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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present Intellectual Output (O9: “Policy Recommendations and Guidelines Report” constitutes part of the activities of the European Project entitled “BaGMIVI: Bridging the Gap between Museums and Individuals with Visual Impairments” with code number: “2014-1-EL01-KA200-001631. The coordinating partner is the University of Thessaly and Dr. Vassilios Argyropoulos, acts as the Coordinator of the project.

This final Intellectual Output (O9) is a study based on the necessity for the creation of a policy guidelines report. The aim of the present Intellectual Output (O9) is to summarize the results of the “BaGMIVI Project”. From this scope it is expected, that the results, the recommendations and the exchanged experience between the partners of the “BaGMIVI Project” could be broadly implemented. This output includes:

- A summary of the work plan, and the challenges and insights that this project brings
- Proposals, that could be implemented aiming at a future sustainable and realistic cultural policy
- Recommendations based on policy improvement, to make museums an example of no barriers, no exclusion and no discrimination spaces.

Intellectual Output 9 encompasses three main strands:

- The first part refers to the intellectual outputs which are based on important frameworks, action plans and policy documents. These documents mainly refer to disability and human rights such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Disability Action Plan 2004-2010 and the Strategy for the period 2010-2020 which is a comprehensive framework committing the Commission to empowerment of people with disabilities to enjoy their full rights, and to removing everyday barriers in life.
- The aim of the second part is to help policy makers and museum staff to become deeply aware regarding the necessary guidelines for the development of inclusive museums.
- The third part is considered to be of great importance because it put emphasis on self-advocacy skills in relation to people with disabilities regarding their rights as museum visitors

The participating organizations of Intellectual Output O9 are:

1. UNIVERSITY OF THESSALY (Coordinator)
2. UNIVERSITATEA BABES BOLYAI
3. SOFIISKI UNIVERSITET SVETI KLIMENT OHRIDSKI
4. EOTVOS LORAND TUDOMANYEGYETEM
5. INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE EDUCATION OF PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT - EUROPEAN REGION, NL (ICEVI-EU)
6. BULGARIAN ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN
7. EUROPEAN BLIND UNION, FR
8. RAKURSI ART GALLERY, BG
9. TRANSYLVANIAN MUSEUM OF ETHNOGRAPHY, RO
10. SZENT ISTVAN KIRALY MUSEUM, HU
11. NICHOLAS AND DOLLY GOULANDRIS FOUNDATION, MUSEUM OF CYCLADIC ART, GR

The following sections include issues regarding: a. the legal and the theoretical background of the BaGMIVI Project, b. policy recommendations, and c. recommendations on a “self-advocacy” basis for persons with visual disability when the latter act as museum visitors.

2 THE FEATURES OF THE BAGMIVI PROJECT: LEGAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 The Features of the BaGMIVI Project and its Action Plan

The access of people with disabilities to museums has become a major issue of interest for museums. Individuals with visual disabilities, which is one of the target groups of the project, face many barriers regarding their access to museums, since museums are considered as spaces “of seeing” and “do not touch”! The present project titled “Bridging the Gap between Museums and Individuals with Visual Impairments” aims to support museums to develop various practices in order to enhance the access and inclusion of people with visual disability into their context and content. Museums, as audience-centered spaces, are required to enhance the access and inclusion of individuals with visual disability. However, this is a challenging task for museums and requires the collaboration between museums and organizations involved in the education and the protection of individuals with visual disabilities. This need for collaboration and interagency partnerships is the basis of the project, which aims to bridge the gap between museums and individuals with visual disabilities, (Argyropoulos et al., 2016). Especially, the project aims to address and fulfill the following objectives:

- To enable the museum members become aware and update their knowledge regarding the disabling barriers that impede the access of visitors with visual disabilities to museums and the techniques that can enhance the access and inclusion of individuals with visual disabilities to the museums.
- To create learning, cultural and social opportunities for individuals with visual disabilities and enable them acquire self-advocacy skills regarding their rights as museum visitors and the requirements of an inclusive museum.
- To promote the collaboration between museums, schools and associations of individuals with visual disabilities.
- To point out the best practices and guidelines for the development of an accessible and inclusive museum for visitors with visual disabilities.

