

(Dis?)Ability Online Course

Lesson 5: Let's organize an accessible event



Welcome to the fifth lesson of the online course (Dis?)Ability, in which we will learn how to organize an accessible event. Accessibility and intersectionality are about considering various needs of recipients in advance, not about making projects and then thinking how to adapt them, because accessibility is also about an interesting and attractive form (for instance when it comes to culture, educational projects, film festivals etc.)

Contents:

- [Transcription of the lesson](#)
- [Questions for reflection](#)
- [Further reading](#)
- [Credits](#)
- [Extra tips](#)

Transcription of the lesson

Narrator: Welcome to the last part of this course. In this video, we want to give some insights into organising accessible events.

Lian: One simple way of defining what accessibility is, it's being able to take part in something with full comfort, and having your needs met. And of course it means very different things for different people. For me it means, because I have a chronic illness, for me to take part, it's really important that I can lie down in the place, and that there's space to rest, and also if, in a group



for example there's a very strong working ethic, and people are valued more if they do a lot, for me that also makes it a bit inaccessible, or if there's very strong macho attitudes or something. Yeah, and I heard from other people that for them other things make it inaccessible, for example, if there's no childcare, or if a room is very White, or if there's no sign language interpretation, or not enough people speak sign language. So yeah, it's a very different thing for different people.

simotier: I'm disabled, and I do use a wheelchair when I'm out. So you might already guess what the barriers might be for me to take part in an event.

I have organised several queer events in the last ten years while living in Berlin, currently I'm part of the organising group of the queer zine fest berlin, where we try to host the queer zine fest as an accessible event, which centers marginalised identities within the queer community.



SchwarzRund: Whenever you recognise that everyone looks the same in the room, there's a problem.

simotier: If your group only consists of non-disabled white people you already see there is there is stuff lacking and as I said, a ramp isn't enough, but it's a good way to start. And then, to start thinking about what other barriers might there be at my location?



SchwarzRund: So when organisation ask me like, "OK, we want to change shit about ourselves when the first person is coming, and that's already the wrong mindset because there are already disabled people in your room, trust me, there are. There are already neurodivergent people in your room, because there always are, they just don't show up. We're like one third of the society. Those who can hide it do the extra labour, and trust me it's a lot of labour, it's like money, and time, and emotional labour, cannot be visible to you, but the

thing is they are already a resource you can ask for, and to make the changes so they feel able to talk and to address problems in your group, or organisation, or demonstration, or whatever.

So the first resource you need is already there:

Change.

Change fast, not when the first person is addressing it, so that you, as a person who has maybe not been in contact with other disabled persons, or just with a disabled person, because you're completely abled. First honey, probably you will be disabled for one part of your life.

And second honey, get to know disabled people. Get through your abled shame. Because the combination of someone being ashamed of your existence when you try to criticise them, is so fucking toxic, it's almost impossible to address shit then.

So understand that the biggest problem is not that disabled people don't feel comfortable.

The problem is you are not comfortable. You're uncomfortable, so we are uncomfortable.

laughs

Just be fucking comfortable. When you make it weird, we will shut up, because we learned when we are too disgusting, too unproductive, too complicated, too much, too drama, too... whatever. all those terms that are flowing around, you will be violent against us.

Lian: If you want to make your events more accessible, one very important thing for me is to ask people what they need and try to fulfill that, because for me it's hard to ask myself what I need, because I'm afraid of being rejected, or seen as a burden. But if you as an organiser make it clear that you want me to say that then it's much easier for me to come and say things.

simotier: We would all wish to be able to organise things, events, events and spaces that would be perfectly accessible for everybody. But most of the time it's not possible, but then it's also OK to write down if something is not possible for you to do.

It's better for us to know that there isn't a wheelchair accessible toilet, than to think there is because you say it's wheelchair accessible, like, break it down, don't just say it's barrier reduced, or it's barrier free. No, nothing in this world is barrier free, you can't know all the barriers that might be there for people.

