**AGENDA INCLUSIVE PERFORMING ARTS**

**2020-2024**

**Introduction**

In ‘Principles for Cultural Policy 2021-2024’ (‘Uitgangspunten voor het Cultuurbeleid 2021-2024’), Minister of Education Van Engelshoven states that culture should be for and by everyone. She also aims to broaden and renew the cultural sector to make it relevant for the entire population. The new culture participation programme 2021-2024 will be focussed on this wide accessibility.

A quote particularly relevant for this Agenda:

***“I consider the UN Treaty on the rights of persons with disabilities to be of great importance. I’ve spoken with representatives of associations of disabled people about their needs and desires regarding cultural participation. These conversations revealed a great need for the availability of contemporary creative activities.”***

In 2016 the Netherlands ratified the 2006 UN Treaty on the rights of persons with disabilities. This treaty recognises the necessity of a physically, socially, economically and culturally accessible environment, the right to access to healthcare, education and information and communication, allowing persons with disabilities to fully participate and freely make their own choices. This comes with legal obligations. But above all it asks of every sector – which also means the cultural sector – to consider how they will improve accessibility and thereby increase inclusivity.

Article 30 concerns participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sports. It calls for, among other things, taking every appropriate measure to offer persons with disabilities the opportunity to develop and use their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not just for their own personal gain but for the enrichment of society.

This Agenda is focussed in particular on increasing the accessibility of the performing arts *for* as well as *with* persons with a disability as (amateur) participant, audience, art teacher and artist.

On the one hand, it focusses on practical accessibility: what can cultural organisations do to remove barriers for persons with disabilities so that they can actually participate in the arts as members of the audience, (amateur) participants or artists?

On the other hand, it looks at the organisational and artistic accessibility: what can cultural organisations do to ensure that the artists benefit from the artistic and aesthetic challenges that artists with disabilities have to offer us?

In realising this Agenda, two models that were also successfully applied in the United Kingdom were the key drivers behind its content:

* **the social model of disability:** people have disabilities, but it is society that is limiting by its structural, cultural and economic barriers and the way it approaches people.
* **the creative model of diversity:** it is enriching for the cultural landscape and society as a whole when one works inclusively, because artists with unique experiences and a different perspective create new and unique art.

A group initiated by Holland Dance Festival, the National Centre of Expertise for Cultural Education and Amateur Arts (LKCA), Theaters Tilburg, the Performing Arts Fund NL and the British Council started a series of roundtable talks in 2019, in order to create this Agenda with people who have experience with working inclusively in their cultural practice or want to do so.

At the same time of this process, the Cultural Diversity Code was also revised and transformed into the Code of Diversity and Inclusion. This Agenda can be considered as a specific elaboration for part of the cultural sector in order to give concrete effect to the Code of Diversity and Inclusion.

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The signatories support the vision and content of this Agenda Inclusive Performing Arts 2020-2024 and will work on the points of action that apply to them. Their progress will be monitored by the LKCA, by means of a national monitor.

**Starting points for inclusive performing arts – general actions**

There are general matters cultural organisations have to think of and work on in order to encourage inclusivity. They concern awareness, structural policy and cooperation to increase access for all on different levels.

General points of action:

* Include persons with disabilities in deciding on the necessary changes in the cultural sector / *nothing about us without us*.
* Create internal support and aim for structural policies: work on teaching people how to act inclusively. That includes education and collaboration with experts (whether professional or based on experience), as well as an inclusive human resources policy.
* Make inclusivity part of the schedule for content *and* finance.
* Work nationally and regionally in order to learn from each other and create more possibilities; create a platform of frontrunners, ambassadors and influencers together.
* Unlock knowledge: make clear which programmers, makers and artists are working on inclusion and which funds pay attention to the subject. That also makes clear where there are potential blind spots that require solutions.
* Make sure culture gets to be part of the Local Inclusion Agenda in your municipality.
* Improve the labour market position of persons with disabilities: join the Labour Market Agenda for the Cultural and Creative Sector of PACCT, the Fair Practice Code and the Code of Diversity and Inclusion.
* Show the difference that art makes, based on research and good examples, both internationally and nationally. It inspires people!

**Themes for the encouragement of inclusion in the performing arts**

Apart from general points of action for all cultural organisations, this Agenda is focussed on three themes that apply to specific actors:

1. Art classes are accessible to all (education & participation)

2. Art education programmes work inclusively (talent development & profession)

3. Venues offer an inclusive programme (visibility & professionalisation)

**1. Art classes are accessible to all**

This theme is about the fundamental right to be able to *actively* participate in art and culture: persons with disabilities should have the opportunity to take art classes if they wish to do so.

Specific points of action focussed on education and participation:

Policy

* Foundations should offer opportunities for exclusive ways of working (as an emancipatory practice for a specific group) as well as for inclusive ways of working.
* Municipalities should ensure that children grow up together, for instance by creating accessible playgrounds.
* Add inclusion to the administrative covenant Quality Culture Education 2021-2024.
* Organise further training for Internal Culture coordinators on special-needs education.
* Cultural institutions should provide knowledgeable teachers, invest in (further) education.