The project in total involved twelve (12) formal partners, including four (4) universities, three (3) non-profit non-governmental organisations, four (4) museums and one (1) IT Company. The BaGMIVI project was conducted through a cluster of activities. Some of those activities referred to design (scoping/IO1, training events/IO4, multiplier events, frameworks

of videos/IO4 & IO5, action research framework/IO6), others to development (training material/IO4, museum educational material and programmes/IO5) and others to implementation (training, visits, events at national, regional and international level). Finally, it is important to underline, that the innovation of the BaGMIVI Project can be justified by the production of outputs that may be used as Open Educational Resources, namely the syllabus, videos from museum staff training events, the development of differentiated museum content/programmes and the best practices guide.

In general, it may be argued that the BaGMIVI project: (a) provides a realistic implementation of theory and the results of field research in a practical scenario and (b) proposes a methodological framework to collaborate, to exchange experience with an intensive follow up character.

2.2 Legal Background – International level

2.2.1 *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD)*

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) was released on December the 6th 2006. The Convention constitutes the first legal document at international level and includes compulsory provisions for the member states of United Nations regarding the field of “Disability Rights”. The CRPD was established on May 2008 and until May 2017 has been signed by 174 States and ratified by 160. The adoption of the Convention came as a result of a long-term negotiation between United Nations, Member States and International NGOs. CRPD was ratified by the European Union, in the scope of putting pressure to European Union Member States to ratify the Convention and to take measures for Persons with Disability. All participating organizations in the BaGMIVI Project has signed and ratified the Convention.

The Convention introduces some important provisions in the field of Disability Law, concerning:

1. The adoption of a modern sociological definition of disability, with emphasis on the barriers that Persons with Disability face. According to this definition, disability is a part of the variety of humanity and a universal experience around the world.
2. The recognition of the philosophy of Human Rights, centralized on Persons with Disability and their anthropological and historical identity.

3. The adoption of a mechanism of monitoring the implementation of CRPD by Member-States, which includes the obligation of periodical reports.
4. The recognition of accessibility as Human Right, connecting with other human or collective rights (e.g. the right to education, access to justice, participation in cultural life etc.).
5. The establishment of a competence of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. According to this mechanism, the Committee receives and considers communications from or on behalf of individuals or groups of individuals subject to its jurisdiction who claim to be victims of a violation by that State Party of the provisions of the Convention.
6. The recognition of alternative accessible formats of communication, including languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, plain-language, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology and languages, including spoken and signed languages and other forms of non-spoken languages, (CRPD: art. 2, 49).

According to article 30 of CRPD: “Participation in Cultural Life”: “1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities: (a) Enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats; (b) Enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats; (c) Enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance. 2. States Parties shall take appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities to have the opportunity to develop and utilize their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society. 3. States Parties shall take all appropriate steps, in accordance with international law, to ensure that laws protecting intellectual property rights do not constitute an unreasonable or discriminatory barrier to access by persons with disabilities to cultural materials. 4. Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture...”

The right to accessibility, (CRPD: art. 9), includes two main dimensions, (Papanikolaou, 2015; 34-35, 2011; 5-6):

- The recognition of Member-States the barriers that Persons with Disability face.
- The obligation of taking measures for the elimination of the barriers.

Article 9 of CRPD refers to facilities and services which should be at the disposal of the public taken into account all aspects of accessibility for persons with disabilities. More specifically, “1. States Parties have to take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have access on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. These measures, which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to, inter alia: (a) Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces, (b) Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services. 2. States Parties shall also take appropriate measures to: (a) Develop, promulgate and monitor the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public, (b) Ensure that private entities that offer facilities and services which are open or provided to the public take into account all aspects of accessibility for persons with disabilities, (c) Provide training for stakeholders on accessibility issues facing persons with disabilities, (d) Provide in buildings and other facilities open to the public signage in Braille and in easy to read and understand forms, (e) Provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public, (f) Promote other appropriate forms of assistance and support to persons with disabilities to ensure their access to information, (g) Promote access for persons with disabilities to new information and communications technologies and systems, including the Internet, (h) Promote the design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communications technologies and systems at an early stage, so that these technologies and systems become accessible at minimum cost”.

2.2.2 Universal Declaration on Human Rights

Although, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 has no specific reference to Persons with Disability, the article 27 par. 1 introduces the right of access to cultural life on

general base, for every person, (UN, 1948): «Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits».

