

Jörn Berding (ed.)

Matthias Gather (ed.)

**Interreg**  
CENTRAL EUROPE

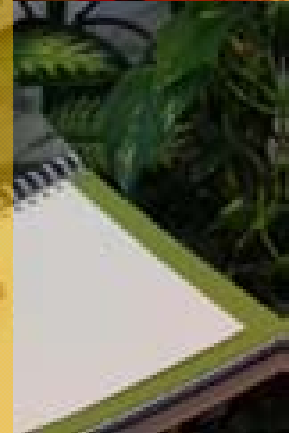


**COME-IN!**

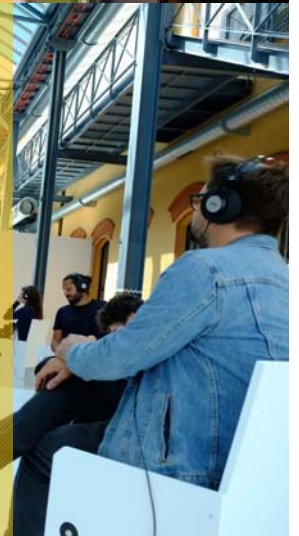
European Union  
European Regional  
Development Fund

**FH E** FACHHOCHSCHULE  
ERFURT UNIVERSITY  
OF APPLIED SCIENCES

**INSTITUT VERKEHR  
UND RAUM**  
der Fachhochschule Erfurt



Proceedings of the COME-IN!-Thematic Conferences:  
**The Inclusive Museum –  
Challenges and Solutions,  
State of the Art and Perspectives**



Activity A.C.3 Publications / Deliverable D.C.3.1 Transnational publications

Berichte des Instituts Verkehr und Raum

ISSN 1868-8586

Band 24 (2018)



## **The inclusive museum -**

### Challenges and Solutions, State of the Art and Perspectives

#### **Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> COME-IN!-Thematic Conferences**

**(9<sup>th</sup> November 2017 in Udine / Italy and 26<sup>th</sup> June 2018 in Erfurt / Germany)**

Activity A.C.3 Publications / Deliverable D.C.3.1 Transnational publications

The project COME-IN! – Cooperating for Open access to Museums – towards a widEr Inclusion is implemented through the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE programme co-financed by the ERDF

Editors:                   Jörn Berding  
                                  Matthias Gather  
                                  27<sup>th</sup> of November 2018

Transport and Spatial Planning Institute (Institut Verkehr und Raum/IVR)

University of Applied Sciences Erfurt (Fachhochschule Erfurt)

Altonaer Straße 25

99085 Erfurt, Germany

phone: +49 / 361 / 6700 758

fax:     +49 / 361 / 6700 757

email:                   info@verkehr-und-raum.de;  
                              joern.berding@fh-erfurt.de;  
                              matthias.gather@fh-erfurt.de

internet:               www.verkehr-und-raum.de

Pictures on cover page and in the introduction by the Come-In!-project, Julia Raasch-Bertram & Monika Lawrence (©TLDA), Jörn Berding/IVR

Pictures in the articles as denoted in the figure caption/by the authors



---

## CONTENT

INTRODUCTION .....	1
THE DEMOCRATIC MUSEUM – ACCESSIBILITY AS A STIMULUS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION	
Dario Scarpati .....	6
INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES	
Marcus Weisen.....	12
INCLUSIVE MUSEUM – A CRITICAL VIEW FROM A MUSEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE	
Gisela Weiß.....	18
INCLUSIVE DESIGN EXPERTISE FOR AN ACCESSIBLE MUSEOGRAPHY	
Linda C. Miesen .....	26
“ACCESSIBILITY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TO VULNERABLE GROUPS” PROJECT: TOWARDS ACCESSIBLE MUSEUMS FOR ALL	
Bojana Rogelj Škafar .....	36
LE MUSÉE D'ARTS DE NANTES, TOWARDS A MUSEUM EXPERIENCE FOR ALL	
Catherine Le Treut.....	48
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT THE BUNDESKUNSTHALLE IN BONN	
Birgit Tellmann .....	58
LIST OF AUTHORS .....	64

---



## INTRODUCTION

### The COME-IN!-project

Despite the societal task to valorise cultural heritage by enabling an equal experience for a variety of different users, many museums in central Europe face challenges in adapting their infrastructure and exhibitions according to the “for all”-concept. In general this approach aims to allow equal access to the built environment and services for a whole variety of persons with their diverse needs, and consequently this does also refer to cultural sites. Reasons for this often unsatisfying situation can be found in a lack of experience and organisational knowledge on behalf of museum operators. Also limited financial resources, both for investments and a targeted promotion, contribute to it.

Against this background the European transnational project *COME-IN! – Cooperating for Open access to Museums – towards a wider Inclusion*<sup>1</sup> aims at increasing the capacities of small- and medium-sized museums by opening them to different user groups with a diversity of needs in terms of access and accessibility for the experience of culture. The project with a total budget of 2,72 million Euro is funded by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme (ERDF) and implemented from July 2016 to September 2019.

The COME-IN!-approach is based on a multi-faceted network of museums, associations and interest groups of people with a disability, academic representatives, training and cultural institutions and local authorities. Thus the partnership encompasses 14 different entities from 6 European countries (AT, DE, HR, IT, PL, SI), that fulfil specific functions within the project according to their focus and expertise, always aiming also at a sensitisation of relevant stakeholders and actors in their area for the current and future situation of inclusion in the museum sphere.

### Transnationally applicable solutions

The consortium jointly defined a strategic approach to promote “museums for all”, their attractiveness and perception in the public. Transnationally applicable solutions are discussed and a structured know-how transfer established. The *COME-IN!-Guidelines* for creating accessible collections and exhibitions and a *Training handbook for museum operators*<sup>2</sup> have been elaborated and tested by the project network. These outcomes are meant as a guidance to museums for developing accessible conditions for everyone to the widest extent. They should be used as instruments to sensitise the museum staff and to self-asses the museum along the whole service chain<sup>3</sup> in terms of accessibility levels, while taking into account four dimensions identified as crucial in this context: Physical, economical and social accessibility and access to information. These dimensions are cross-checked with the elements of the service chain starting with the search for information about the museum, the arrival, the use of the services offered and the visit of the exhibition.

Pilot actions and training of operators and staff have been performed according to this ‘theoretical-analytical’ basis established before and the results of these actions are analysed by a monitoring of user interest and satisfaction. Based on the gained experience a COME-IN!-label for awarding museums complying with the defined accessibility criteria is developed as an innovative promotional tool. It is meant to be disseminated from the local to the European level as a quality feature of “museums for all”.

1 The project website is accessible at [www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/COME-IN.html](http://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/COME-IN.html)

2 Both documents can be downloaded at [www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/COME-IN.html#Publications](http://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/COME-IN.html#Publications)

3 Information (website, flyer, guidance, explanations...), arrival and entrance, services (cash desk, wardrobe, shop...), exhibition area and presentation of objects, toilettes etc..

## The role of the Transport and Spatial Planning Institute of the University of Applied Sciences

Within COME-IN!, the Transport and Spatial Planning Institute (IVR) of the University of Applied Sciences Erfurt (DE) brings in its scientific background and practical experiences in the field of accessibility and design for all, in particular in the context of assessing and creating accessible environments and cultural sites. Knowledge and experiences are shared in order to get different new views on the issue from the international perspective of a transnational collaboration project.

The institute applies its knowledge concerning the consideration of the needs of disabled, elderly etc. persons in the creation of an accessible built environment, cultural sites, public spaces and buildings for all potential users with the goal to build a more inclusive society. The project process and outcomes are critically monitored over the project lifetime and for the different working steps.

The participation also serves to enhance own activities in order to foster the attractiveness of cultural sites at regional level. Moreover it is the task of the IVR to disseminate important findings on the project subject from local to international level.

### Thematic Conferences

In the framework of this communication and dissemination task, the IVR organised two Thematic Conferences dealing with ‘the inclusive museum’ to establish a cooperation and knowledge exchange between stakeholders and experts for different aspects related to the project subject:



**Figure 1:** At the 2nd Thematic Conference in Erfurt (Source: IVR)

- On one hand with the aim to provide a valuable input from researchers and good practice examples to the project consortium and other interested people from the project regions and beyond;



- and on the other hand in order to transfer the project outcomes to the public, discuss them with other museum operators and users belonging to the closer target group for inclusive offers and to influence policy and decision makers.

The first Thematic Conference was held on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017 in the Archaeological Museum in Udine, Italy and dealt with *'Inclusive museums - Challenges and solutions'*. The conferences' main emphasis lied on exploring the function and opportunities as well as potential limits for the creation of accessible and inclusive museums. Essential questions in this regard were raised and examples of good practice solutions and approaches from different European countries shown, before the COME-IN!-Guidelines and the Handbook for museums' operators were presented and discussed with an audience of around 100 participants.

**Figure 2 and 3:** Invitation of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Thematic conference of the COME-IN!-project (Source: IVR)

The second Thematic Conference entitled *'The inclusive museum - State of the art and perspectives'* took place on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2018 in the Monastery of St. Augustine in Erfurt, Germany. The focus of this event was exploring the current picture and perspectives of inclusion and accessibility as essential tasks for museum makers. Potential paths and state of the art approaches of museums to shape this challenge were outlined and demonstrated and finally the COME-IN!-methodology for inclusive museums presented and discussed. Around 75 interested stakeholders representing museums from Germany and neighbouring countries, museum educators, enterprises dealing with inclusive cultural

services and offers, representatives and interest groups of people with a disability and providers of cultural offers at the local and regional level attended this event.

**Table 1:** Overview COME-IN!-Thematic Conferences

No	Date	Venue & Place	Topic
1	9 <sup>th</sup> November 2017	Archaeological Museum Udine, Italy	Inclusive museums - Challenges and solutions
2	26 <sup>th</sup> June 2018	Monastery of St. Augustine Erfurt, Germany	The inclusive museum - State of the art and perspectives

## The proceedings

These proceedings document the contents presented by the authors of both COME-IN!-Thematic Conferences in Udine and Erfurt as a collection of papers. The authors represent universities, independent experts, consultancies for inclusive museum design and museums from France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia.

The papers deal with various aspects of how to plan and manage inclusion in museums. These encompass at first rather theoretical approaches and considerations about the necessity and potential of widening a cultural institutions' - and in particular a museums' - societal tasks in terms of opening it to a broader public. Also potential limits of inclusion in museums are discussed. In the following, concrete strategic approaches and practical examples of how to enhance the quality of a museum that can be experienced by as many different visitors as possible are provided.

In the first contribution the role of a museum that is innovatively thought about as a an offer for participation of the community in addition to its "classical" functions is approached from its potential societal value. This demands choosing new ways and paying more attention to the visitor in his/her relation and perception of the exhibits than was often used to do before.

The second paper examines cultural accessibility for people with disabilities and progress made here in the last decades. Practical examples are shown and policies implemented analysed to identify major challenges in this area and to present a managed approach to change the situation towards a better cultural access for all in an inclusive society.

In the following paper the questions if a museum has to be inclusive and if it even can be inclusive are approached from a museological perspective, considering the purpose of museums and participatory approaches within society.

The next article focuses on the responsibility of the museograph to consider accessibility at the very beginning of planning an exhibition, showing that appropriate professional design can provide equal access to qualified and collaborative experiences for all visitors. The presented seven principles of the Universal Design concept can provide guidance here as a tool for museographs to adequately evaluate offers in public procurement processes.

The following paper provides the example of the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups"-project, which was implemented by the National Ethnographic Museum in Ljubljana in cooperation with five national museums and galleries in Slovenia. The presentation encompasses the objectives of the project, the museological basis and its performance and results.

The next contribution presents the "Musée d'arts de Nantes", its recent renovation has made it possible to increase the exhibition area considerably while meeting at the same time conservation standards, but also offering a broader display of the museum's collections. Focus was laid on creating an accessible museum in many aspects, among them the development of new multimedia tools including an extensive visit application, representing a real innovation in France.

---

The final article then outlines the process undertaken in the last decade of the Art and Exhibition Hall (commonly known as the Bundeskunsthalle) in Bonn of becoming inclusive in terms of education, staff training and events. The museum aims at continuing this process of further opening up to a broader and more diverse audience by focussed training programs and visitor-based exhibitions. Three aspects illustrating the development in particular are outlined here: Work with deaf and hearing impaired visitors, the exhibition “Touchdown”, and workshops for people with dementia.

Note: The articles solely reflect their authors’ views and do not necessarily concur with the editors’ point of view.

## THE DEMOCRATIC MUSEUM – ACCESSIBILITY AS A STIMULUS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

**Dario Scarpato**

Archaeologist – Expert in museum accessibility  
Via Salvatore Bono, 21 – 90143 Palermo (Italy)  
scarpatidario@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

The museum, nowadays, must add new tasks and new purposes to its usual activities; it is no longer enough to be a good container of objects to show to an elitist public. The museum must become one of the subjects that collaborate in an overall territorial project, characterized by elements of sustainability and social inclusion. Therefore, those who work in the museum (especially the director and exhibition manager) must have strong social skills. Only in this way the museum can continue to be a protagonist in the life of a community.

### 1 MUSEUM IN THE SERVICE OF SOCIETY - SHARE EMOTIONS AND STORIES: A LIVELY COMPARISON BETWEEN THOSE WHO LIVE THE MUSEUM

My starting point for every work which describes the function of the museum is always the “International Council of Museums” definition:

*“A museum is a non-profit, permanent **institution in the service of society and its development**, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of **education, study and enjoyment**”.*

Analyzing the before mentioned definition, we can extrapolate some key-concepts. What means “museum to the service of society”? To explain my point of view, I underline the last three words: Education, study and enjoyment.

The educational aim of the museum has added value for citizens: The re-appropriation of cultural, social, historical goods linked to the territory in which we spend most of our life. Mainly civic museums are interested in building networks of connection with local populations, to which they directly direct and propose activities. Therefore, the study and the researches must be finalized to support, to produce and to implement this aspect of the heritage. And the storytelling is the basis for sharing and enjoyment<sup>4</sup> in all its meaning.

In conclusion, if we consider these specific meanings of “education, study and enjoyment”, we can summarize them with the only term “accessibility”. To build an accessible exhibition we must always have 3 questions in our mind:

- Who do I turn to?
- How do I turn?
- What response do I want to have?

In a conception of exposure focused on experience and relationship, the visitor of the museum is certainly more important, for the curator, than the object exhibited; of course this does not mean diminishing the archaeological finds or works of art, trivializing concepts and explanations.

<sup>4</sup> en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/enjoyment: Definition of *enjoyment* in English:

A - The state or process of taking pleasure in something (“For me, art is a medium for pleasure and enjoyment”).

B - The action of possessing and benefiting from something (“Or rather, things are not seen as individual possessions but as being available for common use and enjoyment”).

On the contrary, each object acquires greater importance precisely from the relationship with the visitor, who is invited to consider it conceptually and ideally to develop a personal interpretation linked to his/her visit experience (and life).



**Figure 1:** Programmatic meeting during the execution of the project "Al Museo con ... " (To the museum with ... ) - Museo Nazionale Etnografico e Preistorico "L. Pigorini". In the foreground two operators who communicate in sign language (LIS) (Source: Author)

In this way the exposed object acquires a new life every time it is explored; it will answer always new questions and the aim of a curator is to take them into consideration. It is always a new challenge, fascinating, because it allows you to build a living museum, in a continuous movement, and because it offers the possibility to know the reactions of visitors and, in this way, to improve, step by step, the exhibition system. This is the beauty of our work!

I know it is very difficult to convince the public to share their emotions with the organizer of an exhibition; too often the distance between them and "The Museum" makes them feel inadequate to make "serious" proposals. Nothing more wrong, in my opinion!

The best way to answer to this feeling is organising an exhibition for the five senses: The individuals do not form an experience through sight only (often the one sense used during a visit of exhibition): They take objects by the hands, they recognize tools from their sound, they savour smell and taste. If we cross out them some of these qualification, the objects might become incomplete.

With some simple "technical measures" we could try to build more "friendly" exhibitions: A Roman brick, of course, has many aspects at the same time: It is an archaeological item, witness of the presence of an ancient building; it is a manual work from which we can consider the production system... and so on. But, simply, it is an object from the past, an object that has two thousand years: For non-archaeologists... it is an emotion! To have in hand an object so old...

It is not important that the shape is similar to all the bricks in the world; it is not important that you can see millions of them walking in Pompeii or Ostia Antica; the very important emotion is... to hold in your hands an ancient brick of two thousand years. With similar shrewdness, the curator of an archaeological museum can gain the trust of the visitor and build, along with him, the path of a personal, exclusive and unique visit. A visit created specifically for every person who enters the museum. The museum must collect the "stories" and become able to share a moment of life with the visitor: And this is the greatest result that a museum director can get!

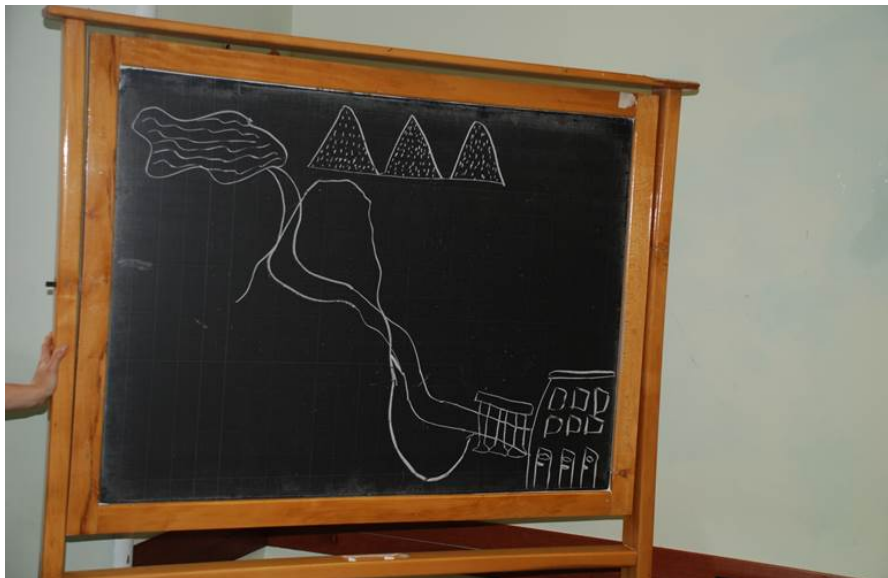
A visit to a museum becomes an "experience". It is not just to acquire information about a painter or a Roman coin; it gives the opportunity to grow, to compare our knowledge with something that we

had not imagined before, to discover something new about ourselves. The way we observe objects of art or archaeological finds opens our mind to the discovery of "other": Who made it? Who used it? Why did one chose to do it? Could he/she do it?

