LESBIANS+

Suggestions for Accessibility of Lesbian, Queer, and Transfeminist Cultural Events and Political Spaces

A project by

Associazione Luki Massa

SOME PREFER CAKE
BOLOGNA LESBIAN FILM FESTIVAL

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SUGGESTIONS FOR ACCESSIBILITY OF LESBIAN, QUEER, AND TRANSFEMINIST CULTURAL EVENTS AND POLITICAL SPACES

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AN INTRODUCTION

This handbook was conceived as a conclusion of the Lesbians + project that was launched in 2025 by Luki Massa Association with the support of the EL*C EuroCentralAsian Lesbian Community.
The project focused on the accessibility to cultural production, representation, and enjoyment for lesbians who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Our decision to address **accessibility through an intersectional**, specifically lesbian **lens** comes from political reflections developed through **the practical experience of organizing the *Some Prefer Cake* lesbian film festival** as the Luki Massa Association
Some Prefer Cake is a small—by duration and funding, though not by participation—independent, political, and community-based festival. From the beginning, we have been critically engaging with the **very idea of "community"**, aware that attempts to build "our shared common world" might leave many of us behind.

SPACE FOR LESBIANS

The Lesbians + project gave us the space to collectively deepen this reflection. During the 18th edition of the *Some Prefer Cake* (September 18–20, 2025), we organized the ***Space for Lesbians* conference**. There, we started conversations about accessibility in cultural production and representation with activists involved in struggles against fatphobia, racism, and ableism, with the festival guest filmmakers, and with representatives of local cultural institutions.
The handbook you are now holding, focuses on **the accessibility of cultural participation, and enjoyment, and community life**, namely one of the central challenges faced by lesbian, queer, and transfeminist collectives, associations, and festivals committed to a real intersectional political approach. This work is addressed to them, to us, and its aim is to offer both **theoretical and practical tools to shift our perspective** and, in doing so, to transform the spaces and experiences we create for our communities, and, hopefully, the communities themselves.
We are under no illusion that this work alone can undo the structural exclusion from cultural life that disabled people, chronically ill people, fat people, and racialized people—particularly lesbians and queer people—face every day. Still, rather than discouraging us, this reality pushes us **to integrate anti-ableism, anti-racism, and the fight against fatphobia into our political work.**

While this handbook is intended for everyone who may be excluded from cultural and LGBTQIA+ social spaces, limitations of space and depth mean that **it focuses primarily on accessibility for people with physical, sensory, and/or neurodivergent disabilities.** Economic barriers, geography, class, and racialization are not at the center here—not because they are less important, but because they demand further, dedicated analysis beyond the scope of this text.

1. GUIDELINES FOR LESBIAN, QUEER, AND TRANSFEMINIST ACCESSIBILITY

Extensive work and knowledge on accessibility have emerged from disabled activists and movements, the independent living movement, disability justice and crip studies, as well as Design for All and Universal Design movements. While we encourage readers to engage deeply with these bodies of knowledge, we also want to share the principles guiding our own practice, in the hope that they can contribute to a shared definition of a l**esbian, queer, and transfeminist political position on accessibility.**

1.1 ACCESSIBILITY IS A PROCESS

Accessibility is an inherently paradoxical concept: it can never be fully achieved. The needs, desires, and lived realities of people who experience exclusion from cultural spaces—including our own spaces—are diverse, manifold, and sometimes contradictory. For this reason, the only sustainable approach to accessibility must regard it as an ongoing process. We approach accessibility as a constant process of transformation that begins with our political imagination and worldview, and extends to the concrete practices we develop to reshape and rethink our community spaces. This process demands **constant tension made of research, learning, vision, commitment, experimentation, and failure—and, above all, relationships** with those of us who are excluded from lesbian spaces.

1.2 NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

“Nothing about us without us” is a **foundational principle** of the anti-ableist movement. Disabled people are structurally excluded from the spaces where decisions about their lives are made. **We must ask ourselves honestly**: are there disabled activists in our associations? Are they able to meaningfully participate and contribute to collective decision-making processes? If the answer is no, we need to ask ourselves why and take responsibility for transforming our organizations. This may also mean building sustained relationships, collaborations, and exchanges with associations, groups and collectives where disabled people are active.

