



Relational Infrastructures of Inclusive Cinema in Indonesia

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Accessibility has gained increasing visibility within Indonesia's film culture through initiatives developed by film festivals and community-based organisers. While disability rights discourse has long focused on education, employment, and public services, cultural accessibility, particularly in cinema, has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. This article examines how three Indonesian film festivals—Minikino Film Week (MFW) in Bali, 100% Manusia Film Festival in Jakarta, and Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival (JAFF) in Yogyakarta—develop inclusive cinema practices within distinct institutional and infrastructural conditions. Drawing on interviews with festival organisers, volunteers, *bisik* (whispering) buddies, and blind audience members, as well as participant observation and programme materials, the study argues that accessibility in these contexts operates as a "relational infrastructure" rather than a standardised technical solution. Inclusive screenings emerge through collaborations among organisers, disability communities, commercial exhibitors, and volunteers, requiring continual negotiation across institutional contexts. Often temporary and event-based, these initiatives nonetheless reshape cinematic publics by recalibrating who is anticipated within festival space. By foregrounding accessibility as an evolving, collaborative arrangement shaped by linguistic diversity, economic constraint, and institutional scale, the article demonstrates how inclusive cinema in Indonesia is built incrementally through relational practice.

INTRODUCTION

Cinema is simultaneously an aesthetic form, a social institution, and a mode of public encounter. However, access to that encounter has never been evenly distributed. Recent disability scholarship from the Global South has emphasised the importance of understanding accessibility through locally situated social and cultural practices rather than universalised models developed elsewhere (Brocco 2024). While national mapping studies have documented the uneven integration of disability within Indonesia's arts sector (Thohari et al. 2017), they reveal little about how accessibility is negotiated within the

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Keywords

Disability media studies
Inclusive cinema
Relational infrastructure
Audio description
Indonesian film festivals

Dates

Accepted: 27/06/2026

Published: 03/08/2026

DOI

10.54103/2036-461X/
30919

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everyday practices of film exhibition. Similarly, scholarship on disability in Indonesian cinema has largely focused on representation and audience interpretation within film texts (Kurnia 2017), leaving comparatively little attention to the infrastructures through which disabled audiences access cinema as a social and cultural practice.

Rather than asking whether access is present or absent, this article examines how access is produced through institutions, environments, technologies, and everyday practices, framing cinema not only as a cultural text but also as a social space whose conditions of participation are continually negotiated. It turns to three Indonesian film festivals—Minikino Film Week (henceforth MFW), 100% Manusia Film Festival, and Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival (henceforth JAFF)—which make these negotiations legible. Each festival represents a distinct approach to accessibility: community-based experimentation (MFW), care-oriented participation (100% Manusia), and institutionally scaled inclusion through commercial partnership (JAFF).

This article contributes to cinema studies by shifting attention from film texts to infrastructures through which cinema becomes encounterable. Initiatives such as *bisik* (live whispering for blind spectators), audio description, volunteer briefings, venue adjustments, and post-screening discussions produce provisional arrangements of space, labour, technology, and community partnership. These arrangements, or what I call “relational infrastructures,” are rehearsed and improvised, dependent on volunteer endurance, institutional will, architectural limitations, and audience reciprocity.

Throughout this article, the term “relational infrastructures” is used to describe the temporary arrangements through which accessibility is produced in practice. Unlike infrastructure understood as fixed architecture or technical provision, relational infrastructures are assembled through relationships among organisers, volunteers, disability communities, venue operators, technologies, and audiences. They are sustained through coordination, negotiation, and care rather than permanence, making them adaptable to different institutional contexts while also dependent on continued collaboration and therefore vulnerable to interruption or breakdown. Here, cinematic encounter refers not simply to the act of viewing a film, but to the social and material conditions through which people come into relation with films, institutions, technologies, and one another. Accessibility, in this sense, reshapes not only what audiences experience on screen but also how cinema is encountered as a shared cultural practice. The three festivals examined here do not implement a single model of accessibility. Rather, each assembles a different relational infrastructure, shaped by its institutional history, partnerships, resources, and understanding of inclusive cinema.

