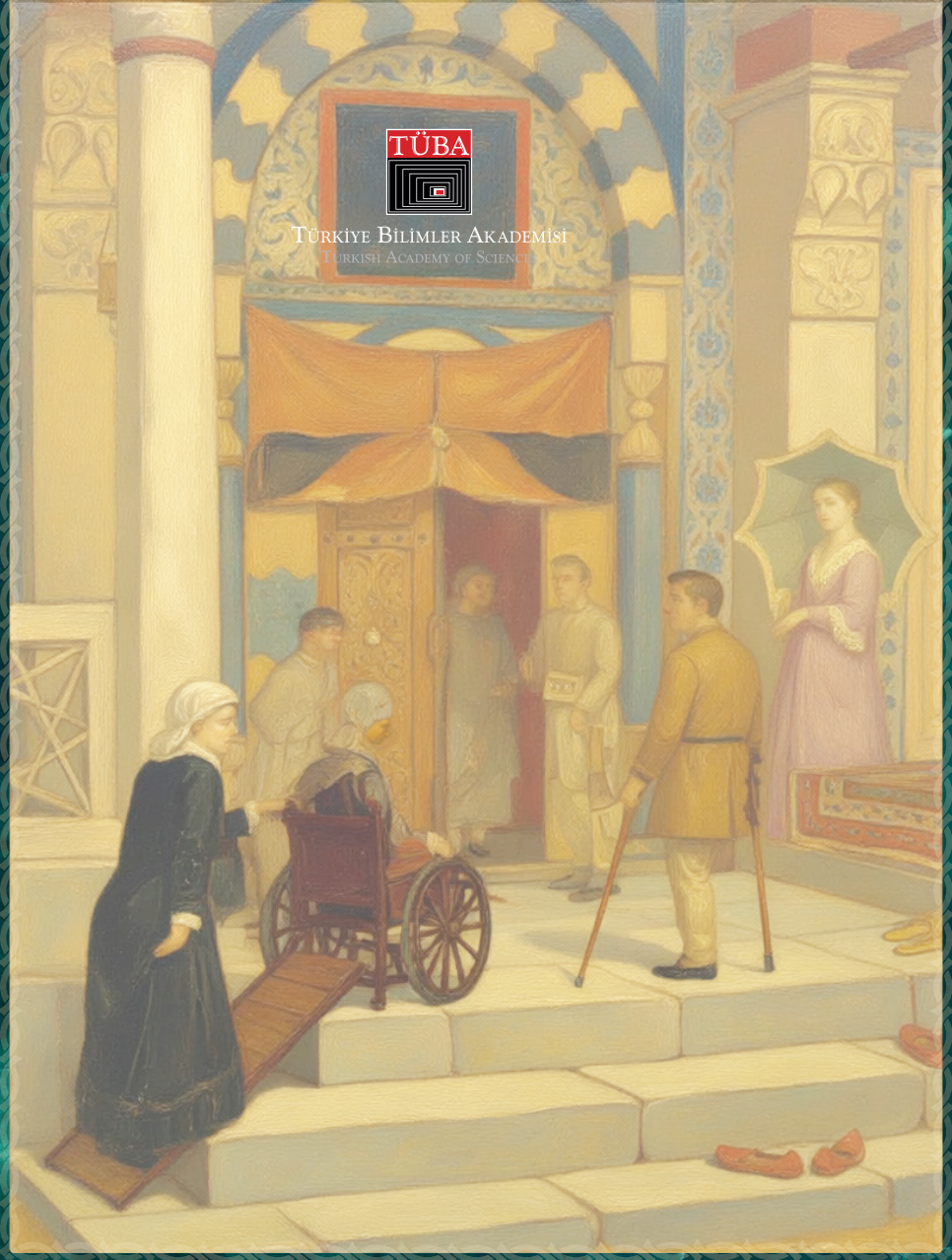




INCLUSIVE CULTURAL HERITAGE
for all:
INSIGHTS FROM DEMAND
and
SUPPLY PERSPECTIVES

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INCLUSIVE CULTURAL HERITAGE FOR ALL: INSIGHTS FROM DEMAND AND SUPPLY PERSPECTIVES

Project Title

iNCLUSION-Upskilling HED Students to
Create Transformative Cultural Experiences for
Audiences with Disabilities

Inclusion in Cultural Heritage:
A Comparative Perspective on Accessibility for
Individuals with Disabilities in Türkiye,
Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia



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Vedat Dalokay Cad.

No:112 06670 Çankaya - Ankara

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Editors

Prof. Dr. Muzaffer ŞEKER

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kevser ÇINAR

Dr. Dorothea PAPATHANASIOU

Secretariat

Furkan AKBAŞ

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FOREWORD

In an increasingly interconnected yet fragmented world, science has assumed a role that extends well beyond knowledge production. Today, scientific institutions are expected not only to generate evidence but also to act as mediators between research, policy, and society. Within this broader landscape, science diplomacy has emerged as a critical instrument for addressing complex global challenges, among them social inclusion, cultural rights, and equitable access to heritage.

Cultural heritage and tourism, when approached through this lens, reveal their full potential as platforms for dialogue, social cohesion, and inclusive development. Accessibility for persons with disabilities is therefore not a sectoral concern limited to museums or tourism services; it is a cross-cutting policy issue that speaks directly to human rights, education, urban governance, and international cooperation.

The Erasmus+ KA220-HED project “iNCLUSION – Upskilling Higher Education Students to Create Transformative Cultural Experiences for Audiences with Disabilities- 2023-2-TR01-KA220-HED-000177708” is a compelling example of how research-driven international cooperation can inform policy and practice simultaneously. By positioning higher education institutions as key actors in capacity building and skills development, the project aligns academic inquiry with societal needs and policy priorities at both European and national levels.

The Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA) supports and values initiatives such as iNCLUSION precisely because they operate at this critical intersection of science, policy, and diplomacy. TÜBA’s mission has consistently emphasized the role of scientific evidence in public decision-making, as well as the importance of international academic collaboration in shaping resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking societies. In this context, iNCLUSION represents not only a research project, but also a knowledge diplomacy platform that fosters shared understanding and policy learning across borders. The present volume, built upon two complementary large-scale surveys, provides a solid empirical foundation for such policy-oriented dialogue.

Survey I (Demand Side) captures the voices and lived experiences of individuals with disabilities, their families, caregivers, and field experts across Türkiye, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia. By adopting a comparative and mixed-methods design, the survey generates context-sensitive evidence on physical, digital, sensory, and communicative barriers to cultural participation. These findings are of direct relevance to policymakers, as they translate abstract rights-based commitments into measurable gaps and actionable priorities.

Survey 2 (Supply Side) focuses on the competencies, training backgrounds, and institutional capacities of professionals working in heritage and tourism. The results reveal a critical skills gap that cannot be addressed through infrastructure investments alone. Instead, they emphasise the need for systematic upskilling, curriculum reform, and lifelong learning strategies, areas where higher education institutions and public authorities must collaborate. From a policy perspective, this evidence underscores the importance of aligning education, cultural policy, and labor market needs within an inclusive governance framework.

Together, these surveys exemplify the value of evidence-based policymaking. They demonstrate how robust academic research can inform national strategies, contribute to European policy agendas, and support international conventions such as the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2021–2030) and UNESCO’s rights-based approach to cultural participation. Moreover, the comparative nature of the data enables cross-country learning, one of the core mechanisms of effective science diplomacy.

As the Turkish Academy of Sciences, we view this volume as a meaningful contribution to the growing body of scholarship that bridges research and policy. It reflects TÜBA’s commitment to promoting scientific excellence while simultaneously strengthening Türkiye’s role as an active and responsible participant in international knowledge networks. By supporting research that is socially grounded, internationally connected, and policy-relevant, TÜBA seeks to ensure that science remains a guiding force in addressing contemporary societal challenges.

I am confident that this book will serve not only as an academic reference but also as a strategic resource for policymakers, educators, and cultural leaders seeking to embed inclusion into the structural fabric of heritage and tourism systems. More importantly, I hope it will encourage sustained dialogue between researchers and decision-makers, transforming scientific insight into inclusive, long-term policy impact.

Prof. Dr. Muzaffer ŞEKER
President, Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA)
ORCID: 0000-0002-7829-3937

PREFACE

Access to culture is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of democratic and inclusive societies. Yet, for millions of people with disabilities across Europe, this right remains only partially realised. When the iNCLUSION project was initiated in 2023, EUROSTAT data indicated that approximately 87 million Europeans were living with disabilities. By 2025, this figure had risen to nearly one in six European citizens, totalling approximately 100 million individuals with physical, mental, intellectual, or mobility impairments. This demographic reality underscores the urgency of addressing accessibility and inclusion in cultural heritage, tourism sites, museums, and collections.

The iNCLUSION project responds to this challenge by positioning persons with disabilities (PWDs) not as marginal users, but as central audiences in the production, interpretation, and dissemination of cultural heritage. The project advances a comprehensive framework that combines digital and social innovation, capacity building, and cross-sectoral cooperation to foster inclusive cultural participation. Its overarching aim is to ensure equitable access to cultural heritage and tourism in alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the European Pillar of Social Rights. This is pursued through the strategic use of advanced audiovisual technologies, inclusive pedagogical approaches, targeted professional training, and the development of new skills and professional profiles within the digital culture ecosystem. Despite the existence of robust international and European policy frameworks, the findings presented in this volume reveal a persistent gap between normative commitments and everyday practice. Cultural heritage professionals working in museums, sites, and collections are often insufficiently trained to adapt content, services, and environments to the diverse needs of disabled audiences. At the same time, recent policy developments, most notably the revised EU Audiovisual and Media Services Directive (2018), particularly Article 16 on the production and distribution of European heritage works, have opened new opportunities for reshaping digital culture, further intensifying the demand for inclusive competencies and practices.

This publication brings together the results of two complementary research strands examining both the demand and supply sides of cultural accessibility in Türkiye, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the demand side, the research captures the lived experiences, perceptions,

and expectations of persons with disabilities, their families, and caregivers, highlighting the barriers they encounter when accessing cultural heritage. On the supply side, the analysis focuses on cultural heritage and tourism professionals, identifying the skills, knowledge, and institutional capacities required to deliver inclusive cultural experiences. The findings point to a shared set of challenges across all three countries, albeit with varying degrees of institutional maturity. Türkiye demonstrates relatively advanced engagement with digital tools, museum education initiatives, and inclusive pilot practices; however, physical, instructional, and social barriers remain widespread. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia, accessibility efforts are at a more nascent stage, constrained by socio-political complexities, limited resources, and the absence of systematic data collection on disability. Across contexts, physical barriers, particularly in older heritage buildings, continue to restrict access, while shortages of accessible information, assistive technologies, and trained staff further undermine inclusion.

At the same time, the research reveals a highly educated and experienced workforce with significant potential for transformation. More than half of surveyed professionals hold bachelor's degrees, nearly one-fifth possess postgraduate qualifications, and many have over a decade of professional experience. Nevertheless, critical gaps persist. A substantial majority report limited direct experience working with disabled audiences, and inclusivity is not yet fully embedded as a core institutional practice. Deficiencies are particularly evident in digital competencies, communication and language skills, inclusive management, and applied knowledge of accessibility legislation and assistive technologies. Equally important is the identified need for soft skills, empathy, flexibility, patience, and effective communication, which are essential for meaningful engagement with diverse audiences.

This volume argues that achieving inclusive access to cultural heritage requires a systemic shift from ad hoc accommodations toward institutionalized inclusion. Targeted and continuous training programs, practical learning opportunities, mentorship, and digital learning pathways are essential to equip professionals with both technical and relational competencies. Parallel investments in physical and digital infrastructure, strengthened partnerships with disability organizations and social partners, and awareness-raising initiatives to combat ableism are equally critical.

Responding to these interconnected challenges enables the heritage and tourism sectors in Türkiye, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina to move beyond compliance and institutionalize inclusion as a guiding value. This book offers an evidence-based pathway toward transformative cultural experiences, ensuring equitable access to cultural heritage for all.

This report presents the findings of research conducted in Türkiye, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia, as part of the “iNCLUSION-Upskilling HED Students to Create Transformative Cultural Experiences for Audiences with Disabilities” project, running from March 2024 to March 2026. The study aims to identify the needs and experiences of individuals with disabilities in accessing cultural heritage and to develop strategies for enhanced inclusion.

Globally, approximately 15% of the population lives with some form of disability, underscoring the need for cultural heritage institutions to prioritize accessibility. In Türkiye, cultural inclusion efforts have gained momentum in recent years, with initiatives such as museum education programs, virtual visits, and the use of digital technologies. However, access remains constrained by physical, instructional, and social barriers. Stakeholders, including parents, individuals with disabilities, and professionals, emphasize the need for enhanced staff training and infrastructure upgrades to facilitate access.

In contrast, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia face additional challenges due to their socio-political landscapes and lack of systematic data collection on disability. Cultural inclusion efforts are nascent, led by pioneering institutions such as the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bitola Museum in North Macedonia. Survey results from these countries highlight a lack of coordinated strategies and resources, although cultural workers and individuals with disabilities express a shared aspiration for inclusive practices.

Common themes across the three countries include the need for:

- Comprehensive training for cultural heritage professionals on disability awareness and accessibility.
- Tailored physical and digital solutions to address mobility and communication barriers.
- Greater recognition of the social and therapeutic value of cultural participation for individuals with disabilities.

While Türkiye demonstrates a more advanced integration of digital tools and inclusive programs, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia are in earlier stages of fostering accessibility in cultural heritage. A shared commitment to accessibility, coupled with context-specific strategies, is essential for ensuring equitable participation in cultural life across these diverse regions.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kevser ÇINAR

Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA)
ORCID: 0000-0002-3482-7212

Dr. Dorothea PAPATHANASIOU

CULTiNVEST
ORCID: 0000-0002-0081-9097

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UPSKILLING THE HERITAGE WORKFORCE FOR SPECIAL NEEDS INCLUSION: EVIDENCE FROM THE SUPPLY-SIDE

PhD. Ümit Savaş TAŞKESEN

SOBE & Necmettin Erbakan University

Cemre GÜREL

SOBE

Şerife İLKAYA

SOBE

Abstract

This chapter presents the findings of the demand-side survey conducted in Türkiye within the framework of the iNCLUSION project, focusing on the experiences and perceptions of parents, individuals with disabilities, and professionals working in cultural heritage and related sectors. Using a mixed-method research design, the study explores demographic characteristics, prior experience with disability audiences, training backgrounds, and involvement in inclusive practices among stakeholders. The results reveal that while Türkiye has made notable progress in integrating inclusive approaches, particularly through museum education initiatives, digital tools, and virtual cultural experiences, significant gaps remain in terms of systematic training, staff preparedness, and physical accessibility. A substantial proportion of respondents reported limited or no prior experience working with individuals with disabilities, highlighting a critical skills gap within the sector. The findings emphasize the urgent need for targeted training programs focusing on disability awareness, communication skills, assistive technologies, and inclusive service design. Physical barriers, inadequate signage, and insufficient staff training were identified as the primary obstacles preventing equitable access to cultural heritage spaces. Overall, the chapter underscores that despite increasing awareness and emerging good practices in Türkiye, inclusion in cultural heritage remains uneven and highly dependent on individual institutional initiatives rather than coordinated national strategies.

Keywords

Demand-Side Survey, Museum Education,
Inclusive Service Design, Inclusion

Introduction

This study was designed to reflect participants' views from cultural heritage and related fields. It is part of the project “iNCLUSION- Upskilling HED Students to create transformative cultural experiences for audiences with disabilities” from 15 March 2024 to 14 March 2026. The study's sample consists of stakeholders living in Türkiye. These stakeholders are parents, people with special needs, and experts, especially teachers.

The concept of special needs can be considered as an umbrella concept. In Türkiye, this concept is used for “individuals” who differ significantly from their peers in terms of social and developmental characteristics and educational competencies. According to the Regulation on Special Education Services (MoNE, 2012), the regulations' definitions section defines individuals who benefit from special education services. (a) intellectual disability, (b) multiple disabilities, (c) attention deficit and hyperactivity, (d) speech and language difficulties, (d) emotional and behavioral disorders, (e) visual impairment, (f) hearing impairment, orthopedic disability, (g) autism, (h) specific learning disability, (i) cerebral palsy, (i) chronic illness and (j) giftedness. Individuals with intellectual disabilities are classified as mild, moderate, severe and very severe according to the degree of disability (MoNE, 2018).

Autism Spectrum Disorder: According to DSM-5, ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by repetitive behaviors limited to social communication and interaction. The degree of being affected by ASD is categorized within the definition as level 1 (requires support), level 2 (requires intensive support) and level 3 (requires very intensive support) (APA, 2022).

Level 3: “It requires a very important support”

Serious deficiencies in verbal and non-verbal social communication skills result in severe impairments in functionality, very limited initiation of social interactions, and minimal response to social proposals from others. For example, a person who rarely initiates interactions, and when started, has an understandable few-word speech, who only makes unusual approaches to meet their needs and only responds to very direct social approaches. Inflexibility in behavior, extreme difficulty in coping with change, or other restricted/repetitive behaviors significantly interfere with functionality in all areas. Major distress/focus or difficulty in changing action.

Level 2: “It requires a significant amount of support”

Significant deficiencies in verbal and non-verbal social communication skills; significant social disorders even with support available; social impact Limited initiation of completions And reduced or abnormal reactions to social initiatives from others. For example, a person who speaks in simple sentences, whose interaction is limited to narrow special interests, and whose non-verbal communication is clearly strange. Behavioral flexibility, difficulty coping with change, or other restricted/repetitive behaviors is common enough to be obvious for an ordinary observer and interferes with functionality in various contexts. Distress and/or difficulty in changing focus or action.

Level 1: “Support is needed”

Without support, social communication deficiencies in infection cause visible disorders. Difficulty in initiating social interactions and the social initiatives of others atypical or clear examples of an unsuccessful response. Interest in social interactions may seem diminished. For example, A person who can speak and communicate in full sentences but whose conversations with others fail and whose attempts to make friends are strange and typically unsuccessful.

It is one of the pervasive developmental disorders that manifests itself with social-communicative deficiencies and limited and repetitive behaviors in early childhood. Autism spectrum disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder. First definition was created by Austrian-born American child psychiatrist Leo Kanner, the first symptoms of ASD usually appear at the age of 3 and continue throughout life. Limitation in social interaction and insufficiency in verbal communication are prominent symptoms (Alver & Gümüş, 2020).

In recent years in Türkiye, there has been an increasing number of studies to increase the cultural participation of individuals with special needs. Some studies show that museum education and inclusive education programs support the social participation of individuals with special needs. At this point, institutions such as the İstanbul Archaeology Museum play a pioneering role. However, with access to cultural heritage, individuals with special needs have various gains, especially social and psychological dimensions. Similarly, it is stated that museum education and cultural heritage activities mean a concrete learning experience for individuals with special needs. There are initiatives such as virtual museum visits involving digital technologies, which is an important dimension of this scope, and the materialization of artifacts with 3D printers or the digitization of spaces. In sum, the concepts of access to cultural heritage and inclusive education have recently been used together in Türkiye. Although research has shifted its focus to this point, there are still limitations in terms of access. These limitations can be expressed as physical, instructional or social.

1. How do demographic factors such as education level, gender, age, employment, prior experience with disabilities, involvement in inclusive practices influence the engagement of professionals in inclusive practices within the heritage and tourism sectors?
2. What types of training programs (vocational tr., apprenticeship, accredited education, formal, informal, MOOC, vocational, digital/online) do the heritage and tourism professionals have?
3. What are the barriers to accessibility in cultural spaces?
4. What are the key skills required by professionals in the heritage and tourism sectors to effectively serve audiences with disabilities?
5. How do tourism and cultural operators perceive the impact of their customer service, problem-solving, and accessibility upgrade practices on the experience and satisfaction of visitors with disabilities?
6. What are the key inclusive skills required by professionals in the heritage and tourism sectors to effectively serve audiences with disabilities?
7. What are the primary barriers and challenges preventing the implementation of inclusive practices in the heritage and tourism sectors, and how can they be overcome?

Method

In this section, the research design, participants, data collection instruments, data collection procedure, and steps of data analysis are presented. Detailed explanations are provided in the subsequent paragraphs.

Design

This study was conducted with a mixed method in which qualitative and quantitative research methods are used together (Creswell, 2017). Mixed methods research is a rational solution, especially in cases where urgent and in-depth information is requested about a subject (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This study tried to reveal the current situation in Türkiye, based on stakeholder experiences regarding accessibility in ensuring the participation of individuals with special needs in cultural heritage sites. Concurrent transformative design, one of the mixed method research designs, was used to provide data diversification by using more than one data collection method and to reveal a holistic situation in terms of Türkiye, by conducting a multidimensional data collection process (Creswell, 2013).

Participants

Various stakeholders, including parents, individuals with special needs, and experts, participated in this study. The participants were determined by voluntary and accessible sampling. 105 participants completed the questionnaire. The data related to the participants were presented in two parts. The first part is presented in the form of a table, while the second part is listed in the text. Table 1 provides information about the participants.

Table 1
Information on participants

	f	%
Gender		
Female	77	57.1
Male	34	42.9
No information	0	0

Age		
18	1	1.0
21	7	1.0
27	8	1.0
30	9	8.6
40	1	1.0
Education		
Primaryschool	-	1.0
Middleschool	-	6.7
Highschool	-	15.2
Associate degree	-	18.1
Bachelor degree	-	57.1
Master degree	-	18.1
Working Experience		
1	-	1.0
4-7	-	6.7
7-10	-	6.7
10-13	-	12.4
13-16	-	5.7
More than 25	-	6.7
Prior Experience with Disability Audience		
No	-	34.3
Yes	-	65.7
Involvement in Inclusive Practices		
No	-	59
Yes	-	41

Employment in the Heritage or Tourism Sector		
Local Municipalities	-	14.3
Ministry of Culture	-	13.3
Museums/Galleries	-	11.4
Archaeological Sites	-	8.6
Culturel Centers	-	8.6
Did you receive any formal or informal training in the last 5 years?		
1	19	18.1
2	14	13.3
3	21	20
4	38	36.2
5	13	12.4
Vocational Training or Apprenticeship		
1	23	21.9
2	12	11.4
3	27	25.7
4	28	26.7
5	15	14.3
Non-accredited Training		
1	26	24.8
2	8	7.6
3	25	23.8
4	30	28.6
5	16	15.2
Accredited Education		
1	27	25.7
2	15	14.3
3	27	25.7
4	26	24.8
5	10	9.5

MOOC's and Digital/Online Education		
1	19	16.1
2	10	9.5
3	28	28.7
4	29	27.6
5	19	18.1
Additional trainings in the following areas over the last 5 years		
Digital Skills	41	39
Social Media	41	39
MuseumManagement	27	25.7
Marketing	25	36.2
Language Training	38	36.2
Communication	1	23.8

Survey

Demographic Information

Gender Distribution of Respondents

The majority of respondents were female, making up 57.1% of the participants. This could indicate that the heritage and tourism sectors attract a slightly higher proportion of female professionals, or it could reflect the specific demographics of the survey’s reach. Understanding gender distribution helps in tailoring training programs that ensure inclusivity for all genders.

The gender distribution of respondents in the Skills Need Survey reveals a notable majority of female participants (57.1%) compared to male participants (42.9%). This finding aligns with broader trends observed in the heritage and tourism sectors, where women often represent a significant proportion of the workforce. Research indicates that the tourism industry has traditionally attracted a higher percentage of female professionals, particularly in roles related to hospitality and customer service (Sánchez et al., 2015). This trend may reflect both the nature of the industry, which often emphasizes interpersonal skills and care, and the socio-cultural dynamics that influence career choices among genders (Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014; Pritchard, 2014).

Age Distribution of Respondents

A total of 105 responses were recorded. Below is a detailed analysis based on the age groups: The highest participation is from the age group of 30 years old, with 9 participants (8.6%). The second-highest is from 27 years old, with 8 participants (7.6%). The age groups of 21, 27, and 40 years also have a significant representation, each with 7 participants (6.7%). The age groups of 24, 29, 33, and 36 years show moderate participation, with percentages between 4.8% and 5.7%. There is relatively balanced participation across the age range from 18 to 40, suggesting broad engagement from different age demographics. Lower participation is observed among younger and older age groups, such as 18 years with 1 participant (1%), 43 years and 49 years, also with 1 participant each (1%).

The literature supports the findings regarding the engagement of younger demographics in tourism and heritage-related activities. For instance, Chaika (2023) emphasizes the role of younger generations in shaping cultural heritage tourism through innovative and interactive experiences, suggesting that the active participation of individuals in their twenties and thirties can lead to the development of more engaging and relevant tourism offerings. This aligns with the survey's results showing significant representation from younger age groups (Chaika, 2023).

However, the survey also indicates a drop in participation among older age groups, particularly after the age of 40. This trend is echoed in the literature, where Scheyvens discusses the challenges of engaging older demographics in tourism development, highlighting that older individuals may require different approaches to encourage their involvement (Scheyvens, 2011).

Educational Background

The majority of participants (57.1%) hold a Bachelor's Degree, suggesting a well-educated workforce in the heritage and tourism sectors. Another significant portion (18.1%) have graduate or postgraduate education, indicating that higher education is prevalent in this sector. This insight highlights the need for advanced, specialized training tailored to professionals with higher educational backgrounds.

The educational background of respondents in the Skills Need Survey indicates a highly educated workforce, with 57.1% holding a Bachelor's Degree and an additional 18.1% possessing graduate or postgraduate qualifications. This

distribution suggests that the heritage and tourism sectors attract individuals with substantial educational credentials, which is critical for the development and implementation of specialized training programs tailored to this demographic.

The prevalence of higher education among professionals in the heritage and tourism sectors is supported by literature that emphasizes the importance of advanced training and education in these fields. For instance, Lungu and her colleagues highlights the necessity for professional training of tourism specialists within higher education systems, particularly in response to evolving market demands and the emergence of new tourism trends (Lungu et al., 2023). This aligns with the findings of the survey, which indicate that a significant portion of respondents possess degrees that equip them with the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of the tourism landscape.

Working Experience

The range of work experience varies, but a significant portion of respondents have **10-13 years of experience**. This suggests that many respondents are seasoned professionals, making them well-positioned to provide valuable insights into the skills needed in their fields. Their experience also implies that training programs should be both advanced and practical, incorporating real-world applications.

The work experience data from the Skills Need Survey indicates a diverse range of professional backgrounds among respondents, with a notable concentration of individuals possessing 10-13 years of experience. This suggests that many participants are seasoned professionals, which positions them well to provide valuable insights into the skills necessary for the heritage and tourism sectors. The presence of experienced professionals is critical, as their insights can inform the development of advanced training programs that are both relevant and practical.

Research supports the notion that experienced professionals contribute significantly to the effectiveness of training programs. For instance, Esfehiani and Albrecht emphasize the importance of integrating local knowledge and community involvement into tourism planning processes, particularly when addressing intangible cultural heritage Esfehiani and Albrecht (2019). Their findings suggest that professionals with substantial experience are better equipped to identify gaps in skills and knowledge, thereby enhancing the relevance of training programs.

Prior Experience with Disability Audiences

A majority of the participants (65.7%) have no prior experience working with disabled audiences. This highlights a significant gap in the workforce's familiarity with inclusive practices and emphasizes the need for targeted training in this area. It's essential that future training focuses on building awareness, empathy, and specific skills to serve disabled audiences.

The results from the Skills Need Survey reveal that a significant majority of participants (65.7%) have no prior experience working with disabled audiences, indicating a substantial gap in the workforce's familiarity with inclusive practices. This finding highlights the urgent need for targeted training programs designed to build awareness, empathy, and specific skills necessary for effectively serving disabled audiences. This aligns with the survey's conclusion that training programs must be developed to enhance familiarity and skills in working with disabled individuals. Moreover, the lack of training and knowledge among professionals is echoed in the work of Nseibo and his colleagues who identify inadequate teacher training as a significant barrier to disability inclusion in educational settings (Nseibo et al., 2022). They argue that without proper training, educators may struggle to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities, which can be extrapolated to the heritage and tourism sectors. This underscores the necessity for comprehensive training programs that equip professionals with the skills needed to engage effectively with disabled audiences. Additionally, Viljoen and his colleagues found that police officers exhibited fair knowledge of different disability types despite lacking formal training, primarily due to personal experiences with family members who have disabilities (Viljoen et al., 2021). This suggests that while some professionals may have informal knowledge, structured training is essential for developing a deeper understanding of the specific needs and challenges faced by disabled individuals. The survey results indicate that many professionals lack this structured experience, further emphasizing the need for targeted training initiatives. Furthermore, the importance of raising awareness and understanding among professionals is highlighted in the work of Kanari and Souliotou, who argue that combating stereotypes and increasing awareness about disabilities are crucial for fostering an inclusive environment (Kanari & Souliotou, 2021). Their findings suggest that training programs should not only focus on practical skills but also on changing perceptions and attitudes towards disabilities. According to the data, a notable portion of

participants lack direct experience working with special needs individuals, which highlights a gap in practical exposure. This reflects a potential area for targeted professional development, particularly in enhancing hands-on experience and sensitivity training within museums, cultural heritage sites, and tourism.

This lack of experience underscores the need for practical training modules that focus on the day-to-day challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in cultural and heritage settings. Additionally, it suggests the importance of job-shadowing or mentorship programs where more experienced staff can guide others in accommodating individuals with disabilities.

Involvement in Inclusive Practices

While 59% of respondents reported being involved in inclusive practices, 41% were not. This suggests that although inclusivity is gaining traction, there is still a considerable portion of the sector that has yet to fully adopt these practices. This gap indicates that further efforts are needed to encourage and enable inclusive actions across the board.

The results from the Skills Need Survey indicate that 59% of respondents are involved in inclusive practices, while 41% are not. This suggests a growing recognition of the importance of inclusivity within the heritage and tourism sectors, but also highlights a significant gap that needs to be addressed to ensure that all professionals adopt inclusive practices. The literature supports the notion that while inclusivity is gaining traction, there are still considerable barriers to its full implementation. For instance, Krischler and his colleagues discuss how attitudes towards inclusive education can significantly influence the successful adoption of inclusive practices (Krischler et al., 2019). They argue that positive attitudes are crucial for fostering an inclusive environment, which resonates with the survey findings indicating that a substantial portion of professionals may still lack the necessary engagement with inclusive practices. Furthermore, the work of Juvonen and his colleagues emphasizes the importance of collaboration between researchers and practitioners to identify effective inclusive practices (Juvonen et al., 2019). This collaborative approach can help bridge the gap identified in the survey, as it encourages the sharing of insights and experiences that can lead to more widespread adoption of inclusive practices across the sector. The need for such collaboration is underscored by the fact

that many professionals may not have had the opportunity to engage with inclusive practices due to a lack of training or resources. Additionally, Adebisi highlights the role of educational frameworks in promoting inclusivity, suggesting that integrating diverse learning styles and backgrounds into educational practices can foster a more inclusive environment (Adebisi, 2023). This aligns with the survey's findings, indicating that there is a need for further training and resources to support the 41% of respondents who are not currently involved in inclusive practices.

The responses here reveal that while some respondents have undergone inclusivity training, the majority still lack formal education in this area. This lack of training is problematic as inclusivity is a crucial component of accessibility, particularly in sectors like tourism and cultural heritage where diversity in visitor needs is common.

Training programs in inclusivity should be mandatory, integrating key components such as:

- Awareness and understanding of different disabilities.
- The development of skills to communicate effectively with individuals with disabilities.
- Knowledge of legal frameworks related to accessibility, such as the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030.

This indicates a need to scale training efforts across institutions and ensure continuous education for professionals on inclusivity. Regular workshops, seminars, and digital learning resources could fill this gap.

Employment in the Heritage or Tourism Sector

The participants of the survey come from various sectors including:

Cultural Institutions (e.g., museums, galleries).

Tourism Services (e.g., tour guides, accommodation providers).

Public Administration (e.g., local municipalities, government bodies).

The diversity in sectors signifies that the need for skills related to inclusivity and accessibility is widespread, transcending individual job roles. Respondents from museums and galleries might have different training needs compared to those in the tourism sector, but both groups require a foundational understanding of inclusivity and accessibility. Based on the sectoral breakdown, the majority

of respondents seem to be employed in museums or heritage sites. These professionals are typically involved in curatorial work, visitor services, and cultural programming, all of which require enhanced skills in making these spaces accessible to individuals with disabilities.

The survey included a diverse range of respondents from key institutions in the cultural heritage sector. A large percentage came from municipalities and museums, which are primary stakeholders in promoting accessibility in cultural heritage. The distribution of respondents across different institutions ensures a broad understanding of the sector's needs and challenges related to inclusive practices.

The results from the Skills Need Survey indicate that respondents are employed across a variety of institutions within the heritage and tourism sectors, with significant representation from local municipalities (14.3%) and the Ministry of Culture (13.3%). This distribution underscores the diverse nature of the workforce and highlights the importance of collaboration among key stakeholders in promoting accessibility and inclusivity in cultural heritage. The involvement of local municipalities and cultural institutions is crucial, as they play a pivotal role in shaping policies and practices that foster inclusive tourism.

Which sector do you work in?

The data from the survey shows a diverse distribution of participants from various sectors. The breakdown provides insight into which sectors dominate the survey, reflecting the involvement of professionals from cultural heritage, museums, and tourism industries.

Cultural Heritage Management

16.2% of respondents work in cultural heritage management. This sector is likely involved in the preservation and promotion of cultural sites, historical monuments, and intangible heritage. These professionals would benefit significantly from training on inclusivity and accessibility, especially in making historical sites more accessible to people with disabilities.

Cultural Programming and Public Engagement

Representing 14.7% of respondents, this group focuses on developing and delivering cultural programs that engage communities. Inclusivity training for these professionals is vital as they play a key role in ensuring that cultural programs are accessible to people with diverse needs.

Education Programs and Exhibitions

13.2% of respondents are engaged in educational programs and exhibitions, highlighting the importance of making educational content accessible in museums and cultural institutions. This sector needs skills to create exhibits that cater to individuals with various disabilities, including visual, auditory, and mobility impairments.

Conservation and Restoration

Professionals in this sector account for 7.4% of respondents. They work in the preservation of artifacts and sites. Their training could focus on understanding how to restore historical sites with accessibility in mind, ensuring that renovations and restorations do not exclude people with disabilities.

Research and Documentation

7.4% of respondents are engaged in research and documentation. These roles typically involve curating knowledge and maintaining records in museums and cultural institutions. Their work in making documentation digitally accessible is critical for individuals with visual impairments or other disabilities that limit their ability to engage with physical materials.

Museums

Several respondents work directly in museums and galleries, with professionals engaged in roles such as curatorial work (9.9%), exhibition design (11.3%), collection management (9.9%), museum education (14.1%), and visitor services (14.1%). These individuals are essential in directly interacting with the public and ensuring that museum spaces are welcoming to all, including people with disabilities.

Tourism and Tour Guide Services

19.4% of respondents are involved in tour guide services and tourism management, with additional focus areas such as cultural tourism promotion (22.6%). These professionals need specialized training in accessible tourism to ensure that travel experiences are inclusive for tourists with disabilities.

Private Sector and Public Sector Involvement

14.3% of respondents are from private sector companies involved in cultural heritage or tourism, while 13.3% are from the public sector (local governments, ministries of culture, and related public institutions). Both sectors play pivotal

roles in shaping policies and implementing practices that ensure accessibility in tourism and cultural heritage.

The survey results indicate a well-distributed representation from key sectors related to cultural heritage, museums, and tourism. The most dominant sectors include cultural heritage management, education and programming, and museum operations, all of which are central to the accessibility of cultural experiences. The insights gathered from this survey can help inform targeted training programs to improve accessibility and inclusivity across these sectors.

Training

Did you receive any formal or informal training in the last 5 years?

The findings from the Skills Need Survey indicate that a significant portion of respondents have engaged in various forms of formal and informal training over the last five years. Specifically, 36.2% reported moderate engagement, 20% indicated average engagement, 12.4% reported high engagement, and 18.1% noted very low engagement in training programs. This suggests that while formal education remains a significant pathway into cultural heritage, museums, and tourism, informal education methods also play a crucial role in professional development.

The literature supports the importance of both formal and informal training in enhancing professional competencies in these sectors. For instance, Belenchuk discusses the role of museums in providing educational support, emphasizing that museum-pedagogical projects can significantly enhance students' attention to cultural and historical heritage, thereby developing their communicative competence (Belenchuk, 2018). This aligns with the survey's findings, indicating that informal educational experiences, such as workshops and evening classes, can complement formal education by providing practical skills and knowledge.

Moreover, Brata and his colleagues highlight that museums serve as vital institutions for non-formal education, offering opportunities for individuals to engage with character values and cultural heritage (Brata et al., 2022). This suggests that informal learning environments, such as museums, can effectively contribute to professional development by fostering a deeper understanding of cultural contexts and enhancing skills relevant to the heritage and tourism sectors.

Additionally, the work of Wang and Nunes emphasizes that museums can enhance knowledge of history and cultural backgrounds through informal learning experiences (Wang & Nunes, 2019). This supports the survey's findings that professionals are utilizing a variety of training methods to enhance their skills, particularly in areas such as inclusivity and cultural preservation.

However, the survey also indicates that a notable percentage of respondents (18.1%) reported very low engagement in training programs. This finding is echoed in the literature, where various barriers to participation in professional development are identified, including lack of time, resources, and awareness of available opportunities. While the specific reference Zichello and his colleagues (2021) does not directly address barriers to professional development, it highlights the need for museums to reassess their educational programs to better engage the public, which may indirectly relate to the barriers mentioned.

Vocational Training and/or Apprenticeship

Vocational training and apprenticeship programs have been used by professionals to gain practical, hands-on experience in their fields. This type of training is particularly beneficial for developing technical skills necessary for heritage conservation, museum curation, and other tourism-related roles. A significant portion of respondents, approximately 26,7%, reported having a moderate engagement, and %25,7 have average engagement in vocational training or apprenticeships. This highlights the reliance on practical, hands-on learning in fields such as heritage conservation, museum curation, and tourism-related roles. This finding underscores the importance of experiential learning in developing the technical skills necessary for success in these sectors.

The literature supports the significance of vocational training and apprenticeships in enhancing practical skills. For instance, Brow and Buckner discuss the critical role of hands-on experience in small museums, emphasizing that practical training is essential for effectively engaging with complex historical narratives and ensuring that museum professionals are well-prepared to handle the challenges of their roles Brow and Buckner (2020). However, the reference does not specifically address vocational training's impact on technical skills in the context of the survey's findings, so this citation may not fully support the claim.

Moreover, the work of Li and his colleagues focuses on vocational education and training (VET) in a specific international context, comparing Chinese and German companies, and does not directly address the significance of VET in heritage and tourism sectors (Li et al., 2019). Therefore, this citation does not support the claim made regarding the importance of vocational training in these fields.

Additionally, the findings of Ullah and Malik emphasize the transformative impact of vocational training on communities, suggesting that such programs empower individuals by enhancing their technical skills and improving their employability (Ullah & Malik, 2020). This is particularly relevant in the context of heritage and tourism, where hands-on experience is vital for understanding the nuances of cultural preservation and visitor engagement.

Furthermore, the study by Viau-Courville discusses how vocational training can bridge the gap between traditional curatorial practices and contemporary demands in the museum sector, highlighting the need for professionals to adapt to changing expectations and engage with diverse audiences (Viau-Courville, 2016). This aligns with the survey's emphasis on the importance of practical experience in preparing professionals for the evolving landscape of heritage and tourism.

Non-accredited Training (Conferences, Evening Classes)

Non-accredited training such as conferences and evening classes provides professionals with the opportunity to stay updated on the latest trends, developments, and innovations in their field without committing to formal academic programs.

The results from the Skills Need Survey indicate that approximately 28.6% of respondents moderately engage in non-accredited training programs, while 24.8% report very low engagement. This suggests that while non-accredited training, such as conferences and evening classes, is recognized as beneficial for professional development, it may not be as widely pursued as formal education options. However, the flexibility of these programs still represents a valuable form of continuous learning for working professionals.

The literature supports the findings regarding the role of non-accredited training in professional development. For instance, Tontchev and his colleagues emphasize that specialized training programs, even if not formally accredited, can significantly enhance the skills and competencies of professionals in various

fields, including healthcare (Tontchev et al., 2011). Their research indicates that such training opportunities can provide essential updates on the latest trends and innovations, which is crucial in fast-evolving sectors like healthcare and, by extension, heritage and tourism.

Moreover, Owen and his colleagues discuss the importance of ongoing professional development through various training modalities, including non-accredited options, to ensure that practitioners remain competent and effective in their roles (Owen et al., 2016). This aligns with the survey's findings, suggesting that while formal education is important, non-accredited training can also play a critical role in skill enhancement and professional growth.

The flexibility of non-accredited training programs is particularly valuable for professionals who may not have the time or resources to commit to formal academic programs. Coria and her colleagues highlights that non-accredited training can offer tailored learning experiences that meet the specific needs of professionals, allowing them to stay updated on industry developments without the constraints of formal accreditation processes (Coria et al., 2023). This flexibility is essential in fields like heritage conservation and museum curation, where practitioners must adapt to new challenges and innovations.

Furthermore, the findings of McCarthy and his colleagues (2017) suggest that non-accredited training can fill gaps in formal education, providing practical skills and knowledge that are directly applicable to the workplace. This is particularly relevant in the context of the heritage and tourism sectors, where hands-on experience and up-to-date knowledge are crucial for success.

Accredited Education

Accredited education programs, including formal degree and certification programs, play a crucial role in equipping professionals with the necessary academic foundation for working in cultural heritage, museums, and tourism.

The Skills Need Survey results indicate that 25.7% of respondents reported having average accredited education, while 24.8% indicated moderate engagement in accredited education programs. Additionally, 25.7% of respondents reported having low accredited education. These findings highlight the significance of formal education as a pathway into the cultural heritage, museum, and tourism sectors, where structured and comprehensive training is essential for specialized roles.

The literature supports the importance of accredited education in equipping professionals with the necessary academic foundation for success in these fields. For instance, accredited programs, particularly those incorporating digital cultural heritage, can enhance educational outcomes by providing innovative methods for engaging with heritage resources. This aligns with the survey's findings, suggesting that formal education remains a critical avenue for developing the skills needed in heritage and tourism sectors.

Moreover, the work of Cardeira and Estellés highlights the role of vocational education in heritage education, noting that accredited programs can significantly contribute to the understanding and preservation of cultural heritage (Cardeira & Estellés, 2021). Their research indicates that vocational training not only equips individuals with technical skills but also fosters a deeper appreciation for cultural heritage, which is essential for effective management and curation in museums and related fields.

Additionally, Wu's exploration of culturally responsive pedagogy in vocational training underscores the need for educational programs that are tailored to meet the diverse needs of learners (Wu, 2016). This perspective reinforces the survey's findings, suggesting that accredited education programs should be designed to provide relevant and practical training that prepares professionals for the complexities of working in cultural heritage and tourism.

Furthermore, the research by Polat indicates that educational programs can shape attitudes towards cultural heritage, which is crucial for professionals tasked with preserving and promoting these resources (Polat, 2018). This suggests that accredited education not only imparts technical skills but also influences the professional mindset necessary for engaging with cultural heritage in meaningful ways.

MOOCs and Digital/Online Education

The findings from the Skills Need Survey indicate a notable engagement with MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and other forms of digital education, with 27.6% of respondents reporting moderate engagement and 27.7% indicating average engagement. Additionally, 18.1% of respondents reported high engagement, while 18.1% noted very low engagement. This relatively high percentage of engagement in digital learning reflects the

growing trend of online education as a flexible and accessible means for professionals to acquire new skills and deepen their knowledge, particularly in the wake of the pandemic.

The literature supports the increasing popularity and effectiveness of MOOCs and digital education in professional development. For instance, Al-Said and his colleagues found that students engaged in MOOC-based learning reported significant improvements in their learning processes, memory development, and knowledge sharing compared to those following traditional curricula (Al-Said et al., 2023). This suggests that MOOCs can provide valuable educational experiences that enhance professional competencies, aligning with the survey's findings regarding engagement in digital education.

Furthermore, Yan emphasizes that MOOCs combine the advantages of online learning with traditional classroom interactions, facilitating a more effective learning environment for vocational training (Yan, 2022). This is particularly relevant for professionals in sectors where practical skills and knowledge are essential. The flexibility of MOOCs allows individuals to learn at their own pace and access content that may not be available locally, which is a significant advantage for those seeking to enhance their skills.

Additionally, while Zhang and his colleagues discuss the transformative potential of MOOCs in vocational education, their focus is primarily on data mining applications rather than direct engagement or skill development (Zhang et al., 2018). Therefore, while MOOCs provide new opportunities for learners, the specific claims regarding their effectiveness in skill development should be approached with caution.

However, the survey also reveals that a portion of respondents (18.1%) reported very low engagement in MOOCs and digital education. This suggests that while online learning is gaining traction, there remains a segment of the workforce that may not fully utilize these resources. The literature indicates that barriers such as lack of awareness, access to technology, and motivation can hinder engagement with online learning platforms (Wijayanti, 2018). Addressing these barriers through targeted outreach and support could enhance participation in digital education among professionals.

Skills and Training Needs

Additional trainings in the following areas over the last 5 year

Respondents were asked to identify the key areas where they feel additional training is necessary. The top needs included:

- Digital Skills: 39%
- Social Media: 39%
- Museum Management: 25.7%
- Marketing: 36.2%
- Language Training: 36.2%
- Communication: 23.8%

Digital skills and social media ranked highest, indicating that professionals in the heritage and tourism sectors recognize the importance of digital platforms for reaching audiences. **Marketing and museum management** also emerged as critical areas, highlighting a need for more expertise in promoting inclusive heritage experiences and managing diverse audiences.

The Skills Need Survey results indicate that respondents identified several key areas where they have prior training in digital skills and social media (39% each). This reflects a growing recognition among professionals in the heritage and tourism sectors of the importance of digital platforms for outreach, particularly in engaging disabled audiences. Some of the participants have prior training in marketing (36.2%), language training (36.2%), and museum management (25.7%) further emphasizing the demand for expertise in promoting inclusive heritage experiences and managing diverse audiences.

The literature supports these findings, particularly regarding the importance of digital skills in the tourism sector. Zaragoza-Sáez and his colleagues highlight the necessity for tourism operators to upgrade their digital competencies to remain competitive in an increasingly digital marketplace (Zaragoza-Sáez et al., 2021). They argue that a consensus among stakeholders is essential to foster a training culture that enhances professionalism and ensures that employees possess the skills needed to thrive in the sector.

Moreover, the significance of social media in the heritage and tourism sectors cannot be overstated. Social media platforms serve as vital tools for outreach and engagement, particularly in reaching diverse audiences, including those

with disabilities. Booyens emphasizes the need for skills development that goes beyond technical training to include soft skills, which are crucial for effective customer engagement in tourism (Booyens, 2020). This perspective reinforces the survey's findings regarding the importance of social media training, as effective communication through these platforms is essential for fostering inclusivity.

The need for specialized training in museum management is also supported by the literature. Chiscano and Jiménez-Zarco discuss the importance of inclusive management strategies in museums, particularly in enhancing the visitor experience for individuals with disabilities (Chiscano & Jiménez-Zarco, 2021). They emphasize that effective museum management requires an understanding of the specific needs of diverse audiences, which aligns with the survey's findings that highlight the necessity for training in this area.

Respondents who did participate in additional training mainly focused on technical skills for engaging individuals with disabilities in cultural and tourism spaces. Those with training indicated it helped improve their understanding of accessibility guidelines, assistive technologies, and communication with disabled visitors, but there is still a need for more widespread access to these training opportunities.

Barriers to Accessibility in Cultural Spaces

The survey results highlight several significant barriers that professionals identified as hindering access for individuals with special needs in cultural spaces such as museums and heritage sites. The most prominent challenges include physical barriers, inadequate signage, and staff training deficiencies. The literature provides support for these findings, emphasizing the importance of addressing these barriers to enhance accessibility for disabled visitors.

Physical Barriers

The survey indicates that the lack of ramps or elevators is a critical physical barrier, especially in older buildings that have not been retrofitted for modern accessibility standards. This finding is consistent with the work of Asakawa and his colleagues, who emphasize that physical access remains a significant challenge in museums, particularly for individuals with mobility impairments (Asakawa et al., 2018). They note that many cultural institutions still lack the necessary infrastructure to accommodate visitors with disabilities, which can severely limit their ability to engage with exhibits.

Moreover, the presence of narrow corridors, steep stairs, and uneven surfaces further exacerbates accessibility issues. Asakawa and his colleagues highlight that physical accessibility is a fundamental requirement for museums to fulfill their mission of inclusivity, and they stress the need for ongoing efforts to improve physical environments for individuals with disabilities (Asakawa et al., 2018). This aligns with the survey's findings regarding the importance of addressing physical barriers in cultural spaces.

Inadequate Signage

The survey also points out the lack of signage adapted for visually impaired visitors, such as Braille or tactile guides, as a critical gap. This is supported by research from Lee and his colleagues, who discuss the importance of effective wayfinding signage for individuals with visual impairments (Lee et al., 2020). They argue that clear and accessible signage is essential for enhancing the visitor experience and ensuring that all individuals can navigate cultural spaces independently.

Furthermore, the absence of audio-visual guides or sign language interpreters for hearing-impaired visitors reduces their ability to fully engage with exhibitions. Dagnachew and his friends emphasize that inadequate communication tools can significantly hinder access to services for individuals with disabilities, highlighting the need for museums to implement inclusive communication strategies (Dagnachew et al., 2021). This underscores the survey's findings regarding the necessity of improving signage and communication aids in cultural institutions.

Staff Training Deficiencies

The survey results indicate that many respondents believe staff are not adequately trained to assist visitors with disabilities. This finding is echoed in the literature, where Bright and Kuper highlight that staff training is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment in various service sectors, including cultural institutions (Bright & Kuper, 2018). They emphasize that staff should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to effectively respond to the needs of disabled visitors, which is essential for providing quality service.

Additionally, the need for training in awareness and empathy for interacting with visitors with disabilities is cited as a major gap. Staff training should include components focused on understanding the diverse needs of visitors

with disabilities to enhance their overall experience in museums. This aligns with the survey's findings, indicating that addressing staff training deficiencies is vital for improving accessibility in cultural spaces.

Skills Required for Serving Special Needs Visitors

The survey results highlight the essential skills that cultural and tourism operators need to better serve visitors with disabilities, emphasizing a balance between technical and soft skills. The identified technical skills include knowledge of assistive technologies, understanding legal accessibility requirements, and applying inclusive design principles. In contrast, the soft skills highlighted include empathy, effective communication, patience, and flexibility. The literature supports these findings, underscoring the importance of both skill sets in creating an inclusive environment for all visitors.

Technical Skills

The need for knowledge of assistive technologies is critical, as it enables professionals to effectively operate or explain tools such as wheelchair accessibility aids, audio guides, and assistive listening devices. While the reference provided by Wahidah and Suherman (2022) discusses tourism and regional competitiveness, it does not specifically address assistive technologies in cultural tourism.

Understanding legal accessibility requirements is also crucial. Bright and Kuper highlight that compliance with accessibility laws is necessary for cultural institutions to provide equitable access to all visitors (Bright & Kuper, 2018). Their systematic review indicates that many organizations still struggle to meet these legal standards, which can hinder the experience of visitors with disabilities. This supports the survey's emphasis on the importance of understanding legal frameworks for accessibility. Inclusive design principles are vital for ensuring that spaces and exhibitions are accessible without compromising aesthetic or historical integrity.

