Inclusive Theatres as Boosters of Well-Being: Concepts and Practices

🆔 **Elena Di Giovanni**✉
University of Macerata

🆔 **Francesca Raffi**✉
University of Macerata

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Abstract

With the surge in media accessibility studies, researchers have explored the possibility of using psychological indicators to study modes of production, consumption, and reception of audiovisual and accessible media texts. However, most of the methodologies and measures applied so far tend to evaluate perception and/or reception in the short term, i.e., immediately after viewing media texts or attending live performances. This article moves from previous articles on inclusive theatres (Di Giovanni, 2021; Raffi, 2021) and sets forth to evaluate individuals' reactions to inclusive activities in the medium to long-term. To this end, the concept of well-being becomes central, along with some of the measures and tools so far employed to measure it outside the realm of accessibility studies.

Key words: media accessibility, inclusive theatre, reception studies, audience participation, subjective well-being.

✉ elena.digiovanni@unimc.it, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5823-0082
✉ f.raffi@unimc.it, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7704-4648

1. Introduction

The history of theatre audiences and their roles in receiving, appreciating, shaping, and even co-creating performances, is virtually as long as human history itself. In the ever-recurring cycles of history (Vico, 1975), theatres in different countries and regions of the world have seen these roles mutate: from marking a clear distance between performers and audiences, to striving in many ways to make the latter co-designers and co-protagonists. Books, magazines and chronicles are filled with extraordinary accounts that are, *de facto*, part of social and cultural evolution worldwide. As Caroline Helm recalls,

> Throughout history audiences have played many additional character roles that lie outside of the traditional audience-as-audience role. In addition to being critics, community, consumers and co-creators, audiences have also been cast as voyeurs, celebrants, participants, and witnesses. Individual iterations of all of these roles have been occluded, celebrated, suppressed, cultivated, ridiculed, and privileged at different times throughout theatre history. (Helm, 2016, p. 39).

To cast a quick eye over some historical milestones, in the early 20th century Filippo Tommaso Marinetti added to the Futurist Manifesto a section dedicated to the *Teatro di Varietà* (1913), where, among other aims, he came up with a number of ways to make theatre audiences spontaneous co-performers. He proposed, for instance, to sell the same seat to ten people, so as to lead them all to enact a live quarrel or even a fight. Additionally, he suggested that seats may be covered with different types of powders causing itching and sneezing, again to stimulate the audiences' enactment of extemporaneous feelings as well as their own personalities, all of this intended as a unique complement to any pre-set performance (Fischer-Lichte, 2003, p. 28).

In the past decades, theatre studies, as well as the very practice of theatre-making, have moved rather steadily towards audience participation at numerous levels (Di Giovanni, 2018). This participatory thrust has many reasons behind it: to expand audiences and boost outreach, to diversify and innovate productions, to stimulate new forms of engagement and reception. However, as Fischer-Lichte points out (2003, p. 33), such a trend has also led to the blurring of the very notion of performance, where roles are no longer pre-established and clear-cut: the performance, says the author, thus turns into an *event* in which the receiver is directly involved, along with the creators and actors, in the same space and at the same time. Audiences are cast as "vital performers in the theatrical experience" (Helm, 2016, p. 41).

This move towards articulated and steady participation, more evident within certain theatrical contexts and genres, has also encompassed special audiences, or rather audiences with special skills, such as persons with sensory disabilities. From New York's Broadway scene to London's West End, but also from Brazil to Israel, Australia and Japan, many a theatre or festival today feature performances, or rather events, that see persons with sensory disabilities directly involved as *vital performers*, in various ways.

It is precisely to encompass persons with different skills that turn from spectators into co-creators and co-protagonists that this article uses the word *audience* in its explicitly plural form (audiences): one of our aims is to highlight and discuss multiple opportunities for theatre participation for persons with a variety of sensory skills. Moving from previous studies in theatre-making and accessibility, the ultimate aim of this article is to prove that it is time to move beyond the well-established practices of feedback collection immediately or soon after a performance or event. By reporting on a two-month experiment with young people with sensory disabilities who were trained to be inclusive guides in theatres, our aim is to reflect on the impact of such events, and of participation, on people's lives in the medium to long-term. We will do so by relying on the concept of well-being and its application to experimental research.

After this introductory section, in Section 2 the move from the notion of accessibility to that of inclusion is discussed. In the wake of with this paradigmatic shift, Section 3 focuses on the relationship between inclusive theatre and subjective well-being (SWB), also discussing a number of definitions and theoretical traditions related to the evaluation of SWB. In Section 4, SWB is further examined, and several ways to measure it are discussed, especially in relation to the experiment reported in Section 5. Finally, some conclusions are drawn (Section 6)[1].

2. The (R)Evolution of Accessibility: From Barrier-Centred Approaches to the People

Originating in the early days of this new century, research on media accessibility has truly blossomed in the past years, reaching maturity and benefiting from an ever-more diversified interdisciplinarity. Although only two decades old, media accessibility research (MAR) has gone a long way: from the early days of a great attention to guidelines and basic principles for the provision of access services, onto a thorough understanding of the end-users' needs, then over to a focus on the training of accessibility operators, MAR has certainly widened its scope and welcomed new, often not-so-close theoretical and methodological approaches. More recently, a steady move has been made away from traditional notions of access, towards more universalistic, creative, participatory approaches.