As Pooja Rangan (2025) cautions, institutional gestures of responsiveness can perform accountability without redistributing structural power. The festivals examined here do not merely add accessibility features onto preexisting structures; they negotiate how space, programming, and participation are organised. Volunteers whisper, audiences adjust expectations of silence and proximity, and organisers balance inclusion against venue limitations. Accessibility emerges through

these negotiations. It is infrastructural, not because it is permanent, but because it reorganises the conditions under which cinematic experience becomes possible, while reshaping that experience. At stake, then, is not simply whether accessibility initiatives exist, but how they reconfigure the cinematic encounter.

Who becomes imaginable as part of cinema's public, and under what negotiated terms? What forms of affective, logistical, and pedagogical labour sustain these efforts, and what remains precarious? By situating accessibility as "relational infrastructure," this article argues that inclusive cinema in Indonesian festival contexts reshapes not only spectatorship but also the social relations through which cinema is shared and valued. The question it seeks to answer, therefore, is not whether these festivals succeed in making cinema accessible in any definitive sense, but how access is enacted, by whom, with what resources, and with what consequences for the audiences whose participation depends upon it. In this article, cinema is understood not simply as a film text but as a social encounter, one in which access, participation, and spectatorship are continually negotiated through institutional arrangements and interpersonal relations.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

This study is grounded in long-term engagement with Indonesia's independent film festival circuit, combining targeted semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted during festival activities in 2025. Over the course of this fieldwork, I gathered data from six key interlocutors: three festival organisers—Edo Wulia (Minikino), Rain Cuaca and Meninaputri Wismurti (100% Manusia), Ajish Dibyo (JAFF)—and three audience members, including blind cinema-goers Sukma Ayyanti and Juwita Rahmawati, alongside the latter's whispering companion, Hasti Saktiningsih.

My relationship with MFW dates back to 2009, when one of my short films was selected for its Monthly Screening & Discussion program. Since then, I have regularly attended and screened work at MFW. This extended involvement has afforded sustained, if informal, participant observation across multiple festival editions. Building on this long-term engagement, I conducted a semi-structured interview with Festival Director Edo Wulia in November 2025, focusing on the historical development of the festival's accessibility initiatives.

A similar familiarity informs my engagement with 100% Manusia, where I screened short films in 2022 and 2024. In 2025, I closely observed the festival's 100% Cinergi program and its whispering cinema initiative. I documented volunteer coordination, audience circulation, spatial arrangements, and the execution of *bisik* during screenings. Following the event, my subsequent joint session with Cuaca and Wismurti, both co-founders of the festival, addressed the institutional motivations behind the inclusive program, its logistical organisation, and the challenges encountered in practice.

My engagement with JAFF differs in duration and scope. Although 2025 marked my first direct attendance at JAFF, the festival itself was already

familiar to me through my longstanding engagement with Indonesia's film festival circuit. Entering its twentieth year, JAFF has established itself as a leading platform for Asian cinema in Indonesia, founded in collaboration with the Network for the Promotion of Asia Pacific Cinema (NETPAC). Since I was unable to attend its inclusive screening due to restricted ticket allocation, my analysis of JAFF's accessibility initiatives draws primarily on a semi-structured interview with Executive Director Ajish Dibyo, alongside observations made during the broader festival. Although this limits my ability to analyse the inclusive screening directly, the interview nevertheless provided valuable insights into JAFF's accessibility planning, institutional priorities, and decision-making processes.

In addition to interviews with organisers, to balance these institutional perspectives, the remaining sessions targeted audience experiences via "purposive snowball sampling," in which I identified and recruited participants through referrals from existing participants. Conversations with Sukma Aryyanti, a blind resident of Denpasar whom I first met during MFW in 2024, captured the reality of navigating festival infrastructures. Similarly, Juwita Rahmawati, a blind activist, and Hasti Saktiningsih, who frequently serves as Rahmawati's whispering companion, offered perspectives on both accessibility measures and the interpersonal negotiations that sustain them, including questions of timing, trust, fatigue, and how to balance assistance and intrusion.

Across these six interviews (three organisers and three audience participants), I was less interested in declarative claims of inclusion than in thick descriptions of adjustment, coordination, or breakdowns in communication. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in Bahasa Indonesia. All participants were informed of the scope and purpose of this study and agreed to be cited by name in relation to their professional roles. Interview transcripts are not publicly archived to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality. However, they may be made available by the author upon reasonable academic request for non-commercial research purposes, subject to ethical considerations. Publicly available festival documents and media materials cited throughout the article remain accessible through the sources listed in the references. I then thematically analysed observations gathered during festival activities alongside the interview materials, paying particular attention to how accessibility was organised, implemented, and experienced in practice.