By comparing our habits and traditions we explore the lives of people we think different from us (because of the time – i.e. the ancient Romans – or because of the geography); but we will discover that they have/had our needs and desires similar to ours... we are all human beings.

## 2 THE MUSEUM AS A PLACE FOR DISCUSSION: THE ECO-MUSEUM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY

An **experiential museum** can be used to explore the world around us. It can help us better understand who lives around us. This means living life with greater awareness. This type of museum is useful for breaking down social tensions because they show how to welcome the other, how to share the same space and time.



**Figure 2:** Explanatory drawing of the route of a Roman aqueduct made by young people with cognitive-behavioral disabilities (Source: Author)

What does the declaration “the museum must be at the service of the development of the society” mean? I think we could consider the activity of a museum from different points of view, but the main objective must focus on the integration between people's lives and the territory in which they live. Most of our museums are located in small and medium-sized communities, and this pushes the operators (the curator of the exhibition, the director, but at the same time all the workers) to have a frequent meeting with a large part of the population.

The effort they have to make is to increase the number of constant visitors and turn them into "users" of the museum. Together with them, museum operators can build parts of the exhibition, they can think about the quality of the territory, they can organize a new way of using the country. Starting from experience, a high level of interpretation and organization of resources can be achieved. The museum can be the catalyst of positive forces to redesign the present and the future of a territory. To do this, the museum must become a center of ideas, relationships, programs; it must have the ability to organize the projects and the people who work there. It must become a meeting point (I like to call it a "square", with the ideal meaning of the ancient "agora").

In short: the museum must live the life of its community of reference!

It is therefore necessary to rethink not only the role of the museum, but also the role of the operators; those who work there must take responsibility for turning themselves into something more complex. The museum, in its entirety, must acquire new skills and collaborate as a primary actor in the transformation of the territory, proposing new issues, questions, ideas and actions. In this way, the museum will participate in the development of society.

It is necessary to move from a vision of the nineteenth-century museum, based on the unique visual and intellectual interaction with the exhibited object, to a more proactive vision; through the practice of eco-museums and the use of community maps, the "museum" can participate concretely in the development of the territory<sup>5</sup>.

By telling the micro-stories of the area, recognizing the "ancient knowledge" and combining it with new technologies, the museum institute takes a leading role in building a sustainable future.

Therefore, we must consider a museum projected towards the future, a museum not limited to a passive repetition of ancient times, too often felt as distant. A museum that exhibits the experiences of past generations and chooses as a point of pride the joy of discovery and the construction of a shared world.

But how can the museum share multiple experiences if it is built from the unique vision of the curator?

Nowadays, I believe (this is my hope) the main objective of the museologists is to improve the social aspects of museum and its exhibitions; and to do this, it is necessary:

- to listen all the people who live the museum, considering each of them with his/her own language and experience (the director, the exhibition curator, the custodians, the visitors)
- organising an analysis of the perception (how the curator, the custodians, the public "feel" the exhibition)
- to talk together with the public, to improve exhibitions and services together, to share ideas.

### **3 AN INCLUSIVE POLICY REQUIRES GREAT ATTENTION TOWARDS COMMUNICATION**

For a correct organisation of an exposition the museologist must obligatorily make some methodological and structural choices. First, the choice of terms and symbols is of great importance.

The choice of a term is not unconcerned; if we divide the words into concentric circles using the criterion of greater or less use, we find that in the innermost circle, that of the words commonly used in everyday language there is a particularly small number of terms. This means that the more we move away from that center, the less people will understand what we mean.

If we use technical words, we speak only with those who know these words, the professionals of a particular sector (archaeologists, geologists, art historians ...).

To open the museum to all people, we must learn to explain important things by means of simple words. It is not trivializing the text of a caption or a poster, but simply making it accessible. Using a Greek term (for example "Ουροχον") rather than "wine jug" (literary translation in English) means to take away the possibility of understanding what this object represents to almost 90% of people.

And it is better not to open a discussion on the correctness of the Greek terms used in archeology... .

---

<sup>5</sup> An interesting discussion on the role that arts, museums, exhibitions play in the development of the city can be read in: AA.VV., Build the city. Perspective on commons and culture, The European Cultural Foundation (Amsterdam) and Krytyka Polityczna (Warsaw), 2015.

I like to think that the most beautiful legend is... without words: An explanatory design must not be translated into a thousand languages, and if we organize the image in the right way, it can "tell" the use of the exhibited objects; in reality it is extremely direct!

The same happens with the symbols and with the information we give. When we use a symbol (for example, the symbol of accessibility for people using wheelchairs), we transmit our idea of disability through the image we select. The symbol is not impartial; it transmits the will (or the reluctance) to include, to accept the other. It provides with the information looked for in an unmediated way and, for this reason, immediately affects the imagination and sensitivity of people.

A museum must make known to the public, from the moment of its presentation on the web, which of its parts are accessible, how difficult a path is, what kind of alternatives exist. Knowing that there is a long road to cross, under the sun and uphill, allows you to evaluate the route to choose from. Knowing if there is an electric vehicle that can help to reach the most distant parts, can determine the choice of the visit in an archaeological area... .

But we must be very careful: Even the information is not neutral. Explain, perhaps unintentionally, the kind of reception that can be expected.



**Figure 3:** During the work with the young inmates of the "Malaspina" - Penitentiary Institute of Minor of Palermo. Project "Fatti un giro, Bellezza" ("Take a ride, Beauty") (Source: Author)

The museologist, today, must have a constant relationship with all the people living in the museum (in the long term as operators or for a while as visitors...); and at the same time he must allow (and if he/she is able to do so, also suggest) and promote further use of the museum.

He/she must therefore build inclusive exhibitions, and not only from a physical-sensorial point of view; he/she must work primarily for social and cultural inclusion. The necessary starting point is the scanning and the analysis of the structures. The examination must be carried out with the aim of



destroying the strongest obstacle - both physical and cultural - which is the entrance threshold: A correct way of exhibiting invites people to enter the museum and make them comfortable.

The analysis of the structures must be centered on the sensation that everyone has of the exhibition; it must highlight the possible relationships between subject/user and exposed object; it must consider with equal dignity every "inhabitant" of the planet "museum": Who works there, who manages it, who visits it.

An analysis that evaluates the different perceptions, must ask everyone according to their task and their vision, for example, as they consider the degree of accessibility of the museum, or of the website, of the indications, of the lights, of the didactic apparatus.

The analysis should try to know, before the visitor approaches the exhibition, what can be imagined to find in it, what one would like to see.

In this way we can find the elements of sharing, we can invent tools to develop a better understanding: For example, a common and shared glossary, comprehensible and usable by everyone. But we must be careful not to trivialize: Simplifying texts is the most difficult task for a museum professional. But it is also a great satisfaction: It allows you to start a constructive dialogue with all people!

#### 4 CONCLUSION

For the conclusion of this article, I would like to return to a previously mentioned concept: The eco-museum practice. Obviously it is not the only way to address the needs expressed in these pages, but, in my opinion, it potentially includes many of the solutions to the needs that a museum has to face in its daily life and in its territory. What is the aim of an eco-museum?

*"Recover, testify and enhance the historical memory, lives, figures, traditions, material and immaterial culture, relationship between natural environment and anthropized environment in order to orientate the future development of the territory in a logic of environmental, economic and social sustainability, responsibility and participation"*<sup>6</sup>.

These are the principles on which they are based: Institutions capable not only of constructing methodologically correct exposures, but also of planning a sustainable future; institutions that are characterised by being accessible, inclusive, able to share choices and management methods. Institutions that make participatory democracy their main characteristic: A museum accessible, inclusive, shared is a democratic museum. That is... a real museum!

#### REFERENCES

[1] AA.VV. (2016): Museo senza barriere - I giovani dell'Istituto penale Malaspina incontrano l'archeologia. Il Castello a Mare di Palermo, Palermo.

[2] AA.VV. (2017): Ti racconto il Museo di Petralia Soprana – "Fatti un giro, Bellezza" – Museo senza Barriere, Palermo.

[3] G. Cetorelli - M. R. Guido (a cura di) - (2017): Il patrimonio culturale per tutti. Fruibilità, riconoscibilità, accessibilità – Proposte, interventi, itinerari per l'accoglienza ai beni storico-artistici e alle strutture turistiche – Quaderni della Valorizzazione del Mi.B.A.C.T., Roma.

[4] H. De Varine (2005): Le radici del futuro. Il patrimonio culturale al servizio dello sviluppo sociale, Bologna (Les racines du futur, ASDIC 2002).

[5] [www.pigorini.beniculturali.it/al-museo-con.html](http://www.pigorini.beniculturali.it/al-museo-con.html)

---

<sup>6</sup> Definition drawn from "Legge 2 luglio 2014 n. 16 "Istituzione degli Eco-musei della Sicilia".

## **INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

**Marcus Weisen**

European Centre for Cultural Accessibility  
Jouanvins, 07160 Le Cheylard, France  
marcus.weisen1@gmail.com

### **Foreword**

This article by Marcus Weisen, European Centre for Cultural Accessibility, has been published in 2013 by Art beyond Sight, USA, as the lead article for a series of pan-disability “Project Access White Papers on Critical Issues re: Accessibility and Inclusion”. It is re-printed here with the kind permission of Art beyond Sight and ECCA.

It provides a state-of-the arts assessment of levels of cultural accessibility enjoyed by people with a disability in 2014. It has become something of a classic and is a frequently quoted in disability studies.

While it provides a nuanced picture of progress achieved and challenges remaining, its conclusion is sobering: internationally, the conditions for achieving significant and lasting improvements for the cultural accessibility for people with a disability are not in place. Key obstacles for change include: The lack of comprehensive national cultural accessibility policies within an overall framework for cultural inclusion, cultural funding policies that are unresponsive to the right of disabled people to participate in cultural life, the quasi absence of disabled people in cultural sector research (that what is not researched, is not funded) and institutional attitude. In the author’s analysis, the situation has not substantially changed since 2014.

The article is focused on strategic analysis, yet includes management tips and resources for cultural organisations.

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper looks at progress achieved in the cultural accessibility of people with disabilities since 1982, United Nations Year of People with a Disability. It blends practical examples with the analysis of policy implementation and identifies some of the major challenges on the road to progress. This white paper also recommends a managed approach to change, with the adoption of short, medium and long-term objectives aimed at bringing about "significant and lasting improvements in access to culture for all people with a disability," something the Council of Europe has called for since 1992.

In today's world, we understand cultural accessibility as inseparable from an engagement with the inclusive design of cultural venues, products and services. An inclusive society in which culture is a shared space for all is our destination. This paper looks at a progress, challenges, and a roadmap to this destination.

### **1 BACKGROUND: THE NEED FOR CULTURAL ACCESSIBILITY**

“1982, United Nations Year of People with a Disability,” is a landmark for the cultural accessibility of people with disabilities. A number of seminal projects sprouted up around that time. The museum of Lons-le-Saulnier, France, used bodily re-enactment of scenes represented in paintings to introduce people with severe physical disabilities to the history of art, the Washington Metropolitan Ear (Washington, DC) took audio description into theatres and Japanese broadcaster NHK begun transmitting audio described TV programs. In London, Gina Leveté pioneered movement workshops with a range of severely disabled people, and founded Shape, an arts development agency for disability and the arts, which employs some twenty people today.

The road to cultural accessibility has always been bumpy. Disabled people in London still remember a conference about accessibility held at the South Bank music centre in a conference room that was not accessible to participants. In 1985, the UK Carnegie Trust published "The arts and disabled people," which was perhaps the first national enquiry into cultural accessibility. The conclusions were sobering: Disabled people of all walks of life enjoyed very little cultural opportunity. Cultural accessibility was simply not part of the routines of arts and cultural practitioners, administrators, funders and decision makers. In short: cultural exclusion was the rule.

## **2 PROGRESS SINCE 1982**

Has the momentum unfolding since 1982 brought about deep and ample change? Has it brought about those "significant and lasting improvements in access to culture for all people with disabilities" called for by organisations such as the Council of Europe?

A small number of developments appear to have brought about great and sustainable improvements of scale. Visually impaired TV viewers can enjoy hundreds of hours of audio de-scribed programs per month in the UK. Some 200 cinemas in the UK provide optional audio description and closed captioning of most Hollywood films on the day of their release. Audio description is available in some 100 theatres in the UK, some 50 in France and probably, as one would expect, in even bigger numbers in the US, Sign Language interpreted perfor-mances are on the rise in a number of countries.

In the nineties, hearing Sign Language interpreters supported museum and heritage tours. Today, deaf guides are being recruited and trained to provide these tours. The change looks small, yet is fundamental. There is growing recognition that tours for deaf people ought to "arise from the ground of Sign Language." A new sophistication in service provision is unfold-ing. For example, the Smithsonian offers tours in ASL which are interpreted for all as well as tours in ASL only. The former provides an inclusive experience, the latter offers greatest fluency of communication.

At the Cité des Sciences in Paris, educational videos feature deaf actors presenting learning content for all. Animation movies explain scientific processes, using very few words. Kids and parents enjoy sitting and lying on the floor to view the movies: Deaf kids, hearing adults, deaf adults, hearing kids. This is an example of how engagement with people with a disabil-ity frequently leads to improved services for wider audiences. In a few some places, such inclusive cultural environments have become an everyday reality.

In the nineties, talking about the disability of great artists was frowned upon by art critics. Today, there is renewed interest in how artists such as Matisse, Degas, Kahlo, Klee and Hes-se responded to the existential challenge of disability and illness to create new ways in their art, powerfully nurturing artistic developments. When blind dancer Saïd Gharbi dances with the world renowned Wim van de Keybus Company, the athletic yet weightless gravity-defying dancers find a counter-point of stability in his energetic earth-based dance. They need him and he needs them. These dancers are a fully integrated organism.

## **3 CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS**

How are we to assess the extent of changes over the past thirty years? Put simply, measuring progress in cultural accessibility does not exist at a national and international level. Measures ought to be user-focused and assess whether "significant and lasting improvements" have been achieved. The absence of such measures is but one sign of a prevailing culture of neglect for cultural accessibility within national cultural administrations. We cannot in any way speak of "significant improvements"

in museum access, for instance, for deaf people, when only a handful of museums in any country provide very limited information in Sign Language. One might rather call it a culture of starvation. Cultural funding remains deeply discriminating. Over the past ten years, tens of billions have been spent worldwide on prestigious new museums and major extensions. As a rule, intellectual and sensory access to the collections they offer to people with a sensory disability or with learning disabilities is extremely poor. Few conscious efforts are being made to bring the best of the world's fabulous cultural collections, their "cultural content" and their power to move us within reach of people with a disability. Thus public funding is being used to maintain and strengthen cultural segregation. The problem is tricky to solve and would require that construction, exhibition and interpretation budgets are fully integrated and an inclusive design approach is adopted. Worldwide, inclusive design of cultural services still tends to remain an after-thought.

Cultural funding worldwide appears to stop at the doorsteps of care home institutions for older adults. A recent report by the European Centre for Cultural Accessibility (2012) shows that very few homes for older people employ an art worker. In these "homes", millions of people worldwide are denied cultural opportunity.

Arts and cultural practitioners list the development and dissemination of good practices, guidance, standards and training as one of the biggest challenges for cultural accessibility, as is shown in the Resolution of the international "In Touch with Art 2010" conference (2010). Digital media is omnipresent in the cultural sector, yet I cannot find easy-to-use sector guidance about the many possibilities for using it as a tool for the cultural equality of people with a disability. Overstretched small disability agencies and small cultural organisations cannot fill such yawning gaps on their own. It takes government commitment to create a national perspective, a vision and a strategy for change. Today, many cultural accessibility projects still rely on the personal initiative of dedicated individuals and short-term funding - a sad state of affairs that had already been pointed out in the 1980s. This leads almost invariably to faltering project legacies. Knowledge gained is not being passed on.

Lack of consistent engagement by many national and regional cultural administrations and funders is clearly a stumbling block. Inside cultural organisations, the major stumbling blocks include attitude and lack of awareness, skills and organisational policies and procedures. Progressive policies put the cultural equality of people with a disability and inclusive design for all at the heart of any planning process.

#### **4 POOR LEVELS OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) recognised the right of people with a disability to take part "on equal terms" in cultural life (article 30). Signatory states, including the US and the member states of the European Union, pledged to undertake every appropriate action to make cultural accessibility an everyday reality for people with a disability. The European Blind Union (2012) found, however, that according to 82,5% of its national member organisations, the cultural rights of blind and partially sighted people are being poorly or very poorly implemented. Yet, cultural participation is not a luxury, it is part of the very fabric of life in society and for many, it is a path to self-realisation. The Council of Europe (2006) states "The right of people with disabilities as individuals to be fully integrated into society is dependent on them being able to participate in the cultural life of that society...".

## 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Something everyone can do

- Being able to listen is one of the greatest cost-free resources on the way towards cultural accessibility. What do users say about their experiences? What is really unique in our cultural events and collections and how can we make the best of these accessible? It all starts with a listening mind, with a listening institution.
- A welcoming attitude works wonders even in places where access to cultural wonders is loaded with barriers. Anyone who engages with audiences knows this deep inside.
- Money is a scarce resource in many countries and in little funded arts and cultural organisations. "Access on a shoestring," a practical guide by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, England (2003) is awash with creative low-cost ideas for improving access to information, collections, and learning.

### 5.2 Changing mind-sets

- You may well have noticed, that attitudes towards people with a disability and their right to take part in cultural life have positively changed. Changing institutional mind-sets, seeing possibilities where one previously saw limitations comes cost-free. It expands the institutional mind, infuses it with life-enhancing lightness, frees up its creativity.
- Resistance to widening access is frequently expressed the following way, "We don't want to do any dumbing down". The news is good for those who suffer from this syndrome. "Not for the Likes of You," by Arts Council England (2005), shows that organisations that open up to new under-represented audiences do not compromise the quality of their artistic work.

### 5.3 Embracing organisational change

A demonstrable commitment to cultural accessibility and inclusive design takes more than the deployment of free and low-cost resources. It takes culture change within cultural organisations. Guidance on organisational change for the cultural accessibility of people with disabilities is pretty common sense. Core guidelines do not change much over the years and many have been rephrased recently by the European Blind (2012):

- Embed accessibility and inclusive design principles into every project development process, right from the start.
- Consult and involve users in project design.
- Build accessibility and inclusive design into every budget.
- Commission an access audit that covers premises, services, events, information (including website), marketing, organisational vision, mission, values, policies, practices, procedures.
- Assess what makes your cultural events and collections unique and what audiences most love. Focus on making these accessible. (Don't be satisfied with giving people with disabilities mere crumbs and broken fragments. That is an insult to the beauty of culture).
- Develop an Access Statement and Access Plan, with short-, medium-, and long-term objectives aimed at bringing about "significant and lasting improvements for all people with disabilities".
- Train staff so they enjoy the learning journey and grow with it.
- Last but not least: directors and senior administration should demonstrate leadership and take full responsibility for progress in cultural accessibility.

