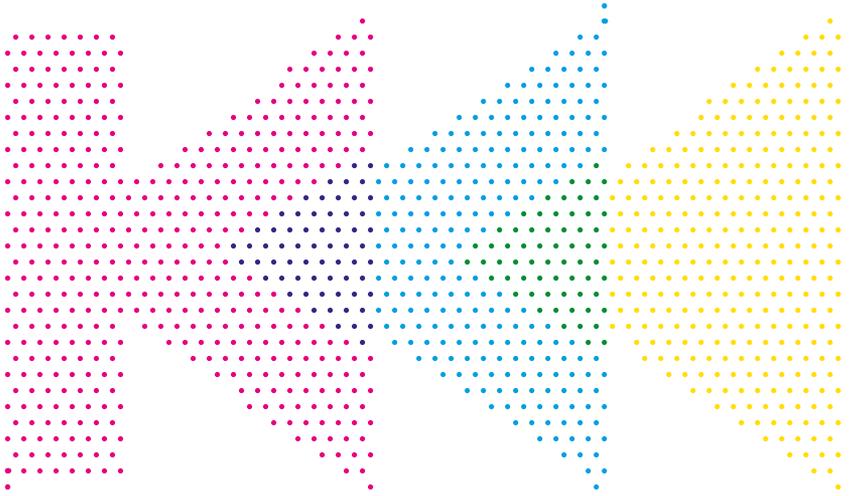


# ACCESSIBILITY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TO VULNERABLE GROUPS: STUDY ON THE AVAILABILITY AND PROVISION OF TECHNICAL CONDITIONS TO PROVIDE VULNERABLE GROUPS WITH ACCESS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

Editors: Tina Palaić and Urša Valič



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA  
MINISTRY OF CULTURE



accessibility  
OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TO VULNERABLE GROUPS

## Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups

Editors: Tina Palaić and Urša Valič

Technical editor: Eva Rožanc

Authors of the texts: Urša Valič, Tina Palaić, Stane Baluh, Melisa Baranja, Nino Batagelj, Rajka Bračun Sova, Samo Dolanc, Nastija Fijolič, Katarina Fuchs, Tina Gostenčnik, Sandi Horvat, Gregor Ilaš, Sandra Jenko, Aksinja Kermauner, Sonja Kogej Rus, Vida Koporc Sedej, Marja Koren, Jana Kostelec, Barbara Kotnik, Tjaša Krivec, Melanie Likar, Katarina Nahtigal, Nejc Oder, Iva Pavlica, Mija Pungeršič, Mojca Račič, Gašper Rems, Marija Repe Kocman, Petra Rezar, Bojana Rogelj Škafer, Eva Rožanc, Nina Schmidt, Antun Smerdel, Anastasia Sorgo, Barbara Sosič, Nastja Strnad, Mojca Sušec, Jera Svetek, Andrej Tomazin, Tanja Turk, Tomaž Wraber

Reviewers: Stane Baluh, Rajka Bračun Sova, Aksinja Kermauner, Sonja Kogej Rus, Petra Rezar

Translation: Alkemist, Translation Agency

Proofreading: Franc Smrke

Design: Tjaša Krivec

Printing: Dravski tisk

Published by: Slovene Ethnographic Museum

Represented by: Tanja Roženberger

Ljubljana, 2015

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji  
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

719:316.344.7(497.4)

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 / [authors of the texts Urša Valič ... et al.] ; editors Tina Palaić and Urša Valič ; [translation Alkemist, Translation Agency]. - Ljubljana : Slovene Ethnographic Museum, 2015

ISBN 978-961-6388-49-8

1. Valič, Urša 2. Palaić, Tina

282000384



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA  
MINISTRY OF CULTURE



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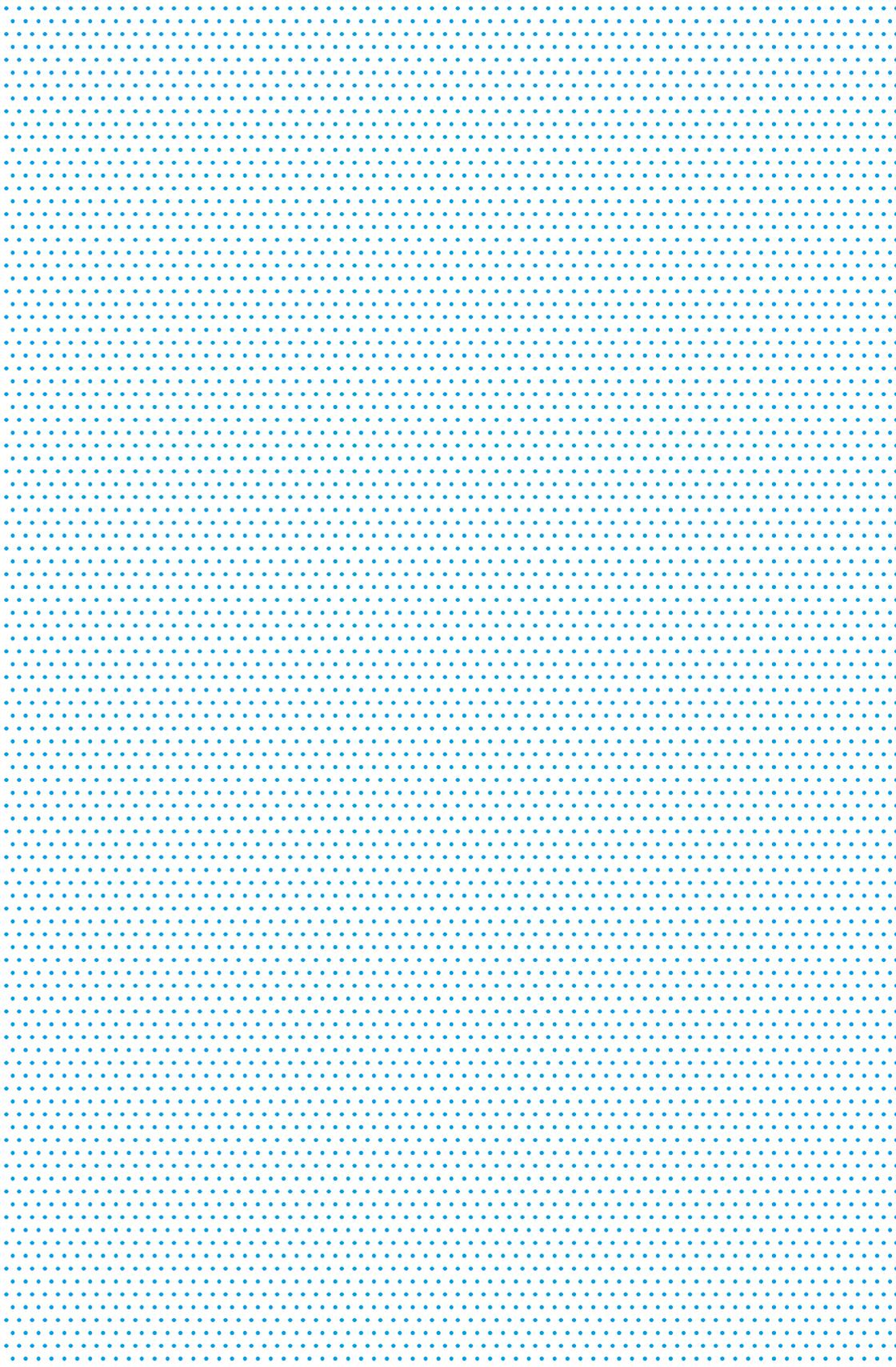
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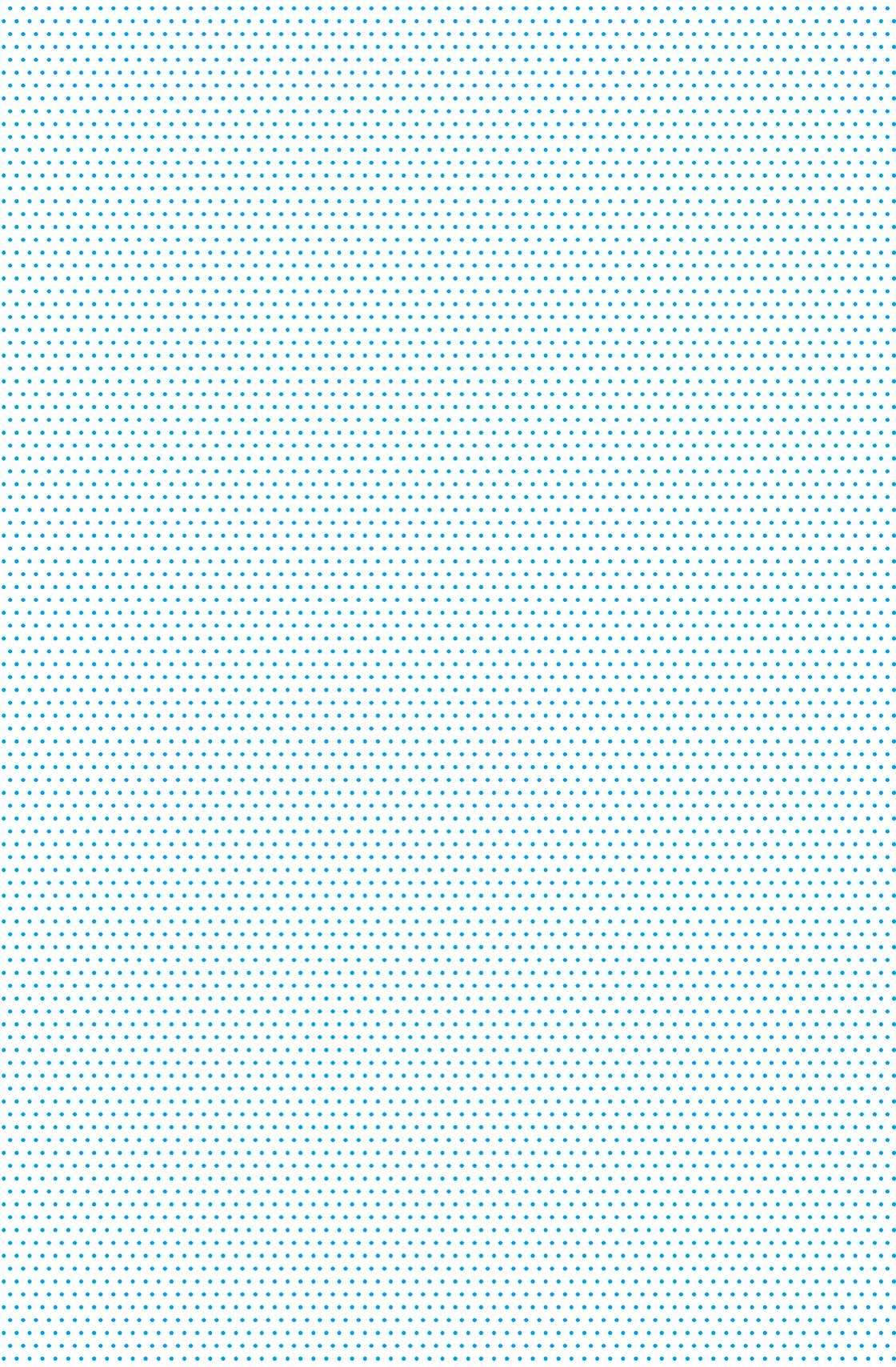
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## FOREWORD

Vida Koporc Sedej,  
secretary, Cultural Heritage Directorate,  
Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia

### FOREWORD TO THE STUDY ON THE AVAILABILITY AND PROVISION OF TECHNICAL CONDITIONS TO PROVIDE VULNERABLE GROUPS WITH ACCESS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE



Accessibility Stone, mascot of the project. (Photo: Urša Valič)

The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia devotes special attention to access to cultural heritage information and to the integration of vulnerable groups into its protection and presentation. Over the past ten years, considerable progress has been made in the strategy for inclusive accessibility of museum collections in Slovenia, which was one of the main objectives of European cultural policy.

The implementation of the two-year project entitled "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups", carried out by the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and funded by the European Social Fund, has put into practice the theoretical guidelines for the optimal accessibility of museum collections. The guidelines were presented in different scientific publications, particularly in the original publication entitled *Dostopen muzej – Smernice za dobro prakso* (Accessible Museum – Guidelines for Good Practice), written by Mojca Lipec Stopar, Rajka Bračun Sova and Vlasta Vodeb and published in 2009 under the aegis of the Association of Slovene Museums, and in the publication entitled *Muzeji, javnost, dostopnost* (Museums, the Public, Accessibility), written by Rajka Bračun Sova and Vlasta Vodeb and published in 2011 by the Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia.

The purpose of the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" project was to establish good practices in three areas of museum work: job training, accessibility of museum collections and education. The main objective of the project was based on the implementation of technical and operational training of the members of vulnerable groups for performing the tasks of museum public service with an aim to promote the equal opportunities concept and to acquire special knowledge, skills and experience for independent and creative work and for career start. This was followed by the aim to form, develop and implement inclusive educational contents in the field of museum work and presentation of museum collections that was carried out within the process of employees training. The key objective of ensuring the sustainable impacts of the project was to provide the museum staff with training, i.e. to acquire special expertise, skills and practical experience in order to establish good practices of working with the members of vulnerable groups in national museums and to implement them in other Slovene museums and areas of culture.

The experience gained in the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" project will make a sustainable contribution to better understanding of the needs of different groups of visitors and to the creation of equal opportunities for training, access and active inclusion of vulnerable groups in the protection and presentation of cultural heritage. Accessibility became a common thread needed for connecting people and their culture. A friendly policy of enabling physical access to the facilities of cultural heritage, the possibility of comprehensible and inclusive monitoring of the implementation of museum programmes and well-trained museum employees working with different stakeholder groups are of essential importance for modern museums.

I believe that everyone who will use the present publication as a scientific tool will find the necessary information, a lot of useful knowledge and examples of good practice. Thus, the project will achieve its purpose and provide an incentive to creativity and strategy for developing new and innovative ways of working in the field of cultural heritage and culture as a whole.

National museums carried out an important task by implementing the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" project. The project employees deserve special thanks for their work and so do their mentors/consultants, who professionally assisted them. A special thanks goes to the Slovene Ethnographic Museum for the implementation of the project.

## FOREWORD

Bojana Rogelj Škafar, project leader

### SLOVENE MUSEUMS TOWARDS ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL



Slovene Ethnographic Museum. (Photo: Andrej Tomazin)

The Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM) was appointed operator of the “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” project in order to develop a model of inclusive accessibility of cultural heritage to vulnerable social groups. 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 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 above mentioned 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 people 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 operator of the programme on the basis of its references and the level of 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.

In terms of implementing the Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities, the museum meets the architectonic standards of accessibility for persons with reduced mobility (ramps, elevators, toilets). What is more, the museum was made more accessible to blind and visually impaired visitors in 2010 when it introduced AV guides. It also carries out programmes for persons with learning disabilities at the communicative level using descriptions and object touching.

## About the Project

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 museum public services, to ensure greater social inclusion and to reduce the financial difficulties of vulnerable groups.

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, elderly unemployed people (55+)) for employment and for performing appropriate tasks at the museum. The project also focused 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 will be further implemented in other Slovene museums and other areas of culture and education.

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 museum staff who collect, study and interpret our heritage strive towards greater accessibility of museum collections in different ways. It is important that the museum cooperates with the environment by enabling information accessibility, physical accessibility and the use of modern technologies. The museum staff play an essential role in providing access through a dialogue with the members of vulnerable social groups. Moreover, within the project the staff helped them become employable, active members of our society. Training

of the museum staff also resulted in improved quality of work with vulnerable social groups.

In addition, the aim of the programmes was to 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.

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 contributed to their professional qualifications and thus enhanced 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 the members of vulnerable groups educated in the disciplines appropriate for working in museums, including students who belong 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.

## Conclusion

At the end of the project, we can say that we have 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 project employees (curators-educators, curators-documentalists, librarians, coordinator), their mentors, i.e. 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 were 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.

Finally, this publication summarises all the diversity of the two-year project and represents a manual for good practices. We hope that the project employees, who acquired many professional abilities, will be able to show their experience in long-term jobs and thus contribute to the accessibility of cultural heritage.

## PREFACE

Urša Valič and Tina Palaić, editors

### “ACCESSIBILITY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TO VULNERABLE GROUPS” PROJECT: IMPLEMENTATION OF 21ST CENTURY MUSEOLOGY

The present publication provides an evaluation of different practices followed in six national museums and a gallery within the “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” project. The practices complement the efforts of the museums in the area of accessibility of cultural heritage to the members of vulnerable groups, with an emphasis on their inclusion in the work of the museum. First, let’s take a look at some of the bases for new museological approaches.

#### Fundamental Museological Bases of the Project

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 exhibiting of museum objects (Black 2005: 9; van Mensch and Meijer-van Mensch 2011: 13). The strengthened educational role of the museums is 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 (Tomislav Šola in Perko 2014: 49; see also Black 2005: 9–10). 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 places for creating new social actions and forcing social change (Peter van Mensch in Hudales 2008: 197). Lidija Tavčar writes about a real “Copernican Revolution” in the attitude of museums to the public: the museums are and should be focused on and adapted to the public. Education thus became one of the central functions of the museums (Tavčar 2009: 119–120). Since then, 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 (van Mensch and Meijer-van Mensch 2011: 13). 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 (e.g. “social arenas”, term introduced by Richard Handler, see Širok et al. 2014: 25–27) and thus try to include the members of vulnerable groups.



The first training within the project regarding the physical and communication accessibility of cultural heritage facilities to vulnerable groups, given by the mentors – members of vulnerable groups and experts from the Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia on 9 June 2014 at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. (Photo: Eva Rožanc)

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 conflicting position that demands a redefinition (see Barrett 2011). Authoritative positions at the museum are mostly related to discourses of social power establishing the categories of symbolic Otherness, since the museums are, after all, ideological state apparatuses (Louis Althusser in Pozzi 2013: 7–8). And not only state apparatuses – through the museums, different communities can control the representations and identities of other communities and some of their highest authoritative truths (Cuno 2007: 514). James Cuno calls into question the participatory museum projects that uncritically honour the representation of only one community, contributing to the re-creation of inequality and exclusion. He stresses the essential role of curators and the museum staff as professionals who can look at the hidden power relations from afar and affect or demystify this power using their expertise. Without



On 5 December 2013, the project was presented to the public at a press conference in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. After the conference, Polona Sketelj, curator and author of the “Doors: Spatial and Symbolic Passageways of Life” exhibition, prepared a multi-sensory guided tour of the exhibition. (Photo: Ines Kežman)

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 (ibid: 511–516).

### 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 in comparison to the general population. We can see that the list is long – ethnic minorities, immigrants, persons with reduced mobility, persons with sensory impairment, the homeless, LGBTQ



During the European Week between 5 and 9 May 2014, the project was presented at a stand in front of the EU House in Ljubljana, giving out promotion material and performing various activities. (Photo: Urša Valič)

people, drug users, the elderly, the unemployed, etc. – and that it 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 (e.g. for people with disabilities see Barnes, Mercer, Shakespeare 1999; Zaviršek 2000, Valič 2010: 31–36). In accordance with the concept of intersectionality, which deals with the intersection of social categories and the resulting discrimination, new forms of social exclusion are constantly developed (e.g. exclusion of women with disabilities, of the elderly with mental disorders, etc.) (see Kuhar 2009). Every society has a system of exclusion of ill, incapacitated, different, symbolic Others; at the same time, the groups



The project was presented at the “Play with Me” festival in Kongresni Square in Ljubljana, carrying out activities and presenting tactile aids, including the “incubus paw”, the tactile symbol of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. (Photo: Urša Valič)

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 members of vulnerable groups into museum work (Edward P. Alexander in Perko 2014: 50).

The project considered several aspects of the concept of accessibility. The first aspect refers to the physical accessibility: it is about overcoming physical barriers in museums by installing elevators and ramps, by marking entrances and stairs, by creating accessible exhibitions (appropriate light, font, height of display cases) and the like (see in particular Bračun Sova, Vodeb and Lipec Stopar 2009; Bračun Sova and Vodeb 2011). This type of accessibility is primarily intended for persons with reduced mobility and sensory impairment but is used by all museum visitors. The efforts of museums to remove architectural barriers and to adapt exhibitions were further supported by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by Slovenia in 2008, and the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act (ZIMI, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 94/10 and 50/14). Both documents advocate non-discrimination of the people with disabilities and underline the importance of an accessible physical space for social inclusion and, indirectly, for cultural integration and participation.

The second aspect of accessibility is the 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" (see Simon 2010; van Mensch and Meijer-van Mensch 2011). 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 – collaborators. Hierarchical and authoritative relations towards the possession and transfer of knowledge are transformed into a much more sustainable reciprocal link between the museum and its audience, i.e. the community in which the museum is located. Richard Sandell is one of the first museologists to talk about inclusive museums. In the context of museums, inclusion indicates the degree of integration of the public into heritage processes and the way of managing heritage within a wider social model in order to include socially or culturally excluded groups (Sandell and Perko 2014: 322–323). In the project, we tried to introduce the concept of inclusion in different ways for different groups, tailored to their interests, preferences and needs. The objectives, however, were the same: equal access to heritage and participation in its creation. Sandell demonstrated that museums could contribute to greater social inclusion at the level of individuals, communities and society as a whole. At the individual level, cooperation of individuals with the museums improves their self-esteem, self-confidence and creativity. At the community level, museums act as initiators of social regeneration by promoting empowerment and an active role in their development. Finally, representations of inclusive communities, collections and exhibitions promote tolerance and mutual respect as well as reject stereotypes (Sandell 2003: 45).

### Guidelines for the Implementation of the Project

In addition to the mentioned theoretical basis, *The Guidelines for the Implementation of the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" Project* (2014),<sup>1</sup> laid down by the project employees at the beginning of its implementation, represented fundamental work bases. The guidelines defined the legal provisions related to the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the area of culture. In order to establish contacts

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1 The guidelines are available on the website of the project:  
[http://www.dostopnost.eu/sites/default/files/Smernice\\_izvajanje\\_projekta\\_koncna\\_0.pdf](http://www.dostopnost.eu/sites/default/files/Smernice_izvajanje_projekta_koncna_0.pdf).

and cooperate with the members of vulnerable groups, we gathered contact information of all the organisations and associations of vulnerable groups included in the project. An analysis of the current situation of the accessibility of cultural heritage, employment and training to members of vulnerable groups in eleven national museums under the Ministry of Culture valuably contributed to the further work. We also analysed the issue of employing persons belonging to vulnerable groups, focusing on the broader fields of culture, cultural heritage protection and inclusion in the cultural and social environment. Based on the analyses, we defined the guidelines for the implementation of inclusive educational museum programmes and specified the actual proposals of educational programmes. Finally, we presented a plan for communicating with the public and a list of vulnerable group media as interlocutors and information providers.

Project activities were planned on the basis of the analysis results presented in *The Guidelines* and on the basis of the set project indicators defined in the project application. The guidelines were perceived as a broad basis for our work, while the selected activities were carried out considering the duration of the project and the resources available.

## Project Results

At the end of the project, the authors of the present text evaluated the project in cooperation with museum professionals from the participating museums and gallery.<sup>2</sup> The evaluation revealed that the museum staff considered the concept of the project to be of very good quality and vital for the Slovene environment, while the implemented activities were assessed as excellent. However, it appeared that the new directions of museum work and the new understanding of the social role of the museums created a need for the division of museum work. Consequently, it is necessary to create new jobs or strengthen

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<sup>2</sup> We wrote more about it in an article that will be published in the 25/2015 *Etnolog*, a scientific periodical of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum.

the existing ones. To continue with the planned work, it is essential to consider employing the persons that gained the appropriate qualifications during the project.

The present publication presents some interesting practices that were carried out during our two-year training in the museums and are the result of the realisation of theoretical bases for participatory, inclusive, engaged, responsible and ethical museums. The publication is divided into six parts. The first part contains the presentation of the project and the evaluation of its performance indicators. The second part describes physical adjustments and the upgrade of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum website. The third part presents the production of tactile aids and highlights their use in exhibitions and educational programmes. The fourth part includes the presentation and evaluation of educational programmes, discussing multi-sensory guided tours and musical tours, various workshops and other programmes carried out during the training. The fifth part presents different ways of participation and inclusion of persons belonging to vulnerable groups in the interpretation and representation of heritage. The sixth part brings forward the proposals for the accessibility of museum libraries. The opinions of the participating consultants and associates as well as the reflections of some of the participating students are also added.

We hope that the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" project, which involved individuals and groups that were not visible as museum visitors and were thus vulnerable, will contribute towards the formation of a more inclusive and democratic society. We also hope that the described practices will be continued after completion of the project and that they will set an example for all Slovene museums.

## PROJECT EMPLOYEES

(Photo: Urša Valič and Gašper Rems)



### **Eva Rožanc**

eva.rozanc@gmail.com

project coordinator (until April 2014: Ines Kežman)

Slovene Ethnographic Museum

“In my opinion, museum accessibility means equal accessibility of cultural content to different groups of visitors.”



### **Sandra Jenko**

sanjenko@gmail.com

curator-educator

Slovene Theatre Institute

consultant: Štefan Vevar

“Although teatrology is not exactly a typical direction for a museum professional, I believe that there are quite a few parallels between the theatre and the museum. Exhibitions and theatre performances are both based on a story they want to tell using their own means of expression. The layout of the space, light, music and other audio-visual elements create atmosphere. One of the main features of theatre performances is mutual, live communication between the audience and the performed. Similarly, museum exhibitions depend on the contact with visitors. This is why the museum staff, especially museum educators, should implement programmes for the public and with the public. Messages can only reach their addressees in a dialogue with the audience.”



**Urša Valič**

ursa.valic@gmail.com  
 curator-documentalist  
 National Museum of Contemporary History  
 consultant: Ivo Vraničar

“I find it very important that we, the members of the so-called ‘vulnerable social groups’, are included in the work of museums and in the creation of museum stories. In such a way, many (for too long) ignored voices can be empowered and discrimination can be banished from the hearts and thoughts of all people.”



