



Rethinking Museum Accessibility Strategies

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museumsforpeople.com

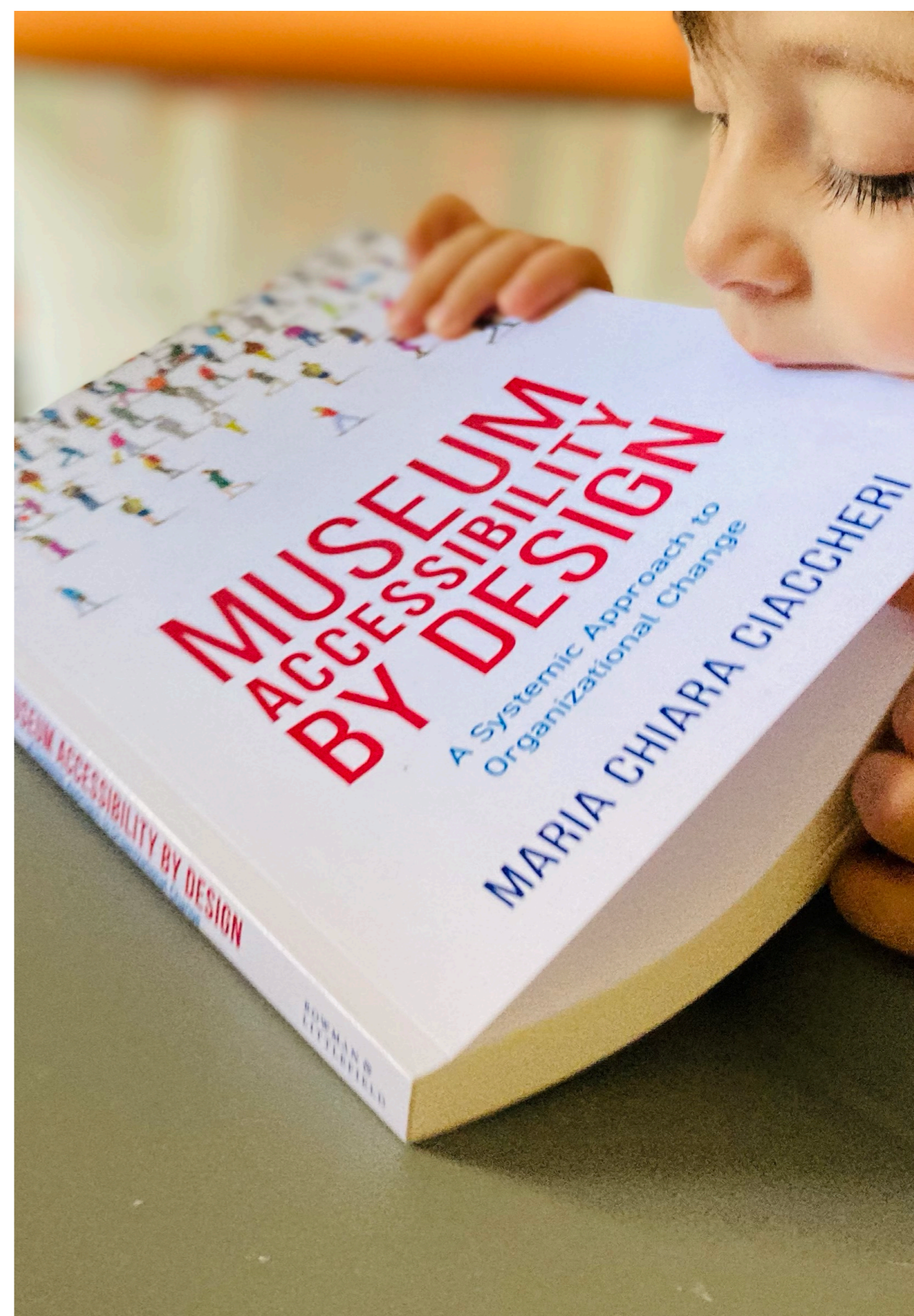
April, 9, 2024 | NEMO



This bone is from
a rare Chicken Dinosaur

- but please,
don't tell your dog
that is a replica!

www.museumsforpeople.com



Museum Accessibility by Design (AAM, 2021)

What is museum accessibility today?

Which barriers and stereotypes we need to break down?

Can access promote change in cultural organizations and society at large?

Where to start?

Today

1. Accessibility: the basics
2. In the museum
3. What about barriers
4. Access is a process - ok, where to start?
5. Insights from a fresh perspective

1/5

Accessibility: the basics

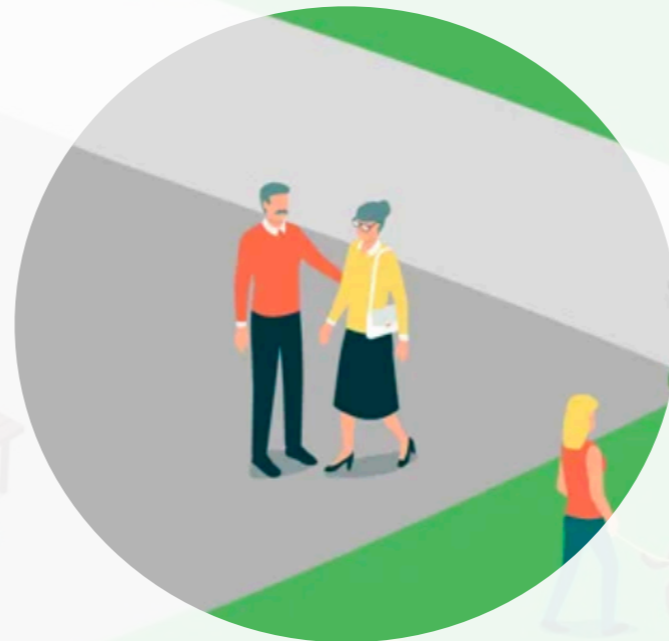




Accessibility is about the relationship between people and the environment

A couple of elderly

- motor difficulties
- visual difficulties
- risk of social exclusion
- low income



An accessible park

- frequent seats
- efficient public transportation
- clearly visible signage
- spaces, places and services for sociability
- free admission
- [...]

Accessibility is the ability to design for different needs

A person using a wheelchair


- knowing in advance accessibility
- feeling independent



An accessible park

- updated website
- accessible facilities and services and routes

Accessibility is the ability to design for different needs



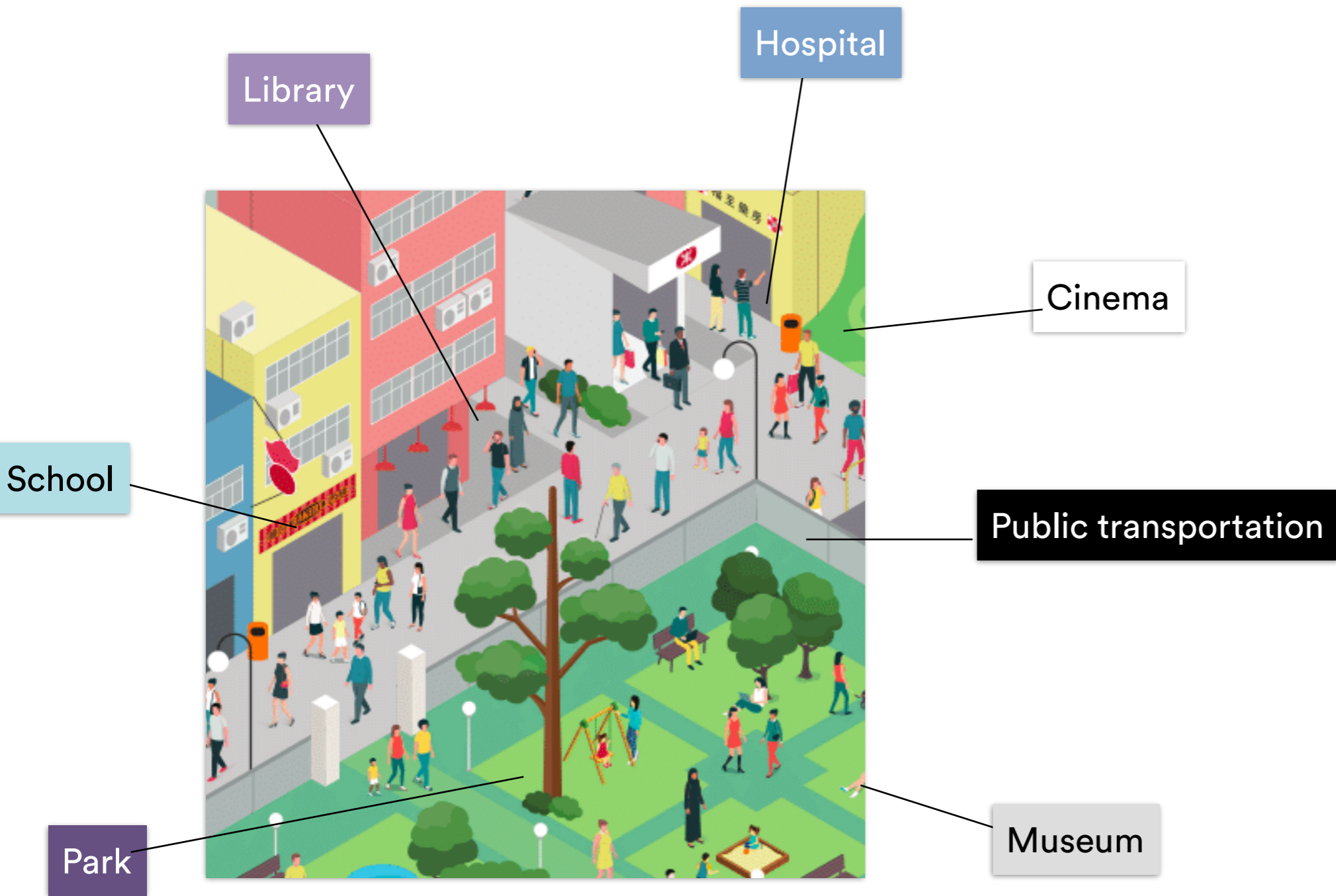
A family just moved from another country

- activities suitable for a child
- little free time
- not knowing the language

An accessible park

- accessible play area
- activities during off-work hours
- family friendly facilities
[...]

Accessibility is the ability to design for different needs



Different organizations should collaborate for offering citizenship opportunity



The relation between organizations and the environment is open



The relation between organizations and the environment is open

----->

Cultural organizations absorb:

- Stereotypes and prejudices
- Social and cultural awareness



The relation between organizations and the environment is open

→

Cultural organizations absorb:

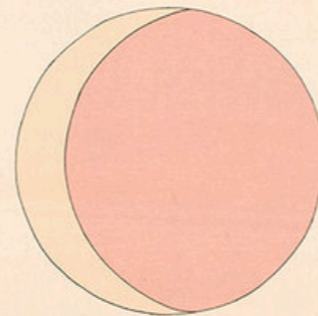
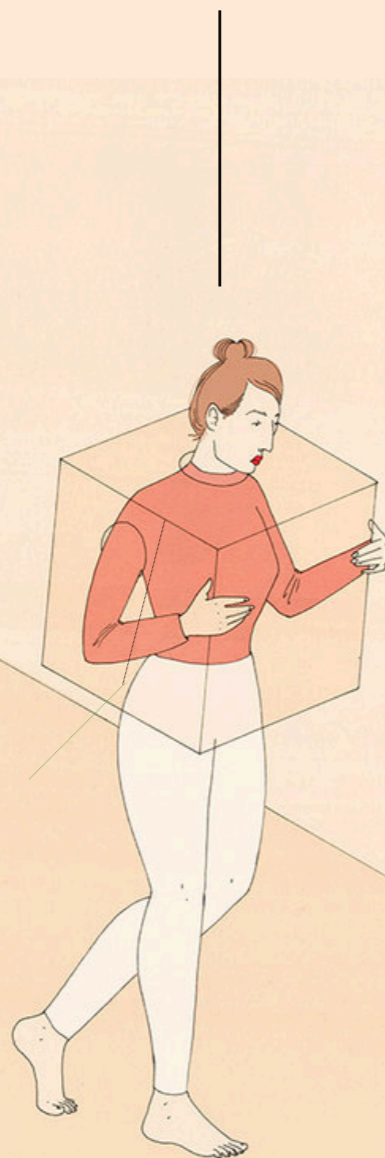
- Stereotypes and prejudices
- Social and cultural awareness

←

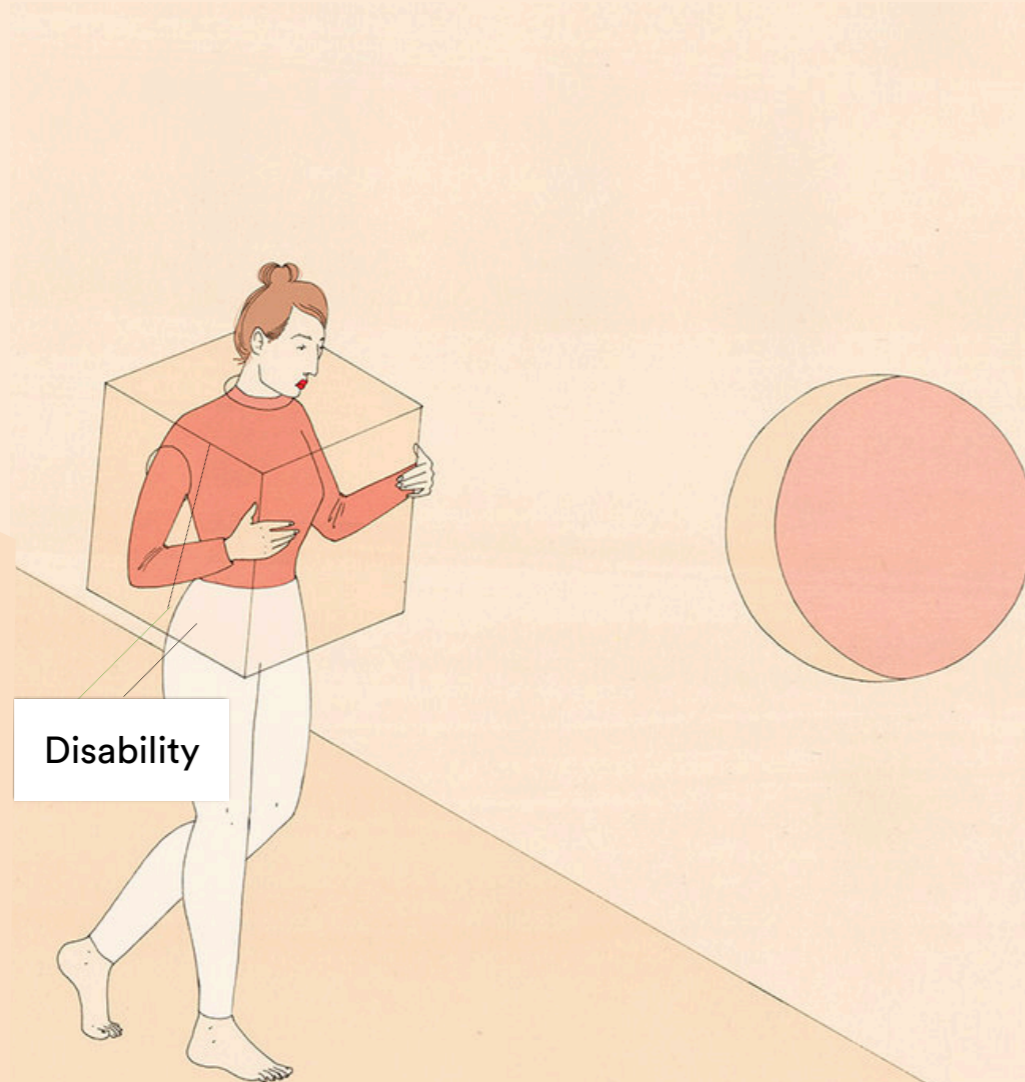
The environment is subject to:

- Impacts (including people's perceptions)

Accessibility is the ability to design a place, a service, a product for different needs

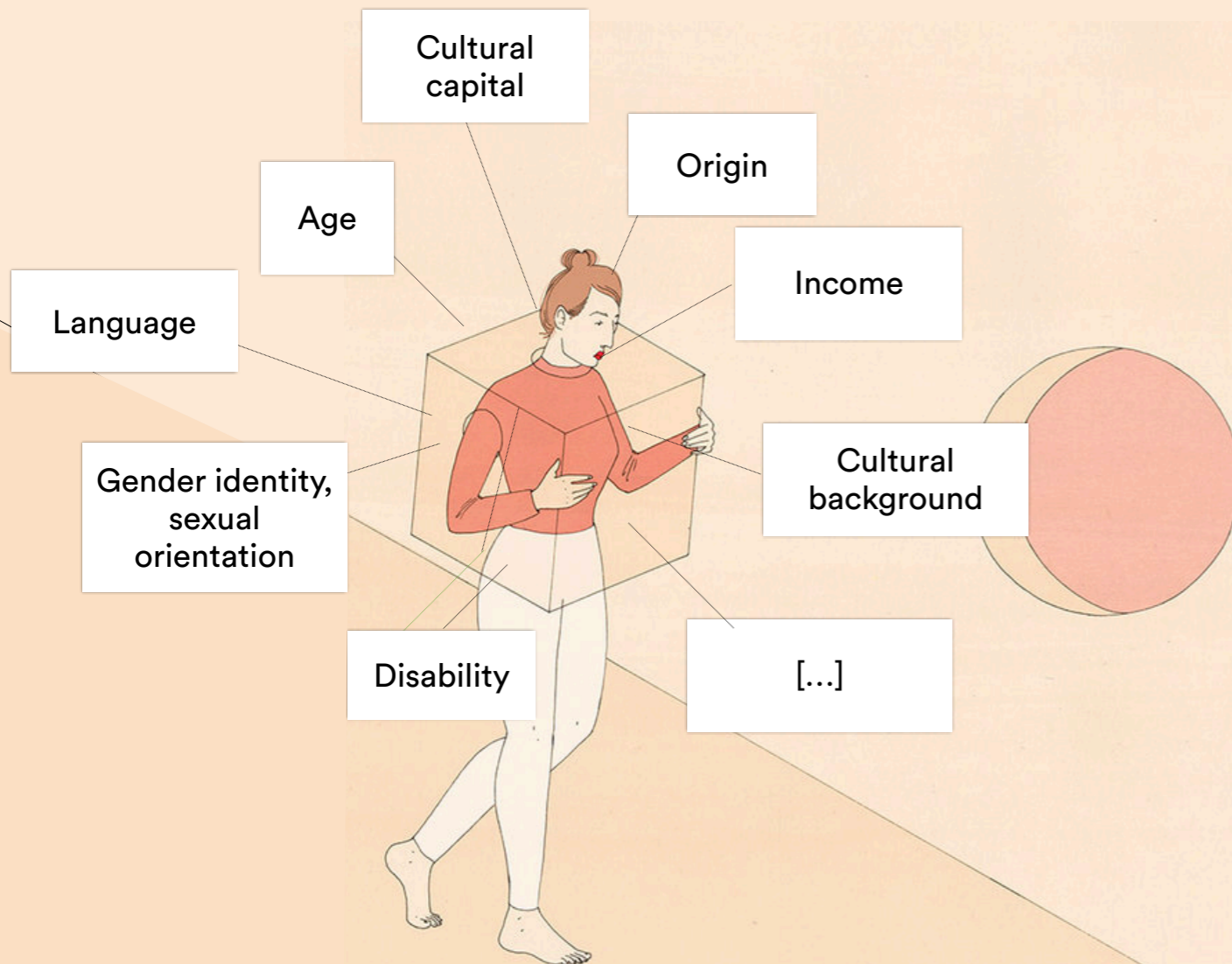


And overcome any mismatch between the person and the environment

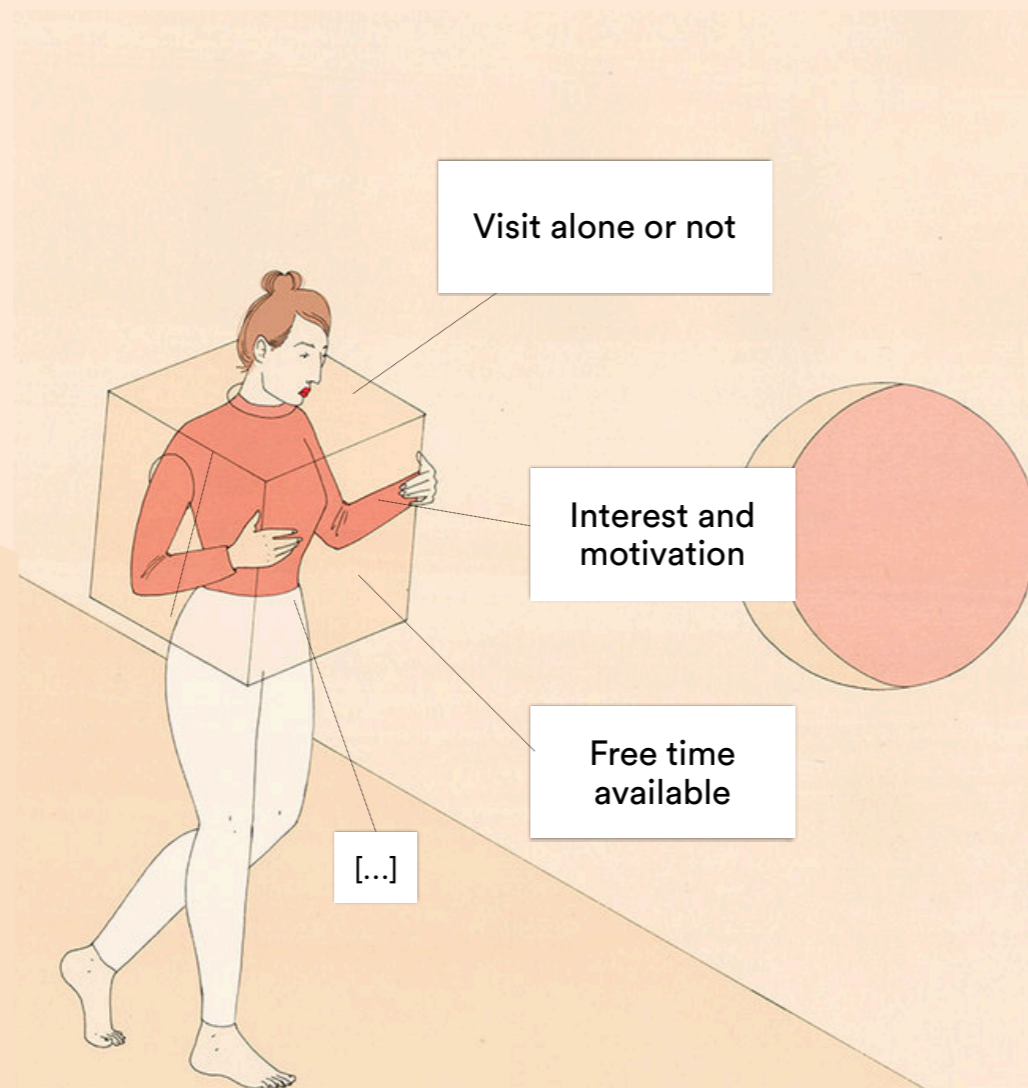


Disability

We think to mismatches
related to disability only



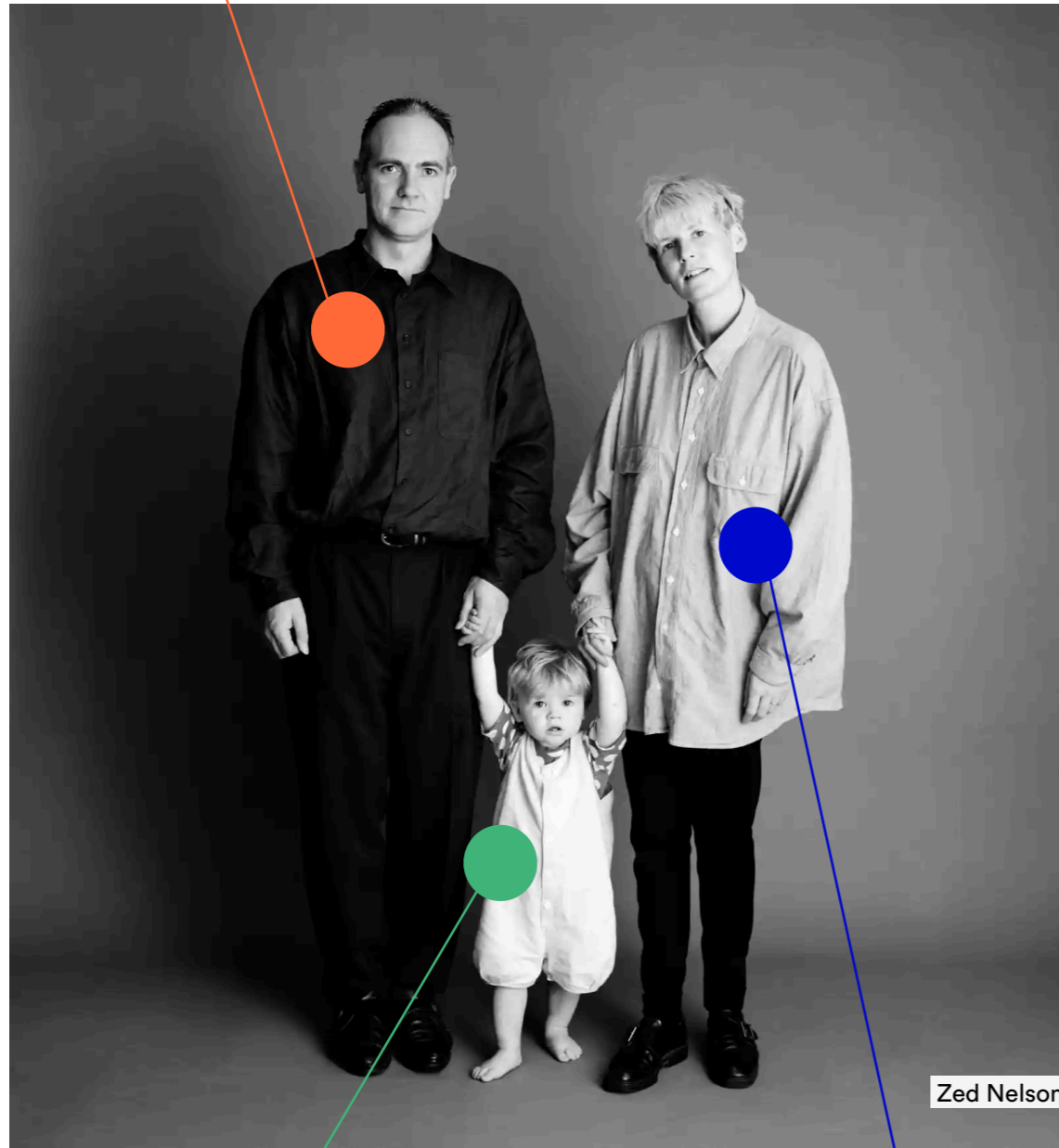
- Each of us is a universe: diversity is an essential topic.
- Different characteristics that coexist and change over time: each of them can be object of a mismatch and therefore discrimination.
- Several issues together can cause a mismatch even deeper: that's about intersectionality.



In contingent situations,
mismatch also occurs

**Access deal with
everyday needs**

Mike, 32, designer, loves museums, has little free time and prefers to visit in the evening. He suffers from asthma and gets short of breath on long ramps.



Lucas, 2 years old. In the afternoon he goes to the park, the library, the museum, as long as someone accompanies him. He is curious, smiling, always running and gets bored easily.

Roswitha, 30 years old, artist. She speaks neither English nor Italian, although she has been living with Mike in Fiesole for over three years. Since Lucas was born, she has little time to visit museums, although she works part-time.

