WHAT INCLUSION HAS TAUGHT ME

A LIFE-CHANGING STORY

by

Miguel Ángel Font Bisier

FASHION, CINEMA AND... SCENTS

My name is Miguel Ángel Font Bisier and I am a Spanish film director, scriptwriter and a researcher.

Although I played the violin for 20 years, **I have always been in love with the Seventh Art**, and here is one of the biggest reasons why:

Cinema is **the only craft that is able to incorporate all the other six arts** - architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance and poetry/literature. Therefore, I am able to intertwine a variety of diverse techniques and disciplines in my works, in order to look for the best way to share my stories with the audience.

Image 1: Shooting *fashion film HERAION*

Although I have worked for many different clients and brands, I will only tell you about the projects which I create and finance independently; the ones that really help to improve my voice as a creator and an artist.

So here is my story. It all started in 2010.

After years of study and experimentation, I came up with *Eiénesis – In search of light*; a script that combined the world of fashion with the world of cinema. I found out that this was already a format that had been recently trending internationally: *Fashion film*.

Given that in Spain there were almost no such projects, **I became one of the first directors to dive into this realm of work.**

Image 2: one of the characters of *fashion film AETERNA*

Later, in 2012, I combined *fashion film* with other genres and formats that were of my interest: Horror, fantasy, video-art, music videos…

Image 3: *SINNSIDE*, a combination of fashion and horror

In 2013, I wrote *XMILE*, a **science fiction/fashion short film**.

Image 4: A frame of *XMILE*

What was this short about? Let us have a look.

"Year 2184. The Earth no longer produces oxygen. BioApps, created by a corporation, become the norm… body implants that allow humans to survive in Nature's new order. Although the Apps were designed to save us, they have become marketing tools that slowly trap our humanity.
In this new world, what is the true cost of a real smile?"

Image 5: different actors of *XMILE*
rehearsing

We started the production in 2014 by **looking for a fashion designer who agreed to create an entire fashion collection** for the project. The plan was to use this collection not only as one of the main attractions of the film, but to show it after the screening of *XMILE*.

XMILE was shot in November 2014.

A few months later, I got a call from my old university teacher. He wanted to introduce me to the CEO of a company from my city Valencia: Olorama.
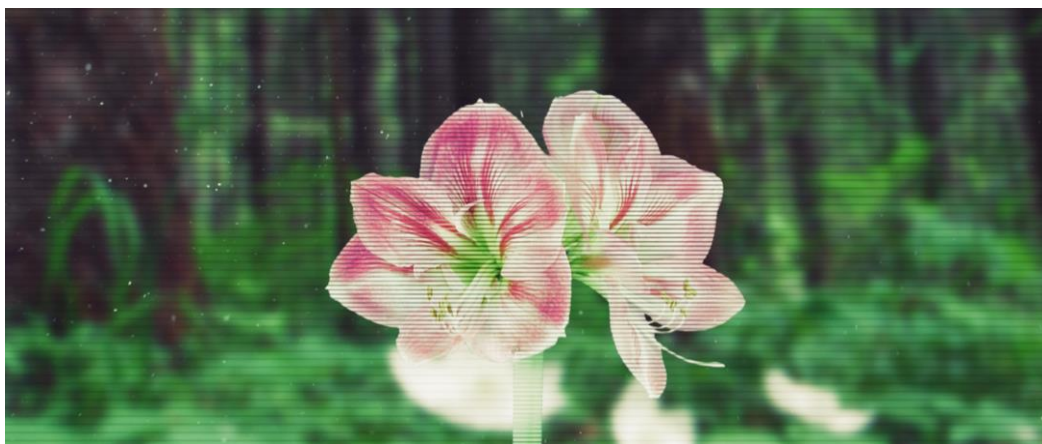

Image 6: A frame of *XMILE*

So, what does Olorama do? They create smell experiences in VR games, events and film theatres.

And, why did they contact the university? **They were looking for audio-visual projects to add smells to**, and *XMILE* seemed like a perfect candidate.

We pitched our project to them and they thought it was a very challenging choice because *XMILE* was still in postproduction.

This means that they were invited into the process at a stage of, let us say, 75% completion, so **they had the freedom to be creative,** which was something new for them. They were accustomed to getting on board when everything else was already completed. Which, as I will elicit later on, is a very common problem in most fields that require creativity.

MY FIRST STEPS INTO ACCESSIBILITY

Smelling my own movie was a surreal experience. It was also an inspiring one, and some ideas popped into my mind: For example, I thought, **if we are able to assign a particular perfume to every main character**, adding an extra layer of sensory realism, then why not add aromas to a catwalk to make these events more enriching? These essences could be carefully chosen by the project's fashion designer him or herself, as they were for *XMILE*.

The multisensory side of the project was interesting, but I had another thing in mind: Given that *XMILE* could be "smelled" as well as seen, **would it be possible to create a cinematic experience that would include people who lack sight or hearing?** And, if so, how does a blind person watch a film? And a deaf person? What about the deaf-blind people?

Image 7: A frame of *XMILE*

With such questions in mind, I found the following accessibility tools for the visually and hearing impaired: Audio description, subtitles for the Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing (SDH) and Sign Language.

Audio description (AD): This additional, acoustic track, provides a narration mainly for the blind and visually impaired. This narration, which appears between dialogues, describes what is happening on the screen and cannot be understood.

Subtitles for the Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing (SDH): These subtitles are designed, mainly, for deaf or hard-of-hearing viewers. They offer any audible information relevant for the understanding of the plot. SDH are displayed in various places on the screen. Dialogues are highlighted in different colours.

Sign Language (SL): Sign Languages are not really an accessible tool. They are vivid, natural languages with their own grammar and lexicon, particular to every Deaf Community in its respective country. It is important to note that the manual sign stream just makes up one part of these Languages. Facial expressions and other non-manual elements are also very relevant to properly communicate in any Sign Language.

Combining these above-mentioned tools with the aromatic experience, a tactile exhibition and a tasting experience, we were able to design a *XMILE* experience for the deaf-blind people.

Image 8: Can you imagine going to the movies without being able listen or to see?

So, **what was this tasting experience and tactile exhibition about?**

First, let me explain how we originally intended the experience to be:

Before entering the screening room, the viewers got specially designed drinks that would later appear in the film. Fun fact, you might assume that the above-featured drinks in screaming green and blue colours, might taste bitter. However, they tasted like sweet strawberry chewing gum in order to help people realize that sight and taste do not need to go hand in hand.

Images 9 and 10: The screening attendees
get their drinks before watching *XMILE*

Then, with the drinks at hand, they watched *XMILE* with the added scents. When the beverages appeared in the film, the viewers were able to drink them, so to speak, with the characters.

After the screening, they had access to the costumes, prosthetics and other items featured in the exhibition.

Images 11, 12 and 13: Tactile exhibition at
XMILE premiere

In regards to the deaf-blind people, the experience was a little different.

With the help of a couple of guide-interpreters and braille texts about the film, we used the tactile exhibition **as a sort of "trailer"** to contextualize *XMILE*.