"A long journey starts with a first step" (Laotse). You have already taken a few or many steps. Good luck on your journey!

© European Centre for Cultural Accessibility, Art Beyond Sight

## REFERENCES

- [1] Arts Council England (2004): Not for the Likes of You. Phase Two Final Report. Document A. How to reach a broader audience. Edinburgh. Online: [www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/NFTLOY\\_doc\\_A.doc](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/NFTLOY_doc_A.doc) (last accessed 25.09.2018).
- [2] Art Beyond Sight (2014): Project Access White Papers on Critical Issues re: Accessibility and Inclusion. New York. Online: [www.artbeyondsight.org/mei/white-papers-on-critical-issues-re-accessibility-and-inclusion](http://www.artbeyondsight.org/mei/white-papers-on-critical-issues-re-accessibility-and-inclusion) (last accessed 25.09.2018).
- [3] Council of Europe (2006): Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the right and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015, Chapter 3.2. Action line No. 2: Participation in cultural life, p. 13. Online: [www.coe.int/en/web/disability/action-plan-2006-2015](http://www.coe.int/en/web/disability/action-plan-2006-2015) (last accessed 25.09.2018).
- [4] Council of Europe (1992): Council of Europe Recommendation R (92)6, chapter VIII, section 8.5, Online: [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int).
- [5] European Blind Union and St Dunstan's (2010): In Touch with Art 2010 Conference Resolution. Online: [www.euroblind.org/campaigns-and-activities/finished-campaigns-and-activities/access-culture-project-2011-2012](http://www.euroblind.org/campaigns-and-activities/finished-campaigns-and-activities/access-culture-project-2011-2012) (last accessed 25.09.2018).
- [6] European Blind Union (2012): EBU Access to Culture Survey 2012: Mapping current levels of accessibility to cultural venues and activities in Europe, Online: [www.euroblind.org/campaigns-and-activities/finished-campaigns-and-activities/access-culture-project-2011-2012](http://www.euroblind.org/campaigns-and-activities/finished-campaigns-and-activities/access-culture-project-2011-2012) (last accessed 25.09.2018).
- [7] European Centre for Cultural Accessibility/André Fertier (2012): Discrimination in Access to Culture against People with a Disability and Older People in Need of Care (no longer online, checked 25.09.2018).
- [8] European (Union) Council (of Ministers) (2003): Council Resolution of 6 May 2003 on accessibility of cultural infrastructure and cultural activities for people with disabilities. Online: [publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9946442c-c9a7-4b96-ad20-1a8690ff9e44](http://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9946442c-c9a7-4b96-ad20-1a8690ff9e44) (last accessed 25.09.2018).
- [9] Official Journal (of the European Community) C 134, 07/06/2003 P. 0007 - 0008.
- [10] Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2003): Disability Portfolio Guide 8: Access on a Shoestring. Online: [webar-chive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110805141003/http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/support/toolkits/libraries\\_disability/~media/Files/pdf/2003/dis\\_guide08.ashx](http://webar-chive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110805141003/http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/support/toolkits/libraries_disability/~media/Files/pdf/2003/dis_guide08.ashx) (last accessed 25.09.2018).
- [11] Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2005): Accessibility of museum, library and archive websites: the MLA audit. Online: [webar-chive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20070708180519/http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets//M/mla\\_web\\_accessibility\\_pdf\\_6541.pdf](http://webar-chive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20070708180519/http://www.mla.gov.uk/resources/assets//M/mla_web_accessibility_pdf_6541.pdf) (last accessed 25.09.2018).
- [12] Paul Hamlyn Foundation (2016): No longer us and Them – How to change into a participatory museum and gallery: Learning from the Our Museum programme. Online: [www.phf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Our-Museum-Report\\_April-2016-double-page.pdf](http://www.phf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Our-Museum-Report_April-2016-double-page.pdf) (last accessed 25.09.2018).
- [13] United Nations (n.y.): Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - Articles. Article 30. Online: [www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html) (last accessed 25.09.2018).
- [14] United Nations (1948): Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 27. Online: [www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights](http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights) (last accessed 25.09.2018).
- [15] Weisen, M. (2010): Disability discrimination in museums is systemic – the case for national strategic approaches in the UK and the world over. In: From the Margins to the Core? Conference on equality and diversity, Victoria and Albert Museum and Museum Studies Department, University of Leicester, pp. 48-72. Online: [www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/f/from-the-margins-to-the-core-2010-conference](http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/f/from-the-margins-to-the-core-2010-conference) (last accessed 25.09.2018).

---

## **NETWORKS, RESOURCES**

Culture for All ([www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi/en.php](http://www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi/en.php))

Heritage Accessibility ([www.accessibilite-patrimoine.fr/?lang=en](http://www.accessibilite-patrimoine.fr/?lang=en))

Jodi awards for accessible digital culture ([www.jodiawards.org.uk](http://www.jodiawards.org.uk))

Museum Access Consortium ([museumaccessconsortium.org](http://museumaccessconsortium.org))

## INCLUSIVE MUSEUM – A CRITICAL VIEW FROM A MUSEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Prof. Dr. Gisela Weiß**

Hochschule für Technik, Wirtschaft und Kultur Leipzig  
University of Applied Sciences  
Courses of Studies Museology B.A. and Museum Education M.A.  
Karl-Liebknecht-Straße 145  
D-04227 Leipzig  
gisela.weiss@htwk-leipzig.de

### ABSTRACT

The article intends to give a critical view on the question of making museums matter in an inclusive way. Starting from the questions if museums have to be inclusive – and further if museums can even be even inclusive – reference is made to the implementation of the UN convention and the discussed right of cultural participation going along with it. Some museums have taken the requirements for accessibility into greater consideration. But accessibility is not the same as inclusion. Removing barriers does not lead necessarily to a social interaction.

Against this background, the purpose of museums is discussed: Representatives in the Anglo-American field assign them tasks as „agents of social changes“ (Richard Sandell). In contrast stays the ICOM definition of museums, which focuses on conservation and securing. Therefore the museum is an exclusive place per se, an institution that is responsible for maintaining order – an institution that develops „we“-identities and therefore is always excluding others. Coming from the question what an exclusive place like a museum can do about inclusion the article concludes with perspectives und impulses.

### 1 THE PROBLEM

“Inclusion” – like “accessibility”, in general “freedom from barriers” – is a central subject in public debates about social equality. These discussions and demands are not only national, the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities can provide an international framework, in which the Central Europe Project „COME-IN! – Cooperating for Open access to Museums – towards a wider Inclusion“ also can be integrated.

The indisputable fact that “Inclusion“ and “Accessibility“ are politically and socially accepted principles makes the following critical view on this topic all the more tricky. Whereby I strongly emphasise that being critical not necessarily has a negative connotation. I do not want to complain and deprecate – that means to criticise in the usual language use, but I want to provide (hopefully) a constructive criticism from a museological point of view. And with this advance notice I can place my provocative question: **Does a museum have to be inclusive? Should that be the goal?** In order to beat this: **Can a museum even be inclusive?**

### 2 THE UN CONVENTION AND THE RIGHT OF CULTURAL PARTICIPATION

Before I start with my argumentation I have to confess something: I have several times already regretted my decision to go on this rhetorical black ice, since who can oppose this approach and claim of inclusion? Everything sounds good and I focus first on the Federal Republic of Germany. Since March 2009, when the German Bundestag ratified the UN convention on the rights of persons with a disability, the change from an individual model to a social model for disabled person has finally taken



place. The definition of article 1, section 2 explicitly refers to the interaction of physical impairment and environmental impairment as well as attitudinal barriers [1].

Article 30 makes reference to the culture and requires the State Parties to enable an equal participation for people with a disability in social life. Furthermore, the member states are to be urged to work on consciousness raising (according to article 8). They should support acceptance, appreciation, and a positive perception of people with disabilities in society; in addition they should overcome prejudice and discrimination [2]. As such, the direction of thrust of the UN convention is twofold: It is not enough to dismantle barriers, there also has to be a change in the mental attitude of society. How have museums reacted to this and how are they reacting? One thing is for sure: The implementation of the UN convention on the rights of persons with a disability and going along with it the right of cultural participation were much discussed among museum experts. During the last ten years there have been many publications on this topic, different working groups on local, regional as well as national level have been working in close communication. Best practice examples, positive and negative experiences have been exchanged among each other. Some museums have taken the requirements for accessibility into greater consideration and could therefore use corresponding regional or state funding programs.

### 3 EXAMPLES: FROM ACCESSIBILITY TO PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

One example is the Deutsches Hygiene Museum Dresden. This museum has already approached the topic accessibility in the past years. An important milestone constitutes the famous exhibition “Der (im-)perfekte Mensch. Vom Recht auf Unvollkommenheit” (“The (im-)perfect human. The right of imperfection”) in 2000/01. The picture (s. Fig. 1) shows the front of the museum with a ramp on the right side which has been installed on the recommendation of disabled associations with whom they worked back in that time and which nowadays facilitates the access for people with physical difficulties. However, today this is gladly used by all visitors as an entry to the museum [3].

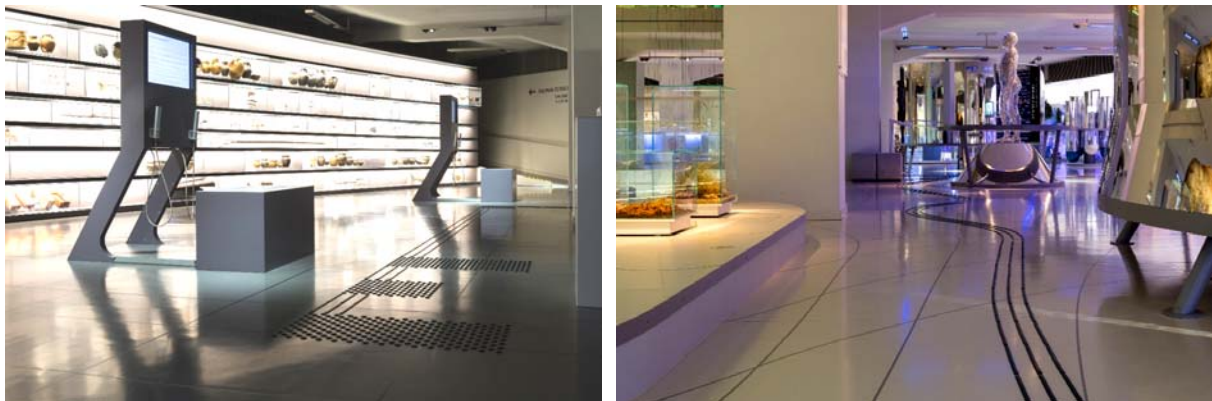


**Figure 1:** The entrance of the Deutsches Hygiene Museum Dresden – with a ramp to facilitate the access for people with physical difficulties, adapted 2000 in the context of the exhibition “Der (im-)perfekte Mensch. Vom Recht auf Unvollkommenheit” (Source: Author)



**Figure 2:** Impression from the permanent exhibition in the smac – Staatliches Museum für Archäologie Chemnitz: First floor with the “Gläserner Neandertaler“ (Source: Michael Jungblut)

Other examples are the State Museums in Mainz and Stuttgart as well as the *smac – Das Staatliche Museum für Archäologie* (State Archeology Museum) in Chemnitz. The picture (see Fig 2) shows the situation in the *smac* just after opening in 2014 – please have a look at the floor. Only few years later the permanent exhibition has been modified (see Fig. 3 and 4) so the floor has got tactile ground guidelines for visually impaired persons, furthermore there are various objects available for visitors to touch and audio guides in “Leichter Sprache” (simple language) [4].



**Figure 3 and 4:** Images to the integrated guiding system for visually impaired persons, installed retroactively 2016, which is also used by all visitors as a practical guidance through the wide exhibition across three floors (Source: Mark Frost)

The *Deutsches Historisches Museum* (German Historical Museum) in Berlin, the *Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany) in Bonn [5], the *Historisches Museum Frankfurt* (Historic Museum Frankfurt) reopened in 2017 and even more museums can be added. Please excuse me in case of leaving out some important museums and that I have only mentioned German examples – especially a closer look at the Historic Museum Frankfurt seems to be essential: On one hand it is not supported by the Federation of the German Country, it is a typical form of an urban museum – and on the other hand it has developed a basic concept for a “museum for all” in the last years.

“The Historic Museum Frankfurt becomes an ‘Inclusive Museum’. That means much more than free accessibility”, so it is stated in the museums’ own publication CURA (volume 16 entitled “The Inclusive Museum”) [6]. It is also pointed out that the social department of the City of Frankfurt established an administrative department of Inclusion in 2013 in order to “continue developing the inclusion and the understanding for it among the society of the city”. Therefore the museum is a tool for this political mission. “A blind guide could lead a group of persons who can see through the exhibition, that is one goal of the Historic Museum.” This is another quote of CURA [7]. Furthermore, the term “holistic inclusion” might be understood as “universal human right based principle of social cohabitation” [8].

This is remarkable, from my point of view they have understood it right because accessibility is not the same as inclusion. The removal of barriers is certainly the first step, however this does not lead necessarily to a social interaction, which is the implicit meaning of the term inclusion. All the more I was puzzled while continuing reading the publication that stated not going further than the level of accessibility and leaving out the essential approach of the Frankfurt Museum concept – the participatory approach.

Since 2011 Frankfurt has taken this path. Back then the *Stadtlabor unterwegs* (so about “City Lab on the Go”) started with an exhibition “Ostend // Ostanfang” (East End// East Beginning) and has accompanied five participatory exhibition projects since that time [9]. The Historische Museum Frankfurt assumes that all 680.000 citizens of Frankfurt are experts for their city. So the museum invites all citizens to introduce this expert knowledge to the newly opened museum. In cooperation with different groups of the urban society new concepts for annual exhibitions with changing topics should be developed in the current City Lab. The topics should be elaborated together with the groups [10]. Such a museum work implies abandoning the classical sovereign right of the traditional museum. That means for the exhibition area, the museum and the museum worker are no longer the ones who tell authorial or decide how or what will be exhibited. However parts of society will be invited to choose contents and to bring in their point of view on this or that topic [11].



**Figure 5, 6 and 7:** Impressions from the participatory approach in Frankfurt, published 2017 in “Cura 17”, entitled “Frankfurt Jetzt! und das Stadtlabor” (Source: Susanne Kößling, Aiketerini Dori)

#### 4 REFLECTIONS ON THE SOCIAL PURPOSE OF A MUSEUM

Frankfurt is one of the leaders in the movement of participatory museums in Germany but, of course, they have not invented this participation model. A well-known activist in this area is Nina Simon with her work “The Participatory Museum” [12]. And this is based on the New Museology from the 1970s. This movement within the museum scene has raised the awareness that museums should play an active role in society. This is the claim for museums to represent themselves in their whole variety and to understand their responsibility as mediating instance.

The social responsibility of the museum is based, according to the American museum philosopher Stephen Weil, on being embedded in society, on having an effect on society and on being formed by society. By the way, he is the author of the well-known statement about changed aims in museums: “From being about something to being for somebody” [13].

Richard Sandell, a British Professor for museum studies at the University Leicester, has to be mentioned in this context as well. His approach is based on the assumption that cultural and social aspects are inextricably linked. Furthermore, he sees a high potential for museums in influencing the society positively and causing social changes because of this mutual interrelation [14]. For him and for Stephen Weil there exist good and bad museums. Especially Weil sees only museums with a clear social purpose to be entitled to exist. He pleads for closing the museum in case the purpose is not determined or not put into action.

However, what is the social purpose of a museum? One could, of course, argue at length about this. To this day the ICOM member states undertake to act accordingly to the following definition of museums from 2007:

*„A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, the tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment“* [15].

One can emphasise the aim that everything should be done in the spirit of service to society and its development, however, the task of being “agents of social changes” (so Richard Sandell) cannot be derived from this if you look at the four functions of the museum. Especially the first two functions are not designed for change but for conservation and securing. The task of a museum is the determination of the cultural heritage and its conservation. What does this mean?

#### 5 THE MUSEUM AS AN EXCLUSIVE PLACE

Cultural heritage does not fall from the sky, it has to be formed. The museum theorist Krzysztof Pomian has explained it in a wonderful way by using the example of an old factory of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This factory is relinquished so it becomes vestige, a relic of the past. It is shown to the public which is sad and indignant. The walls and machines become monuments – either for technical progress, for entrepreneurial spirit or for exploitation of the working class, the working class struggle or whatever. Our factory has become a subject of discussion and gestures, an expression for all the different positions towards the past. This waste product becomes now a worth keeping item, a sign with symbolic value because of its social meaning [16].

Exactly this sequence – thing, waste product, sign with symbolic value – is passed by the majority of items that compose the cultural heritage. And the modern museums – that means museums since the transition from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century until today – claim to determine such things and guarantee permanent protection with it. Therefore a museum is a mediator between past and future: It collects items from the past in order to preserve them for the future, with the purpose to provide an orientation in presence [17].

However, who wants to provide orientation and sense in this situation? Who collects things with which reason, with which meaning and who demands to speak for him- or herself or even for others on this behalf? But this exactly happens when I exhibit, visualize, and label my contemporary ideas of the past. I understand Paul Mecheril when he describes a museum as an exclusive place – an institution that is responsible for maintaining order. I refer to a presentation of this pugnacious professor for migration and education at the University of Oldenburg, that he performed at a symposium in Düsseldorf in 2017 with the topic “Who does the museum belong to” [18].

In the past, I dealt with the history of the museum of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Because of this work and the historic distance I am presumably able to distinguish how the bourgeoisie or middle-classes asserted their own concept of the past and how they were able to legitimate their attitude towards their presence. Furthermore, I agree with Paul Mecheril that the idea of the museum how it was invented in the 19<sup>th</sup> century still exists. The aim of a museum is not to make the world a better place – so Mecheril – the museum is an archive and it is the question which heritage should be passed on [19].

A last theoretical challenge must be added: I want to refer to the concept of “cultural memory” by Jan and Aleida Assmann. Their initial assumption in order to explain how memory works is that every “I”, so each individual, is in his or her memory connected to a “we” as a basis for identity formation. However, these “we”-groups are for each “I” or each individual of varying significance and duration. Therefore there is a difference between a social memory and a collective memory. In the first case the memories are short-term, in the second case they are stable and consistent. Furthermore, there is the cultural memory (it is also long-term designed) which is in the responsibility of institutions like the archives, the libraries and the museums. It is a matter of acquisition of contents by confronting us and them and making them an element of a greater collective identity [20].

That should be all to the Assmann theory – one could lecture even more about this concept, however, the “we”-identity is my field of interest. Because, when the “we”-identity is developed there is always a form of “othering” – a group of others, whose interests are not represented.