Mike, 32 yrs



Zed Nelson

Lucas, 2 yrs

Roswitha, 30 yrs

Mike, 81 years old

Lucas, 51 years old



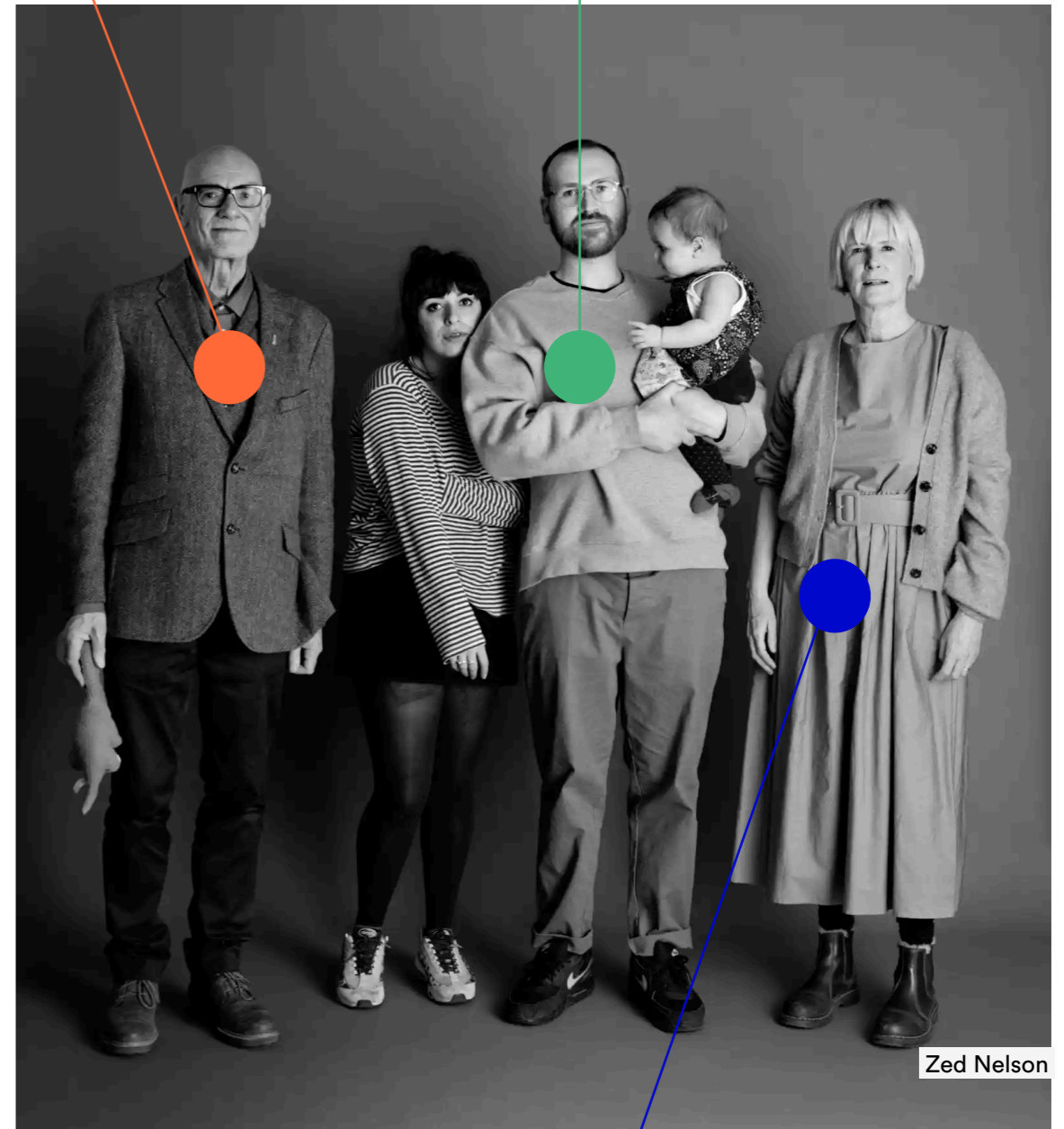
50 years later

Roswitha, 79

Mike, 81 years old, retired, still lives in Fiesole with Roswitha, he had a stroke three years ago and this affects his attention span, he gets tired easily, although swimming lessons have helped him in recent years, he can hardly see out of his right eye, he is on his second cornea transplant.

Lucas, 51 years old. A designer like his father, he works from home and lives in Malmö, Sweden. He has a son and when he goes to museums his visiting times are shortened. He is dyslexic and dyscalculic: this doesn't cause him any problems, not at all, or at least not as long as he doesn't encounter any barriers.

Access is essential for any of us



Roswitha, 79, retired. She continues to paint, sculpt, engrave, and embroider, but like her husband, her eyesight is deteriorating due to maculopathy, she does not drive, and she is very afraid of stairs, but she loves to play with her grandson when she visits him.

2/5

In the museum



...more, are often seen as difficult disciplines, especially by those not directly involved.

...primarily in the field of accessibility and museum education.

CECA
International committee for education and cultural action



ICOM CECA, Carole Perret

Accessibility takes on a strong symbolic value in the museum:
what is culture for, and for whom?

“Rights are the claim that we must ask of any social process or power relationship:

Who counts as human?

What is right?

And who is responsible?”

Alison Brysk, *The Future of Human Rights*, 2018

Society is changing > Museums should change as well
> Accessibility can drive this change



Huge transformation in West societies:
ageing population, cognitive impact of
digital, migrations, identity issues
awareness [...]

Museum accessibility is both a method and a process of removing barriers that limit people's participation in museums.

People are those who visit the museum, but also those who work there



Illustration: Shannon Finnegan



Giveaways

- Accessibility is about people and the environment
- Each person is a universe: but their characteristics and needs can change over time
- Accessibility responds to changes in society and people's needs

3/5

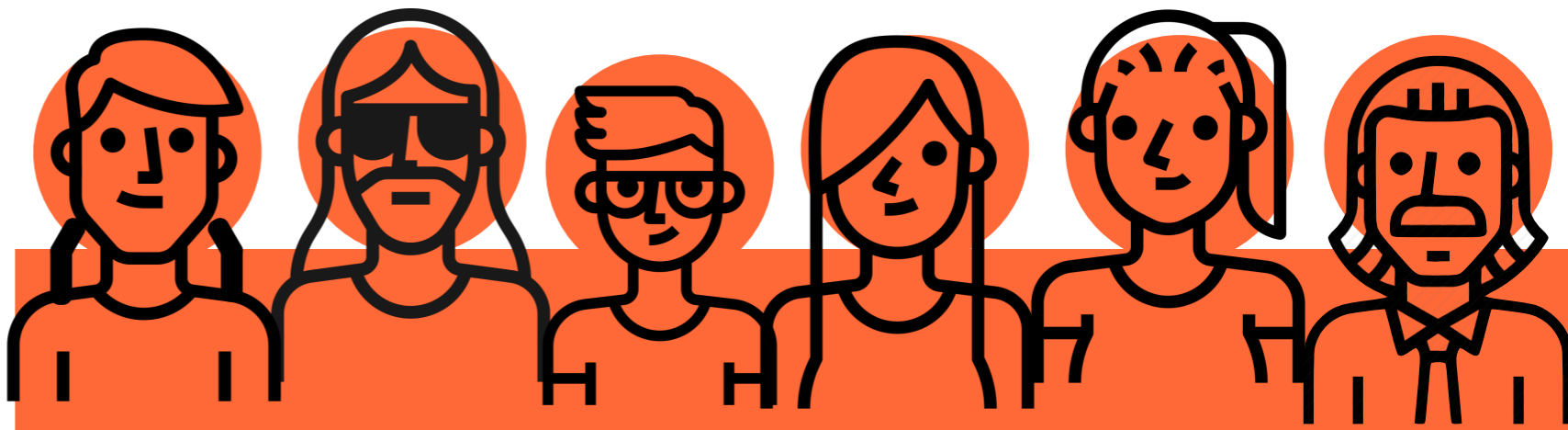
What about barriers



When we talk about barriers in museums we refer to both

MUSEUM
STAFF

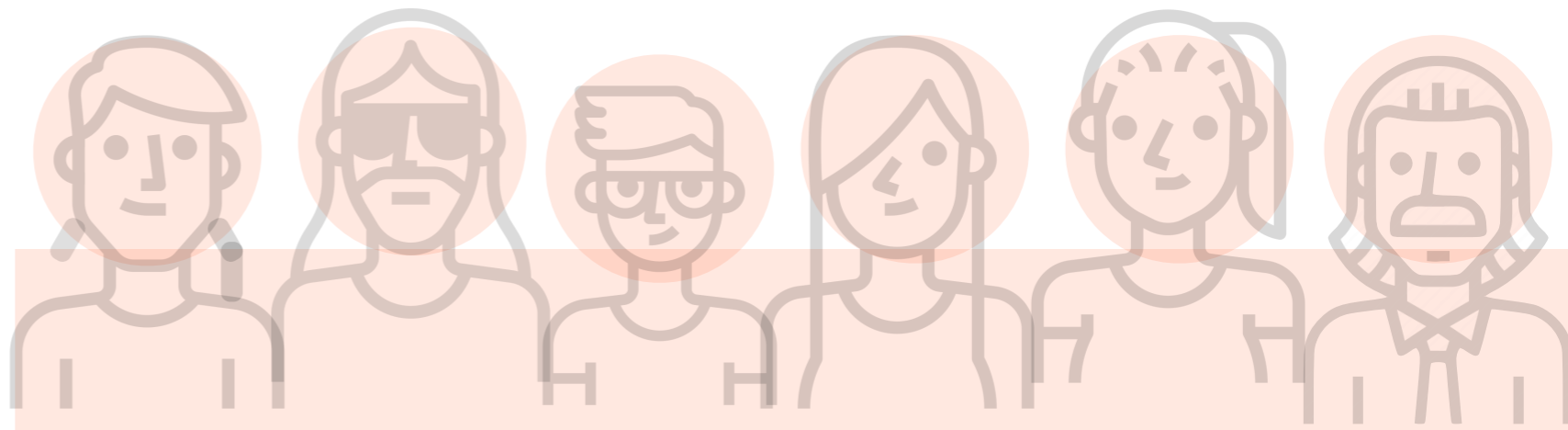
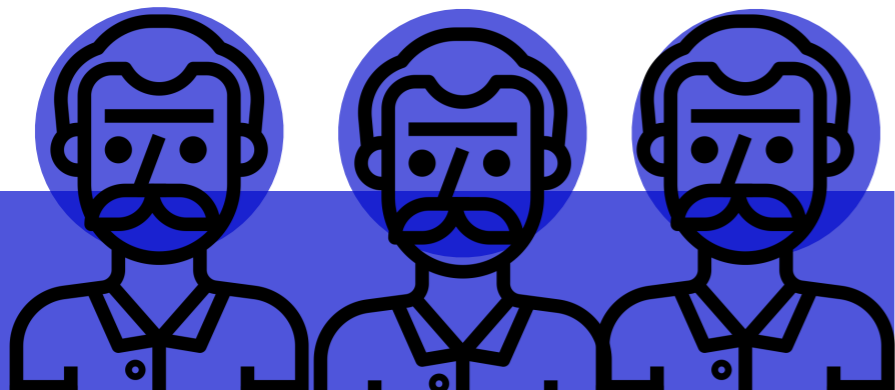
MUSEUM
AUDIENCE



People can find barriers to access the field - related to disability, gender, racial and socio-economic issues



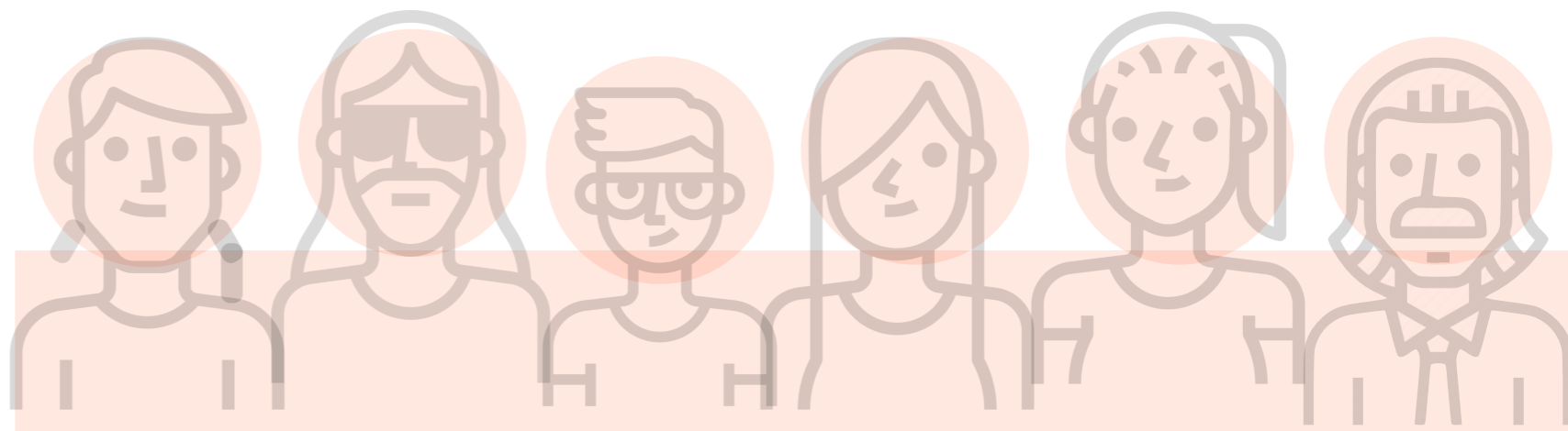
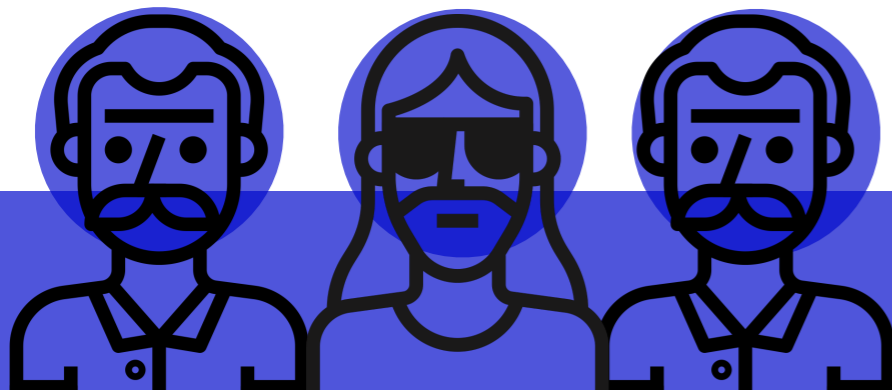
**MUSEUM
STAFF**



MUSEUM STAFF



Diversity is a topic: diverse people
can find barriers in working culture



If the workforce is homogeneous, it generates homogeneous proposals, which can be an obstacle for many.