**Jana Kostelec**

jana.kostelec@gmail.com  
 curator-documentalist and librarian  
 Technical Museum of Slovenia  
 consultants: Martina Orehovec and Mojca Račič

“I mainly understand accessibility of cultural heritage to vulnerable groups as social inclusion of persons belonging to vulnerable groups. Awareness of the importance of social inclusion of vulnerable persons should be promoted through education starting in childhood – this is how we learn to be tolerant and to respect each other. This is now even more important, as the number of vulnerable persons is increasing due to the ageing population and the economic crisis. My motto is that we should not stop vulnerable people but offer them access.”



**Iva Pavlica**  
 iva.pavlica@gmail.com  
 librarian  
 National Gallery  
 consultant: Mateja Krapež

“I understand museum and gallery accessibility as a way of drawing cultural heritage near to all people, irrespective of their status, health, sex, nationality, etc. It also indicates a change in the perspective and perception of the museum staff towards an open museum space as a place where people can socialise and share ideas, information and knowledge. I think that museum libraries could play an important role as undiscovered treasuries of knowledge.”

**Katarina Nahtigal**  
 katarina.nahtigal@gmail.com  
 curator-documentalist  
 Slovene Ethnographic Museum  
 consultant: Barbara Sosič

“I think it is important that museums give voice to different groups of people and thus serve as a place where they can present themselves and be active. Cultural heritage is not monotonous but diverse and manifold, just as the Slovene population and, after all, the entire planet. In my opinion, it is not enough that the museums are ‘about the people and for the people’; they should also focus on cooperation with the people and take their needs, ideas and desires into account. Museums are places where we can meet and socialise, overcome stereotypes and learn about tolerance. They are so important because they remind us who we are and where our place in the world is.”





**Andrej Tomazin**

a.tomazin@siol.net  
 curator-educator  
 Slovene Ethnographic Museum  
 consultant: Sonja Kogej Rus

“I love to spend time with museum visitors, as it is important to me that they feel well in the museum. Museum accessibility therefore signifies that all visitors, regardless of their personal circumstances, feel welcome to the museum, that they satisfy their thirst for knowledge and that they like to return to the museum.”

**Barbara Kotnik**

kotnik.barbi@gmail.com  
 curator-educator  
 National Gallery  
 consultant: Kristina Preininger

“When asked about museum accessibility, I first think of physical access for all visitors. In this way, staff show a certain attitude towards visitors, especially the members of vulnerable groups. Furthermore, I believe that accessible content is also important, overcoming the distance between visitors and display cases through a creative display of museum objects. Finally, accessibility in the mind of every individual visiting or working in the museum also plays a significant role. Accessibility as the awareness of fellow human beings, as education and as respect thus exceeds spatial dimensions. Sometimes, a sincere smile and conversation are enough to create accessibility.”





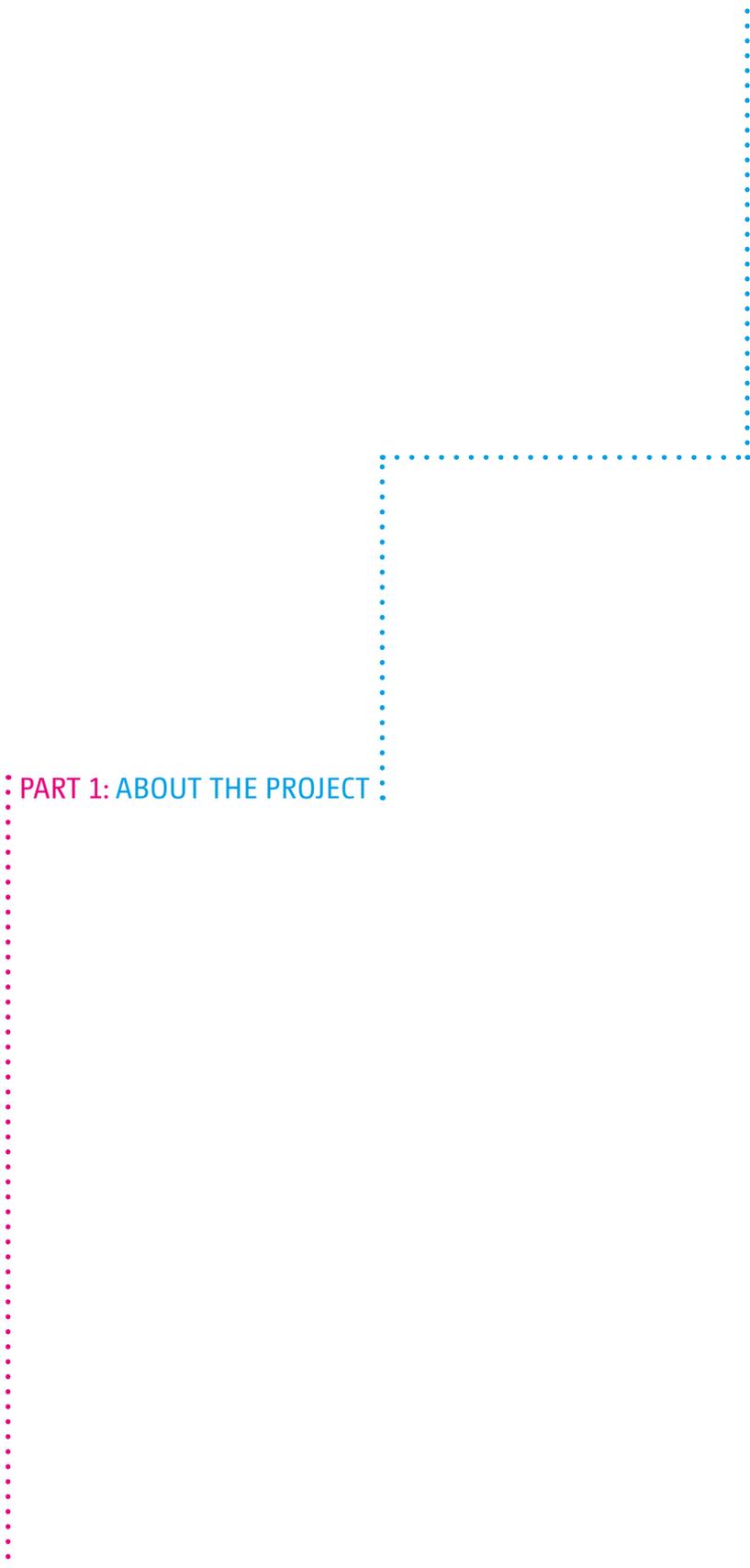
**Tina Palaic**  
tiu.tinna@gmail.com  
curator-educator  
National Museum of Slovenia  
consultant: Mateja Kos

“Access to museum buildings and contents is the right of all people, irrespective of their personal circumstances. I think that all members of a particular society also have the right to participate in the creation of museum content. I see the museum as a place where the members of different social groups can meet. Such a dialogue contributes to a better understanding of different lifestyles, to overcoming stereotypes and to creating a more tolerant society.”



**Katarina Fuchs**  
katafuchsrina@gmail.com  
curator  
Natural History Museum of Slovenia  
consultant: Miha Jeršek

“Considerable progress is already seen in today’s society, and I believe that all museums should be accessible to all visitors. Museums and the content they present are intended for people. The museum staff should make sure that all people feel welcome to the museum, irrespective of their differences and needs.”



· PART 1: ABOUT THE PROJECT ·

## Eva Rožanc, coordinator of the “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” project

### EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Providing optimal access to cultural heritage programmes to the members of vulnerable groups is in accordance with both national and European cultural policies. Museums and galleries play the role of crossroads by connecting people, regardless of their nationality, religion, sexual orientation, social and economic status and beliefs. Furthermore, diversity of themes forms a whole, a story, enabling the possibility of co-creating museum contents. Preliminary analysis<sup>3</sup> of the field, which included the accessibility of cultural contents to vulnerable groups as well as their employment and training, indicated that the legal basis for equal inclusion of the members of vulnerable groups has been drafted and adopted, but that there are many differences in its implementation. The reasons behind this are varied.



In March 2015, we hosted Joel Snyder, internationally acclaimed lecturer, who prepared training in the audio description and accessibility of visual content for the blind and visually impaired people. (Photo: Eva Rožanc)

<sup>3</sup> Project employees presented the analysis concerning national museums under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia in *The Guidelines for the Implementation of the “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” Project* (2014).

Aksinja Kermauner, educator of the blind and writer,  
University of Primorska, Faculty of Education

## Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to the Blind and Visually Impaired

One of the first museums that tried to improve the accessibility of cultural heritage to vulnerable groups was the Celje Regional Museum. In the early nineties, the museum adapted its exhibition, "What Life Was Like in Roman Celeia" to the blind and visually impaired under the slogan: Please touch the objects. In 2008/2009, it adapted the "Rainbow World of Schütz's Ceramics". The museum also exhibits a tactile adaptation of the portrait of Empress Elizabeth of Austria made by Tjaša Krivec.

In 2008, the City Museum of Ljubljana mounted an exhibition entitled "Touch and See", which included tactile adaptation of artistic photographs of Earth's surface, taken by Yann Arthus-Bertrand within his "Earth from the Air" series. The photographs were adapted by the French designer Alain Mikli. In 2010, the museum curator Borut Rovšnik exhibited Pablo Picasso's works of art entitled "Tauromaquia. Myth. Eros.", which could be both seen and touched. The "Faces of Ljubljana" exhibition also includes an audio guide with stories and touchable objects. There were some multi-sensory guided tours of the "Wheel" exhibition and they plan many more adaptations.

In 2000, the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana staged an exhibition called "Everything but the Appearance" in cooperation with a group of artists and scientists – a "blind library" where visitors worked out the contents of books using their hearing and touch under the guidance of blind guides. In January 2015, Nataša

Jovičić interpreted "Highway", a work of art by Croatian artist Edo Murtić, using her own methodology tailored to the perception of the blind and visually impaired.

The Museum of Gorenjska in Kranj prepared a museum suitcase that contains different objects and replicas and visits the elderly, visually impaired and other people with special needs.

The "Mysterious Death of Young Leonora" exhibition in the Natural History Museum of Slovenia included material tailored to blind and visually impaired visitors.

The Museum of Post and Telecommunications in Polhov Gradec, Technical Museum of Slovenia, is adapting its permanent collections to the blind and visually impaired in cooperation with the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Engineering in Ljubljana.

The Celje Museum of Recent History (Herman's Den) is adapting its permanent toy collection to the blind and visually impaired and is planning to organise its first permanent collection of toys and aids for the blind and visually impaired.

The acclaimed "Doors: Spatial and Symbolic Passageways of Life" exhibition in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum is also partly adapted. Moreover, the SEM manages a very complex project entitled "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups", preparing numerous adaptations to the blind and visually impaired visitors in other national museums. The project has been very productive. The National Museum of Slovenia put some images of the "Mummy and the Crocodile: Slovenes Discovering the Lands along the Nile" exhibition on view in the relief technique, which enabled visitors to touch them. In December 2014, Tjaša Krivec presented her tactile portrait of Mihael Stroj's Luiza Pesjak in the National Gallery. In 2014, the Slovene Theatre Institute started adjusting its permanent exhibitions to the blind and visually impaired under the guidance of Sandra Jenko. At the end of February 2015, it exhibited a large tactile

procession model made by Barbara Bertalanič Domiter after Boris Kobe's painting "Škofja Loka Passion Play".

In collaboration with students of the Faculty of Education in Maribor and prof. Jerneja Herzog and under the direction of senior curator Brigita Strnad, the Maribor Art Gallery adapted part of the "Tombs of the Liberators" relief poster by Serbian sculptor Rade Stanković, part of the "Struggle of the Yugoslav Peoples for Freedom and Restoration of their Homeland" by painter Slavko Pengov and a few statues of the "Heroes We Love" exhibition to the blind.

We probably did not list all of the adaptations; more can be found on the website of the Association of Slovene Museums in Borut Rovšnik's presentation of actions and measures for accessibility to sensory impaired visitors at the Cultural Bazaar (Rovšnik 2013).



On 16 June 2014, the training entitled "Inclusive Museum and Programmes" was carried out. Petra Rezar presented the needs of the deaf and hard of hearing when accessing cultural heritage. (Photo: Eva Rožanc)

In order to increase heritage accessibility and to include the members of vulnerable groups in the museum work, the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" project was set up. The employees complemented the results obtained in the preliminary analysis and tried to lay down the guidelines for the inclusion of

vulnerable groups in society, taking into account the provision of adequate working conditions as well as physical and communication accessibility. The outlined programmes expanded the educational contents of the museum work and were aimed to include the members of vulnerable groups in the formation of museum contents. This study is one of the examples of good practice of integrating vulnerable social groups into the field of cultural heritage.

### Training People Belonging to Different Vulnerable Groups

The primary objective of the project was to train people belonging to different vulnerable groups<sup>4</sup> who had already completed a formal education related to museum work. Nine representatives of the above-mentioned groups were employed by the Slovene Ethnographic Museum: seven young graduates – first-job seekers and two persons with disabilities. A project coordinator was also employed. In addition to the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (hereinafter: SEM) as the project operator, another five national museums and a gallery participated and formed a network of professional institutions. Their main role was to train the project employees, to mentor them and to introduce them to the museum work.

The project employees were trained in the museums' and gallery's curatorial departments, documentation departments, libraries and educational departments. Their work was carried out in accordance with the systematisation and identification of activities and tasks of

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4 Vulnerable groups within the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" project are: people with sensory impairment and reduced mobility, immigrants (especially immigrants from the former Yugoslavia), members of ethnic and national communities (minorities and Roma communities), young graduates – first-job seekers, elderly unemployed people (55+). Female members of these groups are particularly vulnerable. Vulnerable social groups face greater social exclusion and are often on the margins of society. Social exclusion is a process usually triggered by a combination of different factors (subjective and objective) and circumstances (Trbanc, Boškić, Kobal and Rihter 2003: 5). Graham Room sees it as a structural concept and defines it as the result of a deficiency of one or several subsystems: the demographic and legal system (promoting civil integration), the labor market system (promoting economic integration), the social system (promoting social integration) and the family/community system (promoting interpersonal integration) (Graham Room in Rapuš 2004: 11). It indicates a poor integration into social life, into the opportunities and possibilities generally available in society (ibid.).

the curator, curator-educator, 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 cultural heritage protection. The project coordinator was responsible for the implementation of the content, financial aspect of the project and for the coordination of other activities (integrating students, organising training courses, information and publicity, etc.).



A visit of the members of the Deaf-blind Association of Slovenia (DLAN) to the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, 15 July 2014. (Photo: Eva Rožanc)



The Slovene Ethnographic Museum has established good contacts with the media. The photo depicts Bojana Rogelj Škafar, project leader and former director of the museum, in an interview with Maja Kuzma, journalist of Tipk TV (web TV of the deaf people), during the visit of a group from the Deaf-blind Association of Slovenia (DLAN) on 15 July 2015. (Photo: Eva Rožanc)

Sonja Kogej Rus and Barbara Sosič,  
museum advisers, Slovene Ethnographic Museum

### Importance of the “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” Project for Further Work of Museums and Galleries

It is encouraging that museums and galleries manage to implement projects that provide new jobs. The members of vulnerable groups thus gain an opportunity to learn to work in museums or galleries. The projects envisaged one-year training and one-year independent work of new curators, which is a good starting point for their future career.

Each member of the project employees was given his/her own consultant who prepared his/her training programme. In addition, the trainees attended – in order to become aware of the specific needs and habits of the members of vulnerable groups regarding the museums – joint training sessions in all areas of museum work and training sessions for working with vulnerable groups. The research and development of the *Guidelines for the Implementation of the “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” Project*, which gave a comprehensive analysis of culture accessibility in Slovenia, was very important for the success of the project. The project employees were constantly establishing contacts with various associations, institutes, school and individuals, informing them about the events, inviting them to the institutions and implementing the programmes at their place.

The SEM had already trained people for individual work in the museum in the past, but this time the process was slightly different. The objective of the project employees was to introduce new

approaches into institutions that would provide more sustainable models for working with vulnerable groups. It was therefore important to connect experience of the museums with new, more complex knowledge of the needs of individuals and different vulnerable groups. The project was a great opportunity for our institutions to open their resources to groups and individuals who are less likely to encounter cultural heritage. The latter is a universal commodity that can enrich each and every one of us, without any exceptions.

Over the last two decades, the SEM has developed some programmes for particular social groups but has always felt a duty to do more. The "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" project is therefore like a breath of fresh air for our institutions. It is always beneficial to include several generations, complementing the experience with new views. It should be noted that we were very lucky with the selected candidates, as they all proved to be a colourful array of gifts and talents that only needed to learn to work in museums. Although they were employed in different museums, their work was coherent and consistent. They set high goals and managed to achieve them. After one-year of training, we obtained many results: tactile photographs, paintings and maps, copies of the objects, puzzles and, above all, inclusive museum programmes. These successful models brought new visitors to the museums and will certainly be implemented even after the end of the project. When planning their future work, the museums will have to consider and develop the achieved results. They have thus become a new standard for museum activities, bringing benefits to all – the museum staff, museum visitors and members of vulnerable groups. Museums friendly to vulnerable groups are friendly to all! After all, good results are also reflected in visitors who are not members of vulnerable groups but like to attend the programmes organised within the project.

The redesigned websites adapted to the visually impaired also reflect new knowledge. They are simpler and more transparent;

their content is not modified automatically and quickly. We found that very important, since the online openness of institutions is today an important path to all users, including ones belonging to vulnerable groups. Websites are an important complement to the content of museum exhibitions and activities.

As mentors and consultants, we hope that this project is not the last of its kind. In times of global and financial crisis, there are not many possibilities to expand and complement museum work without such projects that enable us to improve the accessibility of cultural heritage and the social engagement of museums and galleries.

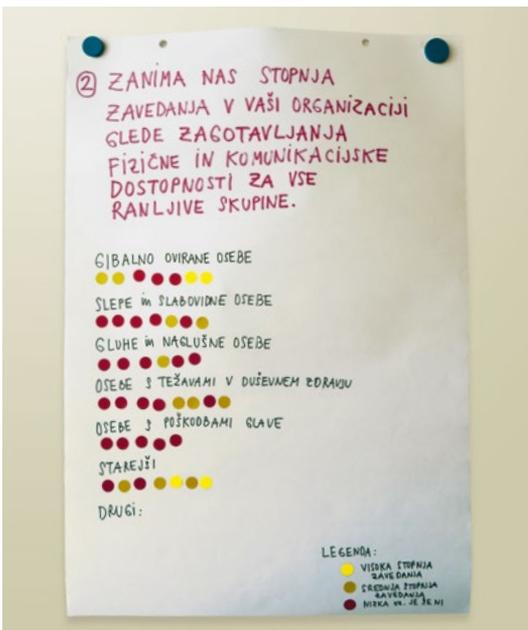
### Forming, Developing and Implementing New Educational Programmes/Contents

One of the major objectives of the 2014–2017 National Programme for Culture is the access to heritage and information for everyone, especially for the young, elderly and disabled, directly through public institutions, museum activities and new technologies. The project employees 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 proposal was already mentioned in *Dostopen muzej: Smernice za dobro prakso* (The Accessible Museum: Guidelines for Good Practice) manual written by Mojca Lipec Stopar, Rajka Bračun Sova and Vlasta Vodeb (2009: 48).

The following activities were carried out:

- guided tours with tactile elements based on a multi-sensory experience (Slovene Ethnographic Museum, National Gallery, National Museum of Slovenia, Natural History Museum of Slovenia, Slovene Theatre Institute);
- musical guided tours (Slovene Ethnographic Museum);

- guided tours/programmes for the deaf and hard of hearing (Slovene Ethnographic Museum, National Museum of Contemporary History, National Museum of Slovenia, Natural History Museum of Slovenia, Slovene Theatre Institute);
- collaboration with the Roma communities (Slovene Ethnographic Museum, National Museum of Contemporary History);
- programmes with immigrants and minority members (Slovene Ethnographic Museum, National Museum of Slovenia, Slovene Theatre Institute, National Museum of Contemporary History);
- visiting programmes (aimed at those who cannot visit the museums for various reasons);
- exhibitions (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; Images of Emona 2015).<sup>5</sup>



“We are interested in the level of awareness of the physical and communication accessibility of your organisation to all vulnerable groups.” A detail from the first training session within the project concerning the physical and communication accessibility of cultural heritage facilities to vulnerable groups, given by the mentors – members of vulnerable groups and experts from the Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia on 9 June 2014 in Slovene Ethnographic Museum. (Photo: Eva Rožanc)

5 Students belonging to vulnerable groups participated in individual exhibition projects.

The indicators of the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" project showed the formation and implementation of ten new programmes in 2013 and 2014 and five programmes in 2015. We implemented more educational programmes and exhibitions than planned and thus exceeded the set indicators. The programmes brought a larger number of visitors to the museums and gallery.

### Including Students Belonging to Vulnerable Groups

» Nejc Oder, student, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana

I work in the documentation department of the SEM. The work is enjoyable and not stressful, and my colleagues are calm and friendly. I would like to compliment the security guards, who are very nice and interesting people. I still remember how they helped when it rained and when my wheelchair had a flat tire. I would also like to compliment the project managers, who gave the students with disabilities jobs. I learned quite a lot at the SEM, got used to working full-time (six to eight hours a day) and learned new things about nations and their customs and traditions. When scanning the photographs and adding them to the Galis database, I got to know more or less interesting things about people's lives and their environment at that time. I got a good insight into the clothing and traditions of people from all over Slovenia.

«

One of the project objectives was to include relevant students, especially those belonging to vulnerable groups. Cooperation with the Slovene Association of Students with Disabilities was established. Most of the students involved studied one of the museum disciplines, while the members of vulnerable groups included: two representatives of the Roma communities, five students with reduced mobility, three students belonging to the deaf and hard-of-hearing group, one person with the status of a student with special needs, three students belonging to the blind and visually impaired group and five 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.

» **Mojca Sušec, postgraduate student, Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana**

Within the project, I copied the records on textile and interior design objects from inventory books to a Microsoft Excel file. I entered the data referring to individual inventory numbers of the objects into individual columns based on the content (object description, place of use, time of use, method of acquisition, purchase price, date of acquisition, notes).

Since I am a lawyer, working with documents is very normal for me; my experience is therefore positive. In addition to a sense of social inclusion, I mainly developed my organisational skills, precision, concentration and perseverance as well as improved the motor functions of my fingers, which is essential for my physical disability. Knowledge of how the inventory of books changed over the last two centuries is also a valuable experience. «

### **Qualifications of the Museum Staff for Working with Vulnerable Groups**

Several training courses were prepared within the project: physical and communication accessibility, an 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. Training courses 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.

### **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. Several authors have written about the engagement of visitors in the museums (Black 2005; Sandell 2002; Simon 2010).

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: there were 117 visitors in 2013, 952 in 2014 and over 2,000 in 2015. The programmes were conceived in a way that allowed equal opportunities for access to cultural contents for all visitors.

### 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 operator's website ([www.etno-muzej.si](http://www.etno-muzej.si)), on Facebook and Twitter.