2.2.3 Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons

On 9 November 1975, many years after the adoption of Universal Declaration on Human Rights, (UN Declaration on Human Rights, 1948), the General Assembly of United Nations adopted the “Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons”. The Declaration guarantees through:

- article 2 the principle of no discrimination, based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, state of wealth, birth or any other situation,
- article 4, the equal recognition of fundamental rights, as persons without disability, and
- article 8, the obligation of the governments to take into consideration the needs of Persons with Disability at all stages of economic and social planning.

2.3 Legal background - European Level

2.3.1 Disability Action Plan 2004-2010

It is estimated, that around eighty million people in the EU (one-sixth of the population) have disabilities ranging from mild to severe. These people, who are often prevented by their disability from taking part in society and the economy, have a rate of poverty 70 % higher than the EU average.

European Union, adopted in October 2003 a strategic policy document, entitled “Equal opportunities for people with disabilities: a European action plan (2004-2010)”. One important feature of the document is the broad approach of cultural life, from the scope of tourism and the rights of tourists and visitors with disability.

The Disability Action Plan, covering the period from 2004 to 2010, seeks to set out a sustainable and operational approach to disability issues in the enlarged Europe. It has three central objectives:

- to implement fully the Directive on equal treatment in employment and occupation;
- to reinforce mainstreaming of disability issues in the relevant Community policies;
- to improve accessibility for all.

The Europe 2005 action plan sought to ensure that people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups can participate in and have equal access to major innovations in on-line public services, covering e-government, e-learning and e-health, and also to create a dynamic, accessible e-business environment. The design and construction of buildings in compliance with the principle of universal design ("design-for-all") ought to be stepped up so that people with disabilities are guaranteed better and effective access to the workplace.

The availability of accessible cultural and leisure facilities is also essential for improving the quality of life of people with disabilities. The Council recognized this in its resolution of 6 May 2003 on accessibility of cultural infrastructure and cultural activities for people with disabilities. Likewise, in its resolution of 21 May 2002 on the future of European tourism, the Council called on the Commission, the Member States and other interested parties to step up their efforts to facilitate accessibility to tourist sites for people with disabilities.

Moreover, in its White Paper entitled "European transport policy for 2010: time to decide", the Commission advocates greater use of accessible public transport.

According to the EU strategy planning 2004-2010: The Commission ought to take further action in the following areas:

- promotion of European standards in relation to all aspects of the built environment, including the planning, design, construction and use of buildings;
- promotion of better education on accessibility issues in schools and among professionals;
- incorporation of accessibility provisions in public procurement policies, taking this dimension into account also in the allocation of the Structural Funds;
- encouragement for the development of studies into the accessibility of tourist sites and infrastructure, and of urban transport systems.

2.3.2 European Disability Strategy 2010-2020

The strategy, which was adopted on 15 November 2010, builds upon the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), and it also complements Europe 2020 (the EU's strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth) and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Lisbon Treaty. The strategy introduces eight areas for joint action between the EU and EU countries highlighted in this strategy:

1. Accessibility: ensuring that people with disabilities have access to goods, services and assistive devices;

2. Participation: ensuring that people with disabilities can exercise all their fundamental rights as European citizens;
3. Equality: ensuring that policies are implemented (both at EU and national level) that promote equality;
4. Employment: ensuring an increase in the number of disabled workers in the labour market, and ensuring better accessibility to workplaces;
5. Education and training: ensuring that disabled pupils benefit from an accessible education system and lifelong learning programmes. The European Commission has already launched several initiatives concerning education, such as the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education;
6. Social protection: tackling widespread social challenges endured by people with disabilities, such as income inequality, poverty risk and social exclusion. EU Structural Funds and EU countries' national measures can be used to ensure this social protection;
7. Health: ensuring that people with disabilities receive equal and affordable access to (mental) health services and facilities;
8. External action: promoting the rights of people with disabilities at an international level.

In order to best implement the strategy, the EU institutions and EU countries must work together to:

- raise awareness of disability-related issues,
- develop funding possibilities,
- improve statistical data, and
- ensure that the UNCRPD is enforced.

2.4 Theoretical Background – Issues of Disability

2.4.1 The Social Model of Disability

It is not easy for somebody to describe, what disability is; this difficulty, also, relies on the mentality, one adopts towards the obstacles of everyday life. Disability appears in many dimensions: it could be part of a human condition, it is a universal experience of humanity, and constitutes at the same time human diversity and a social phenomenon.