My engagement with these festivals is not that of an external observer. As a filmmaker, festival participant, and film educator, I have been involved in Indonesia's independent film ecosystem for more than a decade. This proximity provided access to organisers, audiences, and institutional histories that may not be available through short-term fieldwork alone. At the same time, it shapes the perspective from which this study is written. Rather than treating accessibility as a policy problem to be evaluated from a distance, I approach it as a question emerging from ongoing participation in festival cultures and from an interest in how cinematic publics are assembled, negotiated, and transformed through practices of accessibility.

This methodological approach aligns with the article's conceptual framing of accessibility as relational infrastructure. Rather than treating access as a stable attribute of venues or programs, the study traces how it is assembled through negotiations among organisers, volunteers, venue operators, and audiences. By situating the interviews alongside long-term engagement with these festivals and observations of how accessibility was organised in practice, while acknowledging uneven access to certain screening events, I approach inclusive cinema as an evolving and contingent arrangement.

100% MANUSIA AND THE RELATIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF ACCESS

100% Manusia approaches accessibility through an explicitly care-oriented framework operating across curatorial, logistical, and community networks. While both organisers describe accessibility as central to the festival, Meninaputri Wismurti frames it as part of a broader political commitment to marginalised publics, whereas Rain Cuaca focuses more on the practical and linguistic conditions under which access is implemented. In particular, Cuaca emphasises how accessibility and pragmatic issues of language preference shape curatorial decisions: "That is because input comes from our visually impaired friends, too. [...] So, most of the comfortable language is Indonesian. Not everyone can speak English. That is why we have been trying to find films in Indonesian." She also notes efforts to provide closed captions for deaf students, while acknowledging structural limits: "When we talk about disabilities and access, there may also be other groups who require special access. Nevertheless, for now, we will definitely be screening this way."¹

Whereas Cuaca emphasises the practical implementation of accessibility, Wismurti traces Cinergi back to the earlier *Q! Film Festival* (2002–2017), once described as Asia's largest LGBT film festival by number of films shown (Maimunah 2008). She explains that the programme was carried over from the earlier festival and became one of 100% Manusia's core programmes, requiring close coordination between curatorial work and community partnerships. While Wismurti oversees film selection, screening rights, and filmmaker relations, Cuaca coordinates with disability communities to organise the festival's accessibility initiatives. Accessibility is therefore embedded not within a single programme but across different forms of institutional labour. Wismurti similarly frames accessibility as extending beyond Cinergi itself. Rather than limiting access to sensory accommodation, she describes the festival's broader commitment to marginalised publics through trigger warnings, moderated discussions, post-screening conversations, and opportunities for audiences to seek support if particular films evoke difficult emotional responses. In her words, 100% Ma-

1 Where not otherwise specified, quotes from interviews are translated by me.

nusia “always prioritise[s] the human audience,” treating these practices as integral to cinematic access rather than supplementary services.

Access, in this articulation, includes affective safety and dialogic space in addition to sensory mediation. The festival's fringe programming extends this orientation beyond the screening room. Initiatives such as *A Walk to Understand* and *100% Heart to Heart* are designed as public-facing encounters that invite festival-goers, disabled and non-disabled alike, to engage in dialogue, reflection, and shared learning. The *100% DIY* similarly offers workshops for festival attendees. In 2025, for example, it included a session titled *Sign Language 101*, an introductory workshop on basic sign language that invited non-disabled participants to learn skills supporting more inclusive communication. Rather than targeting disability communities alone, these sessions extend disability knowledge to the festival's broader public. In this way, accessibility is framed not only as accommodation for disabled audiences but also as an educational practice. However, these initiatives remain unevenly distributed geographically. As Wismurti explains, the festival's ability to extend these activities beyond Jakarta depends almost entirely on volunteer availability and local partnerships. As she puts it, “It depends on volunteer availability and partners' willingness.” Consequently, the geographical reach of these initiatives remains contingent rather than institutionalised. This understanding of accessibility resonates with disability justice scholarship, which understands access as an ongoing practice sustained through interdependence and relationships rather than technical provision alone (Piepzn-Samarasinha 2018).