Promotional material (brochures, notebooks, bags, T-shirts and stone-shaped mascots) was also designed. At the press conference in December 2013, we presented the planned project activities. The project was presented to the general and professional public in media and other forms of promotion.<sup>6</sup> The project employees carried out the activities at the Cultural Bazaar, International Museum Day (18 May), Museum Summer Night (June), Merry Day of Culture (3 December), European Heritage Days (end of September–beginning of October),

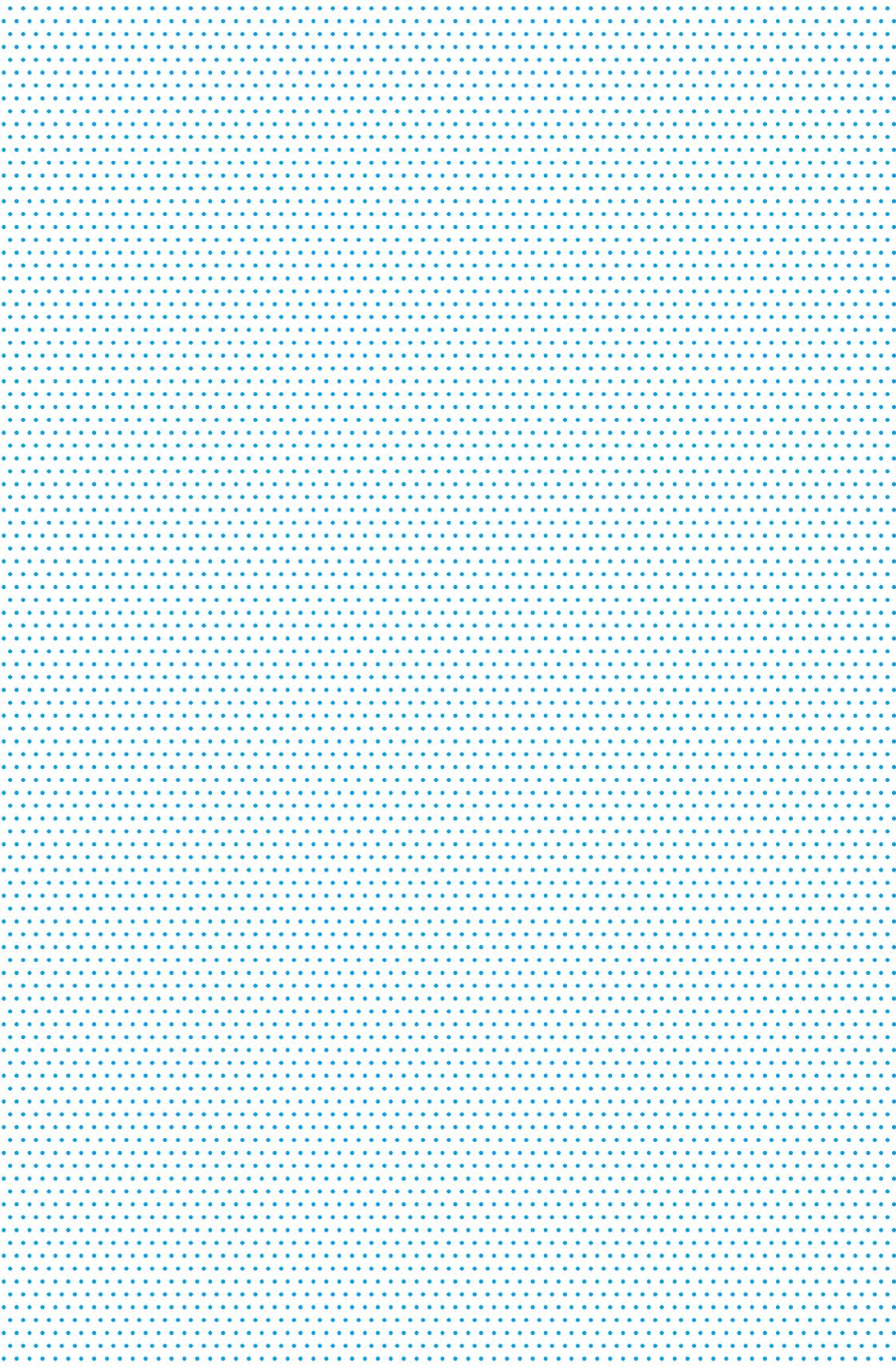
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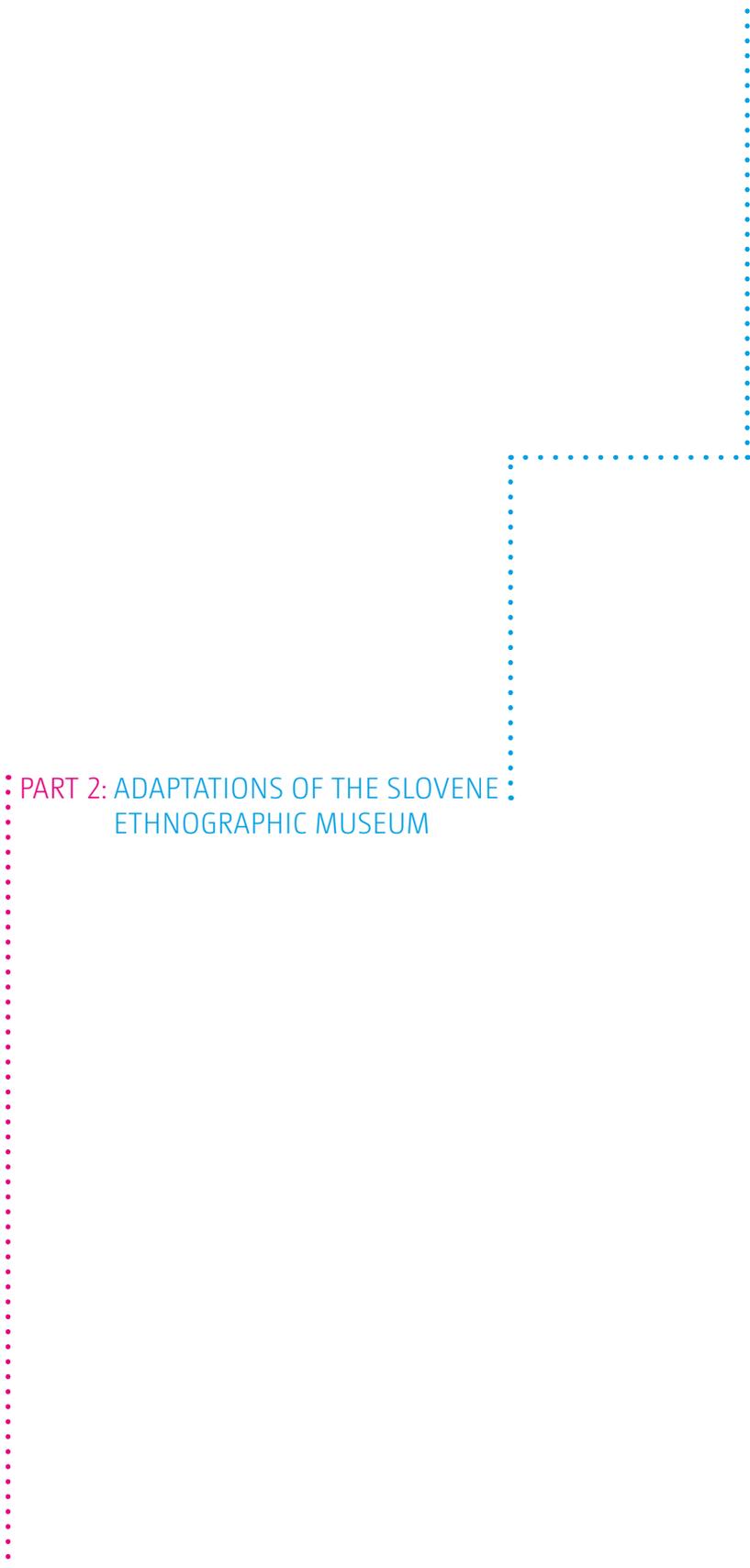
<sup>6</sup> We started cooperating with RTV Slovenija (TV shows: Dobro jutro Slovenija, Dobra ura z Milico, Naše poti – Amare Droma – Amare Drumia – Mengere Droma, So vakeres? – Kaj govoriš?, Priluhnimu tišini; multimedia web portal: Dostopno; Val 202 radio), TIPK TV, Spletna TV (Slovenian Association of Organisations of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing People), Dnevnik and Delo newspapers, Radio Romica, etc. The project employees presented project activities in the museums where they were trained, offered internal training courses on the inclusion of the disabled in the museum work, audio descriptions, etc. What is more, the awareness of the general and professional public was raised with the popular and scientific articles published in journals, such as Argo, Etnolog and Pogledi. The staff also participated in different events and round tables (e.g. a round table at the opening of the "Ignorance = Darkness = Obstacle" exhibition, organised within the "Open House Slovenia" project; a lecture at the 2015 Cultural Bazaar aimed at the professionals, museum staff and employees of educational institutions). In 2014, the project was presented at the European Week in Ljubljana as an example of good practice of inclusion of young graduates in work with cultural heritage.

European Week (May), etc. We also drew up a joint leaflet entitled *Na pot po muzejih s Kamnom Dostopnosti*, (On a Journey through the Museums with the Accessibility Stone) which connected all six museums and a gallery. It included the elements of multi-sensory experience, focusing on equal opportunities for the accessibility of cultural heritage, and presented technical adaptations in the SEM. Two major events were the inclusion of the copies of museum objects in the “Between Nature and Culture” permanent exhibition and the presentation of the final study at the end of the project.

INDICATORS	Planned value in 2013	Output in 2013	Planned value in 2014	Output in 2014	Planned value in 2015	Output in 2015
Number of gross jobs created during the project	10	9 (+ 1 coordinator)	10	10	10	10
Number of students included	40	18	40	23	20	33
Number of new educational programmes in museums and galleries 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	3086 <sup>7</sup>
Study on the accessibility of museums and galleries to vulnerable groups	0	0	0	0	1	1

7 The table includes data collected until 10th October 2015. As the project ends on 30th November 2015, the data is incomplete.





PART 2: ADAPTATIONS OF THE SLOVENE  
ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM

Gregor Ilaš

## Upgrading the Slovene Ethnographic Museum Website within the “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” Project

The Slovene Ethnographic Museum is committed to the optimal accessibility of cultural heritage to all segments of society, including access to the online environment. The museum website used to be relatively well accessible: it allowed visitors to increase the font size and to select contrast as well as contained a good search engine and site map. Administrators deliberately avoided ads, flash animations, etc. As for the programming, the website was also good, allowing screen readers (e.g. JAWS) to skip blocks and to select chapters. Following the discussion with vulnerable groups and considering the recommendations,<sup>8</sup> the SEM decided to upgrade its website in order to increase its accessibility and universality. The museum thus abandoned rotating banners on the main page, avoided giving only graphic information and added linguistic equivalents, included clearer and fewer menus and site navigation via keyboard, highlighted accessibility information on a special subpage and used more precise textual alternatives to photos. The website was also optimised for mobile devices (tablets and phones) using the so-called responsive design, while flash technology was abandoned. Upgrade and modernisation resulted in a consistent website; texts are written in simple Slovene and audio elements are added (guides, explanations, etc.).

<sup>8</sup> The Slovene Ethnographic Museum was invited to participate in the “Broadening Our Cultural Horizons” project, in which the representatives of different vulnerable groups analysed its website: [www.etno-muzej.si](http://www.etno-muzej.si). The other participants were Cankarjev Dom Cultural and Congress Centre, Kino Šiška Centre for Urban Culture and Kinodvor City Cinema.

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.<sup>9</sup> 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. Some of the content should thus be aimed at specific people (e.g. it is impossible to convert a subtle art video into a text). 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). The museum took into account the universal principle (basic information is accessible to all) and the principles of comprehensibility and individualisation gained through hierarchical information (specific information is accessible to a specific target audience). The upgrade methodology involved the so-called preliminary evaluation ("Broadening Our Cultural Horizons" project) and the so-called formative evaluation (participation of different users). Before the representatives of vulnerable groups confirm the adequacy of the upgrade, the SEM will carry out the so-called summative evaluation, which will take the final response of website users into consideration.

<sup>9</sup> Web content accessibility guidelines contain four principles (perceivable, operable, understandable, robust) and twelve guidelines (text alternatives, time-based media, adaptable, distinguishable, keyboard accessible, enough time, seizures, navigable, readable, predictable, input assistance, compatible).

Eva Rožanc

## IMPROVEMENTS AND TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT OF THE SLOVENE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM FOR ENSURING GREATER ACCESSIBILITY OF MUSEUM CONTENT

Physical access is one of the objectives of the “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” project. Most museum buildings are protected historical monuments with stairs and it is not permitted to interfere with their architectural design. The Slovene Ethnographic Museum 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



To facilitate the orientation of the blind and visually impaired in the exhibition space of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, the Geodetic Institute of Slovenia made tactile maps. (Photo: Katarina Nahtigal)

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 the public environment, reading-adapted tactile maps/floor plans are increasingly used, meaning that the content is displayed with elevated elements, including all spatial barriers. 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 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.



Magnifying glasses are among the innovations introduced by the Slovene Ethnographic Museum within the project. (Photo: Eva Rožanc)

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.

By making tactile maps, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum moved a step closer to the independent movement of the visually impaired through exhibition spaces, increasing the accessibility of cultural heritage in museums.

**Marja Koren and Mija Pungeršič, ODTIZ Institute**

### Simple Solutions to Increase Museum Accessibility

It is indisputable that we all have different physical and mental abilities. A building that is accessible to one person can thus be completely inaccessible to another. It is essential that we take these differences into account and do not generalise them. We can soon find out that persons with reduced mobility do not include only people in wheelchairs but also people with walking difficulties, people using walking aids and even people with speech difficulties.

What exactly is accessibility? One of the definitions states: "Accessibility of the built environment enables the inclusion of the people with disabilities in the family, working and wider social environment."<sup>10</sup> Despite the standards that require the accessibility of all new buildings, some adapted public buildings are non-functional. Nevertheless, there have been many improvements in adaptation and accessibility in the last ten years.

10 National Council of Disabled People's Organisations – Accessibility:  
[http://www.nsios.si/podrocja\\_delovanja/dostopnost/](http://www.nsios.si/podrocja_delovanja/dostopnost/).

“We would like to adapt it, but we have no money,” is the sentence often heard by people with reduced mobility. Despite the fact that it is not possible to avoid regulations and bureaucratic procedures, we believe that we can achieve many simple solutions with a great deal of inventiveness and good will.

Accessibility can be improved in several ways:

**With simple adaptations:**

- A special toilet for people with physical disabilities is not necessary if the ordinary toilet is large enough to be accessed on a wheelchair or if it contains movable holders. The elderly and parents with prams would also appreciate such a toilet.
- Use the freight elevator instead of the personal one and enable people to accompany the person with disability to the desired floor. Make sure that the freight elevator is empty and that it is not used for storage.
- Portable ramps are an ideal solution to climb short stairs. They are lightweight, convenient, tested, very safe and, above all, useful in different locations.
- If the main entrance includes stairs, the side and staff entrances are often accessible. In this case, install a doorbell at the main entrance and add a note with a phone number that can be called.
- One of the solutions for accessing partly or completely inaccessible exhibitions is to take photos of the exhibition and screen them as a video projection on the ground floor or on a tablet. You can also benefit from it by additionally explaining the projection.
- Additional measures: handles by the stairs, chairs for resting and display cases that can be seen from a sitting position are adaptations that will also satisfy the elderly and children.

• **With the adequate information:**

• Information about museum accessibility should be provided on  
• your website, including a phone number that people with reduced  
• mobility can call. Accessibility information should also be available  
• in the museum (qualified staff at the entrance to the museum).

• **With the right approach:**

- - Ask the person if he/she needs help. If he/she says no, respect his/  
• her decision.
- - Talk to the person with reduced mobility and not to his/her  
• assistant or companion (as if they are not there).
- - Be considerate and patient, especially with people who have  
• speech difficulties. If you do not understand what they tell you,  
• do not pretend that you understand but rather ask him/her to say  
• it again.

• To conclude, we would like to stress again that the suggested  
• solutions do not only help people with reduced mobility but all  
• museum visitors. Every person deserves access and a respectful,  
• correct attitude, regardless of who they are or how they live. The  
• essence of good interpersonal relations is communication, while  
• a precondition for good communication is to know and to accept  
• diversity. If we are aware that differences between people are  
• normal and enriching, we can create an inclusive environment.  
• Thus, the environment allows us to cooperate, function  
• harmoniously and create a better and nicer world.

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Eva Rožanc

## COPIES OF MUSEUM OBJECTS IN THE SLOVENE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM



In the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, the blind and visually impaired persons helped prepare copies and illustrations. (Photo: Eva Rožanc)

The Slovene Ethnographic Museum 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<sup>11</sup> were added to the "Doors: Spatial and Symbolic Passageways of Life" temporary exhibition as tactile didactic aids; copies from the latter exhibition<sup>12</sup> are part of residential culture. The "Between Nature and Culture" exhibition offers insight into life in the past, recounting the

11 In order to ensure optimal diversity, the following types of museum copies were made: 1. door fillers (wood), 2. locks with corresponding keys (metal), 3. capitals (wood) and 4. forgings. When the exhibition comes to a close, the tactile elements will be used as didactic aids to the guided tours of the SEM permanent exhibitions.

12 The objects were selected by: Polona Sketelj (SEM), Damjana Pediček Terseglav (ethnologist and anthropologist, senior conservator at the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Ljubljana Regional Office) and Vladimir Silič (author of the book on the carved doors in Slovenia).

human drive for survival, creativity, everyday life and holidays in Slovenia and elsewhere in the world. The objects are taken from all exhibition chapters, representing the features of individual historical periods, production techniques and ways of life both in Slovenia and elsewhere in the world. The objects chosen by the SEM curators were also reviewed by the typhlo-pedagogue Aksinja Kermauner. As she pointed out, the choice of tactile objects should observe the law of tactile threshold,<sup>13</sup> which is different for each individual. Her instructions and guidelines were also followed by the copy makers.



On 23 June 2015, the only fully preserved dugout canoe of Slovenian fishermen in the Trieste Region, called “Čupa Marija”, was moved from the “Between Nature and Culture” permanent exhibition of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum to the depot. The original was replaced by a copy – an illustration enabling various interactions with the visitors. (Photo: Špela Regulj)

13 The term “tactile threshold” denotes a minimum amount of space between individual characters that still allows us to extract tactile information. Tactile information should not be smaller than a Braille point, i.e. there should be so much space between individual characters that the information can still be detected by finger pads (internal materials, internal training course by Aksinja Kermauner at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, 4 December 2013; see also a blog by Roman Brvar: *From Practice for Practice*).

**Tomaž Wraber, Slovene Association of Organizations  
for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

Culture has always held an important place in the minds of Slovenes. After all, we identify ourselves as a nation through our culture, which was – and still is – first established by Primož Trubar and mostly by France Prešeren and his poetry. But let's be honest – our cultural goods are often quite inaccessible to people with various disabilities. The awareness that we live in a society of different people with very different personal circumstances is barely present and is still looking for its place in the 21st century.

The loss of sight is one of the chief obstacles to enjoying cultural goods. However, different national cultural programmes have demonstrated that museum staff often encounter blind and visually impaired people and recognise their need to draw the museum content nearer to them. The encounters brought forth a certain response, and many tried to approach people with serious visual impairments. The efforts of the museum staff were neither organised nor systematic, but they were more obvious than the efforts in other fields of culture, since the museums wrote down the need to adapt their collections to the blind and visually impaired in their documents. Even more! The efforts were more evident from one national programme to another and became systematic in recent years, which has provided a number of tangible results.

The results should be evaluated by its users and professionally examined; consequently, we could set our own Slovene standards for the accessibility of culture to the visually impaired. In doing so, we should definitely consider valuable foreign experience.

The standards would help the authors of museum presentations to draw up and spread stories that would be easily accessible and understandable for people with serious visual impairments as well as for all other visitors.

The first difficulty for the blind and visually impaired is how to access the institution and the basic information about its contents as well as how to orient themselves in the exhibition space.

Tactile and other marks on the floor and on the wall are no longer a novelty. An audio description, which was initially intended for showing films and TV shows to the blind and visually impaired, has developed into a technique allowing pleasant individual visits to museums, galleries and other cultural monuments. Thoughtfully prepared texts describe exhibits, paintings, statues, etc. in detail so that the blind and visually impaired can perceive and feel their importance, beauty and historical message. Only the most representative items are selected, since the description of all of them would take too much time. Each object or artistic product described should be widely representative of its period, author and meaning as well as the message it had in that period or the message it has today. The same applies to the selection of tactile replicas, which should always represent a common thread of the museum or gallery story and a pars pro toto of individual collection parts. Replicas are not the only ones who can take this role, since many originals can be touched without causing them any harm. Well-designed guided tours for the blind and visually impaired can add a special charm to the presentations; due to live interpretation and interaction, they are more interesting than pre-recorded texts.

Cultural institutions often question the viability of adjusting their offer to the blind and visually impaired. If they are one-sided, they indeed have no real effect. People who have been taught for decades that culture is not for them eventually accept this fact and never consider visiting a museum. However, it is not hard to prove the opposite to them. The representatives of cultural institutions should thus establish contacts with them as well as their associations

and educational institutions. Different lectures, workshops and presentations would help gain their trust and interest in the institutions they represent. It would be particularly fruitful if they offered them a creative role in the preparation of presentations tailored to the blind and visually impaired. All these adaptations generally bring a benefit to all visitors. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that partial or complete loss of sight is also related to ageing. People with deteriorating eyesight have to change their lifestyle and give up cultural goods. They will accept the new opportunities faster than others will.

Therefore, I believe that a white cane will soon no longer be an exotic curiosity in cultural institutions.

As making copies of museum objects requires traditional craft skills and respect for cultural heritage preservation, the task was entrusted to experts. Given the knowledge, techniques and production methods, most of the objects were made by the SEM restorers, while external contractors were selected based on their craft skills and experience in museum copy making. The work of external contractors was carried out under the supervision and in cooperation with the SEM restorers and individual curators.

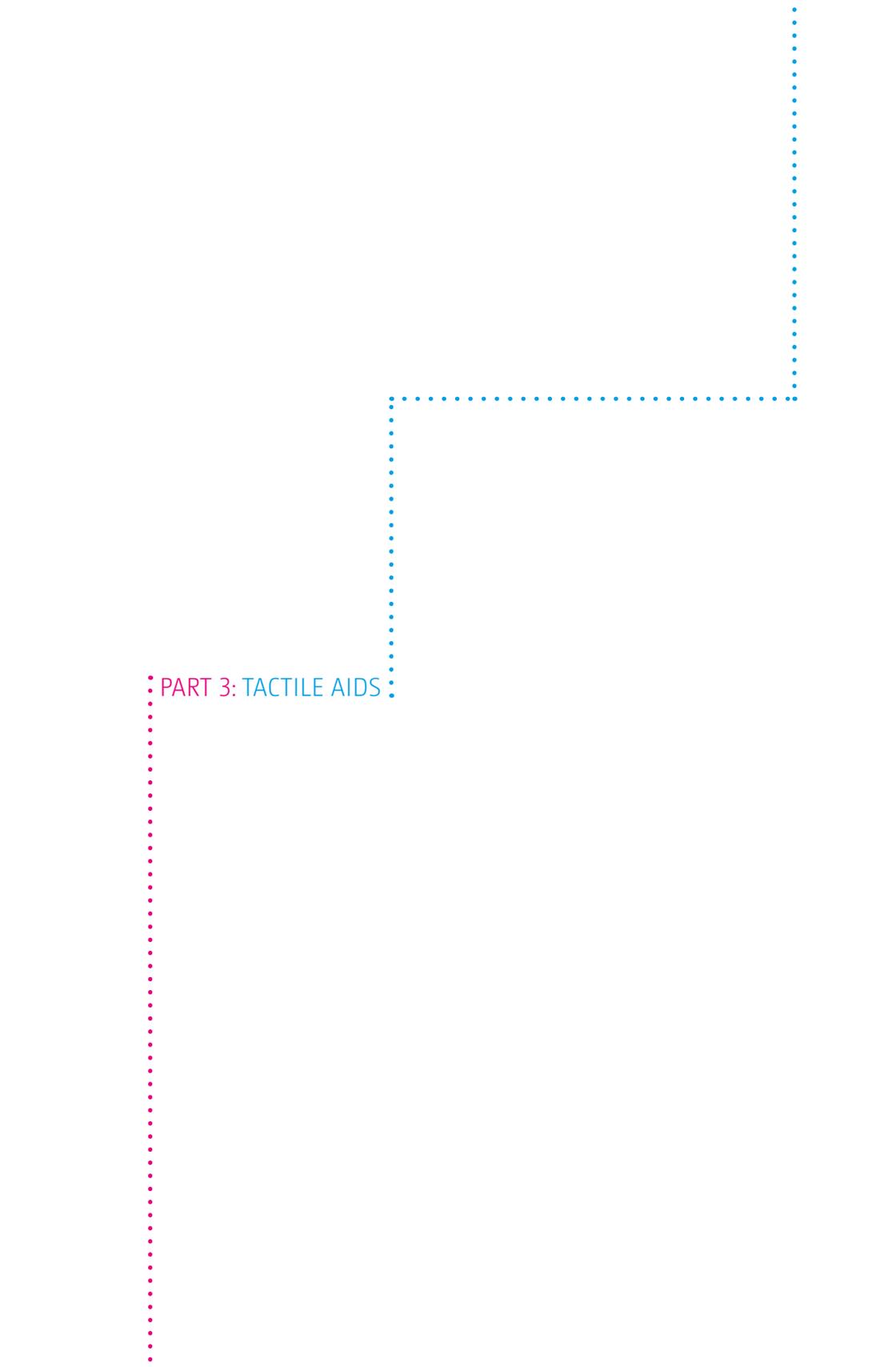
In order to maintain the authenticity of original objects, the copies and illustration models<sup>14</sup> resemble them in size, material (wood, metal, textiles, clay) and structure as much as possible, while the combinations of different materials were also preserved. They can be touched, enabling the visitors a different understanding of

14 The SEM restorers marked a copy of the dugout canoe, the first Slovenian seagoing vessel, with an illustration model. The copy/illustration model has the same size, structure and material (wood) as the original, while the production technique is different. Originally, dugouts were carved out of a silver fir trunk, but the illustration model is made of laminated wood. Such a production technique enables longer and more durable resistance of the object in an exhibition space based on temperature and other factors. Other originals are safely stored in display cases under controlled temperature and other conditions.

museum objects. Originals as part of cultural heritage and different memories remain safely exhibited in display cases, not far away from individual copies, while some are stored in the depot. When making copies and illustrations, the producers constantly collaborated with the representatives of blind and visually impaired persons, collecting feedback on production appropriateness.<sup>15</sup> 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 illustration models 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. They are equipped with audio descriptions in several languages and with a short text in large print for the visually impaired. On the SEM website will be possible to see video clips with subtitles and 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. 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. The publication will also be published in Braille.

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15 Individual production stages were carried out in cooperation with the representatives of the Slovene Association of Organizations for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Library for the Blind and Visually Impaired.



• PART 3: TACTILE AIDS •

Tina Palaić, Katarina Fuchs, Barbara Kotnik and Sandra Jenko

## TACTILE AIDS AT EXHIBITIONS AND IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Modern museums put the museum audience, made up of very diverse social groups, at the centre of their activities. When developing their activities, they have to take into account different needs of all visitors and enable them all to access the cultural heritage they present. Tactile aids are one of the options to improve the accessibility of exhibitions; they can be independently used by the visitors or help the curators-educators, museum guides and animators in the implementation of educational programmes.

Tactile aids allow all groups to experience heritage in a tactile way and are especially useful in passing the heritage to blind and visually impaired visitors. In addition to the auditory receipt of information, the blind and visually impaired should be able to learn about the exhibited content by touch and other senses. In her doctoral dissertation, Aksinja Kermauner (2010) states that the world of the blind is not truncated but comprehensive and rich. Touch and sight are only different in structure and so are the worlds of the blind and those who can see. Sight allows us to observe and analyse the world from afar, while touch enables us to connect with it closely with our skin (see also Pallasmaa 2007). Touch is the most important sense for the blind and is developed through use. That is why tactile aids do not only have a cognitive function but also play a significant role in touch development and care. At least the representative exhibits should be tactilely accessible. The preparation of tactile aids should consider the features of the museum object and cognitive abilities of the blind visitors. The objects are chosen by the museum staff based on their importance, characteristics and interpretation, while their adequacy is verified by the users. It is recommended that the latter participate in the preparation of tactile aids, assessing and suggesting

any adjustments. Teamwork is thus encouraged, i.e. cooperation of the museum staff with blind and visually impaired individuals and organisations.<sup>16</sup>

However, touch is not only relevant for the blind. Tactile aids can be beneficial for all visitors, especially sensory impaired persons, persons with learning disabilities and persons with dementia. Touch gives an opportunity to gain additional information about the object. We can perceive its form, size, weight and material as well as assess its value. If possible, visitors should be allowed to touch authentic museum objects (wearing appropriate gloves). The museum objects selected for touching and tactile aids have an additional value, as they can be taken out of the museum, enabling the message to reach those who are not able to visit the museum for various reasons (Bračun Sova, Vodeb and Lipec Stopar 2009: 29). Tactile aids and texts in Braille also represent a means of raising awareness and informing about the needs of the blind and visually impaired. During the project, we thus prepared copies of museum objects, models and tactile images, often accompanied by texts in large print or in Braille.