Disability is complex, and the interventions to overcome the disadvantages associated with disability are multiple and systemic – varying with the context, (WHO, 2011, 7). World

Health Organization estimates that more than one billion people in the world live with some form of disability. That means that around of 15% of the total world population faces many social barriers, including: inadequate policies and standards, negative attitudes, lack of provision of services, inadequate funding, lack of accessibility, lack of consultation and involvement and lack of data and evidence (WHO, 2011, 6, 9-10). At international level, 285 million people are estimated to be visually impaired, worldwide, 39 million are blind and 246 have low vision, (WHO, 2014). What is for sure is that regardless the type of the vision impairment, Individuals with Visual Impairment constitute a heterogeneous group with a wide range of educational, developmental, and physical abilities and needs which require specialized supports and services (Candlin, 2003, Huebner, 2000, Scholl, 1986· Schulz, 1980).

The social model of disability constitutes a main key topic of the theoretical basis of the BaGMIVI project (i. e. interactions between museums and people with disability). The adoption of the social model of disability in contrast to the individual or medical model of disability had a significant impact on policies and practices towards disability, including those of museums. The social model of disability stresses issues like the failure of the society to respond to the needs of people with disabilities, the barriers and the limitations of the society which isolate and exclude people with disabilities from equal social participation. The content of this model is described, clearly, in the Disability Action Plan of Council of Europe 2006-2015, as “paradigm shift from patient to citizen”:

«We have moved from seeing the disabled person as a patient in need of care who does not contribute to society to seeing him/her as a person who needs the present barriers removed in order to take a rightful place as a fully participative member of society. Such barriers include attitudes and social, legal and environmental barriers. We therefore need to further facilitate the paradigm shift from the old medical model of disability to the social and human rights based model. We have shifted our focus to the individual as central to a coherent, integrated approach which respects the human rights, fundamental freedoms and dignity of all disabled individuals. Consequently there has been a shift in many European countries to promote active policies which empower the individual disabled person to control his/her life. At the same time the role of non-governmental organisations in general, and in particular of those of people with disabilities, in society has changed. They have become partners for governments and disabled people alike, as advocates, service providers or as a source of expert knowledge and competence» (REC 2005(6), par.2., p. 7-8).

3 THE EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN THE 21TH CENTURY

3.1 Museums and dimensions of accessibility

“Bridging the gap between museums and individuals with visual impairment” is an initiative which is expected to contribute to the educational and social role of museums with impact to cultural accessibility for individuals with visual impairments. The above is in line with the development of the role of museums as cultural institutions. Museums in the 21st century are not considered only as spaces of collection, preservation and display of objects but institutions with a wide educational and social role (Black, 2005; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, 2007; Sandell, 2002). Over the past decades, museums have redefined their relationship with their audiences (Vergo, 1989) and this relationship is reflected on the museums’ definition of the International Council of Museums (ICOM, 2007). According this definition:

“A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (<http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/>).

In this framework museums have recognized that audience is not homogeneous or “general” but consists of different people with different and various needs, different ages, different social, educational, religious or ethnic backgrounds, different interests and expectations (Black, 2005; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999a). In this direction museums have developed a wide range of services, activities and practices such as educational programmes for schoolchildren and other groups, workshops, seminars, educational material, publications, outreach programmes, loan services, etc. The recognition of the heterogeneous audience in combination with the finding that museums for centuries were addressing limited social groups (Merriman, 1999), have led museums to redefine their relationship with their audiences and their social and educational role in order to contact different people and respond to contemporary social changes.

3.2 The Access to Museums as a Request for Persons with Visual Disability

Legal dimensions of accessibility were described above placing great emphasis on cultural accessibility for Persons with Disability. This section is focusing on accessibility issues which stem mainly from the interactions between visitors with visual impairments and museums.

The BaGMIVI Project assumes that there is an existing gap between museums and individuals with visual impairment. Attempting to define this gap it is important to note that in case of individuals with visual disabilities the request for access to the exhibits of museums is in contrast with one of the most important “missions” of many museums; to display artworks and museum objects and protect them at the same time. This characteristic of museums as “spaces of seeing” and of “the do not touch”, is in the heart of many discussions about blind people access to museums. Museums prohibit touch to all and historically assumed that people go to museums to “see” the collections. However, touch constitutes a significant channel for people with visual impairments to grasp information from museums and their exhibits (Hetherington, 2000, 2003). Hence, when people with visual disabilities decide to visit museums, they have to deal with this contradiction.