This reliance on unpaid labour means that Cinergi's spatial and temporal sustainability depends heavily on volunteer whisperers. The *Bisik Buddy Workshop* module, *How to Be a Blind Cinema Companion Whisperer*, outlines protocols for interaction, navigation, and spatial description. Volunteers are instructed to describe seating arrangements, stairs, retractable chairs, and environmental features before and during screenings. These instructions reveal that accessibility begins before the film itself. Volunteers are trained not only to mediate the screen but also to mediate movement through space, transforming stairs, seating arrangements, and circulation routes into sites of accessibility work.

Training, however, does not guarantee reliable participation. As Cuaca explains: “Sometimes 50 or 60 people registered. [...] During the briefing, maybe 40 came. Then 20 showed up.” This unpredictable attrition forces on-site improvisation: “Finally, one person whispered to two audience members. [...] Sometimes, if a volunteer could do it, they suddenly became a whisperer too. The important thing is that everyone can watch the film.” Access is therefore not seamless or fully institutionalised. The declaration that “the important thing is that everyone can watch the film” signals how relational infrastructures constrain commitment. Cinergi operates through volunteer coordination, trust, and willingness to adapt; none of which are guaranteed or pre-established.

Through 100% Cinergi, 100% Manusia demonstrates an approach to inclusive cinema while also revealing the fragility of such arrangements. Accessibility

depends on volunteers, partner institutions, venue availability, and fluctuating capacity. In foregrounding this labour, Cinergi makes visible the social conditions under which cinema becomes accessible and the infrastructural limits that continue to shape that possibility.



Fig. 1:
A Bisik Buddy pin
identifying volunteers who
support whisper-based
accessibility initiatives at
the 100% Manusia Film
Festival in Jakarta

ACCESS AS CIRCULATION, LITERACY, AND SITUATED PRACTICE AT *MINIKINO FILM WEEK*

Unlike 100% Manusia, which organises accessibility primarily through a single annual festival, Minikino is a year-round film organisation founded in 2002. Its activities include the Monthly Screening & Discussion programme, Open December, and, since 2015, the annual MFW. Many of the accessibility practices discussed below originated in Minikino's year-round activities before becoming part of MFW.

MFW approaches inclusion as a curatorial concern rather than a supplementary service, enhancing accessibility through the circulation of short films across linguistic, geographic, and social differences. Disability access unfolds along a continuum of accessibility practices: subtitling non-Indonesian-language films, organising outreach screenings in *banjar* spaces across Bali, and curating family-oriented programs that introduce short films to audiences who may not otherwise encounter festival cinema.

As Wulia explains, "the idea of inclusivity emerged when I thought that short films should be accessible to everyone. [...] Minikino's long journey has been about learning how to provide more, more, more access." A key infrastructure

shift occurred with the adoption of subtitles between 2008 and 2009, which has been consistently implemented since 2013. Conceived not solely as accommodation for Deaf audiences, they were equally necessary for viewers unfamiliar with English or with other languages commonly used in festival circulation. Linguistic accessibility thus preceded disability-specific initiatives and situated access within a broader ecology of translation. Since then, disability-focused programming has developed incrementally and multiple collaborations established a foundation for recurring inclusive initiatives. In 2016, during the second year of MFW, Wulia reflected that children's films with minimal dialogue and greater reliance on visual storytelling might be more accessible to Deaf audiences. A special screening was organised in collaboration with Sushrusa Deaf School in Denpasar. This initiative drew upon earlier relationships established through a 2006 documentary workshop with the Deaf (*Kolok*) community in Bengkulu, Buleleng, Bali.²

After learning about *bisik* practices in Jakarta, Minikino organised volunteer whisperers, and "whispering cinema" was added to its programming through an off-festival screening in 2019, following visually impaired attendees' interest in participating. However, the festival organisers later re-evaluated this practice. As Wulia notes, "we learned that this whispering cinema was not really a good fit for what Minikino was doing. [...] It had high social value, but the cinematic experience was missing." The atmosphere grew crowded, and each whisperer interpreted independently, producing what the festival organisers regard as a fractured and incoherent cinematic experience.