Within such approaches, attention has switched from the barriers to the people, and from a barrier-centred view to one that is focused on people's diverse abilities; the perspective has changed radically. Such a switch is, however, nothing new if seen in a broader context: it was recorded a few decades ago in domains such as architectural design and urban planning (Follett, 1998; Ivarsson & Stahl, 2003), and more recently also in the field of entertainment and theatre studies. One interesting example lies in Gareth White's book *Audience Participation in Theatre* (2013) where participation is defined both "as everyday social action and as action within the extra-everyday space of the

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[1] The authors discussed and conceived this essay together. In particular, Elena Di Giovanni is responsible for sections 1, 2, and 4, Francesca Raffi for sections 3, 5, and 6.

performance" (White, 2013, p. 6), i.e., as both an extraordinary fictional experience that is nonetheless potentially open to all, and a social activity that can benefit all and enhance well-being.

More specifically, we can state that MAR within translation studies has recorded a departure from privative, or even segregationist (Gossett et al., 2009) notions of accessibility: this can be traced in the writings of Gian Maria Greco (2016) where accessibility is seen as a basic requirement for the respect of human rights, in those of Remael and Reviers, where media accessibility is related to accessible design (2019), but also in the notions of coaccessibility (Okyayuz & Kaya, 2020), participatory accessibility (Di Giovanni, 2018) and creative media access (Romero Fresco, 2021). Although applying various methodologies and using slightly different terminology, all these writings converge on the move from traditional accessibility to inclusion and inclusive practices, where people are at the core, with their host of diverse sensory abilities that thus become assets, not barriers.

Shifting the attention from the barriers to the people indeed means moving from a negative starting point to one that is neutral: accessibility in its broadly accepted, traditional sense, means granting entrance to what is normally inaccessible, thus moving from a negative to a possibly neutral position. On the other hand, planning in inclusive terms, placing the people and their diverse abilities at the core, means moving from a neutral standpoint to proactively reach more positive conditions for as many individuals as possible.

Some scholars have recently advocated that focusing on the people when designing places, services or activities may also be considered reductive (Wakkary, 2021), as it may lead to neglecting the role of non-human beings and objects at various levels. For the sake of this study, and for the current evolution of media accessibility research, we deem appropriate to fully support the shift from barrier-centred to people-centred approaches in research and practice, as they imply one step forward and an unprecedented openness that, at this stage, can only benefit the field. Moreover, these approaches also imply a deeper attention to the individuals, their skills and needs in any experience, from the theatrical one to all others. Finally, favouring people-centred approaches, in line with the principles of inclusive design (Nussbaumer, 2012) also opens up to more thorough ways of considering the impact of such experiences on people's lives in the medium to long-term, which is precisely the goal of this study.

3. Inclusive Theatres as Purveyors of Well-Being: Definitions

The notion of well-being is nowadays central in a host of areas of work, training, social debate and theoretical reflection, the main reason being the cross-disciplinary nature and the elasticity of the concept itself. Attracting the interest of scholars from the health sciences, but also from philosophy, sociology, psychology and many more disciplines, well-being is a key issue in activities and projects at all levels, including international funding schemes[2].

On the other hand, by virtue of being so flexible and comprehensive, the concept of well-being also proves "intangible, difficult to define and even harder to measure" (Thomas, 2009, p. 11). One of the earliest attempts at defining well-being can be attributed to Bradburn (1969), who defined psychological well-being as parallel to Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia and set to outline it by practically observing how people coped, and succeeded, in their everyday tasks. For Bradburn (1969, p. 6), psychological well-being was synonymous with happiness, just like Aristotle saw eudaimonia as comprising both the ideas of well-being and happiness. This, as we shall see, is partially in contrast with many subsequent definitions of well-being, that see happiness as one of its components but not as the equivalent concept.

In 1989, Carol D. Ryff was one of the first to define psychological well-being by listing its constituents, namely autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, realisation of potential and self-acceptance. Grounded in social psychology, her early work dating back to the Eighties still partially equated well-being with happiness. The great merit of her work, which she further elaborated in the following years, is that it offered sub-categories that were easily operationalized to be analytically measured.

To date, one of the most prolific scholars who have defined and studied well-being is Ed Diener, who has published extensively on the subject since the 1980s (1984, 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009). Working from the perspective of psychology just like Bradburn and Ryff, Diener's approach most exclusively revolved around the notion of *subjective well-being*, which is still one of the most widespread and widely used definitions, applied across a host of disciplinary areas. As Diener et al. stated in 2003,

> The field of subjective well-being (SWB) comprises the scientific analysis of how people evaluate their lives: both at the moment and for longer periods, such as for the past year. These evaluations include people's emotional reactions to events, their moods, and judgements they form about their life satisfaction, fulfillment [...]. Everyone's moods, emotions and self-evaluative judgements fluctuate over time; SWB researchers study these fluctuations but also examine the longer-term mean level differences that exist between individuals and societies. (2003, p. 404)

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[2] See, for instance, the many research paths that prioritise the notion of well-being within the European Union most recent Horizon funding scheme (European Commission, 2001).