4 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Introduction

Museums, in order to achieve their goal for an inclusive cultural access, an access for all, should translate this goal to a realistic policy. A realistic inclusive policy of a “museum for all”, firstly, should plan on clear aims. Questions such as “what is suitable to do?”, “for whom?” and “in which way?” are necessary to be answered before the main planning of an accessible museum. In addition, access museums’ policy should be based on the fundamental principles of human rights and disability law as well as on the rights for Persons with Disability.

4.2 Basic Principles for an accessible museums’ policy

4.2.1 *Non-discrimination*

- The design and the implementation of the access policy of museums should take into consideration all visitors / audiences without any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. A discriminatory policy, based on disability, also, includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation.
- The design and the implementation of the access policy of museums should take into consideration all visitors / audiences with any distinction, exclusion or restriction

because of race, nation, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or other social condition. The design and the implementation of the access policy of museums should take into consideration all visitors / audiences with any distinction, exclusion or restriction because of multiple disability or on the variety of the forms of disability, which include appearance and non-appearance, sited or non-sited disabilities. Museums should ensure the equality between men and women at all levels. Museums should take into consideration the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities, when they design programs, products, visits, trainings etc.

4.2.2 *Respect for Persons with Disability*

- Museums' staff should respect the difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity.
- All documents, labels and internet sites references should be created in a respect for Persons with Disability language. The creators of museums' documents should adopt the definitions of the social model of disability and they should prevent stereotypes and social stigma, (Goffman, 2001), based on all forms of discrimination.
- Museums' policy should be designed with respect for inherent dignity, self-determination, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of Persons with Disability.
- Museums should design their exhibition and their buildings in a way, to promote the autonomy and the freedom of mobility of Persons with Visual Impairment.
- Museums should permit guide dogs for the blind and design their exhibition with a way to facilitate the use of white cane. They should provide information and direction in accessible forms for Persons with Visual Impairment, in order they could be oriented on your own. Museums' should support, by giving general or specific information, including those that refers to touch tours, audio tours, touch exhibitions etc., the escorts of Persons with Disability in their visits.
- Museums should include in their exhibitions, if this is feasible, thematic areas that refer to disability, its historical dimension and to the self-identity of Persons with Disability. They should include in their collections artworks of Artists with Disability.

4.2.3 Accessibility

- Museums should adopt appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to their environment.
- Museums should recognize and adopt a broad / holistic approach of accessibility, including the following dimensions:
 - + *The accessibility of transportation,*
 - + *The accessibility of buildings, indoor and outdoor facilities.*
 - + *The accessibility of information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems and*
 - + *The accessibility of their facilities and services open or provided to the public.*

In order museums to achieve the goal of accessibility, it is necessary, to recognize and eliminate the obstacles and the barriers. According to the circumstances, the accessibility of museums will be feasible in two different ways:

- + *"Reasonable accommodation" It is implemented after the design of services, products, programs, buildings or environments and includes all necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, (See, also, CRPD, art. 2, "Reasonable Accommodation).*
- + *"Universal design" It is implemented before the final design of services, products, programs, buildings or environments, so as those to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design, (See, also, CRPD, art. 2, "Universal Design).*

The tools or methods, through which the goal of museums' accessibility can be achieved, may be the following:

1. Tactile maps
2. Tactile diagrams
3. Reading maps
4. Verbal description
5. Audio description of visual objects
6. Texts and documents in large scale format
7. Audio guides

8. Accessible web sites
9. Accessible mobile or internet applications
10. Tactile materials or other objects
11. Touch tours
12. Touch exhibitions
13. Labels in braille format
14. Sound effects

4.2.3.1 Transportation

- It is very important, if around the museums, there is a transport net, so as everyone will be able to use it to reach the museum.
- Museums should include transport information on their websites in an accessible way of verbal description and accessible reading maps.
- Museums should have a tactile map or a tactile diagram of their outdoor spaces, so as visitors with vision difficulties can navigate themselves.
- All transport information should be provided in large scale text for persons with low vision.
- Museums are urged to cooperate with universities, schools for the blind, organizations, (NGO or Associations) for the Blind and with persons with visual disability as well as with other experts on the field of accessibility, in order to support the creation of a fully accessible informational material.