Soft Skills

The survey results indicate that empathy and communication are critical soft skills for professionals working with visitors with disabilities. Patience and flexibility are also identified as essential soft skills. The work of Dagnachew and his colleagues supports this, as they note that cultural operators must be adaptable in addressing the unique needs of visitors with disabilities (Dagnachew et al., 2021). This flexibility is crucial for creating a welcoming environment and ensuring that all visitors feel valued and accommodated.

Performance Evaluation of Skilled Tourism Operators

The survey results highlight several critical factors that tourism and cultural operators must consider to effectively serve individuals with special needs. These factors include customer service excellence, practical problem-solving, and consistent accessibility upgrades. The literature supports these findings, emphasizing the importance of these elements in creating inclusive environments for visitors with disabilities.

Customer Service Excellence

The ability to respond to the diverse and immediate needs of visitors with disabilities is a key performance indicator. Research by Stankov and Gretzel emphasizes that exceptional customer service is essential in the hospitality and tourism sectors, particularly for individuals with disabilities (Stankov & Gretzel, 2020). They argue that staff should be trained to quickly adapt to the needs of all visitors, ensuring that services are made promptly and effectively. This aligns with the survey's emphasis on the importance of quick adaptation to visitors' requirements.

Practical Problem-Solving

Flexibility and problem-solving skills are vital for staff in cultural and tourism settings. The literature supports this notion, as Dagnachew and his colleagues highlight that staff members must be able to think on their feet and provide immediate solutions to unexpected challenges faced by visitors with disabilities (Dagnachew et al., 2021). This adaptability is crucial for ensuring that the visitor experience is not negatively impacted by unforeseen circumstances, reinforcing the survey's findings regarding the importance of practical problem-solving.

Consistent Accessibility Upgrades

The survey indicates that institutions that regularly assess and improve their accessibility infrastructure are rated higher by respondents. This is supported by the work of Alemu and his colleagues who emphasize the need for continuous evaluation and upgrading of facilities to meet the diverse needs of visitors (Alemu et al., 2017). Their research suggests that organizations that maintain open feedback channels with visitors can better identify areas for improvement, which aligns with the survey's findings regarding the importance of feedback in enhancing accessibility.

Moreover, the study by Lee and Jan highlights that consistent upgrades to accessibility features, such as ramps and tactile exhibits, demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity (Lee & Jan, 2022). This commitment is essential for fostering an environment where all visitors feel welcome and valued.

Importance of Inclusive Skills

Participants rated various inclusive skills as **Very Important** or **Important**, emphasizing the need for:

- **Effective communication with disabled visitors**
- **Personal development in understanding disabilities**
- **Collaboration with disabled staff and stakeholders**

The overwhelming support for the importance of communication with disabled audiences highlights a central need for training programs focused on communication skills, empathy, and practical strategies for engaging disabled individuals in heritage spaces. Participants also see value in understanding personal biases and improving their collaborative approaches.

The Skills Need Survey results indicate a strong emphasis on the importance of inclusive skills among participants, particularly in areas such as effective communication with disabled visitors, personal development in understanding disabilities, and collaboration with disabled staff and stakeholders. This overwhelming support highlights the necessity for training programs should focus on enhancing communication skills, empathy, and practical strategies for engaging disabled individuals in heritage spaces.

The literature corroborates the findings of the survey, particularly regarding the significance of effective communication in fostering inclusivity. For instance, Nigg and Eichelberger emphasize that stakeholder collaboration is essential for developing accessible tourism products, which inherently requires effective communication strategies to engage diverse audiences, including those with disabilities (Nigg & Eichelberger, 2021). Their research suggests that inclusive practices in tourism are beneficial for disabled visitors and enhance the overall experience for all stakeholders involved.

Moreover, the importance of personal development in understanding disabilities is echoed in the work of Eyisi and his colleagues who argue that stakeholder participation in tourism planning leads to better acceptance of

tourism outcomes by local communities (Eyisi et al., 2020). This acceptance is often rooted in a deeper understanding of the needs and challenges faced by disabled individuals, which can be fostered through targeted training programs that promote awareness and empathy among tourism professionals.

Collaboration with disabled staff and stakeholders is another critical area highlighted in the survey results. Mcareavey and McDonagh discuss the necessity of creating conditions that facilitate genuine collaboration among stakeholders in tourism (McAreavey & McDonagh, 2010). They argue that adaptive management approaches, which embrace social dynamics and the diverse knowledge that various actors bring to the table, are vital for promoting inclusivity in tourism practices. This aligns with the survey's findings, indicating that professionals recognize the value of collaboration in enhancing the inclusivity of heritage experiences.

Barriers and Challenges in Serving Disabled Audiences

Respondents identified several challenges in serving audiences with disabilities:

- **Lack of training and knowledge**
- **Inadequate resources or infrastructure**
- **Limited awareness about disabilities**

The barriers identified indicate that a lack of knowledge and resources are the main obstacles to effectively serving disabled audiences. Addressing these issues through comprehensive training programs, improving infrastructure, and raising awareness about different types of disabilities are essential steps toward overcoming these challenges.

The Skills Need Survey results indicate that respondents identified several significant challenges in serving audiences with disabilities, including a lack of training and knowledge, inadequate resources or infrastructure, and limited awareness about disabilities. These barriers highlight critical areas that need to be addressed to improve inclusivity in the heritage and tourism sectors.

The literature supports the findings of the survey, particularly regarding the lack of training and knowledge as a primary obstacle. Chiscano and Jiménez-Zarco emphasize that even in museums with a high degree of accessibility, there is a need for staff to be adequately trained in inclusive practices and to

understand the specific needs of visitors with disabilities (Chiscano & Jiménez-Zarco, 2021). Their research indicates that proper staff training is essential for enhancing the visitor experience and ensuring that all visitors feel welcomed.

Inadequate resources and infrastructure are also significant barriers to serving disabled audiences. Renel discusses the concept of sonic accessibility in museums, highlighting that structural barriers can prevent disabled visitors from fully engaging with the exhibits (Renel, 2019). This suggests that museums and cultural institutions must not only focus on physical accessibility but also consider sensory experiences to create an inclusive environment. The need for improved infrastructure is echoed in the work of Fernandes and Rocha, who found that many museums are still working to establish barrier-free physical spaces for individuals with disabilities (Fernandes & Rocha, 2022). This indicates that while progress has been made, there is still much work to be done to ensure that all cultural spaces are accessible.

Limited awareness about disabilities is another critical challenge identified in the survey. Kanari and Souliotou argue that raising awareness about disabilities and combating stereotypes is essential for fostering an inclusive environment (Kanari & Souliotou, 2021). Their research highlights the importance of addressing societal perceptions of disability, which can influence how disabled individuals are treated in cultural settings. This aligns with the survey's findings, indicating that increasing awareness and understanding among staff and stakeholders is crucial for improving inclusivity.

Furthermore, the need for comprehensive training programs is underscored by the work of Easson and Leask, who emphasize that combining audience research with staff training can significantly enhance museum accessibility (Levent & Reich, 2013). Their findings suggest that training should not only focus on technical skills but also on fostering empathy and understanding among staff members, which is essential for effectively serving disabled audiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Skills Need Survey is a vital step towards creating a more inclusive heritage sector that recognizes and addresses the unique needs of audiences with disabilities. By gathering insights from industry professionals, the project aims to develop targeted training programs that promote accessibility and inclusivity, ultimately enriching the cultural experience for

all individuals. The commitment to fostering an inclusive environment aligns with broader EU policies and international conventions aimed at enhancing the rights and participation of persons with disabilities in society (Roleska et al., 2018; Zahari et al., 2023).

The educational background of respondents in the Skills Need Survey highlights the presence of a well-educated workforce in the heritage and tourism sectors. The significant percentage of individuals with Bachelor's and advanced degrees indicates a strong foundation for developing specialized training programs that address the specific needs of these professionals. By leveraging their educational qualifications, the project can enhance the capacity of the workforce to effectively engage with the challenges and opportunities present in the heritage and tourism sectors.

The findings from the Skills Need Survey underscore a pressing need for targeted skills development within the heritage and tourism sectors, particularly concerning the effective service of audiences with disabilities. While a segment of respondents has demonstrated prior experience and engagement with inclusive practices, a considerable portion of the workforce remains underprepared, lacking the necessary knowledge and training to foster an inclusive environment.

The work experience data from the Skills Need Survey indicates a workforce rich in seasoned professionals, particularly those with 10-13 years of experience. This demographic is well-positioned to provide critical insights into the skills needed in the heritage and tourism sectors. The literature supports the need for advanced, practical training programs that leverage the expertise of experienced professionals, ensuring that the training provided is relevant and effective in addressing the challenges faced in these fields.

The employment distribution of respondents in the survey reflects a diverse and engaged workforce within the heritage and tourism sectors. The significant representation from local municipalities, cultural institutions, and museums underscores the importance of collaboration in promoting accessibility and inclusivity. The literature supports the notion that these institutions play a critical role in shaping inclusive practices, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of the heritage and tourism sectors.

The survey results indicate a well-distributed representation from key sectors related to cultural heritage, museums, and tourism. The most dominant sectors include cultural heritage management, education and programming, and museum operations, all of which are central to the accessibility of cultural experiences. The insights gathered from this survey can help inform targeted training programs to improve accessibility and inclusivity across these sectors.

While the Skills Need Survey results indicate a reliance on vocational training and apprenticeships among professionals in the heritage and tourism sectors, the literature provides mixed support for these findings. The critical role of practical, hands-on experience in developing the technical skills necessary for success in these fields is emphasized. By investing in vocational training programs, stakeholders can enhance the competencies of professionals, ultimately leading to improved outcomes in heritage conservation and museum operations.

The Skills Need Survey results also indicate a significant gap in prior experience working with disabled audiences among professionals in the heritage and tourism sectors. The literature supports the need for targeted training programs that enhance knowledge, awareness, and practical skills. By addressing these gaps, the sector can better serve disabled audiences and create a more inclusive environment that values diversity and accessibility.

While the Skills Need Survey indicates that a majority of respondents are involved in inclusive practices, the significant portion that is not highlights the need for ongoing efforts to promote inclusivity in the heritage and tourism sectors. The literature supports the necessity for targeted training, collaborative approaches, and a focus on diverse perspectives to bridge the gap and enhance the effectiveness of inclusive practices.

The barriers identified in the survey reflect significant challenges faced by individuals with special needs in accessing cultural heritage sites and museums. The literature supports these findings, emphasizing the need for improved physical infrastructure, enhanced signage, and comprehensive staff training to create more inclusive environments. By addressing these barriers, cultural institutions can better serve disabled audiences and ensure that all visitors have equitable access to their resources and experiences.

The results also highlight critical areas for training in the heritage and tourism sectors, particularly in digital skills, social media, marketing, and museum management. The literature supports these findings, emphasizing the importance of equipping professionals with the necessary skills to enhance inclusivity and effectively engage diverse audiences. By addressing these training needs, the sector can better promote accessibility and inclusivity in cultural heritage experiences.

The survey results indicate a clear need for targeted skills development in the heritage and tourism sectors, particularly in areas related to serving audiences with disabilities. While some respondents have prior experience and have adopted inclusive practices, a significant portion of the workforce lacks the necessary knowledge and training.

The Skills Need Survey results underscore the importance of both technical and soft skills in enhancing the accessibility of cultural and tourism experiences for individuals with disabilities. The literature supports these findings, emphasizing the need for professionals to be well-versed in assistive technologies, legal requirements, and inclusive design principles, while also cultivating empathy, effective communication, patience, and flexibility. By addressing these skill gaps through targeted training programs, stakeholders can create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all visitors.

The survey results underscore the importance of customer service excellence, practical problem-solving, and consistent accessibility upgrades in ensuring effective and inclusive services for individuals with special needs. The literature supports these findings, emphasizing the need for trained staff who can adapt to the diverse needs of visitors, as well as the importance of ongoing improvements to accessibility infrastructure. By addressing these factors, cultural and tourism operators can create a more inclusive environment that enhances the experience for all visitors.

The key areas identified for improvement include:

- **Digital and social media skills** to reach and engage disabled audiences
- **Museum management and marketing** for more inclusive programming
- **Communication and language training** to improve interactions with disabled visitors

Training programs designed based on these insights can make a significant impact in creating a more inclusive heritage sector that ensures accessibility and engagement for all audiences, including those with disabilities.

The survey highlights several key areas for improvement that can significantly enhance the capacity of professionals in the sector:

1. **Digital and Social Media Skills:** The ability to leverage digital platforms is essential for reaching and engaging disabled audiences. As the tourism landscape increasingly shifts towards online engagement, professionals must be equipped with the skills to utilize social media effectively to promote inclusivity and accessibility.
2. **Museum Management and Marketing:** Enhanced training in museum management and marketing is crucial for developing inclusive programming that caters to diverse audiences. Professionals need to understand how to create and promote experiences that are accessible and welcoming to all visitors, including those with disabilities.
3. **Communication and Language Training:** Effective communication is vital for improving interactions with disabled visitors. Training programs that focus on empathy, understanding, and practical strategies for engaging with individuals with varying disabilities will foster a more inclusive atmosphere in heritage sites.
4. Expanding training opportunities in inclusivity.
5. Increasing practical experience in working with special needs individuals.
6. Tailoring training programs to specific sectors within cultural heritage and tourism.

Developing targeted, sector-specific training and promoting cross-sector collaboration could greatly enhance the inclusivity efforts across cultural and tourism institutions.

By designing training programs that address these identified needs, stakeholders in the heritage and tourism sectors can make significant strides toward creating a more inclusive environment. Such initiatives will not only enhance accessibility but also enrich the overall experience for all audiences, ensuring that cultural heritage is enjoyed and appreciated by everyone, regardless of their abilities.

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PhD. Ümit Savaş TAŞKESEN

Necmettin Erbakan University - SOBE Foundation

e-mail: [ustaskesen\[at\]erbakan.edu.tr](mailto:ustaskesen[at]erbakan.edu.tr) | ORCID: 0000-0003-3214-6170

Dr. Taşkesen graduated from the Department of Primary Education at the Faculty of Education, Selçuk University. He worked as a primary school teacher for eight years under the Ministry of National Education. Subsequently, he worked with gifted and talented students at a Science and Art Center (BİLSEM). He is a member of the Writers Union of Türkiye and authors short stories, essays, travelogues, and literary criticism. Between 2010 and 2015, he served in London as a teacher of Turkish Language and Culture attached to the Education Counsellorship. Following his return to Türkiye in 2015, he commenced his doctoral studies in Special Education, completing his Ph.D. in 2022 with a dissertation titled "Teaching Intelligence Games to Children with Autism." Since 2017, he has been a faculty member in the Department of Special Education at the Ahmet Keleşoğlu Faculty of Education, Necmettin Erbakan University. He also serves as an academic advisor for the SOBE Foundation. His research focuses on fields related to individuals with autism. He is the author of the book *Otizmsizler için Otizm* (Autism for Non-Autistics). His academic work includes research on art interventions for individuals with autism, as well as the use of technology in autism education.

Cemre GÜREL | SOBE Foundation

e-mail: [cemregurel4\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:cemregurel4[at]gmail.com) | ORCID: 0000-0001-6785-069X

She was born on July 26, 1997, in Konya. She completed my undergraduate education in the Preschool Teaching program at Sabahattin Zaim University. After graduation, she completed a non-thesis master's program in Autism Spectrum Disorder in Early Childhood at Anadolu University, developing my expertise in the field. She began her professional career in 2019 by working in the field of special education at SOBE, where she gained intensive and systematic field experience with individuals with autism spectrum disorder. In 2020, she obtained an ABA practitioner certificate from Prof. Dr.

Şerife İLKAYA | SOBE Foundation

e-mail: [serife.ilkaya\[at\]sobe.org.tr](mailto:serife.ilkaya[at]sobe.org.tr) | ORCID: 0009-0006-5792-2067

She was born in Konya in 1989. She graduated from the Department of Preschool Education at Anadolu University in 2013 and completed a non-thesis master's degree in Special Education at Necmettin Erbakan University in 2015. She began her professional career as a preschool teacher at Deha Special Education and Rehabilitation Center between 2008 and 2012. From 2013 to 2016, she worked as a special education teacher and education coordinator at Cemre Special Education and Rehabilitation Center. Between 2017 and 2019, she served as a special education teacher at the SOBE Foundation, and from 2019 to 2022, she worked as a supervisor. Since 2023, She has been serving as the Research and Development Coordinator at the SOBE Foundation. She holds certification as an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) practitioner. She has presented various oral and poster presentations at national and international conferences on topics including scripted play instruction, graduated guidance and prompt fading procedures, video modeling, the effectiveness of behavioral interventions, teaching safety and daily living skills, and the SOBEP digital education system.

**ACCESSING CULTURAL HERITAGE:
EXPERIENCES OF EXPERTS, INDIVIDUALS WITH
SPECIAL NEEDS, AND CAREGIVERS IN TÜRKİYE**

Prof. Dr. İbrahim Halil DİKEN
Anadolu University

Dr. Tezcan ÇAVUŞOĞLU
Kafkas University

Dr. Uğur Onur GÜNDEN
Anadolu University

Abstract

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of accessibility and inclusion in cultural heritage institutions in Türkiye, drawing on data collected through Anadolu University. Building on a comprehensive methodological framework, the study examines perceptions of inclusion, effectiveness of cultural heritage practices, accessibility of services, and the role of public sector employment in fostering inclusive environments. The findings demonstrate that although awareness of disability inclusion has increased among professionals, accessibility remains fragmented across physical, informational, digital, and sensory dimensions. Respondents highlighted persistent challenges related to physical access, accessible information provision, and digital inclusivity, particularly for individuals with visual, hearing, and cognitive impairments. While digital tools and online platforms are increasingly recognized as facilitators of access, their implementation remains inconsistent and often lacks universal design principles. The chapter also reveals that institutional capacity, staff training, and intersectoral collaboration are decisive factors in advancing inclusive cultural heritage practices. Participants stressed the importance of continuous professional development, inclusive policy frameworks, and evidence-based planning. The chapter concludes with concrete recommendations for practice and research, emphasizing the need for integrated accessibility strategies, stronger public-sector leadership, and systematic monitoring to ensure sustainable inclusion in Türkiye's cultural heritage sector.

Keywords

Accessibility, Inclusion, Cultural Heritage,
Inclusive Policy Frameworks

Introduction

This study was designed to reflect participants' views from cultural heritage and related fields. It is part of the project “iNCLUSION- Upskilling HED Students to create transformative cultural experiences for audiences with disabilities” from 15 March 2024 to 14 March 2026. The study's sample consists of stakeholders living in Türkiye. These stakeholders are parents, people with special needs, and experts, especially teachers.

The concept of special needs can be considered as an umbrella concept. In Türkiye, this concept is used for “individuals” who differ significantly from their peers in terms of social and developmental characteristics and educational competencies. According to the Regulation on Special Education Services (MoNE, 2012), the regulations' definitions section defines individuals who benefit from special education services. (a) intellectual disability, (b) multiple disabilities, (c) attention deficit and hyperactivity, (d) speech and language difficulties, (d) emotional and behavioral disorders, (e) visual impairment, (f) hearing impairment, orthopedic disability, (g) autism, (h) specific learning disability, (i) cerebral palsy, (i) chronic illness and (j) giftedness. Individuals with intellectual disabilities are classified as mild, moderate, severe and very severe according to the degree of disability (MoNE, 2018). The definitions of disability groups are as follows:

Intellectual disability: Intellectual disability is a limitation that manifests mainly in daily life functions. These limitations include delayed intellectual development and inappropriate reactions to the environment. In addition, limitations in academic, language, cognitive, motor, and social-emotional skills that are not age-appropriate go in the definition of intellectual disability. Mental functions, adaptive behaviors, and support systems are considered. Based on IQ scores, they are classified as mild, moderate, severe, and very severe (Diken et al., 2016).

Learning disabilities: According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5 (DSM5), the term “learning disability” was changed to “specific learning disability” and the term “specific learning disability” was defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder of biological origin with disordered behavioral symptoms and cognitive anomalies. Children with learning disabilities are categorized as having basic academic skills such as reading words fluently and accurately, comprehension of the text read, written expression and writing, making arithmetic calculations and performing mathematics-based calculations (APA, 2022).

Emotional and behavioral disorders: Emotional behavior disorders are emotional reactions and behaviors that are not age-appropriate and differ from cultural/social norms (Sucuoğlu et al., 2010).

Autism spectrum disorder: According to DSM-5, ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by repetitive behaviors limited to social communication and interaction. The degree of being affected by ASD is categorized within the definition as level 1 (requires support), level 2 (requires intensive support) and level 3 (requires very intensive support) (APA, 2022).

Speech and language disorders Language impairment is an impairment in the meaning or use of the language’s symbol systems Speech impairment is a disorder of speech caused by problems with one or more of the following language components: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Diken et al., 2016).

Hearing impairment: Delay in language and communication skills as a result of complete or partial loss of hearing ability and thus the individual’s educational and social adaptation. The delay in language communication is the result of other factors, such as other development areas (Diken et al., 2016).

Visual impairment: Two different variables emerge in visual impairment. The educationally blind individual is defined as an individual who needs tactile and auditory inputs other than vision in educational processes. In contrast, the educationally low-vision individual is defined as using the sense of sight in learning activities (Diken et al., 2016).

Attention deficit and hyperactivity (ADHD): ADHD is a disorder that results in rapid distraction, impulsive behaviours and hyperactivity, which in turn negatively affect social life, learning activities, communication and both school and family life (Diken et al., 2016).

Physical and health-related disabilities: Physical disabilities consist of orthopaedic and health disability subcategories. Orthopaedic conditions significantly limiting and negatively affecting children's educational performance are referred to as orthopaedic deficiencies. Orthopedic disabilities can be caused by diseases such as polio, birth anomalies or disorders such as cerebral palsy, fractures, or burns. Health disabilities include health problems such as asthma, heart failure, anaemia, leukaemia, etc., which have indirect negative effects on education (Akoğlu, 2019).

Multiple disabilities: Multiple disabilities are when an individual has more than one disability at the same time and the educational needs of this individual are different from those of an individual affected by an additional disability. For example, an individual may have ASD in addition to visual impairment or additional disabilities in addition to intellectual disability (Şafak & Bilgiç, 2019).

Traumatic brain injury: Traumatic brain injury is a health condition that can result in significant consequences in terms of physical, cognitive and behavioural functioning as a result of various causes. Traumatic brain injury can be divided into open and closed and consist of two species (Denis et al., 2007).

Giftedness: These individuals can be classified into conservative (traditional) and liberal (contemporary). In the historical process, there has been a shift from traditional definitions to contemporary definitions. While traditional definitions make inferences about giftedness on the basis of existence and non-existence, liberal definitions, again for example, while traditional definitions consider individuals with an IQ above 130 to be gifted, liberal definitions use a certain threshold rather than numbers (Sak, 2016).

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank (WB) (2011) published a report on the worldwide prevalence of individuals with special needs, showing that approximately 15.6% of the population has some form of disability. Again, according to this report, the prevalence of disabilities varies in terms of various variables. The geography of residence is the main factor,

but it is also examined in terms of gender, age, socio-economic level, culture, and environmental factors. The prevalence of disabilities varies, especially in developing countries with low socio-economic status and gender perspectives. Similarly, according to WHO (2018), close to one billion people worldwide suffer from inadequacy, and the rate of inadequacy increases as the population ages. It is stated that the number of people with disabilities has increased due to anaemia and accompanying problems such as heart etc. The Turkish Disability Survey was conducted in 2002. According to data from the survey, the prevalence rate in Türkiye is 12.29%, of which 9.7% have a chronic disease, and 2.58% have a mental, hearing, or visual impairment. e, language-speech and orthopaedic deficiencies. United Nations (UN) (2011), data According to the National Institute of Health, the prevalence of inadequacy in Türkiye is estimated to be 7%. According to the 2011 Demographic and Housing Survey (DHS), people with at least one disability (vision, hearing, speech, walking, climbing up and down stairs, seeing, hearing, speaking, walking, walking, walking up and down stairs) have a prevalence of 8.1% in women and 6% in men. In the same survey, the provinces with the highest density of disabled population were Giresun, Çorum and Erzincan, while the least common provinces were Muş, Kocaeli and Ankara. Statistics on individuals with disabilities can also be accessed through administrative records (TSI, 2013). According to the National Disability Data System based on Disability Health Board Reports, as of 2023, there are 2.511.911 persons with disabilities registered in the system. Of these, 1.414.643 of them are men (56%) and 1.097.307 of them are women (56%). 44%. 775,012 individuals are characterized as severely disabled. The proportion of individuals with disabilities is composed of chronic diseases (40.63%), mental disabilities (%17,07) and physical disability (%13,78) (ACSHB, 2023).

In recent years in Türkiye, there has been an increasing number of studies to increase the cultural participation of individuals with special needs. Some studies show that museum education and inclusive education programs support the social participation of individuals with special needs. At this point, institutions such as the İstanbul Archaeology Museum play a pioneering role. However, with access to cultural heritage, individuals with special needs have various gains, especially social and psychological dimensions. Similarly, it is stated that museum education and cultural heritage activities mean a concrete learning experience for individuals with special needs. There are initiatives such as virtual museum visits involving digital technologies, which is an important dimension of this scope, and the materialization of artifacts with 3D printers or the digitization of spaces.

In sum, the concepts of access to cultural heritage and inclusive education have recently been used together in Türkiye,. Although research has shifted its focus to this point, there are still limitations in terms of access. These limitations can be expressed as physical, instructional or social.

This study aims to reveal the experiences of stakeholders such as parents, individuals with special needs and experts with experience in cultural heritage. In line with this purpose, the following questions were asked to be answered:

1. What are the participants' views on accessing individuals with special needs in cultural heritage sites?
2. What are their views on whether the existing practices in cultural heritage sites are effective?
3. What are their suggestions for accessibility in cultural heritage sites?
4. What are their opinions on the staff's role in facilitating access for individuals with special needs to cultural heritage sites?
5. According to their experiences, what are their opinions on the physical and information access and transportation of cultural heritage sites?
6. What are their views on the services provided and staff competence?

Methodology

In this section, the research design, participants, data collection instruments, data collection procedure, and steps of data analysis are presented. Detailed explanations are provided in the subsequent paragraphs.

Design

This study was conducted with a mixed method research method in which qualitative and quantitative research methods are used together (Creswell, 2017). Mixed methods research is a rational solution, especially in cases where urgent and in-depth information is requested about a subject (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This study tried to reveal the current situation in Türkiye, based on stakeholder experiences regarding accessibility in ensuring the participation of individuals with special needs in cultural heritage sites. Concurrent transformative design, one of the mixed method research designs, was used to provide data diversification by using more than one data collection method and to reveal a holistic situation in terms of Türkiye, by conducting a multidimensional data collection process (Creswell, 2013).

Participants

Various stakeholders, including parents, individuals with special needs, and experts, participated in this study. The participants were determined by voluntary and accessible sampling. 112 participants completed the questionnaire. The data related to the participants were presented in two parts. The first part is presented in the form of a table, while the second part is listed in the text. Table 1 provides information about the participants.

Table 1 shows that 68.75% of the participants were female and 30.36% were male. Most of the participants have undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. While most of the participants were married, the most common occupational group was teachers. 40 of the participants have children with special needs. At the same time, 13 participants have special needs.

Table 1
Information on participants

	f	%
Gender		
Female	77	68.75
Male	34	30.36
No information	1	0.89
Education		
Middleschool	6	5.41
Highschool	11	9.91
Associate degree	10	9.01
Bachelor degree	55	49.55
Master degree	26	23.42
Occupation		
Academician	9	8
Retired	3	2,7
House wife	5	4,5
Unemployed	10	8,9
Public (police vb.)	8	7,1
Student	2	1,8

Teacher	37	33,1
Private sector	6	5,4
Health	4	3,6
NGO	10	8,9
No information	18	16,1
Married Status		
Married	70	62
Single	33	29,5
Divorced	5	4,5
No information	4	3,6
Child's disability (parent)		
CP	1	,9
ADHD	1	,9
SLD	1	,9
DS	2	1,8
LD	6	5,4
ASD	28	25
ID	1	,9
Typical development	71	63,5
Disability (PwD)		
ADHD	1	,9
ASD	2	1,8
PD	2	1,8
LD	4	3,6
ID	1	,9
Multiple disabilities	3	2,7
Typical development	90	80,4
Disability degree (PwD)		
Mild	13	11,6
Modarate	9	8
Severe	1	,9
Typical development	89	79,5

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$ (sd)
Age	112	34.92 (9.01)
Professional experience	69	9.09 (8.07)
Working PwD (year)	53	7.84 (7.47)
Year of diagnosis (parent)	43	6.88 (7.41)

Expertise of Participants

27 people (34.6%) in Special Education (SEN), 11 people (14.1%) in Psychology, 7 people (9.0%) in Pre-School Teaching (PST), 5 people (6.4%) in Child Development (CD), 5 people (6.4%) in Academician, 2 people (2.6%) in Archaeology, 1 person (1.3%) in Physical Education (PE), 1 person (1.3%) in Business Administration, 1 person (1.3%) in Ceramics, 1 person (1.3%) in Piano, 1 person (1.3%) in Anesthesia Technician, 1 person (1.3%) in Social Work. 3), 1 person (1.3%) in Ceramics, 1 person (1.3%) in Piano, 1 person (1.3%) in Anesthesia Technician, 1 person (1.3%) in Social Work, 1 person (1.3%) in Quality Control, 1 person (1.3%) in Security, 1 person (1.3%) in Economics and 10 people (12.8%) in Other (No Information).

Participants' Areas of Interest

Among the most frequently mentioned interests, watching movies/series stands out as the most common preference with 12 respondents. Traveling is the second most common interest with 9 respondents, while reading books ranks third with 8 respondents. Sports is ranked fourth by 6 respondents, while Art and Creative Activities (such as painting, music, ceramics) is ranked fifth by 5 respondents. These interests show the level of interest, starting with the most preferred.

Status and Types of Equipment

Use by Individuals with Special Needs

Of the participants who answered this question ($f=40$), 85% ($f=34$) stated that they did not need any assistive device. However, 15% ($f=6$) requested an assistive device for specific reasons. Two main reasons stand out among these "Yes" responses. First, 8% ($f=3$) of users requested an assistive device because of a disability that accompanied them. Secondly, 7% ($f=3$) needed an assistive device due to the general conditions of the museum.

The majority of users preferred sensory assistive devices (regulation aids). 42% (f=8) of the total responses expressed the need for sensory regulation aids such as noise-canceling headphones. This suggests that users have a high need for sensory aids, especially in busy or distracting environments. On the other hand, 21% (f=4) users indicated the need for mobility aids (e.g. wheelchairs, walkers). These devices stand out as the main requirement for users with limited mobility. Communication aids (speech generating devices, etc.) were answered by 21% (f=4) and identified as an important group of devices supporting users with communication disabilities. Finally, devices such as oxygen concentration devices and hearing aids or devices, as well as visual aids (e.g. magnifiers, screen readers), are among the other assistive devices needed with 16% (f=3) responses.

Data Collection Tools, Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, data were collected online using “Google forms.” The research data were handled under two headings: open-ended questions and rating scales according to the relevant item. Participants were determined by the accessible and voluntary sampling method.

Open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is a method that proceeds from the part to the whole and helps construct concepts from the findings obtained. In this model, data are conceptualised and then themes are formed by bringing together similarities. The stages followed during the analysis are as follows: a) coding the data, b) creating themes, c) organizing, and d) transferring and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Graphs were included in the findings. In addition, the participants’ opinions, if any, were expressed with quotations.

Results

In the findings section, participants’ perception of inclusion, the effectiveness of practices, views on accessibility, views on personnel, and adequacy of services are presented respectively. Details are provided in the following paragraphs.

Perceptions of the Inclusion of People with Disabilities

Under this heading, the participants’ views on inclusion are specific to cultural heritage.

Museums, Galleries, and Libraries should offer activities and services for all. Do people with disabilities have equity opportunities to get involved? If not, why do you think that is?

94 participants responded to this question. The analysis of the accessibility of cultural heritage sites for individuals with special needs shows that the responses are grouped around certain themes. Table 2 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to frequency level.

Table 2
Accessibility of Cultural Heritage Sites - Prominent Deficiencies

Area	Explanation	f	%
Physical Accessibility Deficiencies	Inadequacy of structures such as ramps, elevators, wide doors	32	%35
Lack of Staff Training	Employees have not received the necessary training for effective communication with individuals with special needs	13	%14
Lack of Social Consciousness and Awareness	Insensitivity of society and service providers to the needs of individuals with special needs	12	%13
Deficiencies for Special Needs	Lack of auditory or tactile content for individuals with hearing or visual impairments	11	%12
Other	Respondents who did not respond, were unclear or did not have information	10	%11

The most emphasized issue is **physical accessibility deficiencies** with 35.2%. Participants mentioned the inadequacy of basic access facilities such as ramps, elevators and wide doors and stated that these deficiencies create serious barriers for individuals with special needs. The second most frequently mentioned theme is **the lack of staff training** with 14.3%. Participants stated that the employees in these areas are not sufficiently knowledgeable about communicating effectively with individuals with special needs and providing services in accordance with their needs. 13.2% of the participants also mentioned **the lack of social awareness and consciousness** as another frequently mentioned problem. Emphasizing that the society is generally insensitive to the needs of these individuals,

the participants stated that a more conscious approach is needed. Another 12.1% of the responses focused on **deficiencies related to special needs**, and under this heading, the lack of auditory or tactile content for individuals with hearing or visual impairments was mentioned.

Apart from the above, participant P4 stated that there is a need for educational content with “I think it should be supported with animations and narratives that individuals in need of special education can make sense of”. Similarly, participant P11: “These places should have personnel who guide and help individuals with special needs. Special visit times should be organized by applying positive discrimination. In addition, they should be allowed to benefit from these places free of charge”. Another participant P49 expressed the recent change as follows: “But I have seen that more importance has been given in the museums I have visited recently, and this made me happy, even though it was not enough”.

This analysis shows that there are various gaps in cultural heritage sites, especially in the areas of physical access, staff training and public awareness. Developing support and accessibility solutions for special needs and increasing staff training is important for improvement in this area. It reveals the importance of educational content for individuals with special needs as well as physical access and social awareness activities in cultural heritage sites. In particular, the development and use of special educational materials such as animation, simple narratives, tactile or audio guidance systems are considered among the effective solutions to increase accessibility in these areas.

The attitudes of employees can also be an obstacle to the participation of People with Disabilities in cultural activities. Have the attitudes and prejudices of employees in cultural institutions ever prevented you from accessing cultural content and how did you feel about that?

84 participants responded to this question. The analysis of the impact of employees' attitudes on the participation of individuals with special needs in cultural and touristic activities shows that certain themes come to the fore. Table 3 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to frequency level.

Table 3

Effects of Employee Attitudes on Cultural Access of Individuals with Special Needs

Area	Explanation	f	%
Lack of Employee Training	Employees have not received adequate training for effective communication with individuals with special needs	10	%13
Other	Answers that are vague or do not give a direct opinion	10	%13
Lack of Social Sensitivity and Empathy	Lack of empathy and sensitivity of the society and employees towards special needs	7	%9
Prejudices and Inadequate Information	Negative attitudes of employees due to prejudice or lack of knowledge	4	%5
Overprotective or Indifferent Attitudes	Overprotective or indifferent attitude of employees	4	%5

When Table 3 is analyzed, the most frequently emphasized issues were **lack of training** and **Other** category with a rate of 12.5%. It was stated that the lack of communication and inadequate training of the employees towards individuals with special needs may prevent the participation of these individuals. On the other hand, the “Other” category includes responses that did not directly express an opinion or were ambiguous. 8.75% of the participants emphasized that employees should develop more sensitivity towards these individuals due to **the lack of social sensitivity and empathy**. Another 5% of the responses criticized the problems of **prejudices and inadequate information** and the **overprotective or indifferent attitude** of some employees.

Participant P38 expressed his negative experience as follows: “There are prejudices, it is evident in the form of attitudes....This situation upsets us”. Participant 47 stated that this situation was due to lack of training as follows: “It is not right to think that the employees will be prejudiced because the staff are not trained on this issue...”. Participant P23 expressed the result of this situation as follows: “I am not disabled, but yes, attitudes affect a lot. It can go as far as the person waiving this right”.

As a result, it shows that employees working in centers providing cultural services have room for improvement in terms of training, empathy and nonjudgmental approach. The dissemination of training and awareness programs can encourage individuals with special needs to participate in cultural activities in a more inclusive environment.

Cultural institutions should respect diversity in society, with program contents that respectfully portray the lives of people with disabilities. How much do you think such content can help destigmatize people with disabilities in society?

94 participants responded to this question. The analysis of the social effects of cultural institutions’ presentation of sensitive content for individuals with special needs shows that the responses are gathered around certain themes. Table 4 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to frequency level.

Table 4
Social Impact of Responsive Content of Cultural Institutions

Area	Explanation	f	%
Empathy Development	Contributing to society’s better understanding of individuals with special needs by increasing empathy	31	%37
Awareness Raising	Society becomes more aware of the needs and rights of these individuals	23	%27
Reducing Stigma and Prejudice	Making individuals with special needs feel more comfortable in society by reducing labeling and prejudices	12	%14
Social Acceptance and Inclusion Empowerment	Making individuals with special needs feel more comfortable in society by reducing labeling and prejudices	11	%13
Critical Perspective and Doubt	Making individuals with special needs feel more comfortable in society by reducing labeling and prejudices	2	%2

Then Table 4 is analyzed, **empathy building** is the most frequently emphasized theme with a rate of 36.9%, and participants stated that these contents can create a more understanding environment by increasing the level of empathy in society. The second most frequently emphasized theme was **raising awareness** with 27.4%. Responses suggested that society would become more aware of individuals with special needs through such content and be sensitive to the needs of these individuals. The theme of **reducing stigma and prejudice**, which ranked third with 14.3%, emphasized that such content could reduce labeling and prejudice against individuals with special needs. 13.1% of the responses were under the heading of **strengthening social acceptance and inclusion** and stated that such content would enable individuals to be accepted as a natural part of society. **Critical perspective and suspicion** and **Other** themes remained at 2.4%. Some participants stated that this type of content may be fake or for advertising purposes and may not have effective results due to its lack of sufficient depth.

P5 expressed the possible contribution of related content as follows: “People often fear and shy away from what they do not know. With content like this, we can introduce individuals with special needs to the society and inform their sensitivities in this way. In this way, it may be possible to make an adjustment in people’s perspectives”. Similarly, P24: “It can be a small contribution to prevent or reduce the labeling problem...” and P54 expressed the consequences of this situation as follows: “It would be great in any case if the stigmatization and segregation would stop”.

This analysis shows that cultural institutions providing sensitive content for individuals with special needs can have positive effects such as increasing empathy, raising awareness and reducing stigma. It is important that this content is presented consistently and effectively to encourage society to become more inclusive.

Do you know your human rights related to access to culture and cultural heritage?

77 participants responded to this question. Table 5 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to frequency level. The answers given by the participants were under five different headings. Table 5 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to frequency level.

Table 5
Awareness on Cultural and Touristic Rights

Area	Explanation	f	%
Awareness of Rights	Participants who were aware of cultural rights and stated that they used them	31	%40
Lack of Awareness of Rights	Participants who stated that they were not informed about cultural rights	12	%15
Stigmatization and the Need to Improve Rights	Opinions that existing rights should be further developed or improved	3	%4
Inability to Actively Exercise Rights	Participants who stated that they could not fully exercise their rights for various reasons	2	%3
Other	Participants who stated that they could not fully exercise their rights for various reasons	1	%1

Table 5 shows that 40.3% of the participants stated that they were aware of their rights. The theme of not being aware of their rights came to the fore with 15.6% of the participants stating that they did not have information about their rights. The theme of the need to improve rights came in third place with 3.9%. Participants stated that existing rights should be improved and made more accessible. 2.6% of the participants stated that they could not actively use their rights for various reasons. The “Other” theme remained at 1.3%.

Looking at the responses of the participants to this question, participant P28 stated that he did not know his rights fully as follows: “I don’t know exactly what my rights are legally; but I have an idea about understanding the culture, the state taking it under protection and it being open to the public; but not at a sufficient level, to be honest”. Participant P64 stated that he knew his rights as follows: “I am aware of my rights. Thanks to museum cards, it is possible to access many areas without any problem”. Another participant expresses the legal right of each individual to access as follows: “I know that as a citizen, disabled individuals have the same rights as non-disabled individuals...”

As a result, it shows the importance of awareness raising programs on cultural rights. It is recommended to carry out more information and improvement activities for individuals who do not know or cannot use their rights. Conducting these studies in the context of individuals with special needs and relevant stakeholders will increase inclusiveness.

Effectiveness of Cultural Heritage Practices

Under this heading, the views of the participants on the effectiveness of the services offered in the field of cultural heritage are presented.

What do you think about the effectiveness of the current practices of cultural institutions in promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities? (in museums, sites, libraries, etc.)

82 participants responded to this question. The analysis of cultural heritage practices on the participation of individuals with special needs shows that certain themes stand out. Table 6 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to the frequency level.

Table 6
Impact of Cultural Heritage Practices

Area	Explanation	f	%
Inadequacy of Practices	Existing practices are insufficient to encourage individuals with special needs	12	%15
The Need for Inclusion and Inclusion	The need for more inclusive regulation to ensure the participation of people with special needs	7	%8
Lack of Awareness and Information	Lack of knowledge and awareness of the society and institutions on this issue	6	%7
Need for Development and New Work	The need to encourage participation through new projects and campaigns	6	%7
Other	Unclear or ambiguous responses	2	%2

When Table 6 is analyzed, **inadequacy of practices** was the most frequently emphasized theme with 14.5%. Participants stated that current practices are insufficient to support the participation of these individuals and that more effort is needed. Secondly, the theme of the **need for inclusion and inclusiveness** was mentioned by 8.4%. Participants stated that individuals with special needs need more inclusive arrangements in cultural spaces. The themes **lack of awareness and information**, and **the need for development and new studies** came to the fore with a rate of 7.2%, and the participants emphasized that more information should be provided and new studies should be initiated. The “Other” theme is 2.4% and includes responses that did not express a clear opinion.

One of the participants, P8, expressed his views on this issue as follows: “We are all candidates for disability, so I think that all social areas should be adapted for the whole society”. P15 expressed his observations as follows: “Except for school trips, I have not encountered an example so far, but I have witnessed that school trips are mostly made by individuals without special needs.” Similarly, P104 summarizes the current situation as follows: “as far as I observe, it is not enough”. Finally, participant P108 summarized the current situation and made the following suggestion: “while current cultural heritage practices have made some progress in promoting the inclusion of people with SEN in museums and the cultural heritage sector, more effort and innovation may be required for this field to develop further and become more inclusive”.

In conclusion, it can be seen that there are various shortcomings in the existing studies on increasing the participation of individuals with special needs in cultural heritage practices. More inclusive regulations, awareness-raising programs, increasing physical accessibility and new development projects can improve this area. Therefore, the participation of individuals with special needs will be more likely to increase.

Can you tell us about any successful initiatives or practices that you have observed or participated in that have had a positive impact on the inclusion of people with disabilities in institutions?

68 participants responded to this question. The findings show that most of the participants did not come across examples of good practices. Table 7 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to frequency level.

Table 7
Impact of Cultural Heritage Practices

Area	Explanation	f	%
Lack of Information or Negative Opinion	Lack of knowledge about successful practices or negative responses	29	%41
Successful Practices and Initiatives	Practices and examples that positively affect the participation of individuals with special needs	12	%17
Disabled Card and Free Access	Special facilities such as disability card and free access	4	%6
Barrier-Free Life Centers	Stating life centers without disabilities as a positive example	1	%1

When Table 7 is analyzed, 41.4% of the responses emphasized lack of knowledge or negative opinions. The theme of successful practices and initiatives was emphasized at a rate of 17.1%, and participants stated that certain practices had a positive impact in this area. Disability cards and free access were mentioned by 5.7% of the respondents, and it was stated that through these cards, individuals with special needs have easier access to cultural spaces. Barrier-free living centers were mentioned by 1.4% and these centers were shown as positive examples by some participants.

Participant P5 cited an example of appropriate practice: “There are centers for life without disabilities. Cultural activities are carried out with workshops”, while P10 expresses the example of good practice that increases access as follows: “The approach of free access with a companion is a good example, but that’s it”. P24, on the other hand, stated that although there are examples of good practices, they are not sufficient as follows: “Of course there are examples of good practices, but they are numerically insufficient. In the Cappadocia region, NEVÜ ATBİN and Küçük Prens academy can be good examples of local centers that provide continuous service”.

As a result, it shows that the awareness of examples that increase the cultural participation of individuals with special needs should be increased. Further promotion and dissemination of such practices can strengthen awareness

and access. In addition, it can be stated that it is important to disseminate the limited number of appropriate practice examples, set standards and implement new practices simultaneously.

Availability of Museum Services and Cultural Heritage

Under this heading are the opinions of the participants that cultural heritage sites are evaluated in terms of accessibility.

What specifically should be done (or improved) in cultural institutions, museums/sites to improve accessibility for people with disabilities? (e.g. reasonable adaptation of physical access/accessibility, sensory and informational accessibility...)

68 participants responded to this question. Most of the participants responded in the areas of physical access and sensory access. Table 8 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to frequency level.

Table 8
Suggestions for Improvement to Increase Access for Individuals with Special Needs

Area	Explanation	f	%
Improving Physical Access	Physical access solutions such as ramps, access vehicles and stair arrangements	38	%51
Regulating Sensory and Information Access	Arrangements to support audio-visual access	36	%48
Staff Training and Information	The need for trained personnel who can assist individuals with special needs	16	%21
Technological Support and Digital Access	Providing digital access tools and technological support	5	%7

When Table 8 is analyzed, it is seen that the participants emphasized the need to **improve physical access** the most with a rate of 50.7%. Participants mentioned the importance of arrangements that facilitate physical access,

such as increasing ramps, making arrangements that facilitate access instead of stairs, and providing disabled vehicles. 48% of the participants expressed the need to **organize sensory and information access**, and stated that content that appeals to visual and auditory senses should be provided. **Staff training and information** came to the fore with 21.3% of the participants emphasizing the importance of having trained staff to assist individuals with special needs. The theme of **technological support and digital access** was mentioned by 6.7% of the participants, suggesting the provision of audio narration devices, screen readers and digital access tools.

Participants expressed their views on this issue in various ways. P4 emphasized universal design as follows: “Appropriate transportation for physical access can be free of charge. The space can be organized in accordance with universal design principles”. In a holistic sense, P24 suggested the following: “It is imperative to improve the physical access conditions of priority cultural heritage items such as man-made artifacts such as paintings, drawings, prints, mosaics, historical buildings or archaeological sites. Local guides should be able to use sign language, information content presentations in Braille or the use of various technological tools, access quality of virtual visits, use of sensory technologies and smart systems, kinematic technologies, wearable technologies in visiting areas, etc.”. Similarly, P80 suggests the following: “Since the spectrum of individuals with special needs is wide, provide opportunities from the least moderate to the most moderate. If necessary, it would be useful to see them in person or, if necessary, to provide these opportunities through augmented reality and simulation”. Regarding ASD, P11 suggested the following: “Support staff and a calming room should be provided for individuals with autism”. The adaptation suggestion made by P92 is as follows: “The language level can be adapted, introductions can be made with 5-6 words for individuals who simply form sentences with a maximum of 4 words. Explanations can be made with the maximum number of words in a simple sentence+1-2 words”.

As a result, it reveals that physical access arrangements should be made primarily for individuals with special needs to have easier access to cultural heritage sites. Sensory information access, the presence of trained staff and the provision of digital supports are other important areas that encourage the participation of these individuals. In this way, both the physical participation of individuals with special needs in the relevant environments will be ensured and inputs based on knowledge, experience or sensory acquisition will be possible.

Role of Employment in the Public Sector

Under this heading, the participants’ views regarding the staff are included, with a special focus on cultural heritage.

How important is it for employees to understand the needs of people with disabilities to promote inclusion in the cultural heritage sector? And how important is it for employees to take into account the needs of people with disabilities?

77 participants responded to this question. Their responses indicate that the relevant personnel play an important role in the process. Table 9 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to frequency level.

Table 9
Suggestions on Personnel to Increase Inclusion

Area	Explanation	f	%
Staff Training and Sensitization	Personnel approaching individuals with special needs with sensitivity and awareness	34	%44
Regulating Sensory and Information Access	Arrangements to support audio-visual access	9	%11
Staff Training and Information	The need for trained personnel who can assist individuals with special needs	8	%10

When Table 9 is examined, it is seen that the need for **staff training and sensitivity** is the most emphasised theme, with a rate of 43.6%. The theme of **positive discrimination and support** was emphasised at a rate of 11.5%, with some participants highlighting the importance of providing special support and priority for individuals with special needs. **Inclusion and accessibility** was mentioned by 10.3% of the participants, and it was stated that cultural spaces should be made accessible through inclusive regulations.

The views of the participants are in line with these findings. Participant P4 emphasizes the importance of people as follows: “This is the most important thing, I think it is very important that the person who communicates with them is someone with strong communication skills when everything in that cultural

heritage site is inanimate”. P8 expresses the contribution of the related areas as follows: “Individuals with disabilities are already trying to be isolated from society, at least they can get information and socialize by going to such areas. The more knowledgeable the staff is, the more they can spread common sense and understanding to both disabled individuals and individuals with normal development”. P24 states the importance of the staff as follows: “It is extremely important, but unfortunately, staff competence is at a very low level. Many of them cannot even understand their own needs. There are centers that see visitors coming and lock the toilets”. P56 emphasizes the performance system as follows: “Scoring should be taken from individuals with special needs and their families regarding the attitude of the staff and the working status of the staff. It should be determined accordingly because individuals with special needs need understanding interlocutors”.

As a result, it can be said that staff play a critical role in the process. At this point, staff training stands out as one of the barriers to access. One of the recommendations to overcome the limitation at this point is positive discrimination and the dissemination of the supports that should be provided. At this point, it can be stated as a necessity to raise staff awareness and provide educational support.

Can you explain why it is important for staff to understand the needs of people with disabilities to strengthen inclusion in the cultural heritage sector?

77 participants responded to this question. The responses of the participants group the basic arrangements that need to be made for individuals with special needs to receive better service in cultural heritage sites under five main themes. Table 10 shows the areas emphasised by the participants according to frequency level.

When Table 10 is examined, 25% of the participants emphasized the theme of understanding needs and support and stated that the needs of individuals with special needs should be well analyzed and the right solutions should be produced. Identifying these needs plays a major role in service delivery. Empathy and understanding were highlighted in 20% of the responses, with participants stating that empathy and understanding are important for individuals to be included in society and feel accepted. Staff training and knowledge, mentioned by 15%, is necessary for trained staff to better understand the needs of individuals and provide appropriate services. Participants stated that increasing the level

of training and knowledge of staff in this area would improve service quality. The theme of social awareness and acceptance was emphasized by 20% of the participants and it was stated that a better understanding and acceptance of individuals with special needs by the society would support their more active participation in social life. Finally, the theme of creating an inclusive environment, which was emphasized by 15% of the participants, states that providing an accessible and inclusive environment in cultural and social areas supports individuals to participate more easily in activities.