The great value of the definition above, for the purpose of this study, resides primarily in three elements: first of all, it highlights the importance of self-evaluation in a scientific approach to measuring well-being, which, as we shall see, can be elicited by the researcher in several ways. Secondly, it lays emphasis on the short but also long-term effects of events and other circumstances that generally enhance well-being. This is precisely one of the principal goals of this article and the experiment it reports, i.e., to move beyond empirical measures of perception, comprehension, immersion, and similar categories which have been so far applied to the experimental study of media accessibility or categories that are related to immediate or semi-immediate reactions but do not cater for medium or long-term effects on people's lives. The third element that is worth underlining, in the definition above, is the use of the word *event*, which takes us back to our first section and to Fischer-Lichte's preference for the term *event* over *performance,* for a greater emphasis on participation. As a matter of fact, the notion of event is wider and more comprehensive: it can refer to participation in the conceptual design of a theatre show or to interaction during a multisensory tour, for instance. Moreover, in an event, roles tend to be less fixed, compared to what normally happens in a performance: an event is, therefore, generally less normative, more flexible. Finally, an event normally leaves space for the unforeseen, precisely by allowing for participation and interaction by a variety of individuals even without too much planning.

In this and other discussions of SWB, Kushlev et al. also lay emphasis on differences between mean levels of well-being across nations, cultures and social groups (2021). This is indeed an interesting aspect to consider, when aiming to measure and understand SWB in relation to groups of persons with special skills and needs, such as the blind and partially sighted and the deaf and hard of hearing. Among the causes for differences between cultures, for instance, Kushlev et al. include the so-called self-serving bias, i.e., a tendency to rate oneself as relatively better if compared to members of other cultural groups. By contrast, they also reflect on self-critical tendencies in self-evaluations, which may also be useful to understand some of the data obtained by surveying young individuals with disabilities that we present in the next sections.

With reference to the relationship between the notion of well-being and that of happiness, in 1999 Diener et al. redefined the many components of SWB, which comprised three macro-elements, namely pleasant affect, unpleasant affect and life satisfaction (1999, p. 277). Within the category of pleasant affect, Diener et al. place joy, elation, contentment, pride, affection, happiness, and ecstasy, whereas unpleasant affect includes guilt and shame, sadness, anxiety and worry, anger, stress, depression, and envy. Life satisfaction, on the other hand, features a desire to change, satisfaction with current life, satisfaction with past, satisfaction with future and other views on one's life. As the terms above clearly show, differences between components that can be evaluated in the search for an understanding of SWB are rather subtle, and they should not always be taken into consideration all at the same time. As Diener et al. further specify,

Formerly researchers were searching for the core of SWB, but it is clear that there are multiple components that combine in complex ways, and that no single one of them reflects "true happiness." Instead, SWB must be studied as a multi-faceted phenomenon. People combine the basic building blocks of SWB in different ways. (2009, p. 70).

In the following section, subjective well-being will be examined precisely as a multi-faceted phenomenon and ways to measure it will be discussed, in relation to the experiment carried out and reported in the final part of this article.

4. How to Measure Subjective Well-Being?

Since the report delivered by the Sarkozy Commission in 2009 (Krueger & Stone, 2014), which recommended adding well-being measures to existing indicators of societal progress, researchers have been engaged in defining a comprehensive set of measures for SWB that could be valid and comparable at national and international level.

As anticipated in the previous section, SWB, precisely by virtue of being a subjective measure, is primarily concerned with the respondents' own judgment of their experiences. Although subjective evaluations can be conditioned by culture, personality, past experience, and knowledge, research has shown that subjective life evaluations among individuals and across nations are largely explicable by the same life circumstances and according to similar parameters (Helliwell & Barrington-Leigh, 2010), and that their evaluation is revealing of recurrent patterns.

The most common form of assessment used so far is the collection of self-reports, typically provided in response to single direct questions, which respondents answer by ticking one of several pre-given options (see Section 5). Although, as anticipated, there has been scepticism over personal reports about well-being, it has been empirically demonstrated that these self-reports can be related to "biological processes and health outcomes, increasing confidence in the validity of such measures" (Krueger & Stone, 2014, p. 42). As a matter of fact, as Sandvik et al. (1993, p. 337) put it, "the traditional self-report measures of SWB demonstrated high convergent validity by their agreement with alternative SWB measures and their relations with theoretically related constructs". Therefore, self-report measures of SWB show adequate reliability and it seems appropriate that the assessment of well-being could be made by "whoever lives inside a person's skin" (Myers & Diener, 1995, p. 11).

