

Six special cycles of screenings for marginalised groups – a Slovakian initiative to make film-going far more inclusive

Interview with Natália Centková, Kino Úsmev (Kosice, Slovakia), by Geoffrey Macnab

Blind-friendly, baby-friendly, autistic-friendly, dementia-friendly, deaf-friendly and senior citizen-friendly screenings are the bedrock of the new IncluCine initiative. The goal here is to make European movies accessible to groups who usually find arthouse cinemas forbidding or alienating places. Through research and case studies on best practice, the aim is to develop a website containing data looking at cinema accessibility for vulnerable audiences. The initiative is also focusing on inclusive cinema training with a view to eventually creating an “inclusive cinema” label for cinemas, festivals and VOD platforms.

What are the aims and the expectations for the project?

Our cinema Kino Úsmev is run by a civic association. We are an independent cinema and have held many community screenings since we began. We opened the cinema in 2016 and these inclusive activities started in 2018.

We are located in the city centre and many communities pass through our space. We want to reflect their needs and to make our screenings and our space more accessible to them - and to include them in the process. Our activities are for the community and made by the community. We have connected with various NGOs and civic organisations working with marginalised communities and have become progressively involved with these organisations. To cater to their needs, we have to adjust our entire way of thinking.



Autism-friendly screening © Patrik Ontkovic

What were the challenges?

We have to communicate in a way that is accessible to the specific community we are working with. An example is translating invitations for deaf-friendly screenings into Slovak sign language. For the blind community,

we have to use direct and easy to read language. It is about making the small adjustments so the audience can actually learn about the programmes we are offering them.

Are the screenings only for the special groups?

We offer the screenings to everyone, not just the groups we work with, and for €2. We want to encourage the public to come, too. Admission used to be free, but that was not sustainable. When we programme, we discuss our plans with representatives of the individual organisations we are working with. We select films that we think would be suitable based on the data we have already collected. For blind-friendly screenings, for example, the films need to be shorter and have a lot of dialogue rather than a lot of silences. They should also screen at an early hour so members of the community can return home safely using public transport. The biggest expense are not the film rights but the audio description and other means of making the films accessible.

How did you choose your partners in IncluCine?

The selection process was thoughtful and deliberate. We chose Bíó Paradís in Reykjavik owing to our previous successful collaborations. They have excelled in implementing inclusive activities, making them a natural fit. Similarly, our long-standing partnership with Bio Central in the Czech Republic, especially through their "Films For Everyone" initiative, made this collaboration a logical next step. Bio Central has promoted inclusivity in their film projects throughout the same period that we have, further reinforcing the synergy between our efforts.

What do you feel you've achieved?

We are still in the early stages of the project. Our vision is to establish a European-wide initiative, rather than focusing on individual countries. The aim is to equip exhibitors across Europe with the tools, knowledge, and experience they need to make their venues more accessible in terms of safety, programming,

and communication. Currently, we are in the research phase, and all of our documents and data will be made publicly available online. We plan to create a single platform that will compile these resources, along with a map showcasing all of the cinemas engaged in these inclusive activities.

Ultimately, we aim to develop a system to assess inclusion across European cinemas. This would involve a seal of approval, awarded to venues that meet certain inclusivity standards. With this seal, cinemas would be eligible for additional funding and support. By the end of the project, we hope to invite 10

cinema operators from across Europe to participate in a training programme where we can guide them through the necessary processes to enhance inclusivity in their venues.



Senior-friendly screening © Kino Úsmev



Baby-friendly screening © Kino Úsmev



Inclusive workshop Trenčín 2024 © Kino Úsmev



Autism-friendly screening © Kino Úsmev

Natália Centková, Project Manager
at Kino Úsmev

Name of the Project: **IncluCine**

Coordinator: **Kino Úsmev**

Partner Cinemas: **Bio Central,
Hradec Kralove (Czech Republic);
Bíó Paradís, Reykjavik (Iceland)**