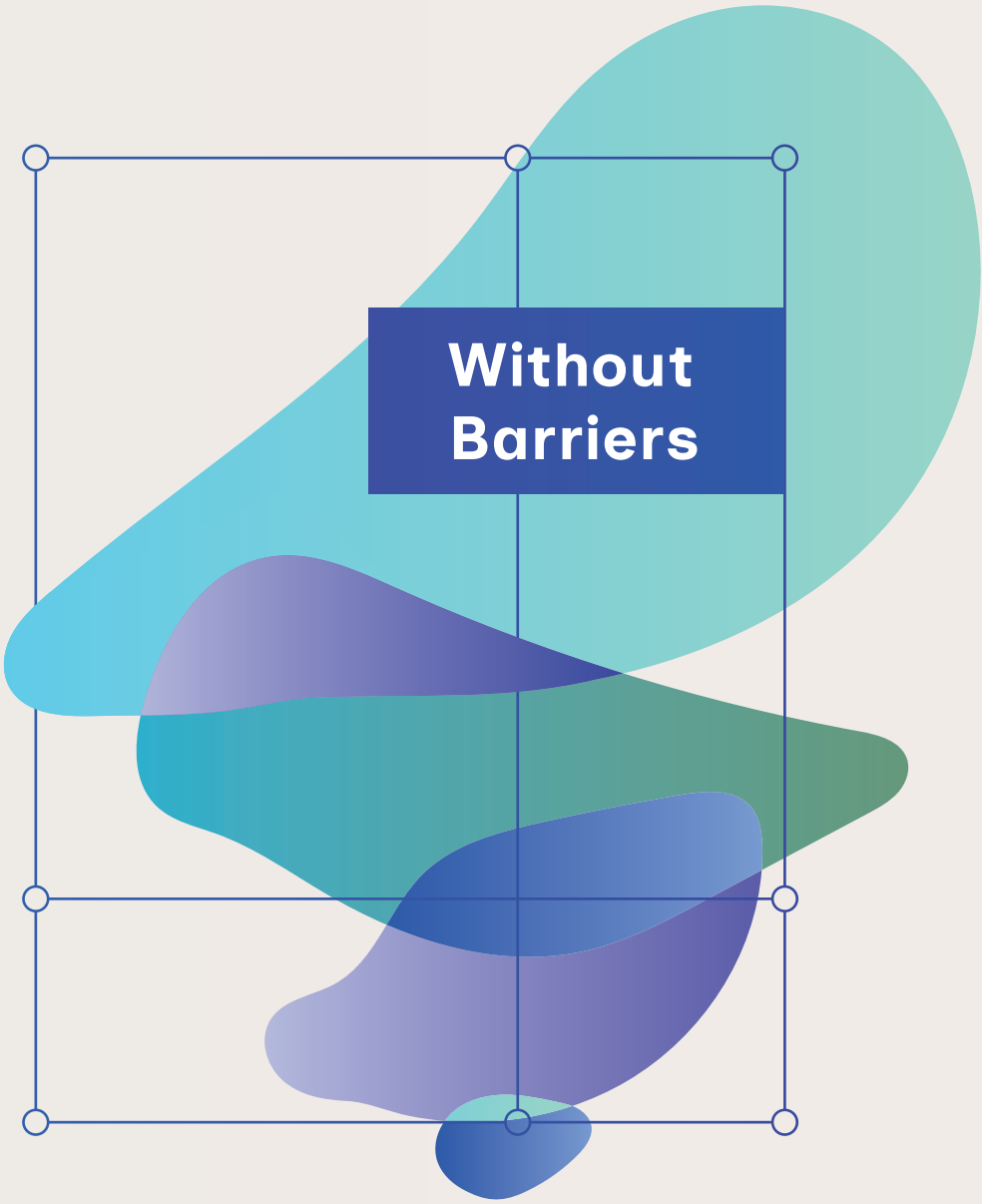


**A practical toolkit
for more accessible museums**

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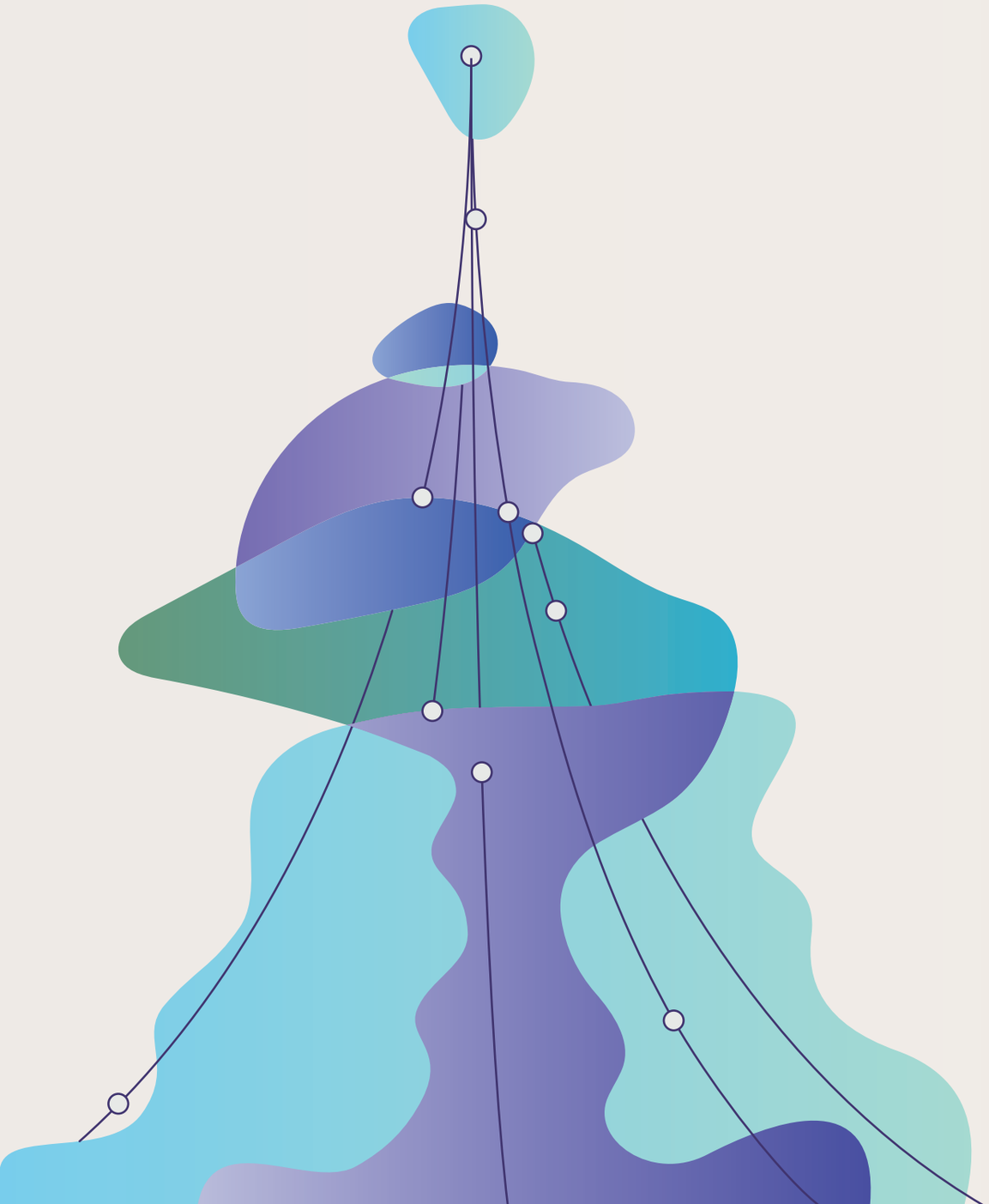
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01

Introduction

Eva Vázalová Gartnerová

Your museum may boast an excellent collection, thoughtful programming, and a dedicated team, yet a part of your audience might still be left out feeling confused and misunderstood. This has nothing to do with your content not generating enough interest, and everything to do with something standing in the way: barriers and walls which were unintentionally put there by the very people who make your museum.

Such obstacles are not actually tied to specific groups of people. They stem from issues in the environment, text, wayfinding, and communication, and can be addressed as such.

The toolkit you're reading right now originated as part of the Museums Without Barriers project at the Faculty of Multimedia Communications at Tomas Bata University in Zlin, running from 2023 to 2026 with support from the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic. The project examined how to make museums and galleries accessible to as wide an audience as possible, with particular attention to people with specific learning difficulties. It didn't start at a desk; it draws on interviews with representatives of cultural institutions, eye-tracking research at the Gočár Gallery in Pardubice, Czech Republic, two surveys, and pilot testing during Zlin Design Week.

While the research this toolkit is based on focuses mainly on audiences with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs), most findings have proven relevant for wider visitor groups as well. Throughout the text, we therefore distinguish between findings drawn directly from research on people with SpLDs and statements about the audience as a whole. The result is a practical tool for people who strive to be the active co-creators of museums and galleries every day.

And that's you: curatorial teams, graphic designers, marketing and PR professionals, production staff, exhibition architecture teams, and institutional leadership. This publication assumes no prior knowledge of accessibility or inclusive design. Some of you may be approaching this topic for the first time; others already have experience and are looking for further impulses, tools, or tangible research data. There's something here for both.

We must point out that accessibility as we use it should not be understood as an additional service provided to a narrow group of people. Measures that help people with SpLDs generally make things easier to navigate and understand for many other groups too: people who are tired, in a hurry, accompanied by small children, or simply not fond of long text in small print. Accessibility is an integral part of a well-designed museum. Not a compromise, not charity—just a smarter way of doing things.

How to use this publication

This document is not meant to be read from start to finish. Start with areas you feel need improvement most urgently, or wherever you see the greatest opportunity for change.

The opening chapters explain why accessibility belongs in today's museum, what concepts it encompasses, and specifically whom the proposed measures help, exploring in detail what kinds of people museums are unintentionally losing today, and how we can make their visit easier. Next comes an overview of the project and the research methods behind the publication.

The main part of the toolkit covers five areas of the visitor journey:

- **Marketing communication** explores how the decision to visit starts with a simple search, usually at home on a computer or phone screen, not at the museum door.
- **Text and typography** determine whether the content provided is read and understood by visitors.
- **Wayfinding and navigation** look at ways of reducing the stress of disorientation and allowing people to move through the gallery space without depending on staff.
- **Interactive elements** can engage visitors in the program, as long as they are simple, predictable, and easy to understand.
- **Physical space** encompasses the physical and sensory environment of a visit, which can communicate even without words.

Each chapter builds upon research findings by providing specific recommendations and useful tips organized by professional role, so everyone can quickly find what applies to their own work. The publication closes with an overview of existing tools and the legal framework.

Checklist

The toolkit also includes a double-sided checklist designed as a standalone worksheet. Print it out and take it straight into your exhibition. One side covers the five key areas, while the other offers statements for self-assessment. Each item allows you to see what a well-designed gallery or museum space achieves. The checklist was pilot-tested with gallery and museum professionals at Zlin Design Week and works as an easy first step you can take right away, even without reading the whole publication.

Many interventions this document describes do not require major investment or specialized expertise. Mostly, they require a willingness to look at your own institution through the eyes of an audience that hasn't yet found its way in.

Thank you for doing this work.



02

Why Do We Do This?

Mariana Chytilová

It's a week before opening. A curator does a final check on the exhibition, going through each info panel. Every block of text seems to be factually correct, with every sentence in exactly the right place. Then they try to read through the panels while standing to see how much time it takes. However, they promptly give up after the third, suddenly realizing that hardly anyone in the audience is going to read all of them.

This is not a failure on the curator's part. Nor is the text at fault here. This very moment is when intention meets reality. Text that works on paper may not work for people with limited attention, people in a hurry, people who are not native speakers, or younger audiences. Museums often discover this only once it's too late to do anything about it.

This chapter explores how such moments come about and how we can address them. However, the goal here is not to make your team forget everything they know, but rather to make them perceptive to these issues and equipped to deal with them.

Text is an obstacle for 30% of visitors

The opening scenario is certainly not far-fetched. It's a pattern that repeats across museums and galleries, and it affects far more people than institutions realize.

Research conducted within the Museums Without Barriers project revealed that up to a third of the adult population reports difficulties with reading. That includes both people with diagnosed dyslexia as well as people who struggle with reading in stressful environments. In other words, roughly one in three people who walk into a museum may perceive written text as an obstacle.