The measurement of SWB is based on the subdivision of its components, which normally leads to the inclusion, in different studies, of some elements and the exclusion of others. Happiness[3], as a long-lasting positive emotional state, is one of the elements which form the emotional component of SWB (Diener & Lucas, 2000), while the judgmental component has long been conceptualised as life

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[3] Economists often consider *subjective well-being* a synonym for *happiness*. However, in psychology happiness is a much narrower concept than SWB. In fact, happiness is a more limited concept than SWB and is also distinct from life satisfaction.

satisfaction (Andrews & Withey, 1976). Happiness can be defined as the "internal experience of a positive state of mind" (Lu & Shih, 1997, p. 182), that is a combination of frequency and intensity of pleasant emotions (Diener, 2000) which is strongly based on a person's affect. The advantage of relying on happiness as a core element to measure SWB is that cross-cultural studies have demonstrated the primacy of happiness compared to other components (Kim-Prieto et al., 2005; Skevington et al., 1997).

One of the most commonly used instruments to evaluate happiness is the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), also known as General Happiness Scale. This scale has been thoroughly validated (Iani et al., 2014; among others): it ensures good to excellent test-retest reliability, a unidimensional structure, and high internal consistency. Even though the scale is relatively short, the SHS meets the minimal psychometric criteria for measuring accuracy.

As anticipated in the previous section, SWB comprises three macro-elements, among which we also find life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999, p. 277). The latter can be defined as "a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his chosen criteria" (Shin & Johnson, 1978, p. 478), that is a conscious global judgment that people make when they consider their life as a whole. This component of SWB can be broken down into satisfaction with various domains but it has been demonstrated that broad categories of SWB (and not only their sub-components) are equally scientifically valid as they focus on global psychological phenomena (Diener, 2009, p. 29). To this end, Diener et al. (1985, p. 71) point out that,

> judgments of satisfaction are dependent upon a comparison of one's circumstances with what is thought to be an appropriate standard. It is important to point out that the judgment of how satisfied people are with their present state of affairs is based on a comparison with a standard, which each individual sets for him- or herself.

Life satisfaction is in fact an ongoing judgment which can be altered and updated over time and is subject to situational influences. This implies that life satisfaction should be measured on different occasions (e.g., over several weeks) in order to obtain a long-term, stable average.

Subjective life satisfaction indicators, just like SWB, rely on people's evaluation of their own satisfaction with their lives: this implies that a person can identify what is more or less significant for them and to what extent (Diener & Suh, 1997). As Pavot and Diener (1993, p. 164) put it, life satisfaction is an overall "conscious cognitive judgement of one's life in which the criteria for judgment are up to the person". Therefore, different types of information can be included by people when making satisfaction judgments, including comparisons with both internal and external social, cultural, or economic standards (Campbell et al., 1976), which inevitably vary from subject to subject. Thus, it is necessary to assess people's global judgment of their life rather than only their satisfaction with specific domains, and this is precisely the strategy adopted by the authors of the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985).

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) items are global rather than specific in nature, which allows respondents to assign different weights to various domains of their lives in terms of their own values, thus arriving at a global judgment of life satisfaction. According to Alfonso and Allison (1992), the SWLS is at the reading level of the 6th to 10th grades (depending on the scoring system used) and is thus usable with most adults. Moreover, it has been found that the SWLS appears to be an appropriate scale to be used in clinical and quasi-clinical settings (Pavot & Diener, 2008).

For the analysis of the experiment reported in the following section, the Italian versions of the SWLS and SHS scales have been used. In order to simplify this first experiment and limit the cognitive load on participants (as in Thomson & Chatterjee, 2015), we decided to utilise shorter versions of the two scales.

5. The Experiment

5.1. Participants

The experiment reported here was conducted between the end of June 2021 and mid-September 2021, in Macerata (Italy). On the whole, 11 participants were involved, all of them blind/partially sighted and deaf/hard of hearing, between 13 and 26 years of age, recruited through a call that was sent to the most prominent Italian associations for the blind and the deaf, namely UICI (Unione Italiana dei Ciechi e degli Ipovedenti), [Italian Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted] and ENS (Ente Nazionale Sordi), [Italian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing]. The call advertised a two-day, 10-hour training for inclusive guides for theatres, followed by at least one practical experience as a theatre guide leading groups of people with and without disabilities. A maximum of 12 candidates were accepted, but a 14-year-old with low vision who started the course had to withdraw from the training for health reasons; therefore, overall 11 participants took part in the programme from beginning to end. The two-day training scheme included workshops on theatre history, theatre structures and the related terminology, accessibility to cultural heritage for persons with different abilities, and a 4-hour, interactive workshop where participants worked in small groups (2 or 3) to design their own theatre tour by following the principles of inclusive design.

Within ten weeks from the end of the course, all participants were able to co-organise and conduct a real tour at the Sferisterio theatre, i.e., a large, open-air arena with a 100-meter stage area, built in 1823 and located in the centre of Macerata. Each of the five tours had 2 (once 3) inclusive guides as leaders, for groups of participants (from 14 to 30) that were of all ages and with diverse abilities. All tours were planned to be inclusive (with Italian sign language for deaf tour leaders and patrons), enjoyable and easy to understand for as many individuals as possible, encouraging the use of all senses.