## 6 CONCLUSION: PERSPECTIVES AND IMPULSES

That is the problem – and the question, what an exclusive place like a museum can do about inclusion? I try to provide five considerations or perspectives:

1. Should one consider participatory formats, in order to enable a bright majority of the society in participation of meaning generating? Now you understand why I have presented the Historic Museum of Frankfurt and the urban social opening in more detail.
2. Should one allow external groups to co-decide about our collections in order to get the different aspects of a society?
3. Do the co-workers, the teams in the museums need to be more diverse?
4. Should we make our history more transparent, should there be a reflexive level? However, in any case it is important to reflect our structures, to inspect the museum items and objects in their colonial, racist or classical based contexts and to consider if and how we can exhibit and communicate these items in the future. But who does benefit from it? I guess – in the first place – we do. However, will the museum be more inclusive because of this?
5. At least: Is that the right way, not only to abandon barriers but to make disability and mechanism of exclusion a subject of discussion? Or rather to formulate it a little bit more positive: Should we make the diversity of our society subject of discussion in as many as possible exhibitions, so we can comply with the UN request of a positive awareness of persons with disabilities in society?

There are so many questions I have purposely left them until the end. They are intended to be impulses, because I have not got answers to my questions from the beginning yet. My preliminary conclusion: For museums it is possible to remove more barriers step by step and to think more about access in order to guarantee an equal participation in cultural life.

However, an inclusive museum in the sense of a “museum for all” seems to me more an utopian idea than a realistic and meaningful claim. But in order to get out of the tight spot I would like to make a proposal: What if we allow the museum the diversity we want to have for our society? It does not make sense to speak about “the” museum. Some museums will stay a refuge for the cultural heritage [21]. Other museums will interpret the museum context in a new way, some of them will use the participatory concept, others will be – in this way or another – an “Agent of Social Change”. However, in these cases the definition of museum will need to be changed completely.

To color the last conclusions conciliatory I end with a quote from Alfred Lichtwark in 1903, he was a cultural critic and famous reform educationist from Hamburg:

*“As long as the museum is not petrified it needs to change. Each generation will set a task and demand even more performance”* [22].

And with this suggestion or stimulation for empowerment I will finish the critical view from a museological perspective to the topic of the “Inclusive Museum”.

## REFERENCES

[1] Wunder, M. (2012): Behindert sein oder behindert werden? Zu Fragen von Ethik und Behinderung. In: Terhooven, A. and J. Weber (ed.) (2012): Wege zur Kultur. Barrieren und Barrierefreiheit in Kultur- und Bildungseinrichtungen. Wien, p. 91 (= Schriften zu Tourismus und Freizeit 3).

[2] Cf. also Teller, T. (2013): Auf dem Weg zum inklusiven Museum: Konzept und Evaluation des Aktionstags „All inclusive! Das Museum barrierefrei entdecken“ am Deutschen Hygiene-Museum Dresden. Bachelorthesis Hochschule für Technik, Wirtschaft und Kultur Leipzig, p. 21.

[3] Cf. Lutz, P. (2001): Der (im-)perfekte Mensch. Vom Recht auf Unvollkommenheit. In: Standbein Spielbein. Museumspädagogik aktuell 59 (Barriere-Frei – Teilhabe von Menschen mit Behinderung im/am Museum), pp. 27-30; Lutz, P.: Barrierefreiheit im Deutschen Hygiene-Museum. Ein Praxisbericht. In: Föhl, P. (ed. et alt.) (2007): Das barrierefreie Museum. Theorie und Praxis einer besseren Zugänglichkeit. Ein Handbuch. Bielefeld, pp. 281-301; Staupe, G. (2004): Szenografie ausstellen! In: Szenografie in Ausstellungen und Museen. 1. Kolloquium in der DASA Dortmund vom 23. bis 24.11.2000. Essen, pp. 124-132.

[4] Cf. the homepage of *smac – Das Staatliche Museum für Archäologie* with the offerings to accessibility: [www.smac.sachsen.de/barrierefreiheit.html](http://www.smac.sachsen.de/barrierefreiheit.html) (last accessed 16.11.2018)

[5] Cf. the homepage of the Bundeskunsthalle in 14 languages, among them “Leichte Sprache” and sign language: [www.bundeskunsthalle.de/index.html](http://www.bundeskunsthalle.de/index.html) (last accessed 16.11.2018); also the project „Pilot Inklusion“, initiated by the *Bundeskunsthalle* in cooperation with other museums and the *Bundesverband Museumspädagogik e.V.*: Bundeskunsthalle (ed. et alt.) (2017): Pilot Inklusion. Module und Prozesse für Inklusion. Abschlussdokumentation des Förderprojektes Entwicklung eines modularen Vermittlungskonzepts zu inklusiver Bildung im Museum (2015 – 2017). Online: [www.bundeskunsthalle.de/vermittlung/inklusion.html](http://www.bundeskunsthalle.de/vermittlung/inklusion.html) (last accessed 16.11.2018)

[6] Von den Borg, Chr. (2016): Kultur inklusive? Inklusion geht uns alle an. In: Cura 16 (Das inklusive Museum), p. 10.

[7] Ibid., pp. 12, 14.

[8] Gemeinhardt, A. (2016): Das Historische Museum wird inklusiv! In: Cura 16 (Das inklusive Museum), p. 18.

[9] Cf. Gesser, S. (2017): Stadtlabor unterwegs. Ausstellungen 2011–2015. In: Cura 17, pp. 26-29.

- [10] Cf. to the three participative projects since starting „Frankfurt jetzt!“, a stationary space for changing *Stadtlabor*-activities („Stadtlabor Sommertour 2016“, „Stadtlabor Film – Stadt filmen als partizipativer Prozess“, „Stadtlabor Sammlungs-Check – Migration partizipativ sammeln“): Cura 17 (2017), pp. 30-39.
- [11] Cf. Gesser, S. (2011): Herausforderung Partizipation. In: Standbein Spielbein. Museumspädagogik aktuell Nr. 91, pp. 31f; Gerchow, J., Susanne, S. and Jannelli, A. (2012): Nicht von gestern! Das *historische museum frankfurt* wird zum Stadtmuseum für das 21. Jahrhundert. In: Gesser, S. (ed. et al.) (2012): Das partizipative Museum – Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen. Bielefeld, pp. 22-32.
- [12] Simon, N. (2010): The participatory museum. Santa Cruz; cf. Simon, N. (2012): Das partizipative Museum. In: Gesser, S. (ed. et al.) (2012): Das partizipative Museum – Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen. Bielefeld, pp. 95-108.
- [13] Weil, St. (1999): From Being about Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum. In: Daedalus 128, 3 (America's Museums), pp. 229-258; cf. Weil, St. (1990): Rethinking the museum and other meditations. Washington; Weil, St. (2002): Making museums matter. Washington.
- [14] Cf. Sandell, R. (ed.) (2002): Museums, Society, Inequality. London.
- [15] ICOM international council of museums (ed.) (2007): Museum Definition. Online: [icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/](http://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/) (last accessed 16.11.2018).
- [16] Pomian, K. (1990): Museum und kulturelles Erbe. In: Korff, G. and Roth, M. (ed.) (1990): Das historische Museum. Frankfurt a.M./New York, pp. 41-45.
- [17] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 51f; Weiß, G. (2005): Sinnstiftung in der Provinz – Westfälische Museen im Kaiserreich. Münster, p. 2 (= Forschungen zur Regionalgeschichte 49).
- [18] Mecheril, P. (2017): Wem gehört das Museum? Fragen und Bedingungen im globalen Kontext. Symposium der Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf 18.-20.1.2017, Panel 3: Diversität. Online: [www.kunstsammlung.de/forschen/museum-global/konferenzen/vorschau.html](http://www.kunstsammlung.de/forschen/museum-global/konferenzen/vorschau.html) (last accessed 15.11.2018); cf. Meijer-van Mensch, L. (Mod.) (2017): Diskussion zu Panel 3: Diversität. Symposium „Wem gehört das Museum? Fragen und Bedingungen im globalen Kontext“, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf 18.-20.1.2017. Online: [www.kunstsammlung.de/forschen/museum-global/konferenzen/vorschau.html](http://www.kunstsammlung.de/forschen/museum-global/konferenzen/vorschau.html) (last accessed 15.11.2018).
- [19] Cf. *ibid.*
- [20] Cf. Assmann, A. (2006): Soziales und kollektives Gedächtnis. Online: [www.bpb.de/veranstaltungen/dokumentation/128665/panel-2-kollektives-und-soziales-gedaechtnis](http://www.bpb.de/veranstaltungen/dokumentation/128665/panel-2-kollektives-und-soziales-gedaechtnis) (last accessed 16.11.2018); Assmann, J. (1988): Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität. In: Assmann, J. and Hölscher, T. (1988): Kultur und Gedächtnis. Frankfurt a.M., p. 9-19; Halbwachs, M. (1985): Das kollektive Gedächtnis, Frankfurt a.M. (first edition: La mémoire collective, Paris 1950).
- [21] Cf. the inspiring „wording“ from Alexander Klein for the museums, which continue as „Noah’s ark“: Klein, A. (2004): Expositum. Zum Verhältnis von Ausstellung und Wirklichkeit, Bielefeld, p. 171.
- [22] Lichtwark, A. (1903): Museen als Bildungsstätten. Einleitung zum Mannheimer Museumstag. In: Schaar, E. (ed.) (1991): Alfred Lichtwark, Erziehung des Auges. Ausgewählte Schriften, Frankfurt a.M., p. 47; cf. Lichtwark, A. (1904): Museen als Bildungsstätten. In: Zentralstelle für Arbeiter-Wohlfahrtseinrichtungen (ed.) (1904): Die Museen als Volksbildungsstätten. Ergebnisse der 12. Konferenz der Centralstelle für Arbeiter-Wohlfahrtseinrichtungen. Berlin, pp. 6-12 (= Schriften der Centralstelle für Arbeiter-Wohlfahrtseinrichtungen 25).

## INCLUSIVE DESIGN EXPERTISE FOR AN ACCESSIBLE MUSEOGRAPHY

**Linda C. Miesen**

Université Bordeaux-Montaigne  
Laboratoire MICA Bordeaux - EA 4426  
Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine  
10 Esplanade des ANTILLES  
F-33607 PESSAC Cedex  
linda-christine.miesen@etu.u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr

### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the responsibility of the museograph<sup>7</sup> to integrate accessibility considerations at the earliest exhibition planning stages and to not view them as an afterthought. The example of a visual-tactile display at the exhibition "Connectivités", MUCEM, Marseille, shows that exhibition design can provide unrestricted access to qualified, participatory and collaborative (educational) experiences for all visitors, outside of mediation programs. Museographers are therefore encouraged to work together with specialised designers who consider the nonstandard visitor and bring inclusive design expertise into museography.

The design concept of Universal Design and its seven principles provide guidance in this respect. Its high creative potential for exhibition design poses the challenge for the designer "to think beyond the minimum requirements... [to] understand the needs of users well enough to make informed judgements and to effectively use the input of users with disabilities" [1]. The author proposes the seven principles as a tool for museographers to better evaluate offers in public procurement processes.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

A growing body of literature presents guidelines on how to expand physical accessibility of museum buildings, or focusses on cultural mediation activities, adapted to the requirements of a disability such as blindness or low vision, during special visits to the museum [2]. Less attention has been paid to accessible exhibition design, missing out crucial understandings of the interface between visitors and exhibition environments [3]. Obviously, when inclusive mediation programs are not framed by an accessible design (i.e., the exhibition furniture, graphic and sensory displays, digital interfaces for communication etc.), the disabled visitors will be barred from active participation in and engagement with the museums' exhibitions once the guided tour has ended. This is particularly interesting given that various authors have highlighted the importance of accessibility and inclusiveness as a cross-cutting task for the museum practice [4]. We therefore propose the term Accessible Museography, in order to highlight the need for innovative inclusive design expertise embedded in the museum's museography.

The museograph is commissioned by the curator; his/ her role is to stage content in the exhibition space and more widely to communicate it to the public [5]. He/She is faced with questions like: How are people moving? How do they discover a space? How do they understand it?

Museography therefore employs various communication methods suitable for information, orientation and way-finding, as well as sensory devices to get across the meaning of the exhibition. Museography may be developed in-house or by specialized teams or freelance specialists.

---

<sup>7</sup> The term "museography" is regularly used in the French-speaking world, identifying the art and techniques of exhibitions. A German equivalent of the term would be "Ausstellungsgestaltung"; in English, the terms "museum design" or "exhibition design" are more common.



The accessible museography's objective is to transfer informations within a meaningful organizational structure and to achieve emotional and intellectual understanding – regardless of visitors' capabilities, knowledge or habit [6].

In this article, we present our idea of BY WHOM and WHEN inclusive design expertise should be embedded in the accessible museography. The question of HOW to do this is more difficult to answer: The museograph may be the designer of the exhibition. In this case, he/she applies his/her design experience and methods, and he/she applies knowledge of materials and fabrication techniques. For the exhibition design to become inclusive, a superordinate design strategy is needed.

The museograph may subcontract designers, suppliers or manufacturers who realize parts of the museography. He/ She will work together with 3D or Graphic designers, multimedia, acoustics or content developers, as well as model-makers, mannequin suppliers, mount-makers, lighting designers, carpenters, casework manufacturers, movie-makers, software specialists, etc..

In both cases, the conceptual framework of *Universal Design* offers guidance, and ensures that the design process is responsible for a satisfactory visit of disabled users. For a simpler understanding of our argument, it is assumed that the museograph needs to subcontract a designer. For this case we propose the Seven Principles of Universal Design as a tool for museographs to evaluate design and eventually make it easier for the museograph to select bidders who respect the Universal Design approach.

## 2 INCLUSIVE DESIGN EXPERTISE FOR AN ACCESSIBLE MUSEOGRAPHY

BY WHOM. Museum practitioners often refer to architects, civil engineers or experienced construction companies when speaking about inclusive design expertise, equalizing the latter with knowledge on requirements for the barrier-free construction of public thoroughfares and buildings, according to guidelines and specialized reports (e.g., DIN Technical Report 18040-1 (DIN, 2010) or DIN Technical Report 18040-3 (DIN, 2014) in Germany). Consultants, e.g., <https://nullbarriere.de> in Germany, offer knowledge on minimum standards and legal codes. This knowledge is important for the museograph's work in so far as the refurbishment of premises guarantees total and easy mobility, comfort and security, thus facilitating the perception of a meaningful organizational structure within the accessible museography. But investments like widening doors, removing steps, placing lifts, measuring furniture or placing seating in strategic places are only improving the accessibility of the museum building. These are, as we argue, efforts which should be done before the museograph begins to work.

As laid out in "The Eco-System of Inclusive Design Expertise" (Figure 1), the museograph may rather address specialized designers. The latter follow the available accessibility standards (i.e., minimum requirements provided in disability standards and guidelines), co-construct together with potential users and evaluate the design with the objective to make it more appealing for a diversity of users. Associations therefore play a major role in accessible museography. Meetings with representatives of self-help organizations at an early planning stage are considered a useful information collection method. It enables idea sharing and discussion in a group format where museum practitioners can learn how to meet the needs and interests of visitors with a special kind of impairment like blindness and low vision [7]. In practice, however, encounters with the impaired visitor more generally take place between cultural mediators and visiting groups once an exhibition is completed.

WHEN. Museums are already being held accountable to integrate conditions in their public tenders, which ensure accessibility, as recommended by the EU Commission in Directive 2004/18 / EC [8]. In Germany, corresponding changes have been made in the Law against Restraints of Competition [9].

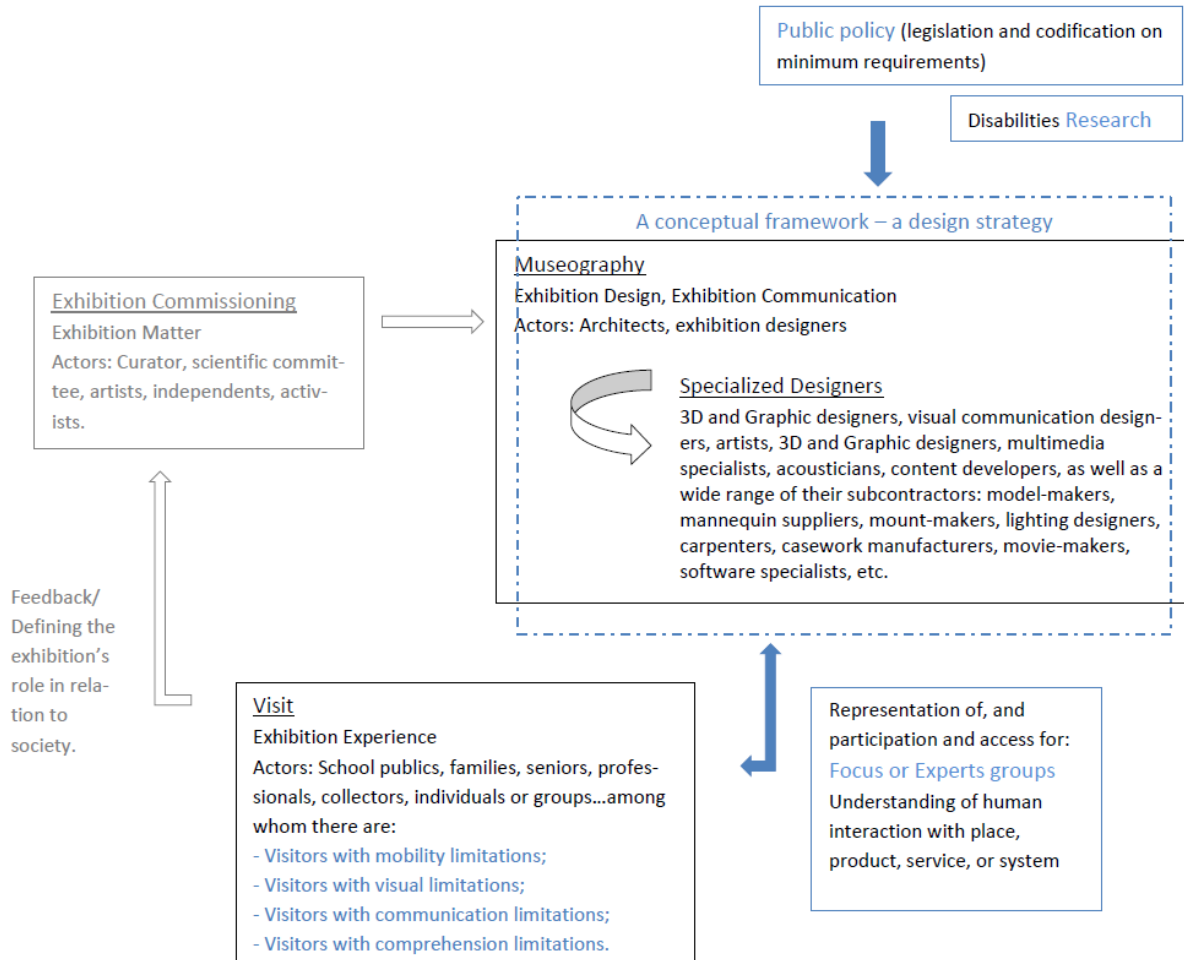


Figure 1: The Eco-System of Inclusive Design Expertise (Source: Author)

Museographers should therefore demand inclusive design expertise in museum tenders. They are in the position to ask design agencies and manufacturing companies to clearly indicate within the offer how their design will bring direct or indirect access to content, offering accessible and usable design features, with customisable or adaptable features.

