Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Exploring how accessible cultural practices impact on community development: The case of *InclusivOpera* at the Macerata Opera Festival in Italy

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ABSTRACT

The growing importance of inclusion for community development cannot be overcome, especially in areas characterized by cultural clashes, economic disparity, and urban marginalization. In this perspective improving community exposure to the arts and extending the access to cultural programs might play an important role. Arts accessibility might magnify important impacts on the community such as the (re)interpretation of the value of diversity, the enhancement of individual capacities through creativity, the empowerment of citizens' political and democratic participation, and the reinforcement of the sense of belonging of a community. On these grounds, the aim of our article is to describe and discuss what arts accessibility is and how the adoption of inclusive practices by arts institutions might improve community development programs. We also present a case study, the *InclusivOpera* project at the Macerata Opera Festival (MOF) in Italy, which stands as a critical case to understand how arts accessibility might trigger community development processes.

Introduction

Accessible good practices have been developed and experimented over the years among cultural institutions and today they represent the core of planning and design of many arts organizations' activities, in an attempt to break down and overcome every physical, sensory, and cognitive barrier (Colclough & Houpert, 2020). Having access means being able to use, interact with, and enjoy that good, in this case arts and the heritage (Greco, 2018). The so-called *accessibility revolution* entails that everyone should have "an adequate quantity and quality of that object a human right], given their particular natural and social circumstances" (Buitenweg, 2007, p. 269). Therefore, accessibility becomes a proactive principle, which calls for an equally proactive attitude from institutions to comply with that necessary requirement (Greco, 2016). As Linda Nussbaumer (2012) puts it, it is not simply a matter of adapting an existing service and making it accessible: it is a necessary process of

listening, it requires co-design and redesign with users, it involves sharing experiences and an inclusive approach that is a kind of continuous experiment, a methodology rather than a goal (Nussbaumer, 2012).

To exemplify such a shift, we can think of domains where it has already occurred and has been widely experimented: accessible filmmaking, for example, which has been theorized and applied over the past years is not only related to an appendix inserted in the post-production phase but an integral part of a film production (Romero-Fresco, 2019). In the same way contemporary theater production is often re-labeled as *inclusive theater-making* (Di Giovanni, 2021).

When we look at artistic and cultural productions, these new and already pervasive approaches can be adopted if a community development process revolves precisely around community cultural productions (Duconseille & Saner, 2020; Kumer, 2020; Webb, 2014). Designing accessible and inclusive artistic and cultural productions might generate significant impact on the community, including the (re)interpretation of the value of diversity, the enhancement of individual capacities through creativity, the enhancement of citizens' political and democratic participation, and the reinforcement of the sense of belonging of a community (Salzman & Yerace, 2018).

On these grounds, the aim of our article is to discuss how accessible and inclusive practices in the arts can enhance and shape community development processes.

We will first discuss the very notion of accessibility, its semantic implications, and its recent shift to inclusive forms of production of arts and culture. Subsequently, we will describe how arts and culture might contribute to community development processes. As will be made clear, the performing arts and theater in particular, seem to be particularly fertile grounds for community development and regeneration. In order to provide a specific set of examples, we will analyze the adoption of inclusive and accessible practices at the Macerata Opera Festival (MOF) in Italy, whose accessibility program has been growing steadily for 12 years. Since the beginnings in 2009, the Macerata Opera Festival has continuously experimented new paths and opportunities through its program called InclusivOpera (https://www.sferisterio.it/en/the-accessibility-at-macerata-opera-festival). The Festival has thus been offering accessible performances, multisensory tours, and a series of other inclusive activities, while also pouring this ongoing experience into academic research. This project stands out as a unique case and a reference point for various Italian and international cultural institutions. In the following sections we will discuss its theoretical premises and how they have been translated into accessible-turned-inclusive practices, which have substantially contributed to the general community development goal of the Macerata Opera Festival.