What the research says

The research combined eye-tracking analyses, surveys, and interviews involving museum and gallery visitors. The sample consisted of 388 respondents, of whom 30.6% reported some form of reading difficulty: people with diagnosed dyslexia (4.7%), people who have yet to address their reading difficulties (5.1%), and people with occasional reading difficulties in stressful situations (20.8%). The research was carried out by the Faculty of Multimedia Communications, Tomas Bata University in Zlin, from 2023 to 2024, as part of a project funded by the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

The eye-tracking analysis showed that exhibit labels only attract 1% of people's visual attention on average. Museums and galleries put a lot of effort into the written content of exhibitions, yet text isn't the main way audiences actually receive information in an exhibition. Moreover, 60% of respondents affirm their openness to reading texts that would be shorter. What that tells us is that people want to read the text, but what matters is how it's written.

Accessible text isn't just a solution for people with dyslexia either. Short sentences, a clear structure, and plain language help deaf people who may have learned the local language as a second language. They further help people with visual impairments, who might be able to take on a short text but not a long one. They help people who speak the language well but not perfectly. And they help people who are short on time, tired, or simply need to get their bearings quickly. A solution designed for one group improves the experience for everyone.

The domino effect: one person's barrier excludes a whole group of people
Data confirm that an obstacle in the form of text has structural implications. If a young family member has dyslexia, the whole family tends to visit galleries significantly less often. This relationship has a strong statistical significance ($p = 0.0005$), meaning it isn't chance but a systemic pattern. One unresolved issue excludes more than one person at a time.

As we can see, the scope of this issue is not negligible. Let's take a closer look at what we can focus on and how we should even talk about barriers and accessibility.

From barrier-free access to inclusive design

For most galleries and museums, accessibility is a known topic. Yet when you ask three different people on your staff about it, you'll likely get three different answers. One might focus on wheelchair access, another will mention audio guides and AI, a third might open with website accessibility. All of these answers are correct in their own right, each one approaching the subject from a different angle: physical space, technology, and communication. Without a shared framework, it's hard for an institution to agree on what it's actually trying to address.

Institutions often fail to be accessible not for a lack of willingness, but rather because there's no shared language, or shared idea, of what an accessible cultural program actually means and what it should look like.

The difference between barrier-free access and accessibility

Barrier-free access is a term most institutions are familiar with. It refers to complying with the law on the most basic elements: a ramp at the entrance, an elevator, an accessible restroom. These are important baseline conditions, not the goal. Barrier-free access deals with physical obstacles and represents the minimum legal requirements.

Accessibility is a broader term. It covers four areas that together make up an accessible visitor experience: physical accessibility (space, wayfinding, orientation), accessibility of programming and services (guided tours, workshops, interactive elements, and how exhibits are interpreted and labeled), accessibility of information (website, marketing, online communication, information about the exhibition and the institution), and accessibility of human resources (staff, training, the ability to assist and communicate).
All of these areas are intertwined. An exhibit label needs to be physically accessible (placement, lighting, contrast), accessible in content (plain language), and accessible in the way it is interpreted (programming). If one of these aspects fails, the whole thing doesn't work. And conversely, when accessibility is built into every aspect, the result can be a meaningful experience.

Four areas of obstacles and accessibility
In her work, Ivana Kocichová (2016) defines four key areas of obstacles in Czech museums: architecture, presentation, information and wayfinding, and communication. This toolkit builds on her research and takes it further, moving from types of obstacles to areas of accessibility as properties of the service as a whole. Accessibility doesn't mean removing individual obstacles one by one. Instead, it is a systemic quality of an institution.

Inclusive design

Inclusive design goes even further. Instead of asking whether legal requirements are being met, it asks who is being unintentionally excluded. It is a process that actively looks for situations where people are excluded from the museum and brings those very people into the process of designing solutions. Kat Holmes calls these situations of exclusion a “mismatch.” From the perspective of inclusive design, an obstacle isn’t a property of a person. It only materializes at the intersection of a person and a poorly designed environment, text, or service.

Mismatch: an obstacle seen as a relationship, not a flaw

Kat Holmes (2018) claims that exclusion rarely happens on purpose. It arises when an institution designs a program around its own assumptions about the visitor—their ability to read in the language of the exhibition, hear the commentary, stand for long periods, find their way around an unfamiliar space, their knowledge of art history terminology, and their readiness to ask questions.

Inclusive design shifts the lens. The problem isn’t “a person with dyslexia” or “a deaf visitor.” Instead, it is poorly designed text, unclear instructions, an inaccessible booking system, or poorly trained staff who don’t know how to assist visitors.

Universal design

Universal design is the ambition behind all of this: designing environments, services, and information so that as many people as possible can use them from the outset, without the need for later adaptations. The seven principles of universal design cover equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and size and space for approach and use. Together, they work as a practical checklist for an inclusive museum.

The relationship between inclusive and universal design can be described as follows: While universal design shows what **we want to achieve** (an environment usable by everyone), inclusive design shows **the process that gets us there.** In practice, that means involving people who encounter obstacles not just in testing a finished solution, but in designing the program and the whole experience from the start.

Why does this matter? Because an institution that settles for a step-free entrance can still be excluding people through an inaccessible website, unclear text, or staff who don’t know how to help. Similarly, an institution that applies these principles mechanically can still overlook the experience of the very people it’s designing for.

What all of these situations have in common is one thing: an obstacle doesn’t mean that something is wrong with a person. It means that something’s wrong with the environment.

The visitor is not the issue

Let’s say a museum is planning a new exhibition. The team is discussing how to make it accessible. Among the proposals are an audio guide, closed captions, and simplified text. Each solution targets a specific group of people. However, we often forget to ask: why is the text written in a way that needs simplifying in the first place? And why do we treat an audio feature of the exhibition as an add-on for a special group instead of building it for everyone?

What happens if an institution stops addressing “special needs” and starts analyzing the obstacles in its environment? Research shows that obstacles do not exist in isolation. They enhance one another and, together, exclude audiences from the museum, both physically and figuratively. Someone who runs into three of these obstacles on

their way in will likely give up on the visit altogether. An inaccessible website compounds with inconvenient opening hours; a lack of information compounds with uncertainty about whether they'll even be able to get there. One problem amplifies the next.

Eight types of barriers according to Kay, Wong, and Polonsky (2009)

A study mapping cultural participation identified eight systemic barriers that together determine who does and doesn't make it into a cultural institution:

1. physical access (building, transport, parking);
2. personal access (assistance, staff, communication);
3. cost (admission, incidental expenses);
4. time and timing (opening hours, booking);
5. product (the form and content of the program)
6. personal interest and peer group (a sense that "this is/isn't for us");
7. socialization and understanding (knowing the rules and what to expect);
8. information (availability, clarity, timing).

Taking a systemic approach to accessibility

Community partnership

One example of what systemic change can look like is the Louvre-Lens museum in northern France. Even before its new building opened, the institution kept the public informed about what was coming. For deaf audiences, it produced videos in sign language and offered tours led by a deaf guide, who appeared not as an interpreter for a hearing guide, but as a direct representative of the institution. She explained the context behind the building, why it was set in Lens, and what it would house. This offered deaf audiences not just information in sign language, but also a way to identify with the Louvre. **When information is shared by someone from the community who also represents the institution, it builds trust and loyalty.** This also increases the odds of people coming back.

A similar approach is used by the Czech film festival One World and the Center for Architecture and Metropolitan Planning (CAMP) in Prague. Both produce sign-language videos on various topics, ranging from festival programming to announcements about covid-related closures. **Information in Czech Sign Language, produced directly by deaf people, is part of the communication strategy itself.**

Representation

Museum entrance is not the only place barriers can occur. Oftentimes they come about even before the visitor ever sets foot in the museum: failing to find information about programming, encountering a website with no accessibility features, or simply not seeing anybody to identify with among other visitors.

They can also be embedded in the structure of the institution, reflecting whose stories and works are represented in the collections, who is visible as a creator, as a subject, as a bearer of cultural heritage. If a museum does not make it a habit to exhibit works of people with disabilities and if their experience is not reflected in the overall story being told, then a barrier exists even before a single ticket has been sold.

The good news is that **inclusive solutions have one clear upside: they benefit all visitors.** When the One World festival and CAMP began providing live captioning for selected events (debates, lectures, openings) for people with hearing loss, hearing visitors started using and appreciating it too. Captioning benefits several groups of people at once: people who speak Czech as a second language, people unfamiliar with expert urban planning and architecture terminology, and ultimately anyone who just wants

text to lean on while following a discussion. Live captioning stopped being a measure for deaf audiences and became a standard part of event production.

Curb-cut effect
Curb cuts were originally created in response to barriers that made it impossible for wheelchair users to move independently through a city. Their spread is closely associated with student activism in Berkeley in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Today, they're also used by people with strollers, suitcases, walkers, shopping carts, or bicycles. This is known as the **curb-cut effect:** an adaptation designed for one group ends up removing a barrier for many others as well.

The same applies to museums and galleries. Providing a transcript for a lecture does not just benefit deaf people but also visitors who are unfamiliar with technical terms or prefer written language for other reasons. Captions are useful for other groups beyond deaf audiences; they also help people watching the video with the sound off, in a noisy space, or in a foreign language. An accessible solution is not a compromise but rather a solution that works for a wider audience.

Uncertainty as a barrier
Posting a photo of the entrance on the website works the same way. CAMP as well as several Prague movie theaters have added a photo of what their entrance looks like alongside the address, opening hours, and a map of the area on their website. This stemmed from a realization that **people who visit their institution for the first time experience a lot of uncertainty.** Oftentimes they ask themselves whether they'll find their way in and wonder if they even belong there, which can lead to frustration or even discourage them from attending altogether. Adding a simple photo may seem like a small gesture, but it may well decide whether a person feels welcome. And that isn't just true for people with disabilities; any first-time visitor can benefit from this measure.

Involving diverse groups of people in program design
The UK's Design Council (2006) framed inclusive design as an approach that involves as many people as possible from the very start of designing a program or service. Its key principle is: "They include you." Inclusive design doesn't mean a separate offer for "special groups." It means environments and services designed to work for a diverse audience. The report The Principles of Inclusive Design stresses that solutions designed with inclusion in mind tend to improve the experience for the majority as well.

Environments, texts, websites, staff, communication, programming, and exhibitions are all places where barriers can arise and can also be dismantled. Change starts with a simple question: what can be done better?

Principles of inclusive design

A curator, a graphic designer, and a director meet to discuss an exhibition. The topic of accessibility comes up. One suggests a tactile model of an exhibit, another a more legible font for labels, another a budget line for a stair climber. All three are good ideas. Yet, by the end of the meeting, no actual progress has been made. Individual measures only address individual barriers.

Inclusive design asks where these barriers come from in the first place, and gives the team a shared framework and concrete next

steps. Barriers arise because museums repeat familiar patterns without realizing who they exclude along the way. Kat Holmes calls these exclusion habits: not intent, not indifference, just learned behavior.

Inclusive design is not the outcome. It's a process. The key questions to ask here are: who's at the table when an exhibition, a communication campaign, or an educational program is being designed? And whose experience serves as the starting point for the discussion?

The following five principles do not work as a checklist to go through. They represent a mindset that can help a museum design its spaces, content, communication, and programming.

Principle 1: Address points of mismatch, not diagnoses

When we think of blind audiences, we usually assume they'll be able to read text in Braille. However, many visually impaired people do not use or cannot read Braille. The problem isn't them—it's our assumptions about what they need.

A mismatch occurs when the museum's offering and a specific person's needs are not aligned. This doesn't mean there's anything wrong with that person. The mismatch merely informs us about a blind spot in our service. Once we know where to look for it, we can find out what that person actually needs.

Why this works

Holmes (2018) defines "mismatch" as a key barrier pertaining to a relationship between an institution or environment and a person, not a property of the person. Shifting the focus from "who has the problem" to "where is the mismatch" opens room for solutions that actually work, and that tend to benefit other audiences as a bonus.

Principle 2: Design the whole journey, not isolated measures

The visitor experience doesn't start at the museum door. It usually starts at home, the moment a person decides where to go. They search for upcoming events, opening hours, and ways to get there. They encounter obstacles in the form of opening hours being hard to find, no directions to the venue, and uncertainty about what to expect once they arrive. Which stop is the best to get off? How much is the ticket? Is there an accessible restroom or a hearing loop on site? Is the tour interpreted into sign language? Will there be somewhere to sit?

The One World festival treats the journey to the venue as part of the visitor experience. On top of providing the physical address, its website includes directions from the nearest stop, information about accessible parking, and a detailed route description for blind visitors. None of these measures are difficult to implement. However, together they send a powerful message: "We see you, even before you reach our doors."