Images 14 and 15: *XMILE*'s fashion designer watches how guide-interpreters explain his art to the deaf-blind attendees

Within the framework of ASOCIDE CV, the project's fashion designer cooperated with the deaf-blind people in order to write the braille texts for the exposition.
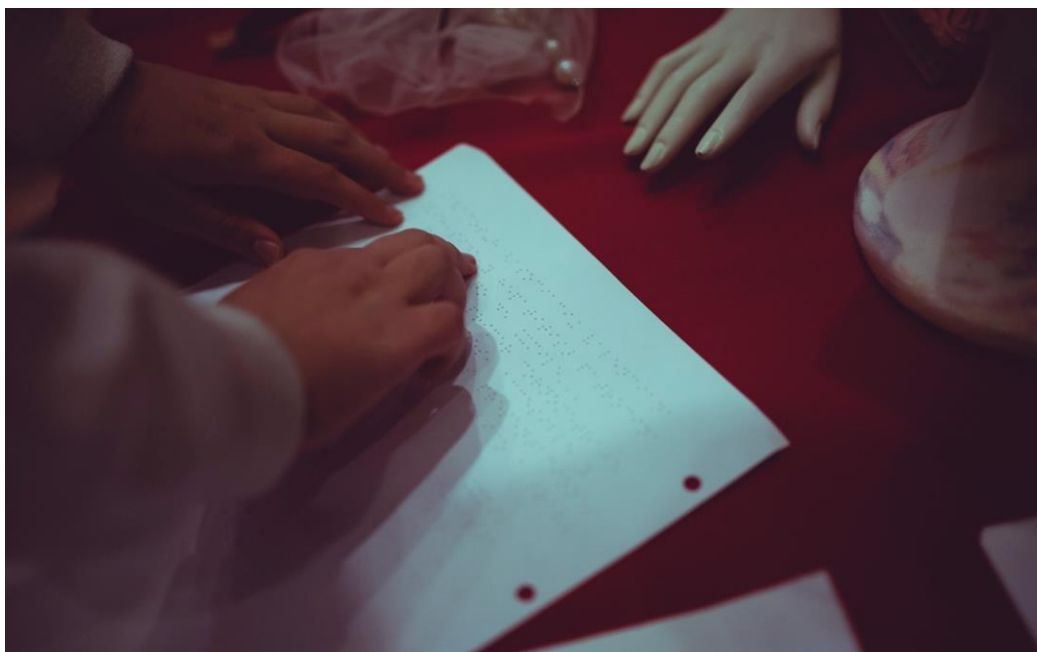
Image 16: Braille texts at *XMILE*'s tactile exhibition

By **touching the costumes** of the main characters and by the help of the braille texts and the guide-interpreters, the deaf-blind people got to learn about the characters' names and personalities.


Image 17: A deaf-blind woman meets *XMILE*'s protagonist at the premiere

Then, like the other members of the audience, they got the movie-featured drink and enter the theatre to experience the film and all its additional scents.

What about the screening?

Two guide-interpreters, working hand-in-hand, were telling them the story. **Using Sign Language**, one of the guide-interpreters explained the plot, while the other one covered the dialogues.
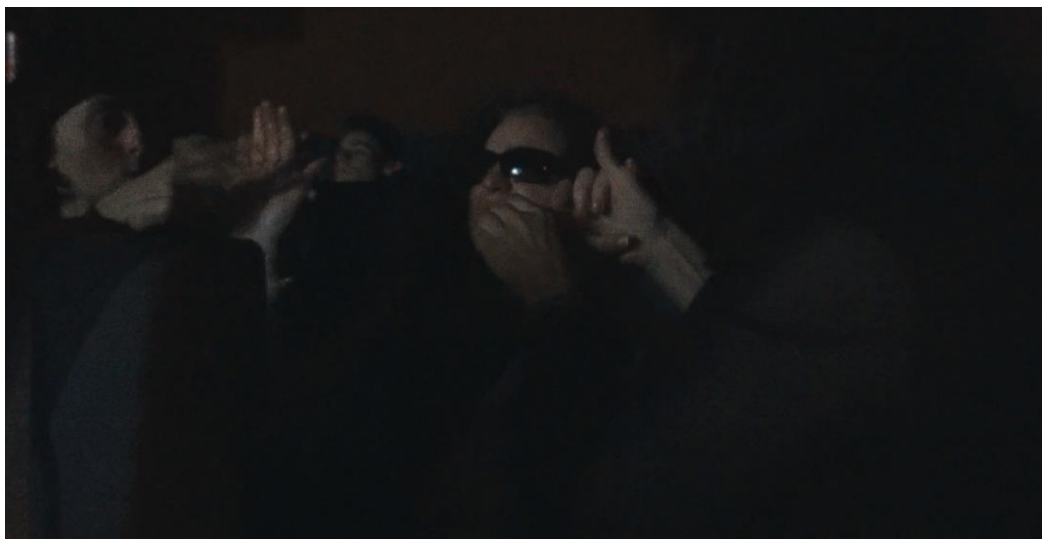
Images 18 and 19: Two guide-interpreters sign *XMILE*'s plot and dialogues to a deaf-blind woman during a screening

The scents played their part as well: Each aroma in *XMILE* was perfectly synchronized with the script the guide-interpreters were signing. That way, the deaf-blind person's film experience was further enhanced.

A wide variety of scents were featured in *XMILE*, including those of grass, smoke and other such environmental odours, as well as the aforementioned character-perfumes.

So, if the main characters were about to appear with their respective perfumes, the guide-interpreters told them so.

For the deaf-blind people, this was a great and new experience!

However, **we cannot claim that *XMILE* is a 100% inclusive film**. As mentioned before, all the accessibility tools were created in postproduction – in order to be inclusive, everything should have been designed this way from the start.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the final experience cannot be treated as an opportunity for employing Universal Design strategies.

In fact, after our work was done, **we did not have one instance in which we had to make specific adaptations** to accommodate an individual member of the audience. Everybody, within their own capacity and regardless of their condition, was able to enjoy the experience of *XMILE* to the full extent.

Image 20: Deaf people clapping at the end
of *XMILE*'s screening

We premiered the film on December 16th.

Since then, many people with or without disabilities attended *XMILE*'s numerous screenings. Also, government representatives, associations, people from the film industry and educators were impressed by **a project which managed to include everybody**, though the plot was not related to the theme of disability at all.

Image 21: High quality audio description plus scents... many viewers closed their eyes and lived the cinematic experience as a blind person would

I met plenty of new people whose life stories had a great impact on me, and who made me aware of how much the world has to change to become inclusive. So, I started to do more research.

FROM THE SCREEN TO THE HEART

Although there was not that much ready-made information available, little by little, I was able to find what I was looking for.

I started with History, Politics and Legislation, in order to know the laws and statements that the UN, EU, World Health Organization (WHO) and my own country have published. Already, a lot of work has been done in the fields of technology, communication, social initiatives, etc. **towards reducing the level of social exclusion**.

The first turning point in my investigation was reading the WHO's definition of disability:

> "Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. Disability is thus not just a health problem**. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives.**
>
> Overcoming the difficulties faced by people with disabilities requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers".

This definition made me realise that, up until this point, **I had created movies without considering the needs of a wide range of people** in society.

Sadly, I have to admit, that if someone wanted to accuse me of playing a role in this culture of exclusion, I would have to plead guilty.

Image 22: Two deaf women (the one on the left suffering from *Epidermolysis bullosa*) talking in Sign Language during *XMILE*'s premiere

At first sight, this could come across as an exaggeration, but let us take a look at the definition of culture.

As the anthropologist Cristina de Rossi explains:

> "The word culture derives from a French term, which in turn derives from the Latin *colere*, **which means to tend to the earth and grow, or cultivation and nurture**. It shares its etymology with a number of other words related to actively fostering growth".