Table 10
Suggestions Regarding Personnel to Increase the Participation of Individuals with Special Needs

Area	Explanation	f	%
Understanding of needs and support	Providing support and producing appropriate solutions by correctly analyzing the needs of individuals with special needs	10	%25
Empathy and understanding	Empathy and understanding help individuals feel comfortable and strengthen their social participation	8	%20
Public awareness and acceptance	Society’s sensitivity to the needs of individuals with special needs facilitates their participation in social life and ensures their acceptance.	8	%20
Creating an inclusive environment	Inclusive and accessible environmental arrangements enable individuals with special needs to participate more easily in activities and support their equal benefit.	6	%15
Staff training and information	Trained staff are required to offer the right approaches to individuals with special needs and to understand their needs.	6	%15

Participants expressed their opinions on this issue. Participant P53’s suggestions to the staff are as follows: “Staff understanding the needs of individuals with special needs enables them to overcome barriers, feel safe and comfortable, communicate effectively and provide inclusive services. This creates a more inclusive and accessible experience in cultural heritage sites”. Similarly, P98, a parent with a child with special needs, expressed her experience as follows: “As a mother of a child with special needs, when I don’t feel comfortable in the places we visit, I don’t go there again unless I have to. The understanding of the staff increases our desire to be there again and again without feeling excluded”.

Participant P27 summarized the situation by making a comprehensive evaluation: “In order to increase the participation of individuals with special needs in cultural heritage, it is critical for staff to understand their needs for several reasons: Effective Communication and Guidance, Accessibility Arrangements, Empathy and Respect, Quick Problem Solving, Inclusive Experience. In short, staff understanding of the needs of individuals with special needs improves accessibility and inclusion, leading to richer and more inclusive cultural experiences for all”.

According to the participants’ responses, recommendations include the development of specific training programs for staff to understand individuals with special needs. These trainings will enable staff to recognize the needs of individuals and provide services with the right approach. In addition, empathy development trainings should support staff to be more understanding and sensitive to individuals with special needs. Ensuring physical and sensory accessibility in cultural and social spaces and making necessary arrangements in these spaces is also an important requirement. In order to raise public awareness, campaigns should be organized to increase public understanding of individuals with special needs. Finally, it is important to establish comprehensive and accessible service standards to ensure that everyone can receive equal services in cultural spaces in order to increase inclusiveness.

Access and Accessibility to Cultural Institutions

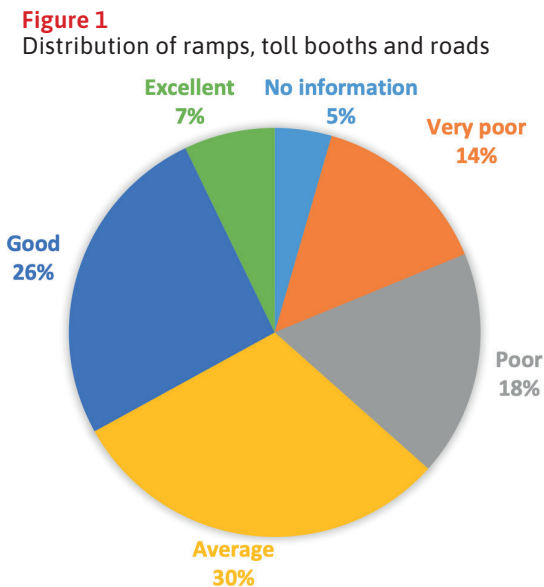
This part analyzes different types of access and accessibility to cultural institutions in Türkiye.

Assessment of Physical Access to Cultural Institutions in Türkiye

Bu başlık altında katılımcıların fiziksel erişilebilirliğe ilişkin görüşleri kültürel miras özelinde yer almaktadır.

Access to Museums, Sites, and Collections (Ramps, Entrances)

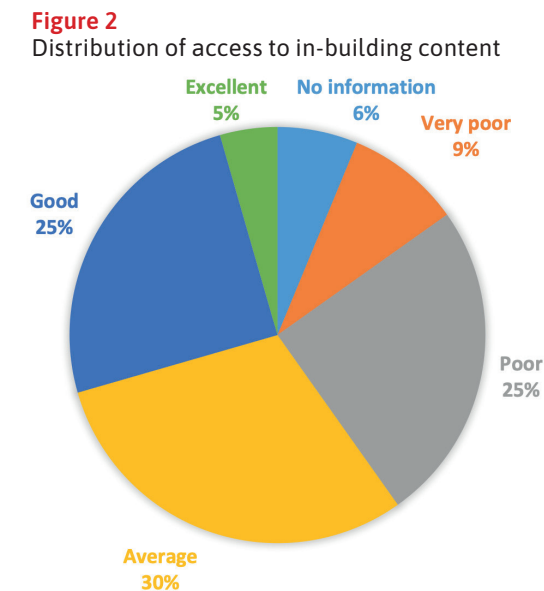
All 112 respondents answered this question. The question asked to rate the accessibility of buildings within cultural heritage sites. These are mainly ramps, toll booths and roads. Participants rated the relevant physical environment as very poor, poor, average, good, excellent, excellent and no information. The distribution of the participants’ responses is shown in Figure 1.



Looking at Figure 1, the participants gave very poor (f=16), poor (f=20), average (f=34), good (f=29) and excellent (f=8) answers. The number of participants who said they had no information was 5. In the light of this data, 62% of the participants stated that the conditions were average or below.

Access to Cultural Content Inside Institutions

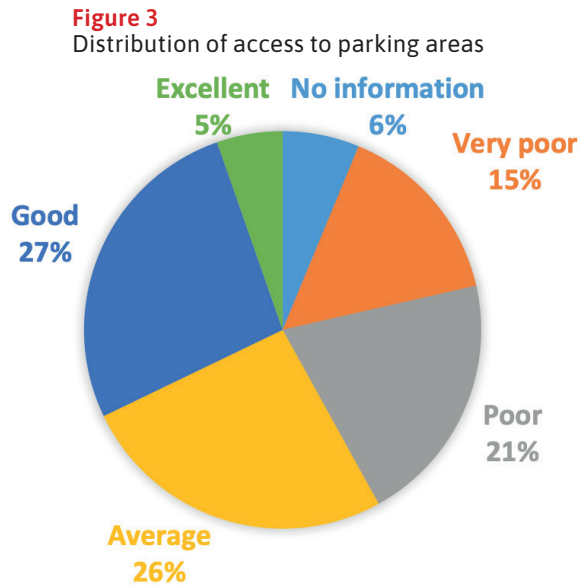
All 112 respondents answered this question. The question asked for a rating of the access to cultural content inside the buildings. The distribution of the participants' responses is shown in Figure 2.



Looking at Figure 2, the participants responded very poorly ($f=10$), poorly ($f=28$), average ($f=34$), well ($f=28$) and excellent ($f=5$). The number of participants who said they had no knowledge was 7. In the light of these data, 64% of the participants stated that the conditions were average or below.

Access to Parking

All 112 respondents answered this question. The question asked participants to rate their access to parking areas. The distribution of participants' responses is shown in Figure 3.



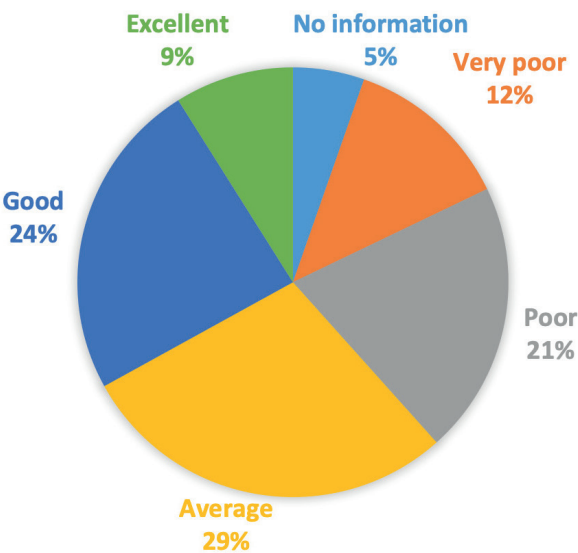
Looking at Figure 3, the participants gave very poor ($f=17$), poor ($f=23$), average ($f=29$), good ($f=30$) and excellent ($f=6$) answers. The number of participants who said they had no knowledge was 7. In the light of these data, 62% of the participants stated that the conditions were average or below.

Access to Toilets

All 112 participants responded to this question. The question asked for a rating of access to toilets. The distribution of participants' responses is shown in Figure 4.

Looking at Figure 4, the participants gave very poor ($f=14$), poor ($f=23$), average ($f=32$), good ($f=27$) and excellent ($f=10$) answers. The number of participants who said they had no knowledge was 7. In the light of these data, 62% of the participants stated that the conditions were average or below.

Figure 4
Distribution of access to parking areas



Access to Cafes, Bars, and Restaurants in Cultural Institutions

All 112 respondents answered this question. The question asked participants to rate their access to cafes, bars and restaurants. The distribution of participants' responses is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5
Distribution of access to cafes, bars and restaurants

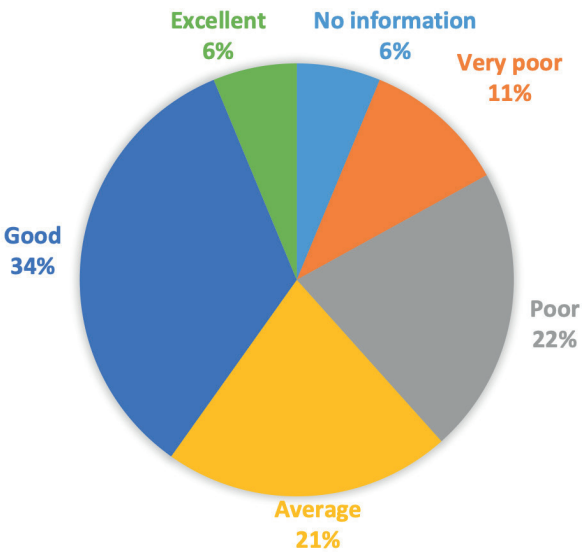


Figure 5 shows that the participants responded very poorly ($f=12$), poorly ($f=24$), average ($f=24$), good ($f=38$) and excellent ($f=7$). The number of participants who said they had no information was 7. In the light of this data, 52% of the participants stated that the conditions were average or below.

Access to Lockers for

Storing Personal Belongings in Cultural Institutions

All 112 participants responded to this question. The question asked participants to rate their access to lockers. The distribution of participants' responses is shown in Figure 6.

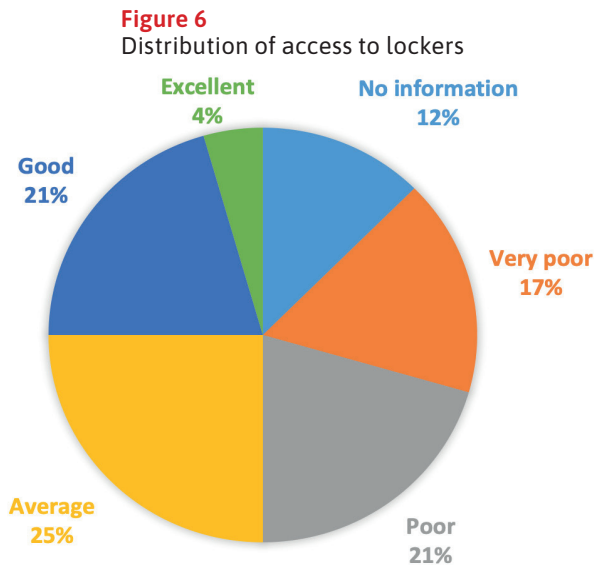


Figure 6 shows that the participants responded as very poor ($f=19$), poor ($f=23$), average ($f=28$), good ($f=23$) and excellent ($f=5$). The number of participants who said they had no knowledge was 14. In the light of this data, 50% of the participants stated that the conditions were average or below.

Access to Places for Rest

All 112 participants responded to this question. The question asked participants to rate their access to recreational areas. The distribution of respondents' answers is presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7
Distribution of access to recreational areas

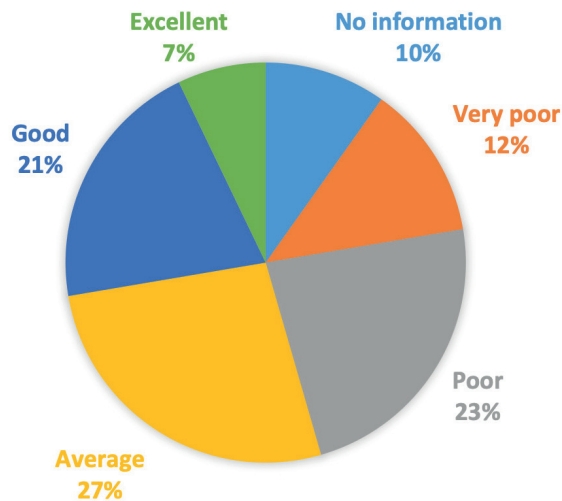


Figure 7 shows that the participants responded as very poor ($f=14$), poor ($f=26$), average ($f=30$), good ($f=23$) and excellent ($f=8$). The number of participants who said they had no information was 11. In the light of this data, 62% of the participants stated that the conditions were average or below.

Access to Cash Registers/Info points in Cultural Institutions

All 112 participants responded to this question. The question asked participants to rate their access to the cash desk and information desk. The distribution of participants' responses is presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8
Distribution of access to cash desk and information desk

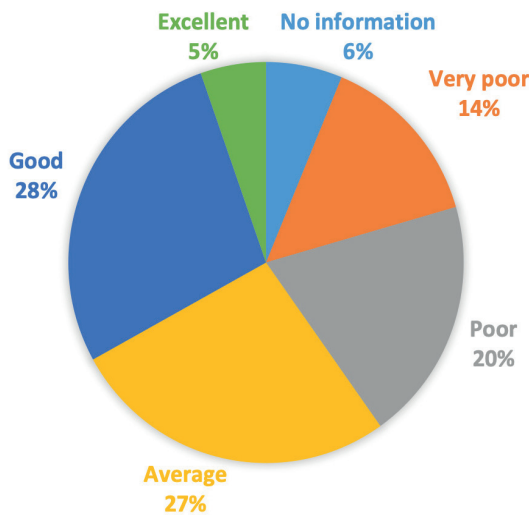
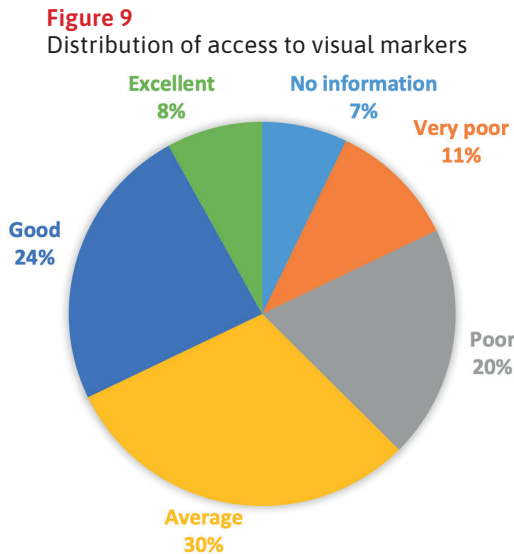


Figure 8 shows that the participants responded as very poor ($f=16$), poor ($f=22$), average ($f=30$), good ($f=31$) and excellent ($f=6$). The number of participants who said they had no knowledge was 7. In the light of this data, 61% of the participants stated that the conditions were average or below.

Rating of Visual Signalization in Cultural Institutions

All 112 participants responded to this question. The question asked participants to rate their access to visual markers. The distribution of the participants' responses is shown in Figure 9.



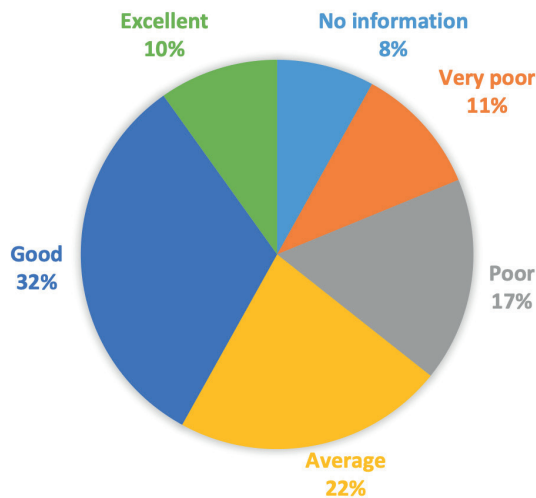
Looking at Figure 9, the participants gave very poor ($f=12$), poor ($f=22$), average ($f=34$), good ($f=27$) and excellent ($f=9$) answers. The number of participants who said they had no information was 8. In the light of this data, 61% of the participants stated that the conditions were average or below.

Access to Shopping and Gift Venues in Cultural Institutions

All 112 participants responded to this question. The question asked participants to rate their access to visual markers. The distribution of respondents' answers is presented in Figure 10.

Looking at Figure 10, the participants responded very poorly ($f=12$), poorly ($f=19$), average ($f=25$), well ($f=36$) and excellent ($f=11$). The number of participants who said they had no knowledge was 9. In the light of these data, 50% of the participants stated that the conditions were average or below.

Figure 10
Distribution of access to shopping and souvenir areas



Accessible Information

Under this heading, the participants’ views on inclusion are specific to cultural heritage.

How do you find out about the offers in the museums/sites/collections?

All 112 participants responded to this question. Participants were able to make several choices. The distribution of participants’ responses is presented in Figure 11.

Figure 11
Sources of information about cultural heritage

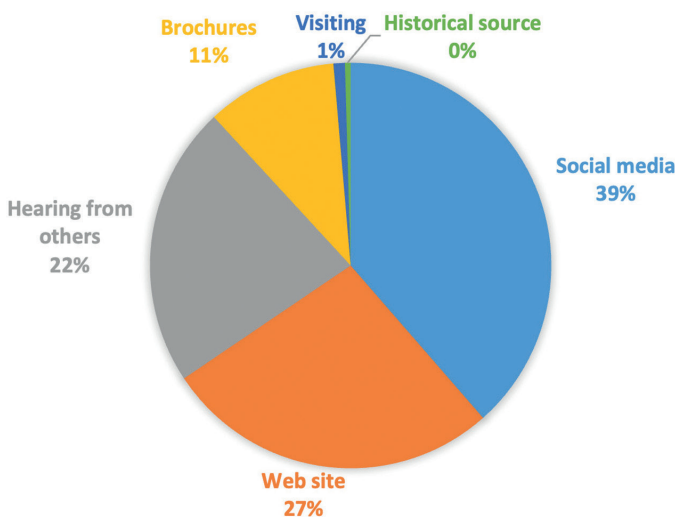


Figure 11 shows that the information sources preferred by the participants are distributed as Social Media ($f=84$), Website ($f=59$), Hearing from Others (Word of Mouth) ($f=49$) and Brochures ($f=23$). In addition, the number of participants who chose the option “Historical sources” was only 1. According to these data, the biggest source of information is social media.

How do you rate the availability of tourist information in museums/ localities/ collections?

All 112 participants responded to this question. The question asked for a rating of physical accessibility in the context of information. The distribution of the participants’ responses is shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12
Distribution of physical accessibility to information

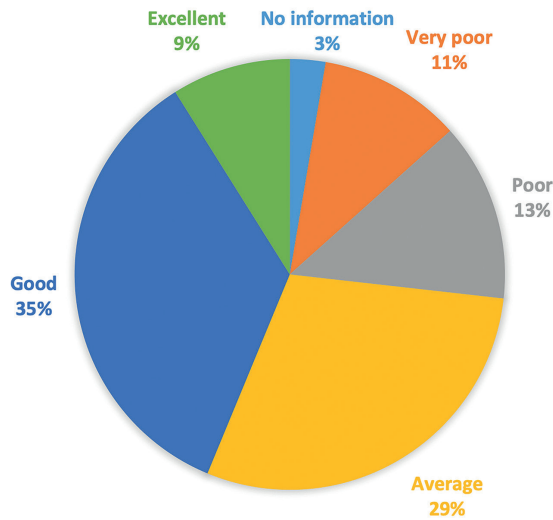


Figure 12 shows that the participants responded as very poor ($f=12$), poor ($f=19$), average ($f=25$), good ($f=36$) and excellent ($f=11$). The number of participants who said they had no information was 10. In the light of these data, it is seen that 56% of the participants stated that they were average or below.

How do you rate the accessibility of tourist information in cultural institutions?

All 112 participants responded to this question. The question asked for a rating of physical accessibility in the context of information. Figure 13 shows the distribution of the participants’ responses.

Figure 13
Distribution of physical accessibility to information

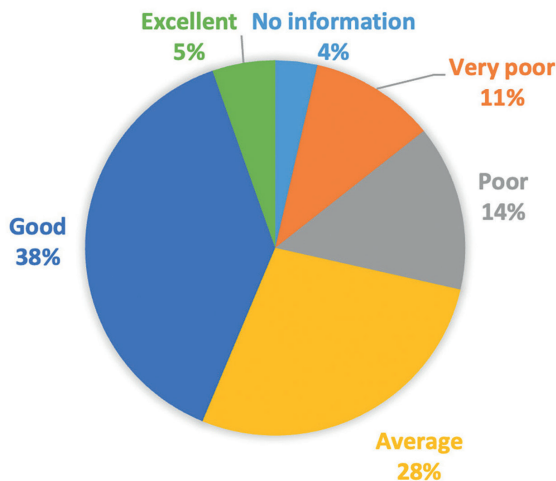


Figure 13 shows that the participants are distributed as “Very Poor” (f=12), “Poor” (f=16), “Average” (f=31), “Good” (f=43), “Excellent” (f=6). The number of participants who said “I have no information” is 4. In the light of these data, it is seen that 56% of the participants stated that they were average or below.

How do you rate the availability of information on cultural content on the websites of the museums/sites/collections? How do you rate the accessibility of information that explains its content?

All 112 participants responded to this question. The question asked participants to rate the website of the relevant cultural sites in terms of accessibility. The distribution of participants’ responses is presented in Figure 14.

Figure 14
Distribution of website accessibility

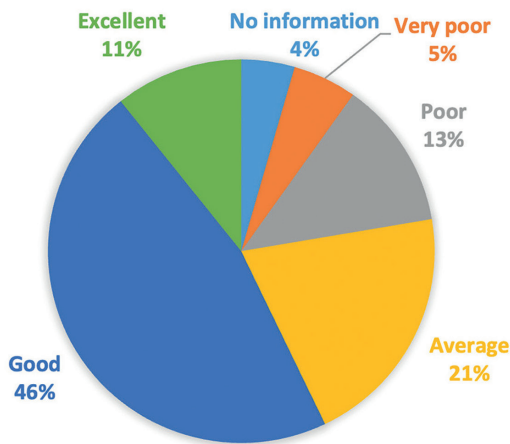
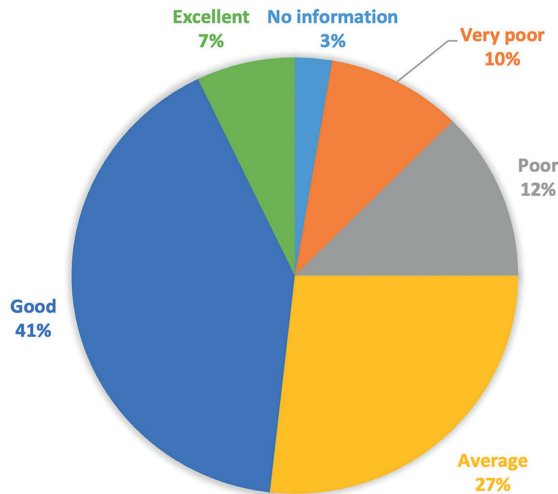


Figure 14 shows a distribution of “Very Poor” ($f=6$), “Poor” ($f=14$), “Average” ($f=23$), “Good” ($f=52$) and “Excellent” ($f=12$). The number of participants who said “I have no information” is 5. In the light of these data, it is seen that 42% of the participants stated that they were average or below. Most of the participants think that website accessibility is good (46%).

How do you rate the accessibility of information that explains cultural content in the institutions? (flyers, catalogs, info panels, and labels)

All 112 participants responded to this question. The question asked for an assessment of the accessibility of the information on the contents of the relevant cultural sites. The distribution of the participants’ responses is shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15
Distribution of the accessibility of the information on the contents



When we look at the evaluations of the participants, we see a distribution of “Very Poor” ($f=11$), “Poor” ($f=14$), “Average” ($f=30$), “Good” ($f=46$) and “Excellent” ($f=8$). The number of participants who said “I have no information” is 3. In the light of these data, it is seen that 51% of the participants gave an average score or below.

Is there information about the contents in cultural institutions presented in some other way? (e.g. illustration, Braille text, audio-visual content, etc.)

112 participants responded to this question. Participants’ responses were organized under four themes. Table 11 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to frequency level.

Table 11
Suggestions for Personnel to Increase Inclusion

Area	Explanation	f	%
Limited Use of Media Tools	Inadequate or limited provision of media tools	45	%36
Accessibility Requirements	In particular, Braille, audiovisual content and tactile models should become widespread	30	%25
Expanded Media Use	In some institutions, media tools are provided at an adequate level	25	%20
Lack of Information	Lack of knowledge about the accessibility of media tools	15	%12

When Table 11 is analyzed, 36% of the participants emphasized the theme of **Limited Use of Media Tools**. This theme consists of participants’ comments indicating that media tools are not widespread enough or are presented in a limited way. It was pointed out that media tools should be presented at a wider level in order to ensure accessibility. 24% of the responses focused on the theme of **Accessibility Requirements**. It was stated that tools such as Braille, audiovisual content and tactile models should become widespread, and it was emphasized that the current regulations are insufficient. The theme of **Expanded Media Use** includes the positive views of the participants with 20%. Under this theme, there is feedback that some cultural institutions offer media tools at an adequate level. 12% of the respondents, grouped under the theme of **Lack of Knowledge**, indicated that they did not know enough about the accessibility of media tools. This indicates that more information about accessibility is needed.

The answers given by the participants support the above information. P3 states that the facilities are sufficient as follows: “The places I visited offered accessible facilities for individuals with special needs. Braille, illustration were available”. P12, on the other hand, states that the relevant services do not work as follows: “I have seen audio promotional mock-ups in a few open-air parks, but either they were not working or they were in an unplanned implementation”. P78 emphasizes that these initiatives are limited: “Unfortunately, it is very rare. When they are offered, they are offered in what we would call a cursory way, for example, the reliefs are prepared in a way that is very difficult to understand”.

According to participants' responses, the accessibility of media tools should be increased. In this context, it is suggested that media tools such as Braille, audio-visual guidance and tactile information systems should be made more widespread in all cultural institutions. Accessibility standards should be harmonized in all institutions and information activities should be carried out to raise awareness about media tools in society. It is also important that staff at cultural sites are trained on accessible media tools and can provide guidance to visitors when necessary. Finally, continuous improvement in practices should be ensured by receiving feedback from visitors for effective use of media tools and necessary improvements.

Do cultural institutions offer a “social story” on their website that helps a person with autism prepare for the visit?

112 participants responded to this question. Participants' responses were organized under four themes. Table 12 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to the frequency level.

Table 12
Suggestions regarding services for individuals with ASD

Area	Explanation	f	%
Inadequacy of Resources	Cultural institutions do not have sufficient resources for individuals with ASD or such materials are not available	50	%42
Lack of Information	Not knowing if there is a resource or not having information about it	30	%25
Encountering Related Resources	Limited availability of such resources (such as Braille, visual guidance) in cultural spaces	20	%17
Implementation Need	Applications such as social stories are needed	15	%13

When Table 12 is analyzed, 42% of the participants emphasized the theme of Insufficient Resources and stated that resources for individuals with ASD are not adequately provided in cultural institutions or that they have never come across such materials. This suggests that resources should be made more widely available. The theme of Lack of Knowledge stood out among the responses with 25%. Some of the participants stated that they were not informed about the availability of resources for individuals with ASD. This points to the need to increase information efforts on accessibility. 17% of the responses were in the theme of Encountering Relevant Resources, and some participants reported that materials such as Braille and visual guidance are available in cultural spaces, albeit limited. However, it

was also noted that these resources are often not sufficient. The theme of Need for Implementation was mentioned by 13% of the participants, who emphasized the need to provide social stories or similar materials for individuals with ASD in cultural spaces. It was suggested that the deficiency should be eliminated and more accessible materials should be presented in cultural spaces.

The responses of the participants support the above information. P12 emphasizes that individual efforts come to the fore: “No, I have never encountered it, but it could have been designed by the teacher individually and worked for a single student”. P47 described her experience as follows: “In the museums I went to in Gaziantep, yes, I came across this kind of narration, but I am not sure if the aim was Autism”. P82 expressed the importance of applications such as social stories as follows: “I don’t think such an opportunity is offered, but I think it is a very good idea for special individuals, I would definitely recommend it to be done”.

According to the participants’ responses, there is a need to increase accessible resources for autistic individuals in cultural institutions. In this context, it is important to make materials such as social stories, Braille, visual guidance more widespread. In addition, informing the society about the availability of resources for the needs of individuals with ASD will increase the level of awareness. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the materials used in cultural spaces, regular updates should be made to the practices by obtaining feedback from visitors. The staff of cultural institutions should be informed about the materials for the needs of individuals with ASD and should be trained to provide guidance when necessary. Finally, new and innovative materials should be developed in order for autistic individuals to participate more easily in cultural spaces. These recommendations are important to provide more inclusive experiences for individuals with ASD in cultural spaces.

Digital Accessibility

Under this heading, participants’ views on digital accessibility are specific to cultural heritage.

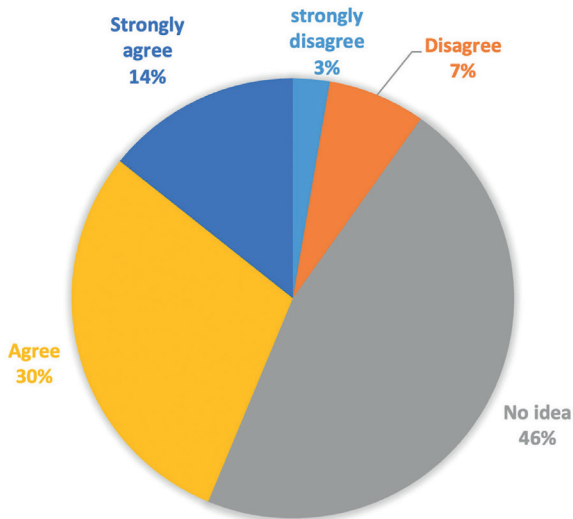
How much could digital technologies and applications contribute and share heritage knowledge and raise audience awareness?

Under this heading, the digital contents offered to the general audience were asked. These contents are a) database and index of concepts, b) digital cultural artworks, c) mobile applications, ç) video and audio guides, e-books and multimedia books,

d) audiobooks, e) films and audiovisual productions, and f) Digital Publishing is included under the headings. Participant responses were strongly disagree, disagree, have no opinion, agree, and strongly disagree. Figures, summaries of findings and recommendations are listed in the following sections.

Figure 16

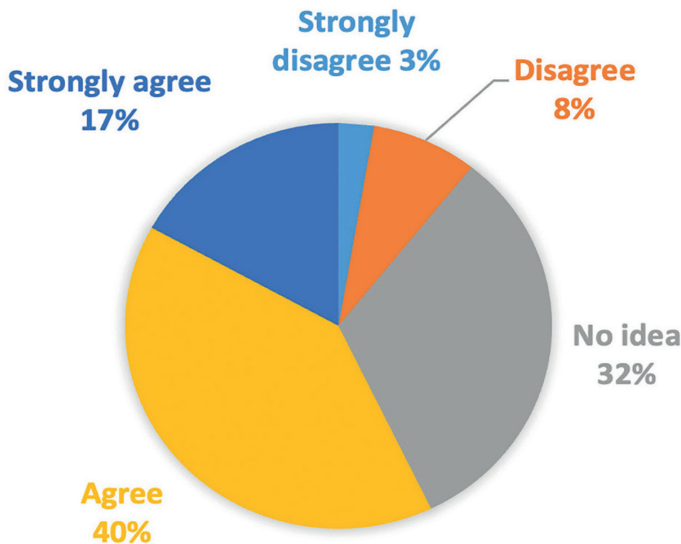
Findings related to database and concepts index



The participants' evaluations show a distribution of "No Opinion" ($f=52$), 'Agree' ($f=33$), 'Strongly Agree' ($f=16$), 'Disagree' ($f=8$), and 'Strongly Disagree' ($f=3$). When the findings are analyzed, it is seen that most of the participants (46%) have no knowledge about the process.

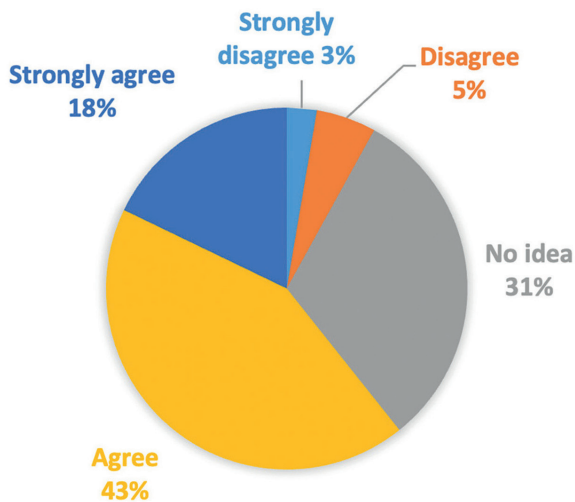
Figure 17

Findings on Digital Cultural Artworks



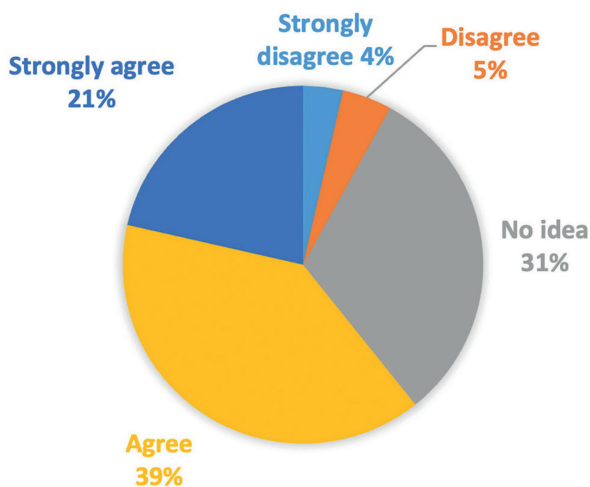
According to the participants’ evaluations, the distribution is as follows: “Agree” (f=45), ‘No Opinion’ (f=36), ‘Strongly Agree’ (f=19), ‘Disagree’ (f=9), and ‘Strongly Disagree’ (f=3). Approximately one-third of the respondents had no opinion on this issue, while about one-third again stated that digital cultural heritage artworks have appropriate access.

Figure 18
Findings on mobile applications



According to the participants’ final evaluations, the distribution is as follows: “Agree” (f=48), ‘No Opinion’ (f=35), ‘Strongly Agree’ (f=20), ‘Disagree’ (f=6) and ‘Strongly Disagree’ (f=3). Approximately one third of the participants had no opinion on this issue, while about half of them thought that the access standards of mobile applications were appropriate.

Figure 19
Findings on video and audio guides



According to the participants' final evaluations, the distribution is as follows: "Agree" ($f=44$), 'No Opinion' ($f=35$), 'Strongly Agree' ($f=24$), 'Disagree' ($f=5$) and 'Strongly Disagree' ($f=4$). Approximately one third of the participants have no opinion on this issue, while more than half of them think that the access standards of video and audio guides are appropriate.

Figure 20

Findings on Video and Audio Guides, E-books and Multimedia Books

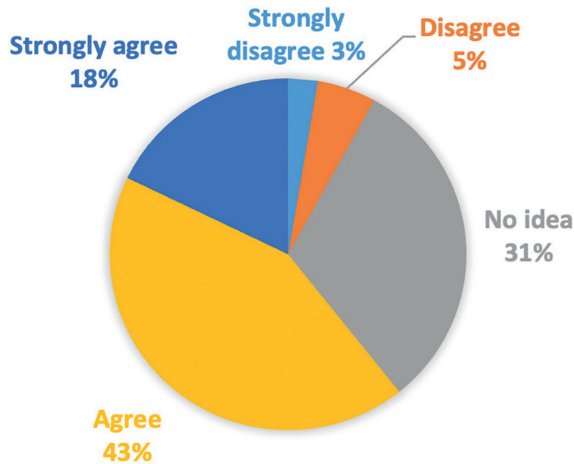
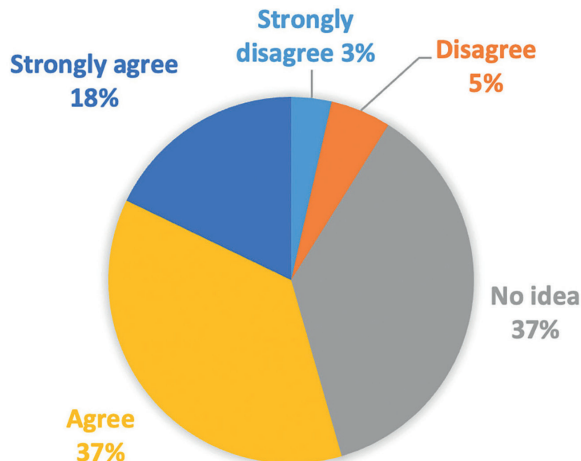


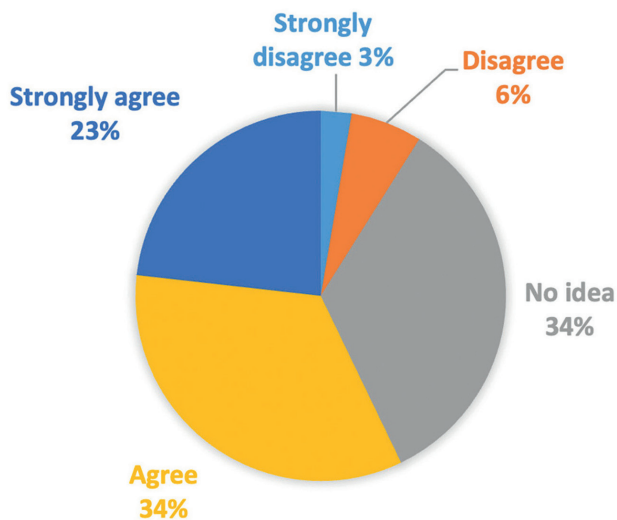
Figure 21

Findings on audiobooks



According to the participants' final evaluations, the distribution is as follows: "Agree" ($f=48$), 'No Opinion' ($f=35$), 'Strongly Agree' ($f=20$), 'Disagree' ($f=6$) and 'Strongly Disagree' ($f=3$). About one third of the participants had no opinion on this issue, while about half of them thought that the access standards of the guides and books were appropriate.

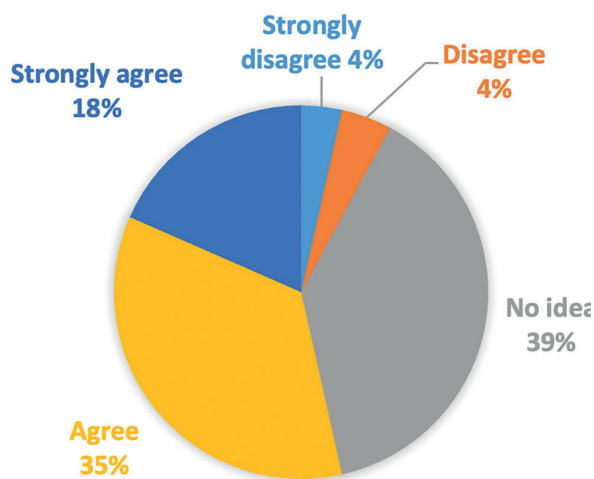
Figure 22
Findings on Film and Audiovisual Productions



According to the participants’ final evaluations, the distribution is as follows: “No Opinion” (f=41), ‘Agree’ (f=41), ‘Strongly Agree’ (f=20), ‘Disagree’ (f=6) and ‘Strongly Disagree’ (f=4). The majority of the participants think that audiobooks will raise awareness.

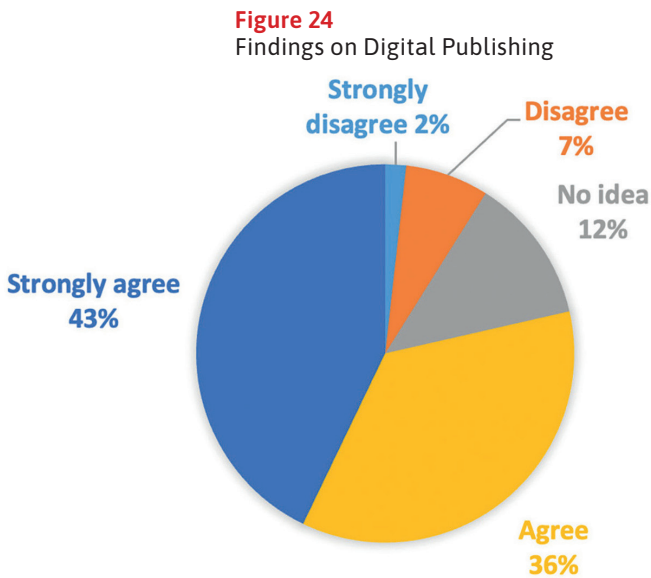
According to the participants’ final evaluations, the distribution is as follows: “No Opinion” (f=38), ‘Agree’ (f=38), ‘Strongly Agree’ (f=26), ‘Disagree’ (f=7) and ‘Strongly Disagree’ (f=3). The majority of the participants have an opinion that Film and Audiovisual Productions will create awareness.

Figure 23
Findings on Digital Publishing



According to the participants' final evaluations, the distribution is as follows: "No Opinion" (f=44), 'Agree' (f=40), 'Strongly Agree' (f=21), 'Disagree' (f=5) and 'Strongly Disagree' (f=4). The majority of the participants have an opinion that Digital Publishing elements will create awareness.

The last question about digital access is: "Do you agree that digital culture and information practices can help audiences, especially those with special needs?". Accordingly, participants are expected to evaluate holistically. Figure 24 shows the findings.



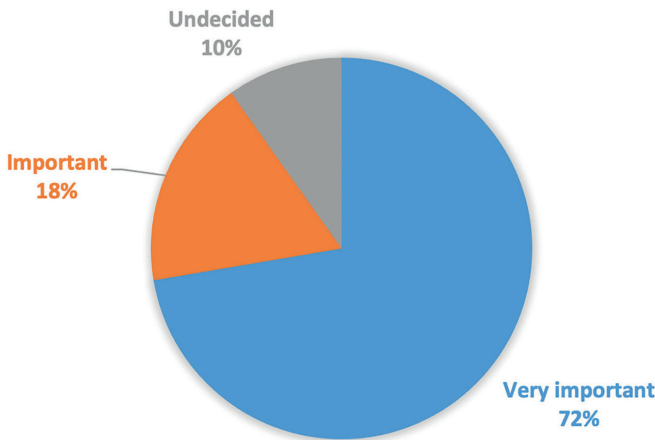
According to the participants' final evaluations, the distribution is as follows: "Strongly Agree" (f=48), 'Agree' (f=40), 'Undecided' (f=14), 'Disagree' (f=8) and 'Strongly Disagree' (f=2). According to these findings, it is thought that digital culture and information applications will provide support to individuals with special needs. This rate is around 79%.

The Importance of Digital Accessibility Tools for Visitors with Special Needs in Museums, Historic Sites, Galleries, etc.

This title asks about the importance of accessibility tools. 112 participants responded to the questions. These contents are respectively a) Museum Guide Application, b) Sign Language Applications, c) T-T-S & S-T-T Application, ç) Audio Descriptions, d) Subtitles and Captions, e) Augmented Reality (AR), f) Virtual Reality (VR), g) Touch Screens, ğ) Braille Screens, h) Screen Reader

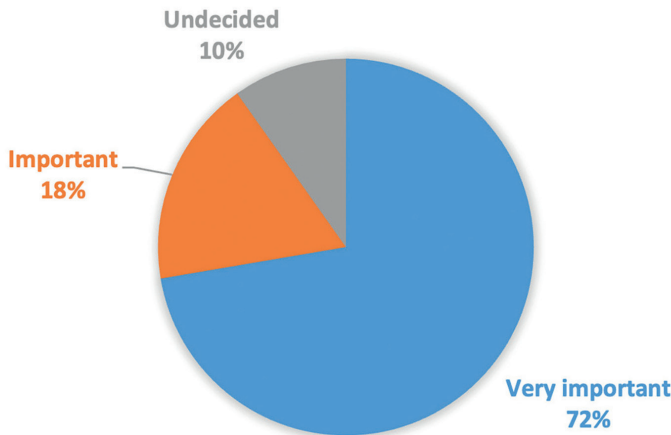
Compatibility, ı) Simplified Navigation, i) Games and j) Tactile Devices. Participant responses were strongly disagree, disagree, no opinion, agree and strongly disagree. Figures, summaries of findings and recommendations are listed under the following headings.

Figure 25
Findings on Museum Guide Application



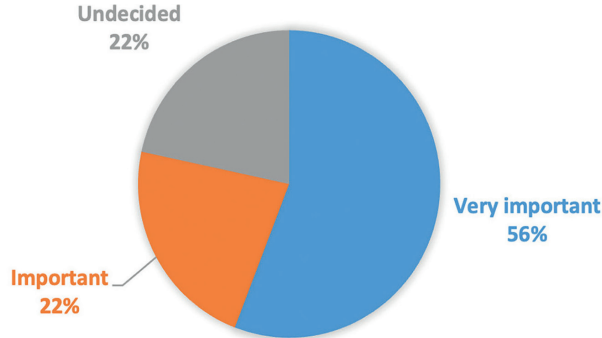
According to the participants’ evaluations, the distribution is as follows: “Very Important” (f=81), ‘Important’ (f=20) and ‘Neutral’ (f=11). 90% of the participants think that the museum guide application is important.

Figure 26
Findings on Sign Language Practices



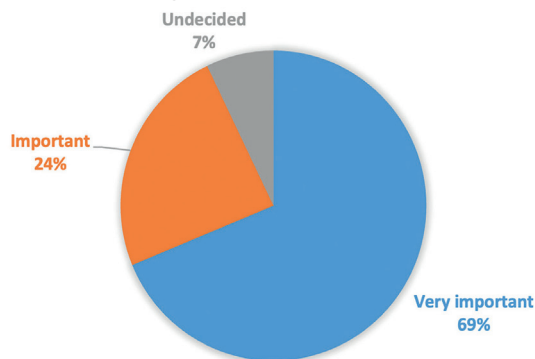
According to the participants’ evaluations, the distribution is as follows: “Very Important” (f=81), ‘Important’ (f=20) and ‘Neutral’ (f=11). 90% of the participants think that sign language implementation is important.

Figure 27
Findings on T-T-S & S-T-T Application



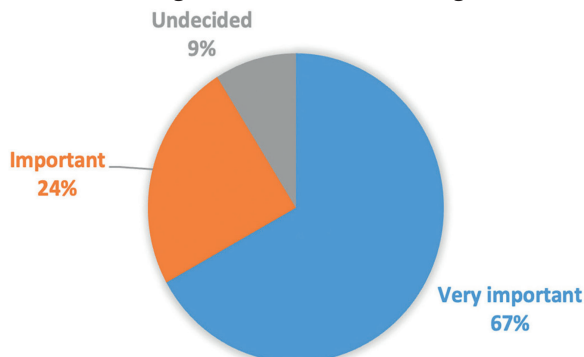
According to the participants' evaluations, the distribution is as follows: "Very Important" ($f=62$), 'Important' ($f=25$) and 'Neutral' ($f=24$). 78% of the participants think that the T-T-S & S-T-T application is important.

Figure 28
Findings on Audio Explanations

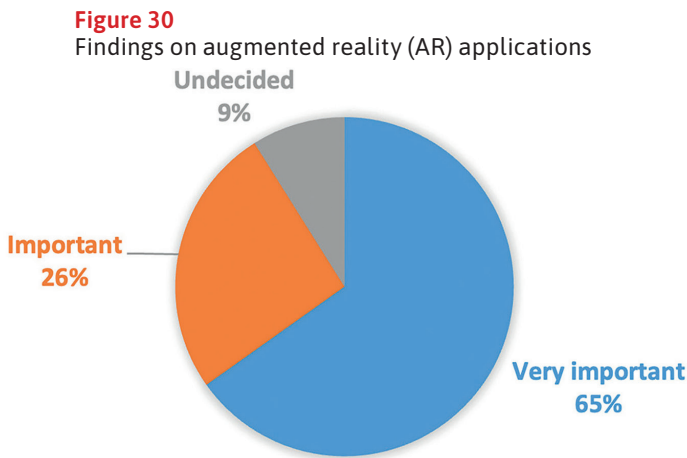


According to the participants' evaluations, the distribution is as follows: "Very Important" ($f=77$), 'Important' ($f=27$) and 'Neutral' ($f=8$). 93% of the participants think that Audio Annotations are important.

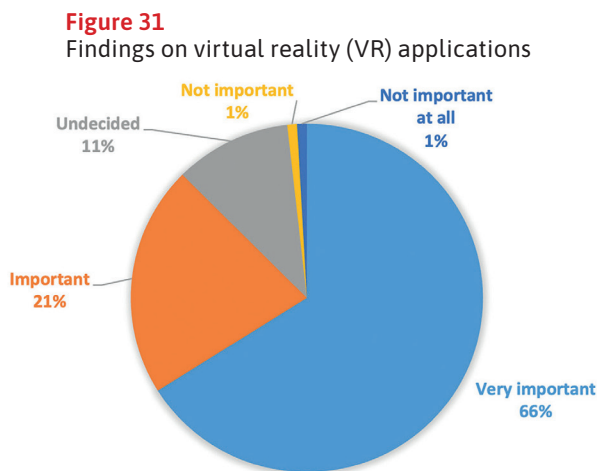
Figure 29
Findings on subtitles and headings



According to the participants’ evaluations, the distribution is as follows: “Very Important” (f=75), ‘Important’ (f=27) and ‘Neutral’ (f=10). 91% of the participants think that captions and titles are important.

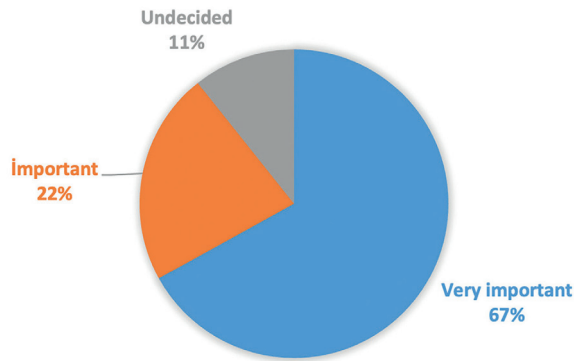


According to the evaluations of the participants, the distribution is as follows: “Very Important” (f=73), ‘Important’ (f=29) and ‘Neutral’ (f=10). 91% of the participants think that augmented reality (AR) applications are important.