Why this works

Kocichová (2016) defines four areas of barriers in museums: architecture, presentation, information, and communication. This toolkit builds on her framework and takes it further, moving from types of obstacles to dimensions of accessibility as properties of the service as a whole. A museum isn't a space. It's a journey.

Principle 3: Offer more than one way to engage

Imagine a sculpture in a gallery. It is well-positioned and properly lit, and next to it are a tactile model, an audio description you can listen to on headphones, and a screen with a short video in sign language. In it, deaf actress Emmanuelle Laborit describes how the piece affects her and what emotions it evokes in her, not as a curator, but as someone with a relationship to the sculpture. The same video and

audio description can be found on the website next to a picture of the sculpture.

The same applies to texts. Core information in plain language helps not only people with SpLDs, but also people whose first language is different from the local language, first-time visitors, or people with limited time for their visit. A more in-depth layer can still be present for those who want to explore the subject further.

Inclusive design does not mean one solution for all. It means a range of ways for audiences to enjoy the museum, the exhibits, and the art, and to engage with the program in a way that makes them feel welcome.

Why this works
The Smithsonian Institution (2010) states this principle as follows: content should be accessible at more than one intellectual level and conveyed through more than one sensory channel.

Principle 4: Reduce unnecessary cognitive load for everyone
Texts that are too long, too technical, and hard to read only serve to discourage audiences. Conversely, shorter texts make people more willing to read and more likely to remember what they've read. Text doesn't fail because people don't want the information. It fails because the cognitive load associated with it is too much to handle for the person in an environment where they are standing, processing several stimuli at once, working with a different level of language, and operating with a limited attention span.

Reducing that load leads to an improved experience by design. A good visitor experience is supported by less text and shorter paragraphs, a clear hierarchy of information, clear wayfinding, enough quiet zones and places to sit, maps that show the quieter parts of the exhibition, and space where one can simply pause for a moment.

What the research says
Data from the Museums Without Barriers project show that labels attract, on average, roughly 1% of visual attention, and that 60% of audiences would welcome shorter texts.

In a Cabinet of Wonders survey (Pilka and Ulahelová, 2024), long or complicated texts came out as the most common source of annoyance among 16 factors surveyed.

Principle 5: Design with people, not for them
When a museum professional invited an expert who uses a wheelchair as a guest speaker to a panel discussion on accessibility, they thought they had checked the accessibility of the auditorium thoroughly. However, it hadn't occurred to them to check whether the stage was accessible as well. That's because they were designing an accessibility measure for the people, not with them.

The difference between these approaches may seem nuanced, but it's crucial in practice. Before designing its Calm Room, the National Gallery Singapore first ran a series of interviews and workshops with neurodivergent visitors. Only then, after hearing their input, did a design for the space take shape. In its first year, the room welcomed more than 22,000 neurodiverse visitors.

A deaf person, a person with dyslexia, or a person with a visual impairment are not mere recipients of accessibility measures. They're experts on the barriers they face and their own needs and can quickly point out places where an institution is falling short. They're people whose experience you can't do without.

Why this works
Holmes (2018) refers to people with lived experience as “exclusion experts” and stresses that inclusive design requires relationship and trust throughout the whole process, not just testing a finished result at the end.

Why inclusive design deserves our attention

The principles of inclusive design described in the previous section are practical tools that change how an institution operates, both toward its audiences and within itself. There are several more reasons why they deserve our attention.

Quality for all

An accessible solution ultimately improves the experience of a wider audience than it was originally designed for. An easy-to-read label may well help a person with dyslexia but also those who are in a hurry, do not speak the language well, or have only limited time for the visit. Clear wayfinding helps a first-time visitor as well as parents with a stroller or a curator setting up an exhibition in an unfamiliar space. A photo of the entrance on the website, clear wayfinding, and easy-to-read labels are no special measures. They’re just signs of a genuinely accessible institution.

New audiences and greater reach

Not only do accessibility measures help reduce barriers for existing audiences; they also help open the institution up to new audience groups that had been left out. People who feel represented and welcome within an institution tend to come back, bringing their family, friends, and other people from their community with them. Audience loyalty builds slowly and is lost quickly. Accessibility is one of the most direct paths to building it.

Innovation

Looking for an accessible solution means looking for a better solution. The constraints accessibility introduces push the team towards thinking more precisely about what it wants to communicate, and to whom. Touchscreen technology in phones came about from the need to operate a computer without a keyboard for people with hand injuries. Today, everyone uses some version of it. The constraints of accessibility lead to solutions that end up working for everyone. Accessibility is a catalyst for innovation.

Team and institutional culture

Accessibility also applies to people who are part of your team. Research shows that roughly 30% of professionals have some form of disability or health condition. Most of them keep it hidden at work for fear of being seen as less capable, their work relationships being negatively affected, and hindering their career advancement. In an environment where accessibility is discussed openly and solutions are simply part of standard operations, people don’t have to live with that fear. Moreover, an institution that attracts a diverse team also tends to think about its programming in a more diverse way.

Accessible environments attract and retain talent
Workplace accessibility determines who can keep working in your institution long-term. Data show that 22% of neurodivergent candidates have turned down a job offer because of the workplace environment, compared with 8% of neurotypical candidates. A further 15% of neurodivergent employees have left a job because of how the physical space was designed. An institution that doesn’t consider accessibility isn’t just missing out on inclusivity. It’s losing access to a diverse pool of talented specialists who could have been

a part of its team. (Turner, Herschel, and Bach, 2019)

Providing clarity and saving time
Accessible solutions are often clearer and cheaper to manage. Clear wayfinding in a building reduces the number of questions staff have to field. In hospital settings, where the issue of people getting lost and overloading staff with repeat questions has been systematically documented, a shift towards a functional wayfinding system has led to measurable relief for both staff and patients. A clear website with well-structured content is easier to update and lasts longer. Accessible label templates save time for curators and graphic designers alike. The return on investment in accessibility is less extra work down the line.

Wayfinding in hospitals: how clear navigation eases the load for everyone
A Czechdesign project on wayfinding systems in Czech hospitals (2023a; 2023b) documents a recurring set of problems: patients get lost, experience the stress of disorientation, and overload staff by asking for directions. Visual clutter, an excess of signs and labels, and unsystematic signage make things worse. Prototypes of a new wayfinding system, tested live at Bulovka University Hospital, showed that well-designed wayfinding reduced the burden on staff and improved the experience for all patients, including those with disabilities.

The same logic applies to museums and galleries. A wayfinding system designed with people who are prone to getting lost in the space in mind helps the whole audience, and frees up staff capacity for more meaningful interactions.

Legal mandate
In its updated 2022 official definition, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) explicitly states that a museum is inclusive. Accessibility isn't an add-on. It's part of an institution's mission. The right to cultural participation is also embedded in international law under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, Article 30). More details can be found in the "Legal Framework" chapter.

ICOM's museum definition (2022)
"A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability."

Neurodiversity and cognitive accessibility

One area often overlooked when talking about accessibility is cognitive diversity. The ways in which different people process information, read text, find their way around a space, and respond to sensory input can vary enormously. A museum or gallery setting places specific demands on all of that at once: standing, moving around, processing visual and auditory input, reading text, and finding your way around an unfamiliar space, all at the same time.

Neurodiversity isn't synonymous with a diagnosis. It refers to a natural spectrum of ways the human brain works. Dyslexia, ADHD, autism, dyspraxia, and anxiety are all part of that spectrum. However, cognitive overload isn't a sensation unique to people with a diagnosis, as it may well affect first-time visitors, people who've

had a hard day, or people navigating a space in a language that isn't their own. There's a limit to how much attention each of us can pay. Visual and auditory noise in an exhibition isn't a neutral backdrop. It's a burden. Too many info panels, too many labels, too much ambient noise, confusing wayfinding, or simply too many visual elements in one place drain the attention of the visitor before they even reach the content they came for.

Cognitive load: what the research says
Cognitive load theory (Sweller, van Merriënboer, and Paas, 2019) describes the limits of human working memory. It can hold five to nine pieces of information at once, and only for about 20 seconds. When an environment or a message exceeds those limits, a person doesn't process the information; they become overloaded.

Environmental stimuli such as visual clutter, noise, or confusing wayfinding take up working-memory capacity before a person even reaches the content. Fisher, Godwin, and Seltman (2014) found that children in an over-decorated learning environment scored lower and had more trouble staying focused than children in a simpler environment. Their working memory was busy processing unwanted stimuli around them.

The same mechanism is at work in a museum exhibition. Timpson (2025) frames the goal of a cognitively accessible museum this way: audiences should spend their cognitive energy on the content, not on accessing it.

Cognitive accessibility is a broad area of expertise that relates to the physical space (clear structure and quiet zones), texts and labels (length, structure, language), wayfinding (clear points of reference, sensory maps), and interactive elements (clear instructions for use, feedback). Solutions designed with cognitive accessibility in mind improve the experience for every visitor.

You can read more about specific groups and types of barriers in the chapters "Who Do We Do This For?," "Text and Typography," "Wayfinding and Navigation," and "Interactive Elements."

Curators: Take the floorplan of one room in a current or upcoming exhibition and mark where it's noisy, where there's a lot of visual stimuli, where there's no seating, and where visitor traffic intersects. Then mark where the most important exhibits and texts are. Do places with the greatest load overlap with places where you want the audience's fullest attention? Each such spot is a design opportunity. A small change in the space can determine whether an exhibit becomes memorable or gets overlooked.

Marketing staff: Walk the route to your institution through the eyes of someone visiting for the very first time, with no idea what to expect. Start from the bus stop or the parking lot. At every step, ask yourself: where might someone hesitate, lose their bearings, or give up? Where is information missing? The result is a first-visit guide: a document that reduces uncertainty before the visit and increases the likelihood of people actually making it all the way to your door.

Management: For one day, document what people ask most often: where are the restrooms? How do I get to the second floor? What is the exhibition about? Each repeat question represents a barrier in wayfinding or information as well as burden on the staff. A

more accessible environment doesn't just remove barriers for your audience. It reduces the operational burden on the whole institution and allows staff to do more meaningful work.

Educators: Take one interactive element or task you use in your work and let someone who's never used it try it out without providing any explanation. Watch what they do closely. Where do they stop and why? At what point do they take a wrong turn or click on the wrong thing? Where do they give up? This is the fastest way to find places with hidden barriers. Each one is a chance to design the program better, so it works for a wider range of people without anyone having to ask for a concession.

Conclusion

Our curator from the opening paragraph gave up after the third info panel, realizing that no one was going to read all the text they had written. This realization is the starting point. Inclusive design doesn't have to begin with a major decision or a new budget line. It begins the moment someone stops and starts asking: who are we actually designing this program for, and where are we creating barriers?

Embedding accessibility into everyday work is a gradual process. It can happen when we write texts, plan exhibitions, update our websites, or train a new colleague. All it takes is starting where you already have the room and the ability to effect concrete change today.

The „Checklist" provided at the end of this publication is a good first reference point. It covers the five areas of the visitor journey and helps you figure out where there's room for improvement.

Summary

- A barrier doesn't originate in a person. It comes from the environment, text, wayfinding, or communication.
- One in three people who visit a museum may perceive text as a barrier.
- Inclusive design is a process that asks the question: who are we unintentionally excluding, and how do we change that?
- A solution designed for one group improves the experience for a much wider audience.
- A more accessible institution is a better institution, both for its visitors and for the team who works there.