The experiment was paired up with a study aiming to assess the SWB of the 11 would-be guides, by asking them questions about their feelings, their experiences, and evaluations about what they were participating in, based on the two scales above (see Section 4). The ultimate aim was to evaluate the impact of these inclusive activities and to measure changes in the participants' feelings and satisfaction over the course of the programme. To this end, three questionnaires were delivered to the 11 guides, one before the training scheme (phase 1), another upon completion of the training (phase 2), and the last one after the tour they led (phase 3). The timespan from training to acting as guides varied from 6 to 10 weeks, and our general hypothesis was that completing the training programme and leading an inclusive theatre tour would yield an increase in positive scores and a decrease in negative scores for the two scales used.

Participants were 45.4% male and 54.6% female, their age range varying from 13 to 26 years (M = 17.7). Age and sensory disability distribution is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Distribution Across Age and Sensory Disability

	Blind/partially sighted	Deaf/hard-of-hearing
13–18	3	5
19–26	1	2

Source: authors' own elaboration.

5.2. Self-Report Questionnaire

The questionnaire used for this experiment (the same for all three phases) is divided into three sections. The first one is based on the Italian version of the SHS[4] (Iani et al., 2014) and comprises two items[5] on a 7-point Likert scale, asking participants to describe themselves using an absolute assessment of their lives:

1) "In general, I consider myself..." (from 1 = *not a happy person* to 7 = *a very happy person*);
2) "Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself…" (from 1 = *less happy* to 7 = *much happier*).

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[4] The SHS has been translated into multiple languages, both European and non-European. As for the Italian language, Iani et al. (2014) first translated the SHS to provide normative data for the Italian population based on data collected from a large community sample.

[5] The standard SHS is composed of four items. We decided to provide participants with a shorter version in order to reduce cognitive load, in line with the work of Thomson and Chatterjee (2015).

The second section is based on the Italian version of the SWLS (Di Fabio & Busoni 2009)[6] and it is composed of three statements[7] that participants had to agree or disagree with. Using the 7-point Likert scale provided for each item, participants were asked to indicate their agreement ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* to the following statements:

1) "in most ways my life is close to my ideal";
2) "the conditions of my life are excellent";
3) "I am satisfied with my life".

The third section comprises only one open question, i.e., "Please tell us anything you think is important". Open questions, especially when placed at the end of a questionnaire, allow participants to describe their experience/feelings using their own words, and to recapitulate both the overall experience they are reporting on and the questionnaire they are responding to. When dealing with subjective measures of well-being, open questions prove particularly meaningful.

Participants that could read and write were given the questionnaire in paper format, together with a pencil for its completion. Blind and partially sighted participants were supported by team members working on this study. Each questionnaire took 6 to 8 minutes to complete, for all three phases.

5.3. Results

The following sections present the results of our study. We will first focus on the affective aspects of SWB, that is happiness, and then on the cognitive aspects of SWB, that is life satisfaction. This will be followed by a linguistic analysis of the open answers provided by participants.
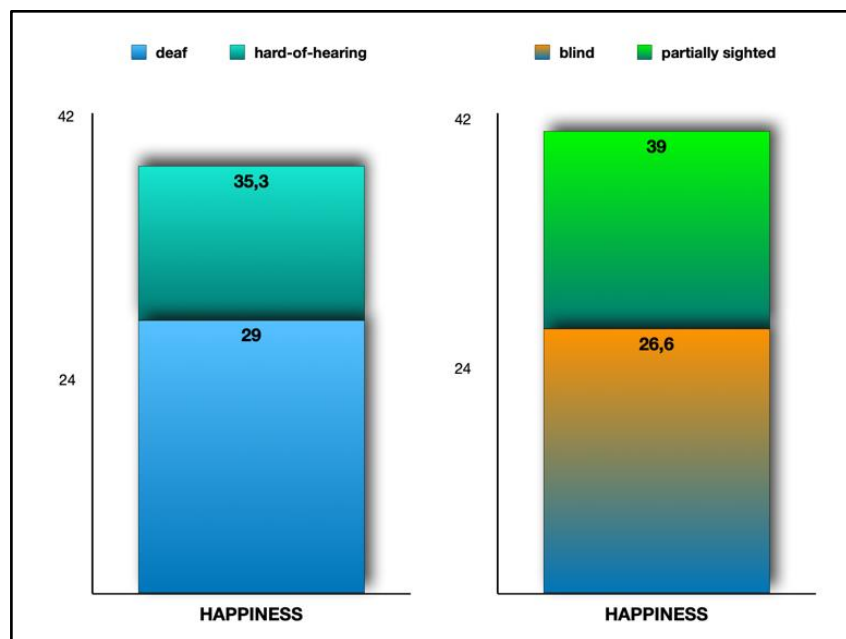
5.3.1. Happiness

The possible range of scores on the SHS for each participant, considering all three phases, is from 6 to 42, with higher scores reflecting greater happiness. From the data collected throughout phases 1 to 3 of this study, results show that participants reported a relatively high overall level of happiness (M = 35.6). Figure 1 shows the different levels of happiness between blind and partially sighted, and between deaf and hard-of-hearing participants. Partially sighted (M = 39) and hard-of-hearing (M = 35.3) participants have a higher level of happiness compared to those who are blind (M = 26.6) and deaf (M = 29). The values remain proportionally stable in all three phases.