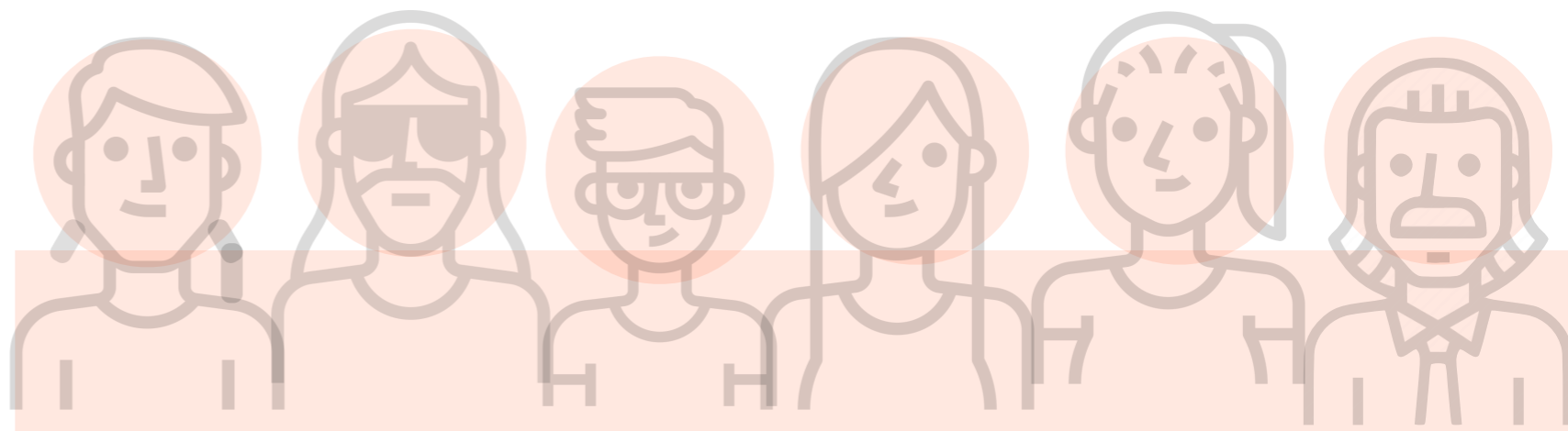
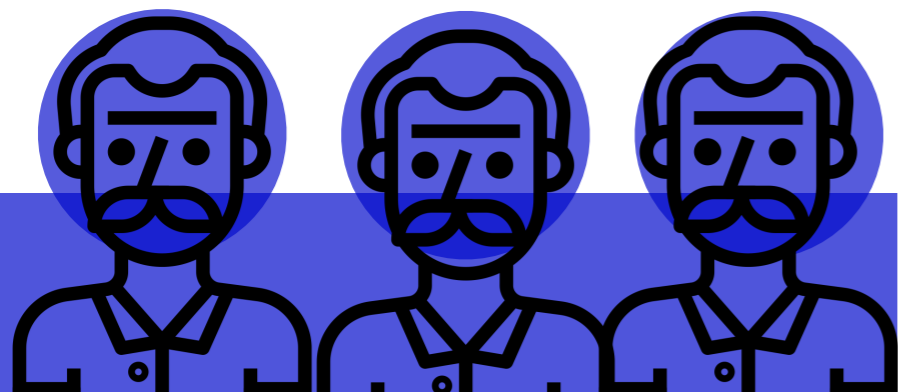


When the staff think of removing barriers, they often refer to **different actions** aimed at reaching especially **vulnerable minorities**.

People find barriers to working in the field

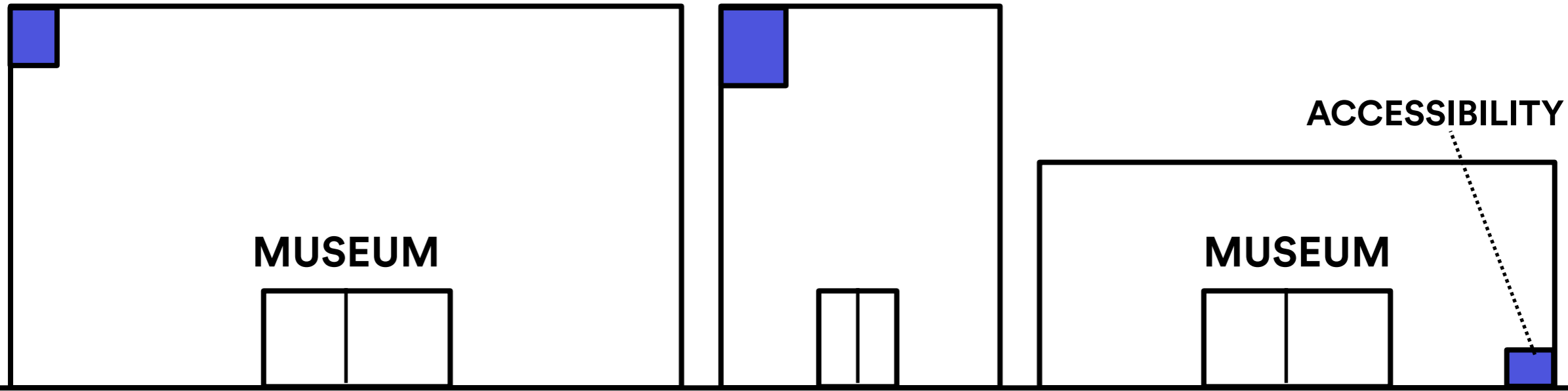
MUSEUM STAFF

MUSEUM AUDIENCE



Accessibility is limited:
in terms of process, responsibilities,
importance

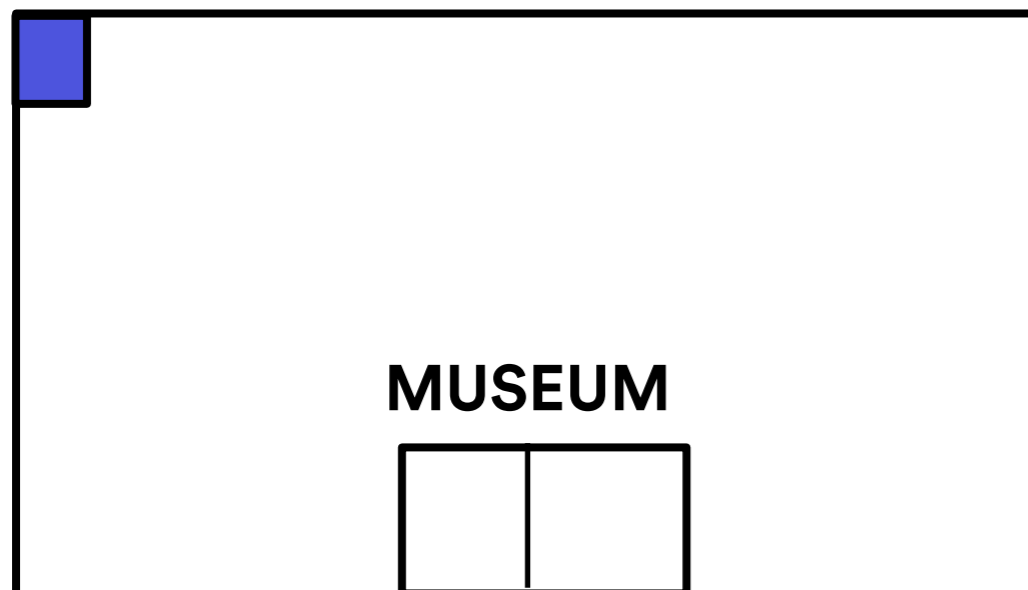
ACCESSIBILITY



Accessibility is often subject to stereotypes and misunderstandings:

- it's only for a few people
- it deals with "special needs"
- it is the responsibility of people who work in education
- it is considered expensive
- it rarely considers usability
- it often denies aesthetics
- it is considered restrictive
- it doesn't deal with organization, internal processes, strategies

ACCESSIBILITY

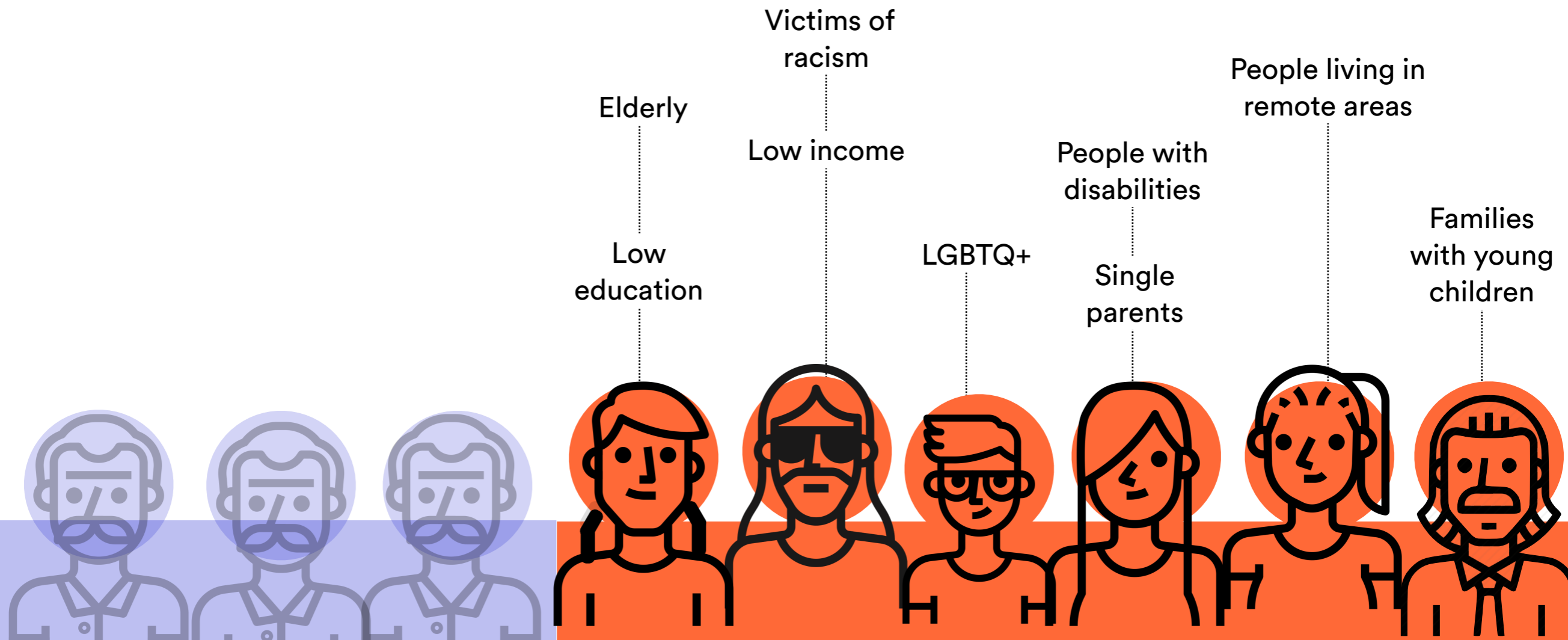


Stereotypes are often about the audience itself



Stereotypes are when you look at someone you've never seen before but you feel like you already know everything about them.

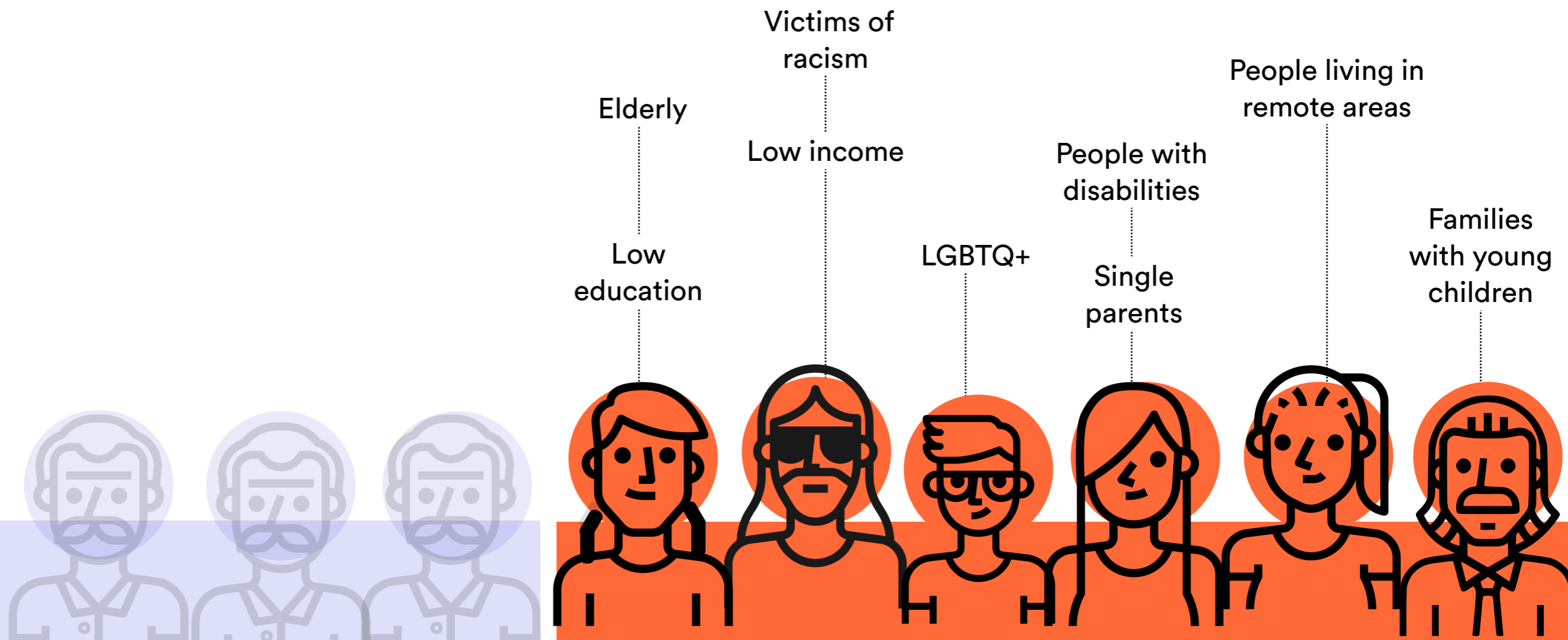
On the audience side, we know that some people are the most discriminated



For them barriers are often:

[36/99]

- being able to access and participate
- recognizing themselves
- having an engaging/relaxing experience
- spending time with someone



Obstacles most of times are relative:
they change according to people and situation

Barriers to
work in the
field



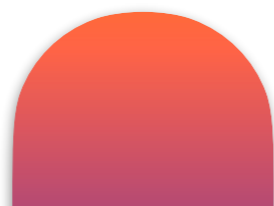
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Barriers to
work in the
field

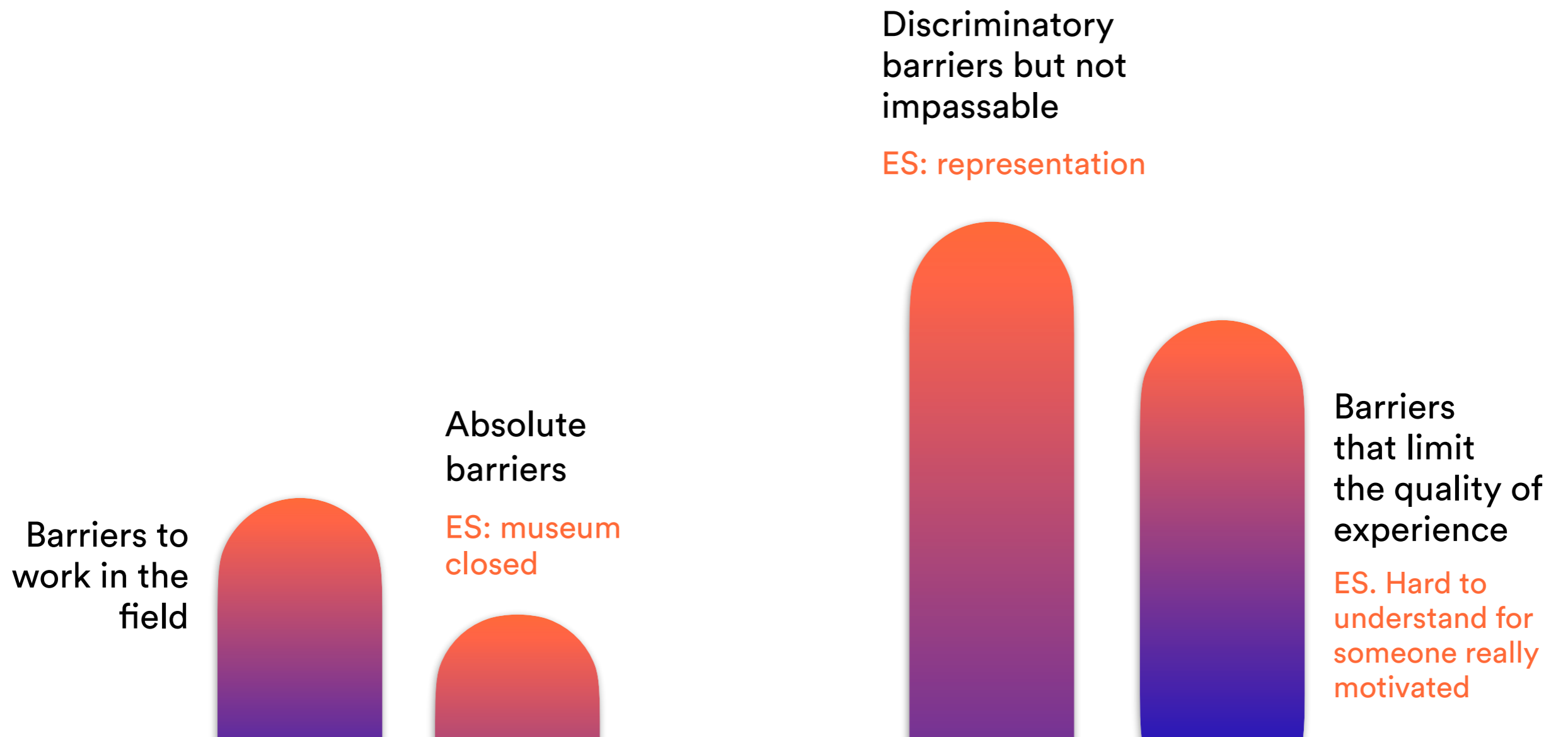


Absolute
barriers

ES: museum
closed



Obstacles most of times are relative: they change according to people and situation



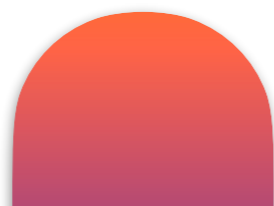
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Barriers to
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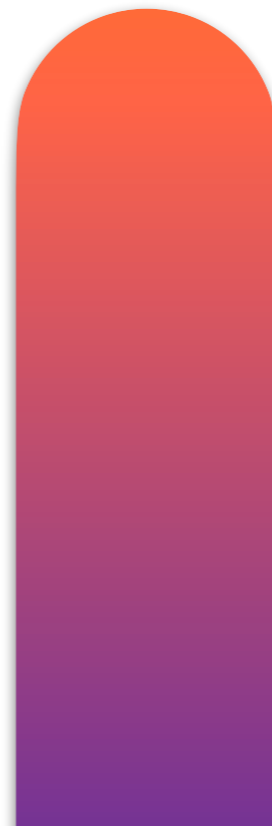
Barriers
impassable

ES: sight is the
only sense
allowed



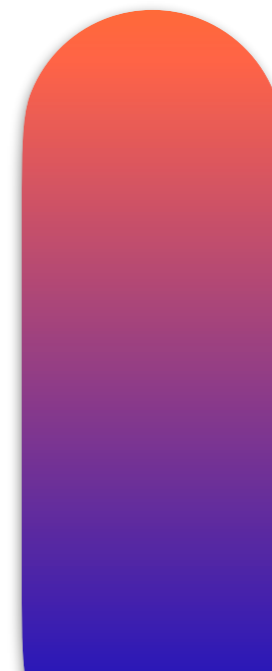
Discriminatory
barriers but not
impassable

ES: representation



Barriers
that limit
the quality of
experience

ES. Hard to
understand for
someone really
motivated



Some impassable obstacles are difficult to narrow:

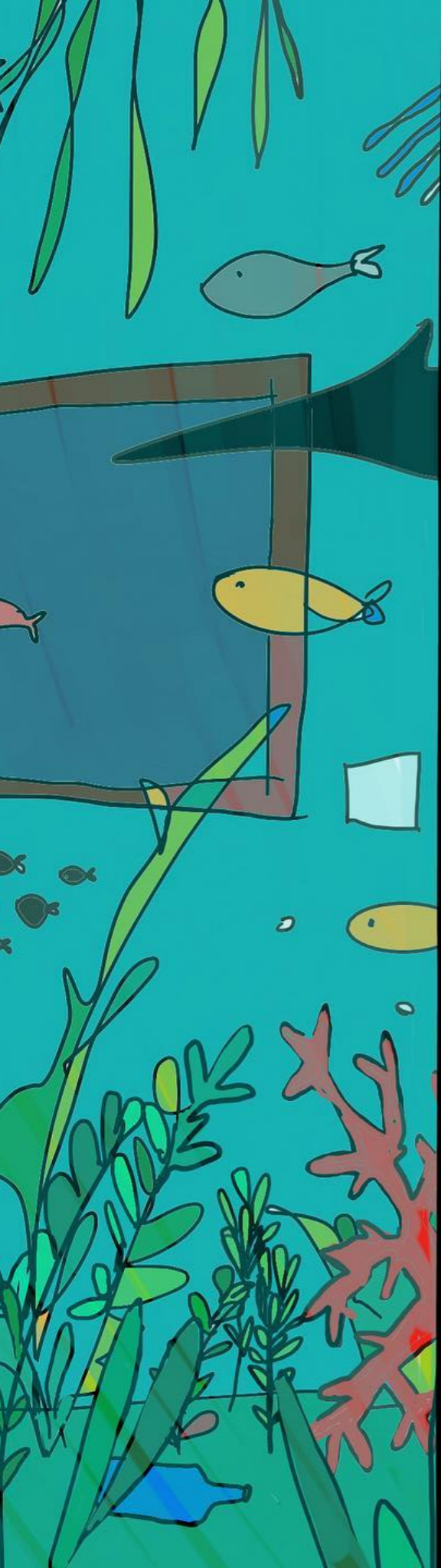
- motor barriers
- visual barriers
- income
- time constraints
- distance from the offer
- lack of motivation
(although not always related to cultural capital)



Accessibility was born in the 1970's thanks to the activist movements of people with disabilities. Even today, they are among those who encounter the most hard barriers to overcome.



Socio-cultural barriers are not easier to be removed



But barriers are also economic, related to information, participation, representation, digital, cognitive in the broadest sense and many others:

most of time the experience is allowed but we can still recognize different forms of discrimination.

Barriers are in all the areas

EXHIBITION DESIGN

CURATORSHIP

COMMUNICATION

FRONTLINE STAFF

EVENTS

EDUCATION

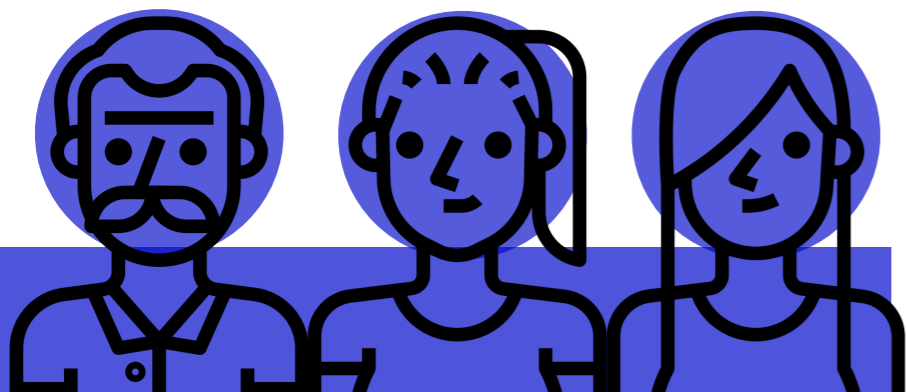
WEB AND TECH

PROCESSI DI LAVORO

ORGANIZZAZIONE INTERNA

STRATEGIA [...]

MISSIONE E POLICY



And more!

Indirect/invisible barriers

The most impactful and the most difficult to overcome: they deal with biases, require training all employees, define long term strategy, involve management, etc.

EXHIBITION DESIGN

CURATORSHIP

COMMUNICATION

FRONTLINE STAFF

EVENTS

EDUCATION

WEB AND TECH

WORKING PROCESS

ORGANIZATION

STRATEGY

MISSION AND POLICY



Giveaways

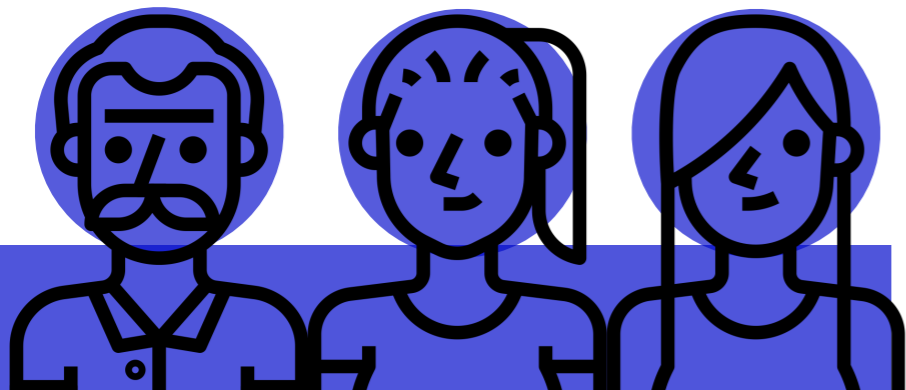
- Barriers are related to audiences and staff
- There are many stereotypes that limit the development
- There are direct and indirect barriers
- Indirect barriers are invisible and the hardest to remove

4/5

Access is a process - ok, where to start?



Where to start?



EXHIBITION DESIGN

CURATORSHIP

COMMUNICATION

FRONTLINE STAFF

EVENTS

EDUCATION

WEB AND TECH

WORKING PROCESS

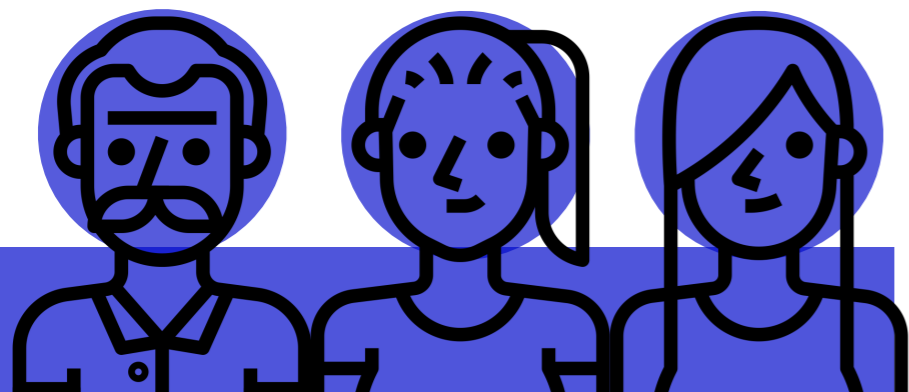
ORGANIZATION

STRATEGY [...]

MISSION AND POLICY

FIRST

- Involve leadership
- Define a responsible
- Train the whole staff
- Define budget



EXHIBITION DESIGN

CURATORSHIP

COMMUNICATION

FRONTLINE STAFF

EVENTS

EDUCATION

WEB AND TECH

WORKING PROCESS

ORGANIZATION

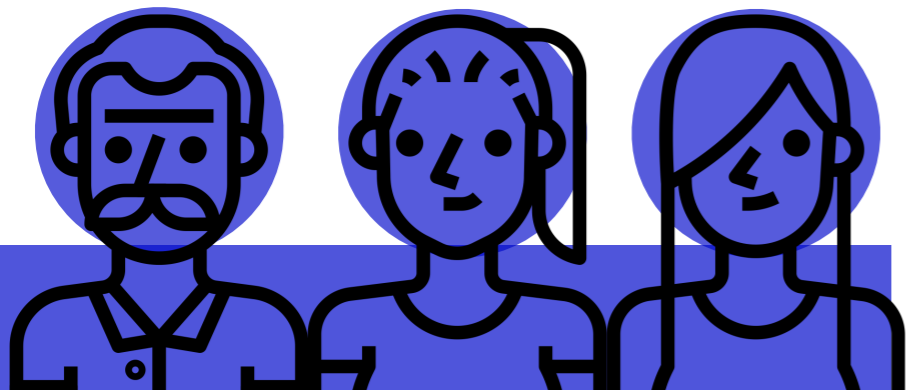
STRATEGY [...]