Accessibility to the arts: Definitions

Multiple definitions of accessibility have been provided over the past years, with reference to its many fields of application and the research domains it touches upon. As a matter of fact, as Betty Siegel, Director of VSA and Accessibility at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, remarks, "You cannot discuss accessibility in a vacuum. You need context" (Siegel, in Pressman & Schultz, 2021), and the contexts are all the more diversified today. In relation to media, for instance, providing accessibility means "improving access for certain social groups to information and to entertainment widely disseminated via the

Internet, on television, on computers, on cinema screens" (Diaz Cintas et al., 2007, p. 11). In relation to the arts, accessibility is a prominent concern given the power of arts to promote social cohesion and community development. Going back in time, and revamping one of the founding documents for accessibility, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) states that "everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits" (Article 27). Internationally, arts accessibility has experienced rapid growth in the number, variety, and modes of delivery of innovative access facilities for people with different abilities (Díaz Cintas & Neves, 2015).

In general terms, the notion of accessibility involves an effort to grant access to otherwise inaccessible places and services for people with disabilities, thus implying a move from a negative condition to a partial or (ideally) total condition of neutrality. Therefore, the notion of accessibility evokes physical, sensory, and cognitive barriers, among others, that need to be removed and it also highlights disability and its limitations.

In the past few years, both accessibility and disability have been subject to review, in conceptual as well as in practical terms. The concept of disability, for instance, has been associated more and more with permanent or temporary conditions (physical, situational, psychological) that can affect all individuals and less with a traditional view of disabilities or impairments. This is found, for instance, in the very definition of disability provided by the World Health Organization on their website:

> Disability is part of being human. Almost everyone will temporarily or permanently experience disability at some point in their life. Disability results from the interaction between individuals with a health condition such as cerebral palsy, down syndrome and depression as well as personal and environmental factors including negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social support.[1]

Thus, as the concept of disability itself widens, it loses its stringent association with physical, sensory, and psychological impairment, to become more universal and, therefore, more of a universal concern.

As for accessibility, the traditionally privative nature of its meaning has become increasingly blurred, as the need for access services, for instance, has turned steadily toward the notion of universality. Across the spectrum of disciplines studying accessibility and over the countless fields and places of its application, accessibility has turned from barrier-centered to people-centered, or, as Romero Fresco states, it has shifted "from a particularist account of access to a universalist account" (Romero Fresco, 2021, p. 291). Such an attitude can be largely identified in studies on architectural design, one instance of which can be found in the article by Gossett et al. (2009), whose very title is significant: "Beyond access: a case study on the intersection between accessibility, sustainability and universal design." Originating in design theory and referring specifically to the creation of equalitarian, universalistic office blocks to host the headquarters of a disability rights organization, this article lays the emphasis on the need to provide equal opportunities for all people, especially individuals with disability, first of all by supporting their participation in the design process. As the authors explain by describing their case study and the qualitative evaluation that followed, their aims were "addressing diversity through flexibility and universality, and segregationist accessibility versus universal design" (Gossett et al., 2009, p. 446). Thus, privative, or segregationist accessibility can and should be

reviewed in terms of universal design, a concern that is also at the core of a pivotal publication by Constantine Stephanidis (2009), *The Universal Access Handbook*. Moving from architectural design to the realm of information technology and the need for universal access, Stephanidis and the contributors included in his handbook provide a host of inspirational insights for a thorough redefinition of accessibility, first and foremost by stating that today "accessibility is not enough" (Stephanidis, 2009, pp. 2–5), and that moving from accessibility toward inclusive design and practices means shifting from a reactive to proactive approach, whereby access is not attached to services, products and events as an afterthought, often resulting in partial functioning. A proactive approach, for Stephanidis, is constructive, equalitarian and it does not move from a privative condition but from the belief that considering all abilities as equal, from design to fruition, can only benefit both design and fruition for all.

This is precisely the approach we are aiming to support and explain in this article, with special reference to theatrical activities for all carried out at the Macerata Opera Festival. Such a move from accessibility to universalistic, inclusive theater was partially discussed in previous articles (Di Giovanni, 2018a, 2018b); more specifically, by focusing on creative activities carried out with blind and non-blind children to make opera performances accessible for all, the notion of participatory accessibility was introduced. Moving along the methodological lines of action research, participatory accessibility was defined as follows: *"participatory accessibility refers to the design, creation, revision and consumption of access services in an inclusive way: the blind, partially sighted and non-blind; the deaf, hard of hearing and non-deaf; children and adults; they can all work together in the making of truly shared access services for the media, for live performances, for museums. In fact, when referring to participatory accessibility, even the word 'services' becomes inappropriate: what is created and enjoyed should rather be seen as an inclusive experience, not merely a service."* (Di Giovanni, 2018b, p. 156)

If participatory accessibility seems to turn the privative nuances embedded in the notion of accessibility into more constructive, positive ideas, a move toward the notion of inclusion in theaters seems to be even more appropriate and incisive. The term "accessibility" will thus be retained to refer, in general terms, to the need for access, and in more specific terms to work done on pre-existing entertainment services and venues. Inclusion, inclusive design, and inclusive practices are at the core of the following descriptions and should be the ultimate goal of future forms of universalistic theater-making, able to guide an inclusive community's development process.

