

“Cinema Without Barriers – Polish Edition” project

Interview with Jakub Walczyk from Zamek Culture Centre (Poznań, Poland) by Anna Tatarska



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Paweł Józwiak © Paweł Józwiak

How did you come up with the concept for this project?

When we talk about film, we often talk about technology: the latest projector or sound system. The people behind “Cinema without barriers” represent a slightly different point of view. We are part of the social programmes division, and cultural animators, so our thinking is that culture has to be, above all, useful - and a tool of change. We believe that once you step out of your bubble, confronting different points of view and different sets of skills, you can create social innovation.

There are already many great institutions that organize events and festivals focusing on accessibility. What do you do differently?

Those are event-based strategies. Accessibility is often tokenistic – there are screenings for the

Deaf or people with alternative motor capabilities, but only as a special event, on an arbitrarily chosen day. What we try to do is integrate it. This is why we asked the people we are trying to include directly about their specific needs, and it helped us choose timings and days. For example, visually impaired audiences have their screenings Tuesday at 11am because they prefer to move around the city when it's still bright and public transportation is also still available – it eliminates the economic hurdle. The Deaf in Poznań, on the other hand, often work until 5pm so they'd rather have their screenings Thursdays at 6pm, and so on. Most importantly, we provide access to the latest premieres. Our audiences want to be in touch with the current trends and watch the biggest titles when they come out!

Do you think your project could be trendsetting and impact culture on a wider scale, for example, nationally?

I hope so, but it will not happen instantly. Our dream is for this project to become a standardized solution. We represent a public institution, so we are open to sharing whatever we create, for example: sending audio descriptions to distributors in the hope that they attach them to every screening copy. We hope such an attitude is going to impact the system. We also hope to impact institutions like the National Center of Culture and the Polish Film Institute to create such solutions for distributors and producers. We are planning a conference in February, where we will present our findings on accessibility in the film sector. There will be panel discussions with producers, distribution companies, cinemas,



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film critics and film scholars. We'll talk about how we can standardize the support and how being inclusive can stimulate the economy. The Collaborate to Innovate financial support is partly dedicated to distribution, so it boosts the market already! Later we will work on another project about audience development and film education with four other countries under the Creative Europe umbrella – so three more years of stimulating the market.

I think your project is perfectly aligned with European values; would you agree?

A focus on accessibility, meeting audience needs and using culture for educational purposes is indeed aligned with EU strategy, which is derived from ideas of involvement and taking action. We do not shy away from stating

that we are a political institution. In times where homophobic and racist acts that are against human rights have been supported by the government, we state loudly this is not what we believe in. It's also the vision of our director Anna Hryniewiecka.

Is this approach also visible in your programme?

Yes. We're not only showing European films, but also productions that touch on issues of great importance, films that are, for various reasons, unavailable to wider audiences, like, for example, *Green Border* by Agnieszka Holland, censored by the PiS party. We do not shy away from stirring the pot, causing a little discomfort and showing that, sometimes, the world is different to what we think. It is gravely important because, for the past several

years, the only fully inclusive medium in terms of audio description and translation into Polish Sign Language was public television TVP, a medium that's been hijacked by the previous government and highly propagandized. We now hope to offer them a new source of information, in addition to the usual broadcast they are used to.

Partner cinemas:

- Kino Pałacowe**, Poznań (Coordinator)
- Kino Echo**, Jarocin
- Kino Nowe Horyzonty**, Wrocław