1.3 THE REVOLUTION STARTS WITH US

The social model of disability understands disability not as an individual trait, but as the result of the **social process of disabling** some body-minds. In much the same way that racialization acts upon bodies perceived as non-white, ableism operates by constructing some bodies as "un-able." The spaces we organize in, can reproduce these dynamics of oppression if we fail to actively challenge them. When we invoke anti-ableism in our political statements or protest chants, we must remember that the first aspect of ableism we need to confront is the one we ourselves reproduce.

1.4 LIBERATION IS COLLECTIVE

Medical and charitable models frame disability as an individual misfortune, obscuring the social and political dimensions of ableist oppression and the **collective responsibility** to change it. If liberation is the horizon of our lesbian politics, we cannot achieve it alone. Taking action to re-imagine our events and spaces through an accessibility lens must be understood as a requirement so that those of us who were not meant to be there can begin to experience these spaces as sites of liberation rather than oppression and exclusion.

1.5 LESBIAN AND ANTI-ABLEIST STRUGGLE

We are aware that our accessibility work exists within a broader inaccessibility framework. Just by getting involved in the process of accessibility, we start to see the world **through lenses that show us how deeply inaccessible this world is**. This is why anti-ableist struggles for independent living and collective accessibility must be woven into our cultural and political practices through participation in anti-ableist struggle and by making those visible in the content of our events.

1.6 NOT ONE LESBIAN LESS

How many lesbians and queer people have never had the opportunity to explore their desires, their sexuality, or a sense of belonging because they are **confined to institutional settings or forced into isolation due to the lack of personal assistance?** How many disabled, neurodivergent, elderly, or chronically ill people are excluded from Pride marches because of physical or sensory barriers? How many women avoid events because they are unsure whether there will be seats to accommodate their fat bodies, or a bathroom they can access with a wheelchair, or a safe-space for sensory overload? We must keep asking these questions.

1.7 WE WANT BREAD AND ROSES, TOO

Accessibility is often framed as right to education, employment, and healthcare—and rightly so as these are fundamental rights and are systematically denied.
However, life is also made of desire, pleasure, passion, relationships and sense of belonging. These dimensions must never be separated from our accessibility practices.
When we work in or organize a lesbian, queer, and transfeminist spaces and events, **access must extend to the full experience:** participating in meetings and book presentations but also in aperitifs and parties; attending screenings and performances as well as workshops and play parties. In short, recognizing that **the right to lesbian joy** belongs to all of us.

1.8 SELF-DETERMINATION WITHOUT CONDITIONS

Accessibility must support self-determination and autonomy of choice; it cannot be affected by external assistance or passed through the back door. There are "reasonable accommodations", namely half-measures that can be explored when there is no other option, but it is paramount **to create spaces where people can freely express their full potential of choice**. An example: an association headquarter with a portable ramp that it is used only upon request.
This situation sends a clear message: that wheelchair users are not expected to be among the organizers because they would not be able to enter without the assistance of a non-disabled companion whereas that disabled person is the one welcoming a group for an awareness-raising workshop or a book presentation.

1.9 OUTSIDE THE NORM

As non-conforming political subjects, we are committed to questioning the very norms our oppression is rooted in. **Our political approach to accessibility is not reduced to compliance with the law**. Italy has accessibility and anti-discrimination laws that can be powerful tools for protest and social change. However, we urge our communities to challenge the idea of accessibility equating "complying with the laws".

Being welcomed helps us exist.

2. PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR MORE ACCESSIBLE LESBIAN, QUEER, AND TRANSFEMINIST SPACES

In this section, we share concrete **accessibility practices** that we have tested in our own spaces, as well as practices we hope to implement in the future. These suggestions grow out of years of failures and mistakes as well as what we learned from exchanges with other festivals committed to accessibility, particularly our sister festivals **Gender Bender (Bologna)** and **Orlando (Bergamo)**. Because this booklet is addressed primarily to cultural event organizers, we follow the typical phases of event planning structuring this section in the **four steps** mirroring the organizational process itself —**Ideation, Organization, Implementation, and Communication.**

Developing accessibility is an ongoing exercise in creativity, and experimentation, one that even small, grassroots organizations can take on. However, some accessibility measures require specific skills that may not exist within activist collectives and may therefore require financial resources. **Choosing to invest money in accessibility is a political decision**: it signals that reducing the “ableist footprint” of our spaces and events is a priority. When there is no funding available -or it is very limited - we can turn to community-based fundraising and push institutions and funders to include dedicated resources for accessibility.

What follows are **practical suggestions for each stage** of organizing a lesbian, queer, and transfeminist event.