Accessibility to the arts as a driver of community development

A community development process (defined as a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems[2]) is a process of broader inclusive dialog, with the aim to involve each and every member of the community – even the more marginalized and oppressed individuals – in the public debate (Azzopardi & Grech, 2012).

The importance of the arts as an engine of community development is nowadays universally shared. Artists are better able to listen to the community's diverse opinions and address local issues: they give voice to emerging needs relying on local experiences and history, showing possible paths to new solutions to overcome community challenges

(Müller, 2019). A comprehensive example of participation of artists in the inclusive development process of a suburban community in Rome is undoubtedly the Big City Life project created in the Tor Marancia, district of Rome, in 2015 (Borgonovi et al., 2021). The project consists in creating a condominium museum with 22 murals by international artists. Overcoming the function of embellishing the facades of social housing and bringing art to the suburbs, the murals tell and interpret the life of the inhabitants of the neighborhood, also with precise references to the people who populate it and who participated with their stories to the realization of the works, thus giving full meaning to the term condominium. In other words, thanks to the language of the arts artists interpreted the history and the needs of the local community, setting a future path for the neighborhood.

More extensive urban regeneration projects revolving around the arts are playing a fundamental role in inclusive community development strategies. The rejuvenation of public spaces through the arts or the creation of new art spaces in communities suffering from distress and decay have appeared to contribute to an inclusive community development (Turrini et al., 2015). Cultural social organizations, such as theaters or museums, offer alternative *art products* and cultural projects of inclusion and cultural education, redesigning public spaces. The development of *artistic wasteland* is particularly interesting in this sense: it started in Europe in the 1970s and consists of a group of artists/citizens/cultural associations, taking over abandoned factories to create a new space dedicated to collective creation and open to everybody (Turrini et al., 2015, p. 48). Artistic wastelands are cultural projects based on cooperation and mobilization of the local population, designing new forms of inclusive artistic expression.

Finally, the most famous example of both urban regeneration and cultural development is perhaps the Bilbao case, which is known for the iconic Guggenheim Museum opening in that city (Plaza, 2007). Since the 1970s, massive investments have redesigned the city and reshaped its community, changing its primary needs and making culture the base for a new development process, after the crisis of the local heavy industry. This successful experience pushed the municipality to invest in cultural projects for community development, such as the one in the Zorrotzaurre Island,[3] where young arts organizations are redesigning the architecture and the local community. Community development in the Bilbao region has been stunning, so that nowadays we can talk about a *Bilbao Effect* as a shared framework, commonly appreciated and debated all over the world (Grodach, 2017).

Among the different forms of arts, theater is increasingly considered as a tool for community development for its ability to support social change, development, and participatory practices (Sloman, 2012). Theaters interpret community needs and often become social spaces where everybody can play a role in the public debate. The combination of words, actions, images, music, and sometimes even smell and touch makes the theater a flexible art form, able to speak to everyone. Kattenbelt (2008) describes the theater as a *hypermedium*, a complex construction built on a stratification of different meanings (Reviers, Roofthooft and Remael, 2021 fc.). The theater, precisely because of the *human element* (Brook, 2005) that characterizes it, is by its very nature a space for discussion in different languages, sometimes replacing words with mimicry and music in the attempt to narrate a place or a community.