**The National Museum of Slovenia**<sup>17</sup> prepared two interactive **tactile memory games** consisting of small tactile images for the “Mummy and the Crocodile: Slovenes Discovering the Lands along the Nile” temporary exhibition and the “Roman Stories from the Crossroads” permanent exhibition. The games consisted of 8 and 32 motifs respectively. They depicted some of the museum objects that could be seen at the exhibitions. Colour contrasts between the motifs, the background and the relief borders of the motifs in contour colours made the games more accessible to the blind and visually impaired. They were placed on low tables, thus enabling access for persons in

16 During the project, we cooperated with the Slovene Association of Organizations of the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana and typhlo-pedagogue Aksinja Kermauner.

17 Tactile aids were prepared by Janka Istenič, Polona Bitenc, Barbara Jerin, Tomislav Kajfež, Tadej Curk, Petra Grom, Nina Vošnjak and Tina Palaič, as well as by Marija Repe Kocman, Jera Svetek and Nina Schmidt from the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana.

wheelchairs. In addition, replicas of the selected museum objects accompanied both tactile memory games. **Brochures describing the motifs**, including technical descriptions and basic information about the object, its historical context and importance, were also available. They were written in large print and in Braille. It turned out that all visitors liked to stop there and test their concentration. As an aid to train memory, to activate brain processes and to focus attention on the selected activity, the tactile memory game is also suitable for the elderly, especially for those with dementia. The replicas of museum objects were essential for blind visitors, since it would be difficult to present more complex objects using only tactile images. They found it easier to master the tactile memory game with fewer motifs. The memory game with 32 motifs was divided into four topics, which enabled adjusting the number of motifs and complexity of the game to the user. The described didactic tools were used in the museum during various educational programmes and at both exhibitions.

The "Mummy and the Crocodile: Slovenes Discovering the Lands along the Nile" temporary exhibition included a **tactile catalogue**, which brought the content and visual appearance of the exhibition closer to the visually impaired. Summaries were drawn up in large print and in Braille. The tactile catalogue included five illustrations that contributed to the visual appearance of the exhibition. Simple illustrations were chosen, as it was easier to adjust them. Basic shapes were kept, while the non-essential details were omitted. The motifs that overlapped each other in the illustration caused the greatest difficulties, since the blind understand spatial relationships in a different way. Different textures were used for individual elements of tactile images, highlighting different types of information. Tactile images were made by the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana using the microcapsule technique, which is less expensive but only allows for simple displays.



During the European Week, visitors to the stand could test their concentration using a tactile memory game prepared by the National Museum of Slovenia for their “Mummy and the Crocodile: Slovenes Discovering the Lands along the Nile” exhibition. (Photo: Urša Valič)



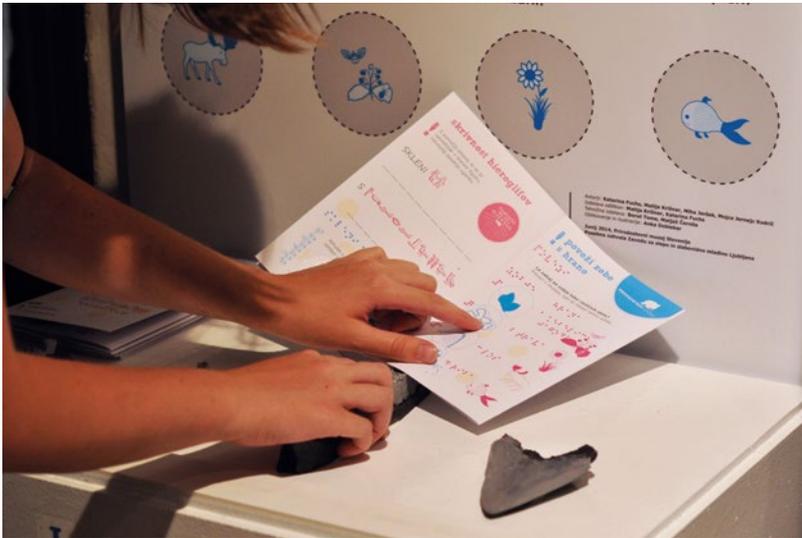
The illustration from the tactile catalogue, prepared by the National Museum of Slovenia for their “Mummy and the Crocodile: Slovenes Discovering the Lands along the Nile” exhibition, shows the Stella Matutina boat, the means of transport of the missionary Ignacij Knoblehar. (Photo: Urša Valič)

The **Natural History Museum of Slovenia**<sup>18</sup> complemented its permanent exhibition, “Geological and Paleontological Collection”, with **tactile aids – casts of the original museum objects**. The purpose of making tactile aids was to display part of the exhibition in an interactive way and to encourage the visitors to learn about different teeth shapes and eating habits by touching. The museum wanted the visitors to feel the difference between the sharp, pointy and serrated teeth of two carnivores and the teeth of a herbivore with a distinctive flat top surface and enamel. Visitors can also search for the similarities between an omnivorous cave bear’s teeth and human teeth, both having a flat surface with bumps. The museum first chose four animals (complete skeletons or jaws and teeth are exhibited) corresponding to the message and purpose of tactile aids. Then it made teeth models using the casts of original teeth made of ceramic paste and coloured and lacquered them.

The teeth models are attached to a base that includes transparent labels with the names of individual animals written in Braille. The labels wear out eventually and have to be replaced from time to time. Exhibition boards next to the copies offer information about animal feeding and teeth. A brochure in Braille with tactile images of teeth has been prepared in order to provide access to this information for the blind. The layout with the brochure allows the visitor to decide how much of the content he/she wants to learn. The tactile images of teeth are made on an enlarged scale, since their real size does not enable tactile perception of significant differences. Tactile images were made at the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana on a microcapsule paper. During printing, it was found that the lines must be neither too thin nor too thick in order to ensure an adequate height of the printed image relief and tactile sensing.

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18 Miha Jeršek, Matija Križnar, Borut Tome, Matjaž Černila, Anka Doblekar, Mojca Jernejc Kodrič and Katarina Fuchs designed and implemented the modified exhibition and were assisted by Marija Repe Kocman and Jera Svetek from the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana.



Learning about the teeth characteristics and diet of different animals in the Natural History Museum of Slovenia, using cast teeth and project leaflets. The leaflet represents a playful way to discover the heritage and promote the participating national museums at the same time. (Photo: Katarina Fuchs)

Teeth models of different animals were used by the museum for various educational programmes. The visitors enjoyed touching them and learning about different animal feedings. Although the tactile images were verified by the target group in advance, the blind found it difficult to connect teeth copies with tactile images without additional descriptions given by their companion or guide. The content was also used in the [project leaflet](#) entitled *On a Journey through the Museums with the Accessibility Stone*, which linked six museums and a gallery in a playful way.

For the 1st Astronomy Week, the Natural History Museum of Slovenia<sup>19</sup> staged an exhibition entitled “Small Solar System Bodies” with several [tactile aids](#). The museum wanted to bring small Solar System bodies and their nearly unimaginable dimensions closer to blind and visually impaired visitors.

19 Tactile aids were prepared by Miha Jeršek, Andrej Guštin, Matjaž Černila, Borut Tome, Matija Križnar and Katarina Fuchs, assisted by Marija Repe Kocman and Sašo Ogrizek from the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana.



The curators of the Natural History Museum of Slovenia are colouring casts of meteorites and a model of the surface of Mars used at an exhibition accompanying the 1st Astronomy Week. (Photo: Ciril Mlinar Cic)

The following aids were used:

- a model of the Solar System, with planet sizes and their distances from the Sun in correct proportions;
- models of the planets' sizes without the Sun, illustrated by differently sized balls;
- casts of three meteorites that fell on the territory of Slovenia;
- two models of the surfaces of Mars and Mercury with meteorite impact craters.

The first Solar System model was aimed to provide visitors with a sense of its enormous dimensions and correct distances between the planets. A 1 cm Sun was placed in a 30 m space together with other planets of 0.03 mm to 1 mm. The planets were exhibited under a magnifying glass. While walking the distance from the Sun to the last planet, the visitors could better understand the proximity of the first four planets and the remoteness of the others (the last one, Neptune, was located 30m from the Sun). Only when planning the presentation of the planets under a magnifying glass did the museum



A game of placing balls, representing the planets, in their correct places. The exhibition was on view during the 2nd Astronomy Week in Idrija. (Photo: Martina Peljhan)

think of the possibility of touching the small balls – planets, which proved to be useful for the blind and visually impaired visitors as well. The balls were mounted on a slide for tactile sensing (see Jeršek et al. 2014). As the planets in the Solar System model were too small for visitors to get an idea of their sizes, the museum added a parallel planet model without the Sun (in this case, the Sun would be too large for the exhibition space). Differently sized balls were placed in the room, from a tennis ball (Mercury) to a 180 cm ball (Jupiter), which also served as an interesting tactile aid in the accompanying educational programmes (the visitors put the balls in their place according to their size).

Due to the particularities of the small Solar System bodies, three cases of original meteorites that fell on the territory of Slovenia were made of ceramic mass. Two of the three had the same weight as the original, with lead being added to their interior; it was technically impossible to do that with the third one, which nevertheless had an interesting typical shape and a smooth surface. Meteorites are usually heavier than rocks on the Earth's surface, which can only be perceived by

touching the casts. Cast models of the surfaces of Mercury and Mars were also made of ceramic mass to enable the blind to admire the surfaces riddled with meteorite impact craters, as seen in the photos of the Moon and some other planets. The models of the selected photo motifs were hand-made using modelling clay, which then served as a basis for casting. The museum decided to display all the details, which may have contained too much information but were nevertheless highly praised by the users. The models included a brief description of the motif written in large print and in Braille. However, it would be great for individual perception if the models also included an audio description. Both surface models and meteorite casts were painted realistically; colour durability was protected with lacquer, which also prevented the visitors from staining their hands when touching (ibid. 2014).

The exhibition was equipped with signs in Braille on transparent foil. The foil containing information about the planet was attached over the text and the image of every planet on the base. Feedback from the users indicated that the foil should contain as little text in Braille as possible. Reading from the foil is slightly more difficult, as the fingers may start to sweat and the poor visibility of the transparent foil placed over the large print and photos may distract visually impaired visitors. The museum also made a tactile plan of the exhibition space. The accompanying legend should not be too large and should contain as little individual content items as possible. It should include all aids available to the blind and visually impaired visitors.

**The National Gallery** added a **tactile adaptation** of Luiza Pesjak's portrait, painted by Mihael Stroj around 1855, to its permanent collection. The curators narrowed down the selection of paintings to two portraits and chose a single half-length portrait. The painting of Luiza Pesjak was adapted because it is known as a pearl of great price and is one of gallery's most visible works of art. As the blind and visually impaired need more time and concentration to observe a work of art, the most prominent works should be adapted first. In principle, any image can be adapted to the blind and visually impaired, but there

is always a question of to what extent they can imagine the adaptation. More tactile images in schools and galleries could facilitate the identification of adapted two-dimensional artworks in museums and galleries to the blind and visually impaired. Luiza Pesjak is in a sitting position and faces the spectator, which posed many problems. The adapted image is more recognisable to the blind and visually impaired if the portrayed person is in a frontal position and fully seen, with his/her arms and legs away from the body.<sup>20</sup> When adapting works of art, it is not possible to consider all the tips for easier identification, since authenticity is of utmost importance. Taking into account the composition and technical aspects of the painting contributes to a clearer tactile adaptation, as the lines and textures do not intertwine. Blind individuals were also involved in the creation of the tactile image. They tested the first version of the tactile image and expressed constructive opinions, thus contributing to the final result. Since tactile paintings in such a technique are rare in Slovenia, the users found it difficult to compare their experience with other tactile images.<sup>21</sup>

The tactile adaptation of the painting, which is smaller than the original and easier to handle with both hands,<sup>22</sup> was put on a desk in front of the original painting and thus became part of the permanent collection. The desk with the tactile image is also accessible to visitors in wheelchairs, while its inclination enables a better position of the arms. Tjaša Krivec, creator of the tactile image, used an innovative approach of UV inkjet printing, creating six (recommended number of different tactile elements is five to seven) different tactile textures representing the key elements of Luiza Pesjak's portrait. The tactile

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20 This was stated by the educator of the blind Aksinija Kermauner at the training lectures. See also: *The Typhlo & Tactus Guide to Children's Books ... with Tactile Illustrations* (Claudet et al. 2008).

21 Tjaša Krivec made a tactile depiction of Elisabeth of Austria's portrait using the technique of UV inkjet printing. The production process is described in detail in her research project: *Taktilna upodobitev portreta Elizabete Bavarske s tehniko UV kapljičnega tiska*, 2012, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Engineering, University of Ljubljana. She received the Prešeren Award for her project.

22 Roman Brvar's book recommends adaptations in the size of 50 x 30 cm, which is the approximate size that can be handled with both hands (see Brvar 2010). Brvar's guidelines were also applied by Tjaša Krivec – the size of her tactile adaptation of Luiza Pesjak is 48 x 55 cm.

image is accompanied with two legends of six textures and of three samples of the textile visible in the original (silk, plush, fur); a necklace with a lorgnette is attached to the desk, a replica of the one painted in the original. Visually impaired visitors can also use the lorgnette as a magnifying glass. A technical description of the tactile image is available in Braille, large print, English and audio format. Moreover, the portrait of Luiza Pesjak has an interesting story, which is certainly important for more vivid guided tours. It should be pointed out that this work of art also attracts visitors without visual impairment, who are thus introduced to the signs in Braille and to the needs of the blind and visually impaired.

Tjaša Krivec, postgraduate student, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Engineering, University of Ljubljana

### Making Tactile Adaptations

Since 2009, the number of projects dealing with the issue of information inaccessibility to vulnerable groups has increased. This largely results from the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" project. A few years ago, however, the situation was completely different. In 1993, the Celje Regional Museum hosted the "Please Touch the Objects" exhibition organised by curator Rolanda Fugger Germadnik. A good ten years passed until other Slovene museums showed their sensitivity for vulnerable groups. Through the development of printing techniques and other technology, it became much easier to make tactile adaptations. Working in the area of adaptation to blind and visually impaired people, I specialise in adaptations of two-dimensional objects, including graphics, illustrations, paintings, photographs and, in particular, portraits. However, as the blind people live in a three-dimensional world, they find such adaptations strange. Moreover, tactile images are, mainly due to slightly higher financial costs,

quite uncommon and the blind are not familiar with them. When making tactile adaptations, I use a technique that allows me to create high and quality sharp lines. I can thus design extremely precise and varied textures, which are very different to the touch and vital for the maximum tactile quality of the adapted image. Since adaptations are always truncated and cannot display all the details, curators represent an important part of the team. They are the only ones that can help us preserve the "real details". A description next to the image, on the other hand, helps the image come to life in its colours and original story.

I joined the "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups" project at the end of 2014. Participation allowed me to continue with tactile adaptations I started making in 2012 at the Celje Regional Museum within their culture and art history collection. During the project, I designed and made a tactile adaptation of Luiza Pesjak's portrait for the National Gallery in Ljubljana and a tactile puzzle with a cradle motif for the Slovene Ethnographic Museum in Ljubljana.



Presentation of the tactile adjustment of Luiza Pesjak's portrait by Mihael Stroj in the National Gallery, Merry Day of Culture, 3 December 2014. (Photo: Bojan Salaj / NG)



This tactile model of the Baroque stage with rotating scenery was made by Sandra Jenko within the “Touch Theatre” programme at the Slovenian Theatre Institute.  
(Photo: Melanie Likar)

The **Slovene Theatre Institute** launched the “Touch Theatre” programme<sup>23</sup> based on a number of **tactile models and images**. The used aids represented and illustrated particular periods of theatre history. The participants thus learned about the development of theatre in Slovenia, especially about theatre space. In addition to the tactile elements, audio clips and fragrances contribute to a multi-sensory experience of a guided tour as well as encourage associations and interpretations. It turned out that stage models, theatre models and floor plans facilitated understanding and improved blind participants’ spatial perception.

A **model** of the exhibited “Škofja Loka Passion Play” painting, painted by Boris Kobe in 1967, was added to the “Imitation of the Theatre: From the Jesuits to Cankar” permanent exhibition.<sup>24</sup> The tactile model of

23 The programme was prepared and implemented by Sandra Jenko. Metka Pavšič, Aksinja Kermauner and Januz Nishori helped prepare the guided tours and tactile aids, as well as Marija Repe Kocman, Jera Svetek and Saša Ogrizek from the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana.

24 The creator is Barbara Bertalanič Domiter, who designed the model as part of her graduate studies of typhlo-pedagogy under the mentorship of Aksinja Kermauner.



The model followed the example of the exhibited “The Škofja Loka Passion Play” painting by Boris Kobe and enabled the participants of the “Experiencing the Škofja Loka Passion Play” workshop to get an insight into the spatial course of the procession and the enormous number of performers. (Photo: Melanie Likar)

120 × 150 cm is not only a transmission of the visual message of the painting to a three-dimensional form but represents the heritage of the Škofja Loka Passion Play, which originates from the 18th century and is still performed every sixth year, including 2015. The main purpose of the model is that users gain an insight into the spatial course of the procession and the enormous number of performers. When presenting space and placement, the three-dimensional models have a much more powerful message than tactile images. The following rules must be observed: the selected materials should be safe, hard and durable enough to touch as well as identical or as similar as possible to the original materials. Due to the emphasis on the main characteristics of the facility presented, it should be decided which details are dispensable or even disturbing and can thus be left out. Particular attention should be paid to correct and realistic proportions. Since most of the models are miniature versions, it is recommended that an element is added to compare the size and proportions. As for the colours, they can be the same as in the template, but an increased colour contrast and glare-free materials can facilitate visual perception for the blind and visually impaired.

The presentation of the model at the Slovene Theatre Institute was accompanied by an exhibition of the costumes used in the staging of the Škofja Loka Passion Play and the “[Experiencing Škofja Loka Passion Play](#)” workshop,<sup>25</sup> which brought the history, importance and appearance of the procession closer to the participants. During the 2015 staging of the Škofja Loka Passion Play, the tactile model was exhibited in the Small Hall of the Sokolski Dom Culture Centre in Škofja Loka, which also hosted the workshop. According to the participants, the tactile model and workshop largely contributed to a better understanding and visualisation of the passion and made it easier for the audience to follow the procession. The tactile model of the Škofja Loka Passion Play also showed how the museums, special educators and organisations of the disabled can improve the accessibility of the performance in cooperation with the organisers of this unique cultural event as well as enable visually impaired visitors to experience living heritage in full.



The tactile cradle puzzle, kept by the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, comes to visit as part of the “[Accessibility Stone Comes to Visit](#)” programme. (Photo: Eva Rožanc)

25 The programme was prepared and implemented by Sandra Jenko. The workshop, temporary exhibition and tactile aids were prepared by Aksinja Kermauner, Barbara Bertalanč Domiter, Mateja Lunar Jemec, Mihael Čepeljnik, Dušan Nelec and Jera Svetek from the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana and by Kitka Koprivnikar, Milan Golob and Matej Mohorič Peternelj from the Passion Play Office.

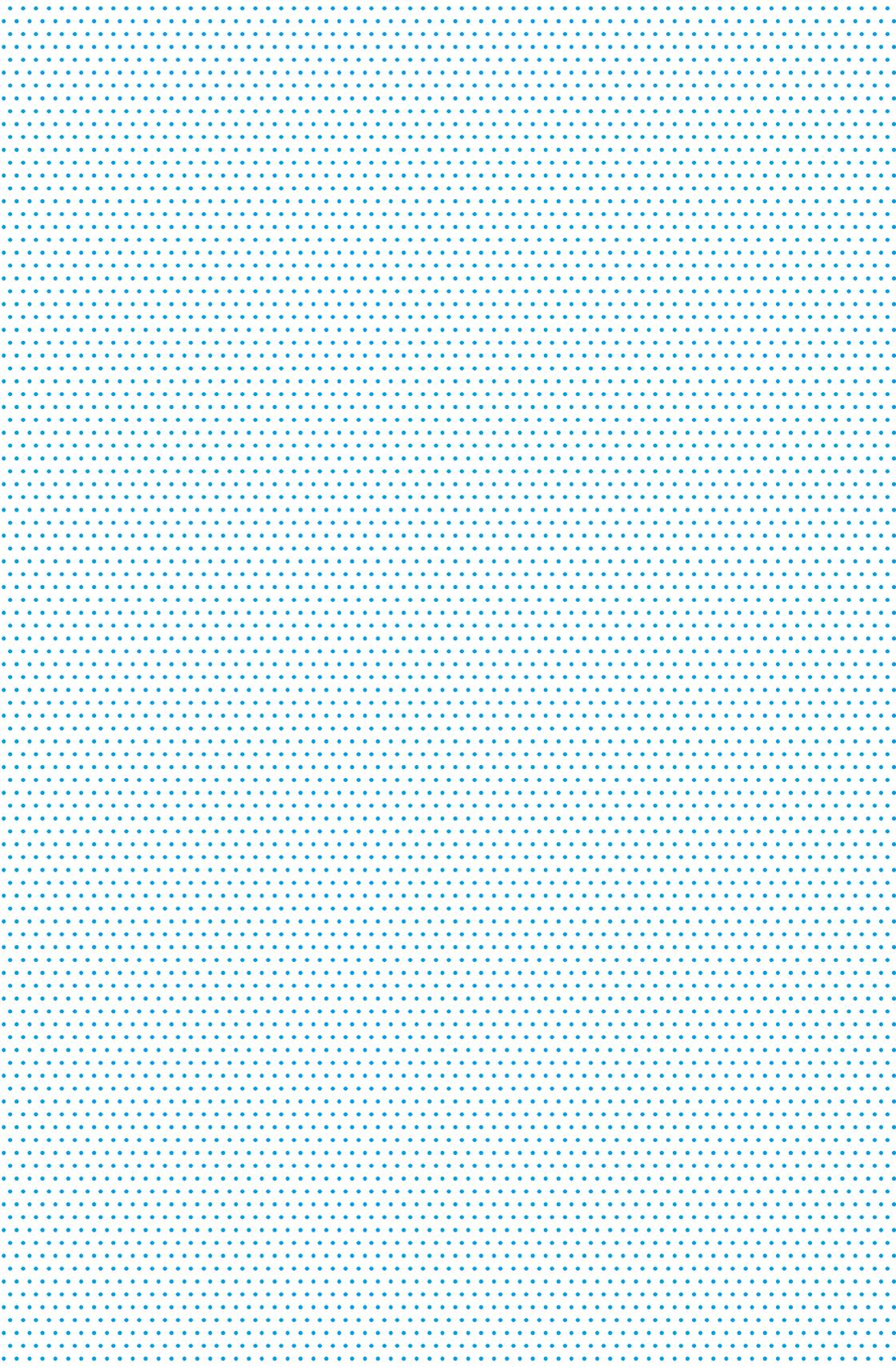
The experience of the use of tactile images, replicas and models as part of permanent exhibitions showed that touching is not self-evident. The visitors hesitate due to the museum rules that usually prohibit touching. To avoid dilemmas about which objects can be touched, it is necessary to establish a clear and uniform labelling system on the principle of "touching allowed".

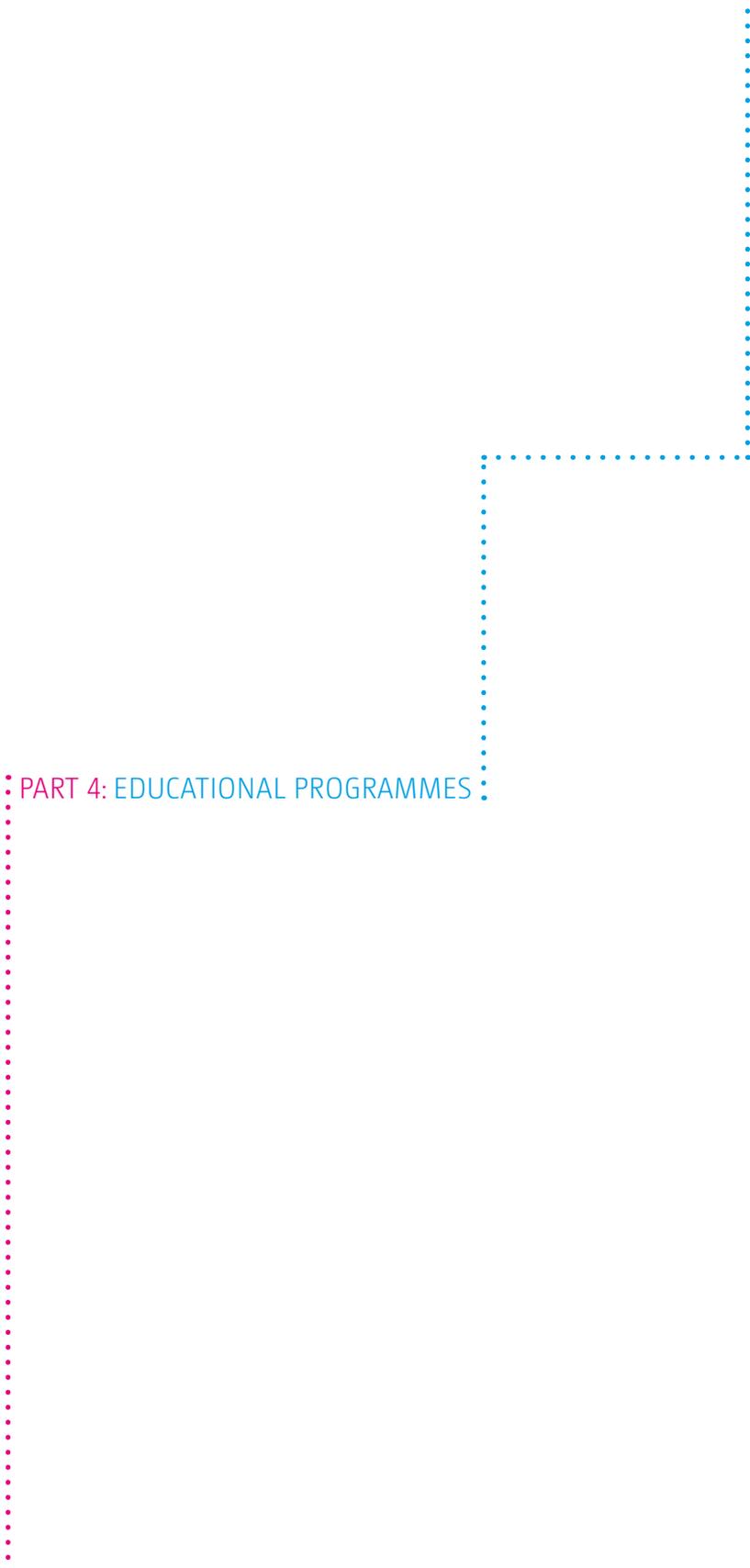
Several museums involved in the project participated in a **visiting educational programme entitled "The Accessibility Stone Comes to Visit"**.<sup>26</sup> The programme includes **copies of museum objects and non-inventory objects**, kept in the museum as didactical tools, as well as a tactile puzzle of a cradle of which the original is kept at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. The visiting educational programme on cultural heritage educates those children who are not able to visit the museum for various reasons.<sup>27</sup> The programme, accompanied by music and play, is based on a folk tale entitled *The Grateful Bear*, which originates from the Koroška Region. Tactile aids brought by the "Accessibility Stone" mascot help the children to learn about cultural heritage from different museums. They thus get to know the history and utility of the objects as well as solve the **tactile cradle puzzle**. The latter is adjusted to the blind and visually impaired – the ornaments are depicted in relief and the colours are accentuated with a stronger contrast. At the end of the workshop, the participants make a cardboard model of the cradle and then decorate and keep it. The programme is also suitable for visually impaired children and children with learning disabilities and/or disorders (including children with several disabilities).