In response, MFW simultaneously introduced audio description (AD) and subtitles for the d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH) in 2020. Over time, they were separated in response to feedback from non-disabled viewers who felt overwhelmed by the information density. As Wulia emphasises, "[w]e do not want it to be an exclusive program, just for people with disabilities. Inclusiveness should also reach people without disabilities. Allowing them to watch together." Inclusion, here, was measured not only by accommodation but also by the presence of an integrated audience. Minikino's model, indeed, depends on consultation. Blind and Deaf participants are involved in planning stages, offering feedback that reshapes descriptive strategies. "Sometimes there is quite surprising feedback. For example, from the blind group, we were told not to drive the emotions. Just read the script flatly, like reading the news. Let the audience decide whether the film is sad or happy." Rather than codifying a standardised module, the festival operates through project-based collaboration, recognising that AD is

² Bengkulu is known for its longstanding Deaf (*Kolok*) community, where many residents communicate using *Kata Kolok*, an Indigenous sign language. Before MFW was established, Minikino collaborated with the community through a documentary workshop and screened *Kolok* (Bayu Sakti Wijaya, Dewa Made Merta Suardana, and I. B. Putu Suwenda, 2006), a short documentary portraying the everyday lives of Deaf residents in Bengkulu. Although this collaboration was not originally conceived as an accessibility initiative, it established relationships that later informed Minikino's inclusive programming.

"very closely tied to language structure" and inseparable from cultural context. An AD track produced in Bali with blind collaborators "will likely differ" from one produced in Jakarta. International guidelines may inform practice, but they require adaptation to Indonesia's linguistic diversity and uneven infrastructure. Rather than standardising audio description, Minikino treats accessibility as culturally situated, echoing Brocco's (2024) call to understand disability through locally grounded practices rather than universal models.

Challenges surrounding SDH and sign language further underscore the cultural specificity of access. Wulia observes that many Deaf audiences prefer sign language to written text, as reading requires a distinct cognitive translation process. Experiments embedding sign language videos on-screen were well received but proved financially unsustainable. Similarly, live dubbing experiments for children's programs were discontinued due to technical and cost constraints. The Kino Media Foundation subsidises AD and SDH production, yet external sponsorship remains limited.

Material conditions also delimit inclusion. The absence of wheelchair ramps in many partner venues demonstrates that accessibility remains unevenly distributed across the spaces where festival culture unfolds. While Minikino "wants to continue expanding the term 'inclusive'," it remains oriented toward preserving the cinematic experience. "Of course, the social experience ultimately has an impact, but it is not the focus." Here, Minikino diverges from care-centered models, prioritising aesthetic integrity as the central commitment that determines access practices.

Fig. 2:
Inclusive screening
for Deaf audiences at
Minikino Film Week



CURATED INCLUSION WITHIN COMMERCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AT *JOGJA-NETPAC ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL*

JAFF is a major Asian film platform in terms of scale and visibility. Its institutional reach extends beyond public screenings to encompass industry activities such as JAFF Market, bridging film, art, industry, and tourism. Its model demonstrates a pragmatic and commercially oriented approach to accessibility, which is not yet embedded across the entire festival, but is staged as a highly visible event shaped by strategic partnerships, popular film selection, and managed capacity.

According to its director Ajish Dibyo, plans for inclusive screening began in JAFF's fifteenth year (2020) but were delayed by COVID-19 restrictions. In 2022, screenings resumed at reduced capacity, and interest has increased steadily since. Addressing the restricted attendance of the inclusive session, Dibyo explains: "If you lost at the ticket war, it was because we did not open it to the full audience. It was only a certain percentage: for partners or colleagues who also wanted to experience watching with friends with disabilities." As Dibyo explained, attendance at the inclusive screening was intentionally limited to accommodate disability partners and participants using inclusive viewing formats. Rather than dispersing accessibility across multiple sessions, JAFF concentrates its resources within a single annual screening that is carefully organised both spatially and programmatically. In 2025, this session accommodated approximately 130 audience members with disabilities. As Dibyo noted, "[r]ather than opening more than one screening and risking a lack of interest, that would be a shame."

Partnership is central to this model: in 2025, the commercial cinema chain Cinema XXI provided venue support and sponsored the inclusive screening. Empire XXI also installed a temporary wheelchair ramp. Dibyo framed this not as a permanent redesign but as evidence that accessibility can be temporarily negotiated within commercial exhibition spaces through cooperation between organisers and venue operators. The temporary ramp made visible how inclusion depends not only on film selection but also on the physical design of exhibition environments.