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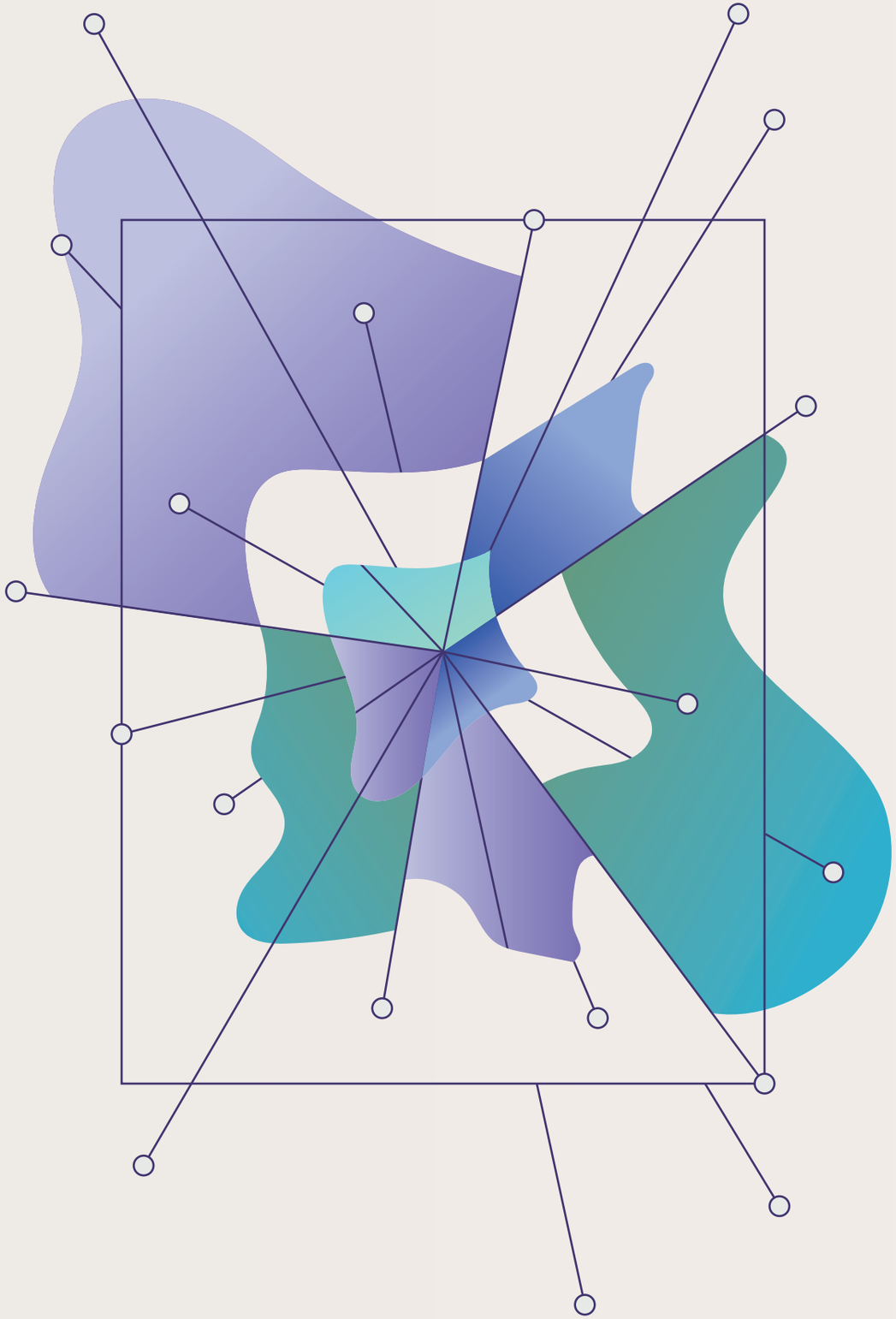
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03

Who Do We Do This For?

Markéta Kukaňová

Museums are visited by people of every generation, and it's the museum team's job to provide them with the best possible experience. Not everyone perceives the world in the same way, and many people run into hidden barriers that make museum language hard to understand. This chapter shows you how to adapt the environment and communication in galleries and museums to make them accessible to everyone. You'll learn how small changes to the way exhibitions are organized can open the door to everyone, including people who see the world differently.

A museum without boundaries

Why equal access matters

Enabling everyone to participate, without exception, is the foundation of a healthy society. It helps build tolerance, solidarity, equal access to education, and respect for every kind of uniqueness. When people with different abilities and lived experience join forces on a team, it naturally boosts creativity and overall satisfaction. In line with an increased focus on inclusivity, museums, too, are working to make cultural heritage accessible to diverse audiences. In doing so, they're responding to recent developments in the field and transforming themselves into living spaces for dialogue, becoming places whose moral duty is to serve the whole community.

The museum audience

In the past, museums and galleries exclusively served the upper classes as well as the scientific and artistic communities. Today, virtually anyone can walk through the door. For most, the first encounter comes in childhood, on mandatory school trips. Today's audiences are incredibly diverse. Younger generations look for visually attractive spots for social media, while families want interactive exhibits. Adults want to spend their free time actively with friends, tourists are chasing new experiences, and older visitors are looking for deeper meaning or a spiritual dimension.

The main incentive for a visit are personal interests and desire for a meaningful program. After all, people use culture to meet important psychological needs. The strongest of these is the need to belong. If our friends go to exhibitions, we're happy to join them. But the reverse is true too: if we avoid cultural life, we risk being gradually excluded from our community.

Six needs that bring people to museums

R. Johnová has categorized people's reasons for visiting cultural institutions into 6 areas based on different underlying needs. These are aesthetic experiences, the need for continuity and connection with the past, the need for social belonging, the need to learn, the need for admiration and respect toward something, and the need to rest. (Johnová, 2008)

What motivates people to visit

Drawing on research about museum attendance, Friedrich Waidacher concluded that the most common reason for visiting a museum is an individual's leisure activities and interests. People want to do something worthwhile, gain new experience, and have a chance to learn. At the same time, they want to be around other people, feel comfortable and at ease in the space, and actively be part of something. (Waidacher, 2000)

Free time and the reference group

The phenomenon of spending free time in line with your reference group has an effect on the attendance of museums and other cultural institutions. "Members of certain social groups can't, in effect, freely decide how they spend their free time: their choice of activity is shaped by the need to conform to the lifestyle, values,

social status, and attitudes of their reference group." (Kesner, 2005, p. 101)

Limits in the museum space

Each of us carries our own personal history with cultural institutions. All it takes is one bad childhood experience, such as a mandatory school trip where you were exposed to dull monologues and forced to walk through the exhibition slowly, quietly, and without any way to engage, to forever brand museums as dull places in your mind. The space itself, its structure, and the way information is delivered determine what kind of experience the audience leaves with. How we choose to present knowledge can affect whether people actually understand it.

When we don't understand what's being shown, it's easy to feel embarrassed and uneasy. When an environment stirs up negative feelings in us, we want to get out of it as fast as possible. Put simply, no one goes to an exhibition voluntarily if they don't feel comfortable there, even when they have a strong desire to learn and belong.

An exhibition works as a code
French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu put it plainly: "Anyone who doesn't speak the language of the museum, who doesn't feel competent enough to visit one, won't come." Traditional exhibition design often works as a kind of code. (Davidson Schuster, 1995, in Kesner, 2000, p. 38)

The ability to decipher this code isn't innate. It is a learned skill, picked up through education and family. Family and social background therefore have a major influence on how we understand art.

When the museum's language seems foreign
Not understanding the language of museums is one of the main reasons some people never visit one, or leave quickly if they do. The museum environment feels incomprehensible and foreign to them. (Dolák, 2008, p. 88)

Ultimately, people who find the content, or the way it's delivered, hard to understand tend not to want to visit museums.

Diversity in how people perceive museums and other spaces

People perceive and process information in different ways. This diversity and difference in how we experience the world is described by the terms neurodiversity and neurodivergence. This approach is not about defining what's in the norm and what falls outside it. It simply describes the natural diversity of human thought. Every human brain works uniquely. Neurodiversity, then, isn't limited to specific groups: it covers all of humanity, and every brain processes the world a little differently. In a sense, everyone is neurodiverse, since how a brain works differs, to some degree, from person to person.

There is a portion of the audience where this departure from the majority pattern in terms of perception is more noticeable. We refer to this group of people as neurodivergent, which includes people with autism spectrum disorder, highly sensitive people, people with attention deficit disorders, and people with specific learning difficulties. The question we need to be asking ourselves is not how these people are different, but rather what it is in our space that does not work for them. The key is to look for places where barriers are present in our environment that don't account for their

differences. As a bonus, measures that help these people usually make the visit more pleasant for everyone else too.

Anyone walking into a museum or similar cultural institution is exposed to a lot of new stimuli. They want to take everything in, process it, and remember it. Every person, whether neurodiverse or neurodivergent, has a need to take in information.

In a museum setting, we most often encounter two groups of neurodivergent people: people with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs), a category that includes what used to be diagnosed separately as dyslexia, dysgraphia, or dyscalculia, and people with attention deficit disorders. For these people, processing information, feeling emotions, and simply behaving all work a little differently due to differences in how the central nervous system, primarily the brain, develops and functions. These differences show up in early childhood and stay with a person for life.

Specific learning difficulties

Innate neurological differences in reading, writing, or working with numbers are known as specific learning difficulties (SpLDs). Today, we understand these as natural neurobiological variations in the human brain, not as a mental deficit or the result of inadequate education.

Nor are they a sign of lower IQ or laziness. People with SpLDs typically have average to above-average intelligence, but their brains simply process text, numbers, or visual symbols differently all the way from childhood.

People with SpLDs process information in such a distinctive way that often underlies exceptional abilities in other areas. Instead of focusing only on deficits, current approaches emphasize developing these natural strengths, which help these people succeed in both their personal and professional lives.

These traits usually only manifest themselves once the relevant skill is brought into question. Difficulty recognizing words, for instance, only appears once a child is expected to read at school. Throughout their lives, people with SpLDs deal with difficulties caused by environments and expectations that haven't been adapted to them. At school, they often experienced failure, which left them feeling anxious about places where knowledge is passed on. If they run into dense text or a cluttered field of vision in a museum, they can easily become tense and give up on the visit altogether.

Dyslexia refers to a specific way in which the brain processes written language, reading, and spelling. A person with dyslexia tends to focus on different details. They may distinguish similar speech sounds or perceive letter shapes differently, which affects how they navigate dense text and a complex field of vision. People with this profile work with text and information at their own pace and in their own way. They need more time to process several inputs at once and may complete tasks in a different sequence than is typical. They also have a unique sense of time, space, and visual symbols. In short, they see texts and labels from a completely distinctive and original perspective.

Dysgraphia affects graphomotor skills, i.e., how someone writes and draws. People with dysgraphia put their thoughts on paper in their own unique style. Writing and drawing require specific input from the whole body, from eye-hand coordination and how a pen is held to a relaxed wrist and a smooth hand movement across the page. In a museum setting, they complete creative and written tasks at their own pace. They experience activities such as drawing or writing in guestbooks and interactive worksheets differently from most people. Their fine motor skills simply need different conditions, more time, or alternative ways of expression, such as typing on a keyboard or touchscreen.

The brains of people with SpLDs are simply wired in a unique way. Their minds tend to focus on discovering the unfamiliar and finding new patterns. Rather than small details, they can grasp the main

idea and see the big picture in a flash. They often have high spatial intelligence and a natural talent for perceiving three-dimensional space. This allows them to find connections in seemingly unrelated things and anticipate future trends.

Another major strength of theirs tends to be exceptional creativity and a talent for original ideas. Since they have had to overcome various obstacles since childhood, they've learned to think differently and look for unconventional solutions. They show high levels of both verbal and nonverbal creativity and have an excellent memory for stories. When something captures their interest, they can immerse themselves in it completely and work with intense focus. Many also have strong intellectual abilities and complex logical reasoning, which helps them easily compensate for slower reading or writing.

Overcoming everyday challenges has made them persistent, resilient, and adaptable. They've learned not to give up and to advocate for themselves. And since they know firsthand what it's like to be different, many have deep empathy and strong emotional intelligence, which makes them excellent at understanding how other people feel and communicating with them.

Attention deficit disorders

People with attention deficit disorders regulate energy and focus differently. The two major forms are **attention deficit disorder** (ADD, also known as inattentive form of ADHD), marked by daydreaming and being easily distracted, and **attention deficit hyperactivity disorder** (ADHD, also known as hyperactive-impulsive form of ADHD), characterized by restlessness and impulsivity.

In exhibitions, they tend to move through space unsystematically, discovering things through trial and error. They may find it hard to sustain attention through long texts, tend to act impulsively, and often manage time poorly. Their motivation system requires quick stimuli and immediate feedback, or they lose interest.

These people are often more sensitive to sensory input from their surroundings. They regulate, filter, and evaluate its intensity differently. They may perceive their surroundings as a whole, or they might fixate on excessive detail instead. They struggle to focus on one task and take in everything happening around them. They tend to ascribe importance to different information than most people.

People with attention deficit disorders have a specific type of nervous system that, in certain situations, gives them real cognitive and personality-related advantages. Their brain doesn't settle into fixed patterns and constantly scans its surroundings for new stimuli. As a result, they often excel at high creativity and divergent thinking. They can generate large numbers of original solutions and connect seemingly unrelated ideas from unconventional points of view.