Hence, because the term "culture" roots in the verb "to grow", we could claim **that access to arts offers more than mere entertainment. It stimulates personal development.**

If there is a wide range of people, who do not have access to culture, then they would not be able to properly communicate or develop a critical way of thinking. So, the notion of caring about disabled people's access to arts is not that far-fetched.

Culture is a big part of everyday life: Literature, theatre, exhibitions, tourism and my field of work, cinema, are more relevant than what we give them credit for.

Image 23: Blind attendees at *XMILE*'s premiere

On the one hand, Spain is a country where film accessibility has been an addressed issue since the nineties. On the other hand, there is still room for improvement: I believe **that there is a need for new initiatives and workflows to enhance, not only its quantity but also its quality**.

Regarding the workflow, it is problematic that there is neither a well-defined professional position, nor a university degree that would lead to such a role. This lack of professional education hinders the smooth flow of communication between the creators of art productions and the accessibility companies that make the sensory adaptations for movie-goers with disabilities. Cooperation is compromised.

Taking Olorama as an example, we can see that **accessibility companies usually do not start working on the project until after the audio-visual part has been finished**.

Image 24: A big part of *XMILE*'s film crew
attended the premiere

By implementing their work at the final phase of the production, the **accessibility professionals are left with very little room to be creative**. Consequently, both the accessibility company and the creators are working on the same project, almost without communication.

That is because the accessibility professionals **are usually hired by distribution companies and apart from the production**. It would make sense that with such a big gap between content and its accessibility, **people with disabilities are left in a weak position to be able to enjoy audio-visual content** to the same extent as others.

Now, let us get technical!

Chapter 4

ANSWERS AND MORE QUESTIONS

Imagine we were going to shoot a movie and nobody from the team would communicate with each other. The actors would not get the script; the cinematographer would not know how the director designed the sequences… we would just meet the day of the shooting and shout: *Action!*

What a nightmare!

Image 25: A break during the shooting of
Blues Time at *Loco Club Concert Hall*

Planning is mandatory while creating a film, and regarding audio description (AD) and subtitles for the Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing (SDH) we could do better.

Image 26: Audio description logo

The most important issue we are dealing with right now is **to initiate the process of accessibility from the very start of the film's creation**.

As the scriptwriter thinks about the music while writing the story, as the producer tries not to forget about the project's distribution during pre-production time...

Anticipating the team's needs really helps.

Accessibility companies need to be included early on in the production process in order to give the best they can. If we keep making accessibility adaptations at the final stage of the movie process rather than earlier on and in collaboration with the creators, **we will continue to risk hampering the disabled person's enjoyment** of the movie experience.

Image 27: A visually impaired person fidgets with the camera during the shooting of *Blues Time* at *Llumm Studios*

While I was checking the audio description guides and recommendations which are followed by Spanish accessibility companies, another accessibility improvement came to my mind.

I noticed that **only one audio description (AD) style guide is available and it is applicable to all movies regardless of genre**. This kind of uniform approach is inappropriate if you consider that the same descriptive style is to be used for both cartoon and horror movies.

Such a broad application of language diminishes the feeling and identity of each and every individual artistic work. On the other hand, the AD style guides from France, UK, USA and Germany all profess a different understanding of how to make these adaptations. **The rules to create AD's and SDH's have been developed externally**, without taking creators, authors and producers into account.

Another matter is the audio descriptor's adhering to these guidelines: They are left to their own devices. This reinforces the point I made earlier: Accessibility is not a real concern in the film industry; it has not yet been organically integrated into the film industry's DNA.
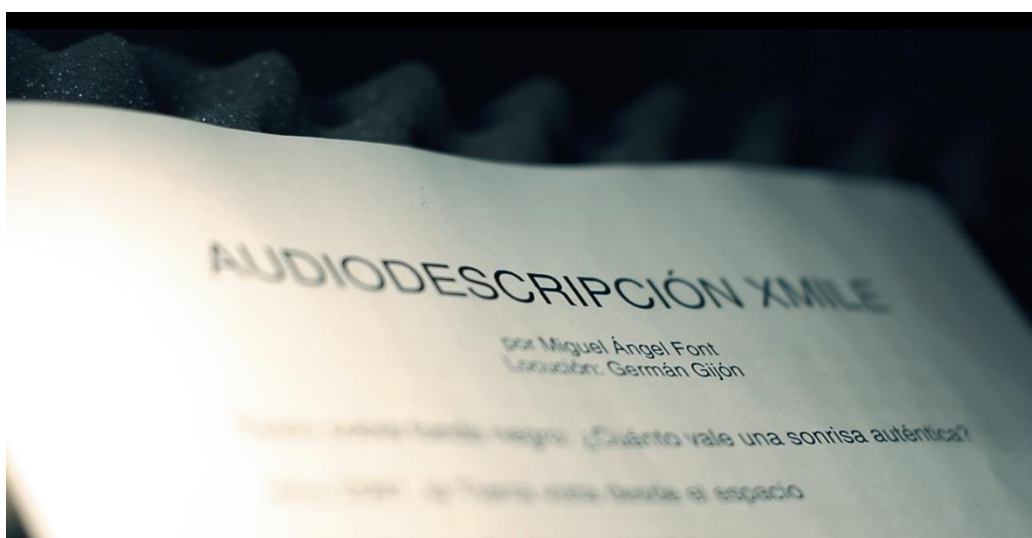

Image 28: *XMILE*'s audio description front page

As you may have noticed, my thoughts and ideas do not only derive from my studies and investigations, but from my deep immersion into the world of movie-making. I was the one to create *XMILE*'s AD and SDH. During the process, as the film's scriptwriter and director, **I started to feel constricted by the AD's guidelines**. At times, I felt I had no other option than to go rogue.

Because… **what really is the goal of accessibility and inclusion?** To follow some rules to simply create generic audio descriptions? Or to offer accessible tools that provide a cinematic experience as accurate as possible to the one intended by its authors?

What if these rules only existed to be broken when we were ready to take a step further and to really work towards including more people in cultural activities?

Chapter 5

POLITICS AND THE FIRST BIG CHANGE

Parallel to the investigation and screenings that we planned across the first half of 2017, we included some interactive experiences in Spanish Sign Language. The *XMILE* experience was so unique that we received a lot of media attention. I will explain those interactive experiences in the following chapter.

As a consequence, politicians sat up, took notice of our project, and called me **to give a talk at the Spanish Senate** on June of 2017.

Image 29: The Spanish Senate

I felt very happy because of the invitation.

But then it hit me: I suddenly realised the magnitude of the occasion. It meant that I was responsible for speaking on behalf of so many people with disabilities, who are often left voiceless.

Anyway, after several weeks of meeting and talking to different associations, university teachers and accessibility companies, I was ready to put together a report and suggestions to share with the senators.

In the 45-minute presentation, I started by explaining XMILE and our work in accessibility and Universal Design. Then, I shared all the arguments I have already mentioned here about accessibility and why its development needs to be a part of the production right from the start.

In addition, I argued about the importance to create links between the film industry, the government, the associations for the impaired, the accessibility companies, the creators and the education system in order to develop an inclusive high quality cultural network. From the economic point of view, I explained to them that nowadays **high technology does not necessarily mean high prices:** Creating an AD, SDH and a Sign Language version for a feature film costs less than 2,000 euros.