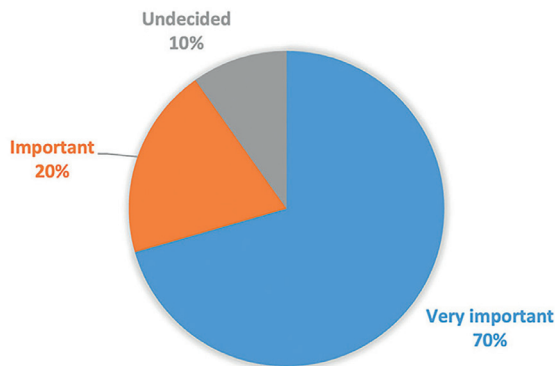
According to the participants’ evaluations, the distribution is as follows: “Very Important” (f=73), ‘Important’ (f=29) and ‘Neutral’ (f=10), Not Important (f=1) and Not Important at All (f=1). 89% of the participants think that virtual reality (VR) applications are important.

Figure 32
Findings related to touch screens



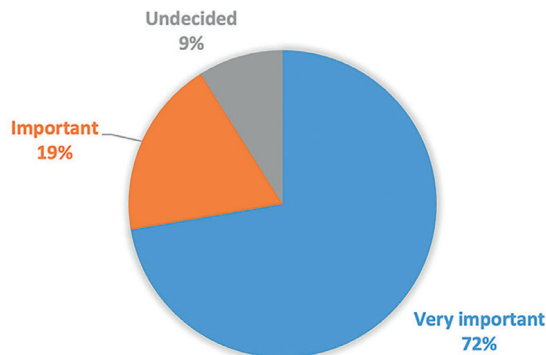
According to the participants' evaluations, the distribution is as follows: "Very Important" ($f=75$), 'Important' ($f=25$) and 'Neutral' ($f=12$). 89% of the participants think that touch screens are important.

Figure 33
Findings on Braille displays

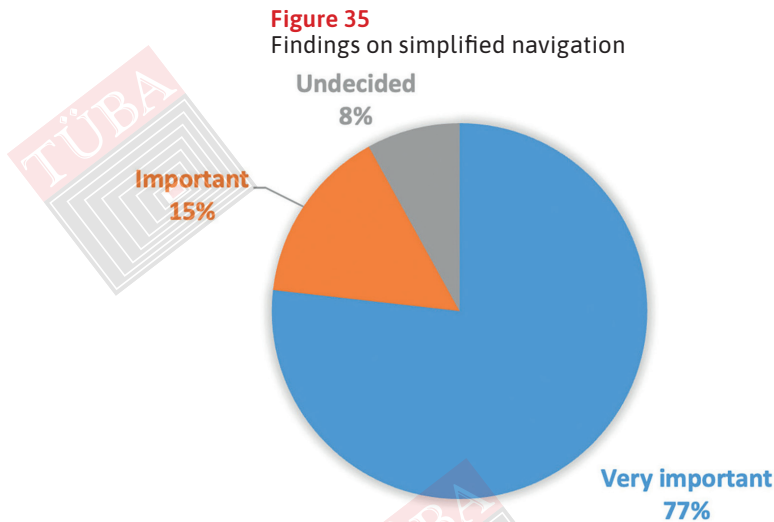


According to the evaluations of the participants, the distribution is as follows: "Very Important" ($f=79$), 'Important' ($f=22$) and 'Neutral' ($f=11$). 90% of the participants think that Braille displays are important.

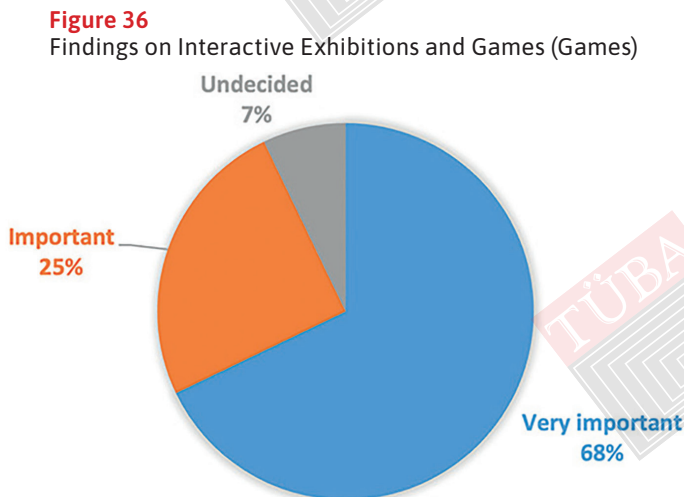
Figure 34
Findings on screen reader compatibility



According to the participants’ evaluations, the distribution is as follows: “Very Important” (f=81), ‘Important’ (f=21) and ‘Neutral’ (f=10). 91% of respondents consider screen reader compatibility to be important.

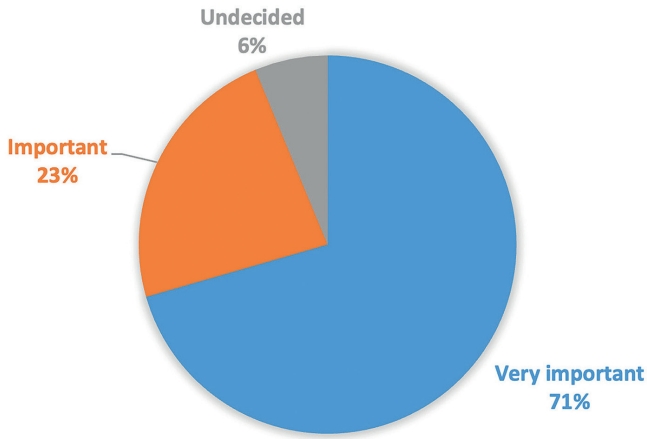


According to the evaluations of the participants, the distribution is as follows: “Very Important” (f=86), ‘Important’ (f=17) and ‘Neutral’ (f=9). 92% of the participants think that simplified navigation is important.



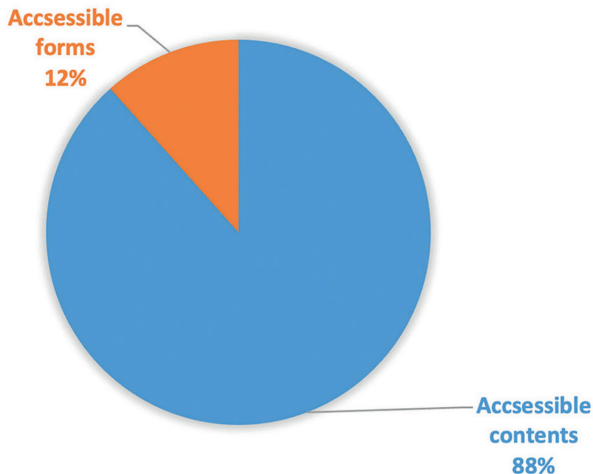
According to the evaluations of the participants, the distribution is as follows: “Very Important” (f=86), ‘Important’ (f=17) and ‘Neutral’ (f=9). 93% of the participants think that Interactive Exhibitions and Games (Games) are important.

Figure 37
Findings on Interactive Exhibitions and Games (Tactile Devices)



According to the evaluations of the participants, the distribution is as follows: “Very Important” ($f=79$), ‘Important’ ($f=26$) and ‘Neutral’ ($f=7$). 94% of the participants think that Interactive Exhibitions and Games (Gaming) are important.

Figure 38
Findings on Social Media and Community engagement tools



According to the participants’ evaluations, the distribution is as follows: “accessible contents” ($f=99$) and ‘accessible forms’ ($f=12$).

Sensory Accessibility

Under this heading, the participants’ views on sensory accessibility are specific to cultural heritage.

Do cultural institutions offer tactile replicas or other didactic material for sensory content exploration?

112 participants responded to this question. Participants’ responses were organised under four themes. Table 13 shows the areas emphasised by the participants according to frequency level.

Table 13
Opinions on Providing Sensory Accessibility in Cultural Institutions

Area	Explanation	f	%
Lack of Sensory Accessibility	Participant responses indicating that sensory material and replicas were not provided or were limited	50	%41
Lack of Information	Participants who stated that they did not have information or could not comment on this issue	35	%29
Restricted Presentation	Sensory access materials are available in some locations but insufficient	20	%16
Sensory Accessibility Experience	Participants who encountered sensory access materials and found the experience positive	15	%12

When Table 13 is analyzed, 41% of the participants emphasized the theme of **Lack of Sensory Accessibility** and stated that sensory access materials are not sufficiently offered or limited in cultural institutions. This suggests that cultural institutions should increase accessible materials such as tactile replicas. The theme of **Lack of Knowledge** was prominent among the participant responses with 29%. Some of the respondents indicated that they were not aware of the availability of sensory access materials in cultural institutions, indicating the need for information. 16% of the responses were under the theme of **Limited Presentation**, with some participants stating that they had come across sensory access materials in certain areas, but that these resources were inadequate. **The Sensory Accessibility Experience** theme received 12% of responses, with some participants reporting a positive experience when they came across such materials.

When the views of the participants are examined, it is seen that these statements are supported. P47 described his experience as follows: “The last time it was presented at the December 25 Panaroma Museum in Gaziantep, it was very impressive”. Another participant P78 emphasized that these practices should become widespread: “There are places that offer them, but there are also places that do not, and I think they should be there”. Similarly, P104 stated that these practices are limited: “104. There are institutions that offer these materials, but most of them do not.”

According to the participants’ responses, sensory access materials should be increased in cultural institutions. In this context, it is suggested that tactile replicas and other sensory tools should be more widely available in cultural spaces. In addition, awareness-raising activities should be carried out to inform visitors about sensory access opportunities in cultural institutions. The provision of sensory materials in some cultural spaces has been reported as a positive experience, and this practice should be more widely disseminated. It is important that staff assigned to cultural sites are knowledgeable about sensory access materials and can provide guidance to visitors when necessary. These recommendations are important for providing a more inclusive experience in cultural spaces.

Do cultural institutions offer additional activities for the audience based on hands-on experience?

112 participants responded to this question. Participants’ responses were organized under four themes. Table 14 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to frequency level.

Table 14
Opinions on Providing Practical Experience in Cultural Institutions

Area	Explanation	f	%
Lack of Hands-on Activities	Responses indicating that hands-on experiences in cultural institutions are insufficiently offered or limited	48	%40
Lack of Information	Respondents who indicated that they did not know about hands-on experiences for visitors	35	%29
Restricted Presentation	Views that hands-on experiences are offered in some areas but are often not enough	20	%17
Hands-on Experience	Participants who have attended such events and had positive experiences	15	%12

When Table 14 is analyzed, 40% of the participants emphasized the theme of **Lack of Hands-on Activities** and stated that there are insufficient opportunities for hands-on experience in cultural institutions. This reveals that cultural institutions need to increase interactive activities. 29% of the responses focused on the theme of **Lack of Information**, with a number of respondents stating that they were not informed about hands-on experience opportunities in cultural institutions. This suggests that more information for visitors is needed. The theme of **Limited Presentation** was prominent among respondents with 17%. Some respondents stated that hands-on activities are available in certain cultural spaces, but they are not adequately presented. The theme of **Hands-on Experience** was mentioned by 12% and some participants reported that they had participated in such activities and had a positive experience.

When we look at the opinions of the participants, it is seen that these statements are supported. P12 states that these practices are limited as follows: “Not all of them. Science centers offer them, but they are difficult to reach”. P28 states that these practices are quite limited: “From my experience, I think that most of the time they are not offered”. Similarly, P29 emphasized that even the conditions that should be offered at a basic level are not provided: “I have seen places that do not even have a simple description of the cultural heritage we visit”. P47 stated the following about the existing institutions: “Some institutions offer yes, and they are very valuable”.

Is the glass under which the objects of cultural importance are placed non-reflective and are they visible?

112 participants responded to this question. Participants’ responses were organized under four themes. Table 15 shows the areas emphasized by the participants according to frequency level.

When Table 15 is analyzed, 38% of the participants emphasized the theme of **Lack of Clear Visibility** and stated that cultural objects cannot be seen clearly in glass spaces due to problems such as reflection or height. This indicates that glass spaces need to be better organized in terms of lighting and layout. 34% of responses focused on the theme of **Clear Visibility**, with some respondents reporting that objects are often clearly visible. These responses suggest that some glass spaces are well designed and visitors can see objects clearly. The theme of **Lack of Knowledge** was present in 17% of the responses,

with some respondents reporting that they did not know about the visibility of objects. This suggests that more information should be provided to visitors. Finally, the theme of **Partial Visibility** was present in 11% of the responses, with some participants stating that sometimes objects can be seen clearly, and sometimes problems such as reflections are encountered.

Table 15
Views on the Visibility of Cultural Objects in Glass Spaces

Area	Explanation	f	%
Lack of Clear Visibility	Responses indicating that objects cannot be seen clearly in glass spaces due to reflection or placement problems	45	%38
Clear Visibility	Positive opinions indicating that objects placed in glass spaces are generally clearly visible	40	%38
Lack of Information	Participants who stated that they did not know about the visibility of objects	20	%17
Partial Visibility	Responses indicating that sometimes objects are seen clearly and sometimes there are problems such as reflections	15	%11

Participants' responses were also in line with the themes. P12 stated the following: "I witnessed that it was difficult to see in the crowd or objects were placed too far away". P27 suggested the following as a solution to the problem: "Often, objects of cultural significance placed in glass spaces may not be clearly visible due to reflection issues. Well-designed lighting and glazing options can reduce this problem". P26, on the other hand, stated that he sometimes had problems: "Not sometimes, some objects can be high up".

According to the participants' responses, some arrangements should be made for cultural objects to be seen more clearly in glass spaces. Accordingly, lighting and layout arrangements should be made more carefully in glass spaces and measures should be taken to minimize reflection problems. In addition, informational materials should be increased to provide information to visitors in these areas. It has been reported that some glass spaces in cultural areas show objects clearly, and it is recommended that these successful arrangements be implemented in other spaces. These recommendations are important to allow visitors to better see cultural objects.

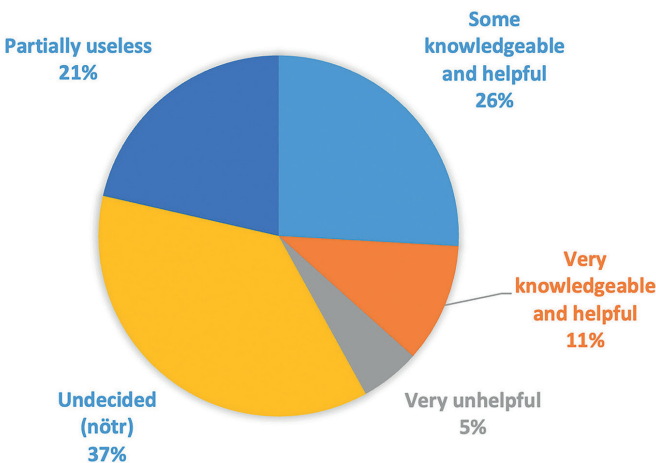
Personnel and Services of Cultural Heritage

Under this heading, participants’ views on staff and services provided within the context of cultural heritage are presented.

How knowledgeable and helpful are the staff of cultural institutions in your area in providing services to visitors with disabilities?

Under this heading, the information and support provided by the staff was asked. 112 participants responded to the questions. Figure 39 shows the responses of the participants.

Figure 39
Findings on the level of information and helpfulness of the staff



According to the evaluations of the participants, the distribution is as follows: “somewhat knowledgeable and helpful” (f=29), ‘very knowledgeable and helpful’ (f=12), ‘very useless’ (f=6), ‘undecided (neutral)’ (f=41) and ‘partially useless’ (f=24). According to these findings, 37% of the participants are undecided. The rate of those who consider them somewhat knowledgeable and helpful is 26%. Similarly, 26% of the respondents were partially and completely useless.

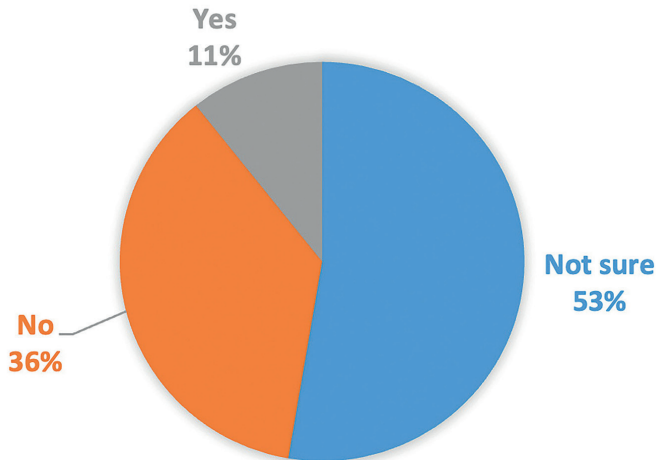
Do you know of any reasonably adjusted programs or guided tours for visitors with disabilities?

Under this heading, the information and support provided by the staff was asked. 112 participants responded to the questions. Figure 40 shows the findings on tours and programs.

According to the evaluations of the participants, the distribution is as follows: “Not sure” ($f=59$), ‘No’ ($f=41$) and ‘Yes’ ($f=12$). According to these findings, 11% of the participants state that programs are organized for individuals with special needs.

Figure 40

Findings on tours and programs for individuals with special needs



Conclusion and Suggestions

Research indicates that one in every five people has special needs. Today, inclusion is an important concept for individuals with special needs and social acceptance. Cultural spaces, which are one of the centers of social life, are the structures to which individuals with special needs have access. There are many obstacles for individuals with special needs to access cultural buildings and receive appropriate services.

The aim of this study is to identify possible problems by collecting data from relevant stakeholders. 112 experts, parents and/or individuals with special needs participated in the study. The data of the study were collected online. The sample was determined to be accessible. The majority of the participants were women. The majority of the participants were undergraduate graduates and teachers.

Most of the participants stated that individuals with special needs have problems in accessing cultural spaces, that the lack of training of employees is an important problem and that the content to be developed will contribute to the development of empathy. Participants stated that they were aware of their rights.

The responses of the participants show that the support provided for individuals with special needs is not sufficient and the practices are limited. In this context, it is thought that it is important to develop applications with a focus on special needs, to organize staff trainings, to design activities focused on sensory stimuli, and to eliminate the barriers to physical access. Participants stated that both physical and information access are important in the access dimension. In this context, it is recommended to implement evidence-based practices and adaptations with a focus on special needs in terms of access to information.

Digital resources, which are an important source of information and access for individuals with special needs, were also asked to the participants. Most of the participants stated that they did not have information about digital data sources. At the same time, the importance level of digital data sources and tools (interactive games, Braille displays, audio descriptions, augmented reality, etc.) was quite high. Therefore, adaptations should be made in this direction and appropriate tools should be made available to individuals with special needs.

In summary, recommendations for practice and research can be listed as follows:

Recommendations for Practice

- Barriers to the physical access of individuals with special needs should be removed, and cultural heritage sites should be standardized accordingly.
- Adaptations should be made for the needs of individuals with special needs and the type of disability.
- Digital adaptations for access to cultural heritage for individuals with special needs should be organized multi-sensory. For example, stories should be handled on a multi-sensory basis.
- Cultural heritage areas should be designed as teaching environments for individuals with special needs according to their learning characteristics. For example, explanations should be designed to go from simple to complex.
- Personnel in contact with individuals with special needs should be raised awareness.
- The environment should be made predictable for families and individuals, especially maps and brochures etc.

Implications for Research

Research is needed that will reflect the experiences of individuals with special needs in cultural heritage sites, both within themselves and in the physical environment.

- Research that considers and reveals parents' experiences is recommended.
- There is a need for effectiveness research that will reveal the participation of individuals with special needs, teaching, and the impact of other factors.
- It is recommended to reveal the effect of experiences offered through multiple senses on the effectiveness and perception of individuals with special needs.

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Prof. Dr. İbrahim Halil DİKEN, PhD | Anadolu University
e-mail: ihdiken[at]anadolu.edu.tr | ORCID: 0000-0002-5761-2900

Dr. Diken received his bachelor's degree in Elementary Education (1994) and his master's degree in Special Education (1998) from Abant İzzet Baysal University. From 1994 to 1998, he worked as a teacher in general and special education settings. In 1999, he was awarded a Ministry of National Education scholarship (Law No. 1416) and began his PhD in Special Education (Early Childhood Intervention) at Arizona State University, completing it in 2004. During his studies, he worked for four years at ASU's Infant Child Research Programs, providing early intervention services to young children with developmental delays and disabilities and supporting related research projects. Returning to Türkiye in 2004, Dr. Diken joined Anadolu University's Department of Special Education, becoming Assistant Professor in 2004, Associate Professor in 2008, and Professor in 2013. He directed the Research Institute for Individuals with Disabilities from 2014 to 2025 and has led numerous national and international projects. He currently teaches in the Department of Special Education and, since September 2025, has served as Acting Dean of the Faculty of Education.

Dr. Tezcan ÇAVUŞOĞLU, PhD | Kafkas University
e-mail: tezcan.cavusoglu[at]kafkas.edu.tr | ORCID: 0000-0002-2225-6651

Dr. Çavuşoğlu is a researcher and academic specializing in early childhood special education, particularly for children with hearing loss and developmental disabilities. Currently serving in the Department of Special Education at Kafkas University, Dr. Çavuşoğlu completed his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in the fields of Education for the Hearing Impaired and Early Childhood Special Education at the Department of Special Education at Anadolu University. Dr. Çavuşoğlu participates in national and international scientific conferences, projects, and working groups in the fields of early childhood special education, inclusion, and inclusive disaster and emergency response, both as an organizational member and as a researcher. Additionally, Dr. Çavuşoğlu works to raise awareness and to advance policy development regarding special education practices in early childhood through his roles in national and international organizations. In addition to his research, Dr. Çavuşoğlu conducts training and consulting for civil society organizations (such as family associations) on early childhood special education.

Dr. Uğur Onur GÜNDEN, PhD | Anadolu University
e-mail: uogunden[at]anadolu.edu.tr | ORCID: 0000-0001-7733-391X

Uğur Onur Günden is an academic and researcher specializing in early intervention and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). He serves as a research assistant at the Research Institute for Individuals with Disabilities at Anadolu University, focusing on developmental screening in early childhood, parent-mediated intervention programs, and assessment processes. Currently pursuing his PhD in special education at Anadolu University, Günden aims to translate scientific findings into practical guidance for families and professionals. He has taken organizational roles in national and international conferences and actively participates in scientific associations and projects. As a member of the Early Childhood Intervention Association (EÇOMDER), he contributes to efforts that promote awareness of early intervention. His scholarly work includes peer-reviewed publications, book chapters, and project involvement at both national and international levels. Beyond research, he produces educational content on social media, provides consultancy to institutions, and supports policy development in early childhood and special education.

**ACCESSIBILITY TO CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS
AND TOURIST SITES IN
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND
NORTH MACEDONIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND
CULTURAL EXPERTS**

MA Aida Sarac BERBIC

National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dr. Irena RUZIN

National Institution Institute and Museum Bitola

Prof. Dr. Vladimir Trajkovski

Macedonian Scientific Society for Autism, Institute
of Special Education and Rehabilitation, Faculty of
Philosophy, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje

Abstract

This comparative research provides a more complete picture of the needs of persons with disabilities and the offer of cultural institutions for this population in two Western Balkan countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia. The demand for better physical access to cultural institutions is evident in the research results; however, persons with disabilities emphasized the need for better-trained employees in cultural institutions, as well as addressing the barriers that exist in their attitudes and prejudices. Both sides assessed the accessibility of cultural institutions in physical, sensory, and informational terms; the results of this section showed a discrepancy: cultural workers assess the accessibility of institutions to a greater extent than the assessment given by persons with disabilities. Although the rights of persons with disabilities are poorly implemented in practice in both countries, and none of the surveyed cultural institutions have officially adopted policies on equity, access, and accessibility, the research nevertheless recorded positive examples of inclusive programs and activities that involve this population, advocating for human rights in public. The specific legal situation in which state cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina have found themselves since the end of the 1990s war, characterized by the absence of a permanent budget and board of directors, does not prevent some of them from actively and successfully engaging in the inclusion of this population in the mainstream of society. By delving deeply into all of the above issues, this research carries great value for the future development of an inclusive offer of cultural institutions in the Western Balkans, improving the skills of cultural workers, and raising awareness of the contribution they can make to the destigmatization of this population in the public.

Keywords

Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Balkans,
Cultural Institutions in the Balkans, Barriers in Attitudes,
Equity and Access

Introduction

This research aimed to gain insight and identify the needs of people with disabilities in the cultural heritage sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia. The results will improve accessibility and inclusion in cultural heritage, ensuring everyone can enjoy and benefit from our cultural heritage.

The report is part of the project “iNCLUSION - Upskilling HED Students to create transformative cultural experiences for audiences with disabilities” which is being implemented in the period 15 March 2024 – 14 March 2026. Activity is within WP2 “Establishing a skills blueprint for the management of audiences with disabilities in cultural heritage.”

Around 16% of the world’s population lives with visible and invisible disabilities. There is no accurate statistical data on the number of people with disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina due to the specific and complex socio-political situation. The war during the 90’ divided the country into two entities the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska entity. Each entity has its union of associations of persons with disabilities. This situation makes it impossible to monitor the number of this population systematically. The situation is similar in North Macedonia, where there is no official register on the number of this population. The data from 2021 are not fully representative, i.e. only 94,412 persons with disabilities were registered, which represents 5% of the total population in the country, but if the figure of 15% is applied, then at the national level in North Macedonia can be estimated that around 276,0004 citizens experience some form of disability. The Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities states that participation in social life is a fundamental human right emphasizing the importance of rethinking the concept of accessibility in cultural spaces. Cultural heritage sites, as well as museums and galleries, express an increasing interest in adopting strategies to improve accessibility and participation for all.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina and N. Macedonia, so far, very little attention has been paid to the cultural needs of people with disabilities, and even less to the fact that the creation of art can have a therapeutic aspect. However, the most efforts in the last ten years in both countries are visible in the following museum institutions: the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Bitola Museum, Memorial House of Toše Proeski and Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The employees there selflessly invested their knowledge for better social inclusion of people with disabilities, and they are among the first in the culture sector to show interest in including PWDs in the cultural life of these two countries.

The total number of people who participated in the survey from Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia is 114, out of which 79 are PwD (36 from Bosnia and Herzegovina and 43 from North Macedonia) and 35 are cultural workers (19 from Bosnia and Herzegovina and sixteen 16 from the Republic of N. Macedonia).

Research Methodology and Results

In July 2024, museum experts in education and accessibility from Bosnia and Herzegovina and N. Macedonia in front of the Association “Balkan Museum Network” conducted interviews with two target groups: people with disabilities, their parents/caregivers and experts who deal with people with disabilities in some way. In addition to the oral interview, the questionnaire is disseminated in digital form to associations that deal with the protection of the rights of PWDs, educators in the field of special pedagogy, psychologists-pedagogues, social workers, and university professors. The results obtained through oral interviews and in digital form were combined and analyzed for each country individually. In Macedonia, the research was conducted by two experts to reach more targeted people as possible, so the analysis of the results will show two graphs from this country. The final report contains summarized data from both countries.

A total of 79 people participated in the research, 36 from Bosnia and Herzegovina and 43 from North Macedonia.

Needs of Persons with Disabilities in Cultural Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republic of North Macedonia

Demographic Data

Gender of Participants

The prevalence of women is evident in the research results. Fifty-seven (57) women participated in the research compared to men, of whom there were seven (7). (For more information look at Fig. 1a, b, c in the Appendix I of this Report).

Age of Participants

The largest number of respondents who participated in the research were in their third decade of life (23), followed by twenty participants (20) in their fifth decade of life, nineteen (19) in their fourth decade, and sixteen (16) in their second decade of life. (Fig. 2a, b, c)

Target Groups

People with Disabilities and their Caregivers/Parents

Types of Disabilities Represented in the Research

Of the total number of respondents, fifty-three (53) are persons with disabilities or their representatives as parents/caregivers. The largest number of respondents live with an autism spectrum disorder, twenty-three of them (23). Then there are nine (9) respondents with an intellectual disability and a physical disability (9). Seven (7) who stated that they have another form of disability. Five with visual impairments (5), four respondents each (4) with cerebral palsy and Down Syndrome (4). Two (2) with speech impairments, two (2) with multiple forms of disability, and one (1) respondent each with hearing impairments, epilepsy, dyslexia, and dysgraphia. The prevalence of represented persons from the autism spectrum in the research reflects the cooperation of BiH and N. Macedonian experts who conducted the research with associations that protect the rights of this population, their families, and individuals from this social group (Fig. 3a, b).

Level of Disability

Out of the total number of PWDs surveyed, twenty-one (21) stated that they live with a moderate degree of disability, seventeen (17) with a serious degree, and, four (4) with a mild form of disability (Fig. 4a, b, c).

Education of People with Disabilities

Analyzing the responses, it was determined that the educational status of respondents with intellectual disabilities is as follows: nine (9) have graduated from high school, two (2) from high school for special education, and one (1) from elementary school for special education. The results on the educational status of people with intellectual disabilities coincide with the prevalence of a mild form of the disability from the results of the previous question. People with sensory and physical disabilities are academically educated. (24) (Fig. 5a, b, c).

Employment of People with Disabilities

Analyzing the responses, it was determined that the employment status of parents and caregivers of persons with disabilities is as follows: forty-one (41) are employed, while twenty-one (21) are unemployed. **Only two (2) respondents with disabilities stated that they are currently employed as a cleaner in a kindergarten and radio announcer** (Fig. 6a, b, c).

The results show that the countries of the Western Balkans, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia, have still not reached the level of respecting the basic human rights of persons with disabilities, namely the right to work. Nevertheless, the results of the work status of their parents and caregivers are quite encouraging with almost half of the respondents employed.

The work field of Parents and Caregivers of PWDs

The parents are engaged in the following professions: criminal law expert, educator for the visually impaired, accountant, teacher, merchant, doctor of medicine, engineer, scientific worker, and professional in security (Fig. 6a1).

Marital Status

The marital status of the interviewed persons with disabilities, their parents, and guardians is as follows: forty-one (41) persons are married, twenty-four (24) are single, and ten (10) are divorced. A fairly high percentage of single people with disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and N. Macedonia testify to the difficult conditions for socialization, acquaintance and life without prejudice.

Assistive Technologies

Assistive technology is any device designed, made, or adapted to help a person perform a task. Products can be purpose-built for people with disabilities or be widely used. These can be mechanical such as wheelchairs, orthopedic aids, glasses, pencil holders, magnifiers, etc., or digital involving various software to enable greater accessibility. Assistive technologies have great potential for use in the environment of cultural institutions. In the context of Cultural institutions Assistive Technologies could compensate for a sensory deficiency, enable a variety of interpretations and offer new experiences to all, not just people with disabilities.

The largest number of respondents confirmed that they do not need active technologies. Those who need them (16) stated that they need assistive technologies because of an inadequate physical environment. For forms of assistive technologies, the respondents mentioned orthopedic aids, wheelchairs, glasses, communicators, hearing aids, and software for simplified information. A certain number of respondents stated that they have a need for assistive technologies, but that they do not have enough financial resources to afford them.

Experts: Educators, Special Pedagogy, Inclusion

Specific Area of Expertise

Experts from different professions who deal with the population of people with disabilities participated in this research. The professions represented among the respondents are the following:

- special education teacher
- special pedagogue
- personal teaching assistant
- faculty professor of rehabilitation and defectology
- advocates of social inclusion
- social worker
- counselor psychologist
- educators in associations for people with disabilities
- expert in sensory integration
- presidents of associations who deal with this population
- advocates for the employment of PWD
- ABA and floortime practitioners
- occupational therapist
- rehabilitator

Experts Level of Education

Twenty-nine (29) respondents are graduates, twenty-three (23) postgraduates, and six (6) with a PhD degree (Fig. 10a, b, c).

Years of working experience with PWDs

The largest number of experts involved in the research have up to ten years of experience working with people with disabilities (10). Then there are seven (7) of them with over ten years of work experience and six (6) with over 20 years of work experience with this population.

Analysis of Open-ended Questions

Perceptions of the inclusion of People with Disabilities

Museums, Galleries, and Libraries should offer activities and services for all. Do people with disabilities have equity opportunities to get involved? If not, why do you think that is?

Few respondents believe that certain possibilities for the inclusion of this population in the cultural life of the local community exist. The majority points out architectural barriers as a primary obstacle to participation in cultural life, inadequately trained staff, and also barriers in the attitudes of employees. Some of the notable answers that reveal the reasons for the lack of opportunities for the inclusion of PWDs in cultural streams are the following:

“Because of the ‘disruption’ of the work of these institutions, observing tantrums and other situations as forms of unacceptable behavior.”

“No, they do not have equal opportunities. Accessibility is either poor or non-existent. This is if it is a physical disability, but the more serious side is with invisible disabilities such as autism. The awareness of organizing larger cultural events aimed at the focus or interests of autistic people is of great importance for their inclusion in a society that is currently not their natural environment. Bringing the neurotypical to the neurodivergent by organizing cultural events understood by both sides will lead to a better society and accommodation of people with special needs.”

One respondent points out the economic barrier, visible in the ticket prices for cultural institutions, which not everyone can afford. Others stated that PWDs in rural areas are completely excluded from cultural life. The respondents note the specific situation in which cultural institutions of state

importance in Bosnia and Herzegovina are, so they say that the participation of this population in cultural activities is less possible due to the unfavorable economic position of these institutions.

But there were also optimistic views of the interviewees, who note that cultural institutions have been making efforts to facilitate accessibility in recent years:

“People with disabilities were marginalized in the past, but the last 10 years, thanks to the great commitment, persistence, and dedication of the employees of the institutions mentioned above, who painstakingly managed to turn each of their ideas into reality, enabled a much greater inclusion and accessibility of people with disabilities in their services. Although great progress is visible, there is always much more to be done. By continuing the implementation of projects for persons with disabilities, greater sensitivity and commitment to their needs at the state level and donations, continuity will be obtained in the improvement of services and the inclusion of persons with disabilities.”

The attitudes of employees can also be an obstacle to the participation of People with Disabilities in cultural activities. Have the attitudes and prejudices of employees in cultural institutions ever prevented you from accessing cultural content and how did you feel about that?

Unconscious attitudes and prejudices of employees in cultural institutions can very well create a barrier to the access of people with disabilities to cultural content and services. If an employee has his vision of the needs of a certain group of this population, there is a possibility that the real needs will not be met. All respondents agreed that the wrong attitudes and prejudices of employees in cultural institutions can be a barrier to the accessibility of cultural content for PWDs. Thirteen (13) of them stated that they never encountered this barrier that prevented them from accessing cultural content. Four respondents confirmed that they had bad experiences with negative attitudes of employees, which prevented them from accessing cultural content. Below are some of the negative experiences of the respondents:

“It happened that they expected us to silence a child who does not speak and who rejoices in a specific way by making certain sounds.”

“At the Light Festival in the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a wheelchair user, I could not enter the Botanical Garden at the back entrance. The employees’ attitudes were as follows:

‘She won’t be comfortable with it’ and ‘We don’t open the back entrance for everyone’.”

“Attitudes and prejudices of employees in cultural institutions may represent an obstacle to the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural activities. When employees are not familiar with the needs of people with disabilities or when negative attitudes exist, an unpleasant atmosphere can be created. This can result in exclusion and frustration and can cause people with disabilities to stop visiting facilities. These experiences should often emphasize the importance of training employees for inclusiveness.”

“They didn’t stop me, but it can be seen by the facial expression and the voice when you are not welcome somewhere when you move a little slowly and they are in a hurry, even though you don’t see that in their voice, you can feel their ‘welcome’.”

From the aforementioned experiences of the respondents we can conclude that the wrong attitude and prejudice towards PWDs still prevail among the employees of Cultural institutions in BiH and N. Macedonia. The reason for this is the lack of staff training,,, the lack of application of the social model of approach to PWDs and thus the lack of sensitization towards this population.

However, the respondents also reported positive experiences in meeting the attitudes of employees in cultural institutions:

“Employees in cultural institutions never had prejudices, but always provided support, guidance and adapted the approach to cultural content, had a positive attitude, tolerance, and commitment.”

“When I was present at some cultural activities together with a person with a disability, I noticed great sensitivity and support from the employees. I assume that employees’ attitudes are largely shaped by the resources they don’t have in the workplace, and they don’t have the tools to be inclusive.”

Cultural institutions should respect diversity in society, with program contents that respectfully portray the lives of people with disabilities. How much do you think such content can help destigmatize people with disabilities in society?

Museums are public institutions with social responsibility and have the power to influence public opinion by giving a voice to marginalized groups in society. By occasionally organizing exhibitions that represent the lives of people with disabilities in a dignified way, they could reduce the stigma of this population in the wider society. All respondents agree that cultural institutions are just one link in enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities and destigmatization should start from an early age, as children move through educational institutions, with the involvement of their parents. Opinions of respondents to what extent such contents of cultural institutions could contribute to the destigmatization of PWDs in society:

“Overall, cultural institutions can significantly contribute to the destigmatization of people with disabilities by creating programs that respect and portray their lives positively and respectfully. It contributes to easier self-expression, changing perceptions, promoting inclusiveness.”

“Content in cultural institutions that depict the lives of people with disabilities can greatly help destigmatize society. These programs can educate visitors, fostering empathy and understanding, thereby changing negative stereotypes. By showcasing the experiences and contributions of people with disabilities, institutions can promote inclusiveness and respect for diversity.”

“Greater representation of persons with disabilities in cultural program contents is of crucial importance. Most of the population, including children, have never had substantial interaction with persons with disabilities. Younger people will think of disability as an abstract concept until they see everyday examples of people with disabilities in theater, screen, television, and so on.”

“Programming content that respectfully portrays the lives of people with disabilities can help destigmatize, but only among the population that usually/frequently attends cultural institutions and events. It will not affect the rest of the population.”

Do you know your human rights related to access to culture and cultural heritage?

More than half of respondents in both countries (40) stated that they are not sufficiently or at all familiar with their human rights to access and production of cultural content. Thirty respondents (30) declared that they are aware of their

rights related to culture. However, the majority of respondents who stated that they are aware of their rights, comment that, although both Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia have ratified the UN conventions on the rights of persons with disabilities, these legislations are not implemented in practice. The lack of knowledge of the target group on the rights for equity access and accessibility to cultural contents, their meanings and services, indicates that BiH and N. Macedonia has not yet satisfied even the primary needs of this population, such as the right to social and health care and the right to equity education and employment. If a person's primary needs are not met, he will not be interested in upgrading domains such as culture and arts.

Effectiveness of Cultural Heritage Practices

What do you think about the effectiveness of the current practices of cultural institutions in promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities? (in museums, sites, libraries, etc.)

The majority of respondents in both countries believe that cultural institutions make little effort to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities through these institutions. A certain number of respondents believe that the current efforts made by cultural institutions are insufficient. Many of them believe that cultural institutions do not make any efforts to promote inclusion. A small number of respondents believe that these institutions make great efforts to promote the inclusion of this population through the programs and activities they offer. On both sides, respondents recognize the lack of financial resources of cultural institutions, as one of the main reasons why not enough time, attention, and resources are invested in providing additional opportunities for (social) inclusion of PWDs through these institutions. Respondents also point out that initiatives for the promotion of persons with disabilities in cultural institutions usually occur only on dates marking a certain disability. Most of them state that a systematic approach is necessary in providing additional opportunities for the social inclusion of this population through cultural institutions. Some of the significant responses of respondents that confirm the stated claims:

“These institutions vary in efficiency. Some institutions are actively working to improve accessibility and inclusiveness by adapting the premises and providing alternative content. But many institutions still have challenges in this regard.”

“Barriers to greater participation include the absence of structures at both local and national levels to represent persons with disabilities and their

issues. Lack of information is another barrier. Information on whether facilities are physically accessible and whether there is equipment for the hearing impaired or visually impaired is often unavailable and inaccessible. This lack of accessibility information – or sometimes the fear of inaccessibility – often prevents people with disabilities from participating in events at museums, libraries, and galleries.”

“Very little, not enough. And they should and must, given that these are public institutions of social importance. For this reason, cultural institutions should be a source of information about PWDs for the wider population.”

“It is evident that work is being done in this field, but it is a long-term process that should not be part of the project and should end when the project is finished, we need long-term solutions.”

Cultural Institutions could promote the inclusion of People with Disabilities in many ways. E.g.:

- employing people with disabilities,
- adopting official policies on equity access and accessibility,
- including their interpretations on cultural contents in official institution’s interpretation strategies,
- occasionally organizing exhibitions that will show the lives of this population with dignity,
- organizing additional inclusive programs and activities whose methods are reasonably adjusted to the needs of different groups from this population,
- reasonable adaptation of the physical environment

Can you tell us about any successful initiatives or practices that you have observed or participated in that have had a positive impact on the inclusion of people with disabilities in institutions?

Through additional activities and programs intended for the public, whose work methods are reasonably adapted to the needs of people with disabilities, cultural institutions can provide additional opportunities for the social inclusion of this population. Six (6) respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina and a certain number from North Macedonia state that they have not heard of positive inclusive practices in cultural institutions nor have they participated in them. Respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina cite positive examples of theater performances that represent the lives of this population or where

the actors are members of the target group (“World of Possibilities” by East-West Center, “All Inclusive” and “Up and Down” by the Theatre of Youth). Respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina cited the inclusive educational program of the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina for people with developmental disabilities called “Blue Artism” as a positive example in museum institutions. A digital assistive technology offered by the same institution for the same population “ARTsee” app as a form of alternative interpretive didactic material. Respondents from North Macedonia cite the following positive examples of inclusive practices of PWDs in cultural institutions:

“So far, I have only participated in one project on the Inclusion of an informal space within the INC-LEISURE project ‘Participatory informal spaces for inclusive school learning’, where through several activities we tried to facilitate the inclusion of children with special needs. I specifically through visual cards and social stories for my students. During the execution of the activities, we noticed interest from the teachers, classmates, and employees of the institutions. And of course, there was a great need for them among parents.”

“People with intellectual disabilities, users of the Poraka Nasha Day Center, are every year part of the ASNOM children’s art camp, which is a traditional art manifestation organized by the Foundation for Culture and Sports - Kumanovo, under the auspices of the Mayor and the Council of the Municipality of Kumanovo. The four-day camp is attended by 30 talented students from municipal primary schools, selected by their teachers together with people with intellectual disabilities. At the end, all created works of art are exhibited.”

“There are successful initiatives in the NI Institute and Museum - Bitola, where there is a trend of constant improvement of accessibility and content adapted for people with disabilities, as well as Museum Toše Proeski in Krushevo, which is rated as the most accessible cultural institution in the Pelagonian region. with excellent physical accessibility and a tactile exhibition for the visually impaired.”

The reason for insufficient awareness of the target group for the programs and activities offered by cultural institutions in BiH and N. Macedonia lies in the insufficient and non continuous cooperation of these institutions with the unions and associations that deal with the protection of the rights of this

population. However, on the other side, sometimes there is a problem in the lack of trust of the associations. A good initiative for the inclusion of PWDs in cultural institutions consists of several key things:

- Identifying the needs of the target group that wants to be included
- Collaborating with the target group, their caregivers, families and associations
- A well designed structure that will be based on (education) methods that are reasonably adapted to the identified needs
- A multisensory experience of the visit
- Adapted information and speech - language skills of the educator

Availability of Museum Services and Cultural Heritage

What specifically should be done (or improved) in cultural institutions, museums/sites to improve accessibility for people with disabilities? (e.g. reasonable adaptation of physical access/accessibility, sensory and informational accessibility..)

All respondents recognize primary barriers in access and accessibility to cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia in physical access to buildings, and the contents in the exhibition spaces. Respondents then state inadequate interpretation strategies offered by cultural institutions. These strategies are not adapted to the needs of different groups of people with disabilities. According to the majority of respondents, cultural workers should be better trained to work with different groups of people with disabilities to increase their access and accessibility to cultural content, activities, and services. A few respondents state that the attitudes of the employees should also be changed to provide greater access to cultural contents for this population.

Barriers to physical access to Cultural Institutions, especially museums, are a frequent occurrence, not just in BiH and N. Macedonia, but in the rest of the world also. Very often these institutions are housed in old buildings that are in themselves cultural and historical heritage under protection. Although many museums are housed in the buildings that have the value of the first, secondary or even zero category, there is still a possibility to find good design solutions that would not reduce the value of the building and would enable better access.

Role of Employment in the Public Sector

How important is it for employees to understand the needs of people with disabilities to promote inclusion in the cultural heritage sector? And how important is it for employees to take into account the needs of people with disabilities?

All respondents believe that it is of great importance that the employees of cultural institutions, especially those who work with the public, understand the different needs of groups of people with disabilities. Understanding the physical, sensory, education, communication, information and other needs of certain groups of PWDs, will enable the cultural workers to meet these needs in a specific environment such as a museum.

Can you explain why it is important for staff to understand the needs of people with disabilities to strengthen inclusion in the cultural heritage sector?

According to the respondents, the reasons why employees of cultural institutions must be familiar with the needs of different groups with disabilities are as follows:

- They will develop empathy and sensitivity
- for ethical and professional reasons
- everyone should have equity access to culture
- to implement better quality content in practice that is the key to social inclusion
- so that PWDs feel welcome in cultural institutions
- so that they do not violate basic human rights
- due to better communication

Access and Accessibility to Cultural Institutions

This part analyzes different types of access and accessibility to cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia for PwD.

Assessment of Physical Access to Cultural Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia

Access to Museums, Sites, and Collections

(Ramps, Entrances)

Eighteen (18) respondents rate the physical access, which includes the width of the entrance, and the existence and usability of ramps, as nonexistent. Fifteen as (15) bad, twelve (12) as satisfactory, and six (6) as good (Fig. 12. a,b, c).

The research results coincide with the objective state of physical access to cultural institutions in BiH and North Macedonia. Most cultural institutions in both countries are almost completely physically inaccessible to PWDs. In addition to bright examples of some recently built cultural centers (Cultural Center Mostar) where the access of people with disabilities was considered in advance during construction. Also, there are positive examples among new museum buildings, such as the Zenica City Museum, where access to PWDs was considered in the design of the building itself.

Access to Cultural Content Inside Institutions

Eight respondents (8) rate access to cultural content within institutions as nonexistent. Twenty-four (24) consider the access poor, six (6) satisfactory, and nine (9) as good (Fig. 13a).

Although enthusiasts in institutions in BiH initiate inclusive practices, they often encounter rejection from the rest of the collective in terms of implementing greater access to cultural content through small changes that do not require finances. Thus, the status quo is maintained in the cultural institutions.

Access to Parking

Twenty-one (21) respondents rate access to parking spaces next to Cultural Institutions as nonexistent. Eighteen (18) rate it as poor, eight (8) as satisfactory, and four (4) as good. (Fig. 14a). In N. Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, several cultural institutions offer parking spaces for PWDs with good access. However, the general situation in access to parking spaces is bad.

Access to Toilets

Twenty-one (21) respondents rate access to toilets in cultural institutions as nonexistent, fourteen (14) as poor, ten (10) as satisfactory, and six (6) as good (Fig. 15a).

An accessible toilet should be the basis of a cultural institution in 21. Century, which will show that it is open and intended for everyone. Unfortunately, this is not the case in cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia. There are rare examples of newly constructed buildings where this was thought about in advance.

Access to Cafes, Bars, and Restaurants in Cultural Institutions

Ten (10) respondents rate the access to cafes, restaurants, and bars in cultural institutions as nonexistent, nineteen (19) rate it as poor, sixteen (16) rate it as satisfactory and six (6) as good (Fig. 16a).

Although cafés and restaurants are a rare phenomenon next to cultural institutions in the surveyed countries, there are still examples with good access, and this can be seen from the answers given by the respondents. Some of the positive examples are Café “Tito” next to the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a coffee shop next to the Cultural Center Mostar, a coffee shop next to the Museum of the Battle for the Wounded in Jablanica and the “Ex Ponto” restaurant next to the Memorial House of Ivo Andrić. Such places could further increase the opportunities for socialization of visitors to cultural institutions.

Access to Lockers for Storing Personal Belongings in Cultural Institutions

Twenty-three (23) respondents rate the access to lockers in cultural institutions as nonexistent, thirteen (13) as poorly accessible, eleven (11) as satisfactory, and four (4) as good (Fig. 17a).

Lockers for storing personal belongings are not as common in the cultural institutions of BiH and North Macedonia as in the rest of the world. However, where they exist, they are often inaccessible due to poor physical access to the building itself.

Access to Places for Rest

Chairs and benches are an important part of museum furniture where everyone can rest after a long tour. Nineteen (19) respondents rate accessibility to resting places in cultural institutions as satisfactory, fifteen (15) as very poor, ten (10) consider it completely inaccessible and six (6) as good (Fig. 18a).

Rest areas should be the basis of a pleasant stay in cultural institutions. Chairs and benches can be used by mothers with children, elderly people, people with disabilities, and others. There are few examples of institutions in the two surveyed countries that offer such places on their premises, inviting visitors to take a break from a tour.

Access to Cash Registers/Info points in Cultural Institutions

Sixteen (16) respondents consider accessibility to Cash Registers in Cultural institutions as inaccessible, thirteen (13) as satisfactory, eleven (11) as poor, seven (7) as good and one (1) as excellent. (Fig. 19a)

The information desk/cash register will be accessible to the extent that the building itself is accessible. In the example of the surveyed countries, the situation in this category is very bad. The barrier to the info desk is often the stairs. Aware of these obstacles, PWD often does not dare to visit cultural institutions because they know they cannot even get a ticket.

Rating of Visual Signalization in Cultural Institutions

Visual Signalization in any public institution is very important for navigating in space for every person, especially for a person with visual and intellectual impairments. Fifteen (15) respondents consider that visual signalization does not exist in cultural institutions, nine (9) consider it poor, nine (9) satisfactory and three (3) good. (Fig. 20a)

It is as if the employees of cultural institutions in the surveyed countries assume that everyone can manage exhibition spaces as they can. In public institutions, such as those of cultural importance, the toilet, exit, exit in case of danger, and publicly accessible spaces (exhibitions, activities, and services) should be indicated by easily understandable visual signaling.

Accessible Information

How do you find out about the offers in the museums/sites/collections?

Most of the respondents (59) find out about the offers in the Cultural institutions through social media networks, eighteen (18) through the web page of the institution, sixteen (16) on-site, and one (1) by brochures and posters and billboards (Fig. 21a, b, c).

Given that respondents mostly learn about new content through social networks, cultural institutions in the surveyed countries should work on the accessibility of this content. Also, a large number of interviewees learn information on the spot, and that is why the staff of the institution with whom a visitor with a disability meets must be very well trained to treat them correctly. Whether the visitor will return depends on the first impression.

How do you rate the availability of tourist information in museums/ localities/ collections?

Twenty-one (21) respondents consider the availability of tourist information in cultural institutions satisfactory. Sixteen (16) rate it as poor, eight (8) rate it as good, four (4) as nonexistent, and two (2) as very poor (Fig. 22a).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the connection of tourist associations with certain cultural institutions, such as museums, is weak. The reason for this is the complex legal status of these institutions. It is a great loss that the contents of these institutions have not been disseminated to a large number of foreign tourists who are visiting this country in recent years.

How do you rate the accessibility of tourist information in cultural institutions?

Thirty-nine (39) respondents rate the accessibility of tourist information in cultural institutions as very poor, twenty-six (26) as inaccessible, fourteen (14) as satisfactory, and eight (8) as good (Fig. 23a).

How do you rate the availability of information on cultural content on the websites of the museums/sites/collections? How do you rate the accessibility of information that explains its content?

Thirty-two (32) respondents rate the availability and accessibility of information about cultural content on institution websites as poor, twenty-three (23) consider this information and their availability inaccessible, fifteen (15) satisfactory, five (5) good, and four (4) excellent (Fig. 24a, b, c).

