Inclusive theatre-making:
Translation, accessibility and beyond

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Abstract & Keywords

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"Inclusive design is a type of design that includes everyone in planning, designing, building and managing as well as those using the product or environment. With this input from the users along with the design team, the design will not bring attention to one specific type of person when a product is used or an environment is explored. With everyone's input in design, the product or environment will function easily for everyone". (Nussbaumer 2012: 33)

These simple words, taken from Linda Nussbaumer's *Inclusive Design: A Universal Need,* provide a comprehensive backdrop for the articles included in this special issue: observed from the perspective of writing, translating, or making a theatrical performance and/or event accessible, each instance of inclusive theatre-making represented in these seven articles offers insights into the ever-growing importance of participation and inclusion, for the benefit of everyone. Moreover, Nussbaumer's words provide valuable support to the great range of interdisciplinary approaches here represented: from translation studies to accessibility studies, from community development to sociology, from psychology to theatre studies, all articles highlight the importance of, and the actual need for, a truly interdisciplinary framework to study such a momentous, ongoing evolution as the one that is currently witnessed in research and practice.

As audiovisual translation studies evolves, yielding increasing space to media accessibility research in all its forms, and as translation studies itself lowers its fences to open up to collaborative, collective, inclusive practices, theatres across many countries explore more and more systematically ways, and strategies, for a true inclusion.

Back in the Nineties, in the wake of the increasing mediatization of global and national cultures, scholars in theatre studies engaged in the exploration of the notion of "liveness" (Fischer-Lichte 2004) in theatrical performances, stressing the great importance and impact of co-presence for audiences and artists, in an era of increasing distance in the enjoyment of media and the arts.

Today, despite the growing consumption of media and theatrical performances on an individual basis, often through screens of different formats, this notion of liveness can be revamped and expanded: liveness can be taken to represent not only co-presence in theatrical activities, but co-planning, co-creation, co-evaluation. In Fischer-Lichte's words, today theatrical performances should be considered as events in the sense that they belong to communities and have to be fully shared with them in as many ways as is possible. Thus, if audiences become diffused (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998), their boundaries being somewhat blurred, participation in theatrical events becomes synonym with growth and empowerment at many levels.

The notion of inclusive theatre-making moves precisely from these ideas and aims to stimulate interdisciplinary research which can and should lead to new theories, new methodologies and, perhaps most importantly, new practices.

With this special issue, we aim to gather theoretical, methodological and empirical reflections on the notion of inclusive theatre-making, with ample space for interlingual, intralingual and intersemiotic translation to be discussed from different interdisciplinary perspectives. Unlike those carried out on media, studies on theatre require true interdisciplinary competences even if they aim to remain on a general level: basic notions related to the staging of a show or an opera, as well as knowledge of a text and its origins, are essential when wishing to analyse any theatrical performance from a scientific standpoint.

The special issue opens with a comprehensive contribution by **Elena Di Giovanni**, which also aims to function as a position paper revolving around the notion of inclusive theatre-making, or inclusive theatrical practice. The article discusses a recent, distinguishable move away from traditional, barrier-centred notions of accessibility to media and live events, towards more inclusive paradigms and practices based on the principles of universal and inclusive design. After defining the notion of inclusive theatre-making, the paper introduces the concept of well-being as well as the tools and scales that can be used to measure it in relation to participation in inclusive theatrical activities. To promote advances in the study of people's reactions to, and appreciation of, inclusive practices in the field of media accessibility, the notion of well-being is analysed in relation to the results of an experiment carried out in Italy in 2021.

The contribution by **Marco Luchetti** and **Alex Turrini,** essentially rooted in economic studies, offers an interdisciplinary literature review of inclusive practices in in theatrical activities, whose ultimate aim is to design a framework for a managerial change in the arts sector and meet the ever-changing needs of diversity management. The authors firstly focus on inclusive strategies in theaters in theoretical and practical terms, then they move onto the exploration of organizational diversity in the third sector and its managerial implications. The relevance of this contribution for translation and media accessibility research is highlighted by the authors, thus providing a valuable reference study for further interdisciplinary explorations.

In the wake of some recent, user-centred proposals in the field of accessibility to media and the arts, based on concepts such as participatory accessibility (Di Giovanni 2018) and poietic design (Greco 2019), **Irene Hermosa Ramírez** and **Miquel Edo** aim to assess users' preferences for the audio description (AD) of *zarzuela*, a traditional Spanish form of operetta in one to three acts intermingling spoken dialogue with sung numbers. The article reports on a two-session focus group carried out with adults (55 to 64 and 65 to 74 age ranges) to gather preferences and good practices to be poured into the writing of AD.

Just as Hermosa and Edo, **Valeria Illuminati** focuses on audio description as a cornerstone of inclusive theatre(s). Her contribution aims at offering insights into the audio description of cultural and intertextual references, by analysing the strategies adopted in the AD for the play *La classe operaia va in paradiso* by Claudio Longhi. Drawing on this analysis, the author also attempts to discuss how integrating accessibility in the very creative process of a show can help make its performance truly and effectively inclusive.

The contribution by **Pierre-Alexis Mével**, **Jo Robinson** and **Paul Tennent** examines the use of inclusive technological solutions to promote accessibility on stage. Specifically, it concentrates on the interrelationship between innovation (understood in the article as the design and implementation of new technologies), practicality (how technology is integrated into workflows and its affordability) and entertainment (the way these new technologies are used to facilitate inclusiveness and immersion).

Alina Secară and **Emília Perez** discuss the potential of creative, integrated and inclusive access services for theatre performances in relation to shows that were staged in Slovakia and in the UK between 2019 and 2020. In relation to the Slovakian experience, the focus is on integrating deaf patrons in the design and organization of performances, with the support of sign language interpreters. The UK case-study, on the other hand, aims to outline a framework for an inclusive approach to creation based on shared experiences with directors and on the use of supportive technology. Ultimately, this article aims to highlight the opportunities for innovation and creativity integration can bring.

In the final contribution by **Manuel Boschiero**, **Jana Karšaiová**, **Massimo Salgaro** and **Nicoletta Vicentini**, the concept of inclusive theatre-making is broken down into the three levels on which the notion of inclusiveness can be seen to operate: the actual contents of a theatrical text; the production of a show, with the interactions between the text and the actors; and finally the representation in which the stage and the audience are connected and the text comes to life. These three levels allow inclusiveness to emerge as a versatile and enriching element in theatrical performances, especially when disabled and non-disabled actors collaborate with their different abilities by transforming the original text into a multisensory experience.

As the editors of this multi-faceted special issue on inclusive theatre-making, we wish, and hope, that all contributions here gathered will provide interdisciplinary stimuli, methodological insights and inspiration for further studies along the lines of collaboration and inclusion in translation and accessibility.

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