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26 Programme concept: Barbara Kotnik; fairy tale interpretation: Katarina Nahtigal; music: Andrej Tomazin; assistance in the implementation: Katarina Fuchs, Eva Rožanc; creator of the tactile puzzle: Tjaša Krivec; creator of the cardboard cradle model: Tanja Milharčič. First, the pilot version of the programme was carried out at the Eye Clinic in Ljubljana and then the elaborated programme with the tactile cradle was conducted at the Gustav Šilih Primary School in Maribor, Maribor Paediatric Clinic, Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana, Cene Štupar Public Education Centre (twice during the Lifelong Learning Week and Intergenerational Learning Days) and at the Museum Summer Night at the SEM (twice).

27 Due to inadequate access or remoteness of the museum, illness and other reasons.



A decorative graphic consisting of dotted lines. A vertical line of red dots runs down the left side of the page. A horizontal line of blue dots runs across the middle of the page, starting from the red line and extending to the right. From the right end of this horizontal line, a vertical line of blue dots runs up to the top of the page.

· PART 4: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES ·

Tina Palaić and Barbara Kotnik

## MULTI-SENSORY GUIDED TOURS

Modern museums contribute to the increased accessibility of the museum content through interpretation. Their exhibitions and educational programmes reveal the meaning of museum objects and collections. When selecting numerous, multiple meanings, the museum staff must consider visitors' needs and preferences (Bračun Sova and Vodeb 2011: 7). Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone see the museum experience as a multifaceted intellectual, aesthetic, sensory and social journey. Neuroscience teaches us that we get to know our environment using all senses. Every museum experience is thus multi-sensory, but it depends on the museum staff whether the exhibitions and programmes are considered and conceived in a way that takes this fact into account or the multi-sensory effect is only coincidental (Levent and Pascual-Leone 2014: xiii, xviii–xix). By encouraging the use of more senses, we can enable the visitors to experience the unwordable, hard to describe elements as well as to evoke memories and create associative links. Multi-sensory guided tours attract many visitors and are particularly useful for the blind and visually impaired, people with dementia and people with autism.

Within the project, this kind of guided tours was named "multi-sensory guided tours". Experience shows that their preparation depends on the type of collection, pursued objectives, characteristics and the needs of the target group. A copy of a museum object, illustration or any other sensory stimulation must include relevant educational information and provide additional, in-depth content. Multi-sensory guided tours demonstrated that the visitors still see the museums as traditional institutions where touching is forbidden and where the exhibits can only be observed. By including different senses, we enabled the visitors to participate in the narration and creation of the museum story more actively.

Marija Repe Kocman, Nina Schmidt, Jera Svetek and Nastja Strnad,  
Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana

### View of the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana on the Adaptation of Cultural Heritage to the Visually Impaired

After the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act was adopted in 2010, some museums and galleries stepped up their fight against discrimination in access to cultural heritage for different vulnerable groups. As the content display is mostly visual, adaptation to the blind and visually impaired requires a lot of special knowledge, creativity, financial assets and unique methods.

We are very pleased that some museums and galleries have already established contact with the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana, which provides professional, educational and advisory information about blind and visually impaired users. We ran several training courses for curators-educators, participated in customising and producing materials, tested the customised materials with the blind and visually impaired people, helped to remedy the deficiencies and regularly visited cultural institutions.

Museums adapted their exhibitions in different ways – with picture descriptions, casts, copies, tactile images, games and different materials, customised spaces, access to exhibitions and the possibility to touch some of the exhibits. We noted that the museums and galleries that organised their exhibitions in such a way that the visitors could activate all their senses were most successful. Multi-sensory guided tours are nowadays a trend, both from an educational and marketing point of view; they thus do not represent adaptation to vulnerable groups but to all visitors. If we do not advertise

exhibitions as tailored to individual vulnerable groups (e.g. to the blind and visually impaired people), we are one step closer to a true inclusion of special needs in ordinary life, since the exhibitions are thus basically intended for all individuals, irrespective of his or her deficiencies. The term “multi-sensory guided tours” comprises the accompanying programmes that include all senses: touch (not only tactile images), smell, sight, hearing and taste. It sometimes turned out that “multi-sensory guided tours” were in fact adapted to only one vulnerable group, i.e. they did not include all senses. Multi-sensory guided tours should not be a synonym for guided tours tailored to the people with disabilities.

Curators-educators learned about blindness and visual impairment and thus gained a better understanding of the field. Nevertheless, we would want all museum and external staff involved in organising and staging exhibitions to take these training courses in order to understand the urgency of certain adaptations, as we often noticed that museums were not adequately adapted to the visually impaired. We should pay special attention to them due to the ageing population and consequent increase in the number of the visually impaired people. Improvements could also be made in the adjustment of access to cultural institutions, which requires cooperation with the local community. Since we want the blind and visually impaired people to explore the exhibition space independently, the adaptations should develop in this direction.

A good knowledge of blindness and visual impairment, cooperation and sharing of good practice between institutions and users and technology development are proofs that we are close to an optimal inclusion of the blind and visually impaired people in society.

The [National Museum of Slovenia](#) complemented the “Mummy and the Crocodile: Slovenes Discovering the Lands along the Nile” temporary exhibition with a [multi-sensory guided tour](#) entitled the



The guides of the “Afterlife of Ancient Egyptians” multi-sensory tour focused on the mummy exhibit. (Photo: Tina Palaić)

**“Afterlife of Ancient Egyptians”.**<sup>28</sup> The guides dedicated the content to the mummy, since this exhibit attracted the most attention; the selected part of the exhibition with the multiple copies of museum objects also had the most potential for sense stimulation. The guides assessed the accessibility of the exhibition space, described it to the participants and warned them about any obstacles. They thus helped all the participants, not only the blind and visually impaired, to orient themselves in space and to feel better. Moreover, they often verified the content and prepared technical descriptions of the used copies before the tour.

The participants learned about ancient Egyptians’ belief in the afterlife through the objects brought or sent to Slovenia by diplomats Anton Lavrin and Jožef Švegelj in the 19th century. In the first exhibition space, the description of the historical and geographical context was accompanied by the background sound of river flow waves. The guides also presented the Nile River and its importance for the development of civilisation. They explained the meaning and techniques of embalming as well as pointed out the mummy studies that provided much information about the lifestyle of the ancient Egyptians.

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<sup>28</sup> Guided tours were prepared and implemented by Antun Smerdel, blind student, and Tina Palaić.

By touching and tasting, the participants learned about their diet – they touched wheat grains and ears as well as barley and lentil grains and tasted figs and dates. When staging the exhibition, the creator of the programme had the opportunity to smell an approx. 2,500-year-old mummified body. She found herbal cream with a similar scent and offered it to the visitors. Many of them had thought that the embalmed body had an unpleasant smell and this experience changed their minds. The participants got to know the eternal home of the ancient Egyptians using the copies of granite and wooden sarcophaguses. The latter had the form of a human body. They therefore learned about the changing positions of embalmed bodies and illustrated them using their own bodies. The copies of amulets and other objects put on mummies' bandages and in the graves of the dead also helped them get to know the embalming ritual and beliefs in the afterlife. The function of these objects was to assist the deceased on their way to the eternal land.

The guided tours showed that the groups of blind and visually impaired visitors should be limited in number. Each visitor should be given enough time to interact with the copies of museum objects and other sense stimulations, which may take too long if the group is large. The number of selected stimulations should also be adjusted to the visitors' needs.

The [National Gallery](#) also prepared multi-sensory guided tours.<sup>29</sup> Its basis was a model of multi-sensory educational programmes (e.g. Gal's Chest) that are part of regular guided tours for preschool children and school children of the first three grades. The museum adapted its regular programmes to different groups of children (children with learning disabilities and/or disabilities, children with autism, children with several disabilities) and added six different inclusive programmes. The "[Headgears – Caps, Hats & Straw Hats](#)" programme (for children) was carried out within a temporary exhibition, while "[Families in the Paintings](#)" (for children and adults), "[I Give You Luck](#)" (for children), "[Pretty as a Picture](#)" (for children and adults)

29 They were prepared by Barbara Kotnik under the mentorship of Kristina Preininger.



The multi-sensory guided tour of the “Families in Paintings” exhibition in the National Gallery connected the contents of art history, ethnology and cultural anthropology through selected works of art and tactile aids. Visitors learned about different family ties and development over time. The activity was prepared and executed by Barbara Kotnik. (Photo: Janko Dermastija / NG)

and “Who’s Sitting around the Hearth?” (for children and adults) are conducted within the permanent exhibition of the National Gallery.

The guided tours included up to six works of art, since the typhlo-pedagogue Aksinja Kermauner suggested that they should not contain too much information (she recommended five to seven artworks) and that they should not last longer than 60 minutes. In addition to the exhibited works of art, the museum also used different objects<sup>30</sup> to present and interpret a certain artwork. The objects are generally the same in both children’s and adult educational programmes, while the interpretations given are different. What all the programmes have in common is a journey through time with an emphasis on a story describing interesting facts about life in each of the periods and on a dialogue between the guide and the participants. To sum up, the National Gallery complemented the selected works of art with objects, storytelling, conversation and other elements sensitising the senses and stimulating cognitive processes. Individual objects sensitise the

30 The gallery owns the objects that visitors try to find in a painting or associate them with a certain work of art. Multi-sensory guided tours sometimes use modern or historical everyday objects. These objects bring the visitors closer to a work of art (or introduce them to it), offer them a context, additional explanation and different perception or engage other senses.

senses with their smell and sound and motivate individuals to find and get to know the selected works of art. The concepts and contents of art history were explained using the objects and the explanation was complemented with the topics of ethnology, anthropology and Slovene literature. The gallery also awakened visitors' interest in artworks with topical issues, making parallels between the present and the period illustrated by a work of art. Educational programmes ended with a creative workshop related to the programme topic.

Despite the differences in their content, the programmes are all based on the principle of inclusion and can be adapted to visitors' specific needs. Adhering to the principles of experiential education,<sup>31</sup> the guided tours are implemented by means of actualisation – by connecting and evoking events, customs, family life; interdisciplinarity – by connecting the findings of different disciplines using practical examples (including parts of the curriculum, e.g. art, literature, ethnology); and accessibility (physical and intellectual).

The tactile portrait of Luiza Pesjak is also included in all programmes. The implementation of inclusive programmes containing tactile elements never ceases to prove that the visitors enjoy tactile contents and object touching, although they are at first a little bit reserved, not being familiar with this option in museums. According to our experience, multi-sensory guided tours should be part of the regular museum and gallery programme for all visitors. The quality preparation and implementation of multi-sensory guided tours also require constant training of all the museum and gallery staff, in particular the training of curators-educators.

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31 "The method of experiential education is increasingly used in the institutional and non-institutional forms of assistance to children and adolescents with problems of social integration. It can be seen in the planned educational activities and reflected experiences and knowledge. The criteria to ensure the quality of project implementation are: personal characteristics of the experiential educator (ability to distance themselves, completeness of participation, identification with the concept of experiential education, environmental awareness), mastery of experiential education knowledge, educational and psychological qualities (empathy, conversation abilities, developed sense for signals related to group dynamics and individual processes, flexibility, knowledge of the specificities of the target groups) ..." (Krajčan 1999: 135).

Andrej Tomazin

## PRESENTATION OF THE MODEL OF GUIDED MUSICAL TOURS AS AN EXAMPLE OF AN INCLUSIVE PROGRAMME AT THE SLOVENE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM



The inclusion of intangible heritage and live interpretation in guided musical tours, prepared for the “Doors: Spatial and Symbolic Passageways of Life” exhibition in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. The programme was prepared by Andrej Tomazin and participating students. (Photo: Nastja Dejak)

The Slovene Ethnographic Museum continued to develop the model of guided musical tours<sup>32</sup> throughout the entire project. The resulting series of guided tours follows the traditions of annual cycle and can thus easily become a regular museum programme accompanying the permanent exhibition. The main objectives of the project were to ensure access to the museum content to blind and visually impaired visitors and to include intangible heritage and live interpretation (by Timothy Ambrose and Crispin Paine in Bračun Sova and Vodeb 2011: 16) in the tours of museum exhibitions.

32 Guided musical tours were prepared by Andrej Tomazin under the mentorship of Sonja Kogej Rus and in cooperation with the students included in the “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” project who participated in a musical performance.

Andrew Robertshaw defines live interpretation as a presentation given by people putting the objects, events or locations in context with the environment or, in our case, with past ways of life. Good implementation of such interpretation should be based on history and should educate. Robertshaw highlights the inclusion of music and craft demonstrations at Skansen, a Scandinavian folklore museum in Stockholm, over one hundred years ago as the first example of live interpretation (Robertshaw 2006: 42). The concept is thus not new, not even in Slovenia. Guided musical tours are therefore mainly an attempt at including familiar techniques in accessibility and the intangible heritage of folk singing in museum exhibitions. Most guided tours complemented the "Doors. Spatial and Symbolic Passageways of Life" temporary exhibition opened at the museum almost simultaneously with the beginning of the project.

Rajka Bračun Sova, self-employed educator and curator

### Museum Accessibility – What's Next?

When ensuring museum accessibility, special attention should be paid to its physical and content aspects. Although Vlasta Vodeb from the Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia has extensively written on infrastructure, there are still some museum buildings and floors that are partly or completely inaccessible to visitors in wheelchairs (e.g. Maribor Art Gallery) and have dimly lit exhibition spaces, especially in art museums where signs and even exhibits are often hardly visible. In this short article, I will focus on the second, content aspect of accessibility, since increasing attention is paid to interpretative activities, but they do not always have a positive effect on visitors. For instance, curators report that people with good eyesight leave multi-sensory guided tours early, as they do not see the point in them.

Interpretation is one of the most important strategies to ensure accessibility of cultural and natural heritage to all visitors, including those with special needs. For example, Freeman Tilden, founder of the interpretation concept regarding national parks in the late fifties, took the example of a twelve-year old child and found that interpretation for children should not be a simplified form of interpretation for adults but should be created differently, preferably as a special programme. Why as a special programme? Because interpretation pursues certain objectives. Just as children in the 5th and 9th grades have different curricula, different museum programmes – at the content, methodical and organisational levels – are essential for museum visitors (e.g. the blind and visually impaired).

Ten years ago, Cheryl Meszaros, a Canadian theoretician and lecturer in interpretation in art museums, was quite critical of museums that do not take interpretation seriously enough and shift the responsibility for understanding entirely onto the visitors in the light of the constructivist paradigm. In her opinion, the intellectual accessibility of museum collections should be ensured by museum staff that is highly qualified for conversations about a work of art and other forms of interpretation, instead of "infantilising adult audiences with discursive contexts and educational strategies designed for children" (Meszaros 2006: 13). This should be considered when we conceive and carry out inclusive activities and when we choose methods and tools.

Interpretation certainly can be different, but it cannot be of any kind. It must be targeted and professional. This means that it has to be based on a museum object as a medium of meaning and content. Museum objects belong to history; in other words, they are subject to tradition. When in direct contact with the object, each visitor brings his/her personal experience to the perception and understanding of the object, but personal experience is independent of the object (it is not part of its history). Interpretation of the object

is subject to culture and history; its meaning can only be found in interaction with the environment – in language, tradition and pre-formed ideas.

Slovenia boasts a rich cultural and natural heritage – castles, mansions, churches, monasteries, museum collections, parks, public monuments. How well do we actually know it? And how do we explain it to visitors? In an “adapted”, impoverished way – referring to details and personal preferences? Or in a multifaceted, contextual, heterogeneous way – respecting all its complexity? I think the “Roman Stories from the Crossroads” exhibition in the National Museum of Slovenia is a fine example of an exhibition with good foundations. The exhibition is physically accessible and appropriately illuminated; it includes superb exhibits, interpreted in space. The museological processes of differentiation, narration and evaluation enabled the curators to put on an exhibition that helps the visitors to learn about and understand the period of Roman antiquity and creates a relationship with this part of cultural and natural heritage – without any misleading “didactic” accessories, such as (not really) delicious rooibos tea and fragrant essential oils.

The physical accessibility and tactile character of the exhibition allow the execution of inclusive guided tours. To illustrate the exhibited images and symbols, tactile images of the “incubus paw”, Christogram and a profile of Janus, a Roman god, were made using contour glass colours. The doors, passages and crossings presented at the exhibition are thematically linked to the tradition of carol singing, i.e. folk singing and going from door to door, through intangible heritage (see Kumer 1995: 7–9). The “Carol Singers at the Door” pilot programme was established in winter 2013, representing the first test of the set objective and the basis for the preparation of other programmes in the series. The preparation included studying celebration-related customs and traditions, from Christmas to Epiphany, selecting music scores

available in literature and making arrangements for the songs. The trio performing the polyphonic folk songs was accompanied with a guitar played by the author of this article; this was a small deviation from tradition but brought the performance closer to those who usually do not go to museums. During the guided tours, the music was not performed in only one place but under selected doors throughout the exhibition. The songs originating from different parts of Slovenia complemented the content of the guided tours.

The relatively open form of the museum programme allowed application in many different situations, while positive reactions of the visitors encouraged further development of the concept. In spring, the museum thus presented St George's Day and the "George is Knocking on the Door" programme; at the Museum Summer Night, it presented the Midsummer songs with the "Tonight We didn't Sleep Much" programme. St Martin's Day in autumn was celebrated with the "Songs about Vine, Wine and Toasts" programme; the visitors participated in music performances and wine tasting and were thus able to perceive the event through smell and taste. In winter 2015, the carolling guided tours were repeated, but with the "We Came to Your House" programme and with a new selection of carol songs.

One of the tasks of modern museums is the inclusion and participation of visitors, which was done through the "With Carol Singers across Serbia and Macedonia" programme. The Natemago Trio, which also includes a Serbian immigrant and a descendant of first generation Macedonian immigrants, presented the customs, traditions and music associated with Orthodox winter celebrations. Such cooperation helps the museum to form an active part of the local community, while the inclusion of the members of immigrant communities in the museum work contributes to a more inclusive cultural environment (see Simon 2010). The last programme in the series was entitled "Love: Between Nature and Culture" and was prepared within the "Between Nature and Culture" permanent exhibition. The replicas and illustrations of museum objects brought the exhibition in display cases closer to the

blind and visually impaired, while tactile elements contributed to the general accessibility of the museum and enabled the use of the model of guided musical tours. The themes of the guided tours were the questions of love, family and sex life in Slovene ethnologic heritage, as reflected in love presents, folk singing, customs and traditions during workdays and holidays.

The model of guided musical tours in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum is a flexible programme that increases the accessibility of museum content to the blind and visually impaired through music and sound and includes the cultures of immigrants and minorities. This addition to guided museum tours introduced new contents in a different, interesting way. Due to the consistency with annual series and celebrations, such a programme is topical, as proved by the visitors who attended the guided tours on several occasions.

Sandra Jenko

## CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN

Theatre education in museums and galleries provides many opportunities for a different interpretation of cultural heritage. Among the options offered by the combination of theatre and museum are, for example, guides in costumes or short scenes performed at the exhibition. Both represent an enrichment and added value to the exhibition and are aimed at a different understanding of museum content. Some examples of using theatre in the museum or gallery were presented by Lidija Tavčar in the National Gallery, where paintings came to life (see Tavčar 2001).

A step further is the theatre-museum symbiosis, in which the visitor is not only a viewer but can express his/her impressions, feelings, opinions and associations through activation, animation and theatre techniques. The participants of guided tours or workshops can imitate or create stories, transform into a prominent figure, travel through other periods of time, try out different customs and traditions, relive historical events or bring the exhibited objects back to life. The exhibitions thus become more interesting and accessible, while theatre performances stimulate visitors' imagination and desire for participation, arouse emotions, establish ties and improve their attention and museum experience.

The theatrical approach helps bring visual materials closer to the participants in an interesting and creative way. This was also the case in the "Clothes Make the Man" workshop at the Slovene Theatre Institute. The workshop focused on the development of theatrical costumes, on the process of making costumes as well as on their meaning and usage. The external appearance of stage actors can reveal the following characteristics of the role or the entire play: sex, age, profession, social status, character, personality, interpersonal relationships, ethnicity and time and place of the action.



Playing with theatre customs within the “Clothes Make the Man” programme at the Slovenian Theatre Institute. (Photo: Boštjan Jenko)

The basis for the workshop were costume sketches and photos that came alive during the theatrical performance. The participants thus learned about the historical development of theatrical costumes, about the profession of costume designer and about the meaning of costumes in the play. Then they turned clothes into costumes and created roles. The imaginative use of clothes and accessories helped them get acquainted with all the expressive possibilities of the costume. The costumes allowed the participants to change their external appearance. When they played different roles without speech and sound, they also transformed their interior. In order to deepen the expressive power of theatrical costumes, the participants created them in groups using different waste materials (newspapers, bags, scraps of fabric, ribbons, etc.). The process required group members to come up with an idea of what to express before making their costumes. The costumes were then presented with a short sketch, dance performance, mime, etc. so that other participants could understand who or what they represent. The objective of the workshop was thus achieved – the participants examined the visual material in detail, understood what stories and messages are hidden behind it and actively used and developed their imagination and creativity.

Willingness to participate is essential for the successful implementation of the “Clothes Make the Man” workshop. As it is focused on visual expression, the workshop is suitable for persons with hearing impairment, speech disorders and limited knowledge of Slovene and for persons with different language backgrounds. The deaf and hard of hearing from different European countries attended the pilot workshop at the Slovene Theatre Institute. The main common language was the theatre, i.e. communication via playing, watching and responding to the play. In addition to the new knowledge of history and meaning of the costumes and new impressions and experience, the participants also got some new ideas for their next theatre project.



Making theatre costumes within the “Clothes Make the Man” programme at the Slovenian Theatre Institute. (Photo: Boštjan Jenko)

Barbara Kotnik, Katarina Fuchs and Iva Pavlica

## USEFUL THINGS MADE FROM LOCAL HERBS



Making natural products under the supervision of Katarina Kovačič, a graduate student in biotechnology, in the series of workshops entitled “Useful Things Made from Local Herbs” in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum.  
(Photo: Katarina Nahtigal)

The Slovene Ethnographic Museum<sup>33</sup> prepared a series of four workshops entitled “Useful Things Made from Local Herbs”, connecting the “Between Nature and Culture” permanent exhibition at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and the old collection of minerals, rocks and ores at the Natural History Museum of Slovenia by making cosmetics from local herbs. Museum workshops can increase inclusion through the promotion of self-esteem by acquiring new useful knowledge and skills as well as arouse the feeling of belonging by learning about the context and history of this knowledge and skills.

33 The workshops were conceived by Barbara Kotnik, Katarina Fuchs and Iva Pavlica in cooperation with Katarina Kovačič.

Museums are not only a creative and inspiring environment but also a safe, encouraging and non-stigmatising environment that gives more development opportunities than other life circumstances (Dodd and Sandell 2001: 26–27).

The series of workshops was aimed at connecting natural and cultural heritage. The creators of the programme adhered to the principle that the Slovene Ethnographic Museum does not want to be only an informative institution, but it wants to create an atmosphere in which visitors develop a positive attitude to heritage, become sensitive to it and try to understand it (Kogej Rus 2003: 233).

Many local and open-air museums in Slovenia offer similar workshops in which cosmetics are made from medicinal herbs. The Slovene Ethnographic Museum houses a rich ethnological collection of food gathering, beekeeping, olive growing and herbalism heritage; one part is on display at the “Between Nature and Culture” permanent exhibition. At the workshops, the creators linked the material heritage kept by the museum to the intangible heritage of the knowledge and processing of herbs (herbalism tradition) and enriched it with the knowledge of modern cosmetic procedures.

Each individual workshop was composed of two parts. In the first part, the participants obtained information about the past and contemporary use of individual ingredients in Slovenia and around the world. They got to know the museum objects, such as a painted beehive panel and a rake for blueberry picking, and clay minerals from the collection of the Natural History Museum of Slovenia. The workshop also included tactile elements and smells of different herbs and was thus suitable for the visually impaired.<sup>34</sup>

The participants had to be present at all four workshops in the series. Consequently, they focused on the different aspects of herb

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34 Among the participants were members of the target vulnerable groups: sensory impaired persons, first-job seekers, unemployed elderly women (55+) and immigrants.

production, got a better insight into the content and developed friendly relationships within the group. Due to the limited space of the educational room at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and to work dynamics, the number of participants was limited to 18 despite higher demand.