HOW. Concentrating on narrow code-compliance will lead to isolated accessible design solutions and may even prove counterproductive, hindering new concepts and innovative use of new materials that may look beautiful and be both accessible and sustainable. Museographers should rather assess the design strategy that guides the designer. This design strategy can be the Design for All strategy which asks designers to involve disabled users in all phases of the design and realisation process [10]. Likewise, the conceptual framework of Universal Design, born in the United States, has existed in design theory for more than 30 years. The very terms Universal Design, Design for All or Inclusive Design may be used interchangeably since they are all rooted in the disability movement, denoting design's social responsibility towards more accessibility and inclusion [11]. But while the concept Design for All focuses on inclusive co-construction, the Universal Design-concept focuses on use and appearance: "provide a design which is accessible to, usable by and appealing to as many people as possible" [12]<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Is Universal Design celebrating disability as a resource or is it trying to hide it? It turned out that Universal Design developed to be perceived as being an alternative to accessible design, the latter being enforced through law and what is inherently about 'special needs'. And that Universal Design was more concerned with social justice understanding of structural context and milieu ("good design for everyone"). The most recent

We argue that exhibition design should follow the Universal Design approach. Why? Earlier in the text we noted that museography is concerned with questions like: How are people moving? How do they discover a space? How do they understand it? Put differently, museography is concerned with the visitors' use of the exhibition. People with limited mobility, with motor and physical disabilities and with cognitive, linguistic, visual, hearing and mental impairments are equally important users. Universal Design harmonizes the range of human functionality and capability thus providing access to use for everyone.

### 3 THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN AS ASSESSMENT FOR INCLUSIVE DESIGN EXPERTISE

The term Universal Design appeared in print in 1985, when the disabled North Carolinian architect and industrial designer Ron Mace wrote an article entitled "Universal Design. Barrier-free environments for everyone" (Designer's West magazine) in which he argued that design should keep all users in mind, not just the average and not just users labelled as "exceptional" [14]. It was a clear statement for more accessibility and a product of the American barrier free movement, which achieved a landmark civil rights legislation in 1990, the ADA (American Disabilities Act). It was also a manifest of the impact of user-centred design on quality of life, emphasising that designing "with all users in mind" was going to be beneficial to all, including impaired users [15].

Between 1995 and 1997 a group of designers and experts at North Carolina State University's Center for Universal Design then developed the seven principles of universal design [16]. The authors neither used the word "disability" nor "access", but aimed at "universally usable design [solutions]", that were so materially "subtle" and "so well integrated that they become indistinguishable from mainstream design" [17]. They were intended as a tool to evaluate existing designs, guide the design process and motivate designers to "understand the needs of users well enough to make informed judgements and to effectively use the input of users with disabilities" [18].

From the outset, the authors made it very clear that "all guidelines may not be relevant to all designs" and that they "in no way comprise all criteria for good design, only universally usable design" [19].

We still believe that the authors of the seven principles have succeeded at creating a usable tool for museographs to seek inclusive design expertise in tender specifications. Museographs can ask bidders for their structure of knowledge production. They can evaluate if a proposed design solution reduces the need for customized, specialized, and purpose-built devices. Ideally, the bidding company will be able to show that they think beyond narrow code compliance, by describing their design according to the seven principles of Universal Design. In the following listing of the seven principles (Figure 2) we propose paradigmatic questions (in blue) that may lead the museum tender:

---

publication on Universal Design (2017) by American author Aimi Hamraie critically questions this development, outlining a shift from what the founders understood as Universal Design to today's perception of it. From a European point of view, Hamraie's book is interesting to read, because it is the author's ambition to remind designers to celebrate disability again as a resource for design rather than trying to hide it – which is what the European Design for All-concept is all about. The author intends to remember the history of disabled designers like Molly Story, James Mueller and Ronald Mace (North Carolina State University) and their role as human activists. In going back in history, Hamraie points out that the concept of Universal Design was originally developed to ensure that designers would remain accountable for disabled users and that the resourcefulness of disabled people was seen at the outset of design processes [13].

---

---

#### Principle 1: Equitable Use

The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities. Which are the different possibilities of physical or cognitive interaction with the design?

#### Principle 2: Flexibility in Use

The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities. If the design primarily addresses a specific impairment, which elements may become useful to the entire public?

#### Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive Use

Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level. Which element of the design is the most difficult to understand /poses an obstacle to full use and which assistive devices will be needed to reduce this barrier?

#### Principle 4: Perceptible Information

The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities. Does the design arrange visual and textual information in a multimodal way?

Principle 5: Tolerance for error – The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions. Is it easy to go “back to start”? Do safety-relevant instructions come in different modes (address at least two of the three senses of seeing, hearing and touching)?

#### Principle 6: Low Physical Effort

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue. Can the design be used while being seated?

#### Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use

Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture or mobility. Can small children as well as people in a wheelchair use the design in the same efficient way as a normal standing person?

---

Copyright ©1997 by North Carolina State University. Major funding provided by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education.

**Figure 2:** The Principles of Universal Design, Version 2.0 (Source: Connell et al., 1997)

## 4 THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN: EXAMPLE

In the following, we will present a practice example. The visual-tactile museum display was conceived and manufactured by a specialized design company.

The visual-tactile introductory information board was one of several multi-sensory displays that the Museum MUCEM commissioned to the design company Tactile Studio, Paris<sup>9</sup>. The complete realization process consisted of several phases, from conception, testing, revision and implementation.

The designers organized two tests of prototypes, together with local associations for persons with disabilities: An early test of design ideas took place at the workshop in Paris, a later test took place at the museum in Marseille.

---

<sup>9</sup> The information was collected in conversations with the responsible designers during and after the design process, in autumn 2017.



**Figure 3:** Visual-tactile display, including audio and video option, for overview and introduction; Exhibition "Connectivités"<sup>10</sup> at the museum MUCEM, Marseilles (Source: © Tactile Studio)

The designer's ambition was to facilitate the tactile reading process as proposed by the important research findings of disability expert Michel Bris, Service des Documents Adaptés pour Déficients Visuels, CNEFEI Suresnes [20]: (1) a global reading in order to understand the dimensions and the volume of the display; (2) identification of blocks of information, leading to (3) a follow-up reading, then to a graphic deciphering from which the mental construction is established.

#### (1) A global reading of the board

The bearer of the tactile board is wood; all corners have been rounded off. The tactile display is installed at a height accessible for a wheelchair. The station is located in the entrance area of the exhibition. To ensure sufficient physical access, it was advisable to attach the tactile board to the wall, not onto a table. The inclination of the board ensures that seated visitors have an insight into all areas of the tactile board. During the test of a prototype, blind users preferred a horizontal presentation, since too much bevelling hindered the tactile reading. The compromise was a 30° inclination of the panel.

The board is organized from top to bottom in a title area, the area of tactile image and finally the field of legend. Seen from right to left, the reader has three information fields, including a tactile text, a tactile world map, and a tactile exhibition plan. Both vertically and horizontally, these sections are separated visually and palpably, by tactile dividing lines, height differences as well as colour contrasts in the background colour. All three information fields were designed according to the space that the user's two hands can easily reach together [21].

The distance separating the represented elements, such as the symbols of the map, was carefully designed. A minimum separation of 3 mm is applied between elements so they can be discriminated with the sense of touch [22].

<sup>10</sup> "Connectivités" (Nov 2017 – Dec 2020), MUCEM, Marseille: This semi-temporary exhibition tells a story of the great port cities of the Mediterranean in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ([www.mucom.org](http://www.mucom.org)).



**Figure 4:** Right-hand view on visual-tactile display at exhibition (Source: © Tactile Studio)

## (2) Identify information blocks

The left-hand information field explains the theme of the room, how the tactile panel is structured and what can be felt on it: A map of the Mediterranean and a room plan with indication of other multi-sensory displays in the exhibition via word tiles.

The title is written in normal type (sans serif, upper and lower case). At this point, the title did not have to be translated into Braille, as the intro text in Braille already informs the reader how the display is organized and how it should be used. In other cases, a tactile image would be titled in normal type and in Braille. The national language in Braille is sufficient, but it should be written out and no shorthand used. Only a percentage of blind people learn Braille and only a few Braillists read the shorthand [23].

Both tactile images correspond with each other. Colours, surface structures and word tiles in the tactile Mediterranean map reappear in the room plan.

The countries of the Mediterranean are detailed along their shores, but inland abstracted areas are sufficient to delineate the areas shown. The finger touches the sublime countries or "falls into the water" - that is intuitively understandable and does not require any practice in tactile reading.

In the room plan, all showcases, walls, exhibits in the exhibition are "obstacles" and therefore elevated, but not explained separately in a legend. The finger finds the wall openings and indexes them as entrances. Since, from a curatorial point of view, there is a circular route through the exhibition room, entries and exits are again differentiated and identified in writing as pictographically.

The location of the visitor is the highest element in the plan. Lowered are the word tiles for indexing tactile stations. The result is a hierarchy in information: location - danger - sensory experience for the blind and visually impaired user.

## (3) Follow-up reading, Graphic deciphering

The legend begins with the word legend. Here, the reader finds all explanations of things that the finger will not intuitively understand. A reduction of this information is the highest goal. It is important that the tactile pictogram is right next to the word in Braille, so that there is no confusion. A sign for visual impairment and the sign for audio guide are very important items. Initially they were placed at the end of the legend, where they were either not found at all or found too late. But as the

sign for the headphones is important for all visitors, it was therefore prominently placed below the entry text and the sign for visual impairment was put right alongside.

Behind the inconspicuous number, which stands next to the sign for headphones, another mean of use is indicated: The Museum MUCEM offers people with hearing impairment the "Visuoguide", an exhibition guide in French sign language<sup>11</sup>.



**Figure 5:** Another visual-tactile display of the exhibition, showing a shipwreck (Source: © Tactile Studio)

Now, if this was the situation of a public procurement process, it would be necessary – and possible – to show in the tender specifications that the display’s design intends to follow Universal Design principles.

Principle 1: Equitable Use

- The design of the tactile display is aesthetically appealing. The ergonomic form of the display provides for security and safety. The Braille writing is an integral part of the display (instead of a print text that is handed out when needed).

Principle 2: Flexibility in Use

- The panel provides information about the exhibition in visual, audible, and tactile formats. Visitors with low vision, but who cannot or do not want to read Braille, can still listen to the audio introduction. The panel allows for right- or left-handed access and use. It provides adaptability to the user’s pace.

Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive Use

- (Here we should have a look at all the other surrounding tactile displays within the exhibition.) All tactile displays are organised in the same way: from global to detail information. For the user, all displays “work” in expected ways. The information is arranged

<sup>11</sup> Link: [www.mucem.org/vous-etes-en-situation-de-handicap/sourds](http://www.mucem.org/vous-etes-en-situation-de-handicap/sourds)

consistent with their importance (hierarchy in tactile information: location - danger - sensory experience).

Principle 4: Perceptible Information

- The panel provides for multiple modes of output. It allows readability and recognition of two-dimensional content by blind people.

Principle 5: Tolerance for Error

- The legend on the panel is clearly separated from the tactile image so as to avoid any confusion; but if users do, the word “legend” can help to relocate.

Principle 6: Low Physical Effort

- The ergonomic design of the board allows users to maintain a neutral body position. The legend and the tactile images are in reasonable reach for the hands so that the blind user can leave one finger in the legend and still find the pictogram in the tactile image.

Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use

- This principle has not been applied. The board should be adjustable in height, e.g. for small children.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to remind museums of the need for an accessible museography. The museograph is not relieved of the task of thinking about accessibility by referring to inclusive mediation programs or the accessible museum building. Our proposed model “The Eco-System of Inclusive Design Expertise” illustrates that design is at the centre of museography and that designers therefore are in charge of developing an expertise in accessibility and inclusion. They do so by applying research findings, following legal requirements or co-constructing together with people with disabilities. A superordinate design strategy is needed, to ensure that design remains accountable for all museum visitors, not only the standard visitor and not only the “special” visitor with an impairment. We’ve shown that Universal Design is the preferable design methodology for inclusive design expertise when it comes to exhibition design and museography: Inclusive design expertise harmonizes the range of human functionality and capability, in order to provide access to usage for all. In case museographs need to subcontract designers for the making of an exhibition, they may ask bidders to show that they think beyond narrow code compliance, by describing their design according to the seven principles of Universal Design.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Welch, P. (1995): What is Universal Design? In Polly Welch (ed.): Strategies for Teaching Universal Design. Boston, pp. 1-4.
- [2] Krantz, G. (2013): Levelling the Participatory Field: the Mind's Eye Program at the Guggenheim Museum. Disability Studies Quarterly 33(3).
- [3] Roppolla, T. (2012): Designing for the Museum Experience. New York.
- [4] Schütte, S. (2016): Museum ohne Grenzen. Inklusion im Ausstellungsbetrieb, in: Hülsen-Esch, A. and See-gers, U. (ed.): kunst\_market\_vermittlung\_2. Düsseldorf.
- [5] Merleau-Ponty, C. and Ezrati, J.-J. (2005): L'exposition, théorie et pratique. L'Harmattan.
- [6] Blanc, J.-F. and Junet, M. (2009): De l'exposition au design d'exposition. In ECAL : Design et Muséographie,



Projet de recherche de l'École cantonale d'art de Lausanne (ECAL) et de la Haute école d'art et de design de Genève (HEAD Genève). Online:  
[www.ecal.ch/download/wysiwyg/7decd4af0dbe2569468b9889fae41c0a.pdf/design-museographie.pdf](http://www.ecal.ch/download/wysiwyg/7decd4af0dbe2569468b9889fae41c0a.pdf/design-museographie.pdf) (last accessed 01.06.2018).

[7] Reich, C. et.al. (2011): Speaking Out on Art and Museums. A Study on the Needs and Preferences of Adults who Are Blind or Have Low Vision. Boston.

[8] Schütte, S. (see Note 4).

[9] Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (2011): Nationaler Aktionsplan. Online:  
[www.bmas.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/PDF-Publikationen/a740-nationaler-aktionsplan-barrierefrei.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](http://www.bmas.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/PDF-Publikationen/a740-nationaler-aktionsplan-barrierefrei.pdf?__blob=publicationFile) (last accessed 01.06.2018).

[10] Design for All relies on the involvement of potential users, where this means not only the end users, but all those involved in the design, development, production, and marketing processes. Online: [www.design-fuer-alle.de/design-fuer-alle/](http://www.design-fuer-alle.de/design-fuer-alle/) (last accessed 08.06.2018).

[11] Coleman, R., Lebbon, C., Clarkson, J. & Keates, S. (2003): Inclusive Design. Design for Whole Population. London.

[12] Sandhu, J. S. (2011): The Rhinoceros Syndrome: A contrarian view of universal design, in: Wolfgang F. E. Preiser and Korydon H. Smith (eds.): Universal Design Handbook, 2nd ed. New York, pp. 450-459.

[13] Hamraie, A. (2017): Building Access. Universal Design and the Politics of Disability. Minneapolis.

[14] Mace, R. (1985): Universal Design. Barrier-Free Environments for Everyone. In : Designer's West 33, no.1, pp. 147-52.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Connel, B. R., Jones, M., Mace, R., Mueller, J., Mullick, A., Ostroff, E., et al. (1997): The principles of universal design. Online: [www.ncsu.edu/ncsu/design/cud/about\\_ud/udprinciplestext.htm](http://www.ncsu.edu/ncsu/design/cud/about_ud/udprinciplestext.htm) (last accessed 12.06.2018).

[17] Story, M. F., Mueller, J. L. & Mace, R. L. (1998): The universal design file. Designing for people of all ages and abilities. North Carolina.

[18] Welch, P. (see Note 1).

[19] Story et. al. (see Note 17).

[20] Bris, M (2003): Recommendations pour la transcription de documents. Service des Documents Adaptés pour Déficients Visuels. CNEFEI. Suresnes. Online:  
[www.inshea.fr/sites/default/files/SDADVrecommandations\\_transcription.pdf](http://www.inshea.fr/sites/default/files/SDADVrecommandations_transcription.pdf) (last accessed 24.09.2017).

[21] Wijntjes, M. W. A., van Lienen, T., Verstijnen, I. M., & Kappers, A. M. L. (2008a). The influence of picture size on recognition and exploratory behaviour in raised-line drawings. Perception, 37, pp. 602-614.

[22] Picard, D., & Lebaz, S. (2012). Identifying Raised-Line Drawings by Touch: A Hard but Not Impossible Task. Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness, 106, pp. 427-431.

[23] Dutier, N. (2012, mai). Les images sont-elles réservées au monde des voyants? Pourquoi communiquer par des images avec les personnes aveugles? Semaine nationale de l'ergo-thérapie 2012, France.

## **“ACCESSIBILITY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TO VULNERABLE GROUPS” PROJECT: TOWARDS ACCESSIBLE MUSEUMS FOR ALL**

**Bojana Rogelj Škafar, PhD**

Slovene Ethnographic Museum  
Metelkova 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia  
bojana.rogelj@etno-muzej.si

### **ABSTRACT**

In the focus of the article there's the project "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups". It was led by the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, the national ethnological museum in Slovenia, in cooperation with five national museums and galleries. In the article the objectives of the project, its museological basis and its performance are presented.

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM) was named the promoter of the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" project by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia in order to develop a model of inclusive accessibility of cultural heritage to vulnerable social groups [1]. During the implementation of the project, between 2013 and 2015, the SEM was joined by five national museums and one gallery: National Museum of Slovenia, Natural History Museum of Slovenia, National Museum of Contemporary History, Slovene Theatre Institute (formerly National Theatre Museum of Slovenia), Technical Museum of Slovenia and National Gallery.

The project was co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund and by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia. The contents of the project were included in the 2007–2013 Operational Programme for Human Resources Development (OP ESF) and were formed and implemented on the basis of its "Equal Opportunities and Reinforcing Social Inclusion" development priority, which primarily aims at raising employability of vulnerable groups in culture and at promoting their social inclusion. The objective of this priority policy is to enable access to training and employment for vulnerable social groups, while its purpose is to motivate and mobilise the actions of the individuals belonging to vulnerable social groups in order to improve their social inclusion and employability. The first condition for achieving the said objective is to increase the administrative capacity, professionalism and creativity of organisations and individuals working in culture, otherwise individuals cannot be provided with the necessary support services.