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[6] The SWLS is available in several European and non-European languages. As for the Italian language, Di Fabio and Busoni (2009) first translated the SWLS to examine the factor structure and the psychometric properties of the SWLS in a sample of Italian adolescents and young adults.

[7] The standard SWLS is composed of five items. We decided to provide participants with a shorter version in order to reduce cognitive load, in line with the work of Thomson and Chatterjee (2015).

Figure 1

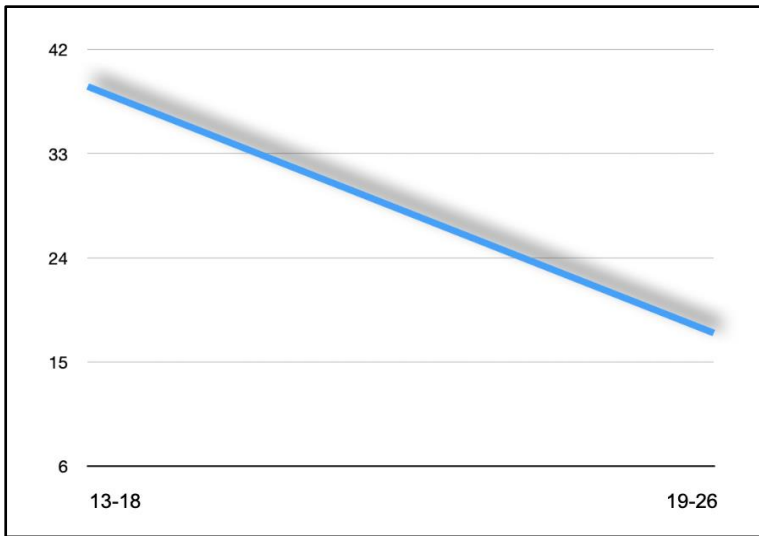*Happiness Within Each Group: Deaf vs. Hard-of-Hearing; Blind vs. Partially Sighted*

Source: authors' own elaboration.

One more interesting aspect that emerges from data analysis is that happiness, as an overall value, tends to decline with age, as was demonstrated by previous research (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008; among others). As a matter of fact, results from our study confirm that scores for happiness record a significant decrease, from $M = 38,8$ for teenagers (i.e., participants aged 13–18) to $M = 17,5$ for young adults (i.e., participants aged 19–26), as portrayed in Figure 2.
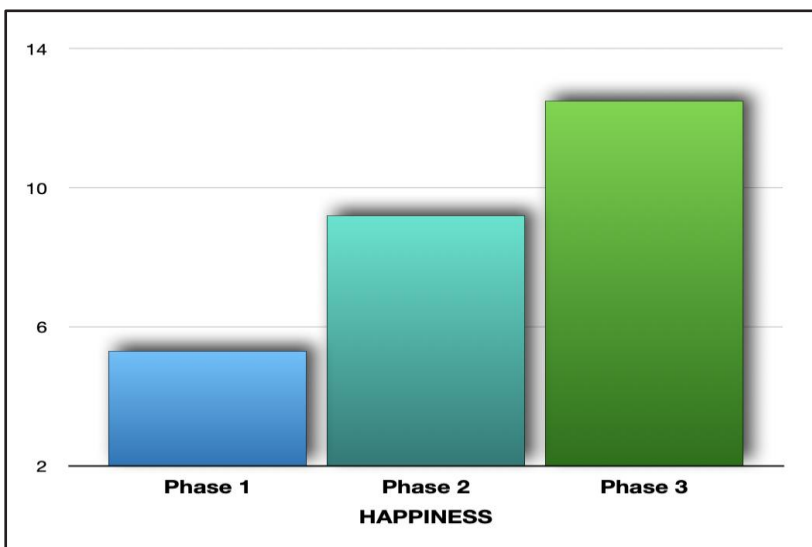
Figure 2