Precisely, the centrality of the artistic and theatrical product in the development of communities and territories has prompted scholars from all over the world to investigate the role of accessible theater in the community development processes and forced organizers and managers first to "translate" it and then to rethink it in an accessible way, to meet the needs of and give voice to those who are part of the community. Julie McCarthy (2004), Kees Epskamp (2006), Sloman (2012), Kabaso (2013) and others discussed the concept of *Theater for Development* (TfD), describing how a participatory, community-based, accessible, and inclusive theater can be a driving force for the development of the whole community, able to disseminate positive messages and conscientize communities. Following this path, theaters are nowadays reappropriating their public dimension and are turning into accessible spaces for accessible performances, implementing specific services and projects to serve local communities. *Social and Community Theater* is attentive to human growth in the cultural, artistic, and social dimensions; it has as its main values and principles the respect for differences, the inclusion and the contrast of inequalities. Under this wide definition, various forms of theater are included, which are used as a tool to address social needs (Van Erven, 2000). Since the 1950s, these theatrical forms, taking different names, have spread across Europe, the United States, and South America, operating within different social contexts to include people who live in fragile conditions. In recent years, in the field of performing arts, the tendency to act through art in social contexts has increased significantly to encourage cultural and social participation of citizens and promote community development processes. Since the 1970s, in the African States, Theater for Development projects were often conceived by huge worldwide organizations, such as WHO, UNICEF, and UNESCO, which successfully used theaters as tools of communication in community development projects (Kvam, 2012). By means of theaters, they share information and knowledge with everyone, even with illiterate people, addressing issues such as health, employment opportunities, farming efficiency, and instructing people in the use of new technologies (Kvam, 2012).

Either through inclusive theater practices or by enacting *artistic wasteland*, cultural institutions engaged in accessible practices and community development processes are forced to redesign and reconsider different aspects of their operations, such as programming strategies, way to produce cultural events, their governance and organizational models, and their marketing and audience development practices (Borgonovi et al., 2021). This change in their strategic orientation implies a new awareness about the specific needs of users but also a new attention about service design, which might concern very concrete actions such as making a physical space wheelchair accessible to creating all-gender restrooms and offering sliding-scale ticketing. Prioritizing accessibility in arts spaces begins some basic questions: Who comes to our events? Why do those people come to our events? Who doesn't come to our events? Why do those people not come to our events? (Lazard, 2019). A cultural organization capable of replying "creatively" to these questions can certainly contribute to the inclusive development of its community through an art that is by its very nature inclusive. Too often, in the artistic and cultural world, many organizations implement accessibility measures just to protect themselves legally; they do not see accessibility as an indispensable way to experience art, in a mutual process of creation and understanding. Others adopted accessibility measures to face a significantly diminished audience (Lazard, 2019), in order to reach new visitors by diversifying their

offer. Accessibility represents a successful path for the future development of cultural institutions which has to be part of their core activity in order to better represent the whole community.

In the following section, we will present the case of InclusivOpera at Macerata Opera Festival to give evidence on how accessibility programs might foster community development.

When arts accessibility meets community development: The case of InclusivOpera at Macerata Opera Festival

Macerata Opera Festival (MOF) is one of the most acclaimed opera festivals in Italy. MOF represents an identarian element for the regional territory and in recent years succeeded in addressing its activities to the overall community, beyond the theater, thanks to many different projects: flash mobs, public concerts, crossover activities, and active participation of the citizens in the opera productions are some of the community development activities the theater has run in recent years.

In particular, as discussed elsewhere (Di Giovanni, 2018a, 2021; Raffi, 2021), for over 10 years, MOF has been leading the way in expanding and diversifying its audience through accessibility and inclusive services through a unique project, known officially since 2016 as InclusivOpera. The main aim of the project is to open up the opera experience to the widest possible audience, particularly regarding people with sensory, physical, and cognitive impairments, non-Italian speakers, children, and young adults with and without sensory disabilities.

Activating transformative community processes requires long-term investments of time and resources in experimentation, learning, and growing. Since 2009, in line with the social model of disability, the project has sought to make the theater experience as welcoming and accessible as possible for the whole audience.

As discussed in the previous sections, accessibility has moved from being an afterthought reflecting a concern over inaccessible environments (i.e. barrier-free design approach) to a more holistic group of processes and solutions aiming at designing environments that are functional for all people and would not require future retrofitting or alteration (i.e. people-centered design approach).

Therefore, an approach to product and service creation that is led by processes based on inclusive design is crucial to the adoption of accessible practices, which can contribute to the inclusive development of the community. Inclusive design extends services and solutions to everyone rather than focusing on specific disabilities, thus providing a diversity of solutions to participate, so that "everyone has a sense of belonging" (Goltsman, cited in Holmes, 2018, p. 53).