The primary objective of the project was to train the members of vulnerable social groups for employment, while the specific objectives were to increase the accessibility of cultural heritage with adapted technology, to offer opportunities for education and training, to improve the qualifications of museum staff working with vulnerable social groups and to provide museums with equipment allowing the implementation of programmes for users/museum visitors, members of vulnerable groups and others.

The SEM was selected as the promoter of the programme on the basis of its references and the level of already existing physical accessibility. In accordance with its mission and strategic plan, the SEM carried out various activities in the field of equal opportunities and reinforcing social inclusion of vulnerable groups even before the launch of the project. The museum continuously cooperated with the members of vulnerable social groups, who had a significant role in creating the programmes of individual projects.

## **2 MUSEOLOGICAL BASES OF THE PROJECT**

While planning the project its associates were thinking about the museological context of activities regarding their social roles in contemporary museum [2]. Since the seventies, a trend in museology has been developing that focuses on the accessibility of cultural heritage to different museum visitors and not only on the storage, studying and exhibition of museum items [3] and [4]. The strengthened educational role of the museums has been reflected in the increasingly diverse educational programmes. Moreover, the museums monitor their audience and their needs more systematically as well as pay more attention to the inclusion of vulnerable and often neglected social groups [5]. From today's perspective, these changes are not so self-evident. A serious economic crisis in the seventies also had an impact on the museums, as the limited public finances raised some questions about their effectiveness. The possibility and viability of their existence was seen mainly in the service of society. We witnessed the second museum revolution, which resulted in a new museology that stressed the social role of museums as facilities for creating new social actions and forcing social change [6].

The museums have gained an increasing reputation in society as treasuries of the past that offer answers to the questions about the present and directions for the future. In particular in times of socio-economic change, museums should offer an evaluation of the past in order to empower today's society searching for sustainable and tolerant solutions for the future. Van Mensch's states that a new museum paradigm started in 2000, focusing on the concepts of participation and social inclusion [see 4]. The emphasis is placed on increasing cooperation with the community in co-creating narratives about the past and in co-deciding about the understanding of cultural heritage. The museums want to become spaces of social dialogue and engaged activities and thus try to include the members of vulnerable groups.

The changing role of museums also causes changes in the status of curators – their work and their role as a museum authority are re-questioned. If we understand museums as spaces of dialogue, interaction and participation of all social groups (particularly vulnerable ones), which represent themselves and talk about themselves when working in the museum, the role of the curator as a museum authority is put in a position that demands a redefinition [7].

Questioning the participatory museum projects that uncritically honour the representation of only one community, contributing to the re-creation of inequality and exclusion Cuno stresses the essential role of curators and the museum staff as professionals [8]. By his opinion they can look at the hidden power relations from afar and affect or demystify this power using their expertise. Without denying the prominent social role of the museum, he proposes that museum staff should be actively involved in the development of museums as educational facilities and should take responsibility for their production and knowledge distribution.

## **3 VULNERABLE GROUPS AND THEIR INCLUSION IN MUSEUM WORK**

The discourses of EU institutions define vulnerable groups as groups that experience a higher risk of poverty, discrimination and social exclusion than the general population. Vulnerable social groups are following: ethnic minorities, immigrants, persons with reduced mobility, persons with sensory impairment, the homeless, LGBTQ people, drug users, the elderly, the unemployed, etc. The list changes according to the socio-economic situation. This variability indicates that vulnerable groups are not vulnerable per se, but that vulnerability is the result of a long-lasting construction of the foreign and different as the symbolic Other [9].

Every society has systems of exclusion of ill, incapacitated, different, symbolic Others; at the same time, the groups of people who think differently develop practices of empowering the excluded

groups and systems of their inclusion. The museums also increasingly cooperate with vulnerable and neglected groups. They establish new social and cultural ties as well as erase ethnic and social boundaries by carrying out customised activities and by integrating their members into museum work [see 5].

The project “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” considered several aspects of the concept of accessibility. The first aspect referred to the physical accessibility meaning overcoming physical barriers in museums by installing elevators and ramps, by marking entrances and stairs, by creating accessible exhibitions with appropriate light, font and height of display cases. This type of accessibility is primarily intended for persons with reduced mobility and sensory impairment but is used by all museum visitors.

The second aspect of accessibility was presence in the discursive space. In museums, this primarily refers to the cooperation and co-creation of museum interpretations and representations, which is often denoted with the term “participation”. Inclusion of the members of vulnerable groups in museum work contributes to the empowerment of the individuals, who can develop and strengthen their identity by creating museum contents; at the same time, it allows them to assume responsibility for shaping public images and narratives about themselves and, consequently, for changing opinions and views. Participation of the public in museums establishes new relationships between the museum staff – curators and visitors – associates. In the project, we tried to introduce the concept of inclusion in different ways for different groups, tailored to their interests, preferences and needs to achieve equal access to heritage and participation in its creation.

#### **4 PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of the “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” project was to train the members of various vulnerable social groups for carrying out the museum public services, to ensure their greater social inclusion and consequently participate to reduce their financial difficulties.

The purpose of the project was to contribute to the concept of equal opportunities by improving heritage accessibility, by informing vulnerable groups and by training their members (persons with reduced mobility, persons with sensory impairment (the blind and visually impaired, the deaf and hard of hearing, the deaf-blind), members of national and ethnic communities and immigrants (in particular, minorities, the Roma community and immigrants from the former Yugoslav republics), young graduates (first-job seekers) and elderly unemployed people (55+) for employment and for performing appropriate tasks at the museum.

The project also focuses on training the museum staff and acquiring special expertise, skills and practical experience in order to facilitate access to cultural heritage for vulnerable groups and to establish good practices in national museums that could be further implemented in other Slovene museums and other areas of culture and education.

In addition, newly created programmes should motivate and reach the general public as well as raise their awareness and spread knowledge, openness, flexibility and tolerance towards fundamental human rights, i.e. towards equal opportunities and access to cultural heritage. An important objective was to strengthen the social role of museums, thus raising the quality of life of vulnerable groups and their social acceptance. The project therefore pursued the objectives of the OP ESF. Its activities were aimed at developing human resources for living and working in a knowledge-based society and at contributing to the greater social inclusion of vulnerable groups. Training and education carried out within the project should contribute to their professional qualifications and thus enhance their competitiveness on the labour market as well as their long-term social inclusion.

The fulfilment of project objectives was carried out in the following parts:

- Part 1: Project management (forming a professional project team, establishing effective project management and providing adequate monitoring and reporting on the project);
- Part 2: Production of a content and organisation model of accessibility to vulnerable social groups (employing and training members of vulnerable groups educated in the disciplines appropriate for working in museums, including students belonging to vulnerable groups);
- Part 3: Provision of access to cultural heritage for vulnerable groups and production of a sustainable model;
- Part 4: Education and training of
  - persons belonging to vulnerable groups;
  - museum staff in order to acquire special skills for working with vulnerable groups;
- Part 5: Information and publicity about the project and accessibility of cultural heritage to vulnerable groups in museums.

## 5 MEASURES OF THE PROJECT

In order to achieve the project's goals the following measures were performed:

### 5.1 Inclusion and training of people belonging to different vulnerable social groups

The primary objective of the project was to train people belonging to different vulnerable groups that had already completed a formal education related to the museum work. Nine representatives of the above-mentioned groups were employed by the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM): Seven young graduates – first-job seekers and two disabled persons. A project coordinator was also employed (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Employees on the project (Source: SEM/Author)

In addition to the SEM as the project promoter, another five national museums and a gallery participated as a network of professional institutions. Their main role was to train the staff employed on the project, to mentor them and to introduce them to the museum work.

The staff employed on the project were trained in the curatorial departments, documentation departments, libraries and educational departments of the museums and the gallery. Their work was carried out in accordance with the systematisation and identification of activities and tasks of the curator, curator-pedagogue, curator-documentalist and librarian. They acquired new knowledge, passed certification examinations to obtain their titles and developed competences to work independently and to pursue their career in the field of cultural heritage protection.



**Figure 2:** Training of the museum staff and employees in the project for working with deaf and hard of hearing (Source: SEM/Author)

They took part in sixty-one organized programmes or lectures (Figure 2). The project coordinator was responsible for the implementation of the content and financial aspect of the project and for the coordination of other activities (integrating students, organising training courses, information and publicity, etc.).

## 5.2 Forming, developing and implementing new educational programmes/contents

The staff employed on the project and their mentors – consultants developed and implemented educational programmes in order to increase the accessibility of heritage to all visitors. The representatives of the identified target groups also participated. The following activities were carried out:



**Figure 3:** Multi-sensory guided tour (Source: SEM/Author)



**Figure 4:** Guided musical tour as an example of the inclusive programme (Source: SEM/Author)

- guided tours with tactile elements based on a multi-sensory experience (Figure 3)
- guided musical tours (Figure 4) programmes for deaf and hard of hearing visitors (Figure 5)
- collaboration with the Roma communities
- programmes with immigrants and minority members
- visiting programmes (aimed at those who cannot visit the museums for various reasons)
- exhibitions<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Photographic Images from the Life of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Ljubljana; Nino: Human Optimism; Look at Me and You'll See; Birth: Experiences of Roma Women; 2015 Images of Emona). Students belonging to vulnerable groups participated in individual exhibition projects.



**Figure 5:** Guided tour for deaf-blind people  
(Source: SEM/Author)



**Figure 6:** Tactile aids in educational programmes  
(Source: SEM/Author)

More educational programmes, tactile aids (Figure 6) and exhibitions were created as planned and thus exceeded the set indicators.

### 5.3 Including students belonging to vulnerable social groups

One of the project objectives was to include relevant students, especially those belonging to vulnerable groups. Cooperation with the Slovene Association of Disabled Students was established. Most of the students involved studied one of the museum disciplines, while the members of vulnerable groups included: representatives of the Roma communities, students with reduced mobility, students belonging to the deaf and hard-of-hearing group, one person with the status of a student with special needs, students belonging to the blind and visually impaired group and members of the Italian minority. The students learned about working with visitors (providing information at the reception desk and in the museum, guarding the exhibition, working in the museum shop, preparing and executing workshops and guided tours) and about working in the documentation, curatorial and other departments of the SEM, while some of them collected data in the field or worked in museum libraries. The students got to know how national museums function as well as acquired new knowledge and gained experience that will help them enter the labour market.

### 5.4 Qualifications of the museum staff for working with vulnerable social groups

Eighteen training courses were organized within the project: physical and communication accessibility, inclusive museum and programme preparation, integration of vulnerable social groups and employment possibilities, preparation and management of culture and cultural heritage projects and preparation of audio description (Figure 7).



**Figure 7:** Training of the museum staff for using audio description method in museum work  
(Source: SEM/Author)

They were aimed at the museum staff, other professionals and the general public; their objective was to improve qualifications, knowledge, skills and competences for working with vulnerable social groups.

### 5.5 Increasing the number of visitors to educational programmes and exhibitions in museums and galleries

Programmes within the project were carried out according to the principle of the inclusion of vulnerable social groups in their preparation and formation and according to the principle of an inclusive museum. Given that the number of programmes greatly exceeded the set indicators, it was expected that the number of visitors, especially those belonging to vulnerable groups, would increase. The programmes were conceived in a way that allowed equal opportunities for access to cultural contents for all visitors.

### 5.6 Providing technical accessibility

The SEM provides a sufficient level of physical accessibility, since the entrance to the building is situated on a platform without any architectural obstacles. In order to ensure the optimal accessibility of cultural heritage and inclusion of vulnerable social groups, the museum made some individual technical improvements to exhibition rooms. They are equipped with an induction loop and thus accessible to hearing-impaired visitors.

Visually impaired visitors can get magnifying glasses at the reception desk.

In order to facilitate the orientation and mobility of blind and visually impaired visitors and to obtain basic information about the location of the exhibits in the building, the SEM made tactile floor plans of exhibition spaces – the ground floor and the spaces of permanent exhibitions (2nd and 3rd floor). There are six floor plans available: Three portable maps (Figure 8) at the reception desk and three maps attached to a one-meter wooden base to the right of the elevator on the ground, second and third floor. Tactile floor plans are made of plastic material in contrasting colours, suitable for 3D printing, providing access to spatial information for the visually impaired. They were made by the Geodetic Institute of Slovenia, which developed a special automated mapping process using 3D printing.



Figure 8: Practising tactile floor plan (Source: SEM/Author)



The SEM also provided 16 copies of selected museum objects. 12 of these copies were included in the “Between Nature and Culture” permanent exhibition, while 4 of them were added to the “Doors: Spatial and Symbolic Passageways of Life” temporary exhibition as tactile didactic aids. The objects chosen by the SEM curators were also reviewed by the typhlo-pedagogue specialist. Her instructions and guidelines were also followed by copy makers.

In order to maintain the authenticity of original objects, the copies and illustrations resemble them in size, material (wood, metal, textiles, clay) and structure as much as possible, while the combinations of different materials were also preserved. When making copies and illustrations, the producers constantly collaborated with the representatives of blind and visually impaired persons, collecting feedback on production appropriateness (Figure 9).

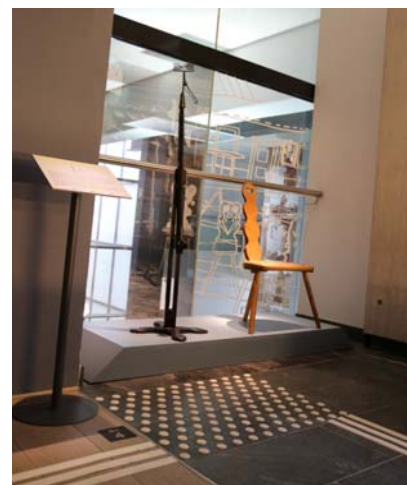


**Figure 9:** Blind and visual impaired persons helped preparing copies (Source: SEM/Author)

The objects are presented as an exhibition at the exhibition, as a set of small islands on which the tactile objects are exhibited. When including the copies and illustrations in the “Between Nature and Culture” exhibition, the SEM followed the recommendations about the height of information boards and desks as well as put proper signs on the floor leading visitors from one object to another (Figures 10 and 11).



**Figure 10:** The copy of “čupa” boat on the SEM’s permanent exhibition “Between Nature and Culture” (Source: SEM/Author)



**Figure 11:** The copies of lighting device “čelešnik” and chair on the SEM’s permanent exhibition “Between Nature and Culture” (Source: SEM/Author)

They are equipped with audio descriptions in several languages and with a short text in large print for the visually impaired. The SEM website includes a video clip with subtitles and an interpretation in Slovene sign language. The texts accompanying the copies and illustrations follow the basic laws of audio description: the use of language, simplicity and abundance of information. They are further enriched with a story enabling the visitor a comprehensive insight into the use, purpose and functionality of the object. The texts were also verified by the representatives of the blind and visually impaired when selected objects were placed before them and the description was read. The final texts were then written on the basis of their feedback and instructions.



Figure 12: “A touch of the past” exhibition brochures (Source: SEM/Author)

Finally, the copies are accompanied with a bilingual publication (in Slovene and English) entitled “A Touch of the Past”, in which individual copies and the purpose of tactile elements in museums are explained (Figure 12). When upgrading its website, the SEM followed the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 or WCAG 2.0 standard, set out in 2008, which applies four website principles and contains twelve guidelines [10]. The standard imposes three stages of conformance requirements that represent a standard of effective accessibility. The SEM was aware of the fact that it is difficult to design a website that would be tailored to all people at all levels. Nevertheless, it is possible to create a website that is accessible in most situations and provides alternative contents (text, video in sign language or audio description).

### 5.7 Information, publicity and public awareness of the inclusion of vulnerable groups in society

Both the professional and general public were informed about the implementation of project activities and about the accessibility of cultural heritage. At the beginning of the project, the [www.dostopnost.eu](http://www.dostopnost.eu) website was set up, while the information was published on the project promoter’s website ([www.etno-muzej.si](http://www.etno-muzej.si)), on Facebook and Twitter.

Promotional material (brochures, notebooks, bags, T-shirts and mascots in the form of a stone) was also designed (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Promotional items (Source: SEM/Author)

The project was presented to the general and professional public in media and other forms of promotion. The major public events were the inclusion of the copies of museum objects in the “Between Nature and Culture” SEM’s permanent exhibition, the opening of the exhibition “Birth: Experiences of Roma Women” (Figure 14), the presentation of the final study<sup>13</sup> together with the project video document at the end of the project, the final conference and an advertising campaign on the streets of Ljubljana to promote the final conference (Figure 15).



Figure 14: Exhibition „Birth: Experience of Roma Women“ and its opening performance (Source: SEM/Author)



Figure 15: Advertising campaign in the streets of Ljubljana (Source: SEM/Author)

<sup>13</sup> Palaić T. and U. Valič (ed.) 2015: Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups: Study on the Availability and Provision of Technical Conditions to provide Vulnerable Groups with Access to Cultural Heritage. Ljubljana: Slovene Ethnographic Museum.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The project “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” has achieved the set goals, such as attaining socio-economic objectives of strengthening human capital, creating ten jobs for persons belonging to vulnerable groups with high unemployment rates according to the principle of non-discrimination and, consequently, increasing their employment opportunities, ensuring their social inclusion and improving the efficiency of the public sector.

The developed model comprised a wide network of associates. It involved the staff employed on the project, their mentors, participating consultants from the museums and the gallery and members of different social groups (individuals, associations, educational institutions) who actively and inclusively participated in numerous programmes, sub-projects and trainings organised and carried out within the project. The staff employed in Slovene museums also participated in the project in different ways. Of special value are the new sustainable educational programmes that improve the accessibility of museum contents to both vulnerable groups and other museum visitors. The SEM obtained technical equipment and made copies of museum objects, which are now even more accessible to visitors.

**Table 1:** Project indicators (Source: SEM/Author)

	2013		2014		2015	
INDICATORS	plan	output	plan	output	plan	output
Jobs created during the project	10	9 (+ coordinator)	10	10	10	10
Number of students included	40	18	40	23	20	33
Number of new educational programmes aimed at vulnerable groups	10	7	10	24	5	37
New copies of museum objects	4	4	6	7	6	5
Number of visitors belonging to vulnerable groups to the exhibitions and educational programmes	200	117	200	952	100	3415
Final project publication	0	0	0	0	1	1

The final study has summarised all the diversity of the two-year project and represents a manual for good practices.