While they might struggle staying focused on topics that don't pique their interest, once something captures their attention, they can enter a **state of hyperfocus**, as it's often called. In this state, they are able to disregard everything around them and work with extreme intensity. If an exhibition's appearance or subject matter captivates them, they can immerse themselves in it completely. Thanks to strong visual memory and deep concentration, they can then absorb a huge amount of information with total fascination.

The huge amount of physical and mental energy present within this audience group can manifest itself as a strong spirit of inquiry. Their natural curiosity and ability to make quick decisions without unnecessary hesitation allows them to explore extensive exhibitions dynamically. In a museum setting, their impulsivity and cognitive flexibility translate into the courage to try new things right away and find their bearings quickly. As a result, they tend to do brilliantly with multisensory and interactive exhibits, getting the most out of a large volume of stimuli.

As tour participants, they bring an element of energy, humor, and sense of spontaneity. They often have strong intuition and skills

related to emotional intelligence, such as empathy, which lets them feel a deep connection with the stories behind works of art or historical objects. Their unique way of seeing the world can fuel the spirit of shared discovery in a museum. Their fresh observations enrich an ordinary tour and turn it into a lively, inspiring discussion.

Designing a space without barriers

How do we make sure every visitor leaves the museum feeling fully satisfied in terms of the quality of the experience, information learned, and experiencing cultural heritage? The key is to adjust the environment so that it fits the needs and ways of perceiving of as wide an audience as possible. The goal is to accommodate individual differences (for example, by allowing more time or providing visual support) without lowering the standard of the knowledge being imparted. What helps people with specific needs ends up making the visit easier and more enjoyable for absolutely everyone

People perceive, sort, and store information from their surroundings in very different ways. That is why it is necessary to simplify the visual layer of an exhibition and make it as clear as possible, including signs and symbols. Text written in short sentences and paired with clear images is appreciated not only by neurodivergent people, but by anyone who wants to leave an exhibition with a clear takeaway.

Navigating through text and space
People with specific learning difficulties often struggle to find information in indexes, charts, tables, diagrams, and glossaries. Visual cues need to be simplified and made as clear as possible. Avoid charts and tables if you can, or convert them into an easy-to-read format. People with SpLDs might also find it harder to find their way around maps, floor plans, and directions. Simple color-coded paths are generally recommended. (Pokorná, 2010)

How to keep the audience engaged
The best way to hold an audience's attention is by presenting facts interactively and through firsthand experience. In a flood of stimuli, people can struggle to find what actually matters. **Key information needs to stand out in the space,** and distractions need to be minimized overall. All instructions and directions should be short and clear, which will be greatly appreciated by families with children, older visitors, and school groups alike.

The physical space should be designed bearing in mind that the process of planning and decision-making can be exhausting for someone who's tired. If **an exhibition is laid out clearly,** without an overwhelming number of confusing crossroads, audiences will feel safer moving through it. It's just as important to respect each person's individual pace. Some people want to move through an exhibition quickly and reflect on it later at home; others prefer to take in what they're seeing slowly, in real time.

When designing exhibitions, relying on our minds' strengths is a good strategy, such as the sense for seeing the bigger picture or spatial intelligence. Instead of long info panels, all types of audiences respond well to **clear, intuitive exhibition storytelling,** where the arrangement of objects tells the story on its own. 3D models, spatial installations, and visual maps engage the imagination and make it possible to understand complex subjects through patterns in space. We all share a desire to **discover and experience stories.** People appreciate investigative tasks, uncovering hidden connections between exhibits, or the chance to explore objects from unconventional angles. Exhibitions should spark creativity through open-ended questions that lead people to their own original conclusions and to conversations with friends.

For people with high levels of mental energy and curiosity, what works best is building a dynamic, multisensory environment, one where something is always changing or that visitors can control themselves. **People also appreciate it when an exhibition doesn't have just one strict route, offering instead freedom of choice** and the ability to explore the space however they feel in the moment.

If you also incorporate complex missions, detective-style games, or codes to crack into your exhibitions, you'll awaken people's desire to fully immerse themselves in the subject. When a gallery turns a tour into an active adventure, it makes use of human curiosity to its full potential and offers a deep experience without the risk of overload or boredom. **Genuine inclusion in a museum simply means turning barriers into opportunities** for a better experience for everyone.

Conclusion

The current trends in modernizing museums are dominated by openness and inclusion. If we want to build a modern space, we have to make it accessible to everyone, without exception. That also means changing how we deliver information. Info panels, websites, and accompanying programs all need to speak a language that older visitors, families with children, foreign visitors, and people with specific learning needs can all understand. Museums need to work for everyone, regardless of how their brain works. Differences in how the nervous system functions are a natural part of the diversity of human cognition. Adapting the environment and the ways of communicating with your audience is a basic condition for a museum to become a living place where people come together.

Curators: Take a second to see whether the space is engaging even for people who can't hold their attention for long. Spark the audience's curiosity with questions that lead them to their own conclusions and to conversations with friends.

Exhibition staff: Arrange objects in the space in a way so that they intuitively tell a story with their placement. Create clear visual anchors in the space that immediately show a tired visitor what matters most.

Educators Respect each visitor's own pace—do not rush those who need more time to take things in.

Summary

- Inclusion is instrumental in building a healthy society.
- The variety of cognitive expressions is a natural part of human diversity.
- The most common reason people visit a museum are leisure activities and personal interests.
- Anyone who doesn't speak the language of the museum won't be compelled to visit.
- A successful exhibition has to be interactive, clear, and understandable for every type of audience.
- A museum or gallery space should offer freedom of movement, sensory stimuli, and engaging tasks that let visitors discover and experience stories.

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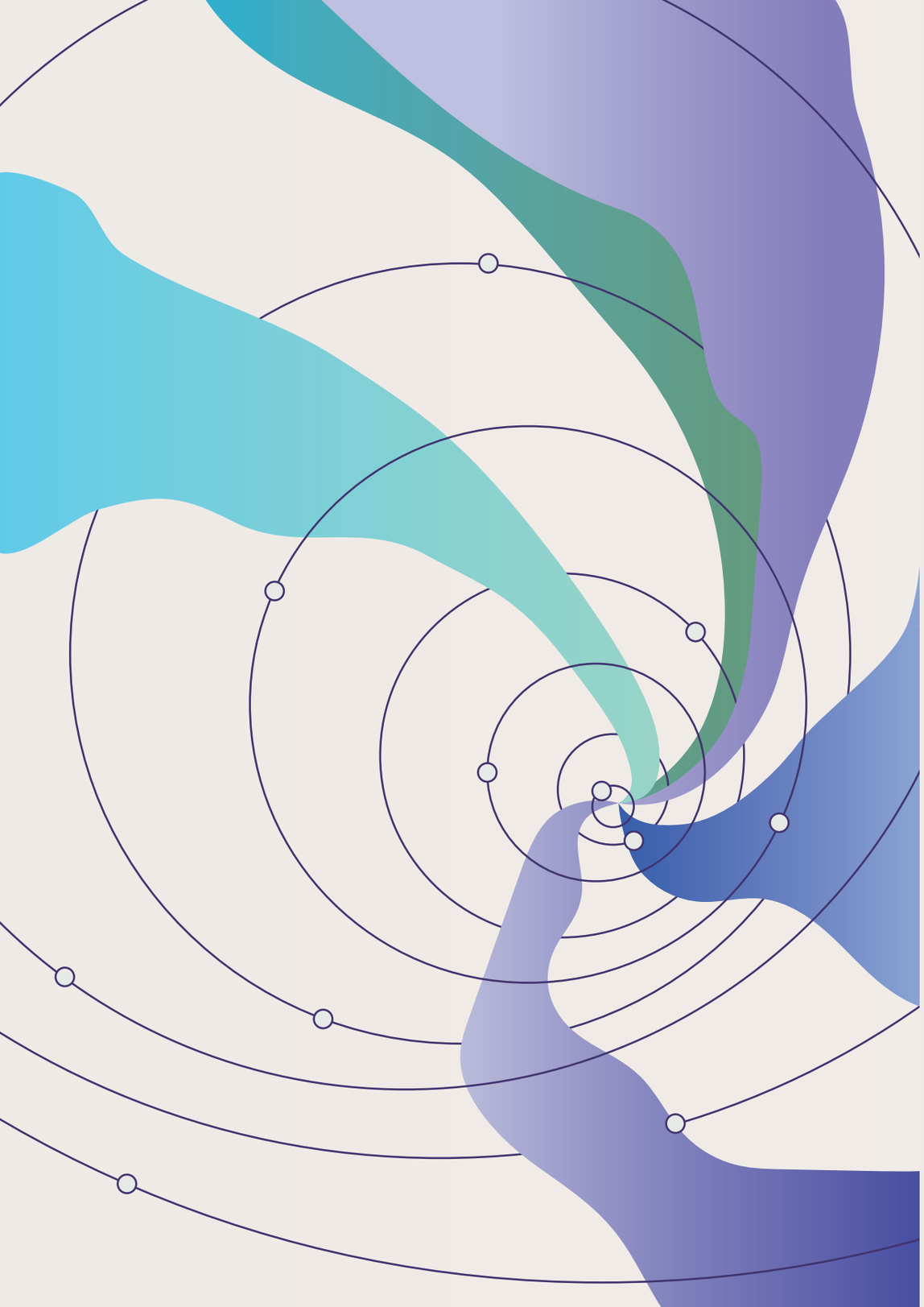
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04

About the Project and Methodology

Martina Juříková

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How do you design an exhibition that people, especially people with specific learning difficulties, can easily find their way around and feel welcome in? That's the question the Museums Without Barriers project set out to answer. It shows how text, wayfinding, graphic design, and interactive elements can remove unnecessary barriers and make exhibitions accessible to as wide an audience as possible. In the Museums Without Barriers project, we examined ways in which museums and galleries can make their exhibitions accessible to wider audiences. We focused on how people perceive and use exhibition texts, wayfinding systems, graphic elements, interactive installations, and other parts of exhibitions. Our goal was to help cultural institutions build environments where people find their way around more easily, understand the content with more ease, and feel more comfortable during their visit.

We focused mainly on people with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs), such as dyslexia or dysgraphia. However, our findings prove useful for a much broader range of audiences. What helps people with specific needs often makes the visit easier for everyone else too.

The recommendations in this publication are based on research we carried out from 2023 to 2026. Over the course of the project, we worked with museums and galleries and conducted interviews with both professionals and visitors. We tracked eye movement as people interacted with exhibition texts and wayfinding systems. We tested different versions of graphic and communication designs and checked how they performed in live exhibition settings. The project also included large-scale surveys among the Czech public and young people from Generation Z.

Based on our findings, we put together a set of practical recommendations for creating inclusive communication in museums and galleries. In this publication, we focus mainly on wayfinding systems, exhibition texts, graphic design, interactive elements, and other parts of the visitor experience, since these can all make or break a visit. The recommendations draw on expert sources, our research findings, and feedback from audiences.

Over the course of three years, we carried out several large-scale studies. The infographic and descriptions that follow give an overview.

Research in figures

The data behind this publication's recommendations

4

4 years of comprehensive research

2023 – 2026

12

Interviews with Museum and Gallery Representatives

- 12 institutions from Czechia and Slovakia
- education, marketing, PR, social media
- identifying barriers and examples of good practice

Participants in a Three-Phase Study

- digital communication (website, Instagram)
- eye-tracking analysis in an exhibition
- follow-up interviews
- 2 men / 14 women
- Gen Z (students and recent graduates) with and without SpLDs

Gočár Gallery

13

506

Stem/Mark

Respondents to the Representative Survey

- adult Czech online population
- experience visiting museums and galleries
- expectations and factors affecting visitor experience

Generation Z Respondents

- text readability
- pictograms
- wayfinding in the exhibition
- interactive elements
- testing different versions of texts and graphics

with suspected or diagnosed dyslexia/dysgraphia

404

17

Zlin Design Week 2025

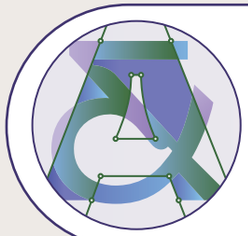
Pilot-Testing Participants

- 5 people with SpLDs
- eye-tracking analysis in the exhibition
- testing optimized visual communication
- interviews and feedback

Methods Used

- Semi-structured interviews
- Eye-tracking glasses
- Online surveys
- Observing the visitor journey
- Testing exhibition texts
- Testing wayfinding systems
- Testing pictograms
- Testing interactive and multisensory elements

What We Tested?