Curatorial decisions further shape accessibility by orienting film selection toward familiarity and narrative clarity. According to Dybio, indeed, films should be suitable for all ages, audience-oriented, easy to follow, and positive in tone; qualities that also facilitate whisper-based mediation: "Usually, we choose films that are quite popular so that our inclusive friends can also experience the current or past hype." In 2025, not by chance, JAFF selected the Indonesian-language animated film *Jumbo* (Ryan Adriandhy, 2025), which became a major commercial success. Film selection is therefore guided not only by artistic or commercial considerations but also by anticipated accessibility. Closed captions are provided for Deaf audiences, while the Jogja Disability Art network supports

outreach, volunteer preparation, and pre-festival whisperer workshops. Rather than embedding accessibility throughout the festival, JAFF assembles a relational infrastructure through temporary partnerships with commercial exhibitors, disability organisations, and volunteer networks.

Dibyو nevertheless views the emergence of inclusive programmes across Indonesian festivals as encouraging while acknowledging their present limitations: "It seems like festivals are developing into an inclusive celebration. [...] However, in terms of percentage, we still have not been able to provide enough." Looking ahead, he imagines a festival where disabled audiences have multiple screening options on the same day and can choose what they want to watch: "the experience of a film marathon or choosing the films they want, because now we are the ones who choose."

Fig. 3:
JAFF Market exhibition
hall at the Jogja-NETPAC
Asian Film Festival 2025



AUDIENCE EXPERIENCES

If the previous sections examined how festivals organise inclusive screenings, this section turns to the experiences of audience members who encounter those initiatives in practice. Across three semi-structured interviews, what emerged was less a single account of "access" than a layered understanding of how cinematic participation is negotiated through memory, economic conditions, linguistic background, and relationships with others.

Sukma Aryyanti, a blind massage therapist and counselor at Love Inside Suicide Awareness (L.I.S.A.) in Denpasar, first encountered inclusive screenings

through her involvement in MFW. When I met her in 2024 and 2025, often while she was providing massage services at the festival, she recalled an initial reluctance toward film itself. "Actually, I did not really like watching films at first, maybe because I was desperate. So, why watch films? I could not see them anyway." Her hesitation reflected uncertainty about what it meant to engage with a medium historically organised around vision. Her orientation shifted when Edo Wulia introduced her to audio description (AD) and demonstrated how narrative flow could be followed through verbal mediation. The first invitation to watch with AD became memorable because it unsettled her prior assumptions. "It was the first time I could really follow the storyline of a film like this, because usually films are full of movement like that, right? So, for the first time, I could really understand."

Since then, Aryyanti has experimented with AI-powered AD features on YouTube, yet she prefers human-voiced descriptions, especially when scripts are developed in consultation with other blind audiences. Automated accessibility may offer functional independence, but collective viewing with human mediators produces a different affective texture shaped by responsiveness and companionship. Aryyanti's account also echoes Kleege's (2018) argument that blindness does not preclude aesthetic engagement but reconfigures the conditions through which visual culture is experienced. Here, audio description does not substitute for cinema; it enables participation in its narrative and social dimensions. Aryyanti's participation in MFW also extended beyond spectatorship. Visually impaired individuals were invited to provide services during the festival, including body massage and coffee sales. "I have a disability, but I am still involved in major events like the Minikino film festival. That is truly a source of great pride for me."

More broadly, Aryyanti's experience suggests that accessibility is not reducible to the provision of a technical aid. Rather, the value of audio description lies in the social processes through which it is produced, shared, and experienced collectively. The collaborative scripting of AD with blind audiences, together with the collective setting of festival screenings, transforms accessibility into a relational practice rather than a purely technological solution. In this sense, participation emerges not from individual independence but from interdependence, echoing disability justice approaches that understand access as something continually negotiated through relationships rather than delivered as a finished service (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018). Aryyanti's experience therefore illustrates the relational infrastructure described throughout this article: access is assembled through collaboration among organisers, blind participants, and mediating technologies rather than provided by technology alone.