In both surveyed countries, there are rare examples of cultural institutions that have integrated software for easier accessibility on their websites and that use easy-to-read language in the presentation of information.

How do you rate the accessibility of information that explains cultural content in the institutions? (flyers, catalogs, info panels, and labels)

Thirty-nine (39) respondents rate the accessibility of information that explains the cultural contents in the institutions as poor. Twenty-two (22) rate it as inaccessible, fourteen (14) as satisfactory, eight (8) as good and three (3) as excellent (Fig. 24a).

Of the cultural institutions in the two surveyed countries, the museums are stuck in elitism because they do not want to give up their intellectualized concepts and interpretation of exhibits and exhibitions. For this reason, we have accessible interpretation content only in short-term projects and content for this population. The curators of these institutions do not want to give up their exhibition concepts in favor of easier comprehensibility of the content for the general population. That is why we often get the impression that the museum's contents are intended for a narrow circle of professionals and not for general society.

Is there information about the contents in cultural institutions presented in some other way? (e.g. illustration, Braille text, audio-visual content, etc.)

Thirty-seven (37) respondents answered that they are not sure about cultural institutions offering information presented in alternative ways, thirty-nine (29) claimed that institutions do not offer any alternatives and thirteen (13) confirmed that they do. Some of the examples they cited are the ARTsee app from the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Museum-Memorial House of Toše Proeski which offers an introduction in Braille, and Heraclea Linkestis which offers audio guides (Fig. 25a, b, c).

Do cultural institutions offer a “social story” on their website that helps a person with autism prepare for the visit?

Forty (40) respondents claimed that cultural institutions in their surroundings do not offer a social story, thirty-five (35) are not sure and four (4) claimed that they do. Respondents cited that the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina offers a Social Story (Fig. 26a, b, c).

The social story is a pedagogical method used in a child on the autism spectrum transition to a new space and environment. Very often, these people can have difficulties encountering new spaces and getting to know new people, so they should be gradually prepared for this. The social story contains photos of the places the child will visit, and photos of the people he will meet, accompanied by a story in the first person singular. Cultural institutions can offer a social story on their websites.

Digital Accessibility

How much could digital technologies and applications contribute and share heritage knowledge and raise awareness among audiences?

Fifty-one respondents (51) consider that DTs and applications can contribute significantly to sharing heritage knowledge among the audience, twenty-three (23) that they can, seven (7) that they can contribute enough, five (5) a little bit, and one (1) that they could not help at all (Fig. 27a, b, c).

Cultural institutions could increase accessibility to digital tools and technologies. They should be approached with caution. If they are given too much space they can be a double-edged sword because they could remove the human factor from these institutions. Also, immersive technologies such as Augmented and Virtual Reality should be approached with caution, because we do not know what effect they could have on hyper-sensory sensitive people in the state of, for example, autism or epilepsy. The visual effects and unexpected sound signals of these technologies could cause seizures in people with autism or epilepsy.

Of the digital technologies offered in the questionnaire, almost all are equally important for respondents. About half of the respondents believe that audiovisual productions, audiobooks, mobile digital applications, digital art, databases and thesauri, video and audio guides, electronic and multimedia books, and digital publishing can contribute to sharing knowledge and accessibility to cultural content. Of the tools offered for digital accessibility, respondents consider the most important software for converting speech to text and text to speech, digital screens in Braille, applications for alternative interpretations of exhibits, simplified navigation, screen reader compatibility, and sign language apps. About half of the respondents consider immersive digital technologies (augmented and virtual reality, haptic devices and interactive digital games) somehow useful for enabling greater accessibility to cultural content for people with disabilities. Respondents consider accessible content on social media networks in a large percentage (69.4%) very important, and accessible online forums for expressing personal opinions about cultural content even more (72.2%).

Sensory Accessibility

Do cultural institutions offer tactile replicas or some other form of didactic material for sensory exploration of content?

Forty-five (45) respondents stated that cultural institutions in their surroundings do not offer tactile replicas, twenty (20) confirmed that they do, and thirteen (13) are not sure about it (Fig. 28a, b, c).

Do cultural institutions offer additional activities for the audience based on hands-on experience?

Nineteen (19) respondents are not sure if the cultural institutions in their surroundings offer hands-on activities. Seventeen (17) state they do and fourteen (14) state they do not offer that kind of activity (Fig. 29a, b, c).

Is the glass under which the objects of cultural importance are placed non-reflective and are they visible?

Thirty-eight (38) respondents stated that showcase glass does create reflection and thus makes the exhibited object harder to see. Twenty-seven (27) respondents stated that they do not create reflection, and fourteen (14) are unsure about that (Fig. 30a, b, c).

Personnel and Services of Cultural Heritage

How knowledgeable and helpful are the staff of cultural institutions in your area in providing services to visitors with disabilities?

Forty-one (41) respondents stated that staff in cultural institutions in their area is very helpful, eighteen (18) stated that they are somehow helpful, eight (8) think they are neutral, eleven (11) little helpful, and two (2) think that they are not helpful at all (Fig. 31a, b, c).

Do you know of any reasonably adjusted programs or guided tours for visitors with disabilities?

Thirty-four (34) respondents stated that they are not familiar with any additional programs or activities that are reasonably adjusted to the needs of some groups of people with disabilities. Thirty-two stated that they are unsure, and thirteen (13) confirmed that they do offer those kinds of activities. (Fig. 32a, b, c) Some of the examples they cited are: the museum-education inclusive program offered by the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina “Blue artism” and digital assistive technology “ARTsee” from the same institution. Various activities for people with sight impairments are offered by the Museum in Bitola and the Memorial House of Toše Proeski in Kruševo.

Summary and Conclusions of the Needs of Persons with Disabilities

Results of this research showed that people with disabilities, their family members/caregivers, and NGO educators from Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia are to some extent aware of the opportunities that cultural institutions offer them for social inclusion. The reason for the lack of awareness about the additional opportunities that cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina offer to this population lies in the fact that the media often have no interest in disseminating this type of information. Respondents in these two countries pointed out the following institutions that promote inclusion by offering additional activities reasonably adapted to their needs: the Bitola Museum, the Memorial House of Toše Proeski in Kruševo, the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The sample of respondents included a fairly large range of different forms of disability, from autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, visual impairments, dyslexia, epilepsy, Down Syndrome, intellectual difficulties, physical impairments, etc. A certain number of the interviewed persons with developmental disabilities graduated from regular schools, and others from special education schools. Respondents with sensory and physical disabilities are highly educated. The fact that out of the total number of people with disabilities surveyed in both countries, only two people are employed, speaks of the slow pace of inclusion in the countries of the Western Balkans compared to the rest of Europe. A large number of respondents need mechanical as well as digital assistive technologies: wheelchairs, glasses, orthopedic aids, and various softwares to compensate for sensory impairments as well as non-understandable information. The respondents state that the most important thing in the quality implementation of inclusion in all social spheres is the public's perception of disability. Therefore, they consider museums responsible for creating a dignified image of them through exhibitions and additional inclusive activities/programs. Respondents state that in public institutions, such as museums, theaters, and cultural centers, wrong stereotypes and attitudes towards this population and their needs still prevail. That is why they require continuous staff training and reasonable adaptation of existing activities and programs to the needs of different groups of this population. The respondents see the

non-systematic handling of this issue as the reason for the lack of inclusion of persons with disabilities in the spheres of cultural life. One of the reasons why in Bosnia and Herzegovina there is no possibility of official policies for equity access and accessibility to the contents and meanings of museum collections for PWDs is that seven cultural institutions at the state level do not have a settled legal status due to complex political and economic conditions. Nevertheless, this big problem does not prevent the above-mentioned two institutions from Bosnia and Herzegovina for continuously providing access and accessibility for people with sight impairments and developmental disabilities. People with disabilities identify architectural barriers as the primary obstacle to their participation in culture. Then the low comprehensibility of the information presented and not enough trained staff working with the audience.

Physical access to cultural institutions is rated very low by respondents in both countries. A certain number of respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina are satisfied with the places for rest offered by the institutions, while in N. Macedonia the situation is somewhat weaker. The toilets of cultural institutions in both countries are completely inaccessible and there are no accessible parking spaces. As for accessible information, the situation is slightly better. Respondents in N. Macedonia note that certain cultural institutions offer alternative interpretations of exhibits for people with visual impairments, while respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina note that one institution makes efforts to make content accessible to people with developmental disabilities through additional programs and assistive technology. Nevertheless, the respondents declare that the information on the websites of cultural institutions is completely inaccessible to them. Cultural institutions should base their additional programs on sensory activities, thus enabling greater accessibility for all, not only PWDs. Respondents note that certain institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina also in North Macedonia offer additional activities based on hands-on experience, tactile exercises, and workshops. A certain number of respondents are unaware of such activities existing in their area. Regarding digital technologies, the respondents' opinions are divided. All respondents declare that DTs could significantly contribute to increasing accessibility for PWDs, spreading knowledge and awareness, and ranking the importance of all offered DTs very high. However, there is evident skepticism regarding immersive technologies such as VR, AR, and haptic devices.

Recommendations for Alleviating the Access and Accessibility of Contents, Services, and Meanings of Cultural Heritage for People with Disabilities

To enable systematic equity access and accessibility to the contents, meanings, and services of cultural assets for people with disabilities, institutions must adopt official policies in accordance with the legal legislation. If this is not possible at the moment, as in the case of Bosnian-Herzegovinian cultural institutions, then special cooperation on this topic must be developed by curators and museum pedagogues/educators, on whom interpretation strategies to communicate with the public depend most. The biggest barrier in accessibility to the museums of the two surveyed countries, besides the physical access to the buildings, is the existence of elitism in the presentation of content and information. A greater understanding of the social roles, responsibilities, and purpose of the museum by the management should contribute to putting the institution on the path to democratization.

Given that respondents from BiH and N. Macedonia learn about cultural content to the greatest extent through social networks, these institutions must enable maximum accessibility of these contents through the description of the photos they publish, the use of easy-to-read language and an enlarged font.

The poor cooperation of cultural institutions from BiH and N. Macedonia with associations dealing with the protection of the rights of PWDs, schools for special education, and other instances, could be improved by presenting the activities and content they offer for their users in different ways. E.g. by printing brochures on the contents of cultural institutions whose information is adapted to different PWD groups or by visiting these instances to promote activities and introduce themselves to the users of the associations.

Professional Capacities and Skills for Accessible Services in Cultural Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia

Research Methodology and Results

Many of the respondents from both countries are Balkan Museum Network individual or institutional members and express big interest to participate in the survey.

Demographic data about the BiH and Macedonian cultural workers, participants in the research:

The total number of participants- cultural workers who participated in the research was thirty five (35), nineteen (19) participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina and sixteen (16) participants from Republic of N. Macedonia.

Demographic Data

The greater number of participants who are involved from both countries are females, twenty two (22), while thirteen (13) of the respondents are men (Fig. 1 BiH / Figure- 1 MKD).

The respondents are aged between 24 and 59 years old (MKD Figure-2 and BiH Fig. 2).

Six (6) cultural workers are with a PhD degree, seventeen (17) master's degrees, and twelve (12) graduates participated in the research.

Of the total number of respondents from BiH, twelve (12) have up to ten years of work experience in the culture sector, four (4) have up to 20, three (3) have up to 30 years of work experience and one (1) of them has over 30 years of experience working in culture.

Macedonian Respondents in this survey are highly educated, with three (3) Ph.D.s, six (6) M.Sc.s, and seven (7) with bachelor's degrees. Almost all respondents are employed. They have extensive experience in the cultural sector ranging from 10 to 30 years. Only one respondent is temporarily employed and one respondent is an M.Sc candidate (Fig. 3).

Nineteen respondents from BiH participated in the research, of which nine (9) represented **museum institutions**, three (3) **cultural centers**, two (2) **tourist agencies**, two (2) **non-governmental organizations**, one (1) **archaeological site**, and one (1) **public library** (Fig. 4).

The respondents from the Republic of N. Macedonia represented different institutions. Nine of them are from **National museums/ galleries**, one from the **National theater**, one from **NGO**, one from **State archive**, one from the **National Cultural center**, one from **National archaeological site**, one from the **National library**, one from the **Municipality Cultural center**. Respondents are working in different areas: curators in museums, educators in museums, museum management, museum design, research, administration, marketing, organizers of cultural programs, audience development etc. (Fig. 7).

The first part of the research deals with the **perception** of people with disabilities in cultural institutions, the effectiveness of existing cultural practices, and the official policies on equity access and accessibility of cultural institutions. Wrong and negative attitudes and prejudices that may prevail among employees can greatly influence the creation of barriers in access and accessibility to the contents and meanings of cultural-historical and artistic heritage for this population. That is why it is very important to determine what opinions about people with disabilities and their needs in the context of cultural institutions prevail among cultural workers.

Open-Ended Questions

Perceptions of the inclusion of persons with disabilities

What are the possibilities for people with disabilities to participate in heritage-related activities and services?

When asked about the current **possibilities** for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the activities and services of cultural institutions in BiH six respondents (6) declared that such possibilities do not exist. One (1) of the surveys believes that the current opportunities are insufficient. Six respondents (6) believe that there are certain possibilities for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the activities and services of cultural institutions, but they need to be further developed. Three respondents (3) answered that such possibilities exist to a certain extent but are implemented exclusively through

projects. Accordingly, they note that there is a lack of systematically based engagement of cultural institutions through policies and official programs that would enable equity participation of this population in activities and services. The lack of systematicity in the state cultural institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be recognized in unresolved legal issues, which, due to the complex political socio-economic, and national situation, have been dragging on since the last war in '90. ended. Seven cultural institutions of state importance in Bosnia and Herzegovina have had no steering boards and no financiers for 32 years. This problem makes it very difficult for cultural institutions in BiH to adopt official policies on accessibility, which would enable a more systematic approach to social inclusion. But this shouldn't be an excuse for their lack of involvement in making new possibilities for including this population in cultural life through activities and programs. An interesting answer from one of the surveys is that *cultural institutions/museums should take advantage of the inclusion of people with disabilities because their interpretations of heritage can give them new insights into the exhibits.*

According to the assessment of eight (8) cultural workers, current practices that aim to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the activities and services of cultural institutions are not efficient enough. Four (4) respondents believe that there are bright examples of efficient practices that promote the inclusion of this population in the additional activities of cultural institutions. One (1) examinee believes those practices are carried out only on international dates marking the day of a particular disability. All respondents (19) believe that people with disabilities should be included in the work processes of cultural institutions. Some propose their direct involvement in planning, designing, and exhibition setup. Others propose establishing advisory bodies that will consist of this population and continuously advise cultural experts of the institution. Or reorganizing work in cultural institutions, where people with disabilities would have the opportunity to influence decision-making from the inside and trial work in different positions. One respondent *says that this question makes him think about the perception of a contemporary art collection that he manages from the point of view of a person with a developmental disability.* The given answers testify to the awareness of cultural workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina for consultations with people with disabilities regarding the contents offered to the public and how they will be represented.

Discussing **possibilities** for people with disabilities to participate in heritage-related activities and services, many responses by Macedonian participants focus on the need for physical accessibility, such as ramps, lifts, and accessible walkways. This includes parking spaces close to entrances and accessible formats like Braille, large print, and audio recordings. There is a strong emphasis on the need for specialized programs, such as tactile tours for the blind, audio guides for the hearing impaired, and educational programs tailored to people with disabilities. The need for staff in cultural institutions to be trained in inclusive practices and communication with people with disabilities is highlighted. The use of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mobile applications to provide access to cultural heritage is suggested by many participants. The inclusion of people with disabilities in planning and decision-making processes for activities and services is seen as crucial. There's also mention of cooperation with organizations that support people with disabilities to better understand their needs. Respondents generally recognize that there are numerous opportunities for the inclusion of people with disabilities in cultural heritage activities. There is optimism about the potential of inclusive practices and the significant contributions that people with disabilities can make to improving conditions in cultural institutions. Some responses point out that despite the potential, the lack of infrastructure and accessibility still poses significant barriers. There's acknowledgment that while steps are being taken, progress is slow, and the conditions are not yet fully adequate. Several responses mention that institutions have the potential but lack the necessary infrastructure, such as elevators and accessible formats, to fully include people with disabilities. Accessibility is either non-existent or limited in many cases, which restricts the opportunities for participation. Implementing accessible infrastructure, (ramps and elevators), and providing information in various accessible formats, developing more specialized and inclusive programs, along with training for staff to help people with disabilities. leveraging technology, such as VR, AR, and mobile applications, to make cultural heritage more accessible. Involving people with disabilities in the decision-making process and collaborating with organizations that understand their needs. One respondent states *"There are a huge number of opportunities for the inclusion of people with disabilities, primarily because of their significant contribution to the improvement of conditions in cultural institutions, making it possible with their experiences and knowledge to make cultural heritage more accessible to all visitors to cultural and artistic events."*

What do you think about the effectiveness of current cultural heritage practices in promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the field of cultural heritage and museums?

Many respondents recognize that there has been progress in promoting inclusion, that workshops and activities have had a positive effect. A significant number of respondents express that while there is progress, much more needs to be done to fully include people with disabilities in cultural heritage. Some responses highlight the **lack of systemic support** for current practices, being driven more by personal interest than by structured, widespread policies. There is a comparison with global practices, with respondents' perception that local efforts are still behind international standards. There is a concern that efforts are not part of a larger, systemic approach but rather depend on individual institutions and their staff. Accessibility remains a significant barrier, with not all facilities are equipped to accept people with disabilities. Some responses indicate that current practices are localized and have short-term effects rather than lasting, widespread change. Respondents suggest that ongoing investment in infrastructure and staff training is necessary to enhance inclusion. There is a need for more structured, systemic approaches to inclusion, rather than relying on the efforts of individual institutions. Efforts should be made to bring local practices in line with international standards for the inclusion of people with disabilities in cultural heritage. One respondent states: *"A lot of attention still needs to be paid. In the last 10-15 years, a step has been taken for the inclusion of people with disabilities, but these are still small steps compared to world practices."*

Do you think that people with disabilities should be included in the process of planning the contents and activities in cultural institutions? How would you implement that process?

The responses reflect a strong consensus on the **importance** of including people with disabilities in the planning process. Here's an analysis of the key points. All respondents agree that people with disabilities should be involved in the planning of cultural activities and programs. The general sentiment is that their inclusion is crucial to creating more inclusive and accessible cultural experiences. Several respondents suggest forming inclusive committees or advisory panels that include people with various types of disabilities. These bodies would participate in the planning and decision-making processes to ensure that different needs are considered. Conducting surveys, focus groups, and other research methods to gather feedback from people with disabilities is another common suggestion. This would help identify their needs, expectations,

and areas that require improvement. A participatory approach where people with disabilities are directly involved in designing programs and activities is emphasized. Organizing workshops where they can contribute ideas and suggestions is suggested as a practical way to implement this. Training for staff in cultural institutions on how to work effectively with persons with disabilities is considered essential. Involving experts and people with disabilities as trainers ensures that the training is relevant and practical.

Some respondents recommend increasing public awareness about the needs and rights of people with disabilities through campaigns, events, and other outreach efforts. Inclusion of persons with disabilities as active participants in these events is seen as vital. Ensuring that infrastructure and information are accessible is a key implementation strategy. This includes adapting physical spaces and providing information in various formats such as Braille, audio guides, and sign language. Direct communication and collaboration with disability organizations and societies are suggested as effective ways to involve people with disabilities in the planning process. Some respondents propose using social media, public forums, and open calls to gather input and involve people with disabilities in planning activities. A few responses mention the idea of hiring or employing people with disabilities in cultural institutions as advisors or even as part of commissions that prepare annual programs. One respondent mentioned the potential challenge of including people with severe disabilities, suggesting that those with mild disabilities might more easily participate in the planning process. This highlights a consideration that different levels of disability might require tailored approaches to inclusion. While there is strong support for inclusion, some responses hint at the challenge of making these practices systemic and ensuring they are consistently applied across institutions. *“Yes, people with disabilities are key in the process of planning activities in cultural policies, especially for educational projects of cultural institutions. The process would take place with the inclusion of persons with disabilities from the very beginning, until the final realization.”* states a colleague from a museum.

In what way do you think that the new definition of museums, adopted in 2022 by ICOM, will affect museum work, program work and additional activities of these institutions?

A significant number of respondents indicate that they are unaware of the new definition adopted by ICOM in 2022. This suggests that there might be a need for more communication and education within the cultural sector

about important updates and changes that could affect museum work. Several respondents recognize the potential of the new definition to positively transform the cultural heritage sector. Responses suggest that if the new definition is implemented effectively, it could lead to museums becoming more inclusive, accessible, and socially responsible, benefiting both the institutions and the visitors. Some responses express hope that the new definition will encourage more proactive behavior among museum employees and lead to positive changes in museum operations. A few respondents are skeptical about the practical impact of the new definition, questioning whether it will lead to real changes in museum practices. These responses indicate a concern that simply redefining the role of museums may not be sufficient to bring about meaningful changes without concrete actions and commitments. One response highlights that changes in museums are largely dependent on local and state policies, rather than international definitions. The impact of the new definition might be limited if it is not supported by local policies and the willingness of museum leaders to implement changes. *“If it is respected and implemented, it will have a great benefit for the museum work and for the visitors in general.” states a colleague.*

Have you initiated or observed any successful practices within cultural institutions that have had a positive impact on the inclusion of persons with disabilities? Can you briefly describe them?

About initiating or observing any successful practices within cultural institutions that have had a positive impact on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, several respondents mentioned the use of tactile exhibitions and digital guides designed specifically for people with disabilities. These practices help make museum experiences more accessible and engaging for visually impaired visitors. Ongoing projects focused on making museums more accessible were highlighted, emphasizing continuous efforts to involve people with disabilities. NI Institute and Museum Bitola was mentioned multiple times for its successful projects involving visually impaired people and the implementation of mobile ramps, tactile images, Braille guides, and sensory activities. Initiatives such as “Braille Guide”, “Open Museums” for people with autism, and “Past in the Palm of Your Hand” were cited as successful examples that foster inclusion and accessibility. “In Touch with Antiquity” Exhibitions. A particularly impactful project was the visiting tactile exhibition from the Louvre Museum, which was set up in the Museum of Macedonia in Skopje. This project was recognized for raising public awareness and demonstrating

the importance of adapting museum facilities for persons with disabilities. There is evidence of successful collaboration between cultural institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and schools to promote inclusion. Despite these successful practices, some respondents pointed out the lack of systemic solutions. While individual projects and initiatives are effective, they are not always supported by broader, institutionalized policies. Although there are laws mandating accessibility for persons with disabilities, some institutions still lack the necessary infrastructure, such as accessible ramps. *“Various workshops for inclusion of people with disabilities (especially those with impaired vision) have been conducted over the years, as well as exhibitions where a specific group of people with disabilities is the target group, but systemic solutions are lacking”* - states museum colleague.

Do you think that the attitudes and prejudices of employees in cultural institutions can affect the availability of cultural contents, activities and services for people with disabilities? Do you think there are any prejudices towards the needs of people with disabilities?

The responses about prejudices towards the needs of people with disabilities provide insight into the various perceptions held by employees in cultural institutions regarding the influence of attitudes and prejudices on the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Several respondents acknowledge that prejudices do exist among employees in cultural institutions, and these prejudices can negatively impact the availability and accessibility of cultural content, activities, and services for people with disabilities. Some responses suggest that societal stigma against people with disabilities is widespread, and this stigma is reflected in cultural institutions as well. A few respondents believe that there is no prejudice in their specific institutions or in cultural institutions in general. They describe an environment where employees are open and supportive of making cultural content accessible to people with disabilities. There is a strong belief among some respondents that prejudices can be gradually eliminated through ongoing education and awareness-raising efforts among employees. This suggests a need for more training programs focused on inclusion. Some respondents distinguish between actual prejudice and a lack of information or experience. They believe that the issue is more about a lack of knowledge and training rather than overt prejudice. One respondent states: *“I think that there are no prejudices against people with disabilities among museum employees.”*

How would you recognize a person with an invisible form of disability and have you heard of the term?

Some respondents are aware of the term “invisible disability” and understand that it refers to disabilities that are not immediately apparent. They recognize that these disabilities can include medical, psychological, or neurological conditions that impact daily life. A significant number of respondents admit that they are not familiar with the term “invisible disability,” indicating a potential gap in knowledge or training within cultural institutions. Many respondents express uncertainty about their ability to recognize a person with an invisible disability. This reflects the inherent challenges in identifying disabilities that do not have obvious physical manifestations. A few respondents suggest that they might be able to recognize certain invisible disabilities based on instinct, experience, or previous training, although they acknowledge that it can be difficult. Those familiar with the concept of invisible disabilities emphasize the importance of awareness and sensitivity among cultural institution staff in recognizing and accommodating individuals with such disabilities. One respondent assumes that invisible disabilities might be related to milder forms of autism, indicating a potential stereotype or limited understanding of the broad spectrum of invisible disabilities. *“Of course I have heard. I would recognize her partly by instinct, partly by the knowledge I have.” states a museum educator.*

Apart from the basic human right to cultural-historical and artistic heritage, what benefits do you think a person with a disability can have from the content and activities offered by cultural institutions?

The respondents highlight multifaceted benefits that cultural institutions can offer to individuals with disabilities. Many respondents emphasize personal satisfaction and joy that individuals with disabilities can derive from engaging with cultural content. This aligns with the universal human experience of finding pleasure and fulfillment in art and culture. Engaging with cultural content allows individuals with disabilities to broaden their horizons, gain new experiences, and step outside the limitations imposed by their disabilities. Cultural institutions provide a platform for individuals with disabilities to integrate more fully into society by participating in shared cultural experiences. This can foster a sense of belonging and identity. Cultural institutions provide opportunities for socialization, helping individuals with disabilities to connect with others, make new friends, and strengthen their social networks. Several respondents highlight the role of cultural institutions in fostering inclusion, helping individuals with disabilities feel

like active members of the community. Engaging with art and culture allows individuals with disabilities to express themselves creatively, which can be a powerful tool for personal development and self-discovery. Cultural activities can contribute to the development of one's personality and overall human potential, offering individuals with disabilities the same opportunities for growth and self-actualization as any other person. Some respondents suggest that individuals with disabilities should be seen not just as passive recipients of cultural content, but as active participants in the creation and curation of cultural activities. This can empower them and give them a voice in the cultural discourse. One respondent states: *"Enrichment of experience, opportunity for creative expression, improvement of social life and many others."*

Access and Accessibility of Services in Museums/Sites

In what areas can improvements or reasonable adjustments be made in the field of cultural heritage to increase access and accessibility for persons with disabilities?

About improvement to increase **access**, respondents discuss installing ramps, lifts, wide walkways, and doorways to ensure accessibility for wheelchair users and others with mobility challenges. This also includes the provision of adapted toilets. Developing tactile maps, braille guides, audio descriptions, and sign language video guides to cater to visitors with visual and hearing impairments. Offering digital access through websites, mobile applications, and virtual tours. This can benefit those who cannot physically visit cultural sites due to their disabilities. Organizing activities that are inclusive of various disabilities, ensuring that people with different needs can participate and enjoy cultural experiences. Organizing inclusive workshops and events, collaborating with organizations. Training staff on how to interact with and assist individuals with disabilities, as well as developing ethical and inclusive approaches to communication and service delivery. Running campaigns to raise public awareness about the needs of individuals with disabilities and the services available to them in cultural institutions. Adopting and enforcing policies that ensure accessibility and inclusiveness in all cultural institutions. Regular monitoring and evaluation of these efforts are also crucial. Implementing audio guides, tactile exhibitions, and accessible pathways to enhance the experience for visitors with disabilities. Where possible, installing ramps, lifts, and providing tactile maps and guides to make these locations more accessible. Introducing medium and long-term programs within museum institutions that focus on accessibility and inclusivity for people with disabilities. Ensuring that theater performances and

other cultural events are accessible to people with disabilities through tailored seating arrangements, sign language interpreters, and other adjustments. One respondent shortly states: *“improving physical and sensory accessibility”*

Role of Employees in the Public Sector

Can you explain why it is important for staff to understand the needs of people with disabilities in order to strengthen inclusion in the cultural heritage sector?

When staff understand the diverse needs of people with disabilities, they can adapt services, content, and infrastructure to make cultural heritage accessible to all. This ensures that individuals with disabilities have the same opportunities to engage with and enjoy cultural events and heritage as everyone else, without facing unnecessary obstacles or restrictions.

Meeting the needs of visitors with disabilities helps create a welcoming and inclusive environment. When individuals feel valued and respected, their overall experience improves, leading to increased satisfaction. Positive experiences encourage return visits and word-of-mouth recommendations, ultimately benefiting the institution by increasing attendance and fostering a stronger community connection.

Cultural institutions have a significant role in promoting social inclusion and celebrating diversity. By implementing inclusive practices and understanding the needs of people with disabilities, these institutions can help integrate individuals with disabilities more fully into society. This supports broader efforts to create a more inclusive, equitable, and understanding community.

Cultural institutions have an ethical obligation to respect the rights of all visitors. Ensuring that people with disabilities can access and enjoy cultural heritage is part of this responsibility. By promoting equality and justice, institutions not only fulfill their moral duties but also set an example for the broader community.

There are legal requirements at both national and international levels that mandate accessibility for people with disabilities. When staff understand and implement these laws, they ensure that the institution complies with legal standards, avoiding potential legal issues and demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity.

Staff who are knowledgeable about the needs of people with disabilities can provide higher-quality services that meet and even exceed the expectations of all visitors. This might include adjustments in communication, logistical support, and physical accessibility. Enhanced service quality leads to better visitor experiences and a stronger reputation for the institution.

Staff awareness of the needs of people with disabilities is crucial in raising public awareness about the importance of inclusion. When staff model inclusive behavior and attitudes, it helps to shift societal perceptions, reducing stigma and promoting solidarity with people with disabilities.

For staff, understanding and addressing the needs of people with disabilities can be professionally and personally fulfilling. It aligns with the broader mission of cultural institutions to serve the community and enhances the sense of purpose in their work by contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society. *“Knowing the needs of people with disabilities among employees in institutions will first open opportunities for understanding the problems these people face. When the problems are more present in the cultural discourse, we can think about their solutions”* states one respondent.

What specific measures or policies do you think public sector institutions should adopt and implement?

Some respondents provided identical responses to this question, discussing also the budget of the institution, the implementation of the law, inter-institutional collaboration, staff training, and the importance of collaboration with the Ministry of Culture. Only a few respondents indicated a lack of knowledge regarding the specific measures that should be adapted and implemented. For one respondent, the most important is *“Access to institutions and necessary training of employees”*

Has the cultural institution/government body where you work officially adopted inclusive policies for access, equality and accessibility to the contents and meanings of cultural-historical and artistic heritage for persons with disabilities?

Some respondents confirmed that their institution has officially adopted **inclusive policies** for access, equality, and accessibility to cultural-historical and artistic heritage for persons with disabilities. Several respondents indicated that their institutions have not adopted such policies. A few

respondents mentioned that inclusive approaches are present in strategic documents, or that some policies have been adopted, but not comprehensively. Several respondents were either unsure about the existence of such policies or did not have sufficient information to confirm. This variety of responses indicates a need for increased communication and transparency within institutions regarding the adoption and implementation of inclusive policies. It also suggests that while some progress has been made, there may be gaps in policy adoption and awareness among employees in the cultural sector. *“I’m not sure about it officially, but through approved accessibility projects we improve the accessibility of content.”* states one respondent.

Accessibility

Physical Accessibility

Cultural workers from BiH (35.3% of respondents) rate **physical access to cultural institutions** as non-existent. 29.4% of respondents rate it as very poor, while 17.5% of respondents think that the physical access to the building is excellent. The rest of the respondents (17.7%) believe that the physical access to buildings (ramps, entrances, pathways) is satisfactory. Almost half of respondents (41.2%) rate **physical access to parking spaces** at cultural institutions as very poor, 29.4% state that parking spaces in front of these institutions do not exist, while 17.6% consider access to parking as good. 35.3% of respondents rate **access to toilets** as non-existent, 29.4% as very poor, 17.6% as good enough, 11.8% as satisfactory, and 5.9% as excellent. 29.4% of respondents consider **physical access to cafes and restaurants** in cultural institutions satisfactory. 23.5% think access is very poor, while an equal percentage (17.6%) evaluates the access as excellent or non-existent. 11.8% of respondents rate access to cafes as good. Almost half of respondents (41.2%) consider the **resting areas in cultural institutions** in BiH to be satisfactory, 23.5% to be good. While 17.6% of respondents declare that there are no resting areas in their institutions. 41.2% of respondents declare that the **lockers for visitors’ personal belongings** do not exist at their cultural institutions. 35.3% of respondents declare that the access to them is satisfactory. 29.4% of respondents rate the **access to the info desk/ cashier** as satisfactory. There is an equal percentage (17.6%) of those who think it is non-existent, poor, bad, good or excellent. 47.1% of the respondents consider **the height of the exhibits according to the needs of wheelchair users** to be very poor. 29.4% think the height is satisfactory (Fig. 8).

Macedonian respondents tried to rate the physical accessibility of the institution but most of them stated that they do not have accessible toilets, parkings, restaurants and bars, lockers, resting areas... The rating is made by those who have, but many of them found that the accessibility is not according to the international standards, so they rated physical access with : very bad: 25, bad: 9, poor: 35, sufficient: 36, good: 21, excellent: 1. (Fig. 9)

Accessible Information

Questions in this Section Focus on the Availability and Quality of Content Information

How do cultural institutions share information about cultural content, activities and services to the public?

Cultural institutions from BiH represented in the research mostly **disseminate information for the public** through social networks, websites, brochures, and leaflets, on-site and equally through TV media and radio broadcasts, online portals, mailing lists, The largest number of respondents **rate the availability of tourist information in cultural institutions** as satisfactory (35.3%). 29.4% of the respondents believe that the availability of tourist information is good, and 23.5% is very poor.

An equal percentage of respondents (35.3%) think that the **written interpretations that explain the contents within the cultural institutions** (Braille alphabet, correct font, size, and contrast of written interpretations) are satisfactory but also very poor. A percentage of 23.5% of respondents say that written information in more accessible formats is not available at their institutions. A percentage of 35.3 respondents declare that there are no **alternative ways to communicate with non-verbal visitors from the autism spectrum** (illustrated cards, illustrated exhibition frame) in cultural institutions.

An equal percentage of respondents consider that the methods of communication with non-verbal visitors are satisfactory. While 23.5% of respondents say that these methods of communication are very poor.

Almost half of the respondents (41.2%) believe that cultural institutions are poorly guided by the **principles of universal design and easy-to-understand language** when representing cultural content through exhibitions. 23.5%

of respondents declare that cultural institutions are not guided by these principles at all. A percentage of 41.2 respondents believe that the **correct terminology addressed to and around people with disabilities** is very poorly respected. 35.3% of respondents believe that the terminology is used satisfactorily, and 17.6% very good. **Visual recognition of employees by accreditation** according to 29.4% of respondents in cultural institutions does not exist. The same percentage consider this form of recognition to be satisfactory. More than half of the respondents (67.4%) declare that the cultural institution does not have a **tactile map** for people with sight loss. The 23.5% of respondents believe that the existing ones are very poor. 35.3% of respondents stated that the cultural institutions where they work do not offer **audio guides** to the public. 29.4% stated the existing audio guides are very poor, while 11.8% said that the audio guides they offer are excellent. More than half of the respondents (52.9%) stated that the **websites** of the cultural institutions where they work are not accessible for people with disabilities. 35.3% of the respondents consider that the website and its contents are accessible to a satisfactory extent.

More than half of the respondents (58.8%) stated that the cultural institutions where they work do not offer a **social story to the audience from the autism spectrum**. 23.5% of the respondents think that the existing social stories on the websites of cultural institutions are very poor. Almost half of the respondents (47.1%) believe that **different forms of interpretations (video and audio interpretations, Braille interpretations, and guided tours adapted to the needs of different groups of PWDs)** exist in their institutions and that they are satisfactory. 35.3% of respondents stated that different forms of interpretation of cultural content do not exist in their institutions (Fig. 8. Fig. 9. Fig. 10, Fig. 11, Fig. 12, Fig. 13, Fig 14, Fig. 15).

The majority of Macedonian respondents indicated that they disseminate information about their activities and cultural programs on social media eleven (11), on their websites four (4), and via the media only one (1) (Fig. 10). The rating of **accessible information-** (in total) we gain following answers: Very bad: 51 Bad: 74 Good: 59 Sufficient: 38 Excellent: 2 (Fig. 11).

About the availability of tourist information on the websites of museums/sites/ collections-very bad (1) bad (5) good (6) sufficient (4) excellent (0). Respondents rate the written descriptions (legends, info panels, catalogs and brochures) that

explain the content of the cultural institution (e.g. Braille texts provided, with correct choice of font, size and contrast) with very bad (8) bad (3) good (4) sufficient (1) excellent (0).

They evaluate the communication of cultural institutions with non-verbal visitors, disorders from the Autism spectrum? (Illustrated Cards, Illustrated Display Frame) very bad (1) bad (8) good (5) sufficient (2) excellent (0) and they you rate the implementation of universal design principles and easy-to-understand language in the presentation of content very bad (4) bad (8) good (4) sufficient () excellent (0) and how cultural institution's use of terminology and speech related to people with disabilities with very bad (8) bad (5) good (3) sufficient () excellent (0). Respondents evaluate the visual recognition of staff in cultural institutions (in uniform, with accreditation) with very bad (2) bad (5) good (6) sufficient (3) excellent (0) They rate the tactile map of cultural institutions for the visually impaired with very bad (3) bad (5) good (5) sufficient (3) excellent (0) and audio guides that explain cultural content for the visually impaired with very bad (1) bad (5) good (6) sufficient (3) excellent (1).

Respondents rate the accessibility of digital content on the institution's website for people with disabilities (TT &-TT; ETR standards; illustration explanation tool) with very bad (4) bad (6) good (3) sufficient (3) excellent (0). Respondents rate the "social story" on the institution's website, the purpose of which is to prepare a person on the Autistic spectrum for the visit with very bad (5) bad (6) good (3) sufficient (2) excellent (0) and the diversity of interpretation strategies in cultural institutions (Braille, video and audio interpretations, guided tours adapted to the needs of different groups of people with disabilities) with very bad (5) bad (5) good (3) sufficient (3) excellent (0).

Communication of cultural institutions with non-verbal visitors from Autism Spectrum Disorder (illustrated cards, illustrated exhibition frame) with - very bad (4) bad (6) good (3) sufficient (3) excellent (0) and implementation of universal design principles and easy-to-understand language in the representation of content with very bad (3) bad (5) good (4) sufficient (4) excellent (0). At the end of this section they value the cultural institution's use of terminology and speech related to people with disabilities with very bad (2) bad (5) good (4) sufficient (4) excellent (1).

There are rating in total for accessible information: Very Bad: 51 Bad: 74 Good: 59 Sufficient: 38 Excellent: 2

Digital Accessibility

The respondents' opinions on the use of digital technologies to enable greater accessibility to the contents of cultural institutions and their meanings are divided. While almost half of the respondents from BiH (47.1%) believe that digital technologies are useful for these purposes, the rest believe that nothing can replace the human approach.

Among the offered digital tools that can increase the accessibility of cultural contents and their meanings for PWDs, the respondents consider Braille readers, screen reader compatibility, audio guides and audio descriptions, accessible touch screens, simplified navigation apps, T-T-S & S-T-T apps, and sign language applications. Immersive digital technologies such as augmented and virtual reality have fewer supporters among cultural workers and haptic devices as well. Of the digital media that can convey knowledge about the contents of cultural institutions, respondents consider audiobooks and audiovisual productions and films to be the most useful.

Of the total number of respondents from BiH, 64.7% believe that accessible content on social networks of cultural institutions is very important, and 47.1% of respondents believe that accessible online forums are important.

When asked about providing digital access to museum collections, eleven (11) responded yes and five (5) responded no, and only one respondent states they can not, one states not too much, and other respondents state that digital technology and applications can raise awareness among audiences, 7 states excellent, 4 states very good and 3 states enough. It is absolutely important, state 13 respondents (81.3%), it is important, state 1 and 2 respondents state that it is good to use digital technologies and applications to make museums and other cultural institutions more accessible for people with disabilities. Almost all respondents state that all mentioned applications and tools are extremely important, (a. museum guide application, b. sign language applications, c. TTS & STT application, d. audio descriptions, e. subtitles and subtitles, f. augmented reality AR, g. virtual reality VR, h. Touch-sensitive screens, i. Braille texts, j. Compatibility of screen readers, K. Simplified navigation) several states- are very important and only a small number of

respondents are skeptical about AR and VR. Respondents from macedonian institutions do not have experience with many of the mentioned applications, but are familiar with the effects and hope that they will have the opportunity to implement all of the tools. Heritage and educational games are very important to 12 respondents and important to 4 respondents. Haptic devices are also very important for 12 respondents and important for 4 respondents. Social media are very important to 14 and important to 2 respondents, and community engagement tools are very important to 12 and important to 2 respondents (Fig. 13a, Fig. 24, Fig. 15 and Fig. 16, Fig. 17).

Sensory Accessibility

Assess the sensory accessibility of the contents and services offered by the cultural institution, so that visitors have a multisensory experience during the visit.

More than half of the respondents from BiH (58.8%) stated that cultural institutions do not offer the audience **tactile replicas of exhibits** for sensory exploration of the content. 47.1% of respondents confirmed that cultural institutions **offer hands-on activities** through workshops.

More than half of the respondents (52.9%) confirmed that the **glass on the display cases** in which the exhibits are displayed creates a reflection, thus making it impossible for visually impaired people to see the object.

Almost all of the respondents (88,2%) declared that institutions do not offer warning next to the **multimedial installations with flickering effects**. More than half of the respondents (64.7%) confirmed that the **surface on which the exhibits in the showcases stand contrasts** with the object on display, thus increasing sensory accessibility for visually impaired people.

Seven Macedonian cultural institutions offer tactile cues for sensory exploration of cultural content and 10 do not offer. About do flashing visual installations contain a warning about the possibility of epileptic seizures for people on the Autism Spectrum, respondent 2 state yes and 14 do not, and 12 answered yes and 6 they do not organize practical activities for a richer sensory experience than the content. About do they care that the glass display cases create a reflection, thus preventing the visually impaired from seeing the objects on display respondents answered yes and 9 no, and 11 care about the display case to have a clear contrast with the objects on display but 6 are not.

In total, we have 40 affirmative responses and 45 negative responses, which represents a 50% split between the two. (Fig. 18)

Staff and Services of Cultural Institutions

More than half of BiH respondents (52.9%) believe that **employees of cultural institutions are useful and competent** in assisting people with disabilities (red). 23.5% think cultural workers are neutral in assisting PWDs (yellow), and 17.6% that cultural workers are somewhat helpful (green). Only one respondent thinks that cultural workers are very useful and competent in assisting people with disabilities in cultural institutions.

Audience studies are very important for identifying the needs of different groups that exist in society. They are a prerequisite for creating more accessible content, activities, and programs that satisfy various educational, sensory, physical, communication-speech, and other needs. Almost half of the respondents (47.1%) stated that the cultural institutions where they work do not conduct audience studies. The rest (52.9%) indicated the methods by which they conduct audience studies: surveys, conversations with the audience, analysis of audience types, observations, and visitors' feedback.

Outreach programs are contemporary museum methods for reaching out to parts of society that do not have access to the museum for some reason. These programs often imply that the museum leaves the architectural framework to satisfy the needs of a certain social group. Out of the total number of respondents, 47.1% stated that the institutions occasionally implement outreach programs through visiting the schools, guesting exhibitions in other municipalities, and cooperating with various associations dealing with the rights of persons with disabilities to identify the needs of this group.

By **employing people with disabilities**, the cultural institution will show its true commitment to the social inclusion of this population and thereby reflect the diversity in society. Out of the total number of respondents, 58.8% stated that the cultural institution does not employ people with disabilities. Two institutions said they had volunteers with disabilities, while four respondents confirmed that the institution employs people with disabilities.

By including the interpretations of persons with disabilities in the official communication strategies of the cultural institution with the public, the institution becomes the neglected voice of this population in society. This is another way the institution demonstrates its commitment to inclusion and respect for diversity. From the total number, 35.3% of respondents confirmed that the cultural institution includes interpretations of persons with disabilities in the official strategies of explaining the exhibits, and exhibitions, and communicating with the public.

By dignified representation of the lives of people with disabilities through occasional exhibitions, cultural institutions can contribute to the destigmatization of this social group in the public. In this way, the institution will take a position of social responsibility. Out of the total number of respondents, 41.2% answered that the cultural institution does not present the lives of this population through its contents. The others cited examples of exhibitions of associations that deal with the protection of the rights of this population, photographic exhibitions of different groups of PWDs, while some keep exhibits in their art collections from authors with disabilities.

The attitude of respondents who are aware of the legal obligations of cultural institutions as public and social places to respect the rights of persons with disabilities. Green and blue (88.3%) show respondents aware of these obligations. Yellow (11.8%) shows those who are not sure what the obligations of cultural institutions are in terms of providing equity access and accessibility to cultural content for PWDs.

The educational impact of a cultural institution is the best way to provide new opportunities for the social inclusion of people with disabilities. **By organizing additional programs and activities that will meet the needs of certain groups of this population**, their inclusion in the institution's works will be ensured. Out of the total number, 35.3% of respondents stated that the cultural institution does not conduct additional activities and programs reasonably adapted to this population. The others stated they perform various activities adapted to this population, while one respondent stated the institution offers a program with an adapted methodology for people with developmental disabilities.

Cultural Workers Skills

Out of a total of 19 respondents, 17 confirmed that they had experience working with people with disabilities in the context of a cultural institution.

More than half of the respondents (52.9%) confirmed that they have **participated in training on the needs** of people with disabilities in the context of cultural institutions and ways of working with this population. Of the respondents who participated in the training on the needs of PWDs in the last 5 years, 45.5% stated that they were moderately satisfied with the **quality of the training** they received. 36.4% of respondents are very satisfied, and 18.2% are satisfied with the quality of accessibility training they received in the last five years.

40% of respondents are moderately satisfied with the **vocational training** they received in the last five years on the subject of inclusion/accessibility/work with PWDs. 30% are very satisfied with the quality of vocational training, 20% are satisfied, and 10% are not satisfied with the quality of this kind of training.

An equal percentage of respondents (30.8%) are moderately satisfied and satisfied with the quality of **non-accredited training** they received on this topic in the last 5 years. 23.1% of respondents are very satisfied with this form of training, and 15.4% are not satisfied with the quality of non-accredited training they received in the last 5 years.

An equal percentage of respondents (33.3%) are moderately satisfied and very satisfied with the quality of the **accredited training** they received on this topic. 11.1% are satisfied, while 22.2% of respondents are not satisfied with the quality of accredited training on accessibility.

36.4% of respondents are moderately satisfied with the **online training** they received on the topic of accessibility, 27.3% are satisfied, 9.1% are very satisfied, and 18.2% are not satisfied with this form of training they received.

We gain insight into the **additional training in various fields that cultural workers have received in the last five years**. The largest number of respondents (12) did not receive any training in museum management, marketing, social networks, or digital skills. Three (3) surveys confirmed that they received training in museum management, two (2) on digital skills, and one (1) each on social networks, marketing, and language training.

Respondents consider the biggest **barriers that need to be alleviated** for people with disabilities to have better access to cultural institutions: poor visual marking of cultural-historical and artistic localities/collections/places in public space (82.4%), lack of involvement of PWDs in the work processes of the cultural institution (76.5%) and lack of motivation of PWDs for cultural resources (64.7%).

Of the offered **skills that a cultural worker should possess**, the surveys consider the following to be the most important in enabling greater accessibility for PWDs: knowledge of the needs of different groups of PWDs (88.2%), consultation with special pedagogues (82.4%), reasonable adaptation of methods of working with PWDs (82.4%), effective action in crises (76.5%) and maintaining a sense of humor and an open mind (76.5%). Skills for working with digital assistive technologies are considered important by 58.8% of respondents, 23.5% very important, and 17.6% moderately important.

Almost every Macedonian respondent (14) says it is extremely important to have trained staff to assist visitors with disabilities, and two (2) say it is very important. (Fig. 19) Only five respondents (31.3%) indicate that they conduct audience research to identify the needs of different social groups, six (31.3%) are not sure, and five do not conduct audience research (Fig. 20).

More than half of the respondents are not sure if they have an outreach program, 3 respondents say yes, 3 respondents say no, and one respondent says they just started to prepare (Fig. 21).

Only four respondents say yes, six respondents say no, and six respondents are not sure whether cultural institutions reflect diversity in society by employing people with disabilities. We note that, according to the information we have, only two macedonian cultural institutions have 2 (two) employees with disabilities (Fig. 22).

About does the cultural institution reflect diversity in society by including people with disabilities, for example in interpretation half of the respondents (8) state no, five (5) are not sure, and four (4) state yes (Fig. 23).

We ask participants does the cultural institution destigmatizes people with disabilities in public by occasionally presenting content that represents the lives of these people in a dignified way and half of the respondents are not sure about this question, a quarter state yes, and the other quarter state no (Fig. 24).

Obligations, human rights conventions, as a legal requirement are familiar to 11 respondents, 3 are unsure and only 2 answered no.

Respondents from 10 institutions indicate that they offer programs and additional activities that are reasonably adapted to the needs of groups of people with disabilities, 4 respondents are not sure, and only 2 respondents state that they do not offer any programs (Fig. 25).

*On every occasion when experts from the Balkan museum access group conducts training for cultural workers, or give a lecture or conduct Access Survey, they recommend the Social model and the rights-based model for persons with disabilities

*Over the past 10 years, many Macedonian cultural sector employees have attended training sessions and workshops organized by the Balkan Museum Network and now they are familiar with the basics of accessibility and inclusion. Many colleagues from the cultural institutions have also participated on conferences in the region and webinars.

Conclusions and Recommendations Related to the Needs of Cultural Workers Skills

There are many **possibilities** for including people with disabilities in heritage-related activities, with a focus on improving accessibility, creating inclusive programs, and using technology. The key barriers are the lack of infrastructure and fully accessible programs. While there is optimism about the potential for inclusion, there is also recognition that significant improvements in infrastructure and programming are still needed. This analysis provides a comprehensive view of the possibilities and challenges of including people with disabilities in cultural heritage activities as perceived by respondents.

While progress in **promoting** the inclusion of people with disabilities is recognized, there is a general feeling that current practices are not sufficient. Respondents highlight the need for more systematic and sustained efforts to promote inclusion, rather than relying on ad hoc initiatives by individual institutions. Despite the challenges, there is a sense of optimism that with continued effort and investment, more effective and inclusive practices can be developed. These responses reflect a balanced view of the responses, recognizing both the achievements and the ongoing challenges in promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in cultural heritage and museums.

There is a broad consensus that people with disabilities should be **involved** in the planning of cultural activities and activities. Their participation is seen as essential to creating inclusive and accessible programs. Respondents offer a variety of practical strategies for involving people with disabilities, ranging from forming advisory committees and conducting surveys to co-designing programs and raising public awareness. While the overall sentiment is positive, there is a recognition of potential challenges, such as the difference in levels of disability and the need for systemic changes.

The lack of systematicity in the state cultural institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be recognized in unresolved legal issues, which, due to the complex political socio-economic, and national situation, have been dragging on since the last war in '90. ended. Seven cultural institutions of state importance in Bosnia and Herzegovina have had no steering boards and no financiers for 32 years. This problem makes it very difficult for cultural institutions in BiH to adopt official policies on accessibility, which would enable a more systematic approach to social inclusion. But this shouldn't be an excuse for their lack of involvement in making new possibilities for including this population in cultural life through activities and programs.

