

Accessibility, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Cultural Sector

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Accessibility, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Cultural Sector: Initiatives and Lessons Learned from Real-life Cases

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About the Editors

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Foreword

Julie Bérubé

No need to argue the importance that issues of accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion (A DEI) play in our societies. More than ever, we need social justice in all spheres. We need a balm to heal wounds inflicted by transgressions like hate crimes, oppression, exclusion, and more. This perspective shaped the idea for our book.

In studying the cultural sector for almost a decade, I have taken an interest in the identity tension experienced by artists who are torn between giving their creativity free rein and needing to earn a living. Cultural activity in rural areas is also of significant interest to me because the concentration of resources in major urban centers leaves artists in rural areas with limited resources and, unfortunately, leads to a less robust cultural offering. Nonetheless, culture should remain accessible to all citizens regardless of factors such as their origins, social status, gender, and location. Art and culture bring well-being and have positive economic and social impacts (Boix et al., 2022; Tubadji et al., 2015). This book affirms the importance of promoting culture and its accessibility for all; it is essential, even vital, that culture becomes a common good.

I have always dreamed of a just society where differences are accepted and appreciated for their uniqueness. However, as I grew up, I quickly realized that differences could frighten, making it easy for people to discriminate against others who did not belong to dominant groups. This led me to take an interest in understanding issues of A DEI. Similar to many people, I have both privileged and unprivileged social identities. I didn't want to assume that I understood other peoples' experiences with discrimination and marginalization, but I could dream of an inclusive and just society. So, with humility, I began to study A DEI issues.

My first research project on A DEI focused on the role that cultural organizations played in relation to A DEI issues in the cultural sector. This project led me to meet artists and cultural workers who are interested in A DEI issues and who are striving for a fair and inclusive sector. I quickly became interested in the initiatives they were implementing to promote inclusion. Cultural workers and artists around the world are advocating for A DEI and seeking greater social justice. We must recognize their work and efforts and share these initiatives to inspire others to join in making cultural sectors more fair and more inclusive. This desire to acknowledge and highlight the work of others gives the book purpose.

By sharing these initiatives that promote ADEI in the cultural sector, we aim to reach two target audiences: practitioners and academics in the cultural sector. Practitioners may find interest in concrete initiatives that can be used to replicate or to inspire other actions. Several best practices emerge from the cases presented, and initiatives from one artistic discipline can also inspire other cultural disciplines. Our goal is to break down barriers and foster exchanges across all disciplines for all cultural disciplines. Similarly, initiatives in one country can inspire cultural workers in others to adopt certain practices or initiatives.

For academics, real cases fuel reflection on the challenges related to ADEI in the cultural sector. Several cases present ideas that academics can further explore, especially in collaborative research projects. In these cases, we can identify not only best practices but also the ADEI challenges that the cultural sector faces. Thus, academics could undertake research projects to find ways to overcome these challenges. The cases can also serve as teaching material, providing concrete examples that illustrate the theories taught in arts and cultural management classrooms. University programs that focus on arts and culture management are increasing in number. These programs must teach the concepts of ADEI, and this book is a perfect tool to promote the practical application of theories. Real cases from various disciplines and regions help students to understand the breadth of possibilities for promoting and integrating ADEI in the cultural sector.

As the idea for the book took shape, it became clear that I couldn't work alone on a project of such significance and scope. I instinctively turned to my close network and invited my colleague Marie-Laure Diah to join me. Marie-Laure has a strong research background on themes of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), Quebec immigration, and socio-professional integration. Her knowledge of these subjects made a valuable contribution to steering this book. Her openness, empathy, ability to engage in dialog, and her desire to continually learn about others make her a perfect editor.

Next, I approached someone I didn't know personally but who is a leader in the field of ADEI in the cultural sector, Antonio C. Cuyler. I have immense respect for all of Antonio's work on ADEI, particularly his relevant and timely contributions to the opera field. His knowledge of the sector, experience, and network were major assets for our work. The contributions of Marie-Laure and Antonio were essential for success; without their efforts and input, the book could not have been realized. I am immensely grateful to them for accepting my invitation and for their dedication for more than a year to deliver a high-quality manuscript.

Of course, the book could not have come to fruition without the participation of all the authors and practitioners who contributed to writing the separate chapters. We reached out to you, and you all responded with enthusiasm for the project. Your experiences make this book even more relevant. On behalf of the editing team, I warmly thank you for your participation and the quality of your chapters.

To maintain an open-minded approach, we intentionally placed few constraints on the contributing authors. Indeed, we only asked them to present an

initiative that promotes ADEI in the cultural sector. Recognizing that the concepts of accessibility, diversity, equity and inclusion are social constructs and inherently polysemic, we acknowledge the existence of multiple and coexisting definitions to understand these concepts. We chose to let the authors refer to their own definitions rather than impose our vision of ADEI on them.

In the same vein, we did not determine the specific type of initiative that authors could present. As readers will observe, some chapters focus primarily on accessibility, others on social justice, and others on inclusion or equity. Thus, we embrace the plurality of perspectives related to ADEI and the various ways of conceptualizing them in the cultural sector.

It is, however, relevant and important for us to share with the reader at the outset how we frame these concepts. We opt for broad and inclusive definitions. For accessibility, we concur with Cuyler (2023) who conceives it as: “Access is the removal of all barriers to participation” (p. 86).

There is a range of definitions for diversity; some identify specific components such as race, gender, ethnicity, age, national origins, religion, and disability (van Ewijk, 2011). We prefer a broader definition suggesting that diversity includes all the ways in which individuals differ from one another and encompasses the characteristics that make an individual or group of individuals different from one another (Cuyler, 2013; van Ewijk, 2011).

For equity, we adopt the definition used by a Canadian funding agency, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (2017):

Equity means fairness; people of all identities being treated fairly. It means ensuring that the processes for allocating resources and decision-making are fair to all and do not discriminate on the basis of identity. There is a need to put measures in place to eliminate discrimination and inequalities which have been well described and reported and ensure, to the best degree possible, equal opportunities. (p. 3)

Finally, for inclusion, we propose one of the definitions suggested by Dobusch (2014): “a process and condition where people gain access to areas from which they were formerly un/intentionally excluded” (p. 220). As mentioned, we did not impose these definitions, but in the foreword, we wanted to offer an initial way of conceptualizing accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion. While readers can understand these as individual concepts, in most cases, they are interconnected, where, for example, accessibility promotes inclusion, and so on. Thus, we advocate for a unified and comprehensive conception of ADEI.

Given the richness of chapters we received, we have chosen to organize them according to artistic discipline: performing arts, music, visual arts, and events. Initially, we aimed to highlight similarities or differences in ADEI initiatives across various artistic disciplines, but it is clear that such classification is not feasible at this stage. Indeed, faced with the diversity of cases presented, we have not been able to identify specific practices unique to each artistic discipline. The initiatives are

therefore presented as independent of each other. Chapter 1 introduces the structure of the book and provides a brief overview of some literature on ADEI in the cultural sector.

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