Just write them down. Even if it feels ridiculous, just make a list, for instance. Say, we have these things, we have childcare, we have a quiet room, we have a buddy system, this is, for instance, a fragrance free event, which means that you ask all the attendees to not wear any kind of fragrances or use any kind of fragrant products on themselves before coming to this event, which might make the event more accessible for many people.

And if then you notice "Oh, there are things we don't have."

Really, just write these things down. and then it would already make it so much easier for people to attend.

A thing that has become more of a norm lately in organising, which I'm very happy about, is to have more space for different needs at events and one thing that can fill many different needs for people is to for instance have a quiet room or like a resting room.

Lian :Sometimes if we want to organise an event, we think, "Oh it's going to be very difficult, and we don't have the resources to make it accessible", but I've made the experience that often if you come together with a group and you think creatively about how it could be done, often we have come up with really good solutions that worked.

simotier: As I said, sometimes it's easier to find a location which has a ramp, but then there isn't a wheelchair accessible toilet. One actual practical solution for this is to actually rent a wheelchair accessible toilet.

SchwarzRund: So if you want to make something better, start to understand that this is not like a start point that you will finish in two sittings, it's about changing the fucking world. It's about changing how the fucking leftist movements work.

So for example, pay people. Make it regular that people get paid.

Lian: Some of the things that make events or groups more accessible have to do with money, for example if you need a sign language interpretation or if you want to have signs in braille.

So it's good to learn about how you can get the money together, and of course you can make parties or something to finance it, but there's also a lot of organisations that are actually happy to fund you if you want to make your organisation or your place more accessible.

SchwarzRund: Trust me, like, paying cabs would open so many doors for disabled people. I would be part of groups if they would just pay my fucking cab.

laughs

So that's one very easy thing you can do. You can just change how structures are working on a day to day basis and then change the culture afterward, don't go out for beers and rum every time, maybe say, on the first Friday, maybe you meet every week, we do that, on the other Fridays we always go for non-alcoholic drinks.

Easy! That doesn't even cost money! It's probably cheaper for everyone.

So you can make very very very easy changes to how your structure is working.

But those changes don't come automatically, you just have to think outside of your perspective. And not with shame, not like, "Ah, there's this poor alcoholic, and now they have to..."

No, don't make it about a person! It's better for everyone.

Trust me, when there are thirty people in the room, one will have an addiction problem that they don't know about.

It's always a question of how many entrance points we're giving to our communities, and how many entrance points we're giving to our movement.

simotier: It's important to not only think about how we can make the event more accessible for people, but also how can you already make the organisational process more accessible for marginalised people so that they can also shape the process and the outcome.

The example with the queer zine fest berlin is that we are a White organising group, most of us are migrated, and for us it was very important to organise the queer zine festival as a very open event and a welcoming event for Black and POC people and that's why we hired a Black consultant who consults white groups or mixed groups in exactly this, how do you organise a racist-free, or hopefully racist free event while being a white orga group?

So this is something I always tell people who organise, before you start running around asking every Black person you see on the street, or every disabled person you see on the street to join your organising group, just pay a consultant to help you understand these things, because it's OK if you don't know these things beforehand, because it's not always possible to get the insight, but a consultant might bring you the insight and then it's a professional person that you pay for giving you their expertise.

SchwarzRund: I want to end with my absolute favourite book it will be linked in the literature list. It was published in February of this year by Devon Price, they wrote this amazing book, which is called "Laziness Does Not Exist".

Devin has this amazing skill to make very very very clear that if you think someone is lazy, or someone is not fulfilling the perfect image of a left, queer, whatever person, it always means you don't know enough about their context.

If we accept that no one is lazy, because there's no scientific proof of laziness, how does that change when we restructure our communities? Our working together, our... our rooms, so by that point we're really taking away one big thing: your leftist group, that is super awesome, and everyone should join, but there are just no Black people, no disabled people.

It's not because they are too lazy to find you, or they are too lazy to first write you an email to ask if you could maybe make it accessible. In their context, there is no resource to do that.

And as you can't change the context of a person that you don't know, you have to change your context, and by that means don't wait for that first email of a deaf person to ask for translation, change your context.