There is a mixed level of awareness about the new **ICOM definition** of museums. While some respondents are well-informed and see potential benefits, others are unfamiliar with it. Those who are aware of the definition generally view it as a positive step that could lead to more inclusive, accessible, and socially responsible museums. Despite the optimism, there is also skepticism about whether the new definition will lead to tangible changes in museum practices without strong internal policies and proactive efforts from cultural institutions. The respondents suggest a need for better communication and education within the cultural sector to ensure that all professionals are aware of significant changes like the new ICOM definition and understand how they could impact their work. These responses reflect the diverse perspectives on the potential impact of the new ICOM museum definition, highlighting both the opportunities it presents and the challenges that may need to be addressed to realize its full potential.

Many cultural institutions are actively engaged in creating more inclusive environments for people with disabilities. Successful practices include tactile exhibitions, digital guides, specialized workshops, and collaborations with

external organizations. Institutions like the NI Institute and Museum Bitola and specific projects like the “In Touch with Antiquity” exhibit stand out as leading examples in the field of inclusion. While there are many successful practices, the lack of systemic support and full implementation of accessibility laws continue to be challenges. This highlights the need for more comprehensive and **institutionalized** approaches to inclusion in cultural heritage. These responses analysis underscores the progress being made in including people with disabilities in cultural heritage activities while also pointing to the areas where further work is needed to achieve full accessibility and inclusion.

The analysis shows that there are institutions where staff are supportive but the **prejudice** still exists in some cultural institutions and can have a negative impact on accessibility for people with disabilities. Education and awareness raising are seen as key strategies to overcome these prejudices and ensure that cultural institutions are more inclusive and accessible. The responses show variability between institutions, with some being more proactive in addressing the needs of people with disabilities than others. These responses highlight the importance of addressing both stigma and information gaps through ongoing training and awareness-raising programs to create a more inclusive environment in cultural institutions.

The responses indicate different levels of **awareness** of invisible disabilities. While some respondents are well informed, others are unfamiliar with the term and its implications. Many respondents acknowledge the difficulty in recognizing invisible disabilities, highlighting the need for better training and education in this area. The analysis suggests that more training and awareness-raising initiatives are needed to help staff of cultural institutions better understand and accept people with invisible disabilities. Actually, most of the respondents underline the importance of ongoing education and training within cultural institutions to ensure that all staff are prepared to recognize and support people with invisible disabilities, thereby making cultural spaces more inclusive.

Respondents indicated that cultural institutions provide a wide range of **benefits** to persons with disabilities. These benefits include personal satisfaction, socialization, creative expression, personal growth, and broader cultural and social integration. The emphasis on inclusion and the potential for persons with disabilities to play an active role in cultural activities

highlights the importance of cultural institutions as spaces for empowerment and community building. In conclusion, cultural institutions can play a vital role in enriching the lives of persons with disabilities, by providing opportunities for personal growth, social interaction and creative expression, while fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion in the broader community.

Summary of areas for improvement:

- Ensuring that cultural sites and institutions are physically accessible to all.
- Providing resources (Braille guides, audio descriptions, and sign language support etc.)
- Offering online and virtual experiences.
- Designing activities that cater to a wide range of disabilities.
- Training for staff with the necessary skills to assist people with disabilities.
- Promoting the human rights and needs of individuals with disabilities.
- Implementing and monitoring accessibility policies.
- Tailoring of accessibility measures to the unique challenges of museums, galleries, historic sites, and performing arts venues. These improvements, when implemented holistically, can significantly improve the accessibility of cultural heritage for people with disabilities, ensuring that they can fully participate and benefit from cultural experiences.

Understanding the needs of people with disabilities is essential for staff in cultural institutions in order to:

- Ensure equal access to heritage.
- Improve the visitor experience for all.
- Promote social inclusion and diversity.
- Adhere to ethical responsibilities.
- Comply with legal standards.
- Improve overall quality of services.
- Increase public awareness and reduce stigma.
- Provide experience, professional and personal fulfillment.

This approach helps people of all backgrounds feel included in our cultural heritage. It also makes our society as a whole more understanding and inclusive.

Respondents gave almost identical answers when discussing **specific measures** and policies, but also mentioned the importance of the institution's budget, implementation of the law, inter-institutional cooperation, staff training

and the importance of cooperation with the Ministry of Culture. Only a few respondents indicated a lack of knowledge about the specific measures to be adapted and implemented.

This variety of responses indicates a need for **increased communication** and **transparency** within institutions regarding the adoption and implementation of **inclusive policies**. It also suggests that while some progress has been made, there may be gaps in policy adoption and awareness among employees in the cultural sector.

Respondents (from the Macedonian cultural sector) are employees we have already collaborated with. Several of them are from museums that have received support from several instances, such as the process of conducting the access surveys (conducted by the Balkan Museum Access Group experts), implemented several projects based on the recommendations from the access survey and supported by the Balkan Museum Network or the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of N. Macedonia and other donors and/or organized multisensory exhibitions supported by Balkan Museum Network's small grants programme.

The most significant development in recent years within the cultural institutions of North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina is the growing interest among colleagues in learning about and implementing activities and projects centered on inclusion and accessibility.

Accessibility has become an important aspect of every institution, and step by step, the situation is improving.

Appendix: Graphs and Survey Results

Accompanying content of the report on the needs of Persons with disabilities in the context of cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia

Figure 1a

Gender of participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina:

36 responses

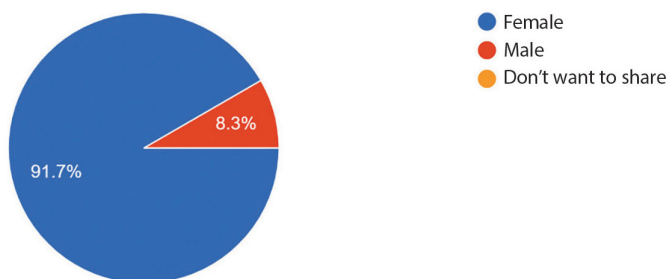


Figure 1b

Gender of participants from North Macedonia:

28 responses

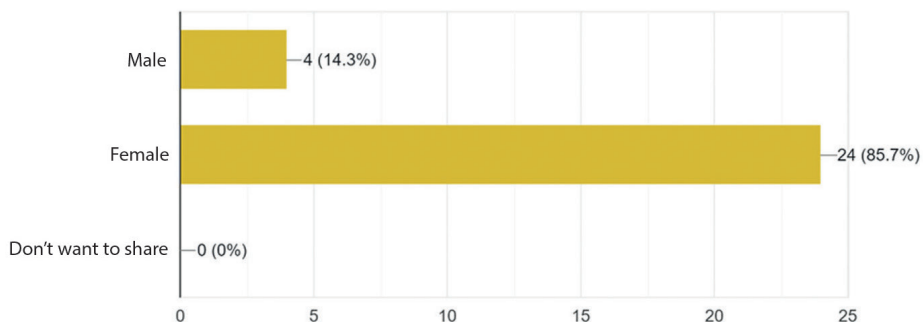


Figure 1c
Gender of participants from North Macedonia:

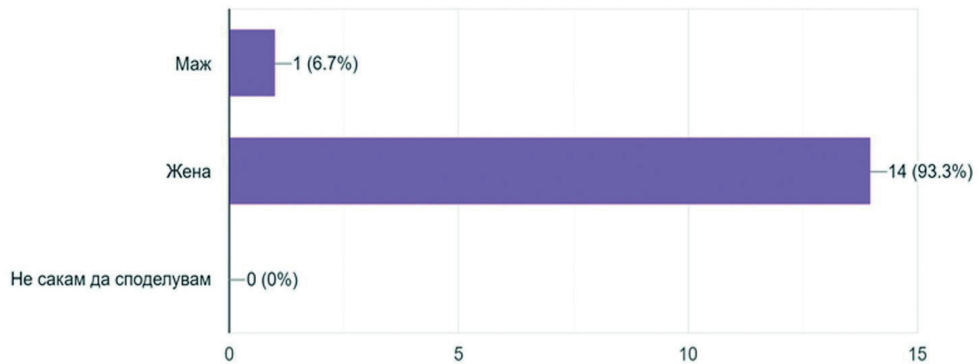


Figure 2a
Age of the participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina:
36 responses

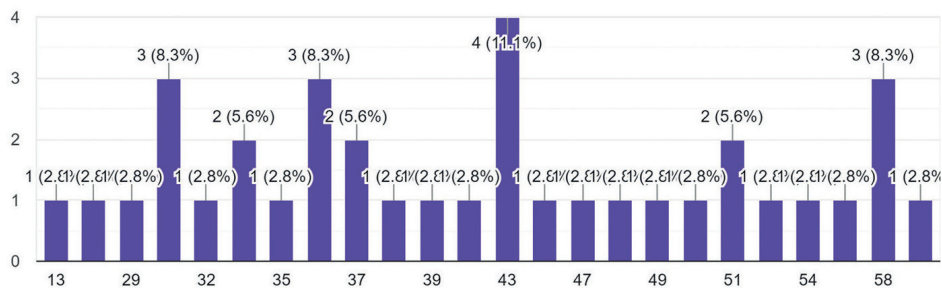


Figure 2b
Age of the participants from Macedonia:
28 responses

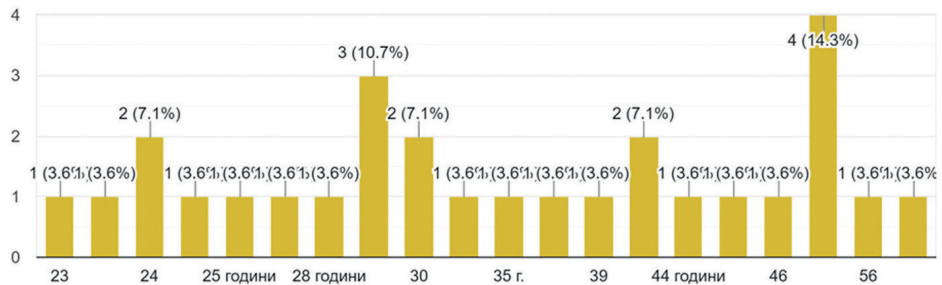


Figure 3a
Representation of Disability Types among Respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina:

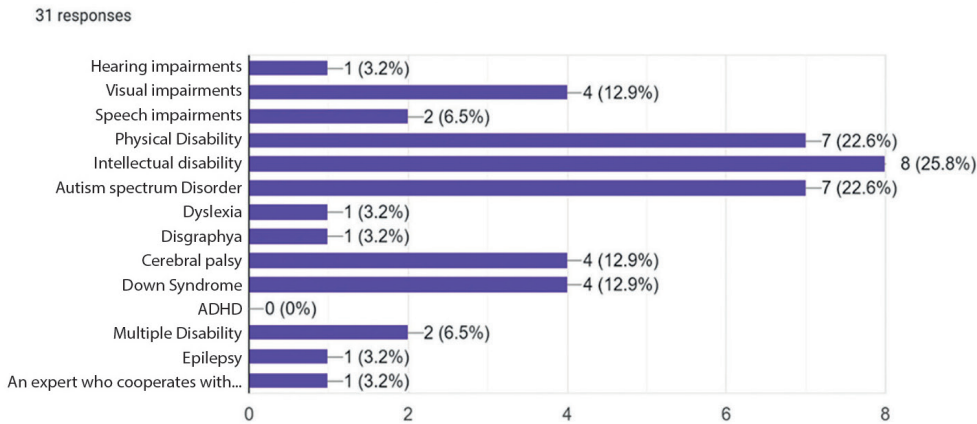


Figure 3b
Representation of Disability Types among Respondents from North Macedonia:

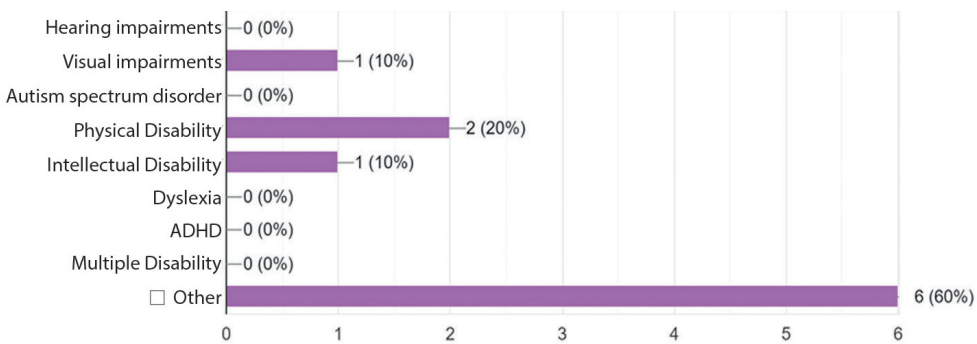


Figure 4a
Level of Disability of Surveys from Bosnia and Herzegovina:

30 responses

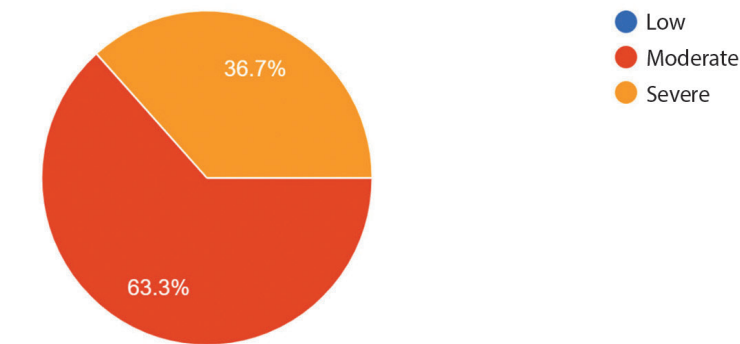


Figure 4b
Level of Disability of Surveys from North Macedonia:

6 responses

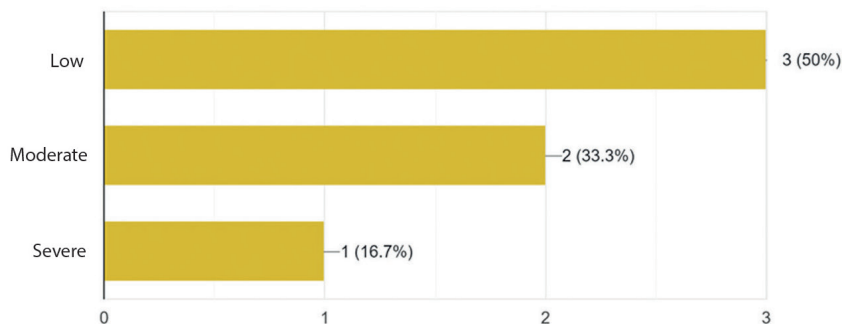


Figure 4c
Level of Disability of Surveys from North Macedonia:

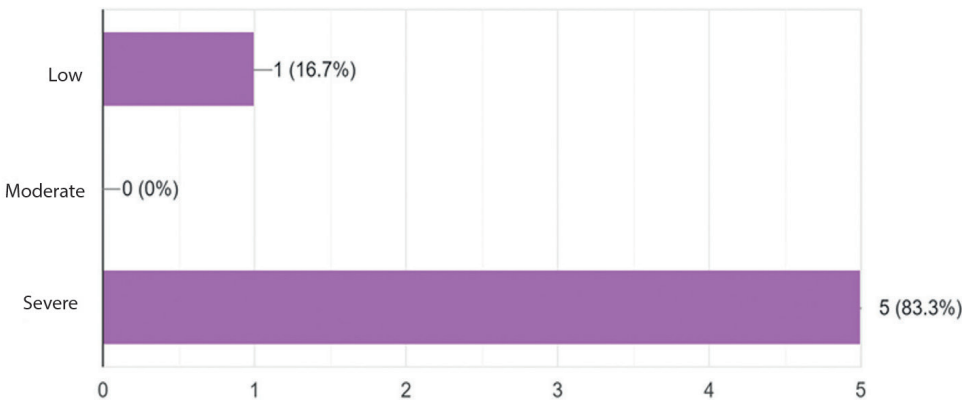


Figure 5a
Education status of all surveys from Bosnia and Herzegovina:

36 responses

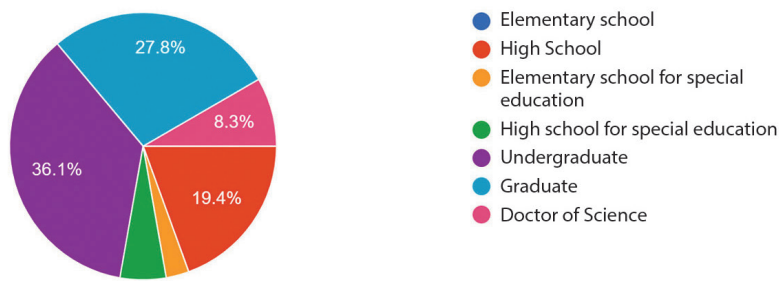


Figure 5b
Education status of all surveys from North Macedonia:

28 responses

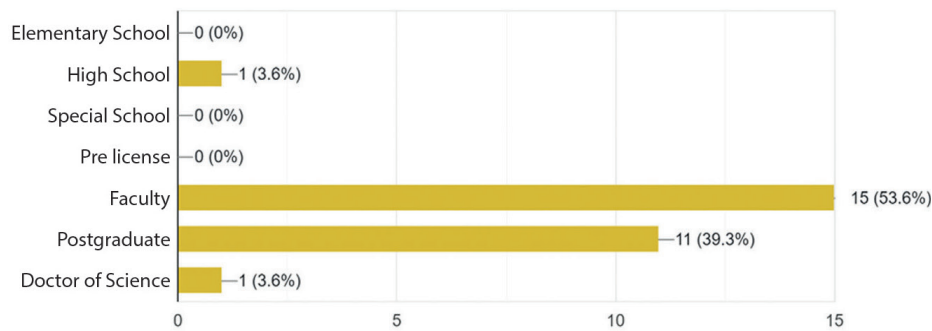


Figure 5c
Education status of all surveys from North Macedonia:

15 responses

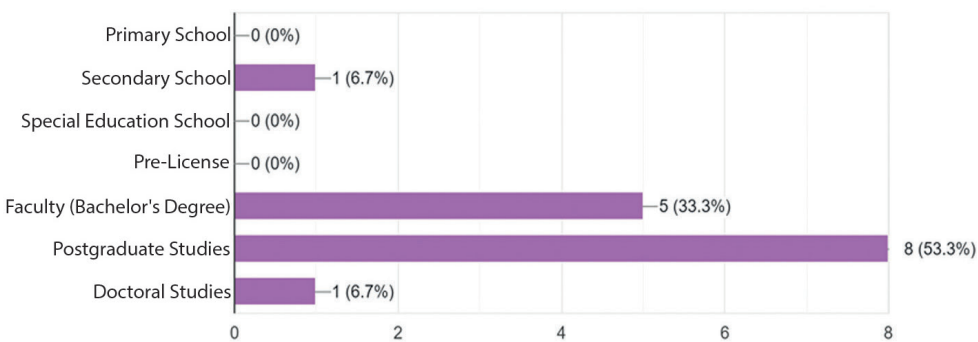


Figure 6a
Employment status of People with Disabilities, their parents, and Caregivers from Bosnia and Herzegovina:

31 responses

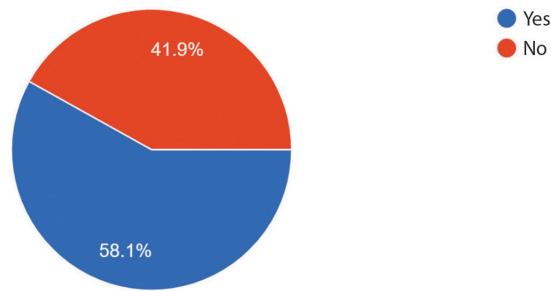


Figure 6b
Employment Status of People with Disabilities, their Parents and Caregivers from North Macedonia:

16 responses

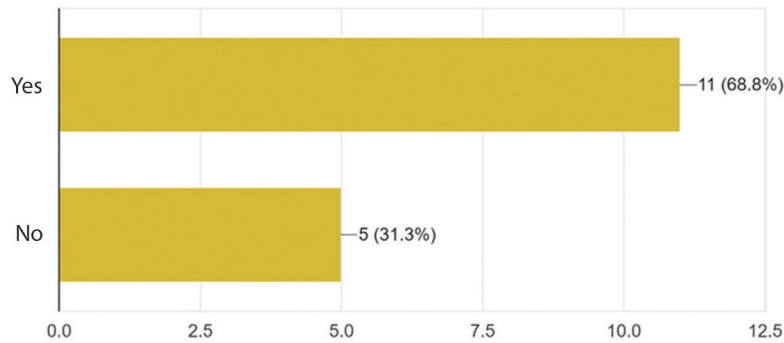


Figure 6c
Employment of People with Disabilities, their Parents and Caregivers in North Macedonia:

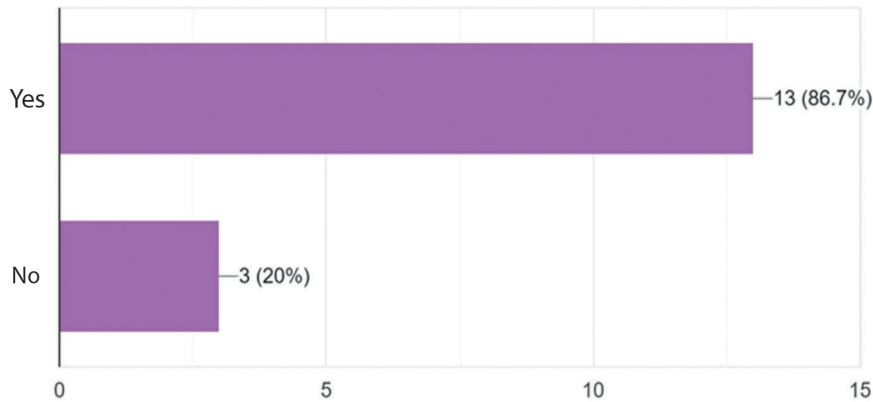


Figure 6d
Representation of Working Fields of Parents and Caregivers of PWDs in Bosnia and Herzegovina

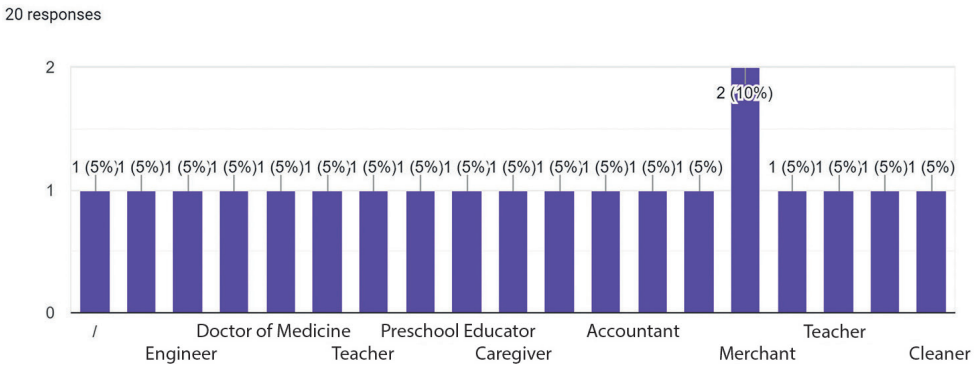


Figure 7a
Marital status of PWDs, caregivers and parents in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

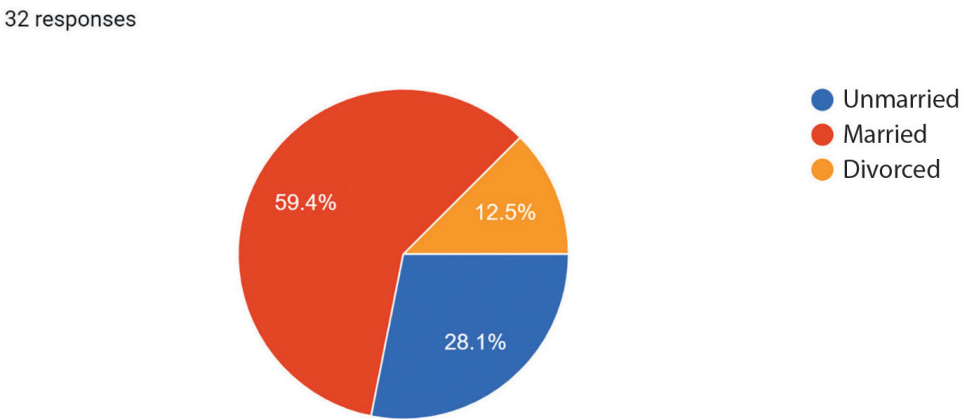


Figure 7b
Marital status of PWDs, caregivers and parents in North Macedonia:

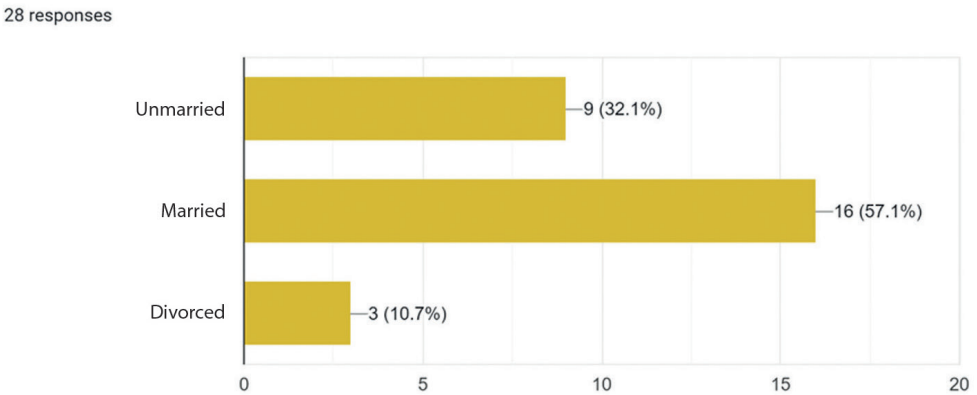


Figure 7c
Marital status of PWDs, caregivers and parents in North Macedonia:

15 responses

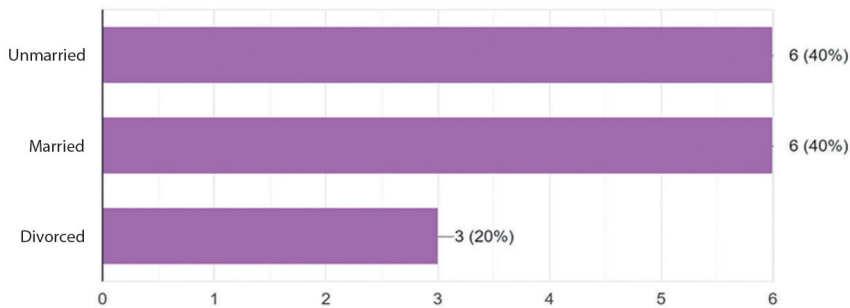


Figure 8a
Need for Assistive Technologies of Participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina

23 responses

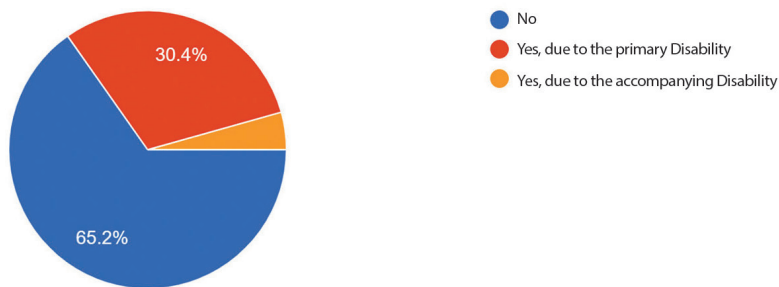


Figure 8b
Need for Assistive Technologies of Participants from North Macedonia:



Figure 9a
Specific Area of Employment of Experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina:

17 responses

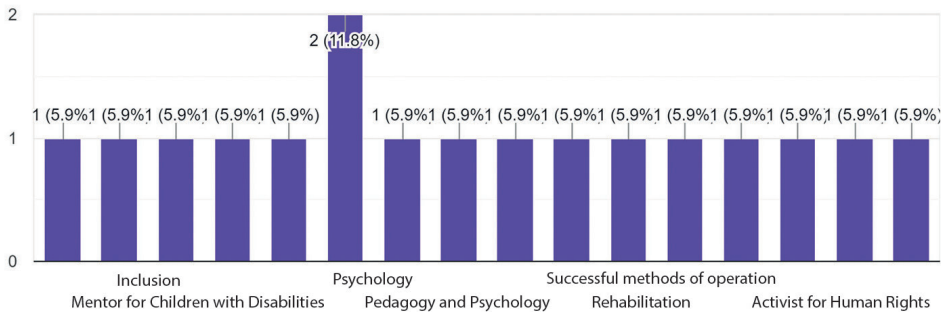


Figure 9b
Specific Area of Employment of Experts from North Macedonia:

28 responses

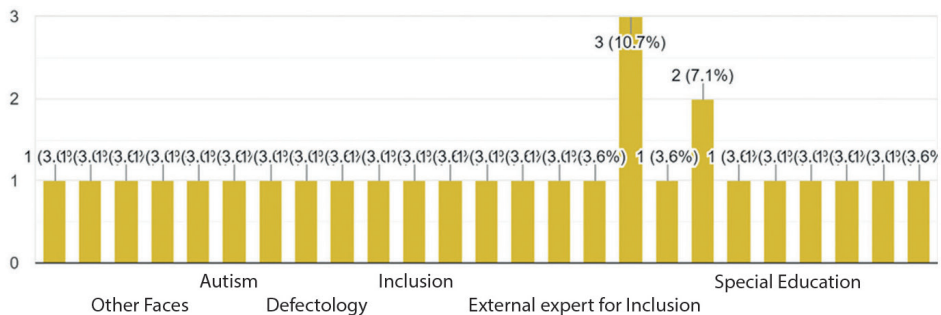


Figure 9c
Specific Area of Employment of Experts from North Macedonia:

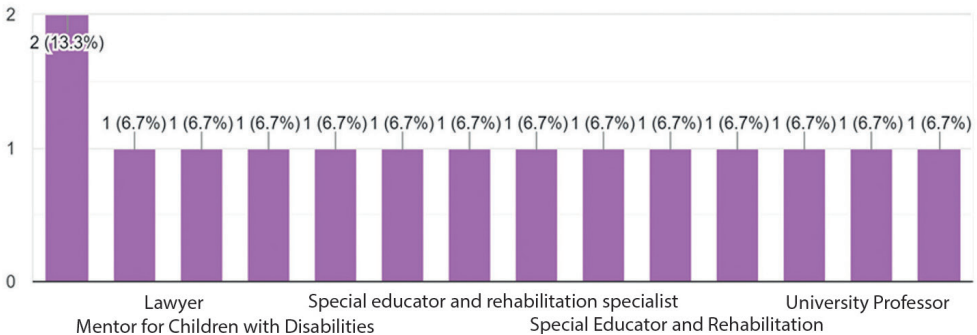


Figure 10a
Experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina Level of Education:

36 responses

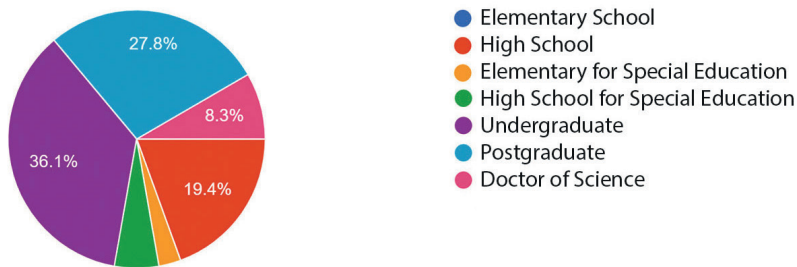


Figure 10b
Experts from North Macedonia Level of Education:

28 responses

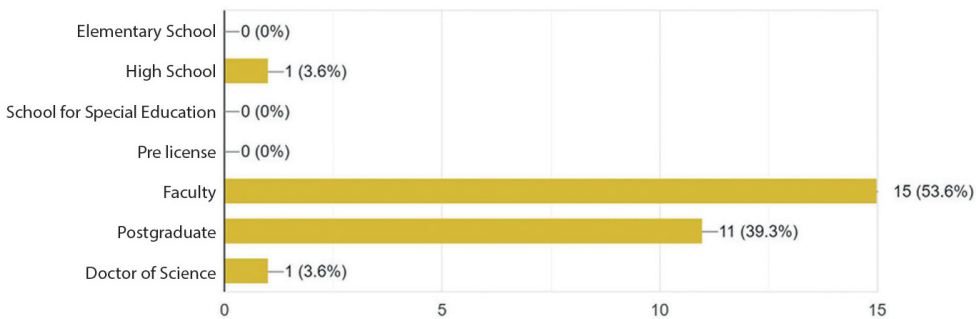


Figure 10c
Experts from North Macedonia Level of Education

15 responses

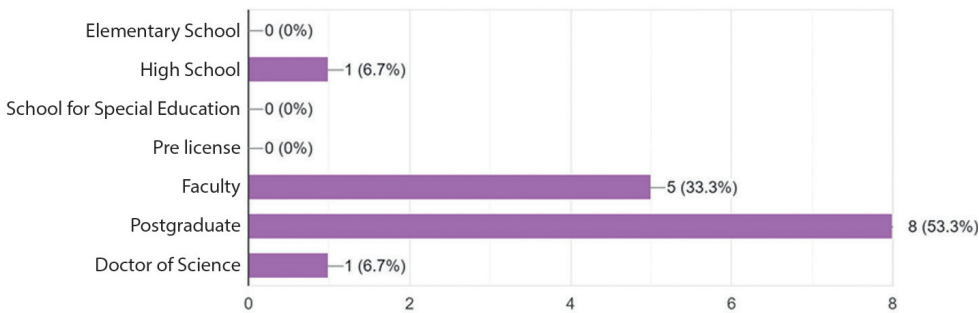


Figure 13
Rating of the Physical Access to Cultural Contents in Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

36 responses

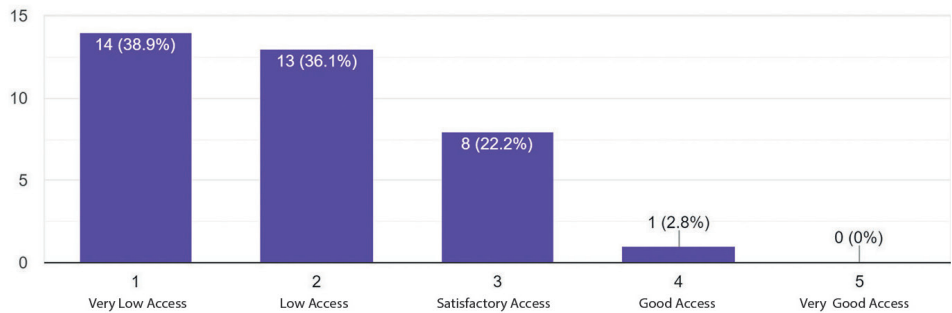


Figure 14
Rating of Access to Parking spaces near cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

36 responses

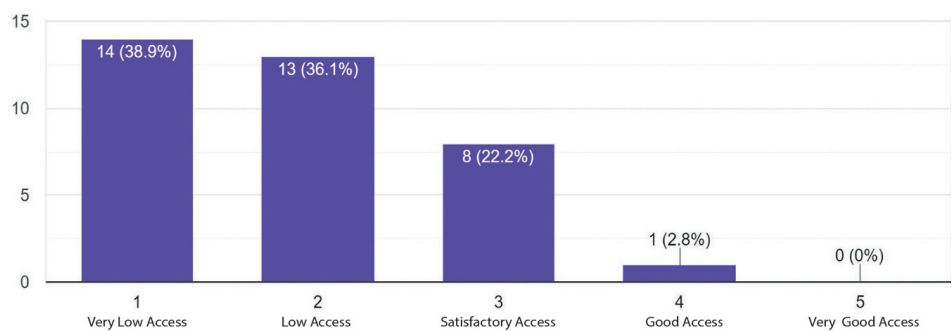


Figure 15
Access to Restaurants, Cafes, and Bars in Cultural Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

36 responses

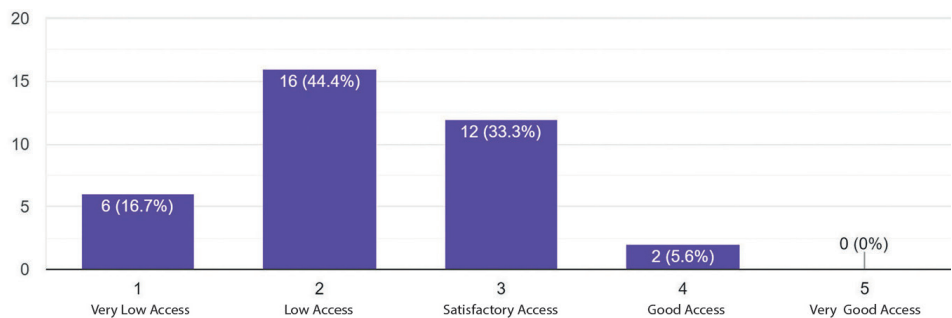


Figure 16
Access to Cafes, Bars, and Restaurants in Cultural Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

36 responses

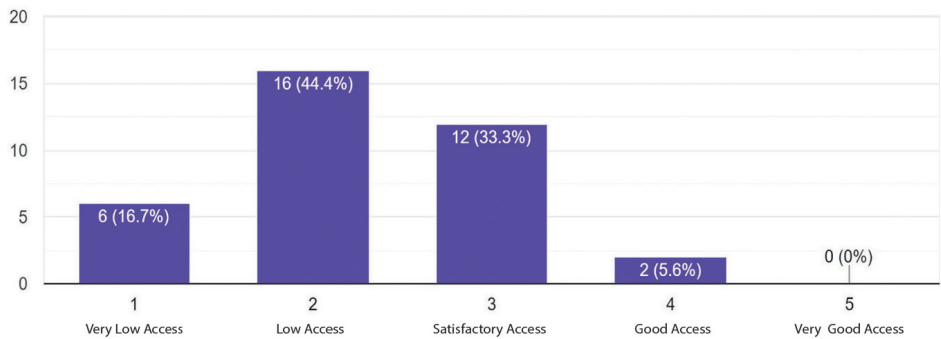


Figure 17
Access to lockers for storing personal belongings in cultural institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

36 responses

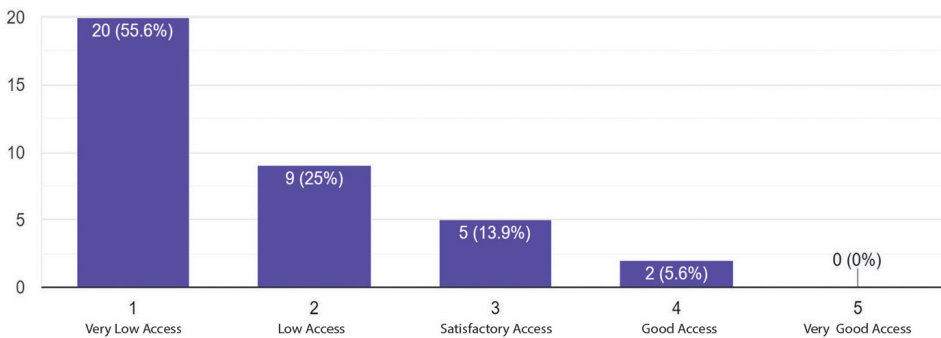


Figure 18
Access to Resting Places (Benches and Chairs) in cultural Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

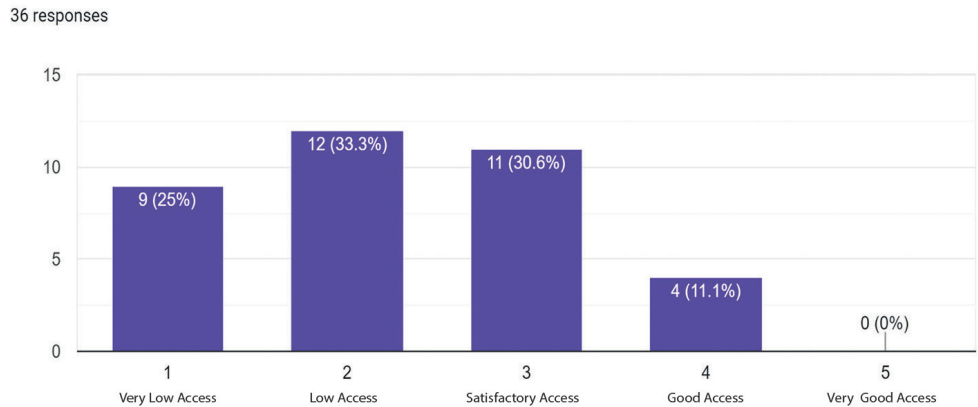


Figure 19
Access to Cash Registers/Information Desk in Cultural Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

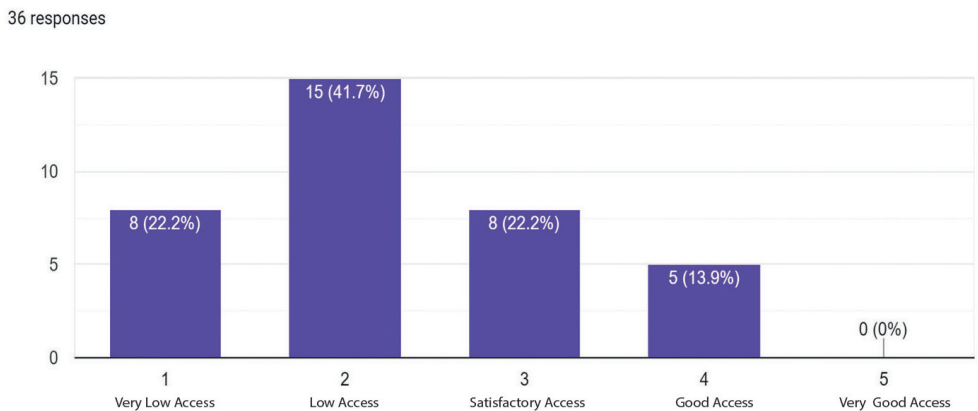


Figure 20
Rating of the Visual Signalization of Cultural Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

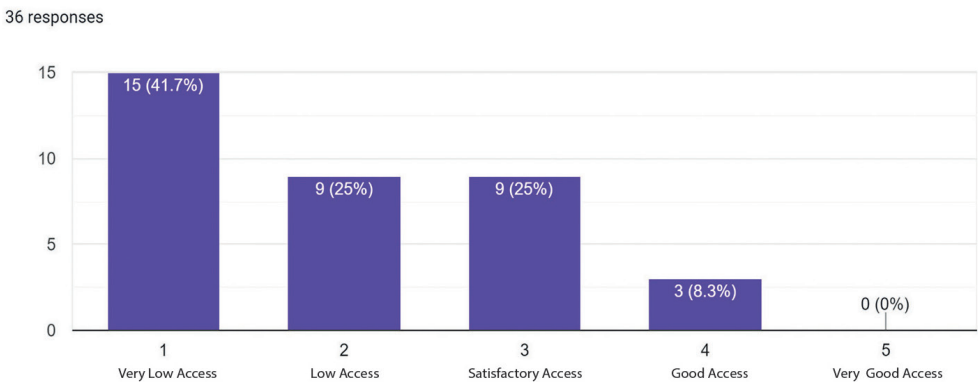
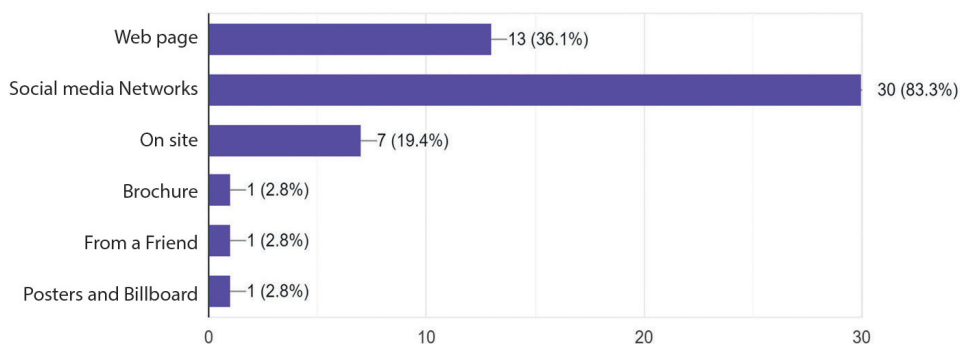


Figure 21a

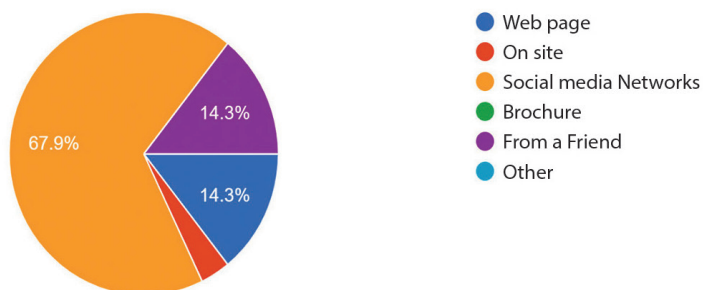
How do surveys in Bosnia and Herzegovina find out about the offers in the museums/sites/ collections:

36 responses

**Figure 21b**

How do surveys in North Macedonia find out about the offers in the museums/sites/ collections:

28 responses

**Figure 21c**

How do surveys in North Macedonia find out about the offers in the museums/sites/ collections:

15 responses

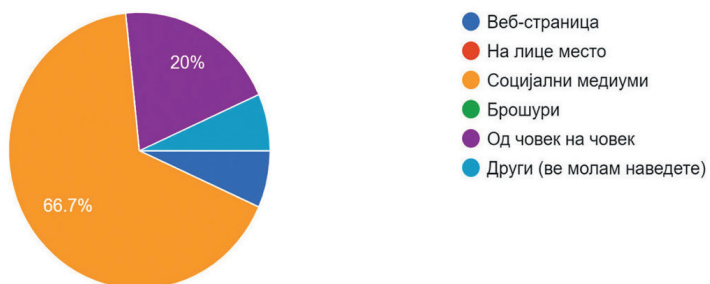


Figure 22
Rating of availability of touristic information in cultural institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

36 responses

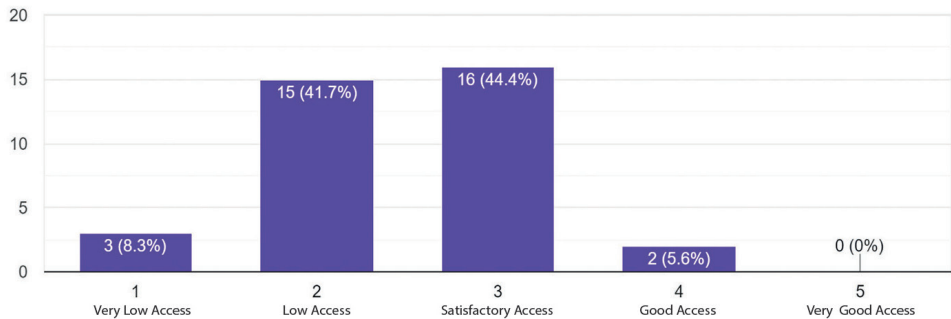


Figure 23
Rating of accessibility of touristic information in cultural institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

36 responses

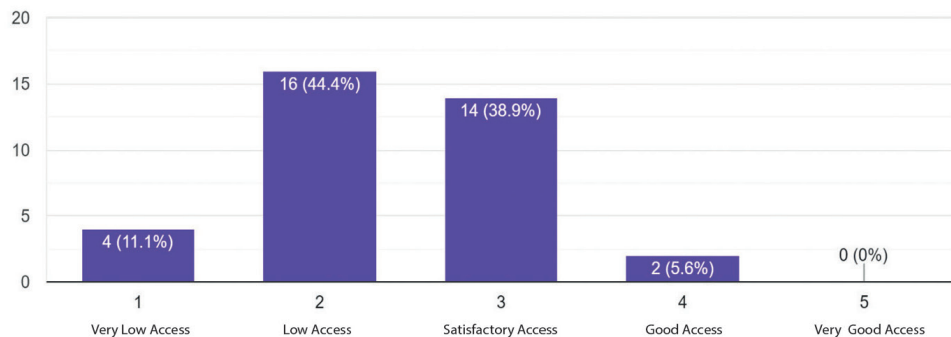


Figure 24a
Rating of availability and accessibility of the information about the cultural contents on the websites of cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

36 responses

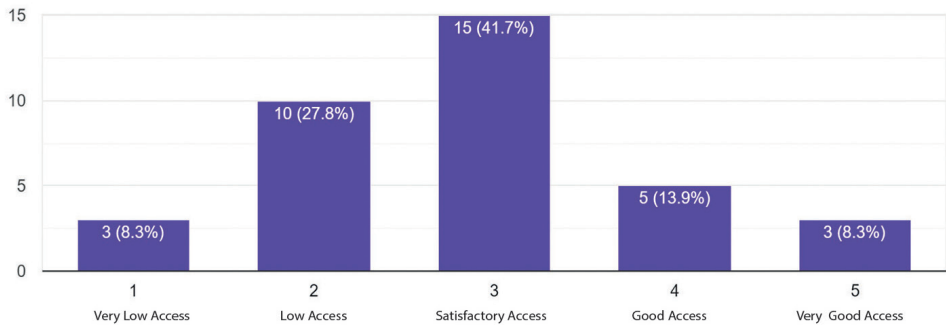


Figure 24b
Rating of availability and accessibility of the information about the cultural contents on the websites of cultural institutions in North Macedonia:

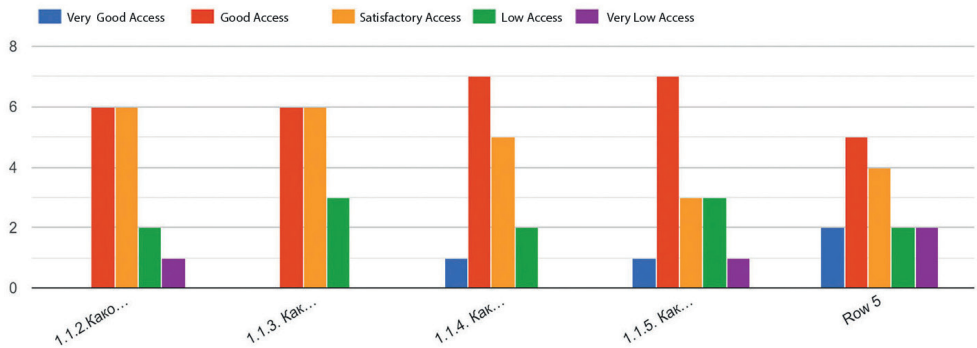


Figure 24c
Rating of availability and accessibility of the information about the cultural contents on the websites of cultural institutions in North Macedonia:

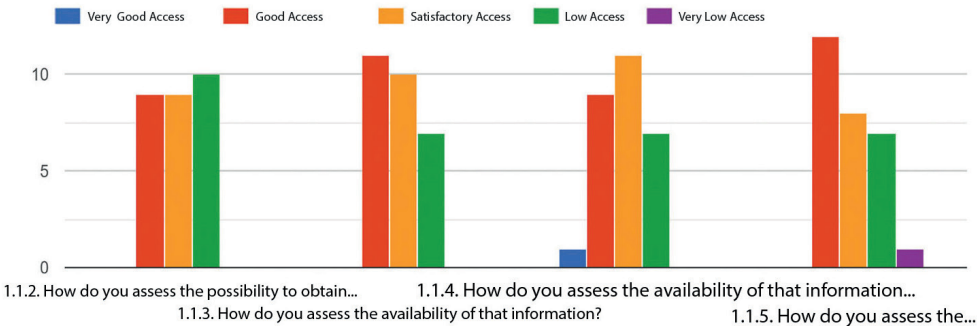


Figure 24d
Rating of the accessibility of the information that explains the cultural contents in the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

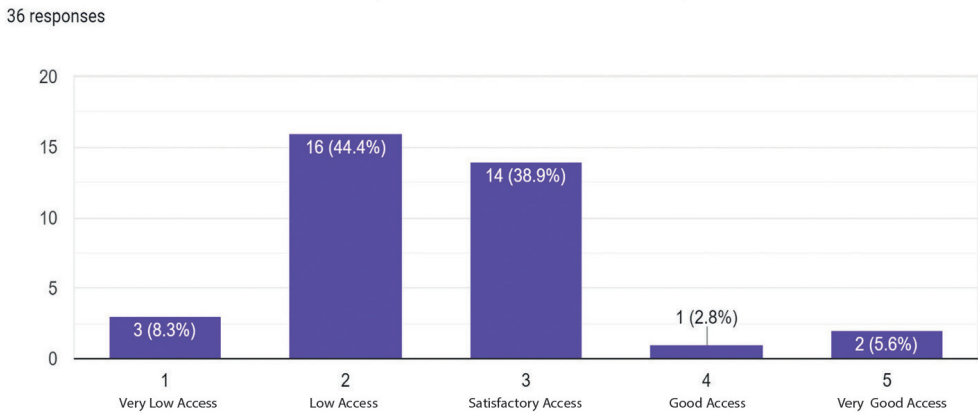


Figure 25a
Alternative ways of content interpretation in cultural institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

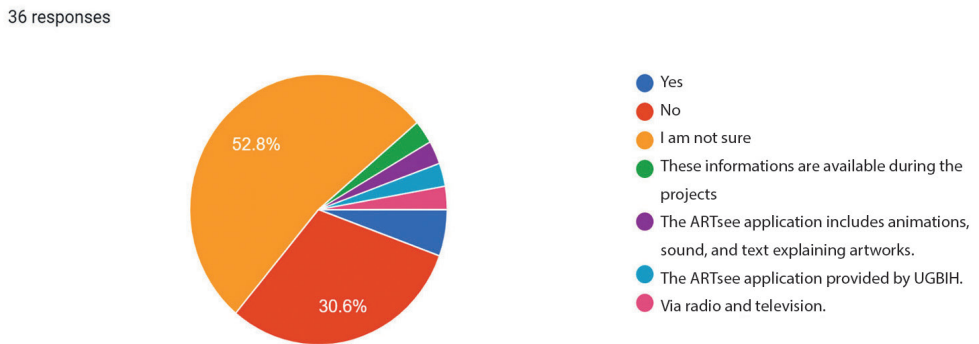


Figure 25b
Alternative ways of content interpretation in cultural institutions of North Macedonia:

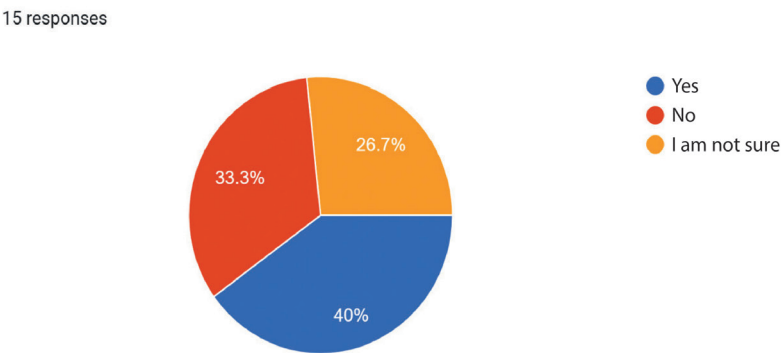
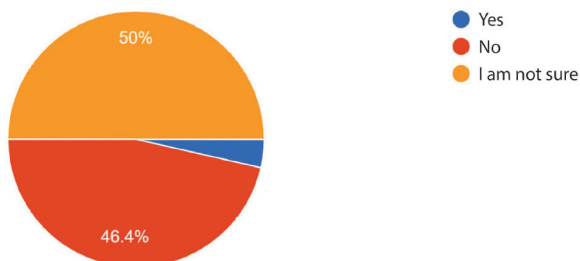


Figure 25c

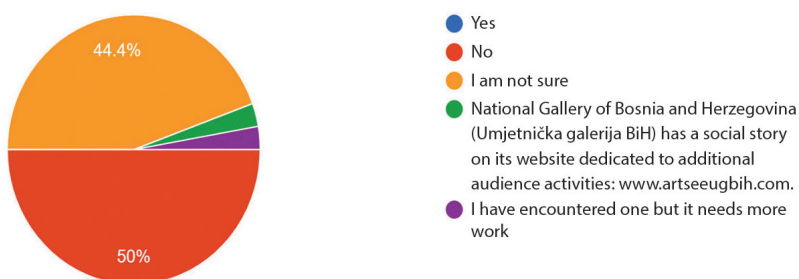
Alternative ways of content interpretation in cultural institutions of North Macedonia:

28 responses

**Figure 26a**

Do cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina offer a social story for people with autistic spectrum disorder?