Inclusive design relies on seven main principles (Story et al., 1998) to create spaces, services, and experiences that can be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible. This means providing an equal way for users to access features and information, not segregating any group of people because of personal restrictions and/or device capabilities (Equitable Use). Users should also have a choice on how and when they access features; therefore, flexibility ensures a more pleasant experience (Flexibility in Use). Inclusive design should also be intuitive to all users: the simpler the design is, the more likely users are to achieve their goals (Simple and Intuitive Use). This implies providing

information which is as easy to digest as possible (Perceptible Information) and which cannot be irreversibly damaged by accidental or unintended actions (Tolerance for Error). The design should also be used efficiently and comfortably by everyone, minimizing physical and mental effort (Low Physical Effort); this implies taking into consideration different body sizes, postures, and mobility to output a final product/service/experience that is effectively usable by a great number of people (Size and Space for Approach and Use).

Therefore, stemming from the principles of inclusive design, four main strategies should guide the creation of inclusive programs: applying the social model of disability; creating and providing non-exclusive and flexible services; consulting people with different abilities and involving them at all levels; and collecting feedback from "consumers" and "prosumers." These strategies are non-hierarchical, interrelated, and aim at placing people at the heart of the design process; acknowledging diversity and individual differences; offering choices when a single design solution cannot accommodate all users; and ensuring flexibility in use (adapted from Patrick & Hollenbeck, 2012). This framework can guide different actions and practices depending on various factors that include, among others, the context (e.g. theaters, museums, or heritage sites), the audiences and communities who usually engage with it, and organizational aspects (see Section 2).

According to the social model of disability (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001), stemming from the *Fundamental Principles of Disability* document first published in the mid-1970s (UPIAS, 1976), it is not the individual that is disabled, but the environment that is disabling due to attitudinal, environmental, and sociocultural barriers. As Corey Timpson[4] puts it: "Rather than designing and developing something and then figuring out how to make it accessible, we [should] design with a consideration to all audiences and all vectors of human difference from the outset so that we don't have to make compromises down the road." The InclusivOpera project applies this social model of disability as a way of considering the whole theater audience in a broad, inclusive-design way. This includes, among others, people who are approaching opera for the first time or are not familiar with it, and who may benefit from downloadable audio introductions as well as live surtitles in Italian and English. This will not only further the empowerment of patrons with different abilities but also benefit the entire audience: if services are designed with inclusivity in mind, the varied abilities of each person are taken into account at the outset and the resulting service can be used by everyone regardless of their differences in ability.

Audience diversity is central to the design of inclusive programs. Considering that different users have different needs, this means offering non-exclusive and flexible services, which can be completely independent but add great value when combined. Non-exclusive services create a permanent inclusive environment for everyone instead of special and temporary opportunities of inclusion. Flexibility also supports the evolving needs of people and communities engaging with a given theatrical activity, including, among others, those of an aging population. As explained in the following paragraphs, the InclusivOpera project offers a variety of services, with particular reference to given community groups (people with sensory and cognitive impairments, non-Italian speakers, and children), which are non-exclusive and flexible by nature. This means that all people, including (but not exclusively) those mentioned above, can enjoy the same experience when attending the same performance, and these services can be adapted to their needs (e.g. using or not using the audio description service).

All opera performances are audio described live in Italian (audience members are provided with a user-friendly receiver and mono headsets), with downloadable audio introductions also available online in Italian and English. These introductory descriptions provide listeners with information about the history of the opera, its plot, its original creators, and the production on stage, from set and costume designs to the director's vision of the opera and the interpretations of the set and costume designers. Blind and partially sighted people are actively involved right from the earliest stages as audio introduction/description editors, proofreaders, and co-writers. In addition, they act as voice-over talents by recording the texts themselves. Audio descriptions can benefit everyone, not only people with visual impairments, for instance, audience members who are seated far from the stage may experience a situational vision impairment. The same applies to audio introductions, which can help the whole audience to better appreciate the performance on stage. In line with the principles of inclusive design, both services contribute to creating an equal and flexible environment by offering a minimal level of intrusion into the experience while enabling people with permanent, temporary, or situational needs to enjoy the performance.