Juwita Rahmawati, a blind activist who previously worked on the impact campaign for *Sejauh Kumelangkah* (*How Far I'll Go*, Ucu Agustin 2019), has had a related yet distinct trajectory. Having been sighted once, she described herself as a film lover long before becoming totally blind. The transition reshaped, but did not extinguish, her cinephilia. "But because my English was not that good, once I became totally blind, I stopped watching foreign films. So, I finally

switched to Indonesian films." The limitation here was both linguistic and sensory; without AD, subtitled foreign-language films become inaccessible. Before attending organised whisper screenings, Rahmawati relied on her older sister as an informal whispering companion. However, her sister, immersed in her own viewing, would explain scenes belatedly, after laughter had subsided or plot turns had passed. "So, it was actually late." Rahmawati's own narrative comprehension lagged behind collective reaction, leading her at times to ask her sister to watch first and recount the film afterward, thus transforming cinema into deferred storytelling rather than a shared collective experience.

This context shaped her evaluation of whisper cinema initiatives such as those organised by 100% Manusia. "Any effort made by anyone to create a more inclusive filmmaking environment is actually quite good for me. It should be appreciated." Her response was pragmatic: while she can watch films independently on her phone using accessibility features, she values the social dimension of whisper screenings. "The purpose of this whisper cinema is not only to entertain the blind... but another aspect is that when non-blind people meet blind people, they can interact." Furthermore, although platforms such as Netflix offer AD on their content, subscription costs remain prohibitive for many blind Indonesians, whose employment opportunities are often limited. Whisper screenings, by contrast, are typically free and include modest hospitality. "They go, and then maybe there is a bonus, like snacks or meeting people. That is really fun for them." Rahmawati's account also complicates assumptions that accessibility is primarily about removing barriers to information. Her emphasis on conversation, shared attendance, and informal hospitality suggests that festivals function not only as sites of film consumption but also as spaces of social belonging. Access, in this context, involves participation in a temporary public assembled around cinema, where the opportunity to meet others can be as significant as the screening itself.

Hasti Saktiningsih, Rahmawati's friend and frequent whispering companion, offers insight into how film genres affect the labour of access providers. "Romance is the easiest. If it is a comedy, and we have not seen it before, it is hard to explain because we are already laughing." The whisperer has to practice divided attention, balancing personal enjoyment with descriptive responsibility. Before screenings, Saktiningsih typically asks her blind friends what they prefer: the atmosphere, gestures, translations of English dialogue, or specific visual cues. "Mostly they want the atmosphere... There are scenes without dialogue, so that is the best I can explain." She also pointed to logistical fragility. Volunteers sometimes fail to appear; whisperers and audience members may be mismatched. "It is confusing... because it is not certain that the person whispering will come, or that the person being whispered to will come." Inclusion thus remains contingent and unpredictable, which can be discouraging for first-time participants.

Taken together, these accounts resist any linear narrative of technological progress or institutional goodwill. Rather than presenting accessibility as the outcome of better technologies alone, the interviews demonstrate how access

is continually assembled through relationships among organisers, volunteers, disabled participants, companions, and digital tools. Accessibility appears instead as a relational infrastructure composed of human mediators, economic conditions, volunteer networks, technologies, and affective commitments. These infrastructures are sustained through practices of care: accompanying, describing, waiting, coordinating, translating, and adjusting to others' needs in real time. Such practices remain contingent rather than guaranteed, depending on the availability of volunteers, financial resources, and institutional support. What emerges beyond the mere availability of AD or whisper systems, indeed, are the social arrangements through which inclusion is sustained, negotiated, and sometimes strained. The audience experiences presented here reinforce the article's broader argument that inclusive cinema is not defined solely by accessible technologies or policies, but by the relational labour that makes the cinematic encounter possible.

CONCLUSION: RELATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURES OF INCLUSION

Across MFW, 100% Manusia, and JAFF, inclusive cinema does not consolidate into a single transferable model, but rather takes shape through distinct configurations of scale, partnership, and constraint. Minikino emphasises translation and community consultation; 100% Manusia foregrounds encounter through whisper cinema; whereas JAFF focuses on accessibility through high-visibility commercial programmes. These diverse approaches generate varied audience experiences that reveal how institutional arrangements are continually received, negotiated, and reworked in practice. Indeed, a consistent pattern across interviews and observations indicates that accessibility remains largely negotiated rather than permanently embedded, given that temporary ramps, volunteer-coordinated whisper systems, limited inclusive screenings, and outreach through disability networks collectively suggest access that depends on extemporaneous coordination instead of structural redesign. In this sense, inclusion emerges as an event-based rather than a systemic reality; it is activated for specific screenings and withdrawn afterward. These three models demonstrate that accessibility is assembled differently depending on institutional histories, organisational capacities, funding structures, and relationships with disability communities. Rather than competing approaches, they illustrate multiple ways of organising access under different material conditions.