36 responses

**Figure 26b**

Do cultural institutions in North Macedonia offer a social story for people with autistic spectrum disorder?

15 responses

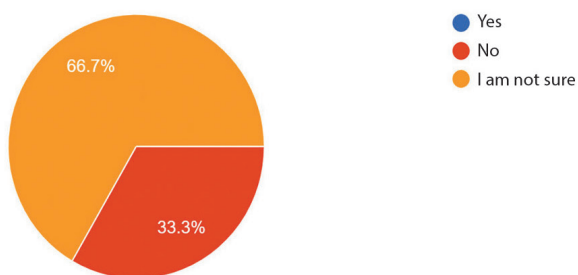


Figure 26c
Do cultural institutions in North Macedonia offer a social story for people with autistic spectrum disorder?

28 responses

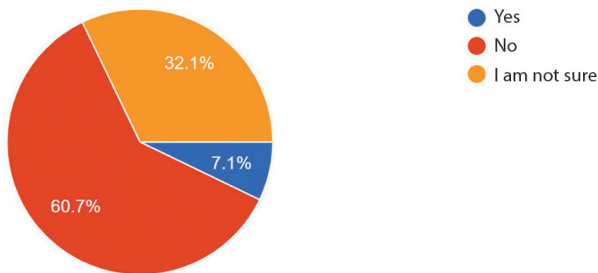


Figure 27a
How much could DTs and applications contribute to sharing knowledge and raising awareness in the cultural institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina?

36 responses

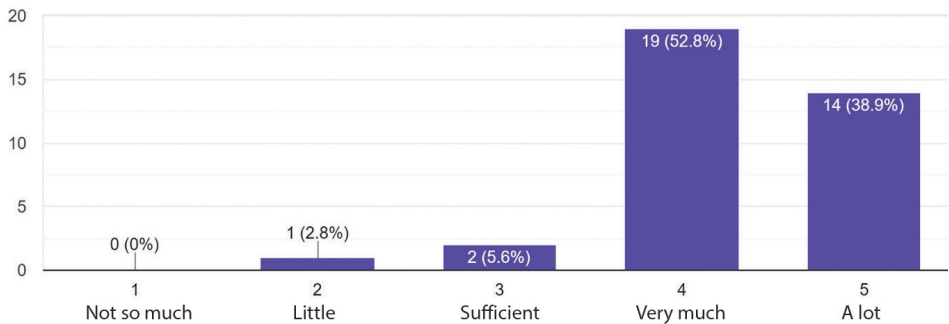


Figure 27b
How much could DTs and applications contribute to sharing knowledge and raising awareness in the cultural institutions of North Macedonia?

15 responses

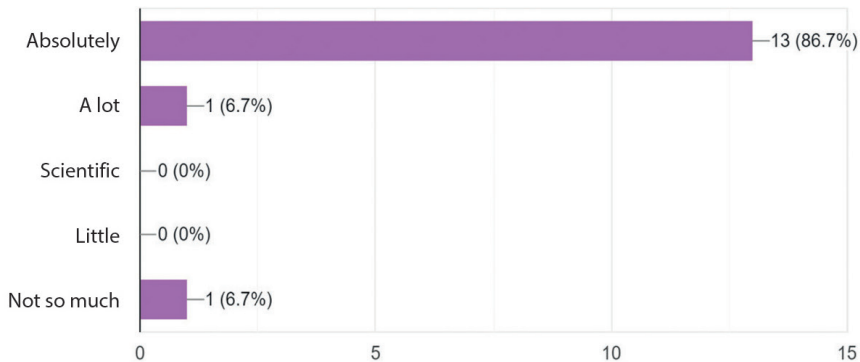


Figure 27c
How much could DTs and applications contribute to sharing knowledge and raising awareness in the cultural institutions of North Macedonia?

28 responses

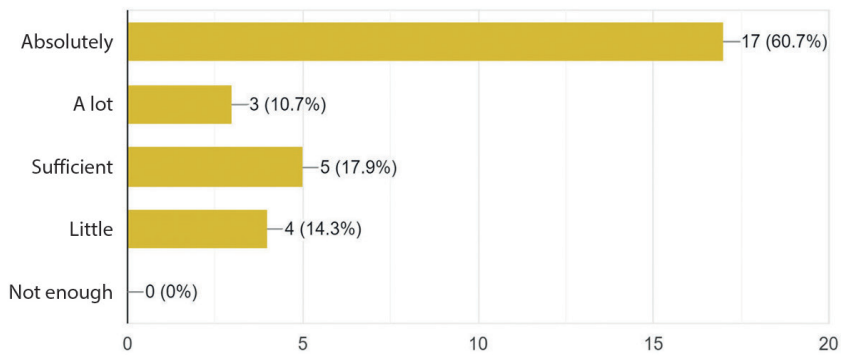


Figure 28a
Do cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina offer tactile replicas for sensory exploration of contents?

36 responses



Figure 28b
Do cultural institutions in North Macedonia offer tactile replicas for sensory exploration of contents?

15 responses

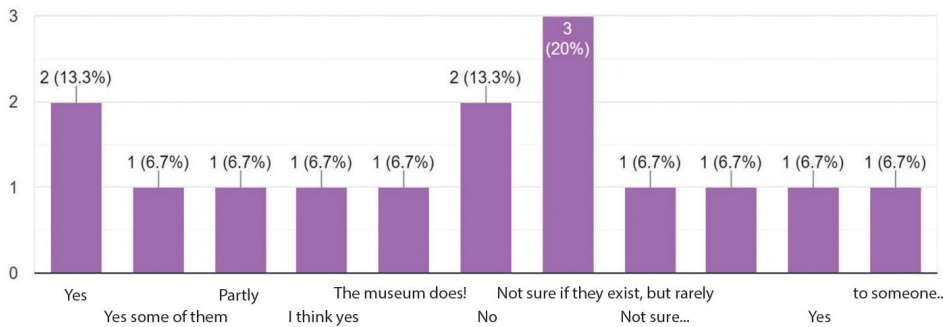


Figure 28c
Do cultural institutions in North Macedonia offer tactile replicas for sensory exploration of contents?

15 responses

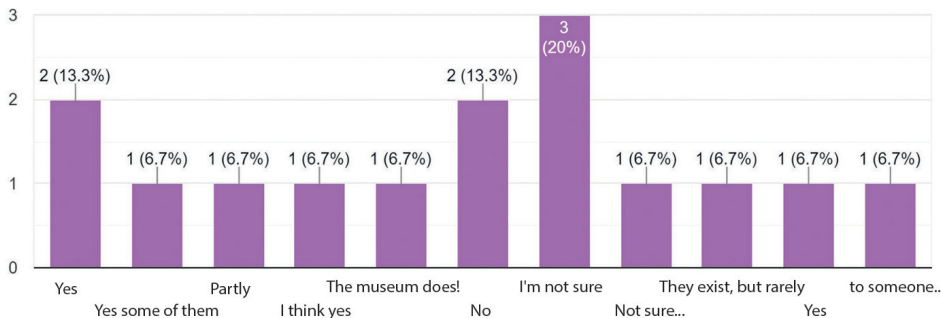


Figure 28d
Do cultural institutions in North Macedonia offer tactile replicas for sensory exploration of contents?

28 responses

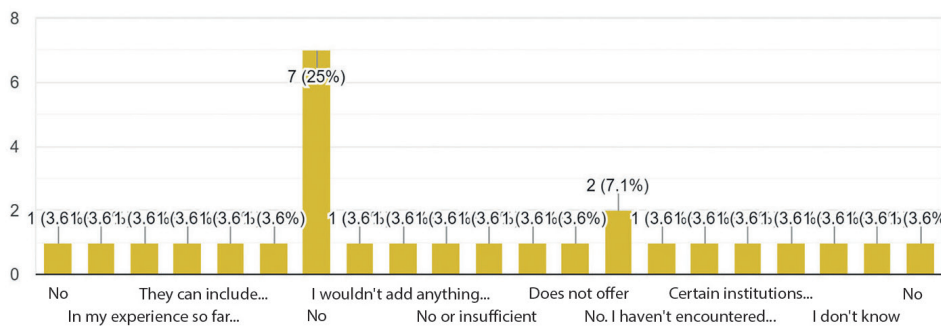


Figure 29a
Do cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina offer additional hands-on activities?

36 responses



Figure 29b
Do cultural institutions in North Macedonia offer additional hands-on activities?

15 responses

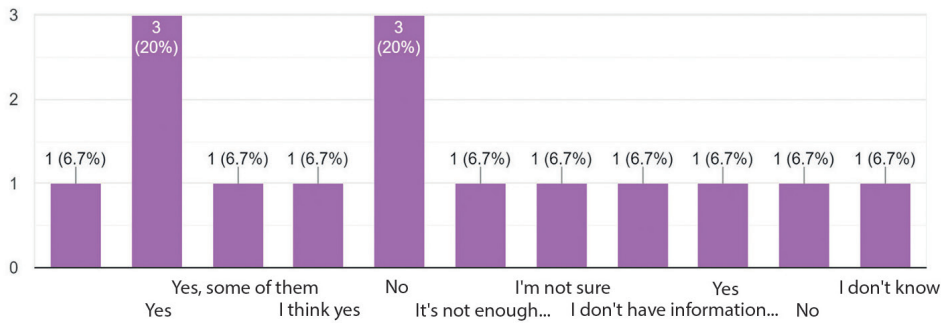


Figure 29c
Do cultural institutions in North Macedonia offer additional hands-on activities?

28 responses

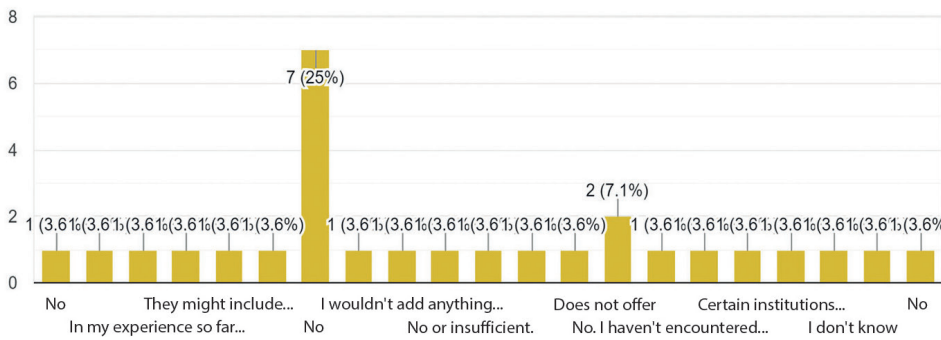


Figure 30a
Condition with glass reflection on the showcases of cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

36 responses

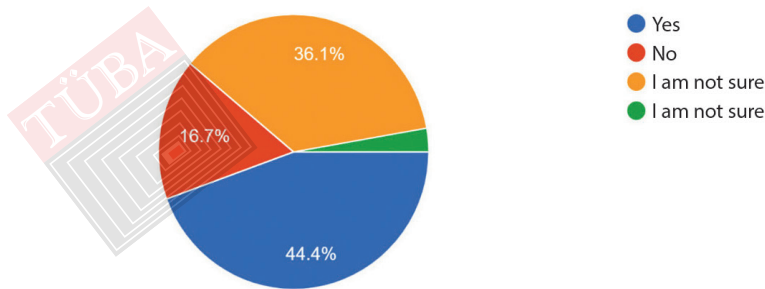


Figure 30b
Condition with glass reflection on the showcases of cultural institutions in North Macedonia:

28 responses

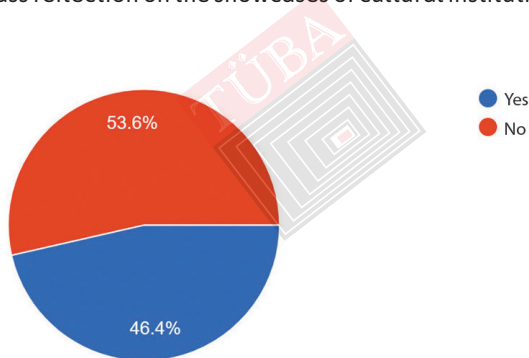


Figure 30c
Condition with glass reflection on the showcases of cultural institutions in North Macedonia:

15 responses

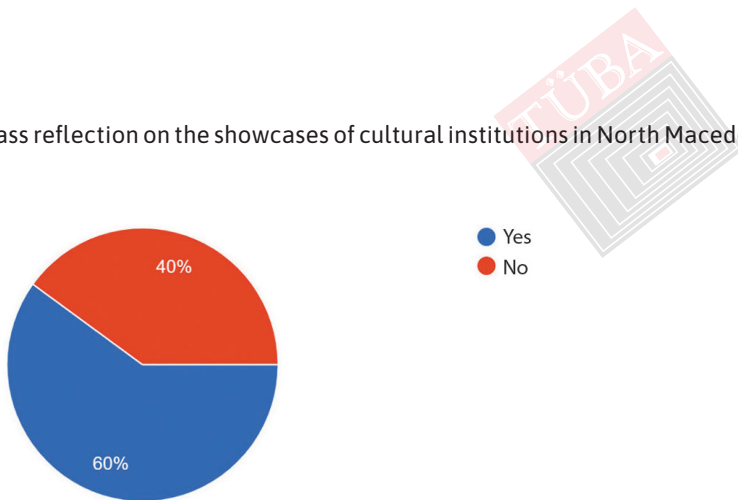


Figure 31a
Knowledge and Helpfulness of staff in Cultural institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina:
36 responses

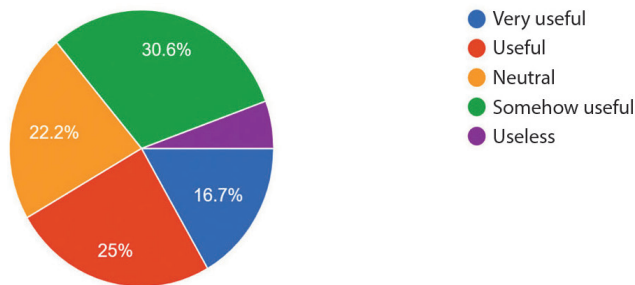


Figure 31b
Knowledge and Helpfulness of staff in Cultural institutions in North Macedonia:
28 responses

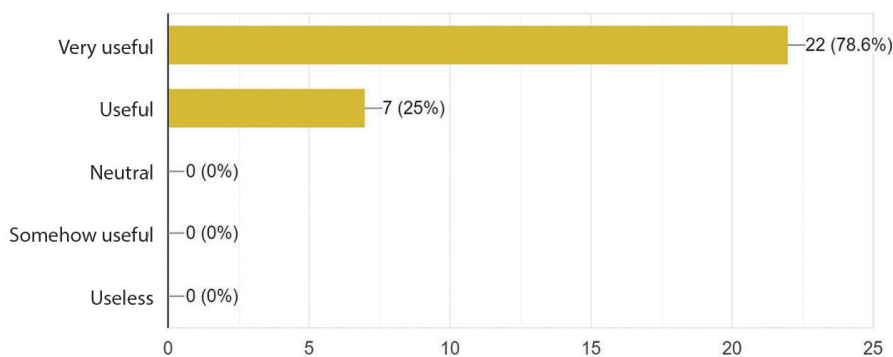


Figure 31c
Knowledge and Helpfulness of staff in Cultural institutions in North Macedonia:
15 responses

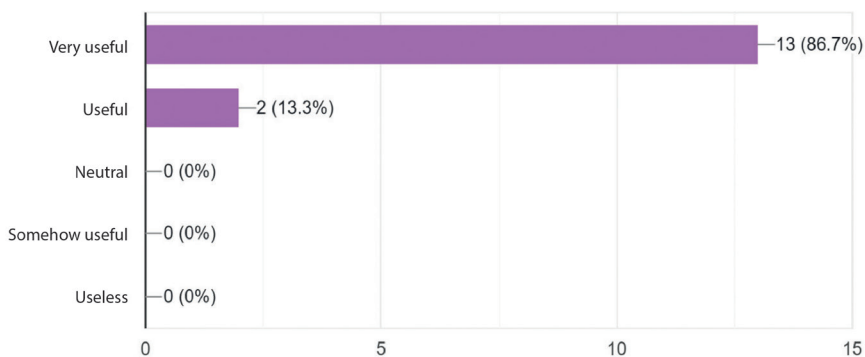


Figure 32a
Reasonably adjusted additional activities and guided tours for PWDs in Bosnia and Herzegovina:
36 responses

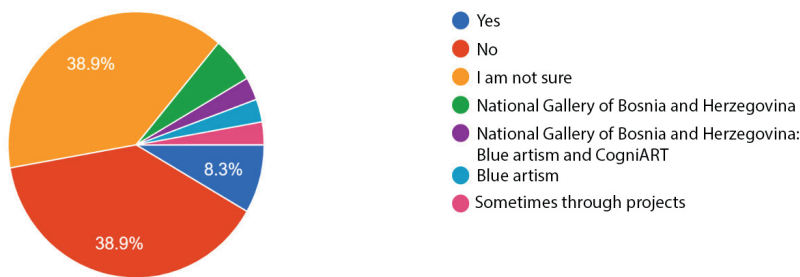


Figure 32b
Reasonably adjusted additional activities and guided tours for PWDs in North Macedonia:
28 responses

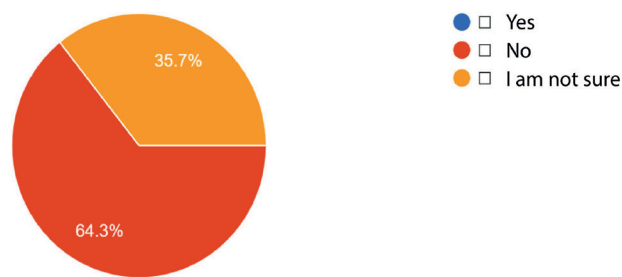
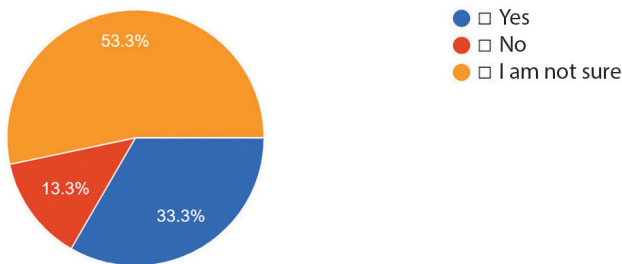


Figure 32c
Reasonably adjusted additional activities and guided tours for PWDs in North Macedonia:
15 responses



Conclusion

Analysis of the Demand Side Survey in Türkiye, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina

The findings from Türkiye, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia demonstrate a shared commitment to improving accessibility and inclusion for individuals with disabilities in the cultural heritage sector. However, these countries also face significant challenges, including architectural barriers, insufficient staff training, and limited awareness of the needs of people with disabilities. The disparities among the countries reflect their different socio-political and economic contexts. While Türkiye has made strides in leveraging digital technologies and implementing inclusive practices, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia are still grappling with foundational issues such as physical accessibility and systemic inclusion strategies.

In all three countries, cultural institutions play a critical role in shaping public perceptions and creating opportunities for social participation. Yet, pervasive stereotypes, elitism in content presentation, and a lack of collaboration with disability-focused organizations hinder progress. The importance of inclusive digital resources, multi-sensory experiences, and targeted training programs emerges as a central theme across all contexts.

Recommendations

For Practice

Enhance Physical Accessibility: Address architectural barriers by ensuring ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and parking spaces are standard features in cultural institutions.

Develop Digital Solutions: Utilize tools such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and tactile devices to create multi-sensory, inclusive cultural experiences.

Tailored Programming: Adapt exhibitions and activities to meet the needs of diverse disability groups, emphasizing sensory experiences and easy-to-understand content.

Staff Training: Provide continuous, evidence-based training for cultural workers, emphasizing empathy, communication, and practical skills for engaging with audiences with disabilities.

Improve Public Awareness: Use social media and accessible online platforms to disseminate information about inclusive programs and opportunities.

Foster Collaborations: Strengthen partnerships with disability-focused organizations, special education institutions, and NGOs to co-develop inclusive initiatives.

For Research

- Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the effectiveness of inclusive initiatives and identify best practices.
- Investigate the impact of multi-sensory experiences on the engagement and learning outcomes of individuals with disabilities.
- Explore the intersection of cultural heritage and therapeutic practices to further social inclusion through art and heritage activities.
- Evaluate parents' and caregivers' experiences to inform the development of family-friendly, inclusive cultural programs.

Comparative Analysis of Findings

Infrastructure and Access

Türkiye has shown progress in implementing digital tools and inclusive designs, but there is still room for improvement in physical accessibility. Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia struggle with basic physical infrastructure, with inaccessible restrooms and parking being significant issues.

Cultural Perception and Awareness

In Türkiye, awareness campaigns and targeted programs have increased public understanding of the importance of inclusion. Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia face challenges in overcoming stereotypes and elitism in cultural content presentation.

Staff Training

All three countries identify staff training as a priority. Türkiye has invested in this area, while efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia are limited due to systemic issues.

Digital Inclusion

Türkiye leads in the use of digital technologies for inclusion, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia have shown a growing interest but limited implementation.

Public Engagement

Across all three countries, social media and digital platforms are underutilized as tools for promoting inclusivity.

Implications

Policy Development

Countries need to adopt inclusive policies aligned with international conventions, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to institutionalize equity in access.

Cross-Border Collaboration

Sharing best practices among Türkiye, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia can accelerate progress by leveraging regional expertise and resources.

Holistic Inclusion Models

Cultural institutions must integrate physical, digital, and social inclusion strategies to address diverse accessibility needs comprehensively.

Funding and Resource Allocation

Governments and international donors should prioritize funding for accessibility improvements, including digital tools and staff training programs. The cultural heritage sector in these areas may get closer to achieving a truly inclusive setting that embraces diversity and guarantees fair participation for everyone by putting these suggestions into practice and filling in the gaps found in this study.

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MA Aida SARAC BERBIC

National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina

e-mail: aidasarac[at]gmail.com

Art Historian with over a decade of working experience in the Art Museum Education Department. Her master's thesis in the subject, "Museum Theory and Practice" (Faculty of Philosophy: University of Sarajevo) proposed a museum-educational program for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, within a broader topic of the museum's social responsibility. Professional interests include museum democratization practices and the digital transformation of museums in the field of audience engagement. The practices she carries out with different types of museum audiences are inseparable from her research into (special) pedagogy in (art) museums and the social responsibility of these institutions. Museum pedagogue and Accessibility and Outreach specialist at the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A member of the Balkan Museum Network Association (BMN), the International Committee of Museums (ICOM), and the Cultural Education and Cultural Action (CECA).

Dr. Irena RUZIN

National Institution Institute and Museum Bitola

e-mail: irenaruzin[at]gmail.com

Her professional work primarily focuses on managing international and national projects, museum marketing and cultural heritage education. She is an active Steering Board member of the Balkan Museum Network, Macedonian representative in the Balkan Museum Access Group, member of ICOM, NEMO LEM, MAAA- Macedonian American Alumni etc. Ruzin is actively involved in EU projects related to cultural heritage, cultural tourism and tourism development strategies. With expertise gained through international training programs, specializations in the USA and UK, study visits in the EU, she continuously shares her knowledge with colleagues across the Balkans. In recent years, has initiated and implemented accessibility and inclusion projects in museums and cultural heritage sites across the Balkans. She is proud of her awards, "Best Project -2023" , "Best Museum Professional- 2022" by the Macedonian ICOM and the prestigious award "Peace broker prize 2025" by Balkan Museum Network.

Prof. Dr. Vladimir TRAJKOVSKI

Macedonian Scientific Society for Autism

e-mail: vladotra[at]fzf.ukim.edu.mk | ORCID: 0000-0002-8369-9501

Prof. Dr. Vladimir Trajkovski is a Full Professor at the Institute of Special Education and Rehabilitation, Faculty of Philosophy, University “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje, Macedonia. With around 29 years of academic experience, his expertise includes human genetics, medical aspects of disability, physiology, and autism spectrum disorders, to which he has been dedicated for 27 years. He is President and co-founder of the Macedonian Scientific Association for Autism. Prof. Trajkovski is Founder and Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences and has held multiple editorial roles. He has led numerous projects, published extensively, and received several prestigious academic awards.

ADDRESSING THE SKILLS GAP IN ACCESSIBILITY FOR HERITAGE AND TOURISM IN TÜRKİYE

Prof. Dr. Muzaffer ŞEKER

Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kevser ÇINAR

Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mürsel DOĞRUL

Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA)

Muhammet Furkan AKBAŞ

Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA)

Abstract

As part of the Erasmus KA220 HED project, the Skills Need Survey attempts to determine the essential competencies required to improve the accessibility of the tourism and heritage industries for people with disabilities. According to the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, because there are about 80 million disabled people in the EU, removing obstacles to accessibility in these areas is a top priority. The survey solicits the views of specialists in tourism, museums, and cultural heritage, who offer a nearly complete understanding of the current state of skills and pinpoint areas requiring improvement to achieve inclusivity. They have an extensive and impressive grasp of the nearly complete skill set required not just to get a job in their field but also to perform effectively in it. Their educational backgrounds, professional experiences, and in some cases, direct involvement with the kind of practices that this survey is interested in (as well as the kind of accessible practices that should have been part of the toolkit even before COVID-19) make them well qualified to speak on these subjects. The survey underscores the importance of concentrated training programs to equip professionals with the hard and soft skills necessary to create an inclusive workplace. The results underscore the essentialness of digital and social media savviness, communication expertise, and tailored staff training in museum management and marketing for making cultural and tourism experiences more accessible. Moreover, age and gender distributions among the respondents underscore the necessity for education and initiatives that are sensitive to gender. The study adds to the literature by identifying key skills gaps and providing practical recommendations to a variety of stakeholders training providers, cultural institutions, and policymakers. The project's efforts to fulfill these needs serve the grander aims of EU policies and international accords that promote the rights and social inclusion of disabled people. The results will help make heritage and tourism in Europe more inclusive and accessible by informing the development of future training initiatives and policy recommendations.

Keywords

Accessibility, Inclusive Tourism, Heritage Sector,
Disability Inclusion, Digital Skills Gap

Introduction

The Skills Need Survey conducted by Erasmus KA220 HED Inclusion Project is key to determining the necessary competencies needed to make the heritage and tourism sectors more accessible to audiences with disabilities. This effort is especially salient in the context of the European Union, where 80 million people of varied abilities constitute a significant and often underserved segment of the populace that faces many hurdles to full societal participation (Qiao et al., 2021). The survey seeks to collect the expert opinions of individuals who work in the cultural heritage, museum, and tourism sectors. More specifically, it aims to amass a trove of data that is, a plain and straightforward reading of the opinions of these experts as a means to achieve two ends: to inform the creation of better and more focused training; and to serve as a catalyst to encourage the adoption of better and more inclusive practices that make these sectors more accessible to people with disabilities (Roleska et al., 2018).

Training and awareness are urgently needed among tourism professionals because of the significantly limited participation of individuals with disabilities in tourism activities. This limitation arises from lacking infrastructure around accessibility and services (Bulgan & Oksay, 2021; Mensah et al., 2015). Given this context, the survey results will help inform a training program customized to the heritage industry. It will help create a tailored fit. The program will do this because it will emerge from a better understanding of what the unique heritage industry requires to adequately serve visitors with disabilities. Research has always indicated that better training makes better human resources in the travel industry (Moris et al., 2019). And we must consider pertinence: The travel operator demographic possesses the “necessary but insufficient” skills and knowledge.

The project seeks to create a more welcoming atmosphere that not only satisfies legal requirements but also improves the overall experience for all guests, irrespective of their abilities, by determining the precise skills needed (Strelnikova et al., 2023; Alqarni, 2023). In line with this purpose, the following research questions were investigated:

1. How do demographic factors such as education level, gender, age, employment, prior experience with disabilities, involvement in inclusive practices influence the engagement of professionals in inclusive practices within the heritage and tourism sectors?
2. What types of training programs (vocational, apprenticeship, accredited education, formal, informal, MOOC, digital/online) do the heritage and tourism professionals have?
3. What are the barriers to accessibility in cultural spaces?
4. What are the key skills required by professionals in the heritage and tourism sectors to effectively serve audiences with disabilities?
5. How do tourism and cultural operators perceive the impact of their customer service, problem-solving, and accessibility upgrade practices on the experience and satisfaction of visitors with disabilities?
6. What are the key inclusive skills required by professionals in the heritage and tourism sectors to effectively serve audiences with disabilities?
7. What are the primary barriers and challenges preventing the implementation of inclusive practices in the heritage and tourism sectors, and how can they be overcome?

Methodology

This section presents the study design, participants, data collection tools, data collection process, and data analysis steps. The paragraphs that follow offer thorough explanations. A qualitative research approach was used in this study in order to gather detailed information on the topic. This study attempted to shed light on the current state of affairs in Türkiye by identifying the skills required to improve the heritage and tourism sectors' accessibility for audiences with disabilities based on the experiences of stakeholders. By obtaining opinions from experts in the fields of cultural heritage, museums, and tourism, it hopes to inform the creation of focused training initiatives and encourage inclusive behavior. Through the use of multiple data collection methods and a multifaceted data collection process, the concurrent

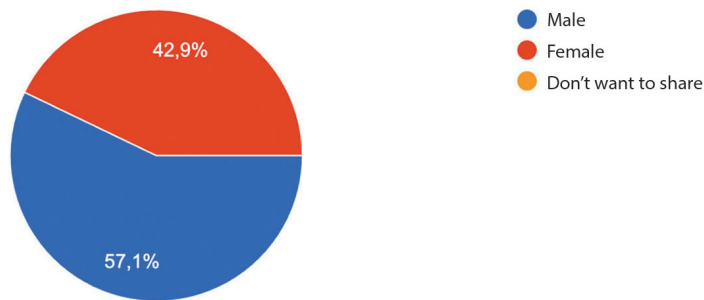
transformative design one of the mixed method research designs was utilized to provide data diversification and reveal a comprehensive situation with regard to Türkiye (Creswell, 2013).

Demographic Information

Gender Distribution of Respondents

Figure 1
Gender Distribution of Respondents

105 responses



Male: 42.9%
Female: 57.1%

Women accounted for 57.1% of the participants, making them the majority of responders. This may reflect the demographics the survey was aimed at, or it may suggest that the heritage and tourism industries attract a slightly higher proportion of female professionals. It’s easier to make training programs that guarantee inclusivity for all genders when you can actually see the gender balance. The Skills Need Survey had a significant lean toward female respondents. Of those who responded to the Skills Need Survey, 57% were female and 42% were male. Where the distribution across genders was known, the numbers were significantly skewed toward female respondents. Women make up a significant portion of the workforce in the heritage and tourism industries, especially in positions involving hospitality and customer service (Sánchez et al., 2015). This is a trend that exists at large within those two fields, too.

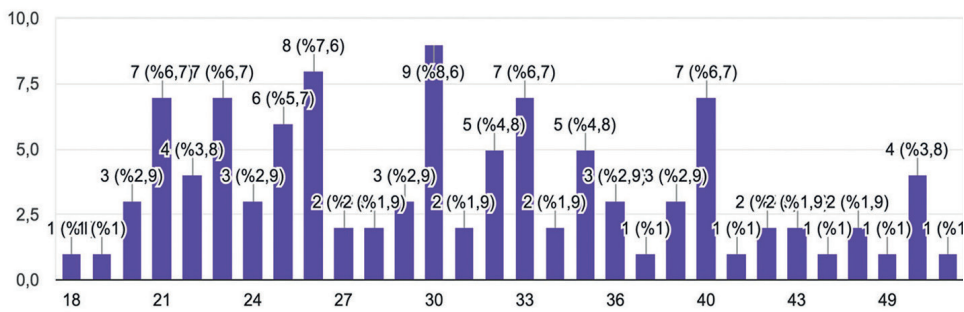
The creation of training initiatives intended to promote gender inclusivity in the heritage industry hinges on understanding the industry’s workforce. Recent studies (Ferguson & Alarcón, 2014; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2011) have reminded

us that even when the tourism and heritage sectors overtly include a gender perspective in policy, practice, or initiative, it doesn't automatically solve or even significantly alleviate the problem profoundly rooted in the industry of unequal treatment of women and men. Most of the people who answered the survey were female, so the training programs can focus on preparing women for leadership in their field and clearing the path for them to get there. Women encounter numerous hurdles that prevent them from taking on leadership roles, and training programs can concentrate on not just preparing women to lead but also on countering the forces that don't want women to lead (Domecq et al., 2020). The tourism sector is intricate and multifaceted, with many layers to its gender dynamics.

The tourism sector is intricate and multifaceted, with many layers to its gender dynamics. Women may prevail in some parts, but they are often underrepresented when it comes to making decisions and leading the charge. This “double gender gap” means that men and women who work in tourism are not on equal footing (Domecq et al., 2020). This also means that we are not taking full advantage of women's talents, energies, and ideas. And it means something else: Studies show that organizations perform better when their teams are diverse. So fostering gender diversity can only help the heritage and tourism sectors do better (Sánchez et al., 2015).

Figure 2
Age Distribution of Respondents

105 responses



Age Distribution of Respondents

This bar graph represents the distribution of participants' ages who took part in the skills needs survey. A total of 105 responses were recorded. Below is a detailed analysis based on the age groups:

With nine participants (8.6%), the age group of 30 years old has the highest participation rate. With 8 participants, the age group of

27 years old has the second-highest percentage (7.6%). With seven participants (6.7%), the age groups of 21, 27, and 40 years old are also well represented. With percentages ranging from 4–8% to 5–7%, the age groups of 24, 29, 33, and 36 exhibit moderate participation. The participation is fairly evenly distributed between the ages of 18 and 40, indicating widespread involvement from a variety of age groups. Younger and older age groups show lower participation, with one participant (1%) at age 18, one participant (1%) at age 43, and one participant (1%) at age 49.

Participants in the survey ranged in age from 18 to 49, which is a fairly diverse range. The Skills Need Survey's participant age distribution shows a wide variety of respondents, with a noticeable concentration in the mid- to late-20s and early-30s. The 30-year-old age group has the highest participation rate (8.6%), closely followed by the 27-year-old age group (7.6%). This clustering shows that the survey's topic appeals most to professionals who are relatively young. This might be related to a growing interest among these individuals in the travel and heritage industries.

The literature confirms that younger populations are participating in increasing numbers in tourism and associated activities around cultural heritage. For instance, Chaika (2023) indicates that this may well be because the young and creative generations hold the very tools that can make cultural heritage tourism more vital and interactive. Rather than passively absorbing the experiences that tourism has to offer, these decades-long stakeholders in a tourism economy are so Chaika argues, and our findings imply active co-creators in the cutting-edge and interactive presentations of what gets called “cultural heritage.”

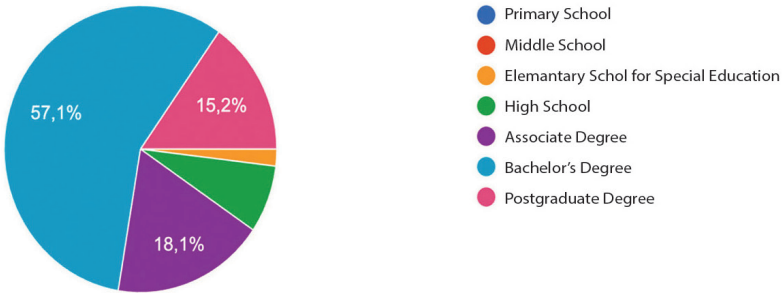
The survey demonstrates a decrease in the participation of older age groups, especially those above 40, in the tourism industry. This trend is reflected in the literature. Scheyvens comments on the underrepresentation of older populations in the burgeoning tourism industry, noting that older individuals may require other strategies to boost their involvement (Scheyvens, 2011). The literature also highlights the critical nature of age diversity in the heritage and tourism sectors. Petrova and Hristov argue that the inclusion of a wide range of age groups in the collaborative management and planning of urban heritage tourism is beneficial. They maintain that each age group brings to the table a unique perspective and

set of life experiences that serve to enhance the management of heritage sites and the urban tourism sector as a whole (Petrova & Hristov, 2014). They make an important point one that is applicable not just in the field of urban tourism and heritage planning but also in many other areas about the vitality of creating a culture of inclusivity across the ages.

After age 40, participation slightly decreases, suggesting that fewer respondents are from older age groups. A good number of respondents are in their mid- to late-twenties and early-thirties, which may indicate that they are especially interested in or involved with the skills needs survey. The data shows that there is a good representation of all age groups, but the majority of respondents are in their late 20s to early 30s.

Educational Background

Figure 3
Educational Background
105 responses



Primary School: 1%
Secondary School: 6.7%
High School: 15.2%
Associate Degree: 18.1%
Bachelor's Degree: 57.1%
Graduate/Postgraduate: 18.1%

More than half (57.1%) of the survey respondents held a bachelor's degree, and nearly one in five (18.1%) had a graduate or postgraduate degree. This realization emphasizes the necessity of advanced, specialized training designed for professionals with more education. The Skills Need Survey respondents have a strong educational background. 57.1% of them hold bachelor's degrees, and 18.1% possess graduate or postgraduate degrees. This distribution indicates that the

tourism and heritage sectors attract people with a high level of education. That is vital because we need precisely that group to develop and carry out initiatives that provide training targeted to this demographic. This is important for two reasons. First, this workforce is very capable of undertaking specialized training. Second, the heritage and tourism sectors are much more attractive, for some reason, than other parts of the economy to people with that level of educational achievement.

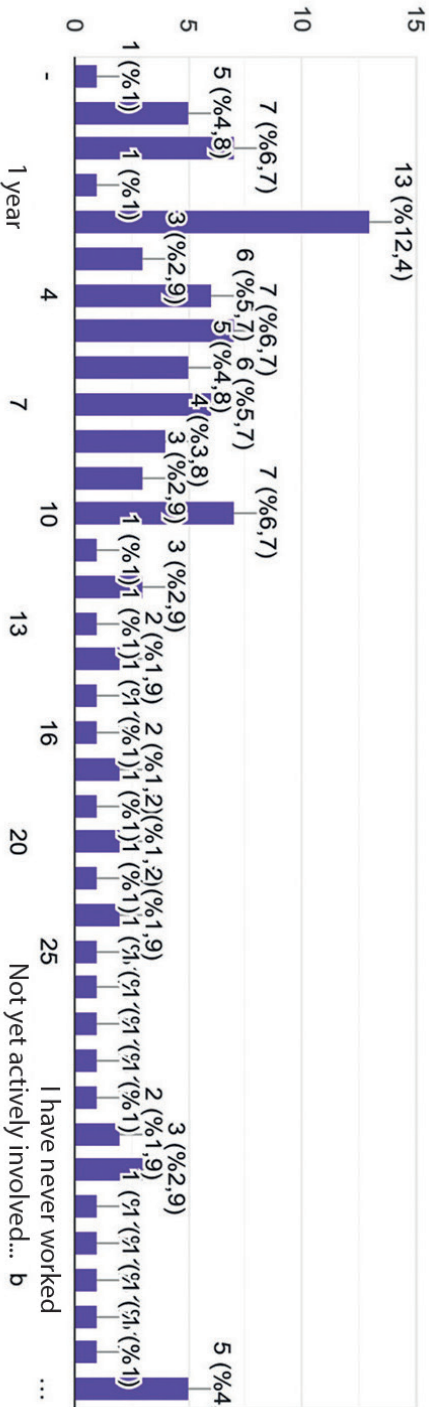
The existence of a large body of higher education among the professionals who work in the heritage and tourism sectors is not just an accident. It is underscored and emphasized by some very important literature that stresses the necessity of having more training and education at the advanced level in these two fields. For example, Lungu and her colleagues (2023) points out the urgent need for a much more qualified cohort of professionals who specialize in (and can teach) heritage and tourism, that is, well-trained experts who will be in a position to make crucial professional decisions as the industry keeps on growing and shifting especially in light of changing consumer demands and the rise of new tourism trends.

The advanced training and education in heritage and tourism sectors underpin the prevalence of higher education among professionals in these fields. For instance, Lungu and her colleagues stresses the necessity of having higher education system train professionals and tourism specialists for new jobs in the tourism sector, especially since consumer demands are changing and we are experiencing new kinds of tourism (Lungu et al., 2023). And this is consistent with what the survey seems to be saying something like 60 percent of the respondents hold degrees that give them the authority, if not the expertise, to deal with the challenging problems concerning the tourism sector.

Additional research indicates that the heritage tourism sector is starting to put a greater premium on specialized knowledge and skill, particularly in areas like sustainable tourism and cultural heritage management. For example, Nega (2018) brings to light the absolute necessity of having educational programs that equip people for these responsibilities by discussing the crucial role that qualified professionals play in managing World Heritage Sites. Since sizable percentage of respondents have educational backgrounds that put them right in the sweet spot of fitting the profiles associated with heritage tourism management, the results point in the direction of the industry really valuing what those respondents have to offer.

Affiliation/Organization Working Experience

Figure 4
Affiliation / Organization Working Experience
105 responses



1 year: 1%

4–7 years: 6.7%

7–10 years: 6.7%

10–13 years: 12.4%

13–16 years: 5.7%

More than 25 years: 6.7%

Data from the Skills Need Survey indicate that those providing work experience have an extensive and diverse professional background. Much of this experience, though, seems to be in the range of 10–13 years. This is a solid span of time for the people involved to have accumulated a good amount of knowledgeable expertise. Their background also suggests that training curricula ought to be cutting edge and useful, integrating real-world applications because they can more accurately gauge what is applicable and what isn't due to their having been on both sides of the experience equation.

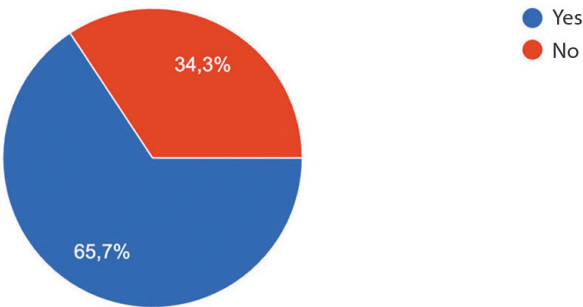
The notion that experienced professionals sharply improve the effectiveness of training programs is well substantiated. They stress how vital it is to build community engagement and local expertise into planning processes, especially when dealing with kinds of heritage that are harder to pin down, like tourism (Esfehani & Albrecht, 2019). They argue that experienced professionals are better better at spotting the gaps in knowledge and skills that need to be addressed, which makes training all the more relevant.

The literature emphasizes the extreme importance of tailoring training curricula to the distinct needs of advanced professionals. Seddighkhaidek and Jamal (2022) shed light on the depth and complexity of cultural heritage management, and their concentration on the associations between tangible and intangible cultural heritage can indeed guide the (re)creation of effective training curricula. However, they do not target seasoned tourism professionals with their research, and thus the significance of their findings remains partially underutilized within the field of cultural and heritage studies.

Although work experience in the tourism and heritage sectors is highlighted by the necessity of ongoing professional development. Ramírez-Guerrero et al. (2021) point out that experienced employees can benefit greatly from retraining that builds on their prior knowledge and sharpens their skills. According to the survey's findings, training programs should be tailored to the requirements of people with more work experience if we are to keep them competitive and productive in their positions.

Prior Experience with Disability Audiences

Figure 5
Prior Experience with Disability Audiences
105 responses



Yes: 34.3%
No: 65.7%

Most of the participants (65.7%) had never worked with disabled audiences before. This underscores the urgent need for training that not only covers the basics of serving individuals with disabilities but also digs deep into the kind of inclusive practices that allow for varied lived experiences and those that even behind-the-scenes staff can perform. Future training must have a tri-fold focus on the awareness, empathy, and specialized skills that virtually all staff will need if they are to serve their audiences with disabilities effectively. A significant knowledge gap exists in the workforce concerning inclusive practices, as evidenced by the large number of respondents to the Skills Need Survey who have no prior experience working with disabled audiences. They make up 65.7% of the total.

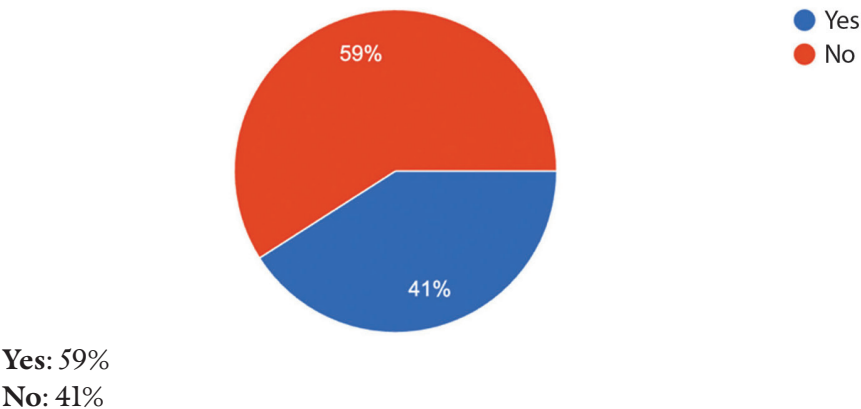
The pressing necessity for training that specifically targets the awareness, empathy, and the particular skills required to serve audiences with disabilities was underscored by this study. This supports the survey’s finding that without sufficient training, cultural heritage operators and tourism staff could have a hard time meeting the diverse needs of visitors with disabilities (Nseibo et al., 2022). They contend that in the absence of adequate training, teachers might find it difficult to accommodate the various needs of students with disabilities, a situation that also applies to the heritage and tourism industries. It makes a strong case for having well-formulated training programs so that these two groups can have meaningful interactions with audiences that have disabilities.

This means that specific training is required for a better and deeper understanding of the unique needs and issues of disabled people, despite some professionals maybe having informal knowledge. The survey indicates that the professionals we looked at do not have this neat experience. Additionally, the work of Kanari and Souliotou (2021) along with our study emphasizes just how significant it is to train professionals. It will be hard to create a truly inclusive environment until dealing with the stereotypes that certain groups hold and raising the level of awareness about disabilities to where it should be. According to their finding, it is not sufficient just to gain understanding; attitudes and practical skills must also be aligned to make those trained truly effective. Another gap our dataset revealed is the lack of real-world experience that a good proportion of the individuals surveyed have. That indicates an area where we could really use some focused professional development.