Happiness/Age

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Most interestingly, the collective results recorded for happiness, including all 11 participants, indicate that there is indeed a positive correlation between participation in inclusive activities, such as those proposed for this experiment, and an increase in self-perceived and reported happiness (Figure 3). The possible range of scores on the SHS for each participant, in each phase, is from 2 to 14, with higher scores reflecting greater happiness.
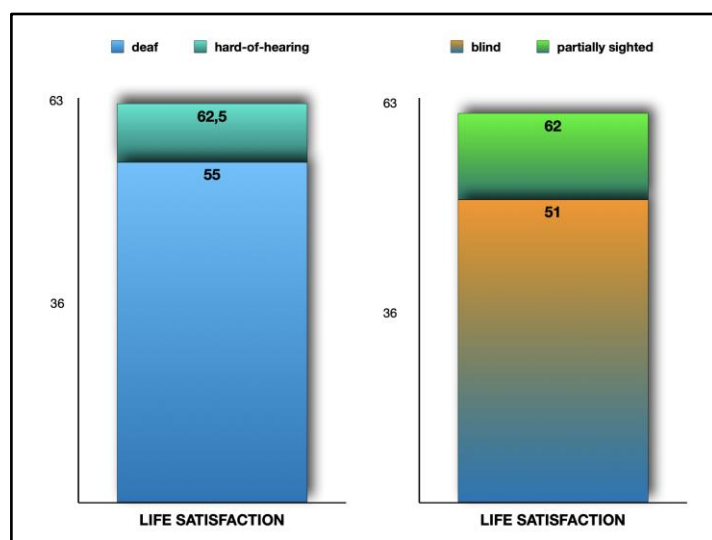
Figure 3

Happiness (phase 1, 2, and 3)

Source: authors' own elaboration.

5.3.2. Life Satisfaction

The possible range of scores on the SWLS for each participant, considering all three phases, is from 9 to 63, with higher scores reflecting greater life satisfaction. From the data collected throughout phase 1 to 3, the life satisfaction level reported by the whole group of participants is relatively high (M = 53). A slight difference was recorded between blind (M = 51) versus partially sighted (M = 62) and deaf (M = 55) versus hard-of-hearing participants (M = 62.2), as shown in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4

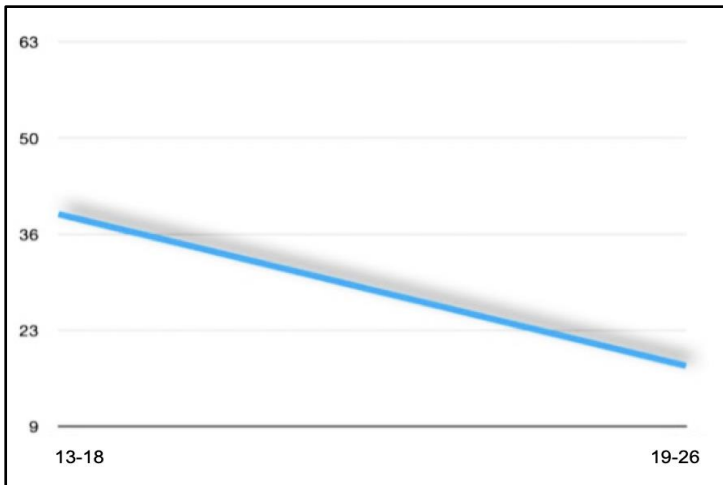*Life Satisfaction Within Each Group: Deaf vs. Hard-of-Hearing; Blind vs. Partially Sighted*

Source: authors' own elaboration.

We may venture to say that these results are in line with the increasing life difficulties of people that can (although partially) see, and those who are totally blind, as shown by the model of grief proposed by Kübler-Ross (1969), whereas in the case of deafness changes day-to-day life are less invalidating.

As for the inverse proportionality between levels of life satisfaction and age, in line with what has been reported for the happiness/age pair, once again our questionnaires point to such a trend, as shown in Figure 5 below. Life satisfaction decreases again, from M = 36,5 for teenagers (i.e., participants aged 13–18) to M = 21,5 for young adults (i.e., participants aged 19–26), although to a lesser extent if compared to the results for happiness.
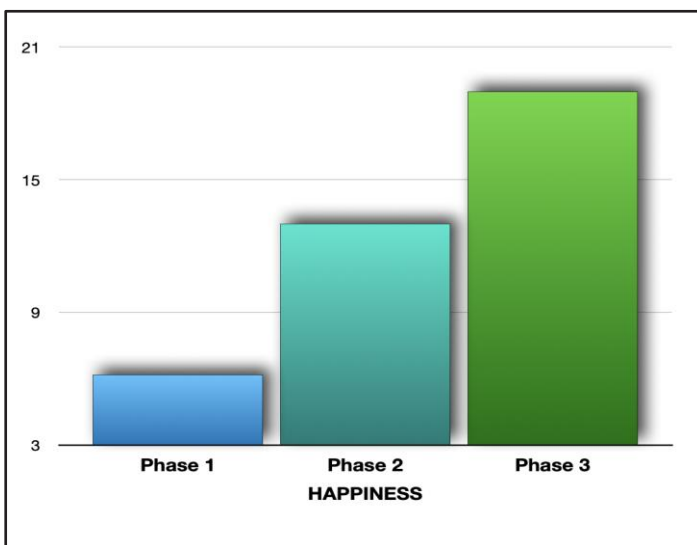
Figure 5