MISSION AND POLICY

FIRST

- Involve leadership
- Define a responsible
- Train the whole staff
- Define budget

Step by step: select one area



EXHIBITION DESIGN

CURATORSHIP

COMMUNICATION

FRONTLINE STAFF

EVENTS

EDUCATION

WEB AND TECH

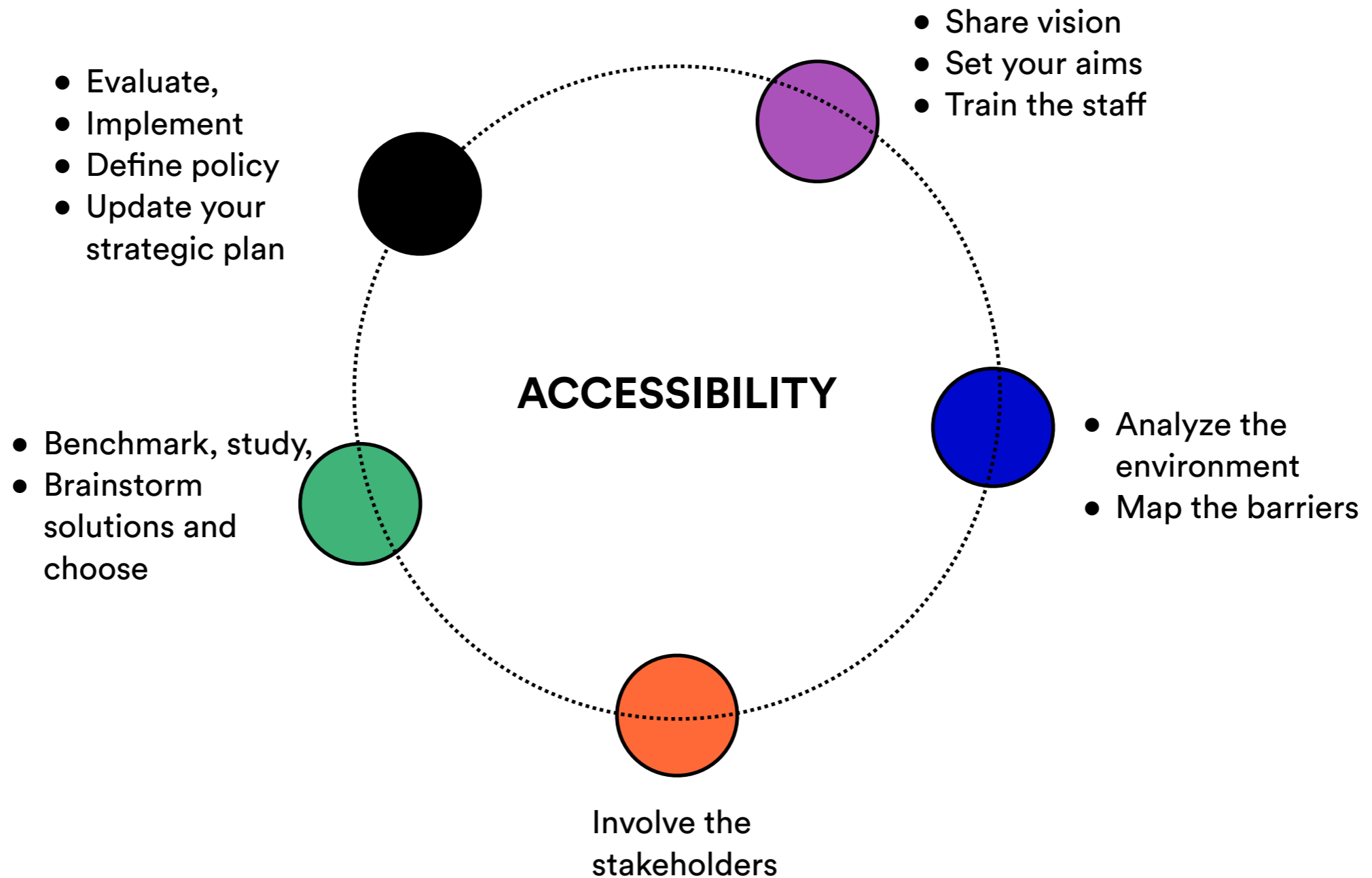
WORKING PROCESS

ORGANIZATION

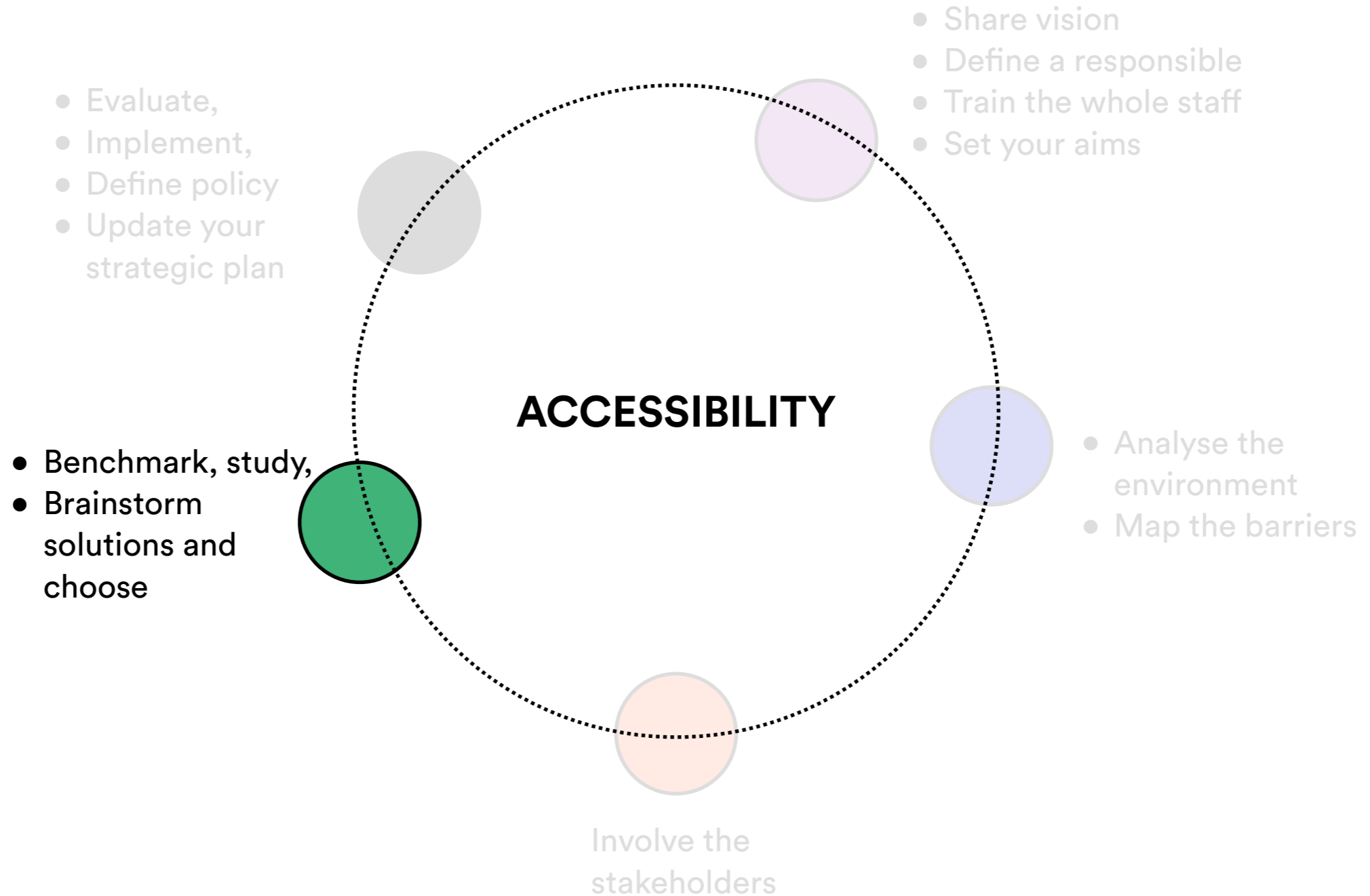
STRATEGY [...]

MISSION AND POLICY

and view access as a process



and view access as a process



Solutions are endless, with different level of engagement where quality and innovation are often in the design

More popular (in Italy)

FRONTLINE TRAINING

ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS

EDUCATIONAL PROPOSAL

ACCESSIBLE ROUTES

Medium/high level awareness

ALL STAFF TRAINING

BARRIERS AUDIT

COMMUNICATION

SOLUTIONS FOR THE AUTONOMOUS VISIT

CO-DESIGN

INCLUSIVE CURATORSHIP AND ARTISTS INVOLVEMENT

EVENTS

[...]

More popular (in Italy)

FRONTLINE TRAINING

ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS

EDUCATIONAL PROPOSAL

ACCESSIBLE ROUTES

Medium/high level awareness

Highest level of awareness

ALL STAFF TRAINING

STAFF DIVERSITY

BARRIERS AUDIT

EVALUATION FOR CHANGE

COMMUNICATION

MISSION AND POLICIES

SOLUTIONS FOR THE AUTONOMOUS VISIT

RENEW ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS

CO-DESIGN

SET CLEAR RESPONSIBILITIES

INCLUSIVE CURATORSHIP AND ARTISTS INVOLVEMENT

ACCESS STRATEGIC PLAN

EVENTS

[...]

[...]

More popular (in Italy)

FRONTLINE TRAINING

ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS

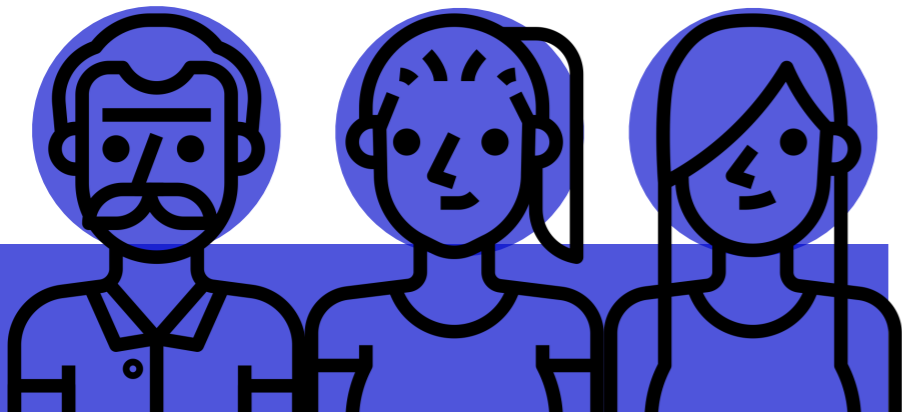
EDUCATIONAL PROPOSAL

ACCESSIBLE ROUTES

In any case, **accessibility** works when it involves **the whole institution**.



**OK, but again:
what solution among
infinite possibilities?**



A strategy is to define priority from easiness and urgency.

EISENHOWER MATRIX

[59/99]

EASY

- no technicians needed
- low skills
- budget < 30 euro
- one person
- < half an hour
- can be done independently

URGENT

- impassability of the barriers
- recipients effectiveness

NOT URGENT

- barriers not particularly impactful
- museum non-place essential

HARD

- budget > 30000 euro
- high expertise needed
- multiple people/multiple departments
- > year
- ask permission

EASY



Feeder for
guidedogs



Change table



Live captions

URGENT

NOT URGENT

HARD



Caterpillar wheelchair

EASY

Do first



1

URGENT

NOT URGENT

HARD

EASY

Do second - it's easy



URGENT

NOT URGENT

HARD

EASY



URGENT

NOT URGENT



Our core

HARD

EASY



URGENT

NOT URGENT



**Sorry, not enough time
for these stuff!**

HARD



Giveaways

- Work on access step by step
- Define one area > map barriers > define priority
- Do what you can, as best you can

5/5

**Insights from
a fresh perspective**





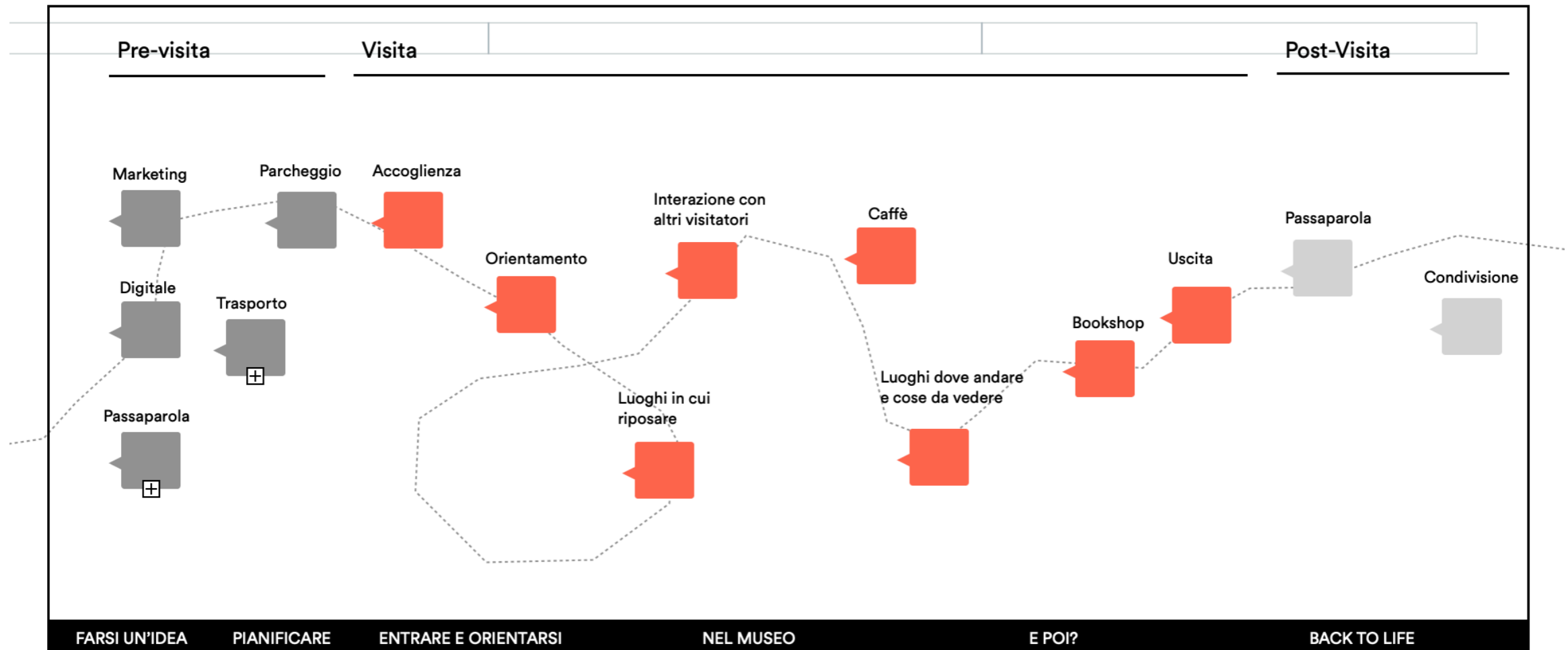
1

**ACCESS
PROMOTES
AUTONOMY,
AND ENABLES
CHOICES**



Out Loud, Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh

Visitor Journey



THEY TOLD ME
THEY ADDED SOME
BRAILLE LABELS.
I HOPE THEY ARE
ALSO MEAT-SCENTED.