Three years after the project’s conclusion it is possible to find out that the degree of sustainability of the project regarding the use of its “products” as well as social ties established in the project is high. The only concern refers to further organized and financial support to employees which hasn’t been formed. We’ve missed the opportunity for having competent team of experts on national level that could provide, develop and share their skills with and for the museums, galleries and other areas of culture and education on long-term regular basis.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Rogelj Škafar, B. (2015): Slovene Museums Towards Accessibility for All. In: Palaić T. and U. Valič (ed.) 2015: Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups: Study on the Availability and Provision of Technical Conditions to provide Vulnerable Groups with Access to Cultural Heritage. Ljubljana: Slovene Ethnographic Museum, pp. 10-14.
- [2] Valič, U. and T. Palaić (2015): "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" Project: Implementation of 21 Century Museology. In: Palaić T. and U. Valič (ed.) 2015: Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups: Study on the Availability and Provision of Technical Conditions to provide Vulnerable Groups with Access to Cultural Heritage. Ljubljana: Slovene Ethnographic Museum, pp. 15-23.
- [3] Black, G. (2005): The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement. London, New York: Routledge, p. 9.
- [4] Van Mensch, P. and L. Meijer-van Mensch (2011): New Trends in Museology. Celje: Celje Museum of Recent History, p. 13.
- [5] Perko, V. (2014): Muzeologija in arheologija za javnost: Muzej Krasa (= Museology and Archaeology for the Public: Carst Museum). Ljubljana: Kinetik, zavod za razvijanje vizualne culture, p. 49.
- [6] Hudales, J. (2008): Slovenski muzeji in etnologija: Od kabinetov čudes do muzejev 21. stoletja (= Slovene museums and ethnology: from Curiosity Cabinets to Museums of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century). Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, p. 197 (= Zupaničeva knjižnica=Zupanič library).
- [7] Barrett, J. (2011): Museums and the Public Sphere. Malden, Oxford, West Sussex: Wiley & Blackwell.
- [8] Cuno, J. (2007): Money, Power and the History of Art. Whose Money? Whose Power? Whose Art History? In: Sheila Watson (ed). 2007: Museums and their Communities. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 510-518.
- [9] Barnes, C., G. Mercer and T. Shakespeare (1999): Exploring Disability: A Sociological Introduction. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- [10] Ilaš, G. (2015): Upgrading the Slovene Ethnographic Museum Website within the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" Project. In: Palaić T. and U. Valič (ed.) 2015: Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups: Study on the Availability and Provision of Technical Conditions to provide Vulnerable Groups with Access to Cultural Heritage. Ljubljana: Slovene Ethnographic Museum, p. 47.

## LE MUSÉE D'ARTS DE NANTES, TOWARDS A MUSEUM EXPERIENCE FOR ALL

**Catherine Le Treut**

Musée d'arts de Nantes

Public Engagement and Cultural Mediation Officer

10, rue Georges-Clemenceau, 44000 Nantes, France

catherine.le-treut@nantesmetropole.fr

### ABSTRACT

The new “Musée d'arts de Nantes” was inaugurated on 23 June 2017, after a massive building project. The landmark Musée d'arts de Nantes has undergone in-depth renovation and extension work, entrusted to the British architectural design practice Stanton Williams. The project has made it possible to increase the exhibition spaces by 30%, to meet current conservation standards, but also to offer a broader display of the museums’ rich collections, from painting to video, via photography and installations, and from pre-modern to contemporary art. Concerning especially the public, henceforth, all the museum is accessible for all. Additionally, the team has developed new multimedia tools to make it even more accessible, including a visit application, which is a real innovation in France. Those new accessibility projects are the subject of this article.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The Musée d'arts de Nantes is an institution founded in 1801 by Napoleon Bonaparte, together with 14 other museums in France. It continuously enriched its collections and developed its exhibition spaces throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, focusing more on its artworks than on the visitor experience.



**Figure 1 and 2:** The first museum and the “Clark de Feltre” collection, in 1830 (Source: © Domaine Public)

Since the creation of a dedicated Education Department in the 1990s, the museum has worked to offer a varied array of educational experiences for all and has carried out targeted projects to improve access for visitors with disabilities. However, the building dating from the 1900s was in dire need of renovation in order to make it accessible, to bring it into line with international art conservation standards, and to display its rich collection of contemporary art from all over the world to best advantage.



**Figure 3:** Palais des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, inaugurated in 1900 (Source: © Domaine Public)

In December 2009, the City Council approved the renovation and extension of the museum. Major work was therefore carried out at the Musée d'arts de Nantes during a 6-year closure period. This has brought it into line with current conservation standards and increased the display space by 30% to 17,000 m<sup>2</sup>.

Led by the British architectural practice Stanton Williams, the extension and renovation project focused on enhancing three buildings whose architecture reflects their respective eras: the Palais building, the Chapelle de l'Oratoire (Oratory Chapel) and the brand new Cube (devoted to contemporary art).



**Figure 4:** The Stanton Williams renovation and extension project (Source: © Stanton William)



**Figure 5:** The renovated Palais (façade) in 2017 (Source: © Cécile Clos/Musée d'arts de Nantes)

Careful thought was given to the issue of accessibility and past experiences were reviewed. In 2011, the new museum was made physically accessible to all visitors in line with the standards imposed by French legislation introduced in 2005.



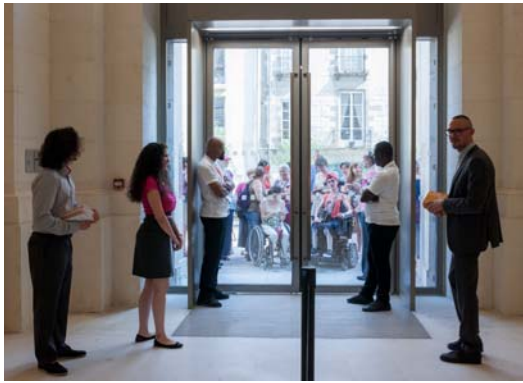
**Figure 6, 7 and 8:** External access points to the museum with a lift and handrails (Source: Author)

The new museum is now fully compliant with standards and totally accessible to all visitors, starting with the street entrance and extending throughout the museum.

A specific programme is now offered for different forms of disability: hearing impairment (French Sign Language tours), visual impairment, and learning difficulties.

But the fundamental criterion was full access to everything for everyone.





**Figure 9:** Main entrance  
(Source: Author)



**Figure 10 and 11:** Tactile floor plan of the museum and  
a Braille text (Source: Author)

To complement this accessibility policy, we spent two years developing a digital project and created a dedicated application for smartphones and digital devices called “My visit”. This is one of the most significant digital projects carried out by the museum, the Education Department and the curators. It involved numerous complex lines of inquiry, but the fundamental premise was to produce a single tool for all visitors in a spirit of inclusivity. Our thinking focused on three basic areas:

- Who is the app aimed at and what type of content do we want to deliver to visitors?
- What is currently the most inclusive medium? How can it be accessed?
- What are the costs associated with this project when functionality issues, updates and maintenance are factored in?

## 2 WHO IS IT AIMED AT? WHAT DO WE WANT TO SAY?

### 2.1 Inclusivity

Given our past experiences with visitors, who were almost totally segregated by type, the team as a whole was keen, insofar as possible, to adopt a unifying and inclusive approach.

This aspiration was reflected by visitors, organisations and specialist third sector associations whom we consulted over a period of several years.

We therefore decided to target as many people as possible, while acknowledging that this project was highly idealistic and that we would therefore not be able to achieve total inclusivity or satisfy everyone.

### 2.2 Digital content

For several years now, the Musée de Nantes has been offering a very wide array of verbal mediation facilities: specialist and introductory art history lectures, masterpiece tours, educational activities for schools, workshops for children and adults, tours with French Sign Language and audio description, tactile tours, etc..

**PROGRAMME ACCESSIBLE**  
**Musée d'arts de Nantes**

**11h VISITE FAMILLE**  
«Nicolas REGNIER,  
l'homme libre»

Par **Lila Bensebaa, guide LSF**  
Visite de découverte de l'expo  
+ manipulations, jeux et activités  
pour mieux comprendre l'oeuvre de l'artiste.

**Infos pratiques**  
Tarifs : 4€-2,50€ public sourd  
Réservation : [contact@culturelsf.com](mailto:contact@culturelsf.com)

**culturelsf**  
plateforme de l'accessibilité culturelle

Musée d'arts de Nantes  
10 rue Georges Clemenceau

MUSÉE  
D'ARTS  
DE  
NANTES

**Figure 12:** Programme of visits in French Sign Language  
(Source: Musée d'arts de Nantes/Author)

Printed mediation materials are also available: visitor guides (translated into two languages and in large-print format), educational resource packs for teachers, activity booklets for families and children, factsheets on works of art, and themed information packs.

These facilities are supplemented by specific projects targeting visitor groups (partnerships with other institutions within the Nantes Metropolis area, nationally and internationally) and a very active events programming.

However, when face-to-face interaction is not possible, we did not previously have any tools for communicating with the public other than traditional print methods.

We therefore decided to make general content available on new media, which is highly documented, accessible, and entertaining, and spans all of the museum's permanent collections (currently with some coverage of temporary exhibitions). The aim is to offer visitors independent access to content both in the museum and remotely. Information terminals and touch-screen tables (which presents the "Work in Focus" device, a mini website that brings together a lot of contextual information and documents of all kinds on one work of art from the collection) are also available in various areas of the museum.

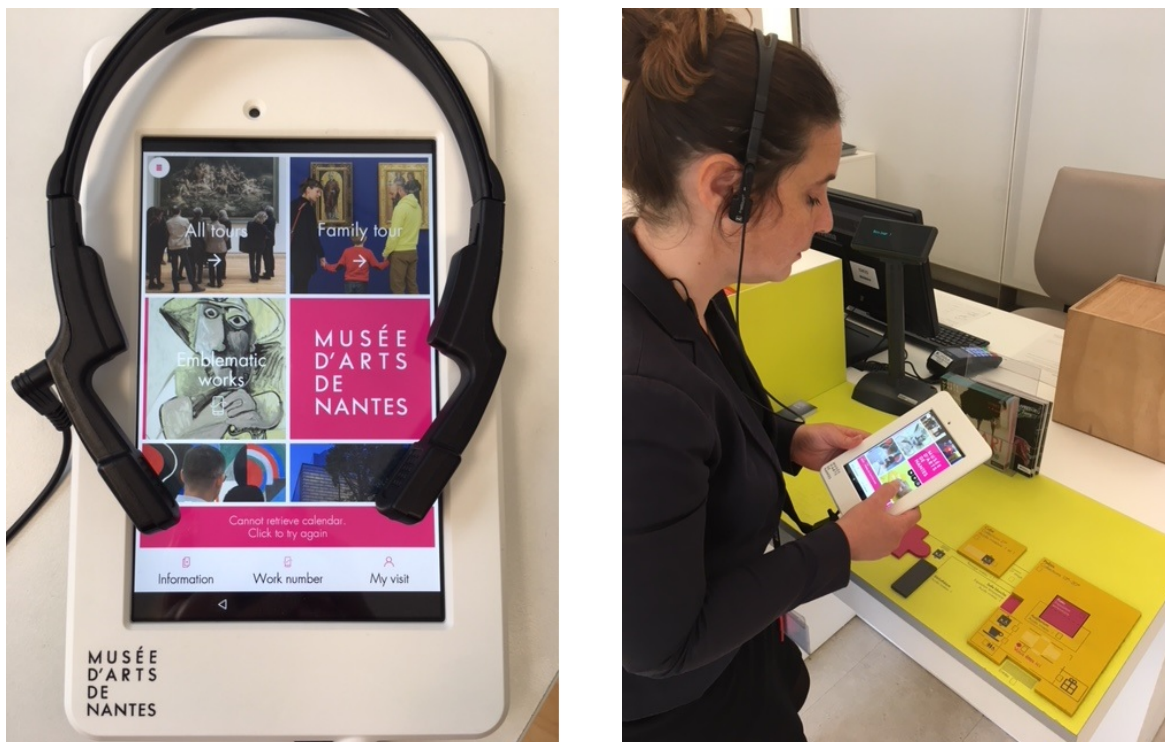
### 3 THE VISIT APP: THE CHOICE OF FORM AND MEDIUM, AND OUR TOUR OFFERINGS

#### 3.1 A handheld multimedia guide or a visit app

We felt that the traditional audioguide option had its limitations. After defining the content we wanted to deliver to visitors – themed and chronological tours of the collections for adults, families and children, with focal points on key works – we were keen to share additional content, photos, videos, sound, music, archive material, fun activities, etc. An interactive digital guide was the obvious solution. The Education Department, curators and a consultant specialized in digital projects<sup>14</sup> explored several avenues during the development phase.

#### 3.2 Accessible to all, free of charge

All of the available content can be accessed free of charge via the Google play and App Store download platforms. Visitors with smartphones can download the interactive digital guide via the “My visit”<sup>15</sup> app either in situ using the museum Wi-Fi or prior to their visit in order to plan their tour. Visitors who do not have smartphones can collect a pre-configured touch-screen tablet from the museum reception desk free of charge.



**Figure 13 and 14:** The “My visit” app home screen on a tablet and a visitor at the welcome point  
(Source: Author)

The content of the app can be refreshed regularly to bring tours up to date and to reflect changes affecting the museum and its collections at any given time (change of location of works, reclassifications, events, etc.).

<sup>14</sup> ANAMNESIA, design and interactive production, Paris/Strasbourg

<sup>15</sup> View the promotional video for the app at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsf7844XDts#action=share](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsf7844XDts#action=share) and on the museum website : [museedartsdenantes.nantesmetropole.fr/mavisite](http://museedartsdenantes.nantesmetropole.fr/mavisite)



**Figure 15:** Visitor listening to the audio description commentary of a work by Claude Monet (Source: Author)

### 3.2.1 Discovery tours of the museum and key works

On the home screen, visitors can select a tour based on their nationality, personal profile and preferences. The key works tour allows visitors to view 40 works with additional content, focusing on 10 masterpieces from each major period in the collections: early art (13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries), the 19<sup>th</sup> century, modern art, and contemporary art. Each work comes with a descriptive commentary, an artist biography, and bonus content setting the work, artist, period or artistic movement in context with photos, videos, sound, film footage, interviews, etc.<sup>16</sup>. All of this content is translated into English, Spanish and French Sign Language, and is available as audio description, in French which is easy to read and understand, and with high image contrast where possible<sup>17</sup>.

There are also thematic and chronological entries. Lastly, works which do not have any additional content do however feature the exhibit label and commentary displayed in the exhibition space in both written and spoken forms, translated into English and Spanish. Commentaries are available for 900 works in total, with additional content for 40 works.

<sup>16</sup> All the content has been written and designed by the museum Visitor Department's cultural mediation team. The content was produced by OPIXIDO (Nantes and Paris); audio recordings are by the SCOPITONE studio (Paris) and integration is by MAZEDIA (Nantes).

<sup>17</sup> Accessibility-specific content was developed by ORPHEO and TACTILE STUDIO (Paris).

### 3.2.2 Accessible tours

Visitors with disabilities can access all specially designed content from the home screen. They have a choice between tours in French Sign Language (sub-titled video), with audio description, in French which is easy to read and understand, and with high image contrast.

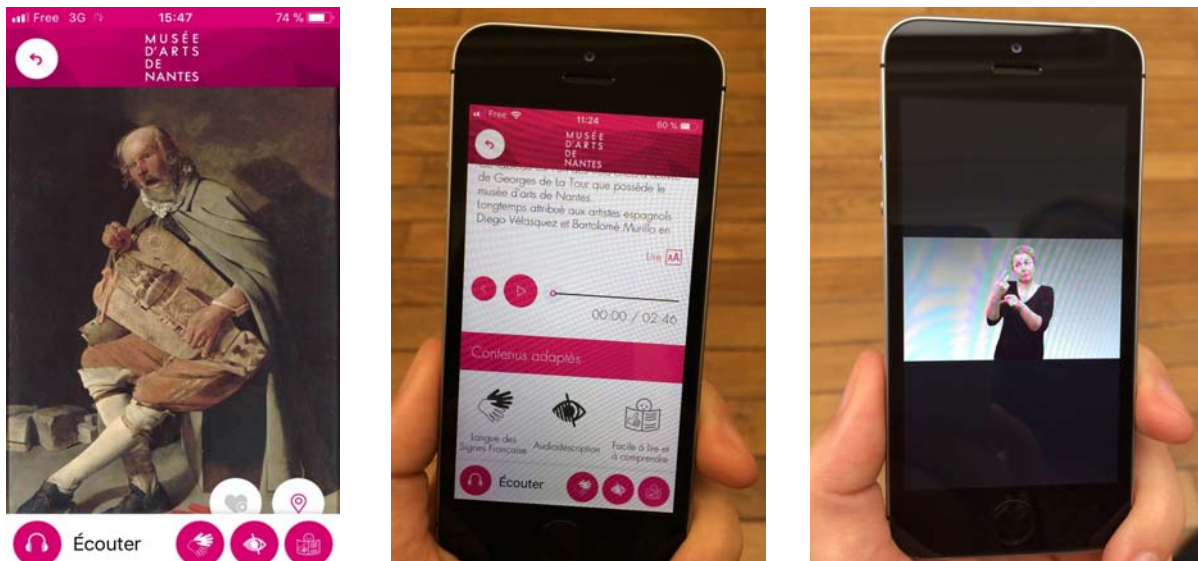


Figure 16, 17 and 18: Accessible content for the painting by Georges de La Tour  
(Source: Musée d'arts de Nantes/Author)

### 3.2.3 The family tour

This tour provides access to a selection of works with associated fun activities: puzzles, a quiz, spot the mistake, etc..

### 3.2.4 Geolocation and an artwork number search feature



Figure 19 and 20: Geolocation and the artwork number search feature  
(Source: Musée d'arts de Nantes/Author)

The app uses geolocation technology to pinpoint the visitor's position in the museum and to show all the works on display in the vicinity. It is also possible to access content relating to a work by typing its number directly into the app. Visitors can therefore orient themselves in the museum space and do

not have to follow a fixed tour route if they prefer to explore independently.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Institutional investment and promising results

The project to create a museum which is accessible to all has harnessed the combined energies of all the teams for six years, including two year’s work by the mediation team on the design of the visitor app. This was an extremely interesting and instructive project, which is still not complete. The results are pleasing and the feedback is positive.

Furthermore, the total investment in this project of 600.000 € by the Nantes City Council and the Metropolitan authority demonstrates their commitment and a growing awareness on the part of these institutions of accessibility in the cultural arena.

Lastly, while analytics for museum website traffic and downloads of the visitor app are encouraging, there is still room for improvement.