When concluding my talk, I made the senators aware that **these tools are not only an affordable right for people with disabilities**, but also an aid to many more people with other needs: Elderly people who need subtitles on television, people who are learning a language and watch films in original version with subtitles, or people who need a clearer explanation on what is going on during a film.

My final thought was: If every citizen pays their taxes, why not include all of them as an audience when crafting audio-visual projects with the state's money?

Image 30: A moment of the talk at the
Spanish Senate

Luckily, my words convinced the senators to agree that something had to be done regarding this issue. I felt relieved!

Two days after my comeback from Madrid, I got a call from the Institut Valencià de Cultura. It is the entity from the Valencian Community that manages the audio-visual production subsidies, among other tasks.

Since 2016, **they were tracking our project and collaborating with us**. For example, they arranged to have *XMILE*'s official press conference at their facilities.

Image 31: Institut Valencià de Cultura workers try *XMILE*'s drinks during the press conference

After the Senate's talk, they called to request a report and to ask, how accessibility could be incorporated into their application form for film subsidies. I sent my conclusions to them, and a year later, in 2018, they announced that every single audio-visual project funded with Valencian money was obligated to have an audio description and SDH.

Valencia was the first of Spain's autonomous regions to make a move towards a real change. This section is still valid today.

COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES

During 2016 and 2017, we also achieved other goals worth mentioning:

1- Cardinal Herrera CEU University **undertook research about the use of the five senses in *XMILE***. Over 200 people were invited to participate as members of the audience in the research screenings, which had been adapted for accessibility.

Image 32: Audience members taking part
in the research after watching *XMILE*

2- The Spanish Organization of the Blind (ONCE) promoted our project in many different ways. For example, ONCE's choir "Allegro" created and performed a cover version of *XMILE*'s official song *Sonríe*.

"Allegro" is a project in which blind and non-blind people together perform music of many different styles. The event in which they performed was very relevant, too. It was **the first screening of a film adapted for accessibility at Kinépolis Valencia**, a big modern multiplex.
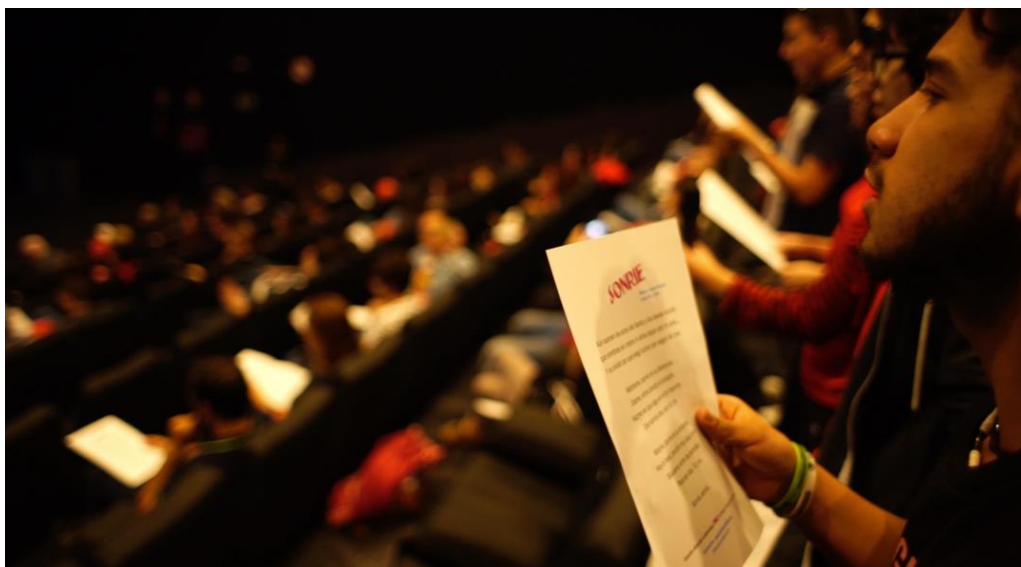
Image 33: The choir singing *Sonríe* at
Kinépolis Cinemas

3- How were we able to play XMILE's AD and SDH in cinemas?

Whatscine, the biggest accessibility company in Spain, was behind it. Their technology offers AD, SDH and Sign Language applied to any audio-visual content just by installing their free app into a smartphone when going to the movies. Then, each user enters the application and, based on their needs, they can select the desired accessibility.

After a few conversations, they sponsored some of our screenings: With the help of a Sign Language interpreter, they created a Sign Language version for *XMILE* and allowed us to use their technology when we screened the film.
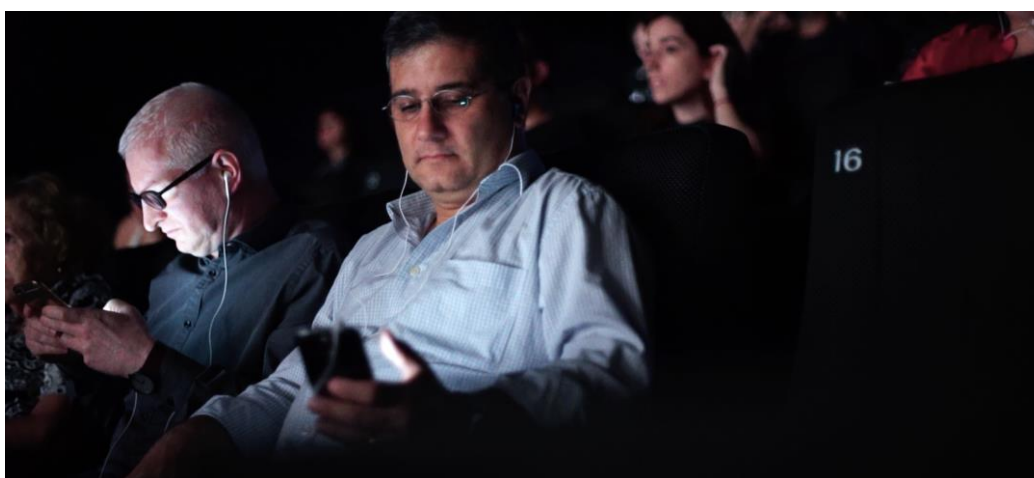

Image 34: Audience members sync their
phones to Whatscine in order to access
XMILE's AD, SDH and SL

4- Internationalization and film festival selections played a big role, too. Likewise, the many conferences, media interviews and panels in which we have taken part, made us expand our project overseas, for example in Mexico.

5- I wrote my first book, *XMILE: Cinema of Universal Design*.

Image 35: Presenting the book *XMILE - Cinema of Universal Design*

6- Thanks to Fesord CV, the Valencian Community's Federation of the Deaf, we were able to have a sign interpreter at many of our presentations.

Also, we shot a very special Sign Language version of *Sonríe*. **We wanted a totally deaf person to translate and perform the lyrics,** because we did not want to lose any of the details and richness provided by a native speaking Sign Language person.

Image 36: A frame of *Sonríe*'s inclusive Sign Language video

Carmen Juan, former president of Fesord CV, was the Sign Language performer in this emotional video, which created a deep connection with the deaf audience.

In addition, we asked some members of the Deaf Community about how we could incorporate other Sign Language activities into the project. They were very kind and told us one of the deaf tricks to listen to music: They use balloons to feel the sound's vibrations.

Thus, for premiering *Sonríe*'s Sign Language video, we organized a new event and gave balloons to the audience. It was amazing!