2.1 IDEATION

2.1.1 NETWORKING

Accessibility begins with relationships: **establishing collaborations, partnerships, and starting discussions** with a wide network of political actors working from different perspectives namely disability associations (making sure they are led by disabled people themselves, not by parents, relatives, or charitable or religious institutions), local Disability Pride groups, neurodivergent collectives, anti-racist associations and decoloniality projects, fat activists, women's associations and LGBTQIA+ people with migrant backgrounds, and cooperatives working with refugees and asylum seekers.
We can organize exploratory and skill-sharing meetings and involve members of these organizations in actively participating in shaping the event itself -both in terms of content and access. In some cases it can take the form of co-hosting some of the events.

2.1.2 SUPPORTING DIVERSE AND MULTIPLE REPRESENTATION

When curating an event, we should ask ourselves: who is on stage? Who appears on screen? Who is speaking at a talk, and who is missing? Accessibility is also about representation so **it is essential to support access to cultural and artistic production** for those people who are constantly invisibilized or misrepresented by centering lesbian, queer, and transfeminist artists, directors, writers, and speakers who are disabled, neurodivergent, racialized, and fat.

2.1.3 PROMOTING POLITICAL SELF-PRODUCTIONS

We actively seek out books, films, and performances **created by people and communities who are marginalized, underrepresented and excluded**: not works *"about disabled lesbians"*, but films written, directed and performed by disabled lesbians. This kind of research is complex. Many of these productions never come into being because they don't have access to the means of cultural production. Additionally, when they do exist, they face further barriers for distribution and visibility. Making space for these works means supporting self-narration and the possibility for communities to speak for themselvese.

2.1.4 PLANNING FOR ECONOMIC ACCESSIBILITY

Economic accessibility is a cross-cutting issue. Many lesbians, women, and queer people facing multiple forms of oppression also experience poverty: economic exploitation, job precarity, and the lack of recognition of independent living allowances often makes cultural participation an inaccessible privilege. At the same time, many of our organizations relying on self-funding must still generate financial resources through ticket sales and fees. We can adopt different strategies such as: **sliding-scale pricing, reduced tickets, "suspended" tickets**, and ensuring that free events are always part of the program.

2.2 ORGANIZATION

2.2.1 APPOINTING AN ACCESSIBILITY CONTACT PERSON

Designating at least one person within the organizers of an event or management of a space as the accessibility contact person: this role **combines political and logistical skills**, supervising and coordinating the entire process, and liaising with the working groups.
The contact person **keeps an overview of the "accessibility chain"** at all stages and liaise with those responsible for fundraising within the organization to make specific requests for accessibility funding.

2.2.2 CHOOSING BARRIER-FREE SPACES, OR REMOVING BARRIERS

Whenever possible, selecting a venue that is already **physically accessible** reduces the effort and the costs of subsequent or temporary fixes to make it accessible which might be also less effective.
In our context, given the scarcity of available accessible spaces, we recommend outlining, together with partner associations, **a list of accessible venues available to our working group**, available even when the person of contact changes.

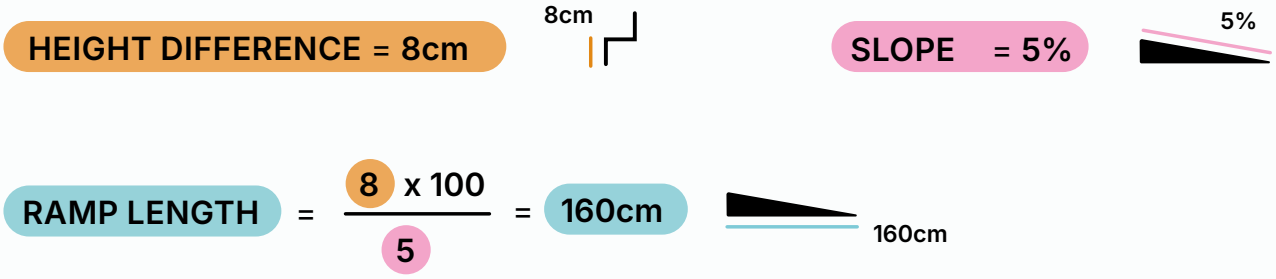
Accessibility must always be verified in person: with on-site audits and verifications led by the accessibility contact person, sometimes in dialogue with associations, groups, and individuals in our network, but without passing the responsibility on to them or making it a sort of "stamp of approval." We shouldn't rely on venue managers claims of accessibility but we need to check them ourselves.
When we talk about space, we mean ***all* areas**: parking, route to the entrance(s), foyers, the room of the event (both performance and audience areas), cafes and refreshment points, restrooms (both accessible and gender-free), cloakrooms, courtyards, and any other shared areas.