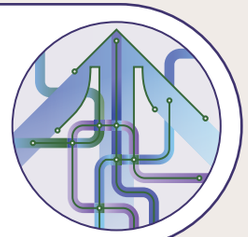


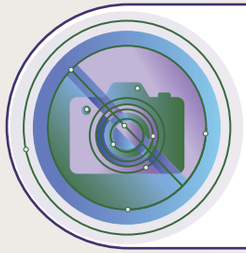
Text

- font size
- line and letter spacing
- font width and weight
- text length
- contrast and colors
- font type (dyslexia-friendly fonts)
- placement of translations

Wayfinding

- navigation within the exhibition
- wayfinding systems
- directional arrows
- entrances and signage
- maps and floor plans



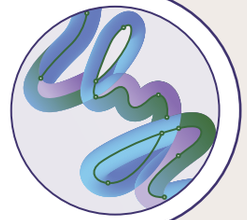


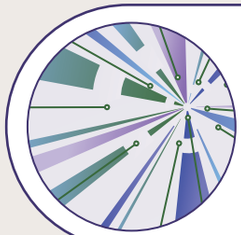
Pictograms

- elevator
- restrooms
- cloakroom
- no photography
- exit

Interactive Elements

- tactile models
- audio guides
- multisensory stations
- digital communication (website, social media)





Visitor Experience

- motivation to visit
- expectations and emotions
- barriers and difficulties
- things that can help
- overall impression of the exhibition



Our goal is to help museums and galleries design clearer, more accessible, and more welcoming environments for the widest possible spectrum of audiences

Interviews with museum and gallery representatives

In the first phase of the project, we conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with representatives of Czech and Slovak museums and galleries. The following institutions took part: Benešov Museum, Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region, Moravian Gallery in Brno, Museum of Fine Arts Liberec, Museum Kampa, National Gallery Prague, Olomouc Museum of Art, PLATO Ostrava, Prague City Gallery, Rudolfinum, Slovak National Gallery, and 8smička.

Our interviews focused on planning and promoting exhibitions, the use of various communication channels, working with different target groups, communicating with young people, and experience with inclusive approaches. We also inquired about which communication tools institutions use most often, which they consider most effective, and what challenges they face in their communication.

We spoke predominantly with members of education and marketing teams. At some institutions, a single person handled marketing, education, graphic design, and curatorial work all at once. That gave us insight not only into how exhibitions are communicated, but also into the day-to-day operations of cultural institutions.

Participants were asked to assess their use of social media, websites, printed materials, newsletters, and other communication channels. We also examined whether and how these institutions adapt their communication for different audiences, including people with SpLDs.

The interviews gave us valuable insights into the current practice at Czech and Slovak museums and galleries. We identified strengths as well as the most common barriers in communication, wayfinding, and making content accessible. We used these findings in the later research phases and in developing the recommendations in this publication.

Visitor experience analysis in a gallery setting

In 2024, we ran a three-phase study at the Gočár Gallery in Pardubice during the exhibition Nový pokus o maximální přiblížení KE 3171 O 96 | Interpretace zátiší. We analyzed how visitors use the gallery's digital communication, how they find their way around the exhibition, and which elements made their visit easier or harder.

16 students and recent graduates from Generation Z took part in the study. The group included people with a diagnosed specific learning difficulty, people who suspected they might have one based on self-assessment, and people without these difficulties. This allowed us to compare the experiences of different visitor groups.

Pre-visit digital communication

First, participants were asked to use the gallery's website and Instagram profile. Using eye-tracking, we tracked how they searched for information about the exhibition, which elements they focused on, and where they ran into issues.

What is eye-tracking

Eye-tracking is a research method that uses special glasses or a camera to track where people look during a visit to an exhibition and what they pay attention to.

Visiting the exhibition

In the second phase, participants visited the exhibition in person at the gallery. They were equipped with eye-tracking glasses, which tracked their gaze and movement through the exhibition space. Examples of elements we analyzed were how they found their way around the space, read labels, used interactive elements, and responded to different parts of the exhibition.

Post-visit interview

After the visit, each participant was interviewed individually. We wanted to know how they felt about their visit, what helped them find their way around and understand the content, and which elements caused uncertainty or difficulty.

By combining observation, eye-tracking, and interviews, we learned not just what participants did during the visit, but why they behaved that way. This let us identify barriers along the visitor journey and develop recommendations for clearer, more accessible communication in museums and galleries.

Large-scale surveys

We tested the findings of the qualitative research through two large-scale surveys.

In cooperation with the STEM/MARK agency, we first carried out a representative survey of the adult Czech online population, with a sample of 506 respondents. We examined people's experience visiting museums and galleries, audience expectations, and the factors that shape the quality of a visit.

Next, we surveyed 404 young people from Generation Z with suspected or diagnosed dyslexia or dysgraphia. We wanted to know how often they visit museums and galleries and how they approach exhibition texts. We were also interested in finding out which elements help them find their way around and understand content, and what barriers they experience during a visit.

Participants rated things such as font size, line spacing, contrast,

typography, the placement of translations, the design of pictograms, and different versions of exhibition labels. We also examined how they perceived interactive elements, tactile models, audio guides, and other tools that are meant to make the visit more enjoyable.

Pilot-testing inclusive visual communication

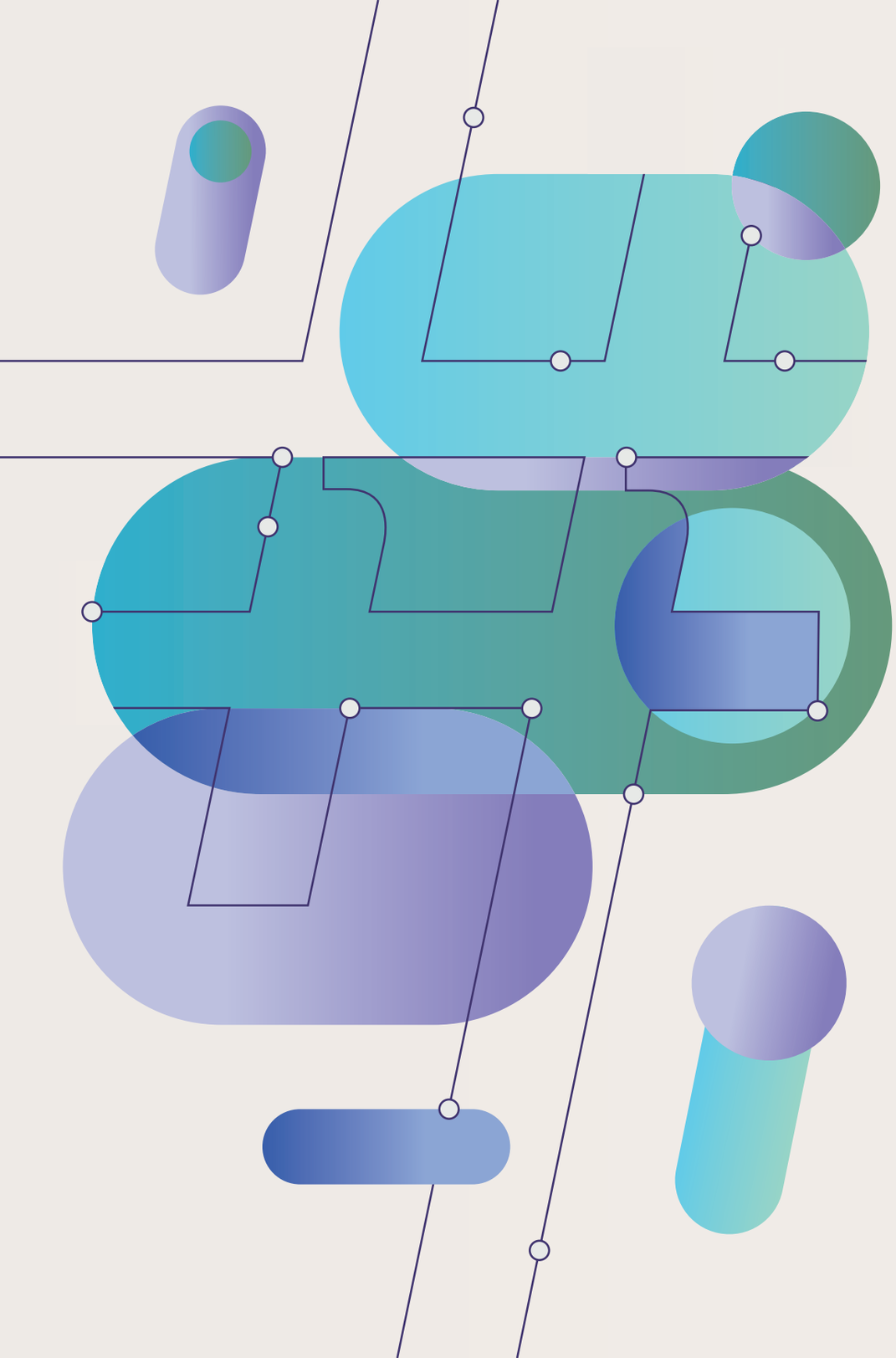
In May 2025, we followed up on the earlier research with a pilot testing of the proposed principles of inclusive visual communication. The testing took place during the Zlin Design Week exhibition at our university's G18 Gallery.

A total of 17 young people from Generation Z took part in the study, five of whom had a diagnosed specific learning difficulty or showed signs of one. We tested how audiences responded to the optimized visual communication elements, and whether the proposed recommendations actually made wayfinding, understanding content, and the overall experience easier.

This part of the research also followed the same logic of sequential phases: pre-visit, visit, post-visit.

After the visit, participants were asked to evaluate content clarity, label legibility, the contrast and color of graphic elements, the use of pictograms, their engagement with interactive exhibits, and their overall sense of comfort during the visit. They also compared different versions of typographic and graphic designs.

Thanks to this phase, we were able to test how usable the proposed recommendations were in a real exhibition setting, and apply what we learned in finalizing this publication.

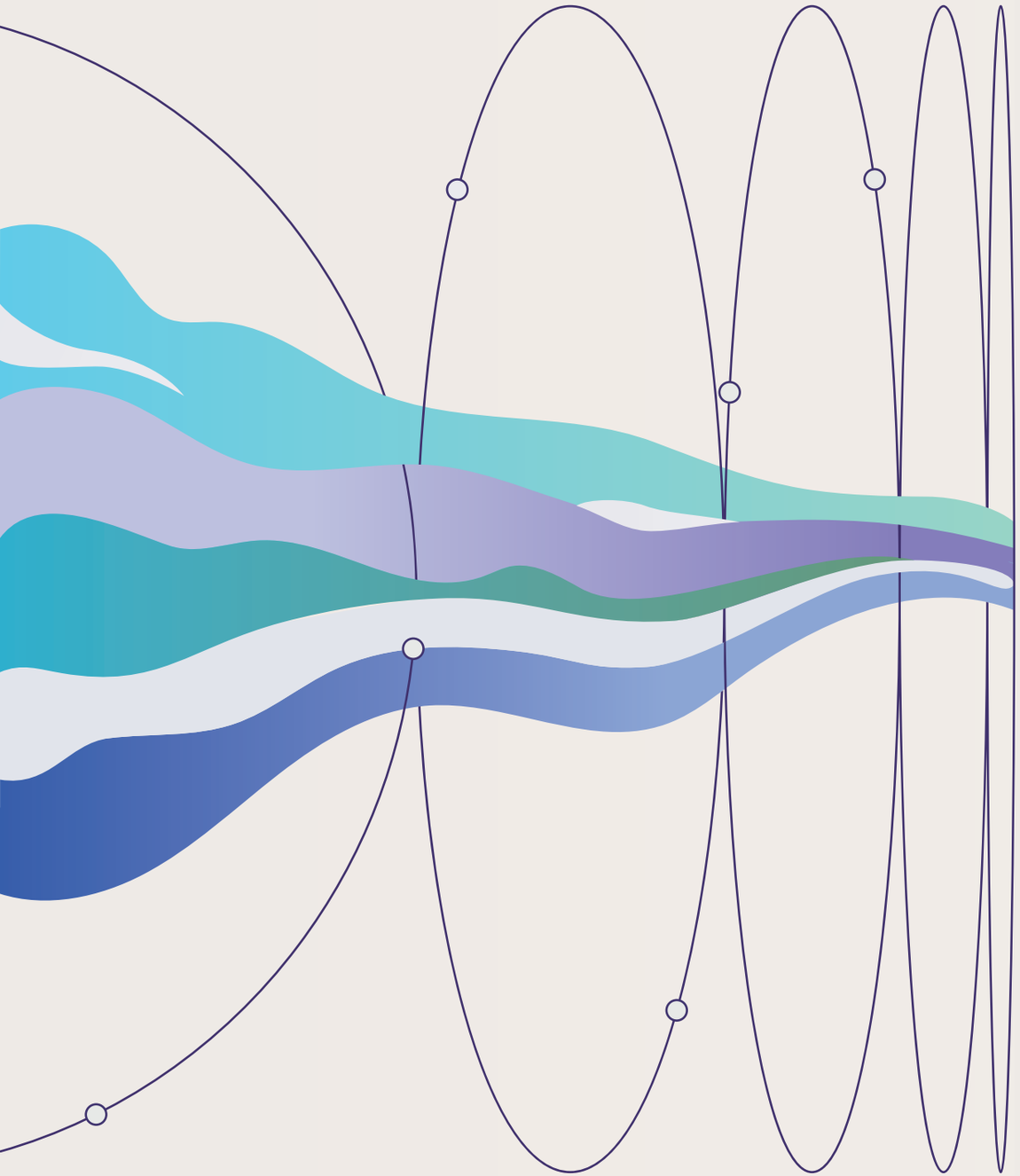


5.1

Marketing Communication

Josef Kocourek

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05 Identifying and Addressing Barriers

Barriers are not intrinsically tied to a person. They arise when an environment interacts with a person. The following chapters cover the five areas where barriers most often appear and ways how to address each area specifically: marketing communication, text and typography, wayfinding and navigation, interactive elements, and physical space. The areas build on each other, but you can also read them independently, depending on what you're currently focused on.