Life Satisfaction/Age

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Last but certainly not least, the results shown in Figure 6 below highlight the positive effect of the inclusive experience (see Section 5.1) on life satisfaction, from phase 1 to phase 3. The possible range of scores on the SWS for each participant is from 3 to 21, with higher scores reflecting greater life satisfaction. In this case, a much higher level of satisfaction is recorded after completion of phase 2, that is at the end of the training scheme.
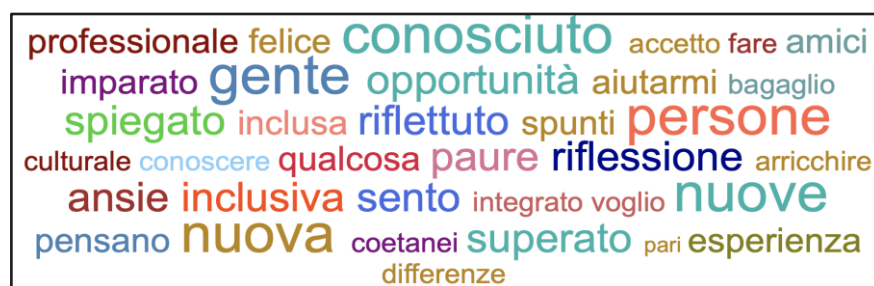
Figure 6.

Life Satisfaction (phase 1, 2, and 3)

Source: authors' own elaboration.

5.3.3. Open Question

As anticipated in Section 5.2, participants were asked whether they wanted to provide any comment about their inclusive experience, from training to guiding visitors inside a theatre. All participants shared comments and their answers[8] to this open question (written by participants or transcribed by interviewers) were prepared for analysis. Texts were broken down into single words (tokenized) and stop words[9] were filtered out from the data to eliminate non-significant frequent terms.

Figure 7

Word Cloud of Free Texts

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Figure 7 shows a word cloud of the tokenized edited texts. Participants adopted a proactive attitude towards the inclusive experience, which can be inferred from the most frequent verbs used by respondents and their collocate "io" (i.e., I): among others, "imparato" (i.e., [I] learnt), thanks to the training workshops (see Section 5.1); and "riflettuto" (i.e., [I] thought about) and "spiegato" ([I] explained), both referring to the 4-hour, interactive workshop (see Section 5.1).

As for adjectives, all those found share a positive value: among others, "felice" (i.e., happy), "inclusa/o" (i.e., included), and "integrato/a" (i.e., integrated), and express the respondent's subjective attitude and emotional response towards the 10-hour course; while "culturale" (i.e., cultural), "nuova/nuove" (i.e., new), and "professionale" (i.e., professional) describe the experience(s) of co-organising and conducting the tours (see Section 5.1).

As for nouns, through a simple concordance run using AntConc Version 3.5.9 (Anthony, 2020), we found that those with negative value, such as "ansie" (i.e., anxiety), "paure" (i.e., worries) and "differenze" (i.e., differences), always collocate with proactive verbs, such as "fighting against anxiety/worries" and "overcoming differences". Those with neutral value, such as "persone/gente"

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[8] The response language was Italian. Texts were set to lowercase because capitalisation had been used inconsistently by respondents and interviewers (see Figure 7).
[9] In this study, we relied on the Italian stop word list provided by IR Multilingual Resources at UniNE. Retrieved from http://members.unine.ch/jacques.savoy/clef/ (accessed 17.11.2021).

(i.e., people) or "coetanei" (i.e., peers), also reflect respondents' proactive attitude, such as "meeting new people/peers", in line with the notion of participatory accessibility (see Section 2).

6. Conclusions

In line with the most recent advances in accessibility research, where a steady move from barrier-centred approaches towards inclusive design and practice has been recently recorded, this article sets forth a new set of concepts, fully centred on participation and inclusion of persons with different abilities. The focus is on inclusive theatre, a concept explored elsewhere (Di Giovanni, 2021; Raffi, 2021) and here related to the measurement of changes in well-being deriving from participation in inclusive practices. Thus, after briefly discussing the paradigmatic shift from the barriers to the people, and from a barrier-centred view to one that is focused on diversity as an added value, this article opens new ways of considering the impact of inclusive experiences on people's lives in the medium to long-term by relying on the concept of SWB and its application to experimental research.

The notion of subjective well-being is then explored and dissected in many ways, so as to offer future researchers wishing to pursue this avenue a host of insights and opportunities for further investigation. In empirical terms, the article reports on an all-new experiment that aimed to train young adults with different abilities to become theatre guides for all. This experiment covered a 10-week timespan and thus allowed researchers to measure variations in subjective well-being, namely happiness and life satisfaction, for all 11 participants at three different stages. The results, although linked to a limited sample, lend themselves to interesting qualitative evaluations and they provide important data for future research into the medium to long-term effects of inclusive practices in theatre and other media experiences.

A focus on the meaningful words and phrases emerging from the analysis of open questions (Section 5.3.3) not only points to the confirmation of our hypothesis, i.e., that inclusive experiences in theatre lead to increased SWB, but they also confirm the overall importance of a move from barrier-centred accessibility to people-centred inclusion: *overcoming differences, to know, to move beyond, to integrate, to help, to make friends*. Besides these largely positive comments and the documented increase in happiness and life satisfaction, this experiment also confirms that multiple abilities can be shared, given the right value, and put to the service of others in innovative, creative ways. The move from performance to event, in theatre studies, is in fact fully embodied by experiments and experiences like the ones reported here.

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