Change your context all the time, so that new people can enter, new people can be part of movements, and then change the context again. and again, and again, and again.

And this is not an ending process, this is just to move forward, which context are we presenting so that people from different contexts can enter that's the question behind it.

Narrator: Of course, we couldn't cover everything in one video, so we've included some links in the description for you to continue to inform yourself.

Something that can be very useful when planning an event is to use an accessibility checklist.

We've included a good one in the description below.

So that was it! Thanks for joining us on this course about accessible and inclusive activism.

See you next time!

Questions

Initiate a discussion with people from your collective or organisation to find out what you can do to improve. Watch the video together and face the reality; no matter how limited your budget is, how much capacity you lack or how important other issues seem to be – there is no excuse. Try harder!

- What needs to be changed in your organisation to think about accessibility and intersectionality at the very beginning of your actions?
- How do you take an intersectional perspective into account in your group/organisation? Have you defined missing or needed areas?
- Do you have a culture in your group where its easy to express needs and where people try to meet each others needs/make things accessible? If not, how could you create such a culture of care?
- Are your current projects addressed towards people with disabilities? Do you give them a chance to be addressed and invited? What does that process look like in your group? does it require any improvements?
- Can you think of examples of how ableist ways of thinking and organising affect everyone in the group?

Quotes:

“Whenever you recognize that everyone is looking the same in the room, there is a problem”.

“Don’t make it [accessibility, inclusion] about a person, it’s better for everyone [those solutions].”

Final task:

Here is the example of the checklist to organise a film festival in person. Based on that create a checklist for one of the events your group organises. Consult with somebody who has the experience of disability about your checklist or/and reach out to one of our experts (You can find links to their website at the end of each video lesson and posts).

Checklist:

- movie subtitles
- audio description
- sign language translation of the movies and the events
- assisting persons – accessible venue, including the toilets and other spaces
- all the information about the accessibility available beforehand, including social media
- people with disabilities in the orga group
- people with disabilities in the panel discussions
- visual content description
- silent room
- discounts for people with disabilities and free of charge for the assistants
- information about the public transport/car access to the venue
- additional screenings with educed levels of incentives
- workshop for the team.

Further reading recommendations:

Devon Price: Laziness Does Not Exist

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Laziness-Does-Not-Exist/Devon-Price/9781982140106>

Very detailed collaborative document on accessible activism:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-g2dkq17NsRmLum-Km-eTyIxoBtvaSxNHAUK2Dh59fs/edit>

A basic accessibility checklist for events: <http://www.punchupcollective.org/accessibility-checklist/>

A more in-depth checklist can be found here: <http://www.dmurring.com/accessibleactivism>

Credits:

SchwarzRund – <https://schwarzrund.de/>

simo tier – <https://simo-tier.de/>

Lian – <https://radicalresilience.noblogs.org/>

Film Edit: Radical Resilience – <https://radicalresilience.noblogs.org/>

Graphics: Carolina Arciniegas – <https://carolina.arciniegas.de/>

Additional Images: @pikisuperstar and @freepik

Music: Delila – <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgPJscNzTAhdDdU3Ye0ZVmw>

Waiting for more practical tips? Here they come.

How to make our spaces more accessible for everyone?

1. Sensory rooms
2. When asking questions, give options
3. Have early check in
4. Pictures of space before arrival
5. Options in lighting (blinds, tinted glasses, etc.)
6. Scent free spaces
7. Separate room for silence
8. Online streaming
9. Conversations about menu + texture in food
10. Share detailed protocol beforehand
11. Reaffirming ability to communicate needs
12. Sending template of access rider (1-2 weeks before)
13. Having expert onsite
14. Training for staff/organizers - this process to be made transparent

The topic explored collectively by the participants of gathering 'Accessible and Inclusive Organizing: collaborative tools and tactics in practice' by EYFA in 2021

How to make the learning environment accessible for everyone?