You've planned your exhibition well in advance. It looks like everything is in place. And yet, something's missing: someone to take care of communication. Someone who'll take on the task of speaking to the audience in a language they'll understand in a way that's both effective and appropriate. This chapter sets out the basic rules: what not to forget in communication, which channels matter most, and what audiences need before and during a visit. In many institutions, this part often gets overlooked. Communication ultimately covers a number of important elements and isn't just about posting information about an exhibition.

Marketing communication is built on the classic 4 Ps of the marketing mix: product, price, and place, whereas the fourth P stands for promotion, or marketing communication. Think of this as the only genuinely active element of communication. Marketing calls for the same level of expertise as curatorial work. Without good promotion and communication, an exhibition simply won't work.

Communication as the foundation of a good exhibition

The main task of communication is to deliver a message clearly and reach as wide an audience as possible. An inclusive approach effectively breaks down the communication barriers that make it harder for people to access content. Alongside language, visual communication also plays a major role.

Institutions often forget to bring marketing teams into exhibition preparation early enough. Oftentimes, a single person also routinely juggles many unrelated roles: educating, designing graphics, doing PR, and managing the online store. Because institutions plan exhibitions so far in advance, this ends up overloading the people responsible for communication. The underlying problem is that cultural institutions, especially those managed by the national or local governments, are often underfunded. Bring the marketing team in when you're just starting to plan your exhibition. That will help you catch communication gaps early, and it will put the exhibition's communication where it belongs: front and center.

What usually ends up happening is that the curatorial team prepares materials on its own during the planning phase, and marketing teams are the last to join. This seems to be common practice regardless of whether an institution contracts a marketer or employs someone in-house. And yet expertise, both in communication and in content, is essential. Clear language is exactly what removes barriers between an institution and its audience. Writing it is no easy task, though, and many teams rely on maximum clarity and simplicity, so-called plain language. However, that only works when an expert is actually in charge of communication. You can read more in the "Tools and Practical Measures" chapter.

What the research says

Inclusive approaches are gaining ground in cultural management. Their goal is to diversify audiences (Li, 2024) and remove communication barriers that limit access to content. Inclusive communication can be described as "sharing information in a way that everyone can understand," while its foundation lies in linguistic and content clarity (Principles of Inclusive Communication, 2011, p. 4). As our research revealed, a single person covers several roles at once (graphic design, curatorial work, marketing) at most participating galleries and museums. Exhibitions are typically planned one to three years out, largely because of grant application deadlines. Many of the surveyed institutions don't have the staff capacity for a dedicated communication specialist who's looped in from the start of preparations. None of the examined institutions use a marketing agency, and it isn't standard practice to bring in communication students either. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Exhibition graphic design

The issue of specialists being brought in too late also affects the graphic design of exhibitions. The only difference lies in team continuity: while institutions usually rely on the same people for communication across projects, different designers are usually hired for each individual exhibition.

Cultural institutions are well aware of just how much audiences need accessible exhibitions. That's why they see adapting texts and graphics for clarity as the key to accessibility. Some curators at galleries and museums already understand this too, while the visitors we surveyed consider these steps essential.

Complicated text, poor graphic design, and a chaotic space are huge barriers for audiences. That's why gallery and museum professionals have been adapting their text into shorter, clearer sentences (plain language). At the same time, they keep a consistent graphic style across every communication channel the institution uses. Only integrated communication, with clear and simple text, will succeed across target audiences.

What the research says

Alongside language, visual communication also plays a major role. How and how often people are represented in promotional materials shapes how much different groups identify with what an institution offers. A lack of diversity in visual representation can reinforce stereotypes and implicitly define who counts as a "typical" visitor (Campbell et al., 2025). Among issues mentioned by Generation Z were graphic elements in an exhibition, font size and typeface, text organized into large blocks, unclear wording, and overly technical language. There were also concerns about finding their way around the exhibition space. Across institutions, working with multiple designers, and combining external and in-house capacity, is common practice. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Four communication channels

Institutions and young people coincide on the four communication channels they see as the most powerful: websites, Facebook, Instagram, and printed materials. When it comes to updates about exhibitions, audiences prefer Facebook events above all. What they want most from institutions is clear graphic design and a clean, straightforward message. When deciding whether to visit an exhibition, they factor in mainly their time availability, the subject matter, the price, and the location.

Institutions often opt for newsletters and podcasts as supplemental channels. As for types of printed materials, audiences are fond of exhibition maps, since maps help with wayfinding, as well as programs. Printed materials round out the overall information package and reach, in particular, the target groups who are less active online.

Small and mid-sized institutions set aside only a very small budget for marketing. When management needs to cut costs on an exhibition, marketing money is usually the first to go. When an institution does have funds, it invests the most in social media advertising. The rest of the budget then goes towards printed materials. Fight to protect your marketing budget. Make the case that it carries the same importance as any other cost.

What the research says

All the surveyed institutions see Facebook and Instagram as essential channels and use them regularly. While using Facebook carries some risk of not reaching younger audiences in their view, Instagram plays the main role in reaching these audiences. Generation Z applauds the use of Facebook events for promoting exhibitions. When visiting cultural institutions abroad, Generation Z uses Google search or maps, where they also check reviews. Websites matter to every institution examined, across every target

group. Programs are the most common printed material, with print frequency ranging from monthly to every few months. Cultural institution professionals see potential in podcasts, which worked well during covid (2021 and 2022). Marketing budgets range from around €10,000 to over €100,000 a year, often determined by the size of the institution and its success with grant applications. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Curators: Bring the marketing team into exhibition preparation starting from the concept stage. Define responsibilities clearly, even on smaller teams, so attention doesn't get spread too thin across too many roles.

Marketing staff: Make sure every piece of communication has clear messaging, using plain language and simple sentences. Don't leave Facebook and Instagram out of your communication plan. Depending on your budget, consider printed materials too.

Graphic designers: Stay in touch with the marketing team from the very start of preparing graphic materials. Ask for a clear brief for exhibition graphics. Visual consistency and simplicity help eliminate barriers.

Management: Invest in your marketing team. Professional communication management is a key element that sets you up for a successful exhibition. Make sure the marketing team is part of the exhibition's preparation team from the start. Budget for communication activities as part of the exhibition's financial plan, and don't change that plan once it's underway.

Communication tools and how to prepare them

Museums and galleries use a range of communication tools. Essentially all of them have at least a website, some kind of social media presence, and printed materials. This section describes and recommends the elements a preparation team shouldn't forget when it comes to communication.

Shared elements of communication

Audiences deem clarity, simplicity, and consistency across all information as important rules of thumb. Make sure you present all the necessary information consistently, both visually and in content, across every media channel the institution uses. Graphic materials for an exhibition need a consistent visual style. Use it across every communication channel. In every piece of communication, keep enough contrast between text and background (for example, dark text on a light background).

Website

First and foremost, a website needs to be up-to-date, easy to navigate, and visually simple. Information about opening hours, admission, location, and upcoming events should be visible at a glance on the homepage. If exhibitions run at multiple locations, the location has to appear right next to the exhibition's name. Pricing needs to be easy to find. Clearly distinguish between types of admission (such as general, reduced, free) including payment options. Tickets should also be purchasable directly from an exhibition's detail page.

Audiences expect to find their way around quickly. Therefore, the menu has to be clear and follow a logical structure (e.g., Current Exhibitions, Coming Up, Archive, Practical Information). The order exhibitions appear in should match how current they are, with the newest at the top, the archive below. Avoid the reverse. Information about the main exhibition should appear on the homepage. Every

exhibition should state its dates and location clearly and visibly. Involve the exhibition's authors in creating the website content. These texts explain why the exhibition matters, what its goal is, and who it's for. Don't forget to provide an audio version of the text (text-to-speech). The "Tools and Practical Measures" chapter covers specific text-to-speech tools.

Avoid making visitors navigate to separate subpages. Instead, consider making the homepage longer, since scrolling is second nature for audiences. Rather than hard page transitions, use distinct sections arranged down the homepage. Scrolling is not a barrier to audiences.

Audiences appreciate visual simplicity and clarity. Color choices matter too. A website shouldn't feel too "bright" or too "washed out." Distinct colors also help audiences tell exhibitions apart. Avoid distracting elements (a footer bar that pulls attention away, a slider with too few images). That will help you keep your audience engaged.

For public institutions, website accessibility is also a legal requirement; see the "Legal Framework" chapter for more detail.

What the research says
Survey participants spent an average of 23 seconds on the homepage. They spent half that time on the main navigation bar in the header. 80% of people appreciate seeing opening hours in the top-right corner of the header. The term "reduced admission" often causes confusion when it doesn't specify which groups are included (students, older visitors). 75% of people tried to scroll through the homepage. This is an intuitive and expected feature, and its absence can trigger a negative reaction. As one research participant put it: "It really bothers me that I can't scroll down." Generation Z looks for information primarily online, so the first few seconds after a page loads are critical for holding their attention. They would also appreciate photos from past exhibitions in an archive. As one cultural institution representative said: "Something we've been dealing with for a long time is that our website really isn't responsive, and the user-friendliness is pretty poor. I'm on it almost every day and it still frustrates me. I can't imagine what it's like for someone who actually has to search for information on it. It's just not good. We know about it, and of course we're trying to change it." (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Curators: Involve exhibition authors in preparing content. Make sure exhibition information on the website is available in audio as well.

Marketing staff: Keep the website clear, both in content and graphic design. Make communication consistent across every channel. Make sure basic information (opening hours, location, admission, current exhibitions) is clear and complete.

Graphic designers: Design a consistent visual identity for the exhibition across every format, as it helps audiences with orientation. Keep the website's structure simple and user-friendly. Plan for a responsive website, even if that means a longer homepage.

Management: Investing in a good website is essential. It's one of the main decision points for audiences planning their visit. Set pricing simply and rationally, and explain it clearly on the website. Don't forget about reduced admission.

Social media

Galleries and museums see Facebook and Instagram as central to their communication. Audiences we surveyed confirm this preference. This section covers how to use these platforms and what to watch out for.

Instagram and Facebook

Approach content creation for Instagram and Facebook together, as part of the same communication effort. Keep in mind how important informational value is, especially for younger target audiences, who tend to favor Instagram. According to gallery and museum professionals, Facebook shouldn't be neglected either, as it tends to reach middle-aged and older audiences. Interviews with audiences revealed that on Facebook, they prefer the format of events, using it as one of their go-to tools for finding exhibitions nearby. Paid advertising is a given here, as it increases your potential reach with your target audience.

What the research says

All the surveyed galleries and museums consider Instagram and Facebook as the most important communication tools and use them regularly. They see Instagram as a tool for reaching younger target audiences. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

In an Instagram bio, include basic information about the institution, and above all a link to the current exhibition and any accompanying program while making sure to keep the bio brief. Similarly, make sure to keep information about the institution and its program on Facebook up-to-date.

Overall, when creating social media content, prioritize clarity, comprehensibility, and visual consistency.

