



In Touch: making museum collections accessible and open to all people with multisensory disabilities at the Museum of Cycladic Art

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Type of best practice

Accessibility

Keywords

accessibility, mobile showcase, multisensory experience

The Museum of Cycladic Art has developed inclusive educational activities which were developed and implemented by the museum for children and adults with visual impairment and children and adults who are deaf and hard of hearing. The museum managed to increase accessibility and available programs which supported inclusion. This happened through research in the field of accessibility through the participation of the museum in EU-funded projects and through direct collaboration with schools for the blind. As a result, the permanent collections are accessible by people with hearing loss while the Cycladic Art collection is accessible by people with hearing loss and people with blindness.

Organisation in charge of best practice

Museum of Cycladic Art

Location

Athens

Dates

This is supposed to run throughout the year.

Description

The program "IN TOUCH" launched in 2022 to enable people with sensory disabilities (vision and hearing impairment) to access the permanent Cycladic Art exhibition. The program was realized within the framework of the European Erasmus+ Programme and is implemented with the support of Eurolife FFH, a strategic partner of the Museum of Cycladic Art.

It was designed in close cooperation with the Non-profit Civil Partnership (AMKE) "Me Alla Matia" and HandsUp - the first sign language interpreting agency in Greece - and was





launched after a successful pilot run involving focus groups with individuals with sensory impairment.

The program includes the following:

1. Thematic tour and a mobile showcase for persons with visual impairment. The thematic mobile showcase includes copies of key exhibits of the permanent exhibition of the museum and also texts in Braille. More specifically, the mobile showcase is a mobile unit with drawers containing copies of artifacts, tactile maps and other materials. These enable visitors with sensory disabilities (visual and auditory impairments) to experience the exhibits for the first time. Accompanied by trained museum staff, two or more individuals at a time will be able to follow a thematic route, taking them on a multisensory tour of Early Cycladic art and culture. Moreover, a floor plan of the exhibition space, tactile maps of Greece and the Cyclades, and real-size copies of exhibits and figurines made of marble or resin are also included. Apart from texts in Braille for the visually impaired, there are texts in large print available for visitors with partial vision, as well as an audio tour of the Collection of Cycladic Art, available in both Greek and English.
2. Multi-sensory museum kit related to Cycladic Culture, featuring the marble figurines of the Cycladic collection of the museum and the associated geographical/historical background. The museum kit is created to take Cycladic culture also outside the museum. The museum kit contains an embroidered map, a tactile water map, stones, threads, and fragments of replica figurines. A video aimed primarily at teachers and programmers explains how the museum kit can be used for a journey through space and time.
3. A series of actions to make the Museum accessible to deaf or hard of hearing persons. The permanent exhibition of Cycladic Art includes a video of a recorded tour in the Greek Sign Language, accompanied by Greek subtitles, and in International Sign, accompanied by English subtitles.

It is important to involve the direct target groups of the actions in all stages of development of the material and decision-making and not just present them with a final product. In this way, the material is produced and developed in a co-creative environment. Fostering collaboration between museums and local disability advocacy organizations to gain insights, feedback, and partnerships in implementing accessibility initiatives can lead to more museums becoming more accessible.

For the implementation of this Best Practice it is important to organize focus groups and several brainstorming sessions as well as pilot sessions with the direct target groups to ensure that the action designed will be relevant and useful.

Links

<https://cycladic.gr/en/koinonikaprogrammata/se-epafi/>





Resources needed

Designers specialized in accessibility, staff trained in inclusion and accessibility as well as museologists to produce relevant content. Material to produce copies of the objects will also be relevant.

Challenges encountered

The main challenge is to create a multidisciplinary team of people to collaborate and create a product that will be useful, relevant and practical. To overcome such difficulties, it is important to present all collaborators with a clear vision and objectives. Frequent team meetings and updates will ensure that everyone is on the same page. Another challenge encountered is to produce appropriate content with texts which will increase accessibility of museums. Therefore the close collaboration of inclusion and accessibility professionals with museum professionals is crucial for high quality descriptive texts in Braille.

Evidence of success

The programme "In Touch" has received a warm reception both by the communities of people with multisensory disabilities who felt welcomed to the museum and the local community in general. Its successful implementation and the fact that the mobile showcase, the museum kit and relevant tours and actions are part of the museum's standard practice is also evidence of its success.

Potential for transfer

This best practice is highly transferrable to a wide range of institutions from museums and galleries to libraries and archives. A special research needs to be conducted involving expert designers, inclusion scientists as well as museum professionals.

Further Information

More information is available here: <https://cycladic.gr/en/koinonikapogrammata/se-epafi/>