At the same time, this temporality does not necessarily imply superficiality, as participants describe pride in contributing to the festival's labour, relief at following the narrative progression without delay, and pleasure in sharing the same temporal experience as other spectators. These cases also complicate technological solutionism: while AI-enabled audio description expands access to independent viewing, it does not replace the desire for shared spectatorship.

Human-voiced description carries tonal and relational nuance that automated systems cannot replicate. Similarly, although streaming platforms may widen access to sensory content, high subscription costs and precarious employment limit who benefits, thereby rendering digital accessibility inherently uneven.

In alignment with disability justice scholarship, accessibility is not reducible to a checklist of accommodations but is understood as an ongoing practice of organising social relations. Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018, 92) describes this as “collective care:” building organisations that accommodate interdependence, changing needs, and mutual support as part of everyday practice rather than exceptional provision. The whisper systems described here reflect this very ethos: relational, imperfect, and sustained through mutual commitment rather than institutional permanence. However, while they exemplify adaptability and solidarity, they simultaneously rely on fragile commitments such as attendance, coordination, and accountability, meaning that when volunteers fail to appear, inclusion becomes entirely contingent. Across these contexts, inclusion emerges as a collaborative cultural practice assembled through partnerships: creating temporary ecosystems of access that, although aspirational and uneven, are persistently reworked.

Ultimately, this study suggests that inclusive cinema across Indonesian film festivals is best understood as a set of situated practices rather than a fixed institutional arrangement. It unfolds through whisper-based screenings, curated inclusive programmes, negotiated partnerships with commercial exhibitors, and community consultation, through which disabled participants act not only as spectators but also as cultural workers. Inclusion here is neither an abstract principle nor a finished infrastructure, but a set of adjustments through which access is continually assembled and maintained. Across these different strategies, the festivals nevertheless share forms of care work that align with calls from Global South disability scholarship to understand accessibility through situated social and cultural practices rather than universalised models (Brocco 2024).

Taken together, the three festivals demonstrate complementary rather than competing configurations of relational infrastructure. Whereas 100% Manusia assembles accessibility through care-centered collaboration and volunteer interdependence, Minikino emphasises iterative experimentation, translation, and community consultation, while JAFF mobilises institutional partnerships within commercial exhibition contexts. Access is therefore assembled differently across each festival, without positioning any one model as more complete than another.

Thinking in terms of relational infrastructures shifts attention away from accessibility as a fixed attribute of venues or technologies and toward the social arrangements through which inclusion is produced, maintained, and continually renegotiated. Rather than treating access as a stable feature of exhibition, this perspective foregrounds the relationships among organisers, volunteers, disability communities, venue operators, technologies, and audiences that make inclusive cinema possible. It is these relationships, rather than any single acces-

sibility measure, that shape how inclusive cinema takes form in contemporary Indonesian festival culture. Because accessibility extends beyond spectatorship itself, organisers, volunteers, filmmakers, moderators, and community partners all participate in creating the conditions that enable access. Inclusive cinema, then, is not only about enabling attendance but also about rethinking how cinematic publics are organised, who can participate in them, and how those forms of participation are sustained over time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to thank the festival organisers, volunteers, and audience members of MFW, 100% Manusia, and JAFF, who generously shared their time, experiences, and reflections for this study. Special thanks are extended to blind and low-vision audience members and *bisik* buddies whose participation made this research possible. The author also gratefully acknowledges the editorial team of the *Cinéma & Cie* special issue *Reimagining Access* for their generous editorial guidance and constructive feedback, which substantially strengthened this article.

This study is based on qualitative interviews and publicly available festival materials. Interview transcripts are not publicly archived to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality but may be made available by the author upon reasonable academic request for non-commercial research purposes, subject to ethical considerations. Publicly available materials used in the analysis are cited in the reference list.

The author was solely responsible for the study's conception, research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and final approval of the manuscript. Digital tools, including ChatGPT (OpenAI), TurboScribe.ai, and Grammarly, were used to support drafting, interview transcription, and language editing. These tools did not determine the article's analytical claims or conclusions. Responsibility for the article's content remains with the author.

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