There are **several aspects to be verified**:

- Step-free access everywhere, including small steps;
- No uneven flooring, holes, or obstacles;
- Ramp slope no greater than 5% (legal requirements in Italy establishes a range between 6% and 8%, with exceptions up to 12%, a regulation critically dismissed by associations of people with physical disabilities as it is very dangerous);
- Door width, weight, and opening direction;
- Height of counters and restrooms;
- Elevator size and operating mode;

Our guiding principle is to ensure that people with different conditions **can access and navigate all spaces independently**: those with walking difficulties, those using crutches and other mobility aids, or those in manual or electric wheelchairs.

When barriers need to be addressed temporarily, it is useful to keep a list of companies that provide ramps and other temporary accessibility equipment.
Ramps should always have the lowest possible slope to ensure the safety of wheelchair-users. Ramp length can be calculated using the formula:



For example, for an 8 cm step with a 5% slope, the formula for the ramp length is:
8 × 100 / 5 = 160 cm

2.2.3 MAPPING THE SPACES

Once a venue is selected for the event, we map all spaces and **define accessibility measures for each area**: signage, stages placement, seatings, counters, desks, and walkways.

2.2.4 CHOOSING ACCESSIBLE FURNITURE AND INSTALLATIONS

For our events, **all public contact points**—ticketing, information desks, cashiers, cafes, bookshops, and merchandise tables—should be step-free and at a height of approximately 80 cm; dining tables should have at least one side open to allow wheelchair access; drinking water stations should be visible and easily accessible at a height suitable for wheelchair users.

2.2.5 AUDITING ACCOMMODATION AND RESTAURANTS

When making arrangements with hotels, hostels, B&Bs, or restaurants, **we audit to ensure physical accessibility** and clearly communicate our access needs to owners and staff. We also should **ensure that staff does not use discriminatory language** and interacts respectfully with lesbian, trans, and non-binary people (e.g: when name and ID mismatches), racialized people, and disabled people.

2.2.6 CHOOSING WIDE, STURDY SEATING WITHOUT ARMRESTS

The topic of seating is still widely overlooked as an accessibility issue in lesbian, queer, and transfeminist spaces, despite long-standing critiques from fat activists expressing the feeling of exclusion sparked by not finding suitable place to sit. “Standard” seating in cinemas, theaters, and conference rooms is designed to comply to society’s fatphobic norms— often being around 70 cm wide—and excludes many bodies. In venues with fixed seating, to those who don’t fit in those narrow spaces we can offer comfortable alternative options such as **additional reserved seating**. In places where seating is mobile, we should choose wide, sturdy chairs without armrests. **Seating should always be available in waiting areas** (e.g queues at the entrance) to provide a resting place for those who have difficulties to stand for long periods.

2.2.7 DESIGNING DECOMPRESSION AREAS

We strongly recommend planning and implementing a decompression space for neurodivergent people and anyone experiencing sensory overload. This space should be **a quiet, comfortable and protected from strong sounds, lights, and smells**. It may include wide, preferably soft seating, low or natural lighting, neutral colored furniture, earplugs, and stimming toys. **This is not a space of exclusion, but one of autonomy**: it allows people to remain part of the event without having to leave because of the stress caused by the situation. For outdoor events, a designated decompression area away from sound, light and smell should serve the same purpose.

2.2.8 TRAINING ALL ACTIVISTS AND VOLUNTEERS

Accessibility training should be for everyone involved in the organization process in the ‘accessibility chain’—volunteers, activists, and professionals. Training should provide clear guidance regarding **political, linguistic, and behavioral aspects** (such as avoiding comments on bodies, using respectful language, recognizing internalized bias that might show also non-verbally, offering help without assuming it is needed, and asking consent before touching mobility aids or bodies), as well as logistical and technical procedures. Providing to all people involved a **document outlining accessibility practices**—both general and role-specific— would be very helpful.

2.2.9 ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

Many disabled and racialized lesbian, queer, and transfeminist people avoid our spaces because they feel those spaces as unfamiliar in comparison to their known safe places and they don’t know other people going there.

Organizing introductory meetings or presentations at partner organizations where we explain our events or spaces, can help build connection, recognition and trus.

