

MuseumEdu 5

Museums, education and people with disabilities

INTRODUCTION

MuseumEdu 5, Museums, education and people with disabilities, is the fifth issue of the on-line, open access, peer-reviewed international journal *MuseumEdu*, published by the University of Thessaly Museum Education and Research Laboratory in November 2017. Guest editors of this special issue are Dr Vassilios Argyropoulos and Dr Charikleia Kanari.

The issue includes papers in English as well as in Greek, accompanied with abstracts in both languages.

The rationale

MuseumEdu 5, Museums, education and people with disabilities, presents articles that focus on the access of people with disabilities in cultural centres such as museums and monuments. This special issue seeks to reveal contemporary approaches which are related to the rights of people with disabilities for equal access to cultural goods, to the dimensions and the presuppositions of access as well as to aspects relevant to learning and social inclusion in museums regarding people with disabilities.

The aforementioned issues constitute topics of many core discussion networks relevant to politics, decision-making frameworks, studies and practices. It is evident that over the past decades issues such as removal of social barriers for people with disabilities, advocate for the rights of people with disabilities for equal access and participation in all sectors of social and cultural life constitute core topics of intensive discussions in contemporary societies at different levels, structures and institutions. The development of the social model of disability, the recognition of the rights of people with disabilities in many conventions, the legislative acts as well as social, political, educational changes, had great impact on museums' policy regarding their cultural, social and educational role.

The discussions within museums regarding their role and their relationship with their audiences have revealed the multidimensional nature of access as well as the need to confront the access to museums as a systematic and continuous process. Furthermore,

the increasing interest for issues of access in museums for people with disabilities in other scientific fields - e.g. in special education, sociology, new technologies, etc-, the complexity of issues of access and the heterogeneity of disability have acknowledged the need for interdisciplinary approach and collaboration with many social networks. In this framework, many museums around the world have taken initiatives regarding the provision of various access facilitations as well as the design and implementation of educational activities for people with disabilities. However, there are many differences among museums regarding the level of accessibility and as a result, people with disabilities still face many barriers in museums.

The aim of *Museumedu 5* is to discuss various aspects regarding accessibility in museums towards visitors with disabilities, as well as to acknowledge issues of equal participation in cultural and social life and social inclusion. We hope that the present special issue will trigger fruitful discussions and raise questions regarding the enhancement of access and participation of people with disabilities in museums and cultural spaces in general.

The structure

Museumedu 5, includes seven papers which deal with various thematic areas: (a) access in museums, (b) museum staff training in disability issues, (c) practices for people with different disabilities which are related with various facilitations, (d) educational material and new technologies as well as issues regarding the contribution of museums to social inclusion, (e) formal education and access to art, and (f) culture and museums.

More specifically, *Museumedu 5* includes the following articles:

ARISTOTELIS NANIPOULOS & PANAGIOTIS TSALIS *Accessibility of monuments and archaeological sites* (GR)

In this paper, Dr Naniopoulos and Dr Tsalis discuss the issue of accessibility of monuments and archaeological sites by disabled persons and they present the project “PROSPELASIS”. This project attempted to counter this issue by focusing on creating a methodology for facing Monuments’ accessibility and perceptibility problems for people with disabilities and testing its application at Byzantine Monuments of Thessaloniki. The authors present the methodology of the project as well the accessibility improvements that took place in 6 major Byzantine Monuments in order to verify the proposed methodology. These improvements were accompanied by the production of a dedicated guidebook as well as the training of involved stakeholders.

VASSILIOS ARGYROPOULOS, CHARIKLEIA KANARI & SOFIA-LEFKI CHAMONIKOLAOU
Training activities in issues of access of persons with disabilities in museums and archaeological sites: A case study (GR)

In the present paper the importance of museum staff training in issues of disability is discussed, which is an important parameter for the enhancement of access of people with disabilities to museums. The authors present the case of a training programme on accessibility issues for people with disabilities to museums and archaeological sites which was designed and implemented by the University of Thessaly entitled “Culture/Special Education: Access of People with Disabilities and/or Special Educational Needs in the natural and cultural environment of museums and archaeological sites”. The paper describes the theoretical framework of the above training programme in conjunction with its constituents and implementation. The characteristics of the programme, the great interest for participation in the present programme as well as the consistency of all trainees towards the requirements of the programme confirm the necessity of the museums’ staff training in disability issues.

MAGDA NIKOLARAIZI

The access and participation of deaf and hard of hearing persons to cultural centres: The case of museums (GR)

In this paper Dr Magda Nikolarazi discusses issues of access to museums for deaf and hard of hearing people (DHH). She describes the communication barriers that DHH persons face regarding their access to museums in relation with the heterogeneity of this population and their diverse language and communication preferences. Additionally, a few examples of museums around the world are provided, which follow inclusive practices and make efforts to enhance the access of DHH visitors.

EVMORFIA TSAMANGA

The use of social stories in museums for visitors on the autism spectrum: The case of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki (GR)

This paper refers to the characteristics of people that are on the autism spectrum and the use of social stories within museums. A social story for the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki (AMTh) is presented as well as the procedure for the development of this social story in cooperation with the Center of Autism “Achtida”. The paper highlights the need of more social stories for people who are on the autism spectrum in cultural sites as well as the need for further research in order to find out the effectiveness of social stories in museums and archaeological sites.

DAVID FEENEY

A modest defence of disability simulation within an arts access context (Eng)

In this paper, Dr David Feeney discusses issues related with the aesthetic experiences of visitors with visual impairment in galleries. With the use of a piece of simulation software, Sight-Sim™, the author examines issues of disability simulation in terms of heightening the engagement levels of gallery visitors with visual impairments in works of visual art. Unlike many of the existing endorsements of disability simulation, the tentative defence of simulation outlined in this paper reveals a number of distinct but interrelated benefits of simulation, neglected by previous advocates of simulation, within an art access context and a democratic reconceptualising of the process of the cultivation of aesthetic literacies.

CHARIKLEIA KANARI, VASSILIOS ARGYROPOYLOS & DIAMANTO FILIPPATOY

Social inclusion and museums: Special education teachers' perceptions regarding museums and social inclusion of students with visual disability (GR)

This paper refers to the actual or potential role of museums towards social inclusion of people with disabilities and more specifically of students with visual disability. Considering the relationship between museum and school, the aim of this research is to explore the perceptions of Primary special education teachers regarding the role and the contribution of museums to social inclusion of students with visual disability. Based on quantitative and qualitative data, the results of this research reveal issues such as the positive impact the museums have on the education of students with visual disability, the ways and the conditions in which museums may contribute to social inclusion of students with visual disability and the dynamic relationship, which seems to be developing between museums and schools.

SIMON HAYHOE

Initial analysis from a grounded methodology study of risk taking and avoidance by students with visual impairments during art projects (Eng)

This paper refers to a research, which was designed to examine the effects that factors such as age and quality of exposure to art have on blind students' belief in their ability to study art. The data were collected by a combination of interviews, observations, monthly reports and photographs of students' artifacts during different stages of production and analysed using an adapted version of Doyle's framework of ambiguity and risk. Research findings as well as the two case studies of students, which are presented in this paper, reveal issues related with prior experiences of blind students in art education. In the context of this study, creativity and task performance was largely premised on previous self-belief and a current willingness to take risks.

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The *Museumedu 5* Guest Editors

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