Programme

* Cultural institutions should offer an inclusive programme for children between the ages of 0 and 4.
* Educational and cultural institutions should offer art education from the first grade on in (regular and special-needs) schools and develop an inclusive long-term learning path up to and including high school. Guest lectures, a school band (with adapted instruments if necessary), school choir, school theatre or dance group can all support this. Make appropriate teaching materials and methods available so that they can be used on a structural basis.
* Cultural institutions should develop an appropriate extra-curricular programme (for children and adults): provide for ‘exclusive’ classes for certain groups as well as ‘inclusive’ classes.
* Teachers should provide a safe environment during these activities: participants can be themselves.
* Teachers should put the joy of experiencing art first: pedagogical skills are as essential as technical skills.
* Cultural institutions should prepare themselves by studying what’s involved in specific disabilities; look for custom solutions.

Communication

* Cultural institutions should communicate in such a way that all (potential) participants know they’re welcome.
* Use clear and easily understandable language.

Organisation

* Schools should organise the connection to extra-curricular activities, for example by using Brede School funds.
* Cultural institutions should remove any (physical) barriers to participate.
* Cultural organisations should work with healthcare providers to be able to provide any desired support to participants.
* Cultural organisations should connect with local/provincial platforms for persons with disabilities to get advice from experience experts.

**2. Art education programmes work inclusively**

Persons with disabilities should get the opportunity to become an art teacher, artist or director/choreographer/conductor. Future art professionals (teachers and artists) should also learn to work inclusively.

Points of action focussed on talent development and job outlook:

Policy

* Show education leaders and directors best practices and have them experience them: how do other programmes do it? What can we learn from other countries? And which artists and teachers are an inspiration?
* Work on awareness: offer the opportunity to increase expertise in working inclusively for teachers in existing further education programmes.
* Create a network for each discipline (performing or teaching, MBO/HBO) for key persons and ambassadors with the opportunity to increase expertise and peer-to-peer coaching (communication, theory, best practices). Think nationally and internationally.

Admission and curriculum

* Formulate admission criteria for art education programmes (MBO and HBO) in such a way that persons with disabilities can also be admitted (think about the interpretation of quality, expressiveness, talent).
* Where possible, create a flexible and custom curriculum; work with other art education programmes: not every programme has to offer the same thing.
* Have students in their first year of their MBO or HBO programme get acquainted with the inclusive art (education) sector, through observation, participation, workshops, experience experts, performances. From the second year on, have them take on internships where they can apply the methods they’ve learned.
* Create interdisciplinary (educational) projects with different educational programmes (art/healthcare/sports) so that students learn to work with people from a different sector and build a network that contributes to working inclusively.
* Art education programmes should study the various artistic possibilities of an inclusive company.
* Encourage students to have their students get acquainted with inclusive art practices in the classes they teach during their internships.

Communication

* Work on the valuation of inclusive art in outside perception (adjust websites and brochures) and internal perception (take students and teachers to inclusive performances, have them participate in inclusive performances and create room for reflection so that implicit ideas can be made explicit and can be discussed).

Organisation

* Offer new students with disabilities mentorships.
* Work with workshops, residencies and exchanges to gain knowledge.
* Art education programmes should work with other sectors, like wellness, healthcare and sports.

**3. Venues offer an inclusive programme**

Cultural organisations, professionals and municipalities can do a lot to remove barriers that prevent persons with disabilities to access venues, to enable a welcoming theatre visit *and* to offer artists with disabilities the opportunity to showcase and develop their talent.

Points of action focussed on visibility and professionalisation:

Policy

* Ensure physical accessibility of the theatre.
* Venues should utilise any available option (like a sign language interpreter) but should also put aside additional funds.
* Foundations should make inclusivity part of their policy an develop incentive programmes.
* Ensure there is adequate expertise available to assess inclusive productions.

Programme

* Ensure that the programme is accessible (is a sign language interpreter available, can the blind experience the performance, etc.).
* Show inclusive art on special days (best practice day or festival), but also as part of regular programming.
* Programmers should actively look for interesting inclusive art and let their audience get acquainted with diverse art forms in this way.
* Art critics should review inclusive art and thereby contribute to a different perspective on art.
* Venues should discuss adapting performances with companies and producers to make them accessible.
* Organise low-stimulus days for those with mental challenges every once in a while; this also turns out to be enjoyable for other groups.
* Work with agents and experts in the field of inclusion or join existing inclusive initiatives and festivals.

Communication

* Make sure people feel welcome; venues should train their staff for this.
* Involve disabilities advocacy organisations in your communication, talk to them about what’s required.
* Communicate available discounts: persons with disabilities often have less disposable income.
* Make sure images and text in all communication are representative.

Organisation

* Pay attention to the visibility of persons with disabilities: offer introductions about inclusive dance/theatre/music with performances.
* Remove financial barriers: work with organisations who specialise in this.
* Venues and makers should join forces to benefit from each other’s knowledge and network.
* Organise matches between makers/artists and theatres that work inclusively.
* Organise matches between makers/artists and foundations that work inclusively.
* Get volunteers involved and use them to coach your audiences.