2.2.10 COINVOLGERE I PUBBLICI

Molte persone lesbiche, queer e transfemministe con disabilità o razzializzate non accedono ai nostri spazi perché non li conoscono, perché non conoscono nessuna che li frequenti, perché li sentono estranei agli ambienti che rappresentano le loro zone sicure. Può quindi svolgere una funzione di **creazione di contatto, riconoscimento e fiducia** organizzare degli incontri conoscitivi nelle sedi di realtà partner, in cui raccontiamo il nostro evento o il nostro spazio.

Being represented helps us exist.

2.3 IMPLEMENTATION

2.3.1 CREATE AN ACCESSIBILITY TEAM

Forming a dedicated accessibility team for the full duration of the event, working in close coordination with the accessibility contact person, allows us to respond quickly to **specific access needs and unexpected issues** as they arise. This team is responsible for monitoring accessibility throughout the event, including **the proper functioning of elevators and other equipment**. The accessibility team should be clearly visible and easy to identify, so that anyone who needs support knows who to approach.

2.3.2 PREPARE AN ACCESS RIDER

All accessibility information should be easy to find and consult. An access rider (or access guide) is a digital and printed document that gathers all relevant information in one place, and is an effective tool. It should include **maps of all venues, detailed descriptions and photos of the spaces, information about mobility and all accessibility services provided during the event.** The access rider can be hosted on the website's accessibility page and shared through newsletters, social media, and QR codes on flyers and programs.

2.3.3 SET UP AN INFO POINT

The info point serves as central reference for all participants, especially people who may feel disoriented, unfamiliar with the space, or unsure where activities are taking place. Volunteers/Activists at the info point should be **specifically trained to welcome disabled people** and to provide clear information about accessibility and mobility. They should also know how to activate the accessibility team if any additional request. When possible, volunteers who speak multiple languages can help welcome people who do not speak the local language. The info point should also provide **practical tools**, such as printed access guides or QR codes directing to the digital version, and earplugs.

2.3.4 PROVIDE SUBTITLES

All films and audiovisual content should be subtitled, preferably in **two languages**. Subtitles increase access for deaf and people with hearing-impairments and also support those who do not speak the original language. Subtitles must be **clearly readable** so their placement on the screen, font choice, size, and color contrast must be accurately considered. When using translated subtitles, it is essential to work with **translators who are familiar with the language and subject of the films** and the event to avoid misgendering, outdated or offensive language, as well as poor translations. Shared translation guidelines can be a useful tool. Whenever possible, consider using apps that allow subtitles to be read on personal devices in sync with the screening.
Subtitling can also be useful for live content such as **spoken interventions**, using **respeaking techniques and/or automatic captioning and translation software.**

2.3.5 PROVIDE SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION

Sign language is used to communicate by part of the deaf community and it is referred to as “signing.” Events that include spoken content should guarantee the presence of one or more **Sign language interpreters**, depending on the duration of the interpretation required to ensure better accessibility for deaf signers. Whenever possible, interpreters should be members of the lesbian, queer, and transfeminist community, or at least be familiar with its language and topics to ensure accurate interpretation of terms related to gender, sexuality, and particular subjectivities.

Not all deaf people use and understand Sign language; in particular, oral deaf people can read lips and use hearing aids and cochlear implants.
In both cases, visibility of the speaker is key so their face must be well-lit and proximity to the speaker is very important so we recommend **reserving front-row seats for deaf people**. When feasible, during events offer direct connection of cochlear implants to the venue’s sound system.

2.3.6 PROVIDE AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

Audio description is an additional audio track for films, performances, and multimedia content. It **narrates key visual elements** (settings, costumes, colors, spaces, movements and facial expressions, actions, and on-screen text) in the pauses between dialogues, making content **accessible to blind and low-vision people**.
Audio description requires specialized writing, recording, and integration with the original audio, and it often involves professionals and higher costs. For this reason, film festival organizers can also **assess the film selection according to the availability of audio description**, as more productions are starting to offer this service.

