

Cooperating for open access to museums towards a wider inclusion (COME-IN!)

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About COME-IN! Project

Every individual needs **accessibility**: it is a cultural principle, affecting all activities of our everyday life and it should concern every aspect of a person's private life. Thus, the concept and the **right to accessibility** must be seen in a broader sense, taking into account the individual with all its different needs and abilities (motor, sensorial, cognitive and emotional) whether they are permanent or temporary, ensuring the right of every person to access products autonomously and safely. This includes the right of every person to participate in and enjoy cultural life and monuments.



However, many museums in central Europe are encountering difficulties in adapting to the “for all” concept because of a lack of organisational knowledge and of limited financial resources, both for investments and for an adequate promotion. **Cooperating for open access to museums towards a wider inclusion** (COME-IN!) tackles this very issue by increasing the capacities of small- and medium-sized museums, making them accessible to a wider public.

The COME-IN! project brings together a wide network of museums, associations of people with disabilities, academics, training institutions and policy makers. It is led by the Central European Initiative - Executive Secretariat and aims at identifying an innovative strategic approach to promote accessibility in

all museums. The latter approach is to provide transnational accessibility standards and guidelines for organising accessible exhibitions and cultural events. Those standards will be applied to the museums involved in the project in order to test their efficiency and accessibility.

Museums complying with the accessibility standards will be awarded with the “COME-IN!” label, a brand that will recognise the “accessibility for all” concept. The final aim is to extend these standards to other museums and cultural institutions, involving other actors in the area, as an accessible town is a benefit for all.

Report on the accessibility in Central Europe

Following the aim of ensuring accessibility in all museums involved in the project, partners agreed that an analysis of the state-of-the-art of accessibility in small and medium-sized museums of Central Europe was needed. Firstly, partners focused on the definition of the users’ needs, but by working with disabilities associations, it has become obvious that there are no special needs, just human needs. Everyone has the right to equal access and equal opportunities. Therefore, it was convened to define “accessibility criteria” that would then lead to developing accessibility standards to be promoted in Central Europe. This is how the report on accessibility in Central Europe was elaborated, providing in addition some best practices and legal framework in relation to accessibility to small and medium-sized museums.

The basis of the report is the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and its understanding of inclusion and accessibility. According to article 9 of the Convention: “To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate full in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access on an equal basis with others to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and rural areas. These measures which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibilities, shall apply to, inter alia:

- a) Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces;
- b) Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services.”

Therefore, the partners agreed that appropriate measures were required to ensure : **physical access** (access to buildings, roads, transportation, indoor and outdoor facilities etc.); **access to information and communication** (including electronic services and emergency services - braille, easy to read, sign language interpreters etc.); **social access** (for example a negative attitude towards people with disabilities is also a barrier); **economic access** (equal price for equal opportunities).

Based on these principles, the partners have elaborated accessibility criteria as “must-haves” for small and medium-sized museums to achieve accessibility by using a common matrix, a tool to provide complete and continuous accessibility to all in order to highlight the holistic approach with regard to inclusion. It comprises the service chain, a means to ensure or evaluate consistent accessibility to a museum, including elements visitors have to deal within order to access a museum:

- Input (Information and communication before the visit)

- Input (information and communication before the visit)
- Arrival
- Entrance
- Cash Desk
- Wardrobe
- Exhibition Area
- Toilet
- Shop
- Output (Information and communication after the visit)



The matrix turned out to be a useful instrument, as it considers all dimensions of accessibility as well as the most important elements of a museum's service chain. It was supposed to be an instrument for museum operators, in order to help them evaluate and improve accessibility of their own buildings and exhibitions.

By analysing the current situation of museums, it has become obvious that their accessibility is poor and needs improvement. In addition, none of the museums follows a holistic approach to accessibility. Experience on how to implement accessibility along the whole service chain and good practices are missing. Therefore, awareness raising, debates and analyses are needed.

As to physical access, most of the museums participating in the project are housed in heritage buildings, whose restoration is usually a complex and cost-intensive process. Being successful in terms of physically accessible museums, their operators need creativity and associations representing the interests of people with disabilities as well as financial resources.

Another finding of the report was that the museum operators had placed their emphasis on accessibility in information and communication, focusing mostly on tactile elements as reliefs, braille, replicas as well as audio guides, simplified language and accessible websites. Yet, more attention should be paid to immersive cultural experiences stimulating as many senses as possible.

Referring to the dimension of social access and economic access few ideas have been brought in. The most important action regards employee trainings. Awareness raising of all employees in a museum is essential to avoid discrimination.

Last but not least, museum operators should be aware of the fact that they are not the only ones responsible for accessibility. Relevant stakeholders such as politicians, local authorities and the local community have to contribute as well. Inclusion and accessibility needs the commitment of many stakeholders.



COME-IN! Guidelines

The COME-IN! Guidelines are the very first result developed in the framework of the COME-IN! Project. They are a guide for museums and galleries to ensure and promote the widest possible access for everyone. The guidelines can be seen as a practical tool for designing and organising exhibitions and collections accessible to people with disabilities and for evaluating the whole service chain of museums and their collections.

Fristly, the guidelines provide the legal framework consisting of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, The European Disability strategy 2010-2020 and national laws of COME-IN! partners' countries. These documents have served as the main basis for the elaboration of the report on accessibility in Central Europe, that provided the accessibility criteria and the state-of-the-art analysis in the partner museums. Both elements are explained in detail in two separate chapters in the guidelines, offering examples and instructions to increase accessibility.

Besides museum accessibility, it is important to understand that appropriate language and wording should be used when speaking to or about people with disabilities. Therefore, the guidelines include a list of do's

and don'ts, to make sure people with disabilities are addressed properly.

Finally, guidelines include a chapter on staff training for museum operators and other staff working with museums. The training is essential to guarantee the provision of a good service to persons with disabilities. It aims at raising awareness on the meaning of inclusion and accessibility, applying the procedures and tools available for the purpose of accessibility, the use of matrix of the service chain and at providing instructions on organising guides and services to single visitors or groups of visitors.

The guidelines represent the project strategy that will be applied in the project museums. They could possibly be extended to other operators and stakeholders beyond the project. Therefore, the guidelines will be applied and tested over a six-month period in all partner museums. Following the results achieved, they will be revised and promoted at transnational level.

With the intention to collect as much feedback as possible, a dedicated campaign has been organised. A transnational conference took place in Brussels, on 8 June, gathering several EU stakeholders that confirmed the COME-IN! principles and visions. In the coming months, partners will organise presentations of the guidelines in their own countries.

The full document is available on the project webpage:

<http://interreg-central.eu/come-in>



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For more information contact: LP – Central European Initiative Executive secretariat Project Manager:

Anna Marconato Marconato@cei.int Tel: +39 0407786748

Our mailing address is:

Central European Initiative (CEI)

Via Genova 9
Trieste, TS 34121
Italy

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