7- Finally, I started to learn Sign Language. Given that some of the screenings' attendants were deaf or deaf-blind, **I had to learn Sign Language properly, if I wanted to really connect with them**. Many wanted to offer their help and joined the project; and some have even become long-lasting friends.

The *XMILE* experience was not only a professional milestone for me. This has really turned into a life-changing project.

Image 37: Me communicating in Sign Language with a deaf-blind person

Due to the knowledge and experience we had acquired, we were ready to move on to the next project, which was...

Image 38: *Blues Time*'s official poster, by Weaddyou advertising agency

Chapter 7

WHAT IF INCLUSION IMPROVED ART?

The idea of *Blues Time* came to me in February 2017.

My grandfather was suffering from severe dementia and living with him was emotionally challenging.

I wrote the first draft of the film, but all my energy was focused on *XMILE* at that time, so I filed it away and moved on for some months. But, after the talk at the Senate, in summer 2017, I was ready to blow off the dust from *Blues Time*'s draft.

The main reason was not only to share my personal experience about my grandfather's; **I wanted to test the new ways of improving audio-visual accessibility** that I had actively been promoting for almost half a year. I needed to be sure that what we had fought for was worth the blood, sweat and tears.
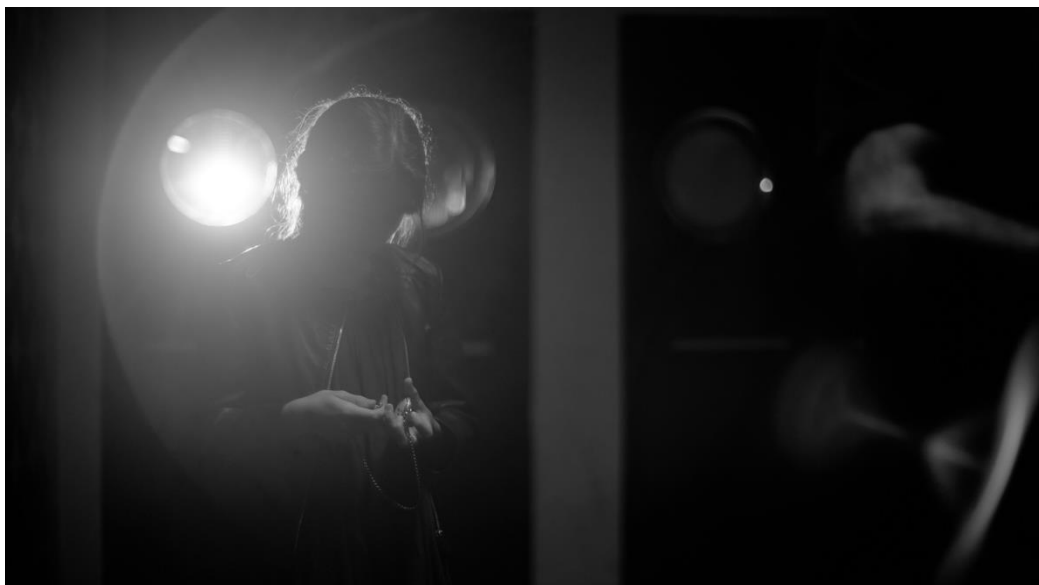

Image 39: *Blues Time*'s main character Fa
and her pocket watch

Both projects aspire towards the same ideal regarding accessibility; and the new script**, like its predecessor's, has nothing to do with the theme of disability**. While our first film ended up being an accessible, multisensory and adult oriented experience, we subjected *Blues Time* to inclusive adaptations at every stage of the filmmaking process: From the moment of its conception to its completion. This was not the case with *XMILE*.

Concurrently, **we wanted to use our experience to help any production company to join us in our effort to make inclusive films**. To fulfil this task, we crafted a new and easy-to-follow blueprint for creating a workflow – to open the door to fluid collaboration between creators and accessibility companies.

For this reason we skipped the use of the five senses in *Blues Time*. It would be impossible to turn our multisensory work into a production standard.

Image 40: Time and family, two of *Blues Time*'s main themes

Here is *Blues Time*'s plot:

'Blues Time' refers to the moments when life seems overwhelming and problems seem to have no solutions. Like a fragile heartbeat ticking to a weird rhythm, it appears as if everything is out of sync.

Fa, an eleven-year-old girl, is going through one of these moments as she runs desperately through the streets of the city, clasping an old pocket-watch, a present from her grandfather. The watch suddenly stops ticking at the exact moment the old man is being taken to the hospital for a serious illness. Still naive, Fa goes on a quest to fix the watch, believing that it will save her grandfather's life...

Image 41: Frame of a deleted sequence of
Blues Time

Let's recap for a second.

Yes, Blues Time is an inclusive short film, **because I wrote it knowing I would include the film's audio description, SDH and the Sign Language version**. But inclusion is not limited to taking these tools into account from the start. As discussed before, due to the fact that many people with disabilities wanted to participate in upcoming projects, some of them were invited to join our project.

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Through the help of these participants, and thus, some of *Blues Time*'s future viewers, we could test the film's accessibility and learn about their suggestions as final consumers of accessibility tools.

They were very helpful to us. Before the shooting, they told us about aspects of audio description or SDH they would like to see improved. We talked about the script of *Blues Times* as well.

Little by little, I realised that **I had found a way to include some particular details in the short film that would improve both the overall experience of the people with disabilities and mainstream audiences.**

For instance, let us have a look at Jay, who besides Fa is the other main character of our story. We had him wearing a key fob. In doing so, it is easier for the blind to know when he is moving on screen.

However, as a result of this decision, the script improved unexpectedly as well. **The addition made Jay more believable as a character**. Since he is a handyman, the object reinforced that particular characteristic of him.

Image 42: Jay trying to fix Fa's watch

Another example is the vast amount of time we spent on planning the film's pacing, so the audio description could fit better. By putting into words some of the scenes, the result was sometimes confusing or less investing than expected.

That's how we were able to identify the weaker parts of the film which did not hold well. Consequently, we would rearrange them, or, as in some cases, delete them.

Let us move on to one of the most complex parts of the film: ***Blues Time* features many musical references**, and the chords that Jay plays on a guitar work as a pivotal plot device. So, what about the deaf audience?

Image 43: The guitar Jay plays was crafted
by Guitarras Raimundo

The goal was to make this sequence as meaningful as possible for the deaf audience. And the most difficult part was to visually translate what Jay is playing on the guitar.

We started by rewriting some of the dialogues with the help of a deaf psychologist.

Regarding cinematography, we used wider shots when Jay plays **major chords**. We thought this type of framing would translate the acoustic feeling of happiness and empowerment that major chords transmit. When Jay plays **minor chords** or even ***blue*** ones, we used close-ups with a blurrier background to suggest a more intimate kind of sound.

Images 44, 45 and 46: Jay plays a major chord, a minor chord and a blues chord. Shot with a 24-mm., 50-mm. and 85-mm. lenses respectively

We also represented Fa's memories and feelings by associating each one with a specific chord. These in turn **resonate with the atmosphere created by the four seasons**.

As a former violinist, I thought this was a nice wink to Antonio Vivaldi's most famous work.