**Supporting autonomy means
also knowing that accessibility
somehow impacts on behavior**

The Global Bestseller



'Few books can be said to have changed the world, but *Nudge* did. The Final Edition is marvellous: funny, useful, and wise'

Daniel
Kahneman

FULLY
REVISED

nudge

*The
Final Edition*

Richard H. Thaler
& Cass R. Sunstein



Richard Thaler, Nobel Prize for Economy in 2017

National Gallery, London



↑ Annenberg Court



↑ Rooms 2–14

Bronzino, Bruegel,
Correggio, Gossaert,
Veronese, Titian

↑ Rooms 15–32

Caravaggio, Claude,
Cuyp, Poussin, Van Dyck,
Velázquez, Vermeer

↑ Rooms 33–46

Canaletto, Cézanne,
Constable, Degas, Goya,
Ingres, Monet, Turner,
Van Gogh



2

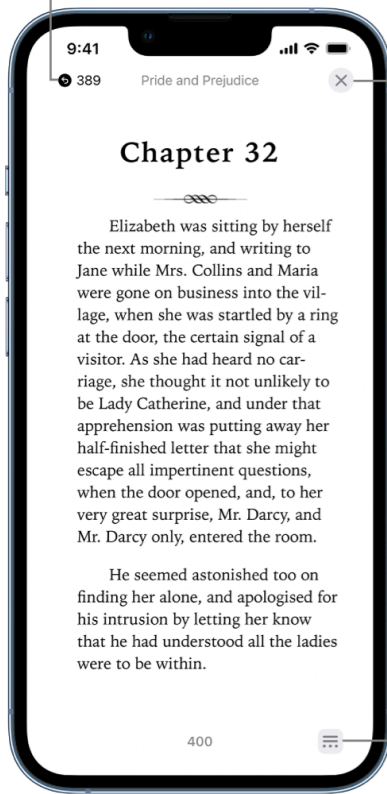
**ACCESS GIVES
PRIORITY TO
COGNITIVE
NEEDS**

THEN HERE

**FIRST YOU
WILL LOOK HERE**

After you look here

Tap to go back to reading start page.

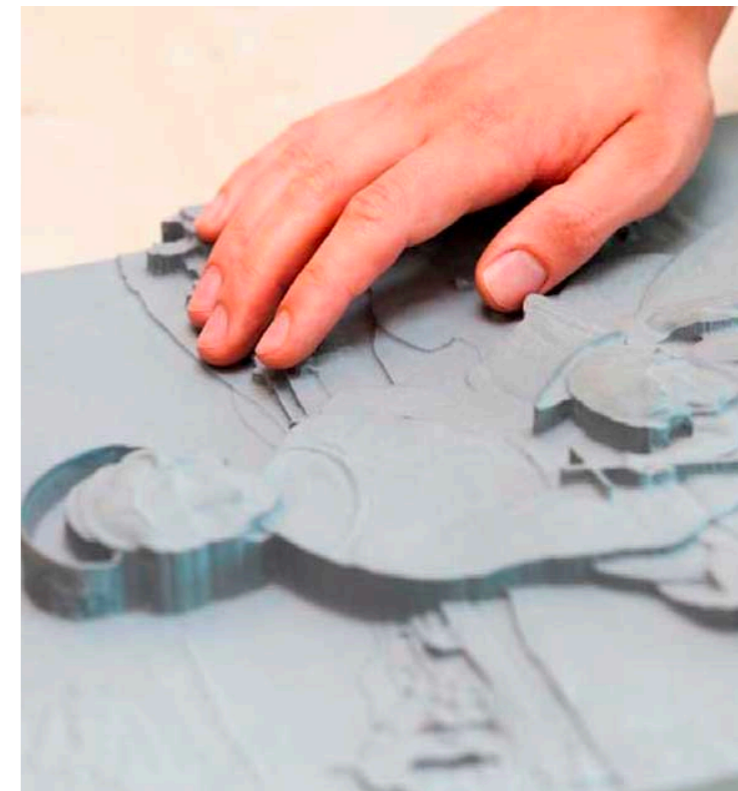
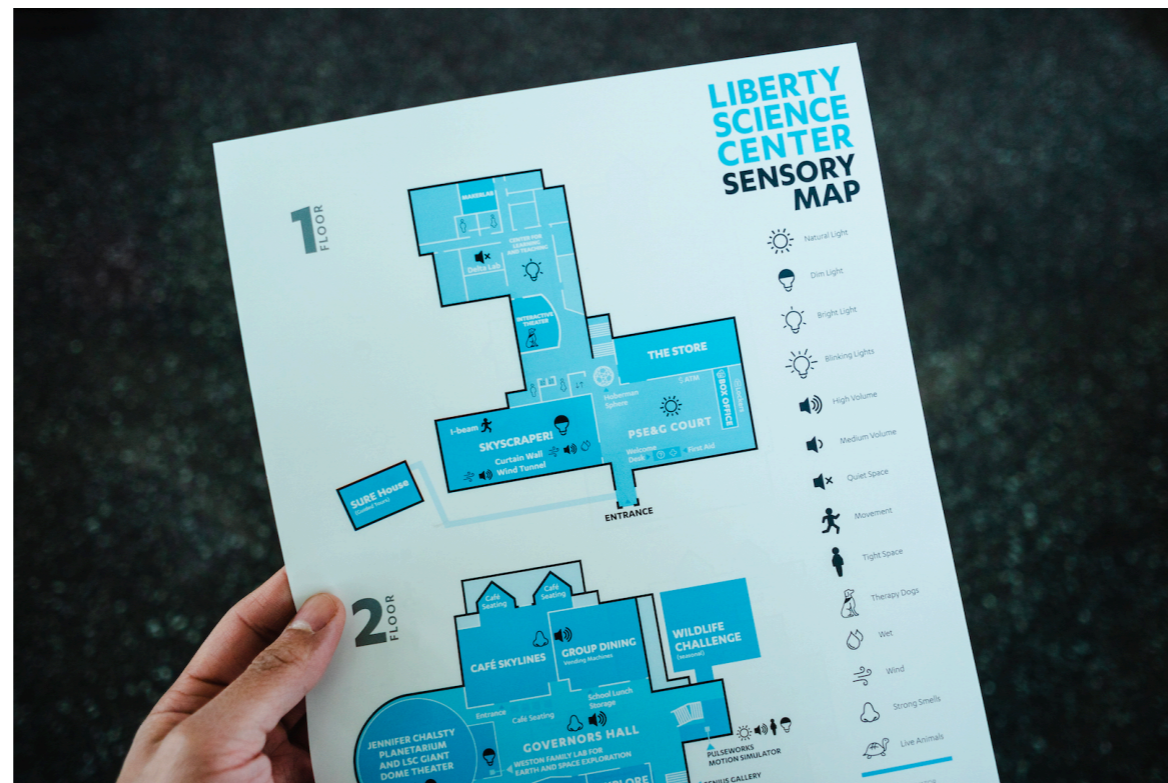


Tap to close book.

Tap to navigate, search, and change the book's display.



[77/99]



"Multisensory elements increase time spent and reinforces memory of the experience."

Tiina Roppola, 2016

[76/89]



The Senses: Design Beyond Vision exhibition, Cooper Hewitt Museum, 2018



2

**UNIVERSAL
DESIGN OR
INCLUSIVE
DESIGN?**

BOTH!



UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Easy to read

Contrast

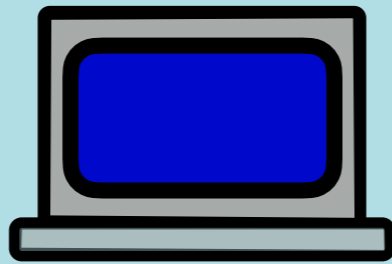
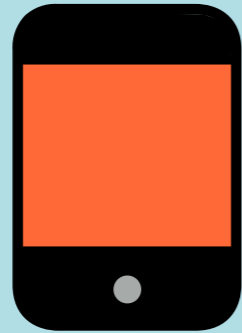
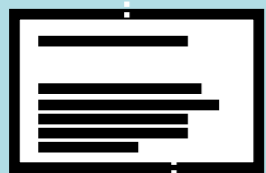
Right size

Relevant contents

Downloadable from the website

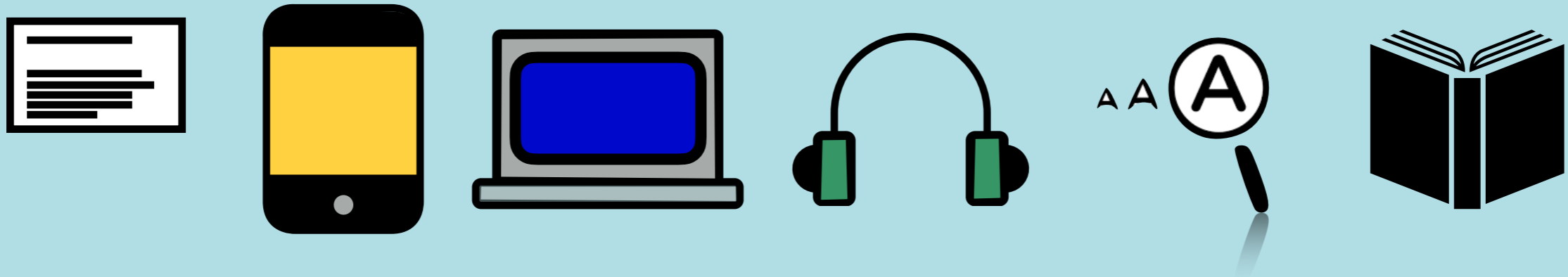
[...]

UNIVERSAL DESIGN
MUSEUM LABEL



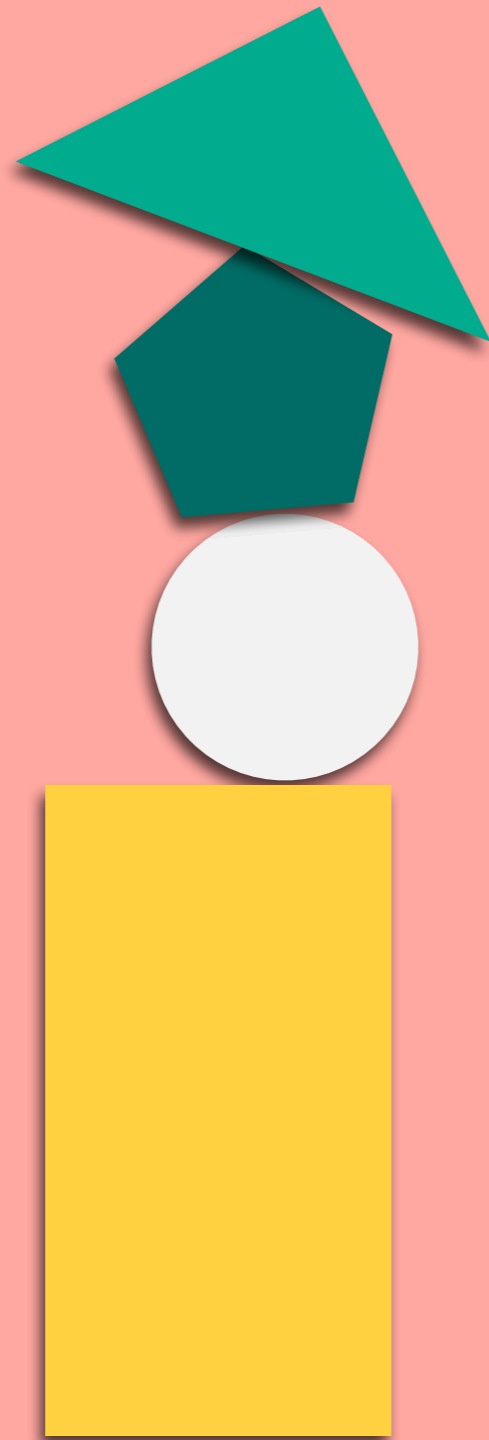
Never accessible for all!

**ONE SIZE DOESN'T
FIT FOR ALL**



Inclusive design is also a good strategy:
different solution for different people





**CONSIDER
PERCEPTIONS
THAT GENERATE**

Access is about normal needs and should not exasperate the perception of in-group and out-group



Looks at needs
- and not labels

[81/99]



One arm



Broken arm



New parent

Looks at needs
- and not labels



One arm

Poor guy!
What a hero!

[only here
compassionate or
heroic stereotype].



Broken arm



New parent

Aesthetics matter - also to overcome stereotypes

Think more, design less.