Intralingual (in Italian) and interlingual surtitles (in English) are projected onto the big wall of the Sferisterio arena for all opera performances, and audience members can optimize intelligibility and sound quality thanks to Sennheiser's MobileConnect technology. These services are once again informed by the social model of disability. In fact, audience members, far from having separate issues and interests, may face common problems. The absence of surtitles can negatively affect the experience of deaf and hard-of-hearing people but also of those audience members who need to see and hear the content to better understand it, either because of learning/cognitive difficulties or because they are experiencing a situational impairment (e.g. they are not familiar with the opera on stage). These solutisons are thus flexible and nonexclusive since they create a permanent inclusive environment and experience for everyone instead of "special performances." Surtitles can in fact benefit older adults, among others, whose ability to understand the singers on stage may be progressively compromised by age-related hearing problems. The same applies to personal hearing aids, such as Sennheiser devices, which allow the audio signal to be easily adjusted according to individual hearing needs, thus enhancing speech intelligibility and sound quality for everyone.

In 2012, the theater also began to welcome audiences with fully guided theme-based multisensory tours.[5] In collaboration with *Museo Statale Tattile Omero* (Ancona, Italy), these tours also include three different typologies of tactile maps and drawings[6] to provide a comprehensive guide to the layout of the Sferisterio arena, the location of the theater within the city, and the key elements of set design. Many are involved in the planning and creation of the tours, at all levels: from artists and theater technicians to people with different abilities who act as consultants and, in recent years, guides for the tours thanks to the variety of their own distinctive skills. Therefore, following the social model of disability, everyone is engaged in the creative and interactive process, thus enhancing empowerment for the benefit of individuals and communities (see Section 3), and promoting collaboration to provide nonexclusive and flexible solutions, which emphasize the importance of all audience members as owners of their experience.

Since 2018, in collaboration with Opera Domani,[7] InclusivOpera has been organizing inclusive workshops to create audio descriptions with children, including (but not exclusively) those with visual and hearing impairments. They are invited to join in with the creation of verbal descriptions for characters, settings, costumes, and actions, before accompanying the performance on stage a week later. A discussion on colors, adjectives, important traits, sounds, and action is developed, including all children, their parents, and friends. These workshops also feature a recording session in which the children are involved as voice-over talents in the recording of the audio descriptions. During the actual shows, those children taking part in the workshop are offered free seats and headsets to follow the performance, sing along and dance, while reading the surtitles and listening to their own audio description. This means that all children, including their families and friends, have the same choices, quality of experience, and opportunities to enjoy the show as everyone else.

In 2021, InclusivOpera has taken its mission to a new level with the *Inclusive Guides* program. First, participants (i.e. young people with vision and hearing impairments) completed a two-day course on practical guiding and planning skills, covering the variety of communication techniques used in inclusive design. They also participated in exercises on shared understanding of permanent, temporary, and situational impairments (Shum et al., 2016), developing visits, tours, and itineraries through the lens of inclusive guiding. The course was highly interactive to allow sharing of best practices among different agents, consultants, and experts including associations of persons with disabilities and young adults with different abilities and skills. The course also offered an opportunity to explore tools for reflection and for acting creatively in an efficient and effective way, taking into account different needs. Within 1 month of the course, participants set up and conducted real tours at the *Musei Civici di Palazzo Buonaccorsi* with a heterogeneous group of people: children, young people, adults, and elderly people. These tours were inclusive and enjoyable for as many individuals as possible and encouraged the use of all senses in a non-exclusive and flexible way. Therefore, the *Inclusive Guides*program empowers all people by increasing participation in decision-making – which can feed into new collaborations and different forms of relationships with stakeholders and audiences that are normally excluded from governance and participation, thus contributing to community development (see Section 3).

As previously discussed, inclusive design principles place users at the center of design processes rather than at the margins (see Section 2). Users must have the ability to "take control of their environments" (Hatch, 1984: 4) and designers must rethink their relationships with those who they design for, with direct implications for the cultural and social fabric of inclusive programs and their communities (see Section 3). Through their lived experiences, people with different abilities are in fact the experts in proposing and co-creating solutions to match design intentions and user intentions, thus resolving points of exclusion. Engaging all users throughout the planning process is important to ensure that the design accurately reflects community values and addresses community priorities and needs (see Section 3). Therefore, inclusive projects must be guided by the "nothing about us without us" approach (Charlton, 1998), according to which persons with different abilities are actively involved in the development and implementation of products, services, and policies concerning them, thus stimulating the evolution from "users" to "prosumers" in line with the notion of participatory accessibility (see Section 2). The

InclusivOpera project has always adopted a co-production model in which associations of people with disabilities, along with users with different abilities and audience members are engaged and involved in both decision-making and creative processes as "experts by experience" thanks to their different abilities and skills, as well as in revision and reception evaluation processes by analyzing issues, generating visions, developing plans, and monitoring outcomes.