This lack of experience points to the need for training programs that focus on the daily difficulties that individuals with disabilities face in the realms of culture and heritage. It underscores the importance of having more seasoned employees to train and mentor those who are new to the field and who are trying to bring about a cultural shift in favor of individuals with disabilities.

Involvement in Inclusive Practices

Figure 6
Prior Experience with Disability Audiences
105 responses



The Skills Need Survey found that 41% of participants do not engage in inclusive practices, while 59% do. This shows that while inclusivity is becoming more popular, a sizable section of the industry has not yet fully embraced these concepts. This discrepancy shows that more work is required to support and facilitate inclusive practices everywhere since nearly half of the professionals in the heritage and tourism fields are not engaging in inclusive practices. The surveys' results hint that the industry far too often gives lip service to the concept of inclusivity, while many of its professionals seem to act in ways that are directly opposed to the idea.

The literature suggests that there are still many obstacles to overcome for inclusivity to be fully adopted, even though it is gaining popularity. For example, Krischler and his colleagues (2019) discuss how attitudes regarding inclusive education can really affect not just the quality, but also the amount, of inclusive practices that get adopted. And as they see it, having a positive attitude is kind of a prerequisite to even cultivating the environment that would allow inclusive practices to flourish. Furthermore, in order to identify successful inclusive practices, Juvonen and his colleagues (2019) point out attitude as an important variable focusing the significance of cooperation between researchers and practitioners.

This cooperative approach can help address the gap highlighted in the survey by promoting the exchange of knowledge and experiences that can lead to more widespread adoption of inclusive practices across the sector. The professionals might not have had the opportunity to engage in practices of inclusion because of a lack of resources or training emphasizes the necessity of such collaboration. Adebisi (2023) also emphasizes the role of educational frameworks in pushing the agenda of inclusivity forward, maintaining that the more “diverse modes of learning” we can construct into our instructional strategies, the more “welcome atmosphere” we are creating in the sector. This is consistent with the results of the survey, which suggest that what the 41% of respondents who are not currently engaging in inclusive practices really need are resources and the kind of training that would make them feel like they had the opportunity to engage in the practices of inclusion.

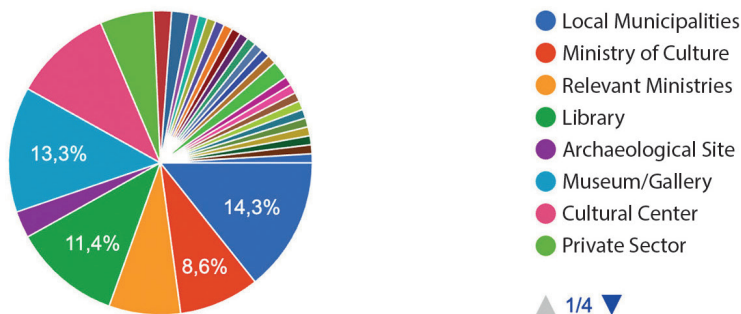
The survey results indicate that while some respondents have been trained in inclusivity, most have not had any formal education in that area. This is concerning for fields like tourism and cultural heritage, where visitor requirements can

vary a great deal, because inclusivity is a vital part of accessibility. Mandatory training programs in inclusivity should involve essential components like understanding intellectual and physical disabilities, knowledge and skills in communication with people who have disabilities, and a familiarization with laws related to accessibility, such as the EU’s 2021-2030 Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This suggests the need for training initiatives to be scaled across institutions and for professionals to receive ongoing education on inclusivity. Digital learning materials, frequent workshops, and seminars could close this gap.

Employment in the Heritage or Tourism Sector

Figure 7
Employment in the Heritage or Tourism Sector
105 responses



The participants are employed in various institutions, including:

- Local Municipalities: 14.3%
- Ministry of Culture: 13.3%
- Museums/Galleries: 11.4%
- Archaeological Sites: 8.6%
- Cultural Centers: 8.6%

The participants of the survey come from various sectors including:

- Cultural Institutions (e.g., museums, galleries).
- Tourism Services (e.g., tour guides, accommodation providers).
- Public Administration (e.g., local municipalities, government bodies).

The variety of industries shows that the demand for abilities about accessibility and inclusivity is broad and goes beyond specific job functions. While respondents from the tourism industry and museums and galleries may have different training needs, both groups need a basic understanding of accessibility and inclusivity. The majority of respondents appear to work in museums or heritage sites, according to the sectoral breakdown. These professionals usually work in cultural programming, visitor services, and curatorial work, all of which call for improved abilities to make these spaces accessible to people with disabilities.

Participants in the survey came from a wide variety of important organizations in the field of cultural heritage. Municipalities and museums, which are the main parties involved in promoting accessibility to cultural heritage, accounted for a significant portion. The respondents come from an array of institutional backgrounds, creating a diverse mix that ensures an almost complete grasp of the sector's requirements and the obstacles it encounters regarding inclusive practices. The Skills Need Survey reveals that respondents work in many different types of organizations within the heritage and tourism sectors. Significant representation comes from the Ministry of Culture (13.3%) and local municipalities (14.3%). This distribution emphasizes the almost complete diversity of the workforce, making the value of collaborating with these key players evident if we want to push the envelope of inclusivity and accessibility in cultural heritage.

According to Dimoska and his colleagues (2016), assert that economic growth and job development at the local level are significantly boosted by the tourism industry. Their assertions derive not only from their own work but also from a review of the extensive literature on this subject. Based on their study, which included a high percentage of respondents from this sector, they argue that local governments play a critical role in pushing forward initiatives such as accessibility, as well as in promoting tourism that is centered around local cultural heritage. As one of the globe's fastest-growing industries, heritage tourism mandates that organizations adjust their practices and make themselves more inclusive in order to reach and serve diverse audiences (Diyah Sir Widari, 2023), (2023). Given that museums and galleries are often at the forefront of cultural tourism and are important players in making accessibility a reality for all and the fact that 11.4% of respondents were from these establishments lends, even more credence to this trend.

The results of the survey draw attention to the need for a detailed understanding of the industry's demands and the practice-related problems of inclusivity. Rived and his colleagues use the term “job niches” to refer to the employment that specialized sectors of the tourism industry can provide. They note that “niche” sectors of the industry tend to generate more job opportunities than do adjacent sectors (Rived et al., 2013). The authors offer several reasons for this trend. One is that specialized sectors often develop a better understanding of the “type of skilled labor” necessary for their sector's unique tourism product. Another reason is that their specialized product tends to have a more “given-thing-to-do variety” of jobs associated with it. Furthermore, Moreover, Sumantri (2020) points out that it is essential to manage the supply chain well in heritage tourism to ensure that visitors have a good experience and that such tourism is inclusive. Managing the supply chain well means ensuring a variety of institutions work together well. The survey we conducted among important institutions suggests that well-managed cooperation among a variety of institutions is necessary for addressing the issues of this sector.

Which Sector Do You Work in?

The survey data reveals a varied distribution of participants from the different sectors. The breakdown yields some understanding of which sectors are most represented in the survey and suggests the presence of professionals from cultural heritage, museums, and tourism in substantial numbers.

Cultural Heritage Management

16.2% of those surveyed are working in the cultural heritage management. This industry likely works to promote and preserve not just tangible cultural heritage like monuments and historical sites, but also “intangible” cultural heritage. Training on accessibility and inclusivity would be extremely beneficial to these professionals, particularly when it comes to making improvements to the usability of cultural sites for individuals with disabilities.

Cultural Programming and Public Engagement

Representing 14.7% of respondents, this group is concerned with the creation and implementation of cultural programs that reach and engage communities. These professionals have a stake in making sure that cultural programs are accessible to individuals with a range of needs. They, therefore, need inclusivity training to serve their stakeholders better.

Education Programs and Exhibitions

Highlighting the importance of ensuring that museum and cultural institution content is accessible, 13.2% of respondents say they work on educational programs and exhibitions. Making exhibits accessible to individuals with numerous types of disabilities such as visual, auditory, and mobility impairments, requires expertise in this field.

Conservation and Restoration

The people who work in this area make up 7.3% of those surveyed. Their job is to maintain and protect ancient or historic places and objects. If they don't already, these professionals could receive training on how to make sure the decisions they make on preserving sites and artifacts also consider the fact that an increasing number of people, both with and without disabilities, will likely interact with those places in the future.

Research and Documentation

Of the respondents, 7.4% are involved in research and documentation. Typically, these are jobs that require careful and swift record-keeping and the development of knowledge in museums and other cultural settings. For those working in this field, the opportunities to make that documentation accessible to the physically disabled, through the digital medium, are rapidly becoming essential.

Museums

Direct employment in museums and galleries is represented by many respondents in occupations such as curatorial work (9.9%), exhibition design (11.3%), collection management (9.9%), museum education (14.1%), and visitor services (14.1%). These professionals are essential to direct engagement with the public and the creation of museum spaces that are inclusive of all people, particularly those with disabilities.

Tourism and Tour Guide Services

Of the qualified professionals surveyed, 22.6 percent said they work in the very field of cultural tourism. Another 19.4 percent said they work in the realm of tour guide services and tourism management. Both sectors, to which almost 42 percent of the professionals surveyed said they belong, would appear to be poorly equipped, if not completely unequipped, to handle the needs of tourists with disabilities.

Private Sector and Public Sector Involvement

13.3% of respondents work for the public sector (local governments, cultural ministries, and associated public institutions), whereas 14,3% are employed by private sector businesses engaged in tourism or cultural heritage. Both industries are essential in establishing laws and putting procedures into place that guarantee accessibility in travel and cultural heritage. According to the survey results, important industries associated with tourism, museums, and cultural heritage are well-represented. The most prominent industries are museum operations, education and programming, and cultural heritage management; these are all essential to making cultural experiences accessible. To increase accessibility and inclusivity in these sectors, specific training programs can be informed by the survey's findings.

Training

Did you receive any formal or informal training in the last 5 years?

The results of the Skills Need Survey show that a sizable percentage of participants had participated in formal and informal training in one way or another during the previous five years. In particular, 18.1% reported very low engagement in training programs, 20% reported average engagement, 12.4 % reported high engagement, and 36.2% reported moderate engagement. This shows that although formal education is still a major way to access cultural heritage, museums, and travel, informal education techniques are also very important for career advancement.

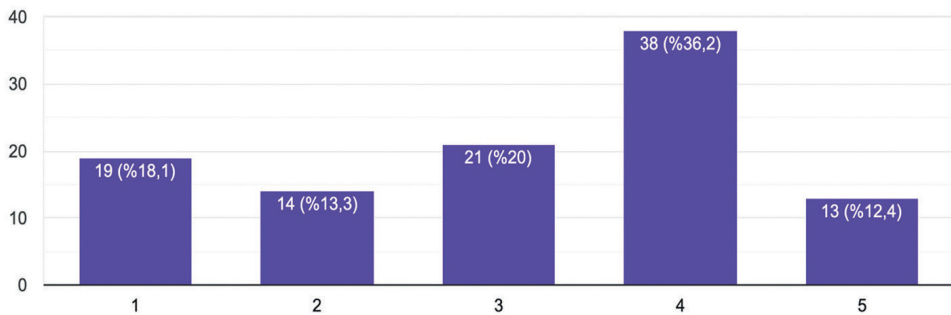
The body of research backs up the significance of both official and informal training in raising professional competencies in these fields. For instance in his discussion of museums' roles in pushing forth education, Belenchuk (2018) emphasizes how much museum-pedagogical initiatives can greatly increase students' awareness of cultural and historical heritage. This is consistent with the survey's conclusions, which show that non-formal learning opportunities like workshops and evening classes can enhance formal education by imparting useful knowledge and skills.

Brata and his colleagues (2022) also stress that museums are crucial informal learning environments where individuals can interact with not just cultural heritage but also ethical principles. That makes sense because informal

learning environments like museums can often help people understand cultural contexts much better, and in absolutely necessary and critical ways, help them understand much better the ethics pertinent to those contexts

Figure 8
Training Background

105 responses



Furthermore, Wang and Nunes (2019) further emphasizes the extent to which learning experiences of an informal nature can occur in museums, wherein the understanding of history and the cultural nuances that accompany it can be significantly enhanced. This confirms the survey’s findings that professionals are improving their skills through a range of training approaches, especially in areas like cultural preservation and inclusivity.

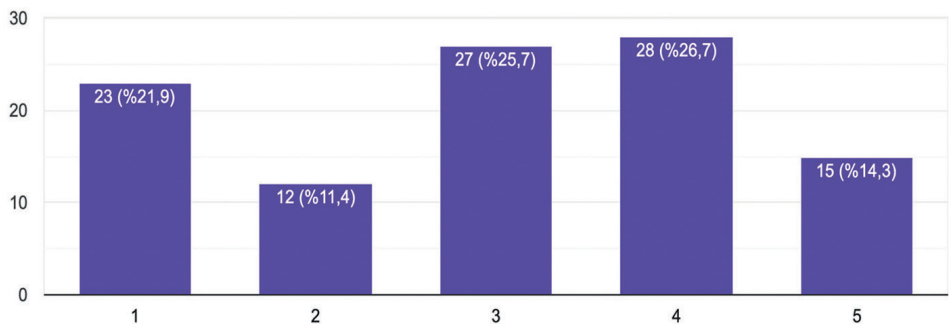
Nonetheless, the survey also shows that a significant portion of participants (18.1%) expressed extremely low levels of involvement in training initiatives. This conclusion is supported by the literature, which identifies a number of obstacles to professional development participation, such as a lack of time, money, or knowledge of the opportunities that are available. Although Zichello and his colleagues’ (2021) specific reference does not specifically address professional development barriers, it does emphasize the necessity for museums to reevaluate their educational programs in order to better engage the public, which may have an indirect connection to the barriers mentioned.

Vocational Training and/or Apprenticeship

Professionals have utilized apprenticeship programs and vocational training to obtain real-world, hands-on experience in their fields. The development of technical skills required for heritage conservation, museum curation, and other tourism-related positions is especially aided by this kind of training.

Approximately 26.7% of those surveyed reported being moderately engaged in vocational training and apprenticeships, and 25.7% said they were engaged at an average level. The data presented underscore the criticality of learning in an experiential manner when it comes to the sorts of occupations these respondents have or are preparing for. Fields like heritage conservation, museum curation, and various forms of tourism are emphatically require vocational training and apprenticeships in enhancing practical skills.

Figure 9
Vocational Training and/or Apprenticeship
105 responses



Moreover, the work of Ullah and Malik (2020) underscores the transformative potential of vocational training across communities. Their research implies that such programs serve to empower individuals, enhancing not just their technical skills but also the vital highway of increased employability that leads to a far more certain economic future. This is especially relevant to heritage and tourism, where real-life experience is critical for grasping the nuances of visitor interaction and cultural conservation. Moreover, the research of Viau-Courville (2016) underscores the need for practitioners to adapt to evolving expectations and to engage with a range of constituents. It does this by looking at how vocational training can bridge the space between standard curatorial practices and contemporary needs in the museum field.

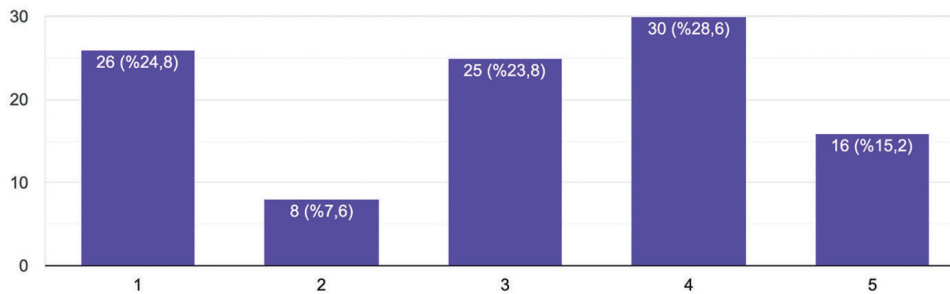
Non-accredited Training (Conferences, Evening Classes)

Professionals can keep up with the latest trends, advancements, and innovations in their fields without enrolling in formal academic programs. They can do this through non-accredited training such as conferences and evening classes. Findings from the Skills Need Survey show that 24.8% of respondents report they have very low engagement in these non-accredited training programs,

while 28.6% report they have moderate engagement. This means that these training programs, which are considered by many to be good opportunities for professional development and growth, are not embraced widely by the survey participants. Their flexibility, however, allows for an opportunity to embrace and engage in more “learning moments” that could enhance a professional’s daily effectiveness.

Figure 10
Non-accredited Training (Conferences, Evening Classes, etc.)

105 responses



The contribution of non-accredited training to professional development is strongly supported by the literature. For example, Tontchev and his colleagues (2011) stress that kinds of training programs, which are not officially recognized, can greatly boost the skills and know-how of the individual trained in a selection of professions such as healthcare, and that same statement applies to a selection of other fields. Their reasoning goes something like this: Most of the people in charge of providing such training are themselves “vital” to the developments in their respective fields. Their “up-to-the-minute” knowledge is, for healthcare professionals or professionals in any field, a “life saver. Furthermore, in order to guarantee that practitioners maintain their competence and effectiveness in their positions, Owen and his colleagues (2016) highlight the significance of continual professional development through a variety of training modalities, including non-accredited options. This supports the survey findings which indicate that non-accredited training can be just as vital to skill development and career advancement as formal education.

The flexibility of non-accredited training programs is especially beneficial for professionals who lack the time or resources to attend formal academic institutions. “Customized learning experiences that are offered through non-accredited training are allowing professionals to stay current on industry

advancements,” stated by Coria et al. (2023). This adaptability is essential in fields like heritage conservation and museum curation, where, thanks to all manner of non-formal training, professionals can adjust to and incorporate what they must consider a constant stream of new ideas.

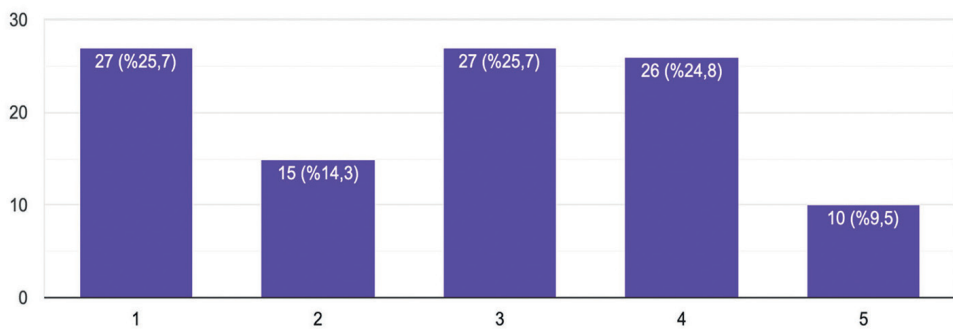
In addition, McCarthy and his colleagues (2017) indicate that non-accredited training can bridge the gaps in formal education by providing real-world knowledge and skills that are immediately applicable in the workplace. This is particularly relevant to the heritage and tourism industries, where success hinges on having up-to-date knowledge and hands-on experience.

Accredited Education

Individuals seeking to establish careers in cultural heritage, museums, or tourism must obtain the academic credentials that institutions of higher education confer. Those of us who work in and around the Skills Need Assessment know that survey respondents had graduated from an array of different institutions; some were even self-taught. Nevertheless, a 25.7% of those we surveyed said their level of accredited education was low. Even more glaringly, 25.7 % said they had only an average level of accredited education. These numbers signal more than just a pronounced pathway from institution to profession; they highlight the importance of education as a prerequisite for entry into cultural heritage, community, and tourism sectors.

Figure 11
Accredited Education

105 responses



There is a lot of support for the idea that a recognized education is valuable. It gives people not just the precedents, but also the kind of preparation that lets them work with, and in the long term succeed, in the fields of s tourism and

cultural heritage. To really underscore the point, El-Din (2019) describes how digital cultural heritage is being integrated with certain university programs can improve learning outcomes by offering creative ways to interact with heritage materials. According to the survey's findings, formal education is still a vital means of acquiring the skills required in the tourism and heritage industries.

Also, the study conducted by Cardeira and Estellés (2021) underlines the real importance that vocational education has in the sphere of heritage education. In their work, they point out that recognized programs can make a tremendous impact on the preservation and understanding of cultural heritage. They highlight that this impact is not only direct when a well-trained museum professional works with the objects that tell our cultural story but also indirect, as their good example and leadership can guide those around them toward a better appreciation of the heritage that is theirs to manage and curate.

Moreover, Polat (2018) states that educational initiatives have the potential to influence people's attitudes toward cultural heritage, which is significant for those dedicated to its preservation and promotion. This suggests that, alongside the impartation of technical-mastery-and-qualification skills, accredited education also shapes something even more essential: the mindset by which professionals engage, in a meaningful and sustainable way, with that which is commonly understood as cultural heritage.

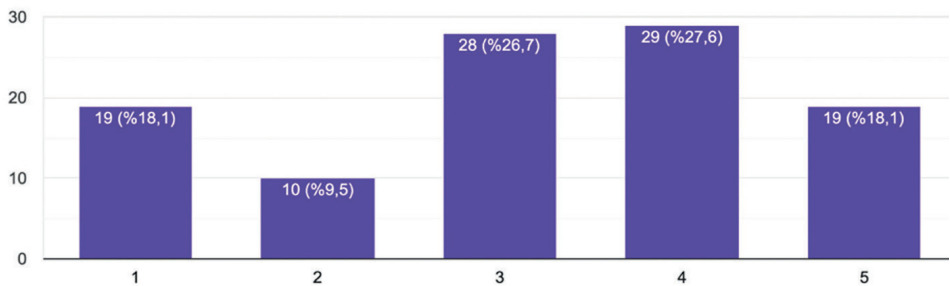
MOOCs and Digital/Online Education

The Skills Need Survey asked a large sample of people about their use of digital education. A quarter of them (27.6%) said they were using the digital platforms and courses moderately. Another quarter (27.7%) said they were using them at an average level. Approximately one in five (18.1%) said they were using them at a pretty good level (they were highly engaged). About the same number (18.1%) were not doing digital education but said they could see themselves doing it in the future. These people have a comparatively high level of participation.

A research body supports the increasing acceptance and efficiency of MOOCs and digital education in professional development. Al-Said and his colleagues (2023) discover that in comparison to students who follow traditional curricula, MOOC-based learners seem to have a noticeable edge when it comes to three

fundamental aspects of education that are too often taken for granted: memory, learning, and knowledge sharing. MOOCs, in this view, are not substitutes for traditional education; they are something better.

Figure 12
MOOCs and Digital/Online Education
105 responses



Yan (2022) brings out another side of the story: how MOOCs can be a productive learning platform for vocational education. He found out that MOOCs are a happy fusion of online learning and in-person classroom interaction. MOOCs, in this instance, aren't about the sort of big-picture learning that you might do if you were, say, working in a think tank or a research lab. They're about practical application and usefulness in real-world situations.

The survey further indicates that a portion of the participants (18.1%) showed very little interest in MOOCs and online learning. This suggests that even though online education is becoming more popular, some workers may not be taking advantage of it. Studies show that many obstacles can prevent people from using online learning platforms (Wijayanti, 2018). These include ignorance, lack of technology, and lack of drive. Reducing these obstacles through focused outreach might increase the numbers of professionals who engage in online learning.

Skills and Training Needs

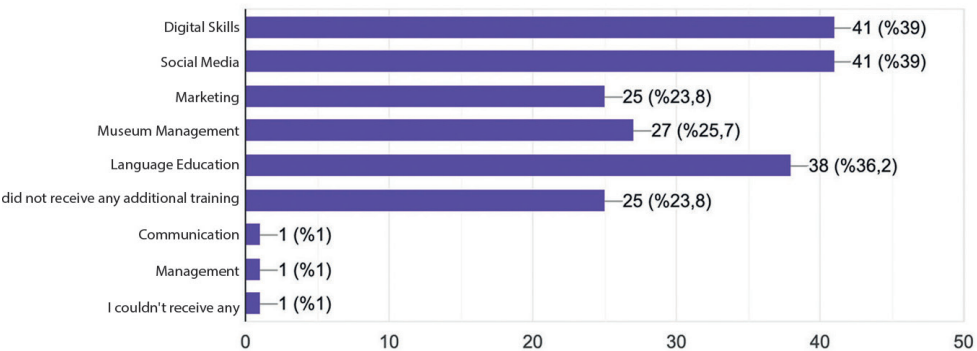
Additional trainings in the following areas over the last 5 year

Respondents were asked to identify the key areas where they feel additional training is necessary. The top needs included:

- Digital Skills: 39%
- Social Media: 39%

- **Museum Management:** 25.7%
- **Marketing:** 36.2%
- **Language Training:** 36.2%
- **Communication:** 23.8%

Figure 13
Additional Trainings in the Following Areas Over the Last 5 Year
105 responses



Digital skills and social media Social media and digital skills were ranked highest, suggesting that professionals in the tourism and heritage industries understand the value of digital platforms for audience outreach. The domains of marketing and museum management emphasize the need for heightened competence in dealing with various audience types and in promoting inclusive heritage experiences. Data from the Skills Need Survey suggest that the professionals targeted by the survey may have little experience in some of the crucial areas of digital and social media skills. Only 39% of respondents said they had received instruction in the important areas of digital and social media skills. This survey result points to a burgeoning awareness among tourism and heritage professionals regarding the platforms and outreach potentials associated with the burgeoning digital world. The idea that these professionals might need this help is further underscored by the fact that most of the participants have training in field areas, such as marketing (36.2%), language (36%), or museum management (25.7%).

With respect to the significance of digital skills in the tourism industry, the literature supports these conclusions. Tourism operators must enhance their digital competencies if they are to remain competitive in an increasingly digital marketplace, according to Zaragoza-Sáez and his colleagues (2021). They suggest that a sustainable training culture among all tourism stakeholders is necessary to ensure that the core workforce possesses the proficiencies that are essential

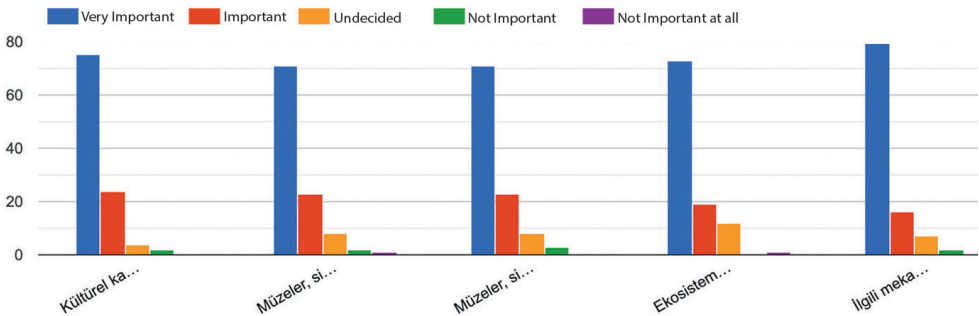
for success in the current competitive environment. Another crucial point can scarcely be overemphasized: the indispensable role of social media in reaching a diverse array of audiences, including people with disabilities. Finally, Booyens (2020) stresses that acquiring soft skills is just as important as technical training, because in the travel and tourism industry, those skills are essential for positive customer relations.

The literature underscores the pressing need for specialized training and inclusive management practices in museum management. As Chiscano and Jiménez-Zarco (2021) discuss, not only is improving the experience of visitors with disabilities essential, but also, and perhaps even more substantially, is the experience of many ‘marginalized communities’ that a spectrum of disabilities covers. They argue that for the museum not to be complicit in excluding any particular group’s experience from being validated and understood, museum professionals must be trained in more than just the ‘standard’ practices of merely being compliant with signage and accessibility statutes.

Barriers to Accessibility in Cultural Spaces

The outcomes of the survey reveal several important obstacles that specialists determined to be keeping individuals with special needs from visiting cultural hotspots such as museums and history-based tourist destinations. The most significant of these obstacles are not having enough signs, staff who don’t know how to help people with special needs, and physical obstacles that make it hard for people with certain kinds of disabilities to get around. If venues want to be more accessible to people with disabilities, then these things need to be upgraded, as the literature backs these determinations.

Figure 14
Barriers to Accessibility in Cultural Spaces



Physical Barriers

The survey's findings highlighted that a significant number of people with mobility impairments encountered major physical barriers that prevented them from getting to certain areas of the museum. Absence of ramps and/or elevators in older buildings that haven't been updated to meet contemporary accessibility standards was a major issue. This aligns with what Asakawa and his colleagues have found in 2019. They did research with the Museum of Nature and Science in Denver and the California Academy of Sciences, which involved a fellowship program for students with disabilities. Asakawa and his colleagues (2019) found that physical access is still a major obstacle in museums, especially for people with mobility impairments, and they stress that "the lack of the very basic infrastructure necessary to allow visitors to get to the exhibits is a real issue." They also emphasize the necessity of continuous improvement efforts once the basic infrastructure is in place.

Inadequate Signage

The survey identified another critical deficiency: lack of wayfinding aids that can be perceived by people with visual impairments, such as Braille or tactile guides. Lee and his colleagues (2020) conduct important research that helps to fill this gap. They found that wayfinding aids are critical for people with visual impairments to navigate and understand the layout of an exhibit or space. This is similar to the findings of another recent study that underscores the importance signing can have for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals in fully enjoying the same spaces (Baldassarre et al., 2020).

According to Dagnachew et al. (2021) insufficient communication tools can seriously impede access to services for people with disabilities. This is a direct challenge to the practices of many museums. Their research leads to two recommendations: first, upgrade the tools; and second, "inclusive communication means far more than translation into Braille" (p. 3).

Staff Training Deficiencies

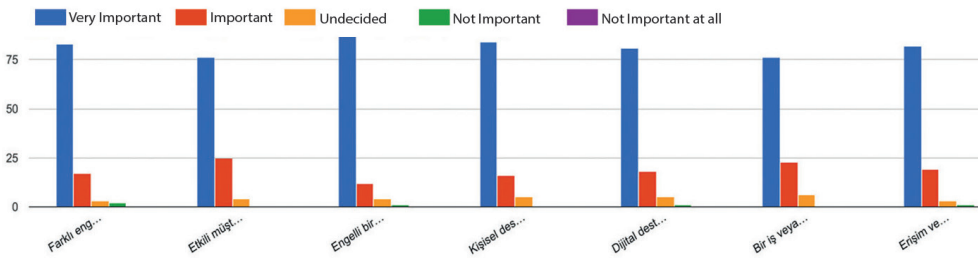
The survey findings reveal that a significant portion of respondents believes that employees aren't adequately trained to assist guests with disabilities. This is a well-founded belief, as prior research affirms the relationship between staff training and the creation of an inclusive environment. Bright and Kuper (2018) make the case for better training in their study of the service sector, which includes cultural institutions. They argue that an inclusive atmosphere of high-

quality service can't exist when some staff doesn't know how to serve guests with disabilities. They also mention that a key gap is the needed training for staff to interact with visitors who have disabilities with awareness and empathy. Furthermore, staff training should encompass understanding the diverse needs of museum visitors with disabilities to genuinely enhance the experience of all visitors. The survey results support this, indicating that to truly improve accessibility in cultural settings, staff training deficits must be addressed.

Skills Required for Serving Special Needs Visitors

The survey results emphasize the need for cultural and tourism operators to have both technical skills and soft skills if they are to provide better services to tourists with disabilities. The technical skills that have been identified as vital include: knowledge of assistive technology; understanding of legal accessibility requirements; and the application of inclusive design principles. But the soft skills that are emphasized as equally important include: flexibility; patience; and effective communication. These findings are corroborated by other studies that underscore the vital importance of both skill sets in creating an atmosphere that is inclusive for all guests.

Figure 15
Skills Required for Serving Special Needs Visitors



Technical Skills

Professionals in cultural institutions have to be knowledgeable about assistive technologies so they can help explain those devices to visitors who might need them. It's equally important, of course, for them to understand the legal side of things. Bright and Kuper (2018) highlight that many cultural organizations still have difficulty coming into compliance with accessibility laws, which exist, in part because human beings have a fundamental right to equal access to cultural experiences, regardless of any disabilities they may have. And Bright and Kuper (2018) nailed that point down by saying these two things: "Visitors with disabilities should not be disadvantaged in their cultural experience."

Soft Skills

The survey results show that the most vital soft skills for professionals working with visitors with disabilities are empathy and communication. Also recognized as critical soft skills are flexibility and patience. This aligns with the research of Dagnachew and his colleagues, who point out that cultural operators need to be much more flexible in complying with the direct and indirect special demands of guests with disabilities (Dagnachew et al., 2021). These necessary skills might seem like common sense, but they add up to the establishment of a friendly atmosphere in which all guests feel both appreciated and accommodated.

Performance Evaluation of Skilled Tourism Operators

To serve effectively the people with special needs, the tourism and cultural operators must consider several important factors. These include constant improvements to accessibility, unfaltering customer service, and realistic problem-solving. The literature on inclusive tourism corroborates these factors. It emphasizes their importance in establishing settings for all kinds of guests, especially those with disabilities.

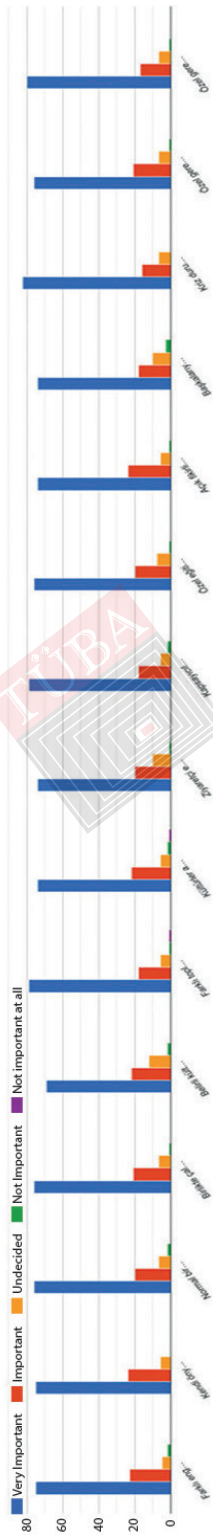
Customer Service Excellence

The capacity to fulfill the various and pressing demands of visitors with disabilities is a key performance indicator. Stankov and Gretzel (2020) say that the hospitality and tourism sectors serve up a nice platter of opportunities for outstanding customer service. Piping hot and fresh to the table, those opportunities must be seized if we are to ensure that people with disabilities can enjoy the same level of service as anyone else. To this end, the authors suggest that employees be trained to handle the quick service adjustments that some guests may require.

Practical Problem-Solving

Problem-solving and flexibility are key staff skills in the cultural and tourism sectors. As Dagnachew and his colleagues (2021) emphasize, staff need the ability to think on their feet and deliver solutions when the unexpected happens. And for us, the unexpected can and does happen across all spectrums of what we term “disability.” Some of our literature points to the importance of staff being “empowered,” i.e., given the leeway and authority to make decisions on the spot, when the plan just won’t do. This survey’s results resonate with that theme.

Figure 16
Performance Evaluation of Skilled Tourism Operators



Consistent Accessibility Upgrades

According to the survey, institutions that regularly assess and improve their accessibility infrastructure rank higher with respondents. Alemu and his co-authors' work, which highlights the ongoing need for facility evaluations and upgrades to serve diversified visitors, supports this (Alemu et al., 2017). Their results reinforce the survey's finding that visitor feedback is crucial for pushing accessibility enhancements forward. They also found that open communication with visitors about needed changes can make the whole process more efficient. According to Lee and Jan (2022), consistently adding new accessibility features, like tactile exhibits next to signs in Braille, or upgrading existing features, like this institution's ramps, shows a commitment to serving the whole public.

Importance of Inclusive Skills

Participants rated various inclusive skills as **Very Important** or **Important**, emphasizing the need for:

- Effective communication with disabled visitors
- Personal development in understanding disabilities
- Collaboration with disabled staff and stakeholders

The overwhelming support for the importance of communication with disabled audiences underscores the urgent need for training programs focused on empathy, communication skills, and practical strategies for engaging with disabled people in heritage spaces. Participants also value improving teamwork and being aware of one's own biases.

The Skills Need Survey's results indicate that participants place a high value on inclusive skills, particularly in relation to working with stakeholders and staff who have disabilities, developing one's own knowledge of disabilities, and effectively communicating with visitors who have disabilities. Training Programs aimed at training professionals in the travel and tourism sector should prioritize the development of skills necessary for working with disabled individuals. This goes beyond simply collaborating and engaging with disabled individuals in tourism planning. It is also fundamental to have stakeholder collaboration to create tourism products that are accessible. By definition, these products require effective communication strategies to engage a range of audiences, including those with disabilities, Nigg and Eichelberger (2021) indicate in their research. They argue that inclusive tourism practices benefit tourists with disabilities and improve the overall experience for everyone. In

addition, it is contended in the work of Eyisi and his colleagues (2020) that including tourism stakeholders in the tourism planning process appears to raise the local community's acceptance of the outcomes of the tourism development in their area. This appearance of increased acceptance appears to stem mainly from a better understanding on the part of the local community of the tourism planning process and, more importantly, the planned outcomes.

The survey's results suggest that working with stakeholders and disabled staff is a third crucial area for achieving inclusivity. McAreavey and McDonagh (2010) say that for tourism to be more inclusive, there must be a condition where genuine collaboration amongst all involved or affected by tourism can take place. They argue that "adaptive management techniques that take into account social dynamics and the different kinds of knowledge various actors contribute" (McAreavey & McDonagh, 2010, p. 146) are required to move forward. In a less precarious environment for all involved, the cooperative model that is so essential for the inclusivity of disabled people in tourism could be much more effective.

Barriers and Challenges in Serving Disabled Audiences

Respondents identified several challenges in serving audiences with disabilities:

- Lack of training and knowledge
- Inadequate resources or infrastructure
- Limited awareness about disabilities

These obstacles indicate that the most significant hurdle to efficiently serving disabled audiences is an absence of resources and know-how. To leap over these obstacles, it is essential to tackle the problems that are cause and effect of the roadblocks through training programs, better infrastructure, and more awareness and understanding of the kinds of disabilities that exist.

The Skills Need Survey found that the participants perceived several serious challenges that hinder service delivery to disabled audiences, including insufficient infrastructure or resources, a limited understanding of disabilities, and a lack of experience and training. These challenges underline major problems that need to be resolved if the tourism and heritage sectors are to serve all potential audiences inclusively. Lack of training and knowledge are primary obstacles found in the survey. Chiscano and Jiménez-Zarco (2021) focus on the need for inclusive museum practices for the staff. Even in high-accessibility institutions, the researchers maintain there's a room for improvement, part of

which should involve the development and delivery of an in-depth training program for all museum personnel. The better the staff understands the nuances of not just disabilities but also the range of possible “access needs,” the more effectively they can ensure a welcoming environment for all visitors.

Also Renel discusses the concept of sonic accessibility in museums, highlighting that structural detours can prevent engaging disabled visitors with the content of the exhibits (Renel, 2019). This means that museums and cultural institutions must confront these barriers head-on, much like the Disabilities Act of 1990 did for physical access, and create plans for “sonically” accessible spaces. As Renel argues, sound is “the most democratic of the senses” (p. 8), yet many spaces sound inaccessible due to poor design or simply being made with disabled individuals in mind. The work of Fernandes and Rocha (2022) emphasizes both the urgent need for barrier-free spaces and the museum sector’s still nascent understanding and work toward accessibility for all audiences.

Another key challenge highlighted in the survey is that of insufficient awareness about disabilities. Kanari and Souliotou (2021) vigorously argue that “awareness cannot be left in the hands of chance,” and state that “the knowledge we possess is vital if we are to move toward an inclusive environment where disabled individuals too can participate fully” (p. 252). Their research makes clear that awareness-raising that is, informing staff, stakeholders, and everyone else who interacts with disabled people in any way, direct or indirect, about the existence of disabilities and the kind of day-to-day impacts they have could hardly be more important.

Conclusion

The Skills Need Survey is a key move toward a more inclusive heritage sector that appreciates and takes into account the unique needs of audiences with disabilities. It is a step toward ensuring that everyone can have a meaningful experience with heritage. The project aims to find out from professionals in the field what kind of training they think would help promote access and ensure that all kinds of people can enjoy and appreciate the experience of heritage. The presence of a well-educated workforce in the heritage and tourism sectors is underscored by the educational background of those who responded to the Skills Need Survey. The significant percentage of individuals holding Bachelor’s and advanced degrees serves as a strong basis for the kind of targeted, specialized training that the professionals in these sectors need. Given their qualifications, the workforce

seems well-positioned to undertake the sorts of engagement, and also to develop the types of training initiatives, that are needed to advance the kind of work that these individuals do both in the heritage and tourism sectors.

The Skills Need Survey reveals that not much is happening in the way of skills development for a targeted minority audience, which includes people from diverse backgrounds as well as individuals with disabilities. So there's a very pressing need for inclusive practices to be implemented in the service of audiences with disabilities. While a segment of respondents responded to the survey do have some prior experience with these practices and could be considered "in the know." Yet, a decent-sized portion of our workforce remains underprepared as well as uninformed and untrained to do this very important work.

The Skills Need Survey's work experience data shows that there are a considerable number of professionals in the workforce who are not just professional but also have the kind of experience that is necessary to understand and even decide on what competencies the tourism and heritage industries need potential employees to have. These professionals offer a kind of insight that is *ONLY* available because we have a set of individuals in the workforce who used to be students and now possess over 10 years of experience in the field.

The survey's respondents depict a diverse and driven workforce working in the heritage and tourism sectors. The large number of respondents from local municipalities, cultural institutions, and museums suggests that the sort of collaboration lauded in the report is already becoming a norm in the realms of both heritage and tourism. The literature says these institutions are pivotal to driving the tunnel vision of collaboration with the sort of "inclusivity" and "accessibility" that is "effective."

The survey results show a well-distributed representation from the key sectors associated with cultural heritage, museums, and tourism. The most dominant of these sectors is cultural heritage management, followed closely by education and programming, and by museum operations. Each of these sectors is key to ensuring that cultural experiences are accessible. The insights we've gathered from the survey can help us to inform even better training programs targeted at the accessibility and inclusivity of cultural experiences across these three sectors.

The results of the Skills Need Survey show that professionals in the heritage and tourism sectors depend on vocational training and apprenticeships, yet the literature offers mixed support for this conclusion. There is consensus, however, on the vital part that practical, hands-on experience plays in developing the kind of technical skills that lead to field success. By investing in vocational training programs, stakeholders can enhance the competencies of professionals, ultimately leading to improved outcomes in heritage conservation and museum operations.

The Skills Need Survey results indicate a significant gap in prior experience working with disabled audiences among heritage and tourism sector professionals. The literature supports the need for targeted training programs. These programs should aim to (1) elevate knowledge about disabled audiences, (2) enhance awareness of the needs of these audiences, and (3) improve the practical skills that are necessary to work effectively with disabled audiences. By addressing the aforementioned gaps, the sector can serve disabled audiences better and create a more inclusive environment.

The results also show that most people involved in the heritage and tourism sectors are practicing something that looks like “inclusivity.” Yet a significant minority (20-40% of respondents, depending on the question) report that they do not include certain groups (like people with disabilities) in their work. Although the literature does not (point to a single cause for this inclusivity gap, it suggests several reasons (sometimes overlapping) that might account for it: Lack of awareness of good inclusive practices among certain people; lack of good models of what inclusivity looks like in practice; lack of good, targeted training that addresses inclusivity; and lack of collaboration with diverse communities to understand their perspectives and needs.

The survey identified barriers that reflect the special difficulties encountered by individuals with special needs when trying to access cultural heritage sites and museums. The existing body of literature backs up these findings. It voices the same concerns and highlights the same needed improvements. The survey findings paint an unflattering picture of the state of access to cultural heritage sites and museums for individuals with special needs. It is a picture that must change if we are to live up to the promised ideal of full inclusive access to these important public resources.

The findings also underscore vital sectors for skill development in the heritage and tourism industries, especially regarding digital capabilities, social media, and marketing. There is a palpable shift taking place toward greater inclusivity in the cultural heritage sector, making it absolutely essential to establish clear pathways that will get us there.

The survey results show a definite need for focused skills development in the fields of heritage and tourism, especially in the niche of serving audiences with disabilities. Some of the people responding have experience and have adopted what we might call “best practices” for working with diverse audiences. But a significant part of our workforce is not there yet. They don’t know what they don’t know. The Skills Need Survey results highlight that making cultural and tourism experiences accessible to people with disabilities is a two-pronged effort. It’s not just about the technical part making sure knowledgeable people are using inclusive design principles, assistive technologies, and the right legal mumbo jumbo. It’s also about the soft part making sure the folks out there in the first contact with guests have empathy, can communicate effectively, are patient, and are flexible as all get-out. Those seem to be the necessary ingredients for a front-line staff that can make the atmosphere immediately welcoming to all.

The survey results indicate that successful and inclusive services for people with special needs are built on three essential components: good customer service; practical problem-solving when customers experience a shortfall in services; and consistent, accessibility enhancements. And these are just the basics. These three components have to be present in all operators of different kinds to an equal degree for the entire system to work satisfactorily. But in reading the report, one gets the strong sense that very few operators in the entire province are doing all of this adequately.

The insights gained from this project inform the development of new and crucial training programs, which have the potential to greatly increase the capacity of heritage sector professionals. A more inclusive and engaging heritage sector that offers truly accessible experiences to all audiences can be achieved through these training programs. The project identified three key areas in which development was desperately needed:

- Digital and social media skills to reach and engage disabled audiences
- Museum management and marketing for more inclusive programming
- Communication and language skills to improve customer interactions with disabled visitors.

These are:

- **Skills in Digital and Social Media:** To connect with disabled consumers, the tourism industry requires professionals who are comfortable using digital and social media platforms. These are the platforms that increasingly constitute the first point of contact between a potential traveller and an operator.
- **Enhanced education in museum management and marketing** is vital to constructing diverse, appealing, programming. Museum professionals, at all levels, must be trained to envision experiences that are inviting and accessible for all guests. That includes those with a wide range of physical capabilities.
- **Communication and Language Training for Staff:** To engage effectively with all visitors, including those with disabilities, it is vital that staff communicate well. For this reason, and to create a more inclusive environment in heritage sites, our staff undergoes training that emphasizes not just empathy and comprehension but also effective communication strategies for people with a range of disabilities.
- **Providing more opportunities for inclusive training.**
- **Obtaining additional practical experience** with individuals who have special needs.
- **Changing the training syllabus** for specific tourism and cultural heritage sectors.

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Prof. Dr. Muzaffer ŞEKER | Turkish Academy of Sciences
 e-mail: mseker[at]tuba.gov.tr | ORCID: 0000-0002-7829-3937

Prof. Dr. Muzaffer Şeker graduated from Uludağ University Veterinary Faculty in 1986. Subsequently, Prof. Şeker earned his Ph.D. in Human Anatomy at the University of Leicester, Faculty of Medicine in England, in 1995. He achieved the position of associate professor in 2000 and was promoted to full professorship in 2006. Throughout his career, Prof. Şeker worked as an instructor in the United Arab Emirates for two years and also held the position of the Head of the Department of Medical Education and Informatics at the Meram Faculty of Medicine at Selçuk University. He played a crucial role as a member of the Founding Board of Trustees of İstanbul Medipol University from 2008 to 2010. In December 2014, he was appointed as the founding rector of Konya Necmettin Erbakan University. He has also served on the selection committees of Türkiye Institutes of Health Administration (TÜSEB) Aziz Sancar Science, Service, and Incentive Awards; YÖK Doctorate Awards; TÜBA-GEBİP Awards; and TÜBİTAK Science, Service, and Incentive Awards. He began his role as President of Turkish Academy of Sciences in 2019. Prof. Şeker has also represented his country at the Science 20 Summits, World Science Forum, and many other international scientific events.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kevser ÇINAR | Turkish Academy of Sciences
 e-mail: kevser.cinar[at]tuba.gov.tr | ORCID: 0000-0002-3482-7212

Kevser Çınar is an Associate Professor in the Department of Tourism Management at Necmettin Erbakan University, where she also completed her PhD in Tourism Management. She graduated from Middle East Technical University in 2003. Çınar currently serves as the President of the Euro-Asia Tourism Studies Association (EATSA) and as Adviser to the President of the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA). With more than twenty years of experience in EU-funded projects, she has coordinated several international projects such as iNCLUSION, TOURBINE, Get2Action, TOURBAN and TOURIBOOST, and contributed as a researcher to projects including SCOUT, E-GAME, Heritage4Growth, Sports4Fun, Gsmart and SMARTDEMA. Her research interests include innovation in tourism, consumer behavior and tourism education. A TEDx speaker, Çınar also serves on the editorial boards of TÜBA-HER and TÜBA-KED journals and frequently delivers invited talks and trainings at international events.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mürsel DOĞRUL | Turkish Academy of Sciences
e-mail: mursel.dogrul[at]tuba.gov.tr | **ORCID:** 0000-0002-0637-843X

Dr. Mürsel Doğrul is an Assoc. Prof. at the National Defence University, specializing in International Relations. He earned his degree in International Relations from Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University in 2014, conducting research in Romania and Spain during his undergraduate and postgraduate studies. In 2013, Dr. Doğrul completed internships at the Ministry of EU Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye. He obtained an M.Sc. degree in International Relations from Necmettin Erbakan University and completed his Ph.D. at the National Defence University in 2021. As a Japan Foundation Fellow, he was a visiting scholar at Meiji University in 2023 and an Erasmus Fellow at Tokyo University in 2024. His research interests encompass Japanese foreign policy, energy policy, and security. Dr. Doğrul has made significant contributions to the field through academic works, examining the evolving dynamics of international security and international relations literature. Since December 2025, he has been serving as the President of the Turkish Young Academy.

Muhammet Furkan AKBAŞ | Turkish Academy of Sciences
e-mail: furkanakbas94[at]gmail.com | **ORCID:** 0000-0002-5413-7892

Muhammet Furkan Akbaş graduated with honors from the Architecture Department of Nişantaşı University in 2018, where he studied on a scholarship. Following his graduation, he took part in the design processes of large-scale urban transformation projects. He later moved to the United Kingdom for language education and gained further professional experience by working on interior and decoration projects. During this period, he received offers of admission from several universities for a master's degree in sustainable architecture; however, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, he continued his academic path in Türkiye. He successfully completed his Master of Business Administration at İstanbul University in 2022. Concurrently, he finished his thesis-based master's degree in Building Physics and Materials at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University and has been pursuing his doctoral studies in the same department since 2024. In addition to his academic work, Akbaş has been contributing to scientific projects, research activities, and publications at the Turkish Academy of Sciences since 2023.



This book presents the academic and scientific outcomes of the iNCLUSION Project (2023-2-TR01-KA220-HED-000177708), coordinated by TÜBA and funded by the Erasmus+ KA220-HED programme. The project was conducted in Türkiye, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia. Based on two extensive surveys, the book presents the perspectives of people with disabilities, their families and carers, as well as heritage and tourism professionals. The project involves higher education institutions in capacity building and skills development, thereby contributing to the growing European agenda on inclusive cultural participation. Featuring contributions from leading scholars and researchers at universities and cultural institutions across three countries, this publication offers an evidence-based framework for creating inclusive cultural heritage spaces.



TÜRKİYE BİLİMLER AKADEMİSİ
TURKISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Vedat Dalokay Caddesi No: 112, Çankaya 06670 Ankara
Tel: +90 (312) 442 29 03 Fax: +90 (312) 442 72 36

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