Happy times captured by major chords take place in spring or summer, minor chords and nostalgic moments are linked to autumn, and moments of anger are represented in a cold winterish *blue* chord.
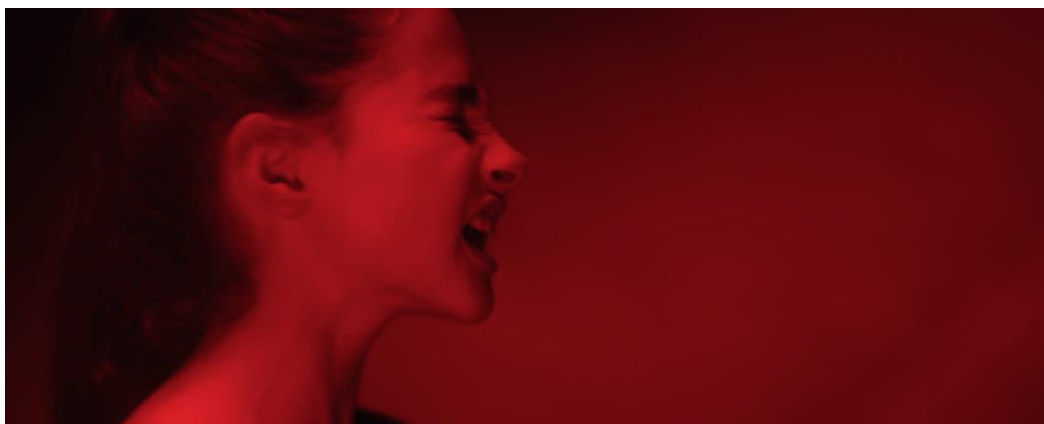

Image 47, 48 and 49: Memories, colors and
the four seasons in *Blues Time*

Feelings were translated into colours: Happiness is presented in orange, nostalgia in black and white with a bit of purple and rage in deep red.

To conclude, as you can notice, adding all these layers of meaning considering the impaired audience, strengthened the message and imagery of the film.

Employing these and other likeminded strategies, *Blues Time* helps viewers to immerse themselves into the film's particular fairy tale atmosphere. **A mysterious, magical and yet realistic tale** that proposes the following question to the audience:

Did Jay really exist, or was it all part of Fa's imagination?

As you may see, attempts at **inclusion in cinema does not necessarily lead to betrayal of a work's artistic merit**. In fact, it enhances it for everybody!

Image 50: *Blues Time's* clapboard

Chapter 8

NIHIL DE NOBIS, SINE NOBIS

"Nothing about us, without us". This Latin slogan is very relevant in the Civil Rights Movements across the world.

We decided to fully embrace this statement and here is how: As stated before, many of the abovementioned innovations and ideas were made possible thanks to the conversations we had with the impaired people who collaborated with us.

Who are they and in what departments did they help?

Vicente was a marketing specialist before losing his sight. He led the marketing department of *Blues Time*.

Image 51: Vicente during *Blues Time*'s
shooting at Loco Club Concert Hall

David, a man who was born blind, is an avid audio description consumer. **He helped me in developing the *Accessibility Report*.**
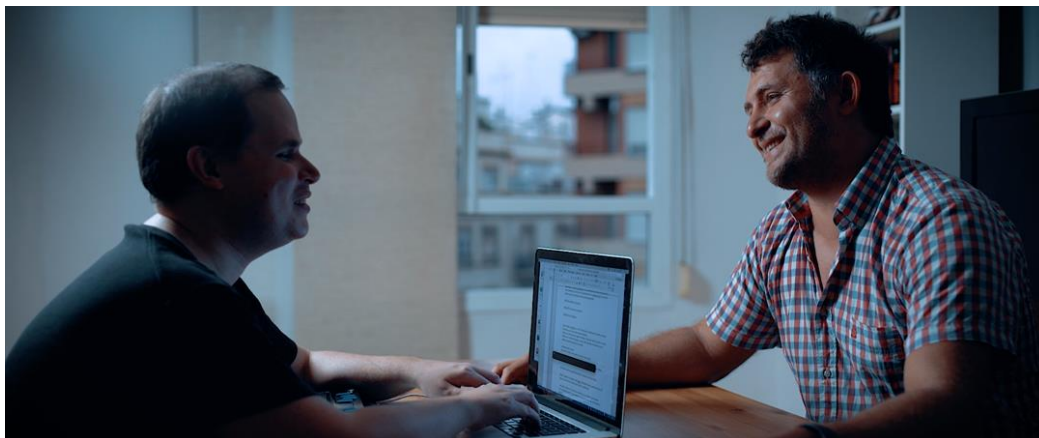

Image 52: David interviewing Fede Taus,
Blues Time's cinematographer, regarding
his role in writing the *Accessibility Report*

Juan, a person with muscular dystrophy, **is very good at computers**, so he worked in production, making spreadsheets and communicating the latest news to the team.

Image 53: Juan talking to Ester during the
shooting of *Blues Time*

Ester is a woman who had two strokes due to a heart tumour. **She was in charge of the social media and has a cameo in the film**.

When we met, I showed her *XMILE* with the audio description.

She told me that AD had been very helpful for her. Due to the brain damage resulting from her strokes, she has concentration problems and the audio description allowed her to follow the film's plot easily.

Her input reminded me of what I had said at the Senate: These adaptations may also aid those who have problematic conditions, but who are not visually or hearing impaired. For this reason, I included Ester as an audio description tester for *Blues Time*.

Imagen 54: Ester shooting her cameo

Juan Carlos, a deaf person, who loves taking pictures and watching TV series, **assisted in the department of direction and the one of cinematography**.

He is the person who taught me how to speak Sign Language.

Image 55: Juan Carlos learning how to handle the sound department's boom

Juan Antonio, a deaf-blind person who **had been a photographer before he partially lost his sight**, took part in the still photography team.


Image 56: Juan Antonio and Juan Carlos
communicating in Sign Language with
Amparo, *XMILE*'s guide-interpreter

Even the catering was done by deaf owners of a restaurant next to the location we were shooting, the Loco Club Concert Hall!

With this team working together with our professional film crew, **we became a big and diverse family**. Everybody adapted themselves to different communication modes in order to work together.

Then, we reconnected with Fesord CV, the Valencian Federation of the Deaf, to continue our work together, like we did before in *Sonríe*'s Sign Language video.