The workshops were carried out by Katarina Kovačič, a graduate student in biotechnology, assisted by her mentors. Her expertise in herbalism and exceptional sense of group guiding enabled her to execute the practical part, supported by excellent preparation and handouts for the participants. Before preparing the programme and carrying out the workshops, she broadened her knowledge by visiting the permanent exhibition and studying the relevant literature. At the workshops, she shared much useful information about the cultivation, drying, storage and usage of herbs, encouraging the participants to find connections between what was said and the permanent exhibition of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. Workshop participants exchanged experience and improved their knowledge of herbs. They first watched the production process, made their own product and took it home. They learned how to make natural soaps, natural syrup, clay facemasks, body ointments and lip balms.



The participants in the “Useful Things Made from Local Herbs” workshops at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum included members of target groups. (Photo: Iva Pavlica)

Urša Valič, Jana Kostelec and Tina Palač

## ACCESSIBILITY OF PHOTOGRAPHS AND OTHER VISUAL MATERIALS

Photographs and other visual materials can be understood as documents of a certain time, but not in terms of mere imitation of reality and ideological neutrality (see Sontag 2001). The photographer's eye always chooses a motif and an angle, manipulating the image by controlling the flow of light. Last but not least is the spectator (the observer of the photograph), who watches the photograph with his/her knowledge. This action is called photograph reading. In general, photograph and other visual material reading must be learned. As it is a cognitive and emotive act, it does not require good eyesight. Roland Barthes, a well-known photography theoretician, wrote down a conversation between Janouch and Kafka in his book entitled *Camera Lucida* (1980/1992). The former claimed that eyesight is a necessary condition for an image and Kafka responded: "We photograph things so that we can dispel them from our minds. My stories are a way to close the eyes" (Barthes 1992: 51).

Roland Barthes explained the interest in photography with two terms: *studium* and *punctum*. *Studium* is what attracts the spectator to watch and "study" a photograph. These are the moral and cultural elements we acquire during socialisation and which we identify ourselves with within a photograph as cultural and social beings. According to Barthes, *punctum* *distracts and interferes with this studium* in a photograph. *Punctum* goes beyond the mere description of an image in the photograph, beyond the socio-cultural reading of the photograph; it belongs to the field of affective consciousness and often acts metonymically (a figure that describes something else). Such an understanding of photographs – i.e. a shift from what is seen in the photograph to the field of interpretation and broader understanding of the role of visual material in our everyday life – helps us develop the content that enables access to photographs.

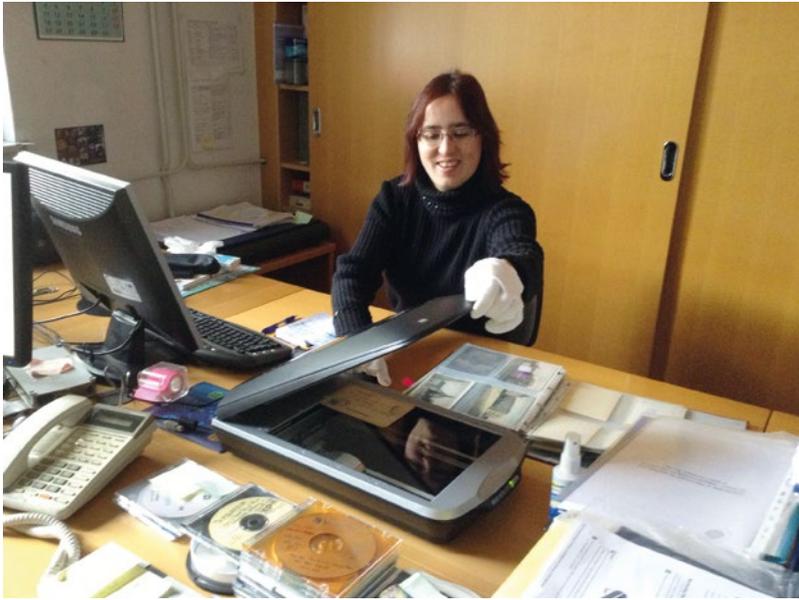
Today, many museums do not only keep objects but also photographs that illustrate ways of life from the mid-19th century. It is nowadays hard to imagine a museum exhibition without photographs. In modern times, people are surrounded by images; modern society could therefore be called the ocularcentric society, putting sight at the centre of its epistemological understanding. This can be a barrier to obtaining information for many people who partly or completely lost their sight for different reasons (blind people, visually impaired people or the elder people). Nevertheless, museums should not neglect the wonderful part of information and pleasure brought by the photographs – the latter can be presented in different ways. One of them is certainly verbal description in the form of a technical and/or audio description. We begin with a description of what is seen in a photograph. It is best to choose one direction of the description (top to bottom or left to right) and use it in all the descriptions. We suggest that the photograph is divided into three parts, as the rule of thirds is (in addition to the golden ratio) frequently used in photography (for the division of visual elements to get a more effective composition of the photograph). The description does not have to cover everything we see in the photograph but only the information needed to read it. The context of the photograph should not be omitted – understanding the period, photographer's biography and other information makes the image more vivid. This is much easier in case of documentary photographs than in case of artistic photographs. It is important for the plasticity of the description that the museum exhibits the objects (or tactile illustrations) similar to those in the photograph and allows the visitors to touch them (perhaps with thin latex gloves). The use of sound and smell is also welcome in order to show the atmosphere. Due to the density and overlapping of visual elements in the photograph, tactile images (in the sense of relief printing) are usually useless for blind persons with no spatial and proportional perception. It is essential that the description tries to go beyond the information level of the photograph and encourages the photograph readers to reflect on the information given by the photograph.



The "9 May 1945" exhibition of 3D photographs was prepared by the National Museum of Contemporary History on the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. (Photo: Sašo Kovačič / NMCH)

In this way, the **National Museum of Contemporary History** presented **photographs** at the exhibition entitled "9 May 1945". The exhibition was distinctively visual; eight photographs from the museum photographic library were presented in the anaglyph technique, which enables seeing the photographs as 3D images by looking through red-blue glasses. Thanks to the documentary and narrative note of the photographs and to the concept of the entire exhibition, it was possible to transmit information on the period and to recreate the moment of the end of the war, encouraging a reflection of modern man surrounded by the images of war. Such an exhibition that transfers the content of cultural heritage by engaging the contemporary spectator was well received among both the younger and older population. What is more, it was possible to present it to visually impaired people and to people with cognitive behavioural disorders in the multimedia way described above.

The **Technical Museum of Slovenia** prepared a similar **virtual presentation** of selected postcards from the museum documentation entitled "Technical Heritage on the Postcards in Technical Descriptions". The museum selected 12 out of 500 postcards, depicting rarely represented motifs from various fields of technique and labour.



The digitalisation of visual materials at the Technical Museum of Slovenia.  
(Photo 1: Neža Renko /  
Photo 2: Martina Orehovec / TMS)

The aim was to bring technical heritage closer to all visitors, including the blind and visually impaired, and to encourage them to visit the museum. The postcards were listed and digitised. In order to provide the visually impaired with better visibility, the museum balanced exposure and increased contrast on the graphic side of the postcards using a photo editing computer program. Technical descriptions were provided for each postcard,<sup>35</sup> converting a visual record into a verbal/textual one. This served as a basis for web presentation comprising an introductory text about the postcard collection and descriptions of individual postcards with four sections (basic information about the postcard, photograph of its graphic side, technical description of its graphic side, history of the depicted object of technical heritage or the procedure). The web layout and virtual exhibition were assessed by Tina Gostenčnik, a visually impaired student, and improved on the basis of her user opinion. Improvements included the addition of the "Accessibility" tab and the "For the blind and visually impaired" sub-tab to the museum website, transparent web presentation and a new icon giving access to the black-and-white textual version of the website, following the example of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. In the future, the Technical Museum of Slovenia wants to complement the project with audio descriptions, translations and contents for other vulnerable groups.

So far, we have dealt with photographs as end products aimed at their readers. Now let's take a look at the use of photographs in terms of taking photos. In cultural anthropology and humanities, there are numerous examples of "participatory action research" (see Wang 1999),<sup>36</sup> encouraging the participants to explore and raise awareness

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35 The Technical Museum commissioned technical descriptions at the Cooperate Creative Bureau Institute, which continues the work of a related European project (<http://www.sodelujem.com>). The method of preparing technical descriptions was developed by artist Katja Sudec and her colleagues. The museum commissioned the review of their website at the same bureau and prepared a virtual postcard exhibition based on its guidelines.

36 Participatory visual projects originated in the work of John Adair and Sol Worth, who taught a group of Navajo students how to use a film camera and how to edit videos in the 1960s. They wanted to find out how the members of other ethnic groups use the film camera and how they create meaning in everyday life through visual elements. More about the project can be found at: <http://www.penn.museum/sites/navajofilmthemselves/> (Navajo film themselves).

of their own situation through visual techniques (photographs, videos, fine art, etc.) and, consequently, to build up their strength to change the situation. Through photographs and photographic processes, we enable people to understand their own situation, express it, pass the message about their everyday life and indirectly control possible changes (ibid.).

The **National Museum of Slovenia** prepared a **photography workshop** for the blind and visually impaired youth entitled “Images of Emona 2015”, accompanying the “**Roman Stories from the Crossroads**” permanent exhibition. At six workshops, the participants learned about the heritage of the Roman Empire and about the photographic processes. The project wanted to highlight the heritage of the Roman Empire that is kept at the museum and can be found in public space as well as to explore the understanding of this heritage and the attitudes towards it that exist among the blind and visually impaired. The museum was interested in how the blind and visually impaired understand and connect museum objects with everyday life and how



The participants in the “Images of Emona 2015” photographic workshop at the National Museum of Slovenia made their own *camera obscuras* and took photos of copies of museum objects. (Photo: Tina Palač)

they experience heritage in space: do they find it important, does it represent an obstacle for them, do they recognise it as heritage, do they change their attitude if they know that it is heritage, etc. In the project, the blind and visually impaired youth, who are often excluded from the photographic production due to their limited sight, presented their view of the selected heritage through photographs. Photographing performed by the blind and visually impaired persons in public space was thus understood as an emancipatory act, establishing this visual activity as their own and thus contributing to overcoming stereotypes about the blind and visually impaired people and their skills. Responses of the passers-by showed that they were mostly surprised and astonished by the fact that the blind and visually impaired persons were taking photos.

» **Antun Smerdel, student, Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana**

I am a blind economics student. I participated in different project activities at several museums. I assessed and improved their websites, helped make replicas and tactile images for the blind and prepared and carried out guided tours for the blind and visually impaired together with Tina Palaić. I delivered a lecture on blindness, visual impairment and accessibility of museum content to the museum staff and participated in the photography workshop.

I found that the project employees were indeed interested in the issues of vulnerable groups and were not there just because of their job. All my colleagues surprised me with their enthusiasm and curiosity. Many complained about the Slovene red tape, which I also hate myself, as it only requires papers and not actions. Unfortunately, we often came to the conclusion that the blind and visually impaired do not attend the events tailored to them, even if they receive assistance in getting there. It is true that there should be more such projects, but the organisations of disabled people should also put more effort in activating their members. I can say that the project employees did much more for vulnerable groups in the field of culture than their organisations. «

The workshops were organised in cooperation with photography student Jure Grom and representative of the blind youth, Antun Smerdel, who assessed and directed the workshops as a participant. Grega Gutman, animator at the National Museum of Slovenia and archaeology student, also participated in the implementation of the first few workshops, presenting the heritage of the Roman Empire in Slovenia using the copies of museum objects and other sensory elements. This was followed by learning about photographic



Some of the photos of the copies of museum objects made by the participants using camera obscura were part of the “Images of Emona 2015” exhibition at the National Museum of Slovenia. (Photo: Jure Grom)

processes. The workshops were held in a small group; they were attended by three blind and three visually impaired students and their companion from the Institute for Blind and Visually Impaired Youth of Ljubljana. Each participant made his/her own *camera obscura*, the forerunner of the camera. The workshop executor, Jure Grom, first bored a hole in metal boxes and explained the production process and their tasks. He directed their work and gave them enough time to prepare all the elements of a *camera obscura* by themselves. Some of them had to correct certain elements or to re-make them. With their *camera obscura*, they took photos of the copies of antique museum objects in front of the National Museum of Slovenia. The participants developed photos by themselves in a darkroom prepared for the workshop. During the fifth workshop, they photographed traces of Roman times in Ljubljana using digital cameras and mobile phones. The sixth workshop was devoted to the selection of photographs and the conception of the exhibition, enabling the participants to get acquainted with the museum work. By exhibiting their photographs, they transformed the traces of Roman presence in Slovenia and created their own stories of interrelating the past and the present

Urša Valič, Sandra Jenko and Katarina Fuchs

## OVERCOMING COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Language is the basic means of communication. It is mostly written or spoken, but there are many other alternative forms of communication. Language as a means of communication is a medium enabling culture and cultural heritage to be passed on, developed and recreated. Language connects us with the community of speakers using a common language. Language learning and use are an important part of identification processes through which we are recognised – by others and by ourselves – as members of the community. It is therefore important that museums understand the socially cohesive role of different linguistic realities and practices and pass their messages in minority languages in order to become spaces of social dialogues. In Slovenia, the Constitution protects the Italian and Hungarian national minorities, while the linguistically and culturally heterogeneous Roma



The National Museum of Contemporary History qualified five students, members of the Italian national minority in Slovenia, to give a tour of the “Slovenes in the 20th Century” exhibition in Italian. (Photo: Urša Valič)

community has a special status. In the past – and even today – there were interesting German language islands in the area of Kočevje and the Škofja Loka Hills as well as a Serbian language island in the Bela Krajina Region and Croatian and Austrian ones in the border areas. We should also mention the diverse range of languages of the immigrants who settled in Slovenia temporarily or permanently. After all, we also cannot ignore the growing tourism industry, including its museum offer. In addition to the legally recognised national and ethnic minorities, we also have a wide spectrum of the population that cultivates and practices its language in an intimate and public space but does not enjoy special minority rights.

By translating the exhibitions, publications and other museum communication forms, museums can pass their message and share the knowledge of cultural heritage to people speaking other languages. The **Slovene Theatre Institute** prepared the “Languages of Theatre” programme, which will be described below. Within the programme, the museum organised **guided tours in German**, since the participants expressed a desire and need for a cultural offer in their mother tongue. The Theatre Institute found that communication in the mother tongue combined with elements engaging the visitor (e.g. guessing the meaning of mimes, creating an atmosphere using coloured lenses) lead to an interactivity that makes every guided tour vibrant and unique. The tour of the permanent exhibition also contained new contents, such as the history of German theatre in Ljubljana, enabling the German-speaking community to identify with and position itself in the theatrical history of Slovenia. After the guided tour, the participants received additional material – a glossary of explained theatre terms in Slovene and German.

The other approach allows the inclusion of the members of different linguistic communities in the educational museum work. The **National Museum of Contemporary History** qualified five members of the Italian national minority in Slovenia for giving **a tour** of the “Slovenes

in the 20th Century” exhibition **in Italian**.<sup>37</sup> The participants translated the Slovene text into Italian and learned to give guided tours. Some museums, especially those dealing with recent history, contain certain topics that do not only require language skills but also a subtle understanding of the past and culture of individual communities, as historical narratives can be problematic. The members of different national and ethnic communities are thus not only translators but may also take on a role of cultural mediators as translators of cultural contexts (Vrečer 2007: 17–18).

» **Anastasia Sorgo, student, Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana**

Between February and April 2015, Erika Valečič, Vita Valenti, Arianna Protic, Chiara Vianello and Anastasia Sorgo, students of different faculties at the University of Ljubljana and members of the Italian national minority in Slovenia, gave tours of the “Slovenes in the 20th Century” permanent exhibition at the National Museum of Contemporary History in Italian.

Long and exhausting but fun preparations in the winter and spring months paid off immensely in the end. At the end of April, we accompanied almost 400 Italians from the Cremona Municipality through the museum halls together with our mentor Nataša Robežnik and received a warm applause for an excellent tour as well as great praise for our professionalism and friendliness. Under the watchful eye of our mentor, who trusted us and gave us a lot of room to manoeuvre the preparations, and through her patience, we managed to compile and arrange all the necessary material and presented the exhibition on 22 April 2015 in a professional and charming way.

A rewarding experience that was a challenge both for us and for the museum and left no one feeling indifferent. Some of the girls faced their fear of public speaking (and successfully overcame it), while others developed their communication skills.

Our work consisted of the preparation and collection of the material and a guided tour given in Italian. Despite the fact that there were frequent changes in organisation and implementation and we had to add the material and learn new texts constantly, there was a lot of laughter and good spirits. When we overcame nervousness and got accustomed to the role of guides, we saw the happy faces in front of us and all the effort was paid off.

The Italian visitors left the museum promising they will return, while we walked through the door with a broader knowledge of history, new working experience and new friendships – enriched. <<

37 Kaja Širok, curator-educator Nataša Robežnik and Urša Valič participated in the training. The members of the Italian national community were Anastasia Sorgo, Erika Valečič, Vita Valenti, Arianna Protic and Chiara Vianello.



Gašper Rems, restoration student at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana, gave a tour of the “Slovenes in the 20th Century” exhibition in the National Museum of Contemporary History in Slovenian sign language. (Photo: Urša Valič)

The sign language of the deaf and hard of hearing people is a special form of communication. Sign language is based on the use of hands, facial expression, expression of the eyes and lips and body movement (for further details, see the Slovene *Sign Language Glossary* at [sszj.fri.uni-lj.si](http://sszj.fri.uni-lj.si)). As sign language is an individual and equal language,<sup>38</sup> it does not have the same grammar structure as spoken language. By 31 December 2014, 937 persons in Slovenia received a decision on the right to use Slovene sign language,<sup>39</sup> but according to Petra Rezar, the real number is even higher.

38 We would also like to point out the Act on the Use of Slovene Sign Language (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 96/02), which “provides for the right of the deaf people to use the Slovenian sign language, the right of the deaf people to information in adapted techniques and the extent and manner of exercising the right to a sign language interpreter in equal integration of the deaf people into the living and working environment and into all the forms of social life with the same rights and conditions as well as with the same possibilities as those enjoyed by people without hearing impairment”.

39 See the bulletin of the Association of Slovenian Sign Language Interpreters: *Ko govorijo roke: Interno glasilo Zavoda Združenje tolmačev za slovenski znakovni jezik*, no. 20, volume IX, May 2015, p. 6, online resource: [http://www.tolmaci.si/\\_doc/Ko\\_govorijo\\_roke\\_maj\\_2015.pdf](http://www.tolmaci.si/_doc/Ko_govorijo_roke_maj_2015.pdf), [09/09/2015].

It is therefore wrong to believe that the written word in museums is sufficient for the deaf and hard of hearing people; many deaf people are not familiar with it and have to learn it as a foreign language. It is thus a good idea to pass the museum message in cooperation with people who provide information in sign language live or via medium (video). Some museums collaborated with Slovene sign language interpreters, who simultaneously interpreted the guided tours, before the implementation of the project.

**Petra Rezar, Slovene Association of Teachers of the Deaf, Deaf-blind Association of Slovenia – DLAN, Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Ljubljana**

### Accessibility of Museums to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

The “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” project was welcome in many areas, posing new challenges and creating new needs to develop collaboration with the deaf and hard of hearing people. It raised awareness among museum staff of the possibilities of adjusting to individual groups of visitors who rarely visit museums. The staff now know that they can organise guided tours for the deaf and hard of hearing people with a Slovene sign language interpreter and offer them free tickets, as is the practice in some other countries.

It is essential that the museums are interested in developing the programmes, accessibility and attractive content with which visitors can easily identify and learn something new. Museums have become a living organism offering new insights into the history and exhibits. New insights and virtual methods are increasingly important for the deaf people, who depend on visual communication. Improved accessibility with Slovene sign language interpreting does not necessarily indicate overall improvement, since the concept is much wider and comprises customised work methods and learning about the visitors’ philosophy (mentality).

Remarkable progress has been so far achieved by organising guided tours in Slovene sign language and, most of all, by introducing deaf museum guides for deaf visitors. The visitors could identify with the deaf guide and accept new knowledge and information through the "deaf philosophy". However, questions arise about tactile communication with the museums and exhibits, which is particularly troublesome in cases of art objects; one of the most vulnerable groups, deaf-blind people, are still unable to picture the objects, exhibits and works of art. Multi-sensory guided tours do not enable unlimited accessibility – in some cases, the deaf-blind people cannot get to know the object using only their fingers. Consequently, it is necessary to provide customised, visual materials that could be read by the visitors in advance and taken with them, enabling them to re-experience their visit to the museum. Animations illustrating the development and changes of an object or space through time would also be very useful.

Accessibility of museum content can be increased through:

- Slovene sign language interpreting (with guided tours);
- interpreting via video clips on the museum website / museum tablet for individual visits to the museum or to a special collection – this role should generally be performed by deaf people with the help of other deaf people that can help them understand Slovene sign language;
- customised text with visual material that can be given to the visitors in advance or during the visit; glossary of foreign words;
- induction loop for hearing impaired persons who can rely on an audio guide;
- customised lighting – the deaf cannot see their Slovene sign language interpreter in a darkened room where only the exhibited items are illuminated;
- longer presentation of exhibits – there should be some time to observe the exhibits after sign language interpretation, otherwise the visitors do not benefit from the visit;

- guided tours for smaller groups of the deaf and hard of hearing in order to improve the quality of information transmission;
- access during weekdays or in the evenings, not only one weekend a month when many prefer to spend time with their families;
- appropriate interpreting space – the background should not be illuminated and brighter than the interpreter so that the deaf visitors are not dazzled; the interpreter should stand next to the guide and at a wide angle so that he or she can be seen by all visitors.

Additional recommendations for deaf-blind visitors:

- organised groups should get the materials in advance so that they can learn about the content before the visit;
- the deaf-blind people should be allowed to touch the objects (natural-size replicas should be made, preferably using the same materials);
- the deaf-blind people should be provided with interpreters qualified for working with the deaf-blind people;
- guided tours should be adjusted to the needs of the deaf-blind people – at a slower pace, with adjusted room lighting and lighting of the exhibits, if necessary (the light should not dazzle the visitors, the room should not be dark).

As the first museum in Slovenia, the **National Museum of Contemporary History** qualified a **deaf guide**, Gašper Rems, to give a tour of the "Slovenes in the 20th Century" exhibition.<sup>40</sup> The museum trained another deaf guide, Samo Dolanc, to give a tour of an exhibition about World War I entitled "We Never Imagined such a War".<sup>41</sup> By introducing guided tours in Slovene sign language, the

40 Curator-educator Nataša Robežnik and Urša Valič participated in training, while journalist Maja Kuzma assisted in the sign language wording.

41 Nataša Robežnik, curator-educator, Marko Štepec, curator and author of the exhibition, and Urša Valič participated in training.

museum acquired a new audience, as the organisations of the deaf and hard of hearing persons mentioned the museum via their media (Tipk TV and Spletna TV). On the Slovene cultural holiday, the museum was presented in the *Prisluhnimo tišini* show on RTV Slovenija 1 as a good example of including the deaf people in cultural work, thus gaining a high reputation in society.



The “Languages of Theatre” programme at the Slovenian Theatre Institute was carried out in Slovenian sign language by Melanie Likar, a photography student at the Higher School of Applied Sciences, assisted by Sandra Jenko. (Photo: Slovenian Theatre Institute archives)

The **Slovene Theatre Institute** wanted to highlight the fact that speech is not the only means of expression in theatre. To this end, the museum prepared the “**Languages of Theatre**” programme.<sup>42</sup> The programme familiarises the participants with the system of theatre signs, enabling the identification and recreation of the theatrical means of expression. Guided tours with a Slovene sign language interpreter showed that theatre terminology is so specific that it causes difficulties to the interpreter, despite content preparations, that can impair the fluency

42 Guided tours were prepared and executed by Sandra Jenko. Lada Lištvanova, Petra Rezar, Gašper Rems and Melanie Likar as a deaf guide participated in the preparation and execution.

of guided tours and lead to mutually uncomfortable situations. Therefore, the guided tours were carried out by a deaf photography student, Melanie Likar, who acquired and elaborated theatrical vocabulary in sign language together with curator-educator Sandra Jenko and student Gašper Rems.

» **Melanie Likar, photography student, Higher School of Applied Sciences**

I am a photography student. I found out about the project from Petra Rezar in 2014. I was drawn by the fact that people with reduced mobility, the blind, the deaf and others would get an opportunity to visit museums, so I asked how I could participate. I applied for a job in the educational department of the Slovene Theatre Institute. Since I am deaf, I wanted to prepare programmes for deaf visitors. I did not like going to the museums before the project, as I found it hard to understand the guides. In addition, texts at the exhibitions were often too complex and incomprehensible.

I thought that museums should have deaf guides or clips of guided tours in sign language available via mobile phones. It is not enough to simplify the content, as the deaf want to learn something new when visiting a museum. The workshops and lectures should also be accessible to the deaf people. On the other hand, deaf people must get used to visiting museums and to the content available to them. They must change their attitude of thinking that museums are not for them.

The objective of my participation was to gain valuable experience and to continue working in museums after completion of the project. I would also like to increase the accessibility of the Slovene Theatre Institute to the deaf audience. My task was to give tours of exhibitions in sign language for deaf visitors as well as to explore and present the history of the theatre of the deaf and hard of hearing in Ljubljana. In cooperation with the Slovene Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, I prepared a symposium on theatre accessibility. Just as it is the case with museums, the majority of theatre performances are not adapted to the deaf and hard of hearing. I hope that the general accessibility of cultural goods will further increase in the coming years. <<

Participants' opinions revealed that guided tours with a deaf guide were more efficient than guided tours with an interpreter. Deaf visitors found it easier to follow a deaf guide who was familiar with their needs and culture, allowing them more time to talk and to see the exhibition; in addition, there was no unnecessary communication gap between the curator and interpreter.

As for all guided tours, it is essential that the deaf guide knows and understands the transmitted content and checks whether he/she

understood it properly with the person who prepared the content (curator or curator-educator). Communication between the curator and deaf guide is thus important. The majority of the museum staff do not master Slovene sign language. It can be learned in long-term training courses offered by the Slovene Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Ljubljana, Association of Slovene Sign Language Interpreters and individual associations of the deaf and hard of hearing in Slovenia. Some gestures can also be learned through an online sign language glossary. Sign language interpreters can also facilitate communication. Since the deaf often use lip reading, we have to take care of appropriate lighting. When communicating with a deaf person, we do not scream; we should take some time to pronounce the words clearly and distinctively. As sign language does not include all the words, some technical words should be written and explained with other words.