4.2.3.2 Environments, Buildings and Services

- Museums should have a tactile map, a tactile diagram or a map or a diagram in large scale document format or in audio format of their indoor spaces, so as visitors with visual impairments may navigate themselves autonomously. Those accessible maps or diagrams should mention useful information for all interesting locations of the museums, including, the parts of the exhibition, the cafeteria, the restroom, the WC, the ticket services, the gift shop, the reception etc.
- It is recommended that the maps or diagrams in audio format should describe the information that refers to the orientation in and around the museum in a way of a verbal description following the clock direction.
- Museums should provide tactile maps or tactile diagrams of their exhibitions.

- Museums should include touch tours in their exhibitions, in order to give the chance of creating tactile experience. If this is feasible and permitted from relevant legislation and curators, museums could design touch tours, providing the opportunity to all visitors, including those who have visual impairments, to experience the exhibits by touch.
- Touch tours may be conducted combined with audio description, verbal description and accessible labels in Braille format.
- Museums should ensure, that their audio guides have been designed, to be usable for visitors who are visually impaired or blind. Tactile keyboards and screen readers are useful technologies for a universal design of audio guides.
- Museums should ensure, that their mobile or their internet applications, including those that provide a virtual internet tour, will be accessible for persons with visual disability and that they have been designed following W3C paradigm and the acceptable technical rules of Universal Design.
- Museums, in order to promote the multi-sensory learning and understanding and the tactile experience, should include in their collections, if this is feasible, materials or objects with tactile interest. This tactile collection could be designed for every visitor.
- Museums, also, for multi-sensory learning, could include alternative ways of the discovery of their exhibition, using music or other sound effects.
- Museums could design specific programs for students with visual disability, on the bases for their lessons' needs. These specific programs could be designed in collaboration with special education teachers who are experienced in working with blind students.
- Museums should ensure that their museum kits are provided in an accessible format, combined with tactile maps or tactile diagrams, accessible audio guides with verbal or audio description of the visual objects.

4.2.3.3 Information and Services

- Museums should provide all necessary information, regarding transportation, the type of the museum building, outdoor and indoor spaces, and locations of interest, services, exhibition, collections, documents, leaflets and catalogs. In addition, it is recommended to provide all information in accessible formats (hard copies or accessible websites) for persons with visual disability.

- Museums should ensure that the information about their accessibility provisions and services are referred in paper or e-books tour guides.
- Museums may appoint contact person(s) from the museum staff, to act as facilitator or/and mediator regarding issues of accessibility. These people should be able, with an appropriate training:
 - to provide information regarding the types of accessibility the museum has at its disposal
 - to cooperate with Schools for blind students, teachers of special education, other experts on the field, universities and organizations for the blind, to design or to organize accessible programs

4.2.4 Training, Cooperation and Evaluation

Museums should encourage the implementation of training seminars or sessions, in collaboration with experts (special education teachers, academics, and other relevant professional), in order to:

- Exchange knowledge and information about the accessibility of museums.
- Learn the ways and the methods, through which the museums would become an inclusive cultural location for all visitors, with emphasis on the features of their museums.
- Update their knowledge on the field of accessibility.
- Follow-up their projects and their programs on the field.
- Record the best practices and the feedback of the implementation of their accessibility programs.
- Reach the goal of an interdisciplinary approach on the universal design and an accessible museum for all.
- Create networks for a future exchange information and follow-up the innovations on the field of accessibility.
- Achieve a positive attitude for disability as a universal experience of humanity

These training seminars or sessions should involve all museum staff. Special training seminars could be organized for the staff, including museums educators, scientific staff and security guards, in order to be able to provide assistive services for all visitors with and without disabilities. In addition, museums should encourage the organization of training seminars or sessions, especially, for tour guides. These training seminars or sessions should

be focus on the awareness about disability in general and especially on the access of visitors and tourists with visual disability.