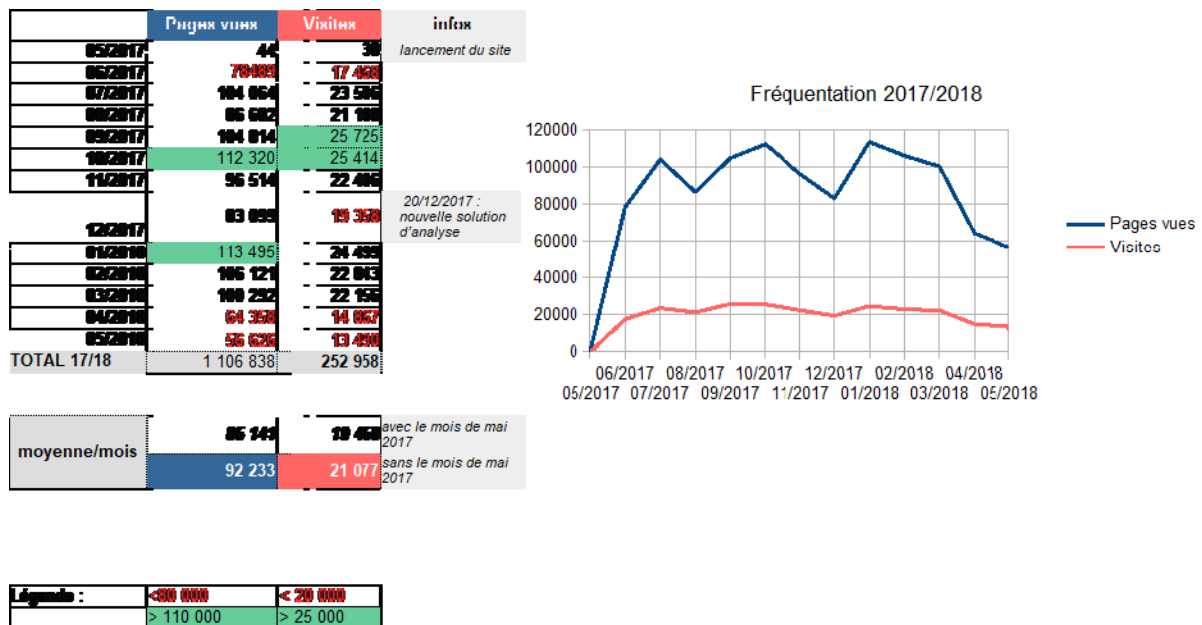


Figure 21: Museum website traffic (Source: Musée d'arts de Nantes/Author)<sup>18</sup>

Table 1: Number of “My visit” app downloads between June 2017 and June 2018 (Source: Musée d'arts de Nantes/Author)

Android installations	4.604
iOS installations	6.137
Average rating	4.2/5

18 Glossary : pages vues : Pages viewed / Visites :Visits / Fréquentation : Website traffic / moyenne/mois : monthly average / avec le mois de mai 2017/sans le mois de mai 2017 : including the month of May 2017 / excluding the month of May 2017 / infos : comments / lancement du site : website launch / nouvelle solution d’analyse : new analytics solution / Légende : Key

## 4.2 Current limitations

### 4.2.1 Technical constraints and issues associated with making the “My visit” app available on download platforms

The app was not operational for the reopening of the museum in June 2017, which impacted on this opportunity to advertise the new mediation tool more extensively. An interim version without the full content was however accessible.

This major issue relating to the loading of content is currently being addressed and should be fully resolved in the coming months. The scope of our aim to offer significant amounts of content with additional visual, video and other features was in retrospect underestimated at the outset, but these types of difficulties are par for the course with a prototype. This is currently the first app in France to offer such a wide array of features to visitors.

### 4.2.2 Areas for improvement

A specific issue for visually impaired visitors – which they have highlighted with some disappointment – is the fact that they cannot visit the museum unaccompanied because it was not possible to roll out the alert feature indicating the presence of a nearby artwork with a commentary, as intended at the outset of the project. We hope to introduce this feature in the next few years to allow these visitors to be more independent and to optimise and enhance the tour options for other audiences.

## 5 CONCLUSION

With support from institutions in Nantes, teams at the Musée d'arts de Nantes have sought to make the issue of accessibility the central focus of their thinking around visitors.

From a cultural mediation perspective, extensive benchmarking work was carried out by the team at museums in France and internationally in order to map out what was already in place and what did not yet exist.

Working with professionals in the digital sphere, we were able to specify clearly what we wanted for the museum in Nantes.

The facilities on offer to the public are diverse and aligned with current visitor activity. Significant updating and improvement work is still required based on visitor experiences and the numerous and exacting wishes expressed.

Be that as it may, the Musée d'art de Nantes has now fully embraced access for the widest possible audience and is committed to moving forward and developing, engaging in interaction, and sharing its experiences.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT THE BUNDESKUNSTHALLE IN BONN

**Birgit Tellmann**

Education: Head of Inclusive Programs

Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany, Bonn

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 4, 53113 Bonn, Germany

tellmann@bundeskunsthalle.de

### ABSTRACT

The Art and Exhibition Hall – which is commonly known as the Bundeskunsthalle – has undergone a process of becoming more inclusive since 2008 in terms of education, staff training, and events. The following article concentrates on three aspects which illustrate this development: Work with the deaf and hearing impaired visitors, the exhibition “Touchdown”, and workshops for people with dementia. Our vision for the future is to open up our institution to a broader and more diverse audience in order to develop training programs and visitor-based exhibitions.

### 1 INTRODUCTION: THE NECESSITY OF DIVERSITY

Art education in the past 30 years has been especially dedicated to conveying the personal needs and interests of various visitor groups, not only limited to children and youths. Of course, it has also included people with disabilities, and museum educators have been the pioneers in this field.

“Culture for everyone” was the slogan of cultural policy in 1970s (Hilmar Hoffmann) and opened up this diversity to the general public [1]<sup>19</sup>.

One of the first exhibitions that demanded a rethinking of the past and dealt with this topic scientifically and artistically on all levels almost 30 years later was the exhibition “Der (im)perfekte Mensch. Vom Recht auf Unvollkommenheit” [“The Imperfect Human Being: The Right to Imperfection”] [2]<sup>20</sup>. It was the first time that the topic of normality was questioned and discussed, new standards were established in terms of content and form, and borders were redefined.

### 2 THE BUNDESKUNSTHALLE

Becoming an inclusive museum means facing great challenges. The Bundeskunsthalle has no permanent collection of its own. Since its opening in 1992, it has been exploring diverse topics not only devoted to all fields of art and cultural history, but also to science, technology, and the environment. Cultures from all over the world have been presented in Bonn. We have shown some 240 exhibitions and hosted countless events such as concerts, readings, film screenings, and conventions.

However, the Bundeskunsthalle is not accessible in all areas although we are continuously working on reducing barriers and increasing accessibility. Although we have always had visitors with disabilities at the Bundeskunsthalle, it was first in 2008 that we began focusing our work on welcoming people with special needs. The important work of diversity and inclusion is set forth in our mission statement:

<sup>19</sup> See on this article a summary of the idea of Hoffmann and his work.

<sup>20</sup> About the exhibition p. 6 ff; p. 161-165, see on this chapter about the exhibition narrative.



*“In accordance with the cultural diversity of our institution, we support the right of every human being to participate in culture and education, regardless of their cognitive limitations and social and physical barriers. According to our political mandate, we thereby promote their active participation in overcoming new societal challenges”.*

The objective of our program on diversity and inclusion at the Bundeskunsthalle is to provide a narrative for exhibitions which is understandable to a wide range of visitors, taking into consideration their personal perspectives, regardless of their mental and physical needs.

Temporary exhibitions are a great challenge when implementing inclusion and must be planned differently than permanent exhibitions. In the following three sections, we would like to provide examples of how we are in the process of achieving diversity and inclusion at our institution.

### **3 THE DEAF AND HEARING IMPAIRED VISITORS: RAISING AWARENESS**

The first step, and the most important experience, was to make our museum staff aware of the needs of people with disabilities. To do so, we held an awareness-training program for our staff members. They learned about the special needs of the blind and visually impaired, the deaf and hearing impaired, and the physically and mentally challenged. For example, we have become aware of the fact that deaf and hearing impaired visitors have difficulties understanding museum wall texts and labels since they use their own grammar and syntax.

Secondly, we worked together with people with disabilities as experts. We started by offering tours with sign language interpreters for deaf visitors. However, it was not a success at first. Meaning often got lost in the process. Deaf visitors felt poorly informed and not taken seriously [3]<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, we approached the deaf community for suggestions and assistance. The native signers let the members of the deaf community know that they are part of the museum culture and are always welcome. Moreover, the native signers acted as mediators between the deaf community and our team. We also decided to open our training program to the hearing as well as the deaf and hearing-impaired and adapted it to their special needs since most of them had not studied art history. We explored the basic principles of art exhibitions, the roles of curators, the work of art educators, and the fundamentals of understanding art. The communication was lively, lasting entire afternoons, and involved role playing, and descriptions of art works. In this manner, both the hearing and the deaf worked together to get to know and understand one another. Since 2015 deaf and hearing impaired art educators are of part of our team of freelancers.

### **4 THE EXHIBITION TOUCHDOWN: PARTICIPATION AND NEW APPROACHES**

Cultural participation for people with disabilities cannot be limited to guided tours to convey the idea of exhibitions. That would be unsatisfactory. The planning of exhibitions has to change as well. Therefore, we tried new approaches and became involved in an exciting two-year experiment. People with disabilities became actively involved in developing our exhibition Touchdown. An Exhibition with and about People with Down’s Syndrome, held in the Bundeskunsthalle (28/09/2016 – 03/03/2017). As first of its kind this exhibition with and about people with Down’s Syndrome takes its visitors on a cultural and experimental journey through our past and present. Besides providing the first account of the history of Down’s Syndrome, this show also tells the story of a complex relationship.

It was the first time that cooperative work was achieved between people with Down’s Syndrome, experts from various museums and institutions, and the Bundeskunsthalle. We approached this exhibition with the purpose of presenting our concept, having people with Down’s Syndrome provide

---

<sup>21</sup> See as example about guided tours held by a native signer the report of a native signer working for Museumsdienst Hamburg.

special guided tours, and publishing texts in the exhibition and catalogue in simplified language [4]. This was the first time that “clear” and comprehensible language was used at our museum, and it was a great success. Another aspect that distinguished this exhibition from every other was that the staff at the Bundeskunsthalle was trained to speak with people with Down’s Syndrome. Many people are not used to communicating with people with Down’s Syndrome because they do not have any contact with them.

Finally, and most importantly, people with Down’s Syndrome participated as equal partners in deciding on the content of the exhibition, thus making it more realistic. Developed and presented in active collaboration with people with Down’s Syndrome – as experts of their own right – the exhibition comprises scientific and artistic exhibits from archeology, contemporary history, medicine, genetics, film, and art. The daily lives of people with Down’s Syndrome were depicted in detail. Can people with Down’s Syndrome live on their own? Which help do they need in terms of insurance coverage, filing their taxes, and applying for financial support? Another important question was how they could find work. Finally, what happens when people with Down’s Syndrome want to live together or even fall in love?



**Figure 1:** Guided Tour at Touchdown. An Exhibition with and about People with Down's Syndrome  
(Source: © Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany)

It was our goal to train people with Down’s Syndrome to become art educators as they are experts in their own right, and they held guided tours with our art educators. For the first time they are not merely the recipients of education and assistance, but take on an instructive role themselves. This

communal aim required extensive preparation and training. On the tours they presented their favourite exhibits. In order to help them to feel more confident, they used index cards with explanations. Every tour was accompanied by an assistant. Before the opening, all participants met and became acquainted with each other and rehearsed their tours which were sold out from the very beginning. During the exhibition journalists from magazines and newspapers throughout Europe interviewed the participants with Down's Syndrome and provided extensive and rave reviews of their participation.

On the weekend of the opening, we organized a festival with artists with Down's Syndrome from all over Europe: From Belgium, France, and England. This was the first inclusive event of its kind in our institution which required more staff members than usual. It included art workshops, photo sessions, and dance performances all by people with Down's Syndrome. One top act was the German theatre group Rambazamba, made up only of people with Down's Syndrome, which tours Germany regularly.

## 5 DEMENTIA: SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

Nowadays, people all over the world are becoming much older than half a century ago and have different needs than the generation before them due to demographic changes. Therefore, museums need to develop programs for a variety of interests and skills.

Since 2011, the Bundeskunsthalle has been offering special workshops for people with dementia: Most of them come in groups from nursing homes. In some cases, relatives go along with them for guided tours on the weekends. This gives them a chance to be a part of culture and public life. As we developed the new programs years ago, we offered a training program together with colleagues from the Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum (Duisburg) [5]<sup>22</sup>. It was the first time that a museum in Germany ever worked together with people with dementia. The response to the idea of the program was overwhelming at the Bundeskunsthalle: More than 50 participants answered from all over Germany.

Our workshops for people with dementia have been successful in combination with all kinds of exhibitions: Art, science, history, and culture. And we like to experiment in every new exhibition. People with dementia respond extremely well to photographs, paintings and furniture which bring them back to an earlier time in their lives. For example, the exhibition on Victorian England presented by the Bundeskunsthalle and The Victoria & Albert Museum reminded people with dementia of their childhoods and the way in which their parents and grandparents dressed. It allowed them to focus on a time when things were simpler, and they did not have dementia.

Individuals with dementia have the need to touch, smell, feel and embrace exhibits, especially those involving sculptures and tactile objects. We have had great success with our garden exhibition, a multisensory experience for everybody.

However, the most important quality of an art educator for people with dementia is the ability to open their hearts and minds. It is vital to create a positive atmosphere which helps people with dementia to communicate by giving validity to their ideas. This should not involve by a direct didactic approach or one that is overly difficult. Instead, people with dementia should feel free to voice their opinions and to communicate with one another.

---

<sup>22</sup> See the results of research on the effectivity of programs for people with dementia.



**Figure 2:** Guided Tour for people with Dementia, The Victoria & Albert Museum at Bonn (2011)  
(Source:© Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany)

Continuously more museums are thinking about starting programs for people with dementia. In this respect, the Bundeskunsthalle has started an initiative (outreach program) across Germany which provides lectures to museums and museum associations.

## 6 WORK IN PROGRESS: DEVELOPPING AND REALITY

At the Bundeskunsthalle, we have come to the conclusion over the years that it is important to have a list of priorities in order to host inclusive exhibitions effectively. Foremost, one must establish common objectives which may be set forth through discussions in work groups. In the process, detailed guidelines [6] should be established about how to implement a certain project, whereby emphasis should be placed on realistic objectives, e.g. the specific needs of the deaf and hearing impaired visitors, since it is impossible to cover all topics. Next, the institution itself should involve all operative areas in the project to mobilize as much creative input as possible. Ideally, it should be a holistic approach which examines the influence of inclusion on the entire system.

Inclusion should concentrate on art and art history and not approach the topic from a therapeutic perspective or as a social science. Funding should also be made available by government ministries for the disabled so that they may study at art academies or institutes of higher education to foster their understanding of art history [7]<sup>23</sup>. This goes hand in hand with commissioning architects with the construction of museums and exhibitions that are appealing to the disabled both aesthetically and physically and make them feel welcome.

<sup>23</sup> See a summary of the status quo of cultural and educational policy at M. Fuchs, pp. 15, about cultural participation I. Merkt, pp. 177.

Most importantly, the approval of resources for inclusive exhibitions must be secured in advance, whereby one should calculate that inclusion will cost 10% more than the budget of the exhibition itself and considerably more time depending on whether an exhibition is new or can be taken from another institution. Finally, networking plays a key role so that one institution or association can help another through their experience and expertise.

## **7 CONCLUSION: INCLUSION MEANS AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT**

We still need to think about visitors and their needs. No matter whether one is speaking of the deaf or the hearing impaired, individuals with Down's Syndrome or people with dementia, all of these groups must be included in culture because they are otherwise isolated in their own worlds. However, there is no single solution at all institutions since the needs of disabled persons concerning art museums are different from those at technical and historical institutions. Nevertheless, we must join together to find an overall concept for inclusiveness. All of these cases have involved a learning process which requires an exchange of ideas and dialogue in the future. Inclusion for museum means a change of mentality in the team and audience development, it takes place in all levels, it is concerning the collection and the exhibition concepts and the programs and events.

## **REFERENCES**

- [1] Hoffmann, H. and D. Kramer (2012): Kultur für alle. Kulturpolitik im sozialen und demokratischen Rechtsstaat. In: Bockhorst, H., V.I. Reinwand and W. Zacharias (ed.) (2012): Handbuch Kulturelle Bildung. München, pp. 298-305.
- [2] Stiftung Deutsches Hygiene-Museum (ed.) (2000): Der (im)perfekte Mensch: Vom Recht auf Unvollkommenheit. Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung „Der (im-)perfekte Mensch. Vom Recht auf Unvollkommenheit“ im Deutschen Hygiene-Museum vom 20. 12.2000 - 12.08.2001, Stuttgart.
- [3] Martina Bergmann (2006): Angebote des Hamburger Museumsdienst für gehörlose Menschen. Ein Erfahrungsbericht. In: Föhl, P., S. Erdrich, K. Maass and H. John (ed.) (2007): Das barrierefreie Museum, Theorie und Praxis einer besseren Zugänglichkeit. Ein Handbuch. Bielefeld, pp. 363-368.
- [4] Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (ed.) (2016): Touchdown. Eine Geschichte des Down Syndroms. Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung „Touchdown. Eine Ausstellung mit und über Menschen mit Down-Syndrom“ in der Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland vom 29.10.2016 - 12.03.2017. Bonn.
- [5] Ganß, M., S. Kastner and P. Sinapius (2016): Kunstvermittlung für Menschen mit Demenz - Kernpunkte einer Didaktik, In: Transformation, Band 2, Jahn, H. (ed). Hamburg.
- [6] Deutscher Museumsbund, Bundesverband Museumspädagogik und Bundeskompetenzzentrum Barrierefreiheit (ed.) (2013): Das inklusive Museum. Ein Leitfaden zu Barrierefreiheit und Inklusion. Berlin.
- [7] Koch, J.J. (2017): Inklusive Kulturpolitik. Menschen mit Behinderung in Kunst und Kultur. Kevelaer.

---

## LIST OF AUTHORS

LE TREUT, CATHERINE

Musée d'arts de Nantes / Public Engagement and Cultural Mediation Officer Nantes, France  
catherine.le-treut@nantesmetropole.fr

MIESEN, LINDA C.

Université Bordeaux-Montaigne, Laboratoire MICA Bordeaux, Pessac, France  
linda-christine.miesen@etu.u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr

ROGELJ ŠKAFAR, BOJANA

Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
bojana.rogelj@etno-muzej.si

SCARPATI, DARIO

Archaeologist – Expert in museum accessibility, Palermo, Italy  
scapatidario@gmail.com

TELLMANN, BIRGIT

Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany / Education: Head of  
Inclusive Programs, Bonn, Germany  
tellmann@bundeskunsthalle.de

WEISEN, MARCUS

European Centre for Cultural Accessibility, Le Cheylard, France  
marcus.weisen1@gmail.com

WEIß, GISELA

Hochschule für Technik, Wirtschaft und Kultur Leipzig/University of Applied Sciences, Leipzig,  
Germany  
gisela.weiss@htwk-leipzig.de