It is incorrect to believe that there is only one global sign language. Each country has its own sign language, which is influenced by other languages and thus has some similar elements. The existing international sign language is understood and used by users who travel frequently. Science progress and hearing aid development, e.g. behind-the-air aids, reduce the use of sign language to such an extent that the users are wondering about its future and faith. In addition to promoting and supporting communication in sign language, the museum also preserves the cultural heritage of the deaf and hard of hearing by using their language.

Communication with the deaf-blind also requires a specific type of communication. According to Simona Gerenčer Pegan, secretary of the Deaf-blind Association of Slovenia (DLAN), there were 100 to 360 deaf-blind people in Slovenia in 2008 (Gerenčer Pegan 2008: 156), but these data are outdated. In Petra Rezar's opinion, there are many more deaf-blind people, their number increasing with the ageing of the population.

» Samo Dolanc, student, Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Technology,  
University of Ljubljana

I am a deaf student at the Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Technology. Within the project, I worked at the National Museum of Contemporary History and Natural History Museum of Slovenia.

At the Natural History Museum of Slovenia, curator Katarina Fuchs and I prepared a guided tour and educational programme for the “Living with Crystals” temporary exhibition for the students of the Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Ljubljana. I also did a workshop entitled “What’s Inside the Treasure?” in the mother tongue of the deaf, i.e. in Slovene sign language. I carried out the guided tour and the programme independently for deaf-blind members of the only Slovene deaf-blind association, DLAN, using tactile communication and Slovene sign language. The students of the Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Ljubljana and the deaf-blind members of the DLAN association thus got to know the world of crystals, minerals and fossils.

At the National Museum of Contemporary History, I gave a guided tour of the “We Never Imagined such a War” exhibition in Slovene sign language in cooperation with Gašper Rems, deaf student and guide.

Both museums warmly welcomed me and my experience with them was very good. The museums adjusted to me and understood my otherness. I gained a lot of valuable experience, improved my public speaking skills, cooperated with other people and made some new friends. I strongly support such projects, as there is always the need for more accessible information in different forms of communication. Vulnerable groups often come across obstacles when accessing information, and such projects successfully deal with this problem. <<

In cooperation with Samo Dolanc, a deaf student and volunteer in the Deaf-blind Association of Slovenia, the **Natural History Museum of Slovenia** adapted the “**What’s Inside the Treasure**” educational programme,<sup>43</sup> originally intended for the blind and visually impaired, to deaf, hard-of-hearing and deaf-blind visitors. It should be stressed that the preparation differed between the groups, since it is not possible to meet the needs of different groups simultaneously, especially in terms of communication. Referring to the Finnish author Leeni Hassinen, Simona Gerenčer Pegan explains the difference between interpreting for the deaf and interpreting for the deaf-blind people. Sign language interpreters for the deaf people only transmit aural information, while sign language interpreters for the deaf-blind also transmit non-verbal and visual information (ibid: 158).

43 The programme was prepared by Katarina Fuchs.



The “What’s Inside the Treasure?” programme of the Natural History Museum of Slovenia was carried out for the Deaf-blind Association of Slovenia (DLAN) in Slovenian sign language by Samo Dolanc, chemistry student. (Photo: Katarina Fuchs)



As part of the “What’s Inside the Treasure?” programme at the Natural History Museum of Slovenia, visitors from the Deaf-blind Association of Slovenia (DLAN) learned about various types of crystals. (Photo: Katarina Fuchs)

Interpreting for the deaf-blind is individual and direct and includes hand touching. As the amount of information is often reduced, it is important that the content is well thought-out. The Natural History Museum of Slovenia had this in mind when preparing its programme.

The purpose of the "What's Inside the Treasure?" programme was to learn about minerals and to compare their diverse features in an interactive way. The museum thus allowed the participants to touch individual minerals and created a didactic game enabling them to compare the features of individual minerals. When preparing the programme for the deaf-blind, the museum paid attention to the text that contains many technical terms and complex explanations in order to interpret the heritage. Since sign language has fewer terms than spoken language, certain contents should be modified and adjusted. A further description was added to the description of minerals. Due to the limited time and content overload, certain contents or terms were omitted. Selection criteria included the content of the entire programme, interesting content and complexity of additional explanation of the content or individual terms. The museum also prepared objects (i.e. minerals) and tactile aids. The programme for the deaf-blind includes the same number of objects as the programmes for other groups, since it allows absorbing as much contents as an individual wants. The programme is divided into several completed units; it is not necessary that each participant goes over all of them. Since additional explanation through interpreting and object touching requires more time than ordinary implementation of the programme, the programmes for the deaf-blind should include a detailed timeline of passing the content. A deaf person also helped prepare and implement the programme, which demonstrates the enormous potential of the deaf people for employment in museums.

Tina Palaić

## ENCOUNTERS WITH AFRICAS: FROM THE 19TH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

The inclusion of immigrants in society is extremely complex, ranging from education, health care, social policies and integration into the labour market to culture. Promoting the inclusion of migrants in society and intercultural understanding are the responsibilities of socially responsible institutions, including museums. The latter may present the perspectives, life experience and realities of the migrants, strengthening their identity in the new country (by Watson 2007). In addition to presenting the current development of the migrant situation, museums can use their collections to encourage a reflection on the images about the so-called Others in the past and today as well as on the balance of power between different social groups and their relations. It is important that migrants are included in the museum work and that they participate in creating museum content, highlighting their testimonies and stories that are usually ignored.

The National Museum of Slovenia complemented the "Mummy and the Crocodile: Slovenes Discovering the Lands along the Nile" temporary exhibition with a workshop entitled the "Encounters with Africas: From the 19th Century to the Present".<sup>44</sup> Among other things, the exhibition presented the efforts of Slovene missionary Ignacij Knoblehar in today's South Sudan. On their field missions, the missionaries collected "material evidence" about the inferiority of Africa, contributing to the legitimisation of colonialism. The purpose of the museum workshop was to recognise and analyse the stereotypical images of black peoples created by the missionaries in the 19th century and to draw parallels with the contemporary stereotypical images of black migrants in Slovenia. The museum

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44 The workshop was prepared and carried out by Max Zimani and Tina Palaić. Marko Freljih, curator of the American and African collections at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, also participated in the preparation.



searched for different stereotypical images about the black peoples in the excerpts from reports and letters sent to Slovenia from the lands on the Nile River by the missionaries in the 19th century and published in the Slovene Catholic newspaper *Zgodnja Danica*. The participants thus read the copies of newspaper articles from the 19th century and used them as a basis for the reflection and discussion on today's stereotypes about African migrants in Slovenia. The workshop included the following methods: guided tour of the exhibition with conversation, working with texts in small groups and discussion (cf. Krajnc 1979). The workshop represents a good example of using cultural heritage to encourage reflection on the attitude towards migrants in modern times.

**Stane Baluh, Office for National Minorities of the Republic of Slovenia**

### Reflecting on the “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” Project

I am referring to the meaning of the “Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups” project and its activities. Assuming and knowing that the social status of (national, ethnic, religious or other) minorities is one of the central and essential issues of human rights protection and that the predecessor of modern international human rights law is international protection of minorities, I think that only one activity, cultural heritage, can be expanded to the minority policy in a broader sense.

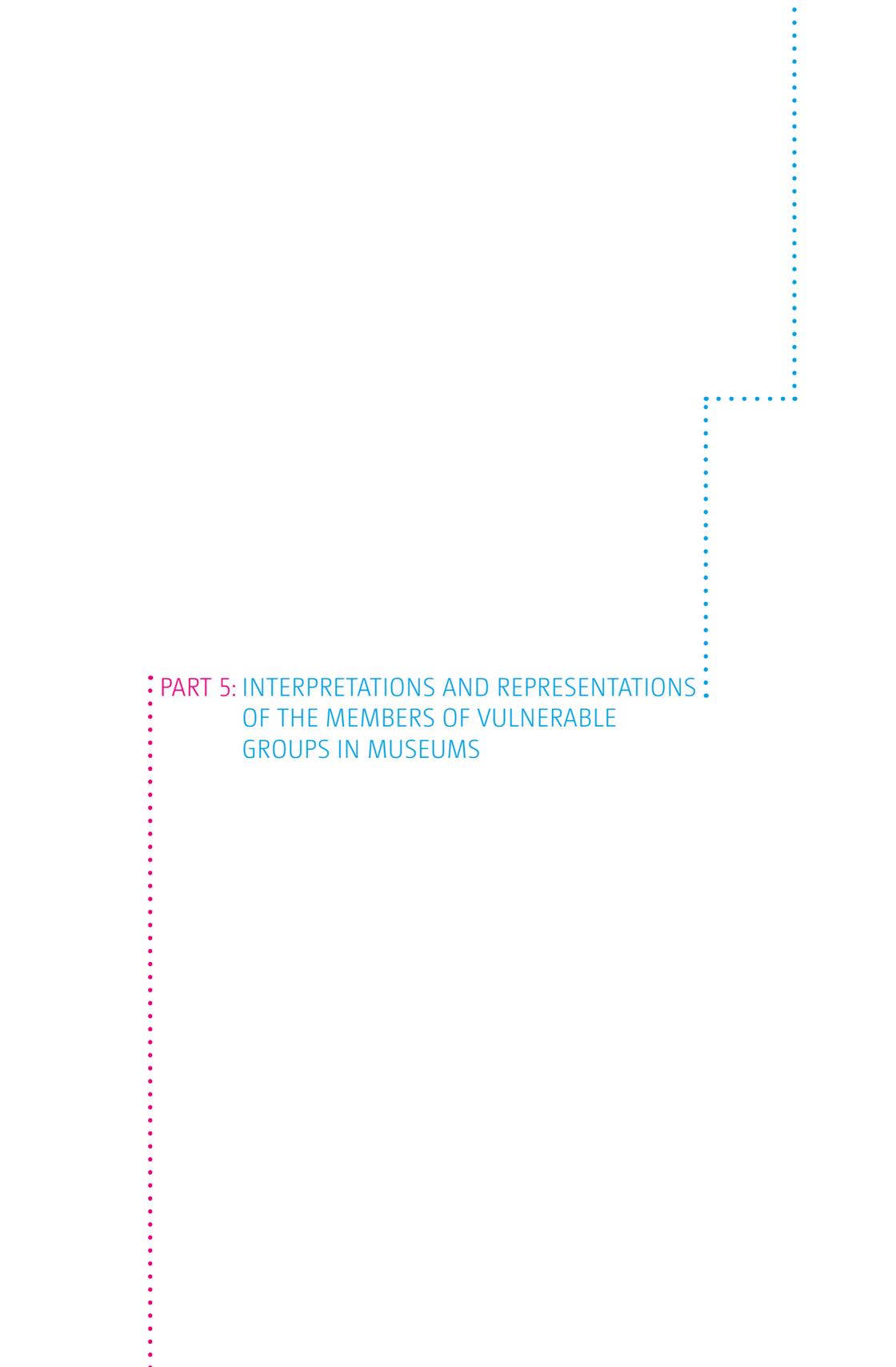
In my personal opinion, culture has a special place in the Slovene history of national identity formation processes. Accessibility of different cultural institutions to the members of vulnerable groups and their active participation will result in wider social integration

and demarginalisation as well as in the respect and protection of the past, responsibility for the present and a solid foundation for the future.

The area of culture is very diverse, rich, lively and changing. In addition to creative and professional motives, it is also influenced by the situation in society, the possibilities offered by legislation, the extent of available budgetary resources, the priorities in cultural policy, and the resulting measures. Taking into account the constitutional provisions referring to constitutionally protected rights (collective and individual), we can say that the component of culture is included in the concept of founding organisations and developing cultural rights. It is also stipulated that the implementation and enforcement of these rights are financially and materially supported by the state. Under this assumption, minority communities can actively participate in the creation and formation of programmes that strengthen their own identity, present and future. However, since the theory often falls through in practice, the provisions of domestic law should be upgraded at the European level with projects that can complement the shortcomings in domestic policy but should not replace them. Vulnerable minority groups deserve projects such as "Accessibility of Cultural Heritage to Vulnerable Groups", so that they can complement and develop their identity in space and time and mutual respect. In this light, Slovenia has always been known as a driving force in the common European area.

I see such a project as an opportunity for interinstitutional cooperation, deepening and integration of different communities at the Slovene and international levels. Museums have always been and will remain the crossroads for integrating diversity, since the most vulnerable (i.e. the minorities) do not have the possibility to be objectively visible in the general public. The museums and their programme and project activities allow these communities to gain





• PART 5: INTERPRETATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS •  
• OF THE MEMBERS OF VULNERABLE •  
• GROUPS IN MUSEUMS

Katarina Nahtigal

## DOCUMENTING LIFESTYLES OF THE MEMBERS OF VULNERABLE GROUPS – ORAL HISTORY

Museums should be a memory storage for all and should represent all social groups (Black 2012: 5). Consequently, they must also include and present the stories of groups that were not present in museums in the past, as they are also part of the common history. This is increasingly carried out by collecting archives, photographs, videos and, in particular, oral sources (ibid: 2013). In recent decades, museums assumed a significant role in collecting and presenting personal testimonies, especially where there are no artefacts (Green 2006: 416).

At the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, the implementation of the project showed that museum collections include almost no materials on vulnerable groups. The training of a curator-documentalist



Collecting and presenting photos, memories and life stories of the members of vulnerable groups can contribute to overcoming the stereotypes and prejudices about social vulnerability. (Photo: Urša Valič)

thus comprised the field recording of documentation material on vulnerable groups (collecting their photos, memories, life stories as secondary documentation material) (see Sosič 2001: 42).

Life stories are collected in three stages: planning the interview; carrying out the interview, in which the researcher leads the interviewee through the main periods of his/her life or through the research topic; transcribing the interview (Ramšak 2003: 386). During the interview, the interviewee can talk about important memories and views. The semi-structured interview questions are asked according to chronological order and also concern topics with no direct connection with the identity of a vulnerable group member. Disability, gender, ethnicity, social vulnerability, etc. are in fact socially constructed categories that may be expressed in different social situations, which is also related to the identification with these categories as vulnerable. This variability and flexibility of identity positions should thus be taken into account.

As the narration of life stories is not a one-way process, but a dialogue and personal interaction between two people, the researcher and the narrator, the interviews require self-reflection. Differences in ideology or worldview, gender, age, social class or nationality have an impact on the way we ask questions, respond to the narrator and interpret his/her words (see Yow 2006). If the members of vulnerable groups are also included in the collection, the differences in position are not so large and the confidentiality between the collector and interviewees may be higher. Consequently, a student with reduced mobility, Nastija Fijolič, also participated in collecting the material on vulnerable groups by video recording her friends in wheelchairs. These video clips are included in the emerging collection of the thematic narratives and life stories of vulnerable groups.

After the interviews are recorded, they are formed into a narrative intended for the collection of the narratives produced by the members of vulnerable groups, which is the final objective of the collection and research. The narrative is a "report of one person on the life

of another, but the writer should, as far as possible, rely on the narrator's expressiveness and truth, which serves as a starting point for interpretation" (Ramšak 2003: 44). Life stories are heard if the researcher's decision allows it, i.e. it is not enabled by the biographical method itself (Milharčič Hladnik 2009: 18); this fact should be always considered when creating a narrative.

Cooperation with the interviewees – if they are interested – is of great importance for interpreting the material and creating the final story. The interviewees thus have control over the presentation of their stories. If allowed by individual interviewees, the edited material will be presented in the online collection in order to reach a wider audience. Before the online publication, all interviewees gain an insight into their narratives and decide what should be changed, complemented or published.

The purpose of collecting and transmitting life stories online is to encourage the visitors to reflect on the concept of social vulnerability and to address the stereotypes and images of social vulnerability. It is necessary to understand that vulnerable groups are not homogenous and that individual stories do not represent everybody belonging to a particular group; individuals have diverse experiences and unique views of life.

Katarina Nahtigal and Andrej Tomazin

PERSONAL EXHIBITIONS:  
NINO: HUMAN OPTIMISM AND LOOK AT ME AND YOU'LL SEE



Nino Batagelj, co-creator of the “Nino: Human Optimism” exhibition, staged by the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. He presented the turning point in his life using, among other things, medical results and other documents. (Photo: Ema Lukan)

Museums are places where people search for meaning and value by exploring the diversity of human experience. They are a tool for expressing, getting to know and presenting yourself. They include the memories, knowledge and views of various individuals (Weil 2007: 12–45). The task of modern museums is to include the history, experience and voices of groups that were overlooked in museum narratives in the past. When people share their experiences with visitors at their personal exhibitions, the various aspects of life of different social groups are presented from the perspective of their members – their voices, opinions and experiences (see Simon 2010; Žagar 2013: 182–184).

As part of its "I, We and Others: The Images of My World" permanent exhibition, dedicated to man and his place in the world (see Žagar 2013), the Slovene Ethnographic Museum enables visitors to present themselves or their social environment in personal exhibitions. Personal exhibitions want the visitors to reflect on themselves by presenting their world through self-research processes. The visitors are thus actively involved as the creators of the museum programme. The self-portrait stories presented within the exhibition reflect the issues of identity and self-identification, while the authors can somehow "regulate" their past in the process of presenting their life story (Žagar 2013: 182–184). The role of the museum staff is to mentor and to "encourage individuals to speak about themselves and about the current issues of different social groups they belong to – in the way they experience and interpret it", and not from the perspective of professional distance (ibid: 183), while the visitors contribute the content. The latter are thus included in the museum work as active co-creators of its content, connecting the museums with their environment and enabling the external participants to actively take part and be engaged in the creation of cultural content.

Within the project, two students with reduced mobility, Nino Batagelj and Nastija Fijolič, prepared their personal exhibitions. They were the result of self-research processes guided by mentors through conversation. The questions arising at the "I, We and Others: The Images of My World" exhibition encouraged the creators to think about themselves and others and about their environment and attitude towards it. When the exhibitions were being prepared, the question of where is the boundary between professional advice and the creators' freedom was constantly brought up. Nino Batagelj and Nastija Fijolič had to "speak out" by themselves. The curator role moved from exhibition creator to advisor, facilitating the interpretation of the narrative in the context of the museum with his/her museological knowledge. Gaining mutual trust based on personal contacts and respect for experience and views of others represented an important part of the cooperation (see also Besley and Low 2010: 139–141).

A personal exhibition entitled "Nino: Human Optimism" was opened in January 2015. It was the result of the cooperation between Nino Batagelj, student at the Institute and Academy of Multimedia, and Andrej Tomazin, curator-educator employed on the project. Through the exhibited objects and accompanying texts, the authors showed Nino's story, which was divided into two parts separated by the accident and the resulting tetraplegia. The author decided that his story would not be narrated only by him; his loved ones wrote essays describing different stages of his life, while he presented his view of the world in a video interview. The duality of his life story was also stressed – his inner world reflected in the objects and video material on one side and the response of his environment to his existence on the other. The title of the exhibition, "human optimism", is taken from one of the displayed texts, while the use of only his first name indicates the intimate world shown at the exhibition by the creator. The concern for improving access for the widest possible group of people was also an important part of the exhibition. The creators added subtitles to the video, while all the texts were available in catalogue written in Braille. The visitors could also touch the exhibited objects.

» **Nino Batagelj, student, Institute and Academy of Multimedia (IAM)**

Within the project, I was involved in the editing of visitors' stories published in the Gallery of Narrators on the Slovene Ethnographic Museum website. Together with my colleagues, I edited the recorded video material to such an extent that we can learn about a person and his/her world as much as possible in a short time when watching the video.

I got acquainted with teamwork, which brought dynamics and good products to the relationship between colleagues. I obtained insight into the functioning of institutions such as the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. I gained interesting experience of working in my field and received confirmation that I can do the work I like and I want to continue doing it professionally in the future despite my injury (tetraplegia). <<

The personal exhibition of Nastija Fijolič, a photography student at the Higher School of Applied Sciences, entitled "Look at Me and You'll See" was on view from mid-February to mid-April 2015. It was prepared under the mentorship of curator-documentalist Katarina Nahtigal. Nastija dealt with a topic that she finds very important. By exhibiting photographs and short texts about herself, she wanted to highlight the issue of body ideals in today's society and to encourage more open thinking, which she hopes will one day be taken for granted. She wondered: "If human proportions are not perfect, does it mean that the body does not conform to the so-called ideals of a beautiful and sexy body?" Hoping that the museum visitors would change their attitude towards people with reduced mobility and reflect on their own body perceptions, she exhibited the portrait photos of walking and mobility impaired people.



The opening of the "Look at Me and You'll See" exhibition in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, prepared by Nastija Fijolič, highlighting the issues of body ideals in today's society.  
(Photo: Amadeja Smrekar)

» **Nastija Fijolič, photography student, Higher School of Applied Sciences**

At the beginning, I helped organise the documentation, but my main contribution to the project was videos and photographs. I made three videos about people with reduced mobility, presenting their life as something normal. I also prepared a photo exhibition entitled “Look at Me and You’ll See”, in which I tried to include all people. I photographed 14 people and gave a chance to those who usually do not have this possibility. I exhibited a series of black-and-white photos in a personal exhibition at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. The exhibition wanted to encourage people to think differently, more openly and to show them a different view of perfection.

My experience was definitely positive. I learned something new in all three fields. Although I made video clips and the exhibition for other people, I learned to view them and myself in a different light. The experience gained by participating in the project gave me a new momentum. Since visitors’ reactions to the exhibition were only positive, I would like to carry out more such projects in the future. The visitors were surprised by the fact that there is so much beauty behind every individual. The project allowed me to express myself, and that is what I find most important. <<



“The exhibition wanted to encourage people to think differently, more openly and to show them a different view of perfection,” said the exhibition creator, Nastija Fijolič. (Photo: Amadeja Smrekar)

Tina Palačić

## PERINATAL PRACTICES, EXPERIENCES AND MEMORIES: COOPERATION WITH ROMA WOMEN

According to different institutions, there are 7,000 to 12,000 Roma living in Slovenia. They are mostly settled in the Prekmurje, Dolenjska, Bela Krajina and Posavje regions and in larger cities such as Maribor, Velenje, Ljubljana, Celje, Jesenice and Radovljica (Sinti families live mainly in Jesenice and Radovljica).<sup>46</sup> Roma face many obstacles in education, employment, housing and access to social and health care services (Humljan Urh 2006: 41; Vzporedna življenja 2011). Within the Roma community, women are in a particularly vulnerable position, as they are often discriminated both in contact with the wider community and within their own group (Humljan Urh 2011: 358). Based on the concept of intersectional discrimination, which presumes unequal treatment on the basis of several personal circumstances at the same time, we can recognise the discrimination of Roma women at least on the grounds of ethnicity and gender (Kuhar 2009: 30–31). This can, in addition to difficult social circumstances, have a major effect on their quality of life.

Between September 2014 and April 2015, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum cooperated with the Roma. 20 women from different Roma communities were included in the project: from Serdica, Maribor and Kerinov Grm. Together with the museum staff, they explored the heritage of perinatal customs and related practices, experiences and memories. Special attention was paid to access to health care services for women in reproductive age. The final result was the exhibition held at the museum and in participants' communities as well as an accompanying programme. A brochure entitled *Birth: Experience of Roma Women*, which described the cooperation and its effects, was

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46 Office for National Minorities, [http://www.un.gov.si/si/manjsine/romska\\_skupnost/statisticni\\_in\\_osnovni\\_podatki/](http://www.un.gov.si/si/manjsine/romska_skupnost/statisticni_in_osnovni_podatki/), [12/06/2015].

also published, as well as a catalogue with women's statements and photographs of their exhibited personal objects.

The Slovene Ethnographic Museum decided to cooperate with Roma women in studying, interpreting and presenting perinatal customs, practices and experiences and access to health care services due to the lack of relevant information in this field, especially from Roma women themselves. Men did not participate in the project, as the participants wanted to talk about intimate topics in an exclusively female group. They would certainly contribute an important aspect as well as enable and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic, but the museum wanted to exclude any factors that might affect the ease and willingness of the women to participate. The cooperation encouraged the recognition of their communities' cultural heritage and the importance of its preservation. By attaching importance to their experience, the museum empowered Roma women and strengthened their role in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage. What is more, the exhibition and the accompanying programme enabled a



Several workshops were carried out in Roma communities when preparing the “Birth: Experience of Roma Women” exhibition. For instance, Roma women presented their thoughts and experiences about health care access using posters prepared on the basis of texts and photos from health magazines. (Photo: Tina Palaić)

dialogue between the Roma and the majority community, opening up the possibility of overcoming the misunderstandings, stereotypes and prejudices of the members of both communities.

» **Melisa Baranja, student, Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana**

I participated in the project as an intermediary – I coordinated the cooperation between the Roma Community and the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. I had to find eight Roma women from my village, Serdica, who would participate in the project and workshops. The women were willing to participate and to spend their free time with us. I also participated in the workshop as a “participating Roma”. As a coordinator, I informed the women about recent developments, was in constant contact with the leader of the project with Roma, Tina Palaić, prepared the “territory” and took care of the refreshments at the workshops. I also ensured a smooth flow of information between the museum and the women, arranged transportation to the museum and looked for solutions regarding props, costumes, etc. I helped create and set up the “Birth: Experience of Roma Women” exhibition and gave guided tours of the exhibition together with Tina Palaić. The overall experience was unforgettable, unique and special. I got an insight into the integration of the community into mainstream society. I learned to be an intermediary, a challenging task that requires quite a lot of time and effort. I communicated with the women and the museum on a daily basis. I therefore improved my communication skills and acquired valuable knowledge of developing group dynamics. I broadened my knowledge of accessibility to vulnerable groups, especially Roma women who suffer from double discrimination – on ethnic and gender grounds. Many of the participating women assumed the role of wife and mother at a very early age and, consequently, gave up education. They thus became more vulnerable, less confident and more subordinate. The project helped empower them and seek the sources of their power; through their life stories, they were given an insight into a better tomorrow and felt their commitment to the society, group and community. The project enabled access to culture for those who rarely enter the public space and enjoy art, culture and poetry, i.e. things that strengthen, inspire and encourage us to become a strong part of our communities. Such work should be continued in order to overcome the past and enable a better future. <<

Before starting the planned activities, the links with the communities were established through Roma women who coordinated the cooperation between the museum and the women and are largely credited with the success of the project. Melisa Baranja, social work student, was the coordinator in Serdica, Jasmina Ahmetaj, Roma activist and president of the Terne Roma – Young Roma Society, in Maribor and Sarenka Hudorovac, president of the Mosto – Society for Intercultural Dialogue, in Kerinov Grm. In addition to the meetings

at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, where the participants saw the "I, We and Others: The Images of My World" permanent exhibition and organised their own exhibition, most of the meetings took place in Roma communities. Given the sensitivity of the topics covered, intensive Theatre of the Oppressed workshops were carried out in each community by Nika Rudež and Anja Božič.