Ellen Lupton

Born
1963,
Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania,
United States

Ellen is a graphic designer, curator, writer, critic, and educator. Known for her love of typography, Lupton is the curator of contemporary design at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York City and the director of the Graphic Design M.F.A. program at



**EXTRA
BOLD**

a feminist
inclusive
anti-racist
nonbinary
field guide
for graphic
designers

The stories you share matter



Garzoni e Massere
Houseboys and Maidservants
Servantes et Garçons de maison

Già a nove anni noi bambini delle classi più povere arriviamo dalla terraferma per lavorare nei palazzi signorili. I piccoli garzoni sbrigano le commissioni per conto dei "padroni" e apprendono l'arte del "remo", invece noi massere (cameriere) impariamo a cucire, pulire e cucinare. Abbiamo la stessa età dei figli e delle figlie dei patrizi, cresciamo con loro e, a volte, ne condividiamo la stanza da letto. Verso i vent'anni lasciamo il servizio, noi fanciulle per sposarci, mentre i ragazzi tornano in campagna o aprono una bottega in città.

Having to travel from the mainland to work in the houses of the high and mighty is already something that many of us run-of-the-mill kids are doing by the age of nine. The little houseboys deal with orders from the master and mistress, as well as learning how to row. It's down to us maidservants (massere) to learn to sew, clean, and cook. We're the same age as the Querini kids – we're growing up together, and sometimes we end up sleeping in their rooms. By the time that we're twenty, it'll be time to leave the family's service. Marriage will be on the cards for the girls. The boys will go back to the countryside or open a shop here in the city centre.

Dès l'âge de neuf ans, nous autres enfants pauvres arrivons de la campagne pour travailler dans les maisons des aristocrates. Les petits garçons font les courses pour les maîtres et apprennent à ramer, tandis que les servantes comme nous (les massere) apprennent à coudre, à nettoyer et à cuisiner. Nous avons le même âge que les fils et les filles des nobles – nous grandissons à leurs côtés et partageons parfois leur chambre à coucher. Vers l'âge de vingt ans, nous quittons le service, nous les filles pour nous marier, et les garçons pour retourner en ville.

Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venezia



Wellcome Collection, London

m for everyone!

actical advice on museums; ideas museum professionals asked to provide to execute solutions access and inclusion, s of as many people s difficult disciplines, tly involved.

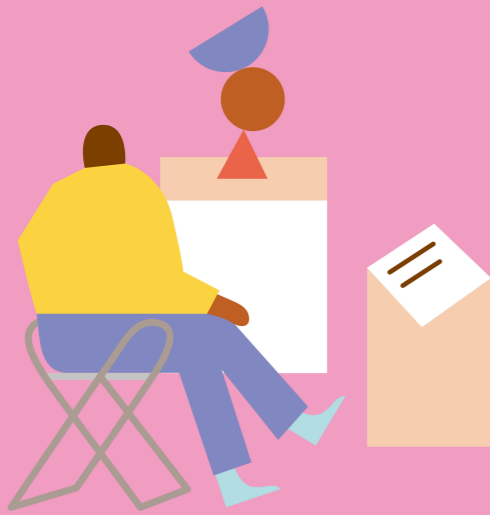
This poster, in contrast, seeks to demonstrate how museums can become welcoming places through simple strategies. The list is the result of a selection of 132 ideas collected through an online survey answered by 72 museum professionals working on 4 continents primarily in the field of accessibility and museum education.

This tool is meant to inspire curators, conservators, museum guards, museum directors, audience development managers, mediators and anyone working in a museum. It is a product developed within the Special Interest Group (SIG) *Inclusive Museum, global accessibility* created within ICOM CECA. The poster can be downloaded on the site of ICOM CECA: ceca.mini.icom.museum

ICOM CECA International committee for education and cultural action



**ACCESS
CAN BE CREATIVE,
ALL AROUND,
LOW COST**



2 Provide portable chairs and wheelchairs. Mettre à disposition des chaises pliantes et des fauteuils roulants. Proporcionar sillas plegables y sillas de ruedas.

3

Offer baby marsupiums so that parents can leave pushchairs in the cloakroom.

Proposer des porte-bébés aux parents pour laisser les poussettes à l'entrée.

Ofrezca portabebés a los padres para que dejen los cochecitos en la entrada.



20

Offer the consultation, free of charge, of the catalogs of previous exhibitions.

Proposer la consultation gratuite des catalogues des expositions précédentes.

Ofrecer consulta gratuita de los catálogos de exposiciones anteriores.



5

Create priority entry for those audiences who may need it.

Créer une entrée prioritaire pour certains publics.

Cree una entrada prioritaria para determinadas audiencias, que necesiten ayuda.



6

Define protocols and policies for welcoming all audiences.

Définir des protocoles et des politiques d'accueil pour tous les publics.

Definir protocolos y políticas específicas para adaptarse a los diferentes públicos.



4

Write Welcome next to the entrance in multiple languages.

Écrire Bienvenue en plusieurs langues à l'entrée du musée.

Escribe Bienvenida en varios idiomas a la entrada del museo.



From the British Museum's website

Visita > **Accessibilità**
English Deutsch Español Français Italiano Русский 中文 日本語 한국어

Accessibilità

Borse grandi, valigie e bagagli: trolley e bagagli di grandi dimensioni non sono permessi al British Museum per ragioni di sicurezza. Depositi bagagli sono disponibili presso le grandi stazioni ferroviarie come Euston, King's Cross e Charing Cross.



Ingresso

L'ingresso principale del museo su Great Russell Street ha una scalinata con 12 gradini ed un corrimano su entrambi i lati. Su ciascun lato della scalinata sono installati montascala portacarrozze, dotati di segnalazione acustica per chiedere assistenza in caso di necessità. L'ingresso su Montague Place è al piano terra, con ascensori per raggiungere gli altri piani del museo.

L'ufficio informazioni è situato nel Great Court
+44 (0)20 7323 8299
information@britishmuseum.org



Ascensori

Il museo è dotato di numerosi ascensori. La maggior parte delle gallerie e tutte le mostre sono accessibili a tutti. La posizione degli ascensori e le modalità per raggiungere le gallerie sono riportate nella piantina gratuita disponibile presso l'ufficio informazioni sito nel Great Court.



Parcheggio

Un piccolo parcheggio riservato ai disabili è disponibile nel piazzale antistante il museo. Per riservare un posto auto, chiamare l'ufficio informazioni al +44 (0)20 7323 8299. Sarà necessario comunicare il numero di immatricolazione, marca e modello del veicolo nonché la data della visita.



Toilette

Le toilette sono distribuite su ogni piano. Quelle dotate di accesso per disabili sono situate presso la Great Court, il Ford Centre for Young Visitors, il Clore Education Centre e a nord della Sala 66.



Sedie a rotelle

Sedie a rotelle sono disponibili presso entrambi gli ingressi. Per assicurarsi della disponibilità di una sedia a rotelle all'arrivo, contattare il +44(0)20 7323 8299 prima della visita.

Unfortunately the Museum cannot provide assistance around the Museum for wheelchair users.



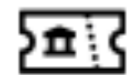
Cani guida

Sono ammessi cani guida. Ciotole per cani sono disponibili presso l'ufficio informazioni.



Sedili

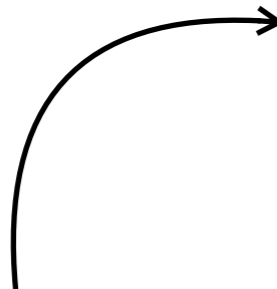
La Great Court è dotata di panche e sgabelli. Sedie pieghevoli sono disponibili solo in certe gallerie. Rivolgersi all'ufficio informazioni per ulteriori dettagli.



Esibizioni a pagamento

I visitatori disabili godono di particolari agevolazioni e ricevono un biglietto di ingresso gratuito per i loro accompagnatori. Alcune mostre a pagamento hanno orari di apertura designati per visitatori disabili.
Mostre in corso >
Mostre future >


12 steps at the entrance



[ART AND ARTISTS](#) / [ITINERARIES](#)

Nothing to See

The MACBA has been conducting research into art and visibility since 2018 within its educational and accessibility programmes. We offer you a tour of some of the museum's holdings that reflect on visibility and which question the centrality of the gaze and of the 'presence' of the artwork.

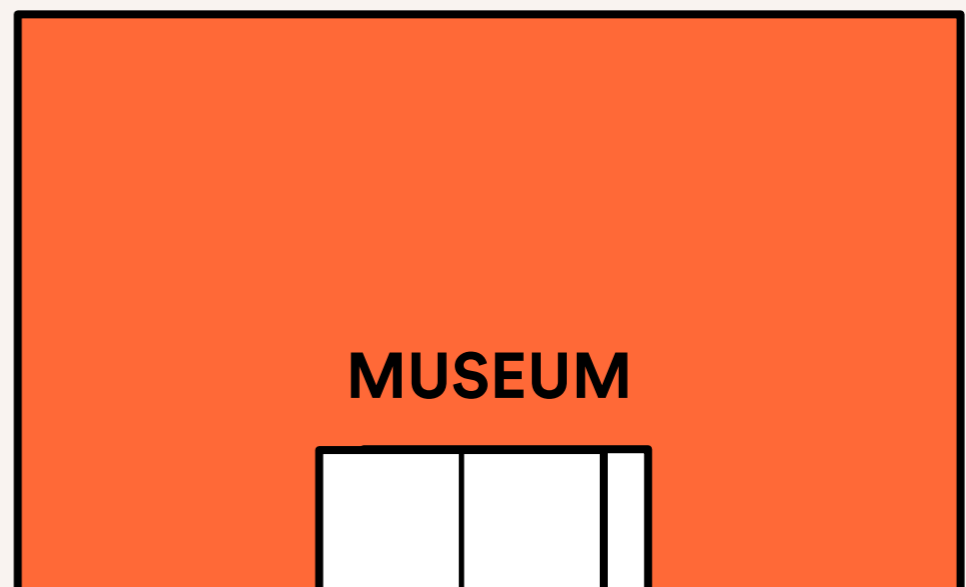
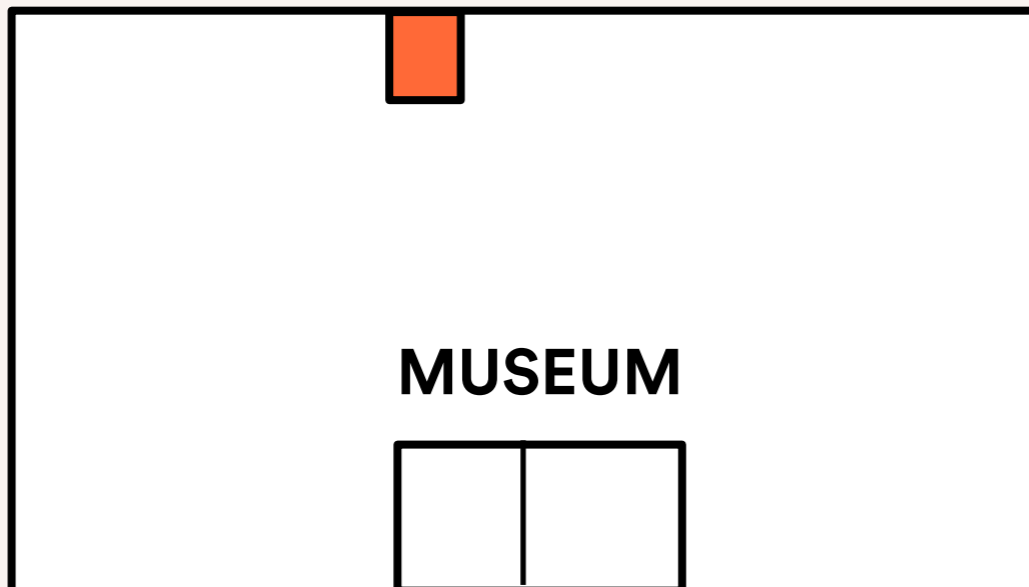
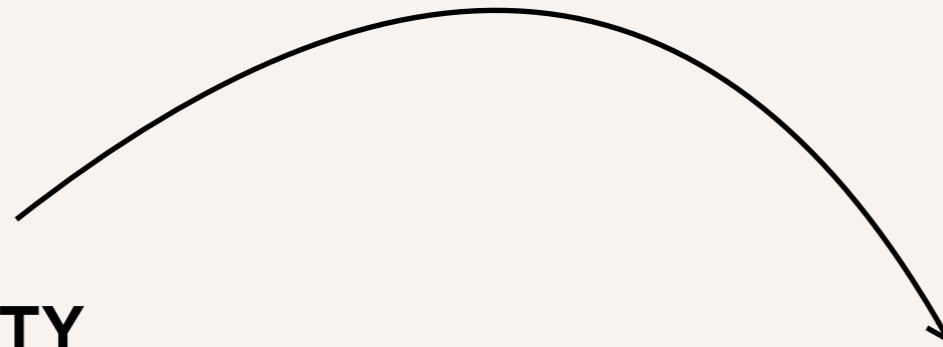
 **Ignasi Aballí "Nada que ver, mucho que decir".
Texto que forma parte del Cuaderno Educativo
2019**

This content is not available in English. You can consult it in [Spanish](#).



Carmen Papalia performing Mobility Device with Carnival Band in Kitsilano, Vancouver, October, 2021.

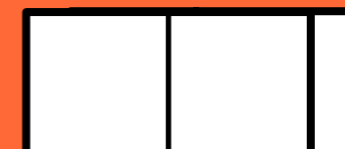
ACCESSIBILITY





For accessibility to have an impact inside and outside the museum and make feel people part of something bigger.

MUSEUM



TO READ

Orian Brook, Dave O'Brien, and Mark Taylor (2020), *Culture Is Bad for You: Inequality in the Cultural and Creative Industries*, Manchester: University Press.

Maria Chiara Ciaccheri (2022), *Museum Accessibility by Design. A Systemic Approach to Organizational Change*. Lanham, Maryland: AAM & Rowman & Littlefield.

William Lidwell, Kritina Holden, and Jill Butler (2010), *Universal Principles of Design, Revised and Updated: 125 Ways to Enhance Usability, Influence Perception, Increase Appeal, Make Better Design Decisions, and Teach through Design*. Beverly, MA: Rockport Publishers.

Ellen Lupton e Andrea Lipps, eds. (2018). *The Senses: Design beyond Vision*. Hudson, NY: Princeton Architectural Press.

Richard Sandell, Jocelyn Dodd, J. and Rosemary Garland-Thomson (2010), *Re-Presenting Disability: Museums and the Politics of Display*. London: Taylor & Francis, Inc

Holmes, Kat. *Mismatch: How Inclusion Shapes Design*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2020.



Rethinking Museum Accessibility Strategies

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