Feedback can considerably improve the planning and effectiveness of inclusive programs and empower both "consumer" and "prosumer" groups (who act as evaluators) by increasing their participation in decision-making. This should be seen as an ongoing process, rather than an occasional, one-off event; it should examine different variables and incorporate inclusive practice principles and guides. As for the InclusivOpera project, feedback collection measures users' preferences and opinions, in addition to their emotional responses to the experience (e.g. a live performance or a multisensory tour). Furthermore, feedback collection assesses the well-being of both consumers (e.g. the audience) and prosumers (e.g. the "inclusive guides") using subjective indicators about feelings, experiences, and judgments about life before and after a given experience (e.g. attending a live performance or leading a guided tour). The InclusiveOpera project also includes feedback collection to assess not only users' preferences and opinions on the experience (e.g. a live performance or multisensory tour) but also the well-being of those participating using subjective indicators to evaluate their feelings, experiences, and judgments based on the Life Scale and Subjective Happiness Scale as well as the Smiley Face Likert Scales. This helps to evaluate the impact of the project and measure changes in participants' feelings and experiences over time in order to detect increases and decreases in positive/negative scores with medium to large effect sizes. A holistic and inclusive approach by combining different methods is adopted (e.g. questionnaires printed on paper, smiley feedback surveys, one-to-one interviews, short in-app surveys, among others) through considering the diversity of both consumers and prosumers to make it easier for them to give their feedback in a simple and intuitive way. This inclusive feedback collection helps reach out to groups which might not always have a voice in community governance; this is key not only to ensure a participatory and comprehensive planning process but also to involve community members taking collective action. In fact, community development takes place most productively when an array of social and cultural backgrounds, personal characteristics, and varying abilities are involved and actively participate in the development process.

Final remarks

This article has aimed at highlighting the great importance of promoting and supporting community development processes through the adoption of accessible-turned-inclusive practices.

After highlighting the need for more accessibility in the arts, with a special focus on the performing arts, a paradigmatic shift from accessibility toward inclusion and inclusive design, also in theatrical organization and performances, has been discussed, with the aim to foster ever-more systematic and strong community development through inclusive theaters. From a focus on barriers to one on diversity as an added value, from the services to the people, inclusive design has been brought to the fore and its principles applied to

the definition of core strategies for the implementation of inclusive theater programs by adopting a people-centered approach, as it puts the needs of all audience members up front and center.

Our case study, i.e. the InclusivOpera project by the Italian Macerata Opera Festival, has helped highlight activities, ideas, best practices but also shortcomings, all of them to be possibly poured into the design of new, inclusive theater programs.

Originating from different disciplinary competences and reference frameworks, brought together by the practice of inclusive theater-making at the Macerata Opera Festival, this article has no claim to scientific thoroughness. However, its aim is to shed light on the added value that originates from practical activities based precisely on different background competences and their cross-fertilization. Indeed, accessibility, inclusion, and community development are broad concepts that allow for multiple interpretations and applications, thus providing multiple-entry points for people with a variety of preferences, skills, and levels of ability.

Both the methodological insights and the practice here explained hope to lay one more brick in the pathway to ever-more effective, empowering community development through inclusion.

Endnotes

1. https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1 (last visited 16.08.2021).
2. Definition of community development given by United Nations, UNTERM (2014).
3. https://www.zorrotzaurre.com/en/
4. https://www.frogdesign.com/designmind/inclusive-design (last visited 21.08.21).
5. All tours are free and available for up to 35 people, while tickets for the performances are available at a reduced rate.
6. Tactile explorations are structured around three main steps: first, visitors read the braille lettering on the top of the map/drawing; then, they familiarize themselves with the overall map/drawing by quickly touching the whole surface; finally, they focus on each element of the map/drawing, going from general elements to particular ones, and vice versa.
7. The aim of *Opera Domani*, within the framework of the *Opera Education* project, is to educate children and young adults from 6 to 14 years of age and to enhance their enjoyment of opera at all levels. For further information, see https://www.operaeducation.org/it/progetti/opera-domani/.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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