However, this time, the goal was take it a step further: Instead of just doing a Sign Language version of *Blues Time*'s official song, we aimed to create an inclusive Sign Language version of the whole film!
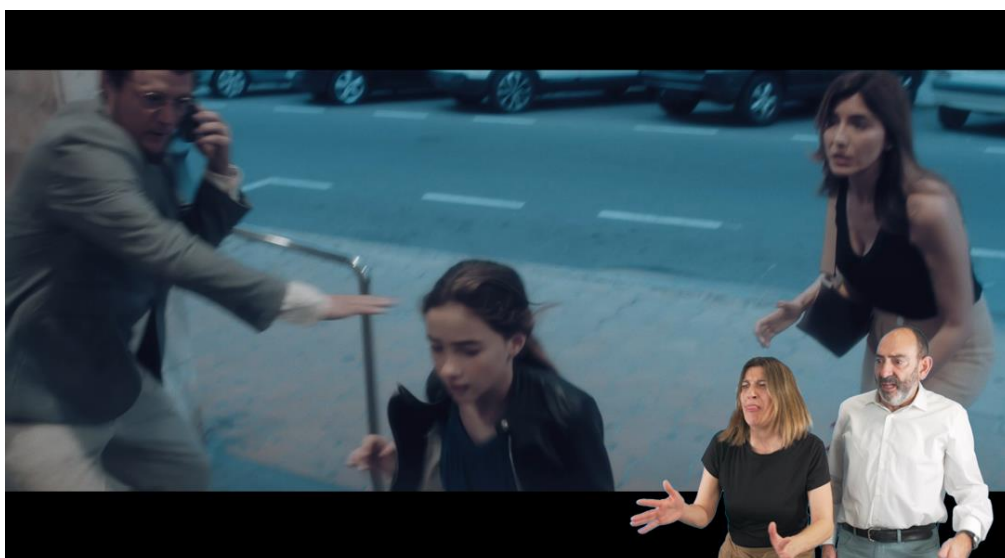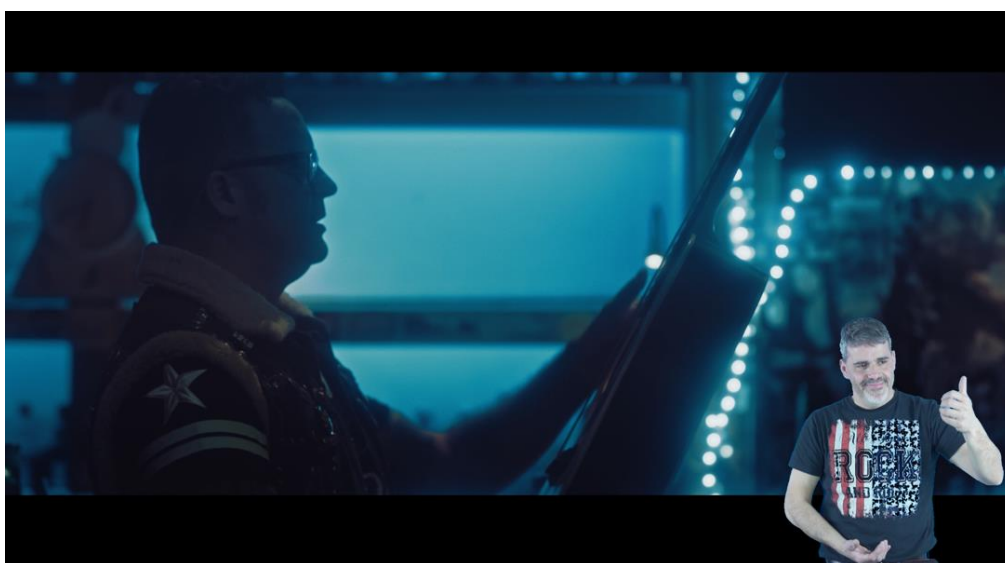
Images 57, 58 and 59: Frames of *Blues Time*'s Inclusive Sign Language version

We used SDH for the characters who appear off-screen and for other important acoustic information and music.

The shooting took place in Fesord's chroma studio. A Sign Language interpreter and the deaf psychologist, who helped us with Jay's chord scene, assisted us throughout the process.

Due to this inclusive version, we were able to further develop an activity we had already included in *XMILE*'s screenings: As an exercise to practice and promote empathy, we asked the audience to close their eyes and to only watch the film with the audio description. As blind people would do.

This activity was already part of the upcoming screenings of *Blues Time*, because the film's audio description was in the making. Now, the All-Inclusive Sign Language version came into play. In order for the audience to put themselves into the deaf people's shoes, we muted the dialogue track of the film. **The only audios we left playing were the music and the sound effects**, so the viewer would access the character's lines via the Sign Language performance.

This was the last inclusive improvement we wanted to make. The next step was to build the bridge that would bond the creative team with the accessibility companies.

We call that bridge the *Accessibility Report*.

THE ACCESSIBILITY REPORT

But, what exactly is this *Accessibility Report*?

Image 60: Fernando Villamanta,
Whatscine's CEO, reading the *Accessibility
Report*

An *Accessibility Report* is a memo that includes all the information that accessibility companies may need in order to create the project's audio description and subtitles for the Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing (SDH).

It **contains different texts written by the film's creative team**: Director, producer, cinematographer, art director, costume designer, sound designer and music composer. Every one of them briefly shares the information necessary to properly represent their artistic work in the audio description and in the SDH.

There is also a film's technical aspects sheet and a glossary section. With these, we make sure that the accessibility professionals use the same lexicon as the film's creators. This establishes a much better dialogue between creators and the companies, saving a lot of time and improving the quality of work.

Among other things, an *Accessibility Report* will answer the following questions regarding accessibility:

- When does the audio description narrator need to give the names of the characters?

- What could be considered a spoiler?

- Should the narrator be a man or a woman? Of what age?

- What colours are needed to in the subtitles for each character?

For *Blues Time*, we gave a 12 to 14 page-long Accessibility Report -**consisting of the vision of the team, the technical aspects sheet, the glossary and notes on accessibility**– to the accessibility company in charge of the project, which in our case was Whatscine.

When they read our *Accessibility Report*, they loved it and thought it was a perfect tool for improving audio-visual accessibility. Other professional audio descriptors thought the same.

The thing was that, like in *XMILE*, I wanted to test myself, so I created my own versions of Blues Time's AD and SDH. When I finished them, I asked Whatscine a favour: Would they follow the normal procedure and hire an external accessibility company to craft an AD, SDH and Sign Language version of *Blues Time*? Fortunately, they agreed.
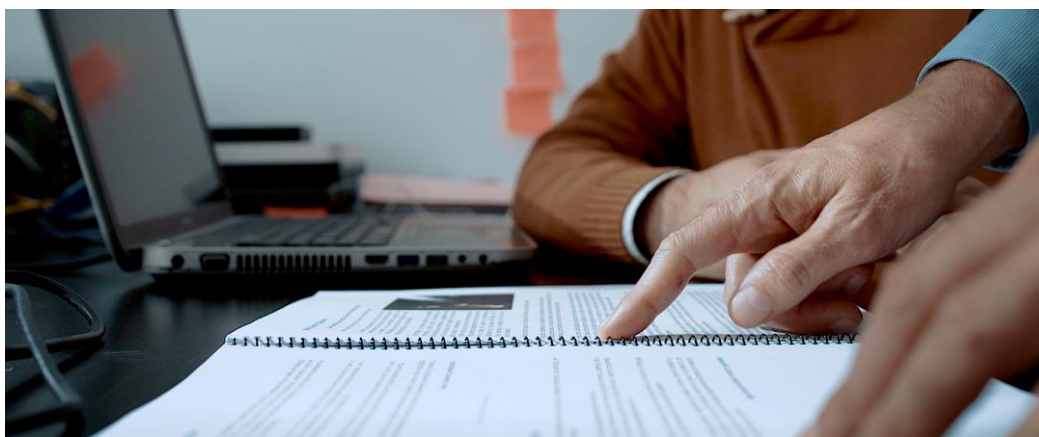

Image 61: The *Accessibility Report*

The accessibility company was so kind and sent us the three-above-mentioned accessibility tools as they usually create them, without any input from the film crew. Having these external AD, SDH and SL versions, we were able to compare if our new vision of accessibility offered any real improvement.

Luckily, the professional's and audience's answer was a positive: Yes!

To sum up, together with our three inclusive versions, plus the regular one without accessibility**, there are seven different ways in which *Blues Time* can be experienced**!

But, how did we get there, to produce and shoot this new, ambitious film?

Let us time travel back to June 2017.