The Theatre of the Oppressed<sup>47</sup> is a system of exercises, games and techniques aimed at understanding the reality and responding actively. Its main objective is to turn the passive spectators of a theatre situation into subjects that actively affect it. When an individual becomes an active player, he/she can understand different personal and social situations in a new way and is empowered to change them. As the participants rarely or never talk about selected topics, the Image Theatre as one of the techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed represented the basis for conversation. Using their own bodies or the bodies of others, with no words or sounds, they illustrated experiences they might never have articulated before. The Newspaper Theatre technique was also used, with the participants transforming texts from health magazines into a theatre performance and thus stressing certain obstacles they face in accessing health care services (cf. Boal 2012). Several factors had to be considered when preparing the workshops: Slovene language skills, household, business and study obligations of the women, presence of children at the workshops, group dynamics and willingness to cooperate. After completing the workshops, the meetings continued in the communities. The women once again shared their experiences and reflections, told new stories and selected the material for the exhibition. In Serdica, the women prepared a theatre performance about the customs, experiences and practices related to the reproductive period of nine women from the village, using the

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47 The Theatre of the Oppressed comprises several techniques: Newspaper Theatre (use of media, such as newspapers, magazines, pictures, etc.), Image Theatre (the the body is placed in a posture representing the emotions, memories and experiences that affected the person), Invisible Theatre (theatre performance given on the streets without prior knowledge of the people in the surrounding area), Legislative Theatre (its purpose is to change legislation through the play), Forum Theatre (spectators have the role of actors and search for the answers to a social issue) and Rainbow of Desire (used for therapeutic purposes).

Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. They performed at the opening of the “Birth: Experience of Roma Women” exhibition, while the visitors could watch a video clip of the performance throughout the duration of the exhibition.

The exhibition entitled “Birth: Experience of Roma Women” was opened on 26 March 2015 by Julijana Bizjak Mlakar, Minister of Culture. Bojana Rogelj Škafar, the then Director of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Janja Rošer, President of the Council of Roma Community, and Tina Palaić, the leader of the project of cooperating with Roma women, also gave a speech. The coordinators of the cooperation between the museum and the community presented the exhibition. Melisa Baranja, one of the authors of the exhibition from Serdica, assumed the role of the moderator.

The accompanying programme was prepared and implemented by Tina Palaić in cooperation with some of the authors of the exhibition. They talked about cooperating with the museum, presented different elements of Roma culture and highlighted the challenges they face. On 8 April 2015, International Roma Day, they organised an event entitled



During the guided tour of the “Birth: Experience of Roma Women” exhibition at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Melisa Baranja and Tina Palaić discussed ethnically sensitive social work with the students of the Faculty of Social Work. (Photo: Ema Lukan)



Dress rehearsal for the play prepared by women from Serdica based on the methods of the Theatre of the Oppressed and performed at the opening of the exhibition in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. The play can be seen on YouTube (Predstava: Rojstvo – Izkušnje Rominj): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lmLnmxbi3w>. (Photo: Urša Valič)

"From Roma Treasures: A Fairy Tale for the Little Ones", where children from the preparatory kindergarten for Roma children in Kerinov Grm (Krško) and from the Ledina Kindergarten in Ljubljana listened to a Roma fairy tale, narrated by Sarenka Hudorovac, Roma assistant at the kindergarten in Kerinov Grm. They sang children's songs and saw a dance performance, prepared by the primary school students from Kerinov Grm. On 21 April 2015, the "Status of Roma Women in Slovenia" seminar was organised in cooperation with the Terne Roma – Young Roma Society from Maribor. At the seminar, seven women, Roma activists and representatives of public institutions, presented their papers. It was aimed to encourage a more active inclusion of Roma women in addressing Roma issues. The speakers suggested establishing a network of all the people interested in Roma issues that would serve as a voluntary and non-formal platform for sharing information, seeking help and cooperating. A guided tour with a workshop, intended for high school students, university students and adults, was prepared at the exhibition and executed by Melisa Baranja and Tina Palaić. In addition to visiting the exhibition, the participants tried out different techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed as a starting point for the discussion on various topics tailored to visitors' interests.

Urša Valič

## INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PAST, REPRESENTATIONS IN THE PRESENT AND IDENTIFICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Understanding the history of a community is an important part of the identification processes that form and change the identity of a community. In these processes, people create meanings to interpret the continuity of their presence between the past and the present and to plan their steps in the future. The processes are not self-evident: they take place in a world that is already semantically developed, i.e. the understanding of the past is generated in specific social circumstances and is thus never completely neutral. Historiography can be understood as an identification process when it comprises a construction of selectively organised events in the form of continuity between the past and the present for the purpose of achieving the objectives in the future.

"Making history is a way of producing identity insofar as it produces a relation between that which supposedly occurred in the past and the present state of affairs. The construction of a history is the construction of a meaningful universe of events and narratives for an individual or collectively defined subject." (Friedman 1992: 837).

Writing and making history as an identification process can be understood as a political act leading to homogenisation of a community and its emancipation. This is a very important act of empowering individuals and communities that were often excluded from the dominant historic narratives as vulnerable parts of society. Accessibility and participation contributed to the fact that dominant narratives in national and regional museums, which show national history or the history of a particular territory from the perspective of a dominant, majority community, are gradually decomposing. It is time for each community treated as alien or a symbolic Other by dominant narratives and thus discriminated at all levels of society



Gašper Rems at the opening of the “Photographic Images from the Life of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Ljubljana” exhibition in the Trubar House of Literature. He prepared the exhibition as part of his training at the National Museum of Contemporary History and in cooperation with the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. (Photo: Urša Valič)

is included in dominant history narratives as part of “us” and “our” history. These communities have helped shape the Slovene cultural space and contributed important and valuable insights. Several events and exhibitions on topics often ignored by national history were prepared within the project at the initiative and in cooperation with the members of different groups.

In summer 2014, Gašper Rems, a student of restoration at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana, received training at the photographic library (Oddelek za dokumentarno fotografijo) of the National Museum of Contemporary History. He digitised black-and-white negatives and photos of the life of the deaf people in 20th-century Ljubljana. He also read literature on the history of the deaf people and did some fieldwork. He visited several elderly deaf people, interviewed them and thus gathered numerous testimonies. On the basis of the photographs, literature and fieldwork, he prepared an exhibition entitled “Photographic Images from the Life of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing People in Ljubljana”, in cooperation with documentalists Urša Valič, Katarina Nahtigal and Jana Kostelec and their mentors – consultants Ivo Vraničar, Barbara Sosič and Martina Orehovec. The exhibition was opened at the Slovene Ethnographic

Museum on 16 October 2014, at a conference of the Slovene Association of Teachers of the Deaf Students entitled “The Deaf People in Ljubljana in the Past and Today”, which highlighted an important part of the history of the deaf people. In September, the exhibition was on display at the Trubar House of Literature in Ljubljana.<sup>48</sup> In March 2015, Gašper Rems and journalist Maja Kuzma filmed a half-hour show on Tipk TV, presenting the exhibition in Slovene sign language. The National Museum of Contemporary History then prepared a virtual exhibition and posted it on the blog of the photographic library, together with a link to the Tipk TV show (<http://fototekamnzs.com/bxfbs/pretekle-razatave/fotografske-podobe-iz-zivljenja-gluhih-in-naglusnih-v-ljubljani/>).

» **Gašper Rems, student, Academy of Fine Arts and Design, University of Ljubljana**

I am a deaf student of restoration at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana. I find it important to cooperate with museums, since conservators-restorers and other museum employees strive for the same goal: to increase the importance of art in the life of every individual.

In summer 2014, I started working at the National Museum of Contemporary History as part of the project. At the “The Deaf People in Ljubljana in the Past and Today” conference, organised by Petra Rezar, I prepared my first exhibition entitled the “Photographic Images from the Life of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing People in Ljubljana”. The photographs depicted schooling of the deaf youth and deaf adults in workshops, dance classes and other activities. I obtained the photographs from the old negatives and photos kept at the National Museum of Contemporary History in Ljubljana. My colleague Urša Valič suggested that I should prepare guided tours for the deaf people in Slovene sign language. I thus gave a tour of the “Slovenes in the 20th Century” exhibition, while Samo Dolanc and I gave a joint tour of the “We Never Imagined such a War” exhibition.

I am very pleased that this project tries to open, adapt and bring museums closer to deaf people. I am therefore very proud that I was able to participate in the project and I learned a lot from it.

«

Every year on 27 January, the National Museum of Contemporary History organises an exhibition and lectures marking the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. In 2015, the events were particularly solemn, as the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II was celebrated. On 27 January 2015, the museum hosted a lecture

48 We would like to thank Rok Dežman, programme manager of the Trubar House of Literature, for hosting the exhibition and organising its opening.



Porajmos – The Forgotten Past, discussion on the genocide against the Roma during World War II at the National Museum of Contemporary History had an impact on the young members of the Roma community, who expressed their need and interest to explore their past. (Photo: Urša Valič)

by Boris Hajdinjak entitled “Slovene Jews and Roma in Auschwitz”. On the eve of the International Roma Day, 7 April 2015, the museum organised a discussion on the genocide against Roma entitled “The Porajmos – The Forgotten Past”, in cooperation with the Roma Union of Slovenia.<sup>49</sup> Guests were selected at the initiative of members of the Roma community. Monika Sandreli, Vera Klopčič, Irena Šumi and Jožek Horvat Muc participated in the discussion led by two Roma students, Melisa Baranja and Sandi Horvat. On the day of the discussion and on International Roma Day, the National Museum of Contemporary History also housed an exhibition on the porajmos organised by the Roma Union of Slovenia. The benefit of the event to the Roma community and to the museum was revealed at a later stage: in particular, through the initiatives of the young members of the Roma community who continued exploring their past<sup>50</sup> and of the

49 The report on the event was published in the *Svobodna misel* magazine on 24 April 2015 under the title “The Porajmos – The Forgotten Past: On the Roma Holocaust” (Valič 2015: 20).

50 At the end of April 2015, Sandi Horvat filmed an interview with his 86-year-old grandmother for the *Naše poti – Amare Droma – Amare Drumia – Mengere Droma*, show on Radio Slovenia. She told him about her experience of World War II from the perspective of the Roma community in the Prekmurje Region and sang a touching song about a mother and a child who died in a concentration camp crematorium (<http://4d.rtvsl.si/arhiv/nase-poti/174332769>).

museum staff who wanted to continue their work and deepen their understanding of Roma history.

» Sandi Horvat, postgraduate student of intercultural management, School of Advanced Social Studies of Nova Gorica, journalist with the Roma shows “Amare Droma” and “So vakeres?” at RTV Slovenia, active member of the Roma Academic Club

The “Porajmos – The Forgotten Past” round table at the National Museum of Contemporary History confirmed that we Roma, especially the young and educated among us, should expose ourselves in society and show examples of good practice. We are the ones who will pass on the history of our ancestors and make sure that their efforts and sacrifices will not remain silenced. Two Roma representatives and two scientists participated in the round table, discussing the holocaust and genocide against the Roma mainly on the basis of historical records, facts and research. However, as a moderator, I wanted to focus more on the stories of the Roma whose relatives experienced and survived World War II. I am fortunate to have a grandmother who is alive and well at the age of 86 years and could share her story with me. Since I participated in the round table, I asked my grandmother about this period one afternoon. She never talked about the events and terror of World War II with her large family. I was the first among my cousins to hear that her cousin was taken to a concentration camp with her children and died in the crematorium. I had no idea that grandmother’s parents and their children were also on the list of people who should have been taken to the concentration camp. I saw in her eyes that it was difficult for her to talk about it and I could not possibly imagine how traumatic the experience was. Luckily, everything worked out well for her and her family, otherwise you would not read my words today.

As I mentioned earlier, I do not believe in coincidences. We are always in the right place at the right time to receive the right information. By participating in the round table, I received many confirmations. Young Roma are on the right track. I am even more thankful to our ancestors for what they did in the past to enable us our present. <<

By including individuals belonging to vulnerable groups who cover topics from the history of discrimination and social exclusion, the museums contribute to the recognition of the role of various neglected communities in the creation of contemporary social and cultural space. The recognition of this significant role indirectly contributes to highlighting the absurdities and reducing the effects of discrimination.



· PART 6: ACCESSIBILITY OF MUSEUM LIBRARIES ·



Jana Kostelec and Iva Pavlica

## ACCESSIBILITY OF MUSEUM LIBRARIES

So far, very little has been said of the accessibility of museum libraries to the members of vulnerable groups. When it comes to the accessibility of libraries, we mostly have public libraries and libraries in general in mind.<sup>51</sup> Museum libraries should be part of the efforts to increase the accessibility of museums and other institutions that store cultural heritage.



Museum libraries must provide physical, information and content access and enable the employment of persons belonging to vulnerable groups. (Photo: Martina Orehovec)

When planning the adaptations of museum libraries, it should be taken into account that these are specialised libraries aimed at a narrow range of users (mostly curators, students and researchers). Before introducing any adaptations, it is important to consult the potential

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51. Legislation and international instruments (Libraries Act, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Marrakesh VIP Treaty, Novo Mesto Declaration) do not emphasise individual types of libraries in terms of accessibility.

users of the adaptations. This year, a translation of the guidelines, issued by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and entitled *Access to Libraries for Persons with Disabilities – Checklist*, will be published (see Irvall 2015).

**Mojca Račič, head of the library, senior librarian,  
Slovene Ethnographic Museum**

### A consultant's Experience in the Field of Library Science within the "Accessibility of cultural heritage to vulnerable groups" Project

The main agents of the project were the members of vulnerable groups who were trained for specific tasks of the public museum service, in particular for conceiving, developing and implementing innovative educational contents and programmes. The programmes were mainly aimed at persons belonging to vulnerable groups. The second group of agents thus consisted of the integrated members of vulnerable groups, the institutions and professionals that strive to improve the quality of life of vulnerable groups. The third group were the mentors – consultants employed on the project. The fourth and largest group were the visitors, i.e. the users of the participating institutions.

As a consultant, I participated in the European Social Fund project for the first time; I consulted a person who was trained to become a librarian and curator–documentalist at the Technical Museum of Slovenia. In terms of training in the area of library science, I assess the project as useful and beneficial, accomplishing its main objective: to meet the formal requirements and obtain practical qualifications for independent work in the library. However, as regards access to cultural heritage for users belonging to vulnerable groups, I conclude that in the two-year period we did not achieve

- a similar theoretical and practical development as in museum education. I believe the reasons lie in the following:
- we focused on the training of the candidate, as the training for librarians is quite extensive, time-consuming and demanding;
  - the candidate was the only one of the nine persons who was trained for two working areas (curator-documentalist and librarian);
  - the candidate and the consultant were both employed at SEM, but the former worked at the TMS;
  - as only two candidates were trained as librarians and seven for different curator profiles, the latter had more opportunities for teamwork;
  - the working conditions in the TMS library were adverse (the library was an overfilled book storage; it was organised, but without an administrator and library catalogue; library material was situated both in the central room and at other locations);
  - the unforeseen relocation of the administrative offices of the TMS took place during the project, which provided the library with better spatial conditions but more time was spent for physical and less for professional work;
  - there are fewer opportunities and needs for participation and integration in library science and in a specialised library.

Since the candidate was also trained as a curator-documentalist, this field gave her more opportunities for the implementation of the programmes aimed at vulnerable groups. Thanks to her diligence, enthusiasm, responsibility and flexibility, she also participated in the preparation of the educational programme of the TMS. In terms of training the candidate, the set objectives were undoubtedly achieved.

Given the number of the activities carried out within the project and the response of the users, we can conclude that the objectives of the accessibility of museum programmes to the members of vulnerable groups were also achieved. Finally, we can estimate the project

as useful for the wider society, since the improvements aimed at vulnerable groups were beneficial for other visitors as well, as stated at a conference organised within the project. It was also stressed that the first steps may seem small and the results not very obvious, but the efforts made were actually intended for future generations.

Although the Slovene Ethnographic Museum has long paid attention to persons belonging to vulnerable groups, participation in the project, especially in its role as project operator, enabled increasing the number of activities, innovations and improvements, both in terms of content and technology. What is more, the museum staff became even more sensitive to the needs of vulnerable groups. I can therefore conclude that it was a pleasure to participate in the museum training for the 21st century and to establish a professional and personal network. I hope that the network will continue to expand in the future.



The opening of the library at the Technical Museum of Slovenia. (Photo: Martina Orehovec)

Access to museum libraries is often limited, as many museums are situated in old listed buildings. However, library facilities could be nevertheless designed in a universal and inclusive way.

Poor knowledge of museum libraries and a lack of awareness of their existence are also problematic. It is thus very important to (first) provide information accessibility. The museums should publish (also in selected foreign languages) on their website that the library is accessible to the members of vulnerable groups. Information accessibility is principally provided by adding the museum library to the Slovene Co-operative Online Bibliographic System and Services (COBISS) and by cataloguing the material. Establishing and maintaining contacts with the organisations of vulnerable groups are also useful. It is best to have personal contact, showing respect and building trust and friendship with the persons belonging to vulnerable groups. The library can also be presented during Doors Open Days.

Content accessibility can be provided by digitising the materials in appropriate formats that facilitate access to the material for the members of vulnerable groups. In order to ensure the accessibility of electronic information resources in the COBISS system, the recommendations for website accessibility should be followed (Dostopnost spletnih strani 2015: 8).<sup>52</sup> The recommendations are written in the form of four principles describing the basic objectives regarding website accessibility: the principles of perception, operability, understandability and robustness.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, content accessibility could be increased with customised hardware and software, magnifying glasses, orientation labels, signs in Braille, audio recordings, etc. Special attention should be paid to the accessibility of periodicals. Wherever possible, specialised services should be

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52 Public sector website accessibility is defined on the basis of the WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) recommendation made by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). The recommendations became an international standard.

53 This means that people with disabilities should be allowed to perceive web content (e.g. non-textual content is converted into a textual alternative or audio clips of written texts are made), find it easily and understand it (it is simplified, in an appropriate language, e.g.) and that the content is compatible with the modified technologies (see Dostopnost spletnih strani 2015).

introduced, e.g. the “Book at Home” service, which provides a free visit of a librarian to the homes of members who cannot go to the library due to reduced mobility, advanced age or other barriers. Reading clubs could also be organised, presenting selected contents to the members of vulnerable groups or their achievements and inputs in the field of heritage. Searching for library material can also be facilitated with a variety of other aids, e.g. with comfortable stools used for searching for material on the bottom shelf.

» Tina Gostenčnik, student, Department of Sociology,  
Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana

I am a visually impaired student in sociology of culture. Within the project, I work at the Technical Museum of Slovenia, where I help organise the library. The entire project has been a pleasant experience. I learned to be more patient and found that I was able to sit still for a long time doing the same thing; only a month ago, I would argue that this was impossible. I also learned many new things. However, I must say that books often seem to be friendlier in everyday life than people. I hope that I will continue to cooperate with my colleagues at the TMS and other people participating in the project.

«

Adequate qualifications of the museum librarian for helping users belonging to vulnerable groups also represents an important aspect of the accessibility of library material. The librarians should have adequate knowledge of the users and their features, what kind of help they need (e.g. when using assistive technology) and in what circumstances. The librarians gain basic knowledge of the methods of adapting library and information services during their studies, but they should constantly expand it. They have several possibilities: workshops on working with users with disabilities offered (at least occasionally) by the National and University Library of Slovenia, library conferences and congresses, technical literature (see Starman, Južnič and Žagar 2011).

By employing persons belonging to vulnerable groups, the museum library enables their active participation in society. It is difficult to employ people with reduced mobility due to the inaccessible facilities of museum libraries or the failure to comply with the conditions for such employment (e.g. inadequate sanitary facilities). This problem

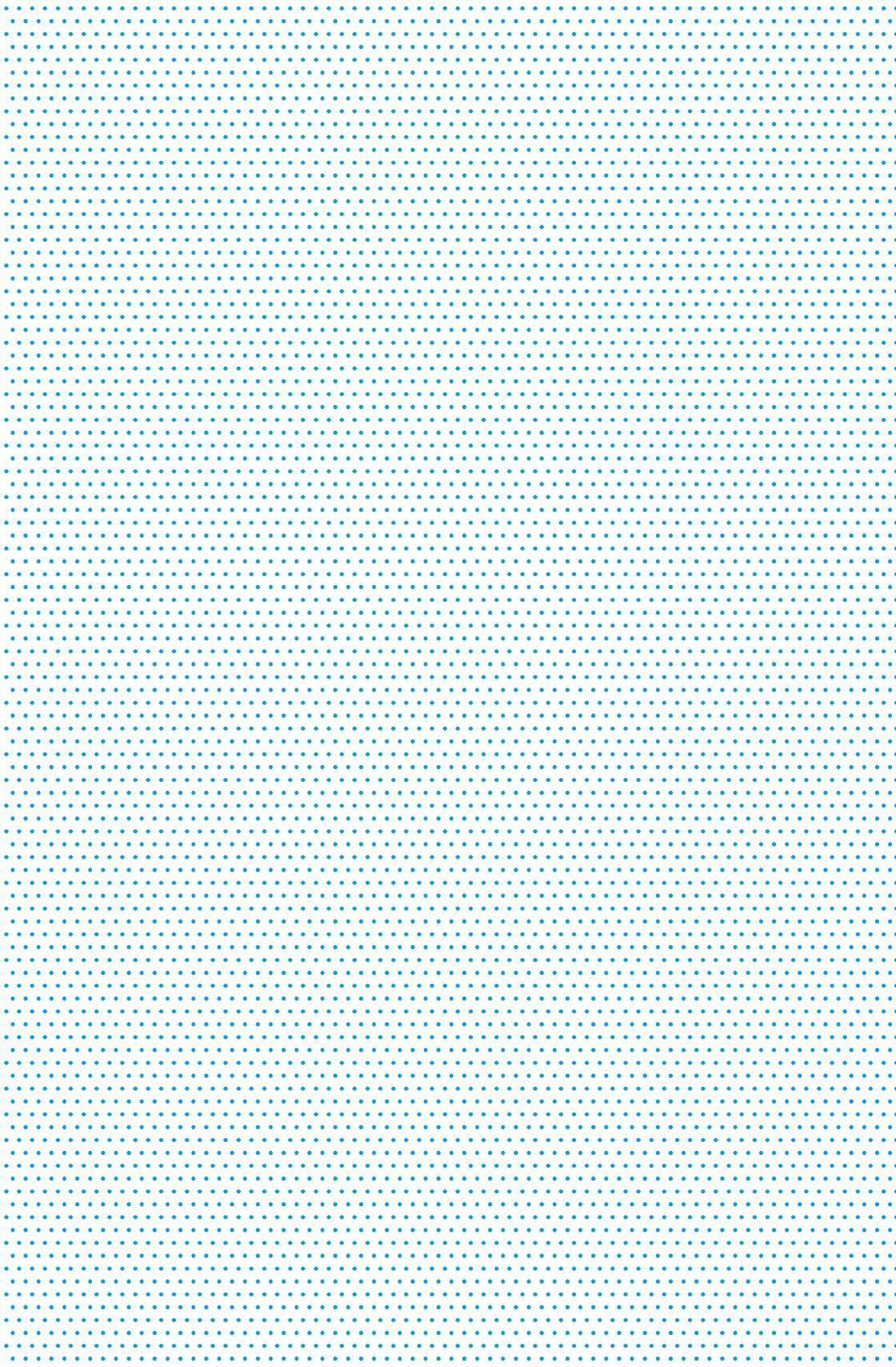
can be avoided by allowing the person with reduced mobility to work from home, e.g. to catalogue or insert data into the database.<sup>54</sup> People with sensory impairment can also be useful in the library – they can make an inventory, advise and help adapt library material. The members of ethnic communities can help with their language skills, for instance, and assist in the understanding of texts written in foreign languages (e.g. cataloguing foreign publications) and in translating the texts. As most museum libraries only have one librarian, the employment of persons belonging to vulnerable groups (e.g. via public works as assistant to the librarian) would be very useful both for the library and the librarian.

» **Tanja Turk, student, Department of Library and Information Science and Book Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana**

As I am a person with reduced mobility and thus belong to the so-called vulnerable groups, I was drawn by the project from the beginning. I am glad that I could work in a library, which is my area of expertise. Working in a museum library was a special challenge for me. I learned a lot about it while studying library science at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana and I wanted to test and deepen the acquired knowledge in practice. Since I have a licence for record downloading and holdings in the COBISS3 environment, I was assigned to do this kind of work. It means that I downloaded the records of exhibition catalogues from the shared COBIB database to the local database of the National Gallery and added uncontrolled subject headings. All exhibition catalogues of the old holdings should be entered into the local database of the National Gallery – this information may be useful sometime in the future. Since the specialised library I work in is aimed at both institution employees and outside users, who need quick and reliable information on the exhibition catalogues and other library material for their professional research work in a specialised field, the information must be entered into the local base carefully. Moreover, when adding subject headings, we must not think strictly professionally but put ourselves in the user's shoes and consider which subject headings he/she would use to search for a particular exhibition catalogue. This kind of work may seem dull, but I find it very interesting, as I can learn about different, mostly Slovenian 20th-century artists. I am particularly delighted when I come across a catalogue with the author's handwritten signature – this is what gives additional value to the exhibition catalogue. As I work with enthusiastic and motivated people, I can also grow personally. In addition to everything listed, I believe that the most important thing is to give jobs to persons belonging to vulnerable groups and to enable us to work diligently and accurately despite our disabilities. I would be happy to participate in such projects in the future. <<

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54 We must make sure that the material is delivered to his/her home.





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