new offerings significantly improve the sense of local identity, also in areas threatened with marginalization which have had to deal with a dearth of cultural offerings;

- economic benefits – supporting the cultural sector has a significant but mainly indirect impact on the (local, regional, national) economy. Accessibility leads to an increase in social activity among the residents and thus brings benefits to businesses which cater to people who use local infrastructure and services. It may even improve job opportunities and increase the income of businesses operating in the area. Increased participation in events organized by cultural institutions, resulting from targeting a wider audience, has an influence on the budget of communes and makes them more attractive to tourists;

- fostering inclusivity, social responsibility and the cultural competence of communities – the issue of accessibility in cultural institutions should be included in their social responsibility and social awareness strategies. They should be the main centers of social change, where people with different needs not only take advantage of cultural offerings, but also "co-create" institutions, which reinforces the benefits of diversity as well as people's sense of influence and care for their little homeland;

- lower risk of poverty and social exclusion – rural areas and small towns still face problems in terms of access to public services, including cultural services, which leads to decreased access to personal or professional development. Accessibility measures aim at increasing people's activity, including raising their competence levels, which has a positive impact on their living conditions.

As you can see, accessibility is a broad and complex issue. In the context of cultural institutions (same as all others), you can't confine accessibility to just

one operational area, and by doing so, wrap up the discussion on whether it's important. Accessibility doesn't begin with big plans and massive investments. It starts at the very moment we reflect on what surrounds us, what language we use and whether we can look at the world from the perspective of others or remember how many times we have wondered why the reality around us is not more "user-friendly." Finally, by implementing accessibility, we care not only for people who need it here and now, but also for the next generations and for ourselves – those of us who will be there in the future. And although accessibility is a never-ending process of change, one thing is for sure – by introducing this change (even slowly, step by step), we make this world a better place for all of us.

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Agnieszka Zielonka-Mitura – cultural animator, educator, educationalist, art therapist, handicraft specialist, project specialist and accessibility coordinator at Teatr Ziemi Rybnickiej – Galeria Sztuki Rzeczna (the Rybnik Region Theater – Rzeczna Art Gallery) in Rybnik. She specializes in educational, artistic and activating measures addressed to people in late adulthood. On top of this, she supports small cultural institutions in implementing accessibility.

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