Chapter 10

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Blues Time was meant to be innovative and also my most personal production, but this time **I could not finance it myself**.

Clearly, I had to find a production company to join the project.

Image 62: Cinematographer Fede Taus
ready to shoot

Around September 2017, **producer Nuria Cidoncha agreed to make *Blues Time* a reality** via her production company When Lights are Low. We started looking for funds. Together, we shot the first accessible *Blues Time's* teaser, which was released in *XMILE*'s Kinépolis event.

Thereafter, we contacted the Valencian Government and were granted a meeting with the director of the Department of Inclusion and Equality. He endorsed our project, and **wrote a letter recommending our work in accessibility to any future sponsors**.

In his own words:

> "Based on the director's previous satisfactory experience, *Blues Time* allows impaired people to participate in a cultural, innovative activity. The project embraces the accessibility recommendations of the International Conventions, which increases its social value".

Image 63: Nuria and the Department of Inclusion and Equality director, Antonio Raya at *Blues Time*'s press conference

In February 2018, Nuria called me: Caixabank was interested in *Blues Time*! Caixabank is the leading retail bank in Spain. Their mission is not only to contribute to the financial wellbeing of their customers, but to play a relevant part in social progress. For this reason, via their Social Banking Foundation, *"la Caixa"*, **they wanted to invest in us**.

Image 64: Nuria, me and Xicu Costa, territorial delegate of Caixabank

That was the start of a ripple effect.

We began to build a film crew while other sponsors joined the project, such as Spanish Society of Authors and Publishers, Vithas Nisa Hospitals, Guitarras Raimundo, Weaddyou, Whatscine, Llumm Studios, La Alternativa Films and Fesord CV, among others.

When we were about to shoot, the first week of July, two things happened:

First, **we started appearing on the news again**. Second, Vicente, responsible for our marketing, made possible that a *falla* commission collaborated with us in different ways.

For those of you who are not familiar with las Fallas, it is a Valencian tradition (considered Intangible Cultural Heritage) in which we celebrate the arrival of spring by burning big wooden monuments – called *fallas*, like the celebration itself - which, in some cases, cost millions of euros.

There are many Fallas, each one with its own commission. Ours was Cuenca Tramoyeres – La Guardia Civil.

Image 65: *Blues Time,* fallas and inclusion!

The team of individuals responsible for this *falla* wanted to join social projects. *Blues Time* seemed to fit the bill perfectly, because we could form a reciprocal relationship: The commission would raise funds for our production and, in turn, we would support them to make their *falla* a more accessible monument.

Our film's inclusive methodology was already spreading beyond the bounds of the movie screen!

The effect of this synergy was great, coming to fruition at Fallas 2019: Blind attendees would be offered some braille texts that explained the *falla*. Due to this adaptation, the Spanish Federation of the Blind (ONCE) deemed the monument "accessible".

That same month, March 2019, we finished *Blues Time*'s post-production and its 6 accessible-inclusive versions.

Meanwhile, many things were already happening: **We had more political meetings, we gave different workshops and masterclasses**… though the film was not even released!

Image 66: Political meeting with senator Pilar Lima

Now that we explained many of the details surrounding *XMILE* and *Blues Time*, I would like to **take a minute to thank the whole team who took part in both projects.**

Especially, to all the photographers and filmmakers who contributed so much archive footage from so many years of work!

Image 67: Miguel and Ruth, two of the
photographers of *Blues Time*

Taking care of having proper behind-the-scenes footage was so useful in *XMILE* but, regarding *Blues Time*, something incredible happened.

Miguel Serrano was in charge of shooting the short film's behind-the-scenes footage. After the 3-day shooting, I checked the material he sent me and I was amazed by it. Miguel had captured the strong feeling of comradery and friendship of the shooting wonderfully!

That is why I asked to not only release a brief behind-the-scenes video, but to go on and **craft a full 22-minute long documentary**, in which we would explain how to create an inclusive film. He accepted and I started writing and preparing the new project.

Nuria and the rest of the team and sponsors were stunned when they heard the news… **Instead of having produced just one film, we had produced two!**
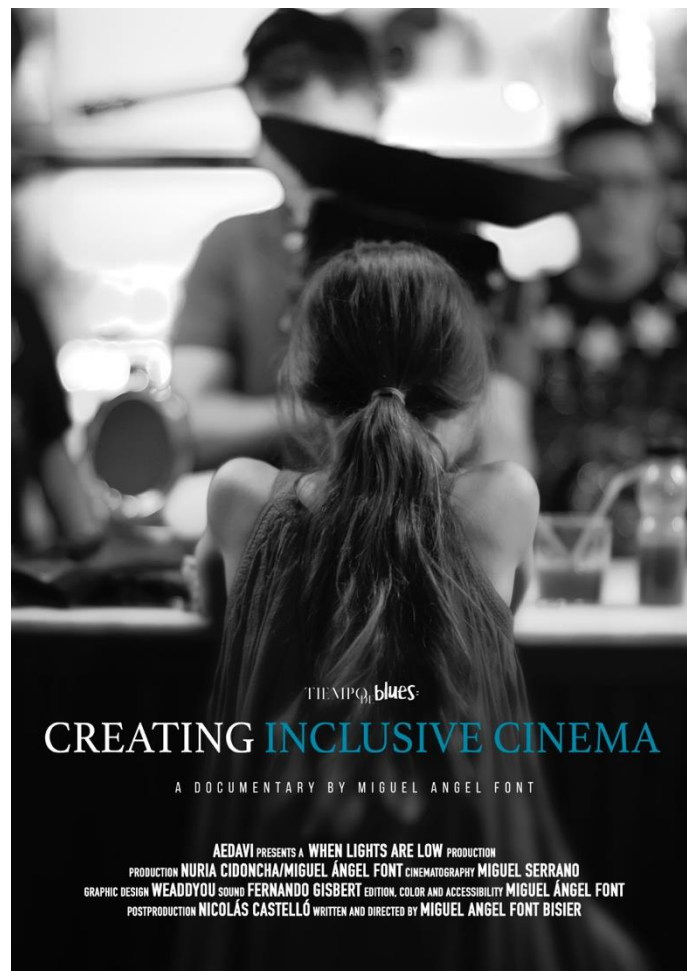
Image 68: Poster of the documentary
Creating Inclusive Cinema

This is the synopsis of our documentary *Creating Inclusive Cinema*:

"Miguel gets the offer to shoot the behind the scenes of an inclusive short-film named Blues Time.

But, what does inclusive filmmaking mean?

This question, and many others, start to pop up inside Miguel's mind. His job, to simply document what is happening on set, turns into something more: It becomes a record of an emotional and unpredictable experience, which captures the formation of a true bond between the filmmakers and people with disabilities, including both those in front of and behind the cine-camera lens".

Next step… distribution!

APRIL 2019: The narration ends here as we have arrived at present day. *Blues Time* and *Creating Inclusive Cinema* have not been released yet, and we do not know what will happen in the future. Instead of waiting up until that moment, we wanted to take the chance to tell you about our story, about the social and cultural changes that are about to come.

This text deals with an issue of public interest: We all have someone in our family or who is close to us, that has some kind of impairment. Also, due to the fact that each generation is going to live longer than before, the power of our senses will decrease with age, but our eagerness to watch films will never do so.

We hope that this story will feature more chapters. Let's stand up for each other and continue to improve such universal and relevant matters like cultural accessibility.

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