In addition, the following constitute useful supplementary actions in the direction of an effective museum policy regarding evaluation and continuous improvement

- Museums need to cooperate with NGO Organizations or Associations for Persons with Visual Disability, to promote this access policy and keep them posted for their accessible programs.
- Museums could cooperate with other museums with experience on the field of accessibility and Universal Design.
- Museums should provide their evaluation form in accessible formats.
- The evaluation forms or documents should include topics, key points or questions about the accessibility of the museum.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS ON A “SELF ADVOCACY” BASIS FOR MUSEUM VISITORS: THE CASE OF PERSONS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

5.1 Introduction

The first step for a Person with Visual Disability, to decide, to visit a museum is to have information about:

- The features of the museum
- The ways of transportation
- The accessibility provisions for Persons with Visual Disability

5.2 Golden IFTT & IFTA (IF... Then Try, IF... Then Ask)

- If you are able to use internet and web sites, try to find the official web site of the museum, you want to visit.
- If you haven't decided yet, which museum, you will visit, try to search, which museums in your country / city or in the country / city, you are hosted. Try to search, using search engines, putting key words like “museums + accessibility + blind”. If you are not able to use the internet, try to ask about your classmates, teachers, your family members, your friends etc.
- The official web sites of the museums, normally, should include information on their accessibility provisions. If these do not exist and in the case of you are not able to use the internet, communicate with the museum's staff, to ask about the accessibility provisions for Persons with Visual Disability. Moreover, you can communicate with NG Organizations or other Association for Persons with Visual Disability, or with Schools for Students with Visual Disability, to ask about the museums that provide accessible services or facilitates for Persons with Visual Disability.
- During your communication with the museum's staff or any other person, who can help you with the accessibility information, try to explain, if you are interested in provisions that have to do with Persons, who are blind, partially sighted or for Persons with Multiple Disability. Try, also, to explain your skills, e.g. if you know how to read braille documents, braille labels, tactile maps or tactile diagrams, if you use the internet, if you speak foreign languages. In general, try to describe your requests and your interaction skills with the social environment.
- If you decided to visit the museums autonomously, try to find on the web or ask, if there are tactile maps, tactile diagrams or reading maps of the outdoor, the indoor and

the exhibition of the museum. If these are not exist, ask for the possibility of an assistive support of the museum staff.

- Before your visit, do not forget to make clear, if guide dogs for the blind are permitted and if the use of white cane is possible.
- If you visit the museum with your escort, try to explain to her/him, what do you want to learn, discover or touch in the exhibition.
- The museum's policy, may, ask for the assistive help of your escort. If your escort has to help you, during the touch tours or to discover the touch exhibitions, follow, exactly, the recommendations of your escort.
- If the museum permits to do the touch tour on your own, follow the recommendations that the museum's staff will give you.
- Ask if the museum provides other facilities, such as mobile applications or other assistive technologies, audio guides with verbal or audio descriptions, alternative tools to discover the exhibition, by using sound effects, museums etc.
- Before you leave, ask if the museum provides its evaluation form in accessible for Persons with Visual Disability formats. Express your opinion and your attitudes from your visit with emphasis on the accessibility provisions.
- If you are student, try to encourage your teachers and your classmates, to visit a museum all together. Ask your teachers, if there are programs designed for Students with Visual Disability as a group. Ask your teachers, if this is feasible, to use the museum kit, during the lesson.

If the museum, you want to visit, has no access provision for Persons with Visual Disability:

- Express your request orally or written, directly to the museum's staff. This way will be useful, in the cases of other provisions, that could solve the problem, such assistive technologies or other forms of assistance.
- Check, if your country or the country, you are hosted, has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability. On the official web site of United Nations, you could find an accessible map of the signatures and ratification of the Convention and the Optional Protocol, (See at: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/maps/enablemap.jpg>).
- If your country or the country you are hosted, has ratified the Convention, it has, according to article 30, the obligation to take measures for the accessibility of

museums and other cultural sites. If you are not in position to use the internet, ask any other NGO, specialized on Person with Disability Rights or any other Association for Persons with Visual Disability, to inform you about the legislation that exists.

- If the museums reply to your request negatively, contact with NGOs, specialized on Persons with Disability Rights or with any other Association for Persons with Visual Disability and keep them aware of the incidents during your visit at the museum and the negative reply on your request for access. You can also ask for help or legal advocacy other administrative, such as National or Regional Ombudsman, National Commissions of Human Rights. You can inform about your request and the negative reply the administrative, that are obliged to supervise the museums. These administrative may be will be different, if the museum belongs to the private or to the public sector of economy and if it is public or private.
- If there is no legal means in your country or in the country, you are hosted, or if you existed all of the available legal means, you can aware for your request other international institutions, such as the European Parliament or the Committee of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability. In any case, you can ask a lawyer for legal advice.
- Do not forget, that the access to the museums is a universal right and an experience belongs to all humanity!

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