Rethinking Museum Accessibility Strategies
This bone is from a rare Chicken Dinosaur

- but please, don’t tell your dog that is a replica!
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
Accessibility: the basics
Accessibility is about the relationship between people and the environment.
Accessibility is the ability to design for different needs

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
- [...]

[6/99]
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
A family just moved from another country

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

Accessibility is the ability to design for different needs

An accessible park

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

[Image of a family and an accessible park]
Different organizations should collaborate for offering citizenship opportunity
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
The environment is subject to:

- Impacts (including people’s perceptions)

The relation between organizations and the environment is open

Cultural organizations absorb:

- Stereotypes and prejudices
- Social and cultural awareness
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.
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.

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.

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.
Mike, 32 yrs

Roswitha, 30 yrs

Lucas, 2 yrs

50 years later

Mike, 81 years old

Roswitha, 79

Lucas, 51 years old

Roswitha, 79
Access is essential for any of us
In the museum
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
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.
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
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.
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**.
Accessibility is limited:
in terms of process, responsibilities, importance
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
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:

- Elderly
- Low income
- Low education
- Victims of racism
- LGBTQ+
- People with disabilities
- Single parents
- People living in remote areas
- Families with young children
For them barriers are often:

- 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
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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
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.
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
Access is a process - ok, where to start?
Where to start?
FIRST

- Involve leadership
- Define a responsible
- Train the whole staff
- Define budget
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- Train the whole staff
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Step by step:
select one area
and view access as a process

ACCESSIBILITY

- Share vision
- Set your aims
- Train the staff

- Analyze the environment
- Map the barriers

- Involve the stakeholders

- Benchmark, study, brainstorm solutions and choose

- Evaluate, implement, define policy, update your strategic plan

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- Share vision

- Involve the stakeholders

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- Evaluate, implement, define policy, update your strategic plan
and view access as a process

ACCESSIBILITY

- Benchmark, study, Brainstorm solutions and choose
- Evaluate, Implement, Define policy, Update your strategic plan
- Share vision, Define a responsible, Train the whole staff, Set your aims
- Analyse the environment, Map the barriers
- Involve the stakeholders
Solutions are endless, with different level of engagement where quality and innovation are often in the design.
ACCESSIBILITY TOOLS
EDUCATIONAL PROPOSAL
FRONTLINE TRAINING

ACCESSIBLE ROUTES
INCLUSIVE CURATORSHIP AND ARTISTS INVOLVEMENT
CO-DESIGN
SOLUTIONS FOR THE AUTONOMOUS VISIT
COMMUNICATION
BARRIERS AUDIT
ALL STAFF TRAINING

More popular (in Italy)

Medium/high level awareness

[...]
Medium/high level awareness

- All Staff Training
- Barriers Audit
- Communication
- Solutions for the Autonomous Visit
- Co-design

Highest level of awareness

- Staff Diversity
- Evaluation for Change
- Mission and Policies
- Renew Organizational Models
- Set Clear Responsibilities

More popular (in Italy)

- Frontline Training
- Accessibility Tools
- Educational Proposal
- Accessible Routes

- Inclusive Curatorship and Artists Involvement
- Events
- [..]
- [..]
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

URGENT
- impassability of the barriers
- recipients effectiveness

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

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

NOT URGENT
- barriers not particularly impactful
- museum non-place essential
URGENT

- Live captions

EASY

- Feeder for guidedogs

HARD

- Change table

NOT URGENT

- Caterpillar wheelchair
URGENT

impassability of the barriers

recipients
effectiveness

HARD

NOT URGENT

EASY

URGENT

Do first

1

HARD
Do second - it’s easy

1

2
URGENT
• impassability of the barriers
• recipients effective

HARD
• barriers not particularly impactful
• museum non-place essential

EASY

1

2

3

Our core
Sorry, not enough time for these stuff!
Giveaways

• Work on access step by step
• Define one area > map barriers > define priority
• Do what you can, as best you can
Insights from a fresh perspective

5/5
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.

Let's find them!
Supporting autonomy means also knowing that accessibility somehow impacts on behavior.
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
ACCESS GIVES PRIORITY TO COGNITIVE NEEDS
THEN HERE

FIRST YOU WILL LOOK HERE

After you look here
Chapter 32

Elizabeth was sitting by herself the next morning, and writing to Jane while Mrs. Collins and Maria were gone on business into the village, when she was startled by a ring at the door, the certain signal of a visitor. As she had heard no carriage, she thought it not unlikely to be Lady Catherine, and indeed that apprehension was put away her half-finished letter that she might escape all impertinent questions, when the door opened, and, to her very great surprise, Mr. Darcy, and Mr. Darcy only, entered the room.

He seemed astonished too on finding her alone, and apologized for his intrusion by letting her know that he had understood all the ladies were to be within.
"Multisensory elements increase time spent and reinforces memory of the experience."
Tiina Roppola, 2016

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

**THEY**: those who need to be helped

**WE**: those who help
Looks at needs - and not labels
Poor guy!
What a hero!
[only here compassionate or heroic stereotype].

Looks at needs - and not labels
Aesthetics matter - also to overcome stereotypes

Think more, design less.

Ellen Lupton
The stories you share matter

Garzoni e Massere
Houseboys and Maidservants

Servantes et Garçons de maison
ACCESS CAN BE CREATIVE, ALL AROUND, LOW COST
3. Offer baby carriers so that parents can leave pushchairs in the cloakroom.

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

Ofrecer portabebés a los padres para que dejen los cochecillos en la entrada.

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 necesitan 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 las diferentes públicos.

4. Write Welcome next to the entrance in multiple languages.

Ecrire Bienvenue en plusieurs langues à l’entrée du musée.

Escribe Bienvenida en varios idiomas a la entrada del museo.

20. Offer the consultation, free of charge, of the catalogues of previous exhibitions.

Proposer la consultation gratuite des catalogues des expositions précédentes.

Ofrecer consulta gratuita de los catálogos de exposiciones anteriores.
**Accessibilità**

Borse grandi, valigie e bagagli: trolley e bagagli di grandi dimensioni non sono permessi al British Museum per ragioni di sicurezza. Deposit 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 montacarrozze, 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.

- **Ascensori**
  - Il museo è dotato di numerosi ascensori. La maggior parte delle gallerie e 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 guida sono disponibili presso l'ufficio informazioni.

**Sedili**

La Great Court è dotata di panche e sgabelli. Sedie pieghevoli sono disponibili solo in certe gallerie. Rivolgerti 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.
ART AND ARTISTS / ITINERARIES

Nothing to See

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

Ignasi Aballi "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.
For accessibility to have an impact inside and outside the museum and make feel people part of something bigger.
TO READ


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