2.3.7 OFFER FATPHOBIA-FREE MERCHANDISING

When events rely on self-financing and offer clothing as merchandise, we should ensure that the clothing sizes range from XS to 5XL so that **fat people are not excluded from purchasing**. Anyone responsible for merchandising tables must be very careful to **avoid comments or judgments on people’s bodies.**

2.4 COMMUNICATION

2.4.1 USE SIMPLE, CLEAR LANGUAGE

Whenever possible, we apply the rules of **"plain language"** so that our written materials are easy to access and understand, for example:

- write short direct sentences (subject-complement-object) no longer than 25 characters;
- choosing words from everyday vocabulary and explain any complex, foreign words, or acronyms;
- avoiding passive voices and long subordinate clauses;
- preferring using verbs over nouns;
- breaking text into short paragraphs and use titles and subtitles;
- using accessible, sans-serif fonts with a minimum size of 12 pt, and 1.5 line spacing, left-justify, and bullet points when appropriate.

Blank spaces help us read better. Avoid blocks of text and use images, icons, info-graphics, charts, and other tools to make reading and understanding of our texts easier. **"Easy to read Language"** can make comprehension easier for people with intellectual disabilities or limited proficiency in the local language. Whenever assessing accessibility for people with intellectual disabilities, we can collaborate with associations specialized in **Augmentative and Alternative Communication**.

2.4.2 USE ICONS, SYMBOLS, AND IMAGES

Visual communication can enhance **clarity and immediacy**. Associating **specific icons**, such as strobe lights, loud sounds, sign language interpretation, with accessibility information in every individual event helps people find what they need and understand what to expect. These icons should appear across all materials used to communicate the program, as well as on the signage at the entrance before each individual event.

2.4.3 CREATE A DEDICATED ACCESSIBILITY EMAIL ADDRESS

Setting up a dedicated accessibility email address can be a simple but effective tool for collecting specific accessibility requests for information and communicating to the appropriate contact person. This email address should be **clearly visible across all communication tools** (print, web, press releases) and associated with clear text inviting people to get in touch.

2.4.4 DEVELOP AN ACCESSIBLE WEBSITE WITH A DEDICATED PAGE

Disabled people often spend significant time and energy searching for accessibility information. This is known as the **hidden labor of disability**. Creating a website developed according to **international digital accessibility standards (WCAG guidelines)**, along with a clearly marked accessibility page within it, helps reduce this burden. This page should include detailed description of spaces, routes and distances within the venue, information on how to reach the venue, details about strobe lights, loud noises, or other sensory stimuli, information about free admission for personal assistants, and the options to download any access guides, maps, and other aids.

It is an act of care to clearly and explicitly communicate in case there are spaces, times or situations at the event that may not be accessible to everyone.

2.4.5 PROVIDE ACCURATE MOBILITY INFORMATION

For people with walking difficulties or those using mobility aids, knowing how to reach the venue is essential. We should always provide detailed mobility information **including public transportation options**, taxi services and apps, any **services equipped to transport electric wheelchairs, parking availability** (clearly indicating whether free or paid), maps and directions to all nearby accessible parking areas. When events take place in multiple locations, we should also indicate the distances between the venues and any other walking required.

2.4.6 SHARE ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION WELL IN ADVANCE

Accessibility information should be published as early as possible **across all available channels** (website, social media, newsletter, press releases) to leave time to plan an experience that, for a disabled person traveling from far away, can be complex to plan. When Sign language services are provided, such information should be shared clearly to deaf signers and, whenever possible, accompanied by a video in Sign language posted on the event or organization website and social media, ideally created in collaboration with deaf signers or organizations.

2.4.7 MAKE ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION VISIBLE DURING THE EVENT

Accessibility information should be available throughout the event. This helps people understand and make use of the accessibility tools provided. For example, **accessibility messages can be projected on screens** in the venue before screenings or talks.
These messages can also raise awareness in the audience about a shared collective responsibility regarding accessibility (for example, not using restrooms reserved for disabled people or not occupying seats reserved for fat people if not needed).

2.4.8 DESIGN SIMPLE, CLEAR ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNAGE

Clear environmental signage helps everyone navigate the event more easily. Widespread signage, **combining text and images**, should be placed in **highly visible locations**, taking care to use fonts and sizes that are easy to read, considering an appropriate height for placement to ensure visual accessibility for people with different needs.

2.4.9 RACCOGLIERE FEEDBACK

To foster the accessibility process, feedback on the implemented practices and tools used is essential. We can gather feedback through an **accessibility questionnaire** shared via QR codes during the event, as well as in **post-event meetings with partner organizations**, the accessibility team and the entire organization grou

Being remembered helps us exist.

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For any comments, observations, criticisms or collaboration proposal, please write us at accessibilita@someprefercakefestival.com

Being heard helps us exist.