- Ask about needs
- Not having strict social expectations
- Be mindful about sensory overstimulation (noise, movement, light), quiet spaces with opportunities for sitting and lying down
- Less aggression against people behaving in ways that others don't understand, don't assume someone is angry or grumpy or don't wanna take part just because of their facial expression or if they don't talk
- Shorter time blocks - Less packed agenda - Flexible time frame
- More clear agenda/time plan
- Structure - provide enough information about what's gonna happen, about the place + facilities
- More centering/grounding exercises? So that we are more present + sensitive towards each other
- Listen to people, value different communication styles, more time to express
- More clearly defined + direct and transparent communication channels (also for feedback)
- Enough space (not too crowded)

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How to organize an event accessible for people with disabilities with no or small budget (DIY)?

People with Deafness & Auditory Processing Issues

- **Announcement**
 - allow participant input, if they have needs
 - promo video? caption it!
 - extra or free entrance for signing interpreter/assistant
 - sitting/hanging out spaces with good visibility
- **At the door**
 - pre-registration
 - clear signage at the entrance & at all over the venue
 - clearly designated awareness team (with training)
- **Bar**
 - printed drink menu with listed prices
 - sufficient staff
 - note pads and pens
- **During the show**
 - captions
 - accommodating for sensory needs (i.e. closer to stage/speakers, announcing before it starts)
 - if possible to pay for interpreters on stage or personalized who are deaf or from the community
 - amplifying the bass
 - specific awareness
- **Navigating the space**
 - furniture arranged so it allows clear visibility between participants
 - set time listed + signs on the space that are clearly visible (map of the space would be cool)
 - lighting! so it's not too dark

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ANNOUNCEMENT, COMMUNICATION (how, where)

- Free entrance for accompanying person
- Dog? To ask further
- Service phone number
- Online
 - Plain txt
 - Image description
 - Accessible website
 - Regular info sites also
 - Voice message through channels
 - Clear statement

EXTRA (before start)

- Care/support
 - to reach out
 - to discuss taboo
 - consultation
- Find money - applications for accessibility
- people to work on the space before

How to organize an event accessible for people with disabilities with no or small budget (DIY)?

Blind or Visually Impaired People

EVENT (toilet, performance, stage, bar)

- A person/buddy from the organisers
 - visual moderation
 - familiar with the venue
- Audio info:
 - line up
 - time etc.
 - bar
- Public transport pick up/by car
- Visual signs (basic info like emergency exit)
- Temporary hand rail (rope)
- Clean floor
- Extensive communication to everyone about using the space
- Place to leave your stuff
- Braille menu/cardboard menu visible one

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How to organize an event accessible for people with disabilities with no or small budget (DIY)?

People with Mobility Impairments

- announcement - clear communication beforehand about:
 - access i.e. ramp, steps,
 - public transport i.e. distances to walk, wheelchair accessibility,
 - accessible toilets (you can rent one)
 - how to enter
- standing, sitting, lying down options
- pick up service
- projection outside, music via bluetooth (bring your phone and headphones)
- collective hot water bottles (bring yours)
- low bar
- table next to the bar
- menu at different levels and online
- straws, deep plates, glasses with handles
- online channel where you can write about your needs, somebody reads it and finds creative solutions
- staged places in the middle of the room
- workshop: how do we want to dance with each other

The topic explored collectively by the participants of gathering 'Accessible and Inclusive Organizing: collaborative tools and tactics in practice' by EYFA in 2021

How to organize an event accessible for people with disabilities with no or small budget (DIY)?

Neurodivergent People and People with Mental Health Issues

- Trigger warning for sensitive topics
- Designated person to reach out in case of crises/announce them!
- Explanations on how to get there - location, public transport, streets
- Drug free space/drug check kits/harm reduction/smoking area
- Trained/informed buddy system
- Find spaces as big as possible/with windows/not overcrowd it
- Ear plugs/bursts
- Static lights
- Update the waiting line time
- Guest list for trans/black
- Low prices/pay what you can/donation
- Panic attack kit
- Try to make a chill out space in/outside
- Available water
- Gendered neutral bathroom/toilet
- Help line/awareness team/awareness phone
- De-escalator
- Signs of things/places

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