Use pinned posts, story highlights, and reels as your main tools for keeping your Instagram profile organized. Pinned posts aren't just for promoting the current exhibition: they also draw attention to key information. As a rule of thumb, follow this strategy: pinned posts for current information, story highlights for sections organized by theme, reels for visual storytelling. Facebook lacks most of these features, but it offers other formats. On top of your regular posts and reels, make sure to set up Facebook events, as mentioned earlier. That will increase your reach with the target audience.

When keeping your social media organized, do not overlook clarity, both in content and visual. Design text posts to be visually striking, clear, and easy to read. Keep your message brief and clear, including the contrast between background and text. Maintain a consistent visual style even across different kinds of exhibitions. Avoid mixing styles within an exhibition's visual identity or the organization's own. Inconsistency creates barriers to understanding.

Basic information about an opening or an exhibition's dates is essential. Generate content in the form of exhibition photos with a clear, brief caption, tagging relevant profiles (collaborating artists, partners, and so on). Choose hashtags carefully and stay consistent in how you use them.

Story highlights and reels on Instagram are a good way to round out an exhibition's content and visual identity. When creating them, keep in mind the audience's short attention span, and the need to hook them within the first three seconds. If you need text in a video format, keep it short and legible. Don't forget behind-the-scenes video formats either.

What the research says

Using video content is standard practice, even a requirement, at many galleries. Example content types include shots from the opening event or a short video featuring a curator walking through the exhibition. In our eye-tracking analysis, more than half of participants looked for pinned posts on a profile, while the rest

focused on selecting stories from the top of the page. Generation Z considers Facebook events popular for promoting exhibitions. Some galleries run a secondary profile alongside their main one, aimed at a more narrow audience, for example programming for children or educational activities. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Content creation needs to start from a clear idea of who you're communicating to: your target group. When choosing what information to communicate, don't forget information about the exhibition itself, but also about any accompanying program. Beyond what's already been mentioned, like clear and simple language, differentiating information matters too.

Set up a clear workflow for this process. Assess whether the website is the primary information channel for an upcoming exhibition. Then adapt the most important information from the website for social media. Next, decide on a content format: video, photos, or maybe text? Once you've set out each step, plan a timeline and set your communication priorities. Assign a paid advertising budget to them with a clearly defined goal, target audience, and timeline. If you run secondary accounts, don't forget to plan for those too.

What the research says
Gallery representatives diverge on views regarding specific content institutions should share. Some see Facebook as a place for sharing only brief updates, with more detailed information going on the website; others copy website updates straight over to social media. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)
Curators: Clarity and simplicity of content matter twice as much on social media. Make sure the information is accurate, but leave the form and tone of communication to the marketing team. Help create video content that delivers something relevant for the target audience.

Marketing staff: Create short videos from openings, interviews with curators and artists, and behind-the-scenes exhibition prep. Don't forget to make a communication plan for Instagram and Facebook profiles, integrating it into the exhibition's overall communication plan. When writing text, stick to the rules of clarity, simplicity, and brevity.

Graphic designers: Based on the marketing team's brief, create visual formats that match the exhibition's distinctive style while still respecting the organization's visual identity.

Management: Oversee and support the creation and execution of the communication plan for both individual profiles and the exhibition as a whole. Support these activities through short video interviews on Instagram and Facebook too. Make sure there's enough budget for social media content, including paid advertising.

You'll find checkpoints for this area in the "Checklist," under "Marketing Communication."

Key points

- The decision to visit a particular institution starts with searching for information using Google or AI tools.
- The marketing team should be involved in preparing the exhibition from the very start.

- A consistent visual style for the exhibition across every communication platform helps the target audience understand it.
- Simple, clear text helps every target audience.
- Keeping the website and social media profiles up-to-date helps people find their way and understand information about the exhibition.

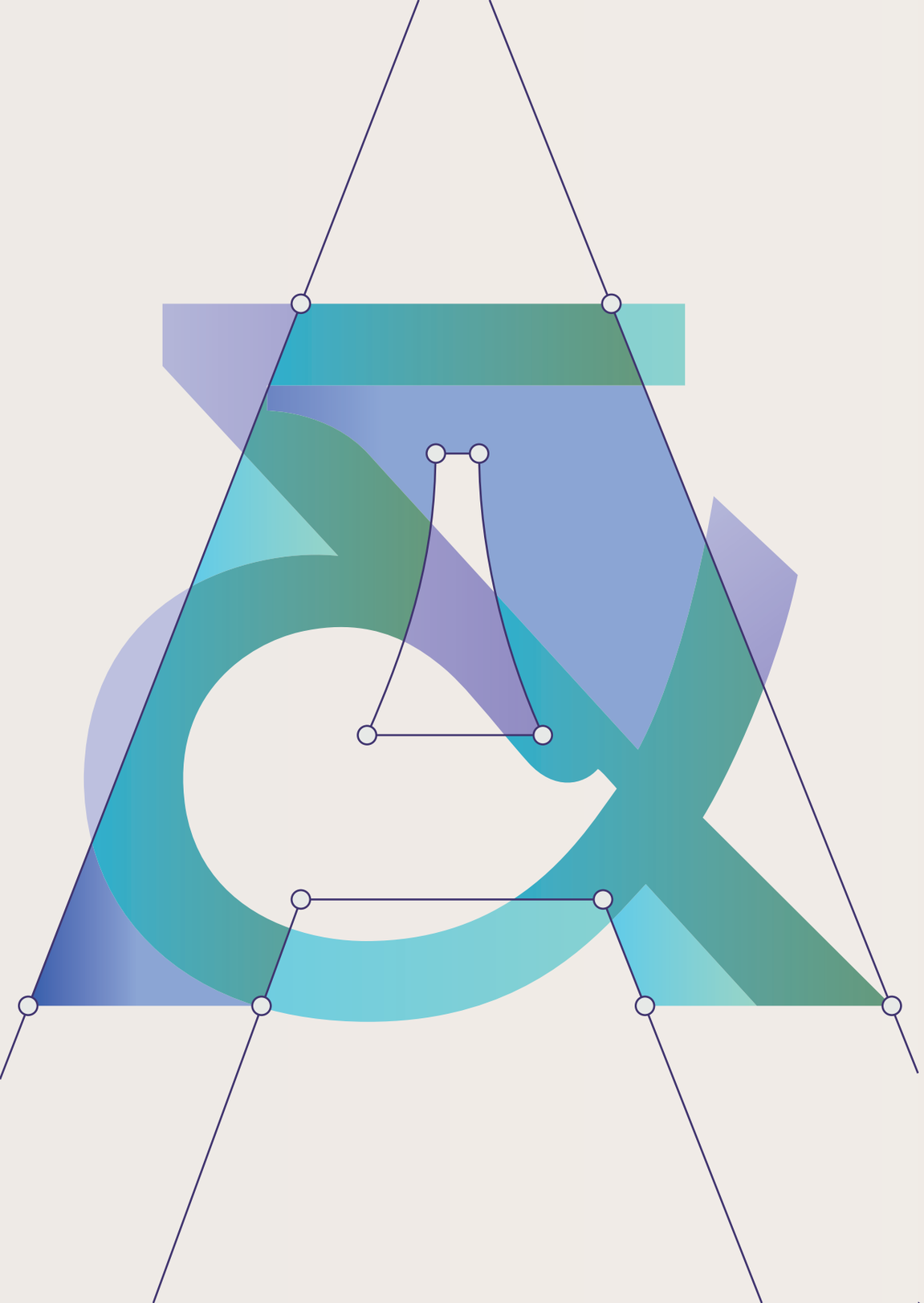
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5.2 Text and Typography

Eva Vázalová Gartnerová

As the most common way information gets interpreted in a museum, text is also the most frequent source of barriers. This chapter shows why texts in exhibitions fail, and how to design them so audiences actually read them. Whether you're on the curatorial, graphic design, architecture, or marketing team, you'll find concrete steps here you can take right away.

Text no one reads

Exhibition texts get written, installed, translated. And yet, research shows again and again that audiences either never start reading them or never finish.

This doesn't only apply to visitors with dyslexia or other specific needs. The problem is structural. Text, in its current form, simply doesn't match how people actually behave in an exhibition.

What the research says
Exhibit labels attracted, on average, just 1% of overall visual attention. Info panels with broader context got up to 21%. Almost no research participant read a curatorial text all the way through, because of its length and lack of structure. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Why institutions don't adapt their texts

In the traditional curatorial approach, text is a tool of expert authority. It's written for precision and completeness, not for the people who'll actually read it. The result is dense text, packed with information, written in technical language, and poorly adapted for someone who is standing and may not be paying their full attention.

Add onto that a fear of oversimplifying. A shorter text tends to be seen as a loss of quality. However, empirical data show the opposite: a shorter text increases the odds that audiences will read it at all.

What the research says
60% of respondents said shorter texts would make them more motivated to read. 41% see length as the main obstacle. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Another issue is that texts almost never get tested for readability and clarity. Unlike digital products, there's an assumption that a technically accurate text will simply work. Eye-tracking and interviews show that visitors' real behavior differs considerably from what the authors of the texts assume.

Dyslexia as the litmus test of the whole system

European estimates suggest dyslexia and other reading difficulties affect about 10 to 15% of the population. Our research on the adult Czech population shows a considerably higher number.

What the research says
30.6% of respondents report difficulties with reading: 4.7% with diagnosed dyslexia, 5.1% with unspecified difficulties, and 20.8% with occasional problems. A barrier affecting one family member affects the whole group, as families with a dyslexic member visit museums less often, so the loss of audience is larger than the numbers alone suggest. (European Dyslexia Association, 2018; Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

The key finding isn't in the numbers themselves. In many areas, no real differences showed up between people with dyslexia and people without it. Preferences for how text should be adapted are similar across the population. This matches the principle of universal design: what helps people with specific needs helps almost everyone. This principle is known as the **curb-cut effect**, describing situations where a solution designed for one group of people with specific needs ends up improving the experience for a much broader group of users. Just as curb cuts were originally built for wheelchair users but are now used by parents with strollers, older adults, cyclists, and people with suitcases, more accessible texts, wayfinding systems, or exhibition environments can help not just visitors with specific learning difficulties, but practically everyone. You can read more about this principle in the "Why Do We Do This?" chapter.

How audiences engage with text

Visual data from our eye-tracking analysis show where visitors actually fixed their gaze, and where they did not.



Figure 1: Visualization of unread paragraphs. Areas marked in red show text that audiences skipped. Eye-tracking analysis, Museums Without Barriers project, Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026.



Figure 2: Gaze duration heatmap (all respondents). Yellow and red areas correspond to the longest fixations. Visitors focus mainly on the visual material, while text stays in the periphery. Eye-tracking analysis, Museums Without Barriers project, Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026.

People don't read texts from top to bottom, or in their entirety. If a text looks long or unorganized at first glance, they often won't even attempt to start.

Audiences scan text, looking for fragments that seem accessible visually or in terms of content. The hard truth is that curatorial texts rarely get read through, longer info panels tend to scare people off, and text length acts as a discouraging factor.

The theory behind this

Cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988) describes how our working memory has limited capacity. Text that's too long or poorly organized causes cognitive overload and leads people to give up on reading. For people with specific learning difficulties, this load is even greater, since decoding the letters themselves takes up more capacity. The principle of "scanning behavior" (Nielsen, 2006) describes users' tendency to skim text quickly and pick out only the relevant parts. In an exhibition, where someone is standing and processing several stimuli at once, this effect is even stronger.

What audiences want vs. how they behave

The survey data are clear: audiences want shorter, clearer, better-organized text. Real behavior in exhibitions confirms it.

What's striking is that people without any diagnosis, who simply say they find reading difficult, describe barriers similar to those described by people with diagnosed dyslexia. These people tend to visit museums less frequently and are more prone to skipping labels than people with no reading difficulties. For museums, the main conclusion is that the need for clearer text isn't limited to a small group of people with a diagnosis. It affects a much wider part of the audience.

What this means in practice

If we concede that text isn't the dominant medium in an exhibition, but one of many elements, the way it's designed must change as well.

- **Reduce:** text shouldn't aim for completeness; it should aim for usability.
- **Structure:** readers must be able to identify key information within a few seconds.
- **Separate:** instructions, context, and interpretation shouldn't mix inside one block of text.
- **Test:** move on to typography only after rigorous testing. Though important, there's only so much typography can solve.
- .

Typography: a key prerequisite, not a detail

Typographic choices decide whether audiences engage with a text at all. It's not just about readability in a technical sense. It's about a first impression: "Is this worth reading?"

Text legibility in a physical space is affected by what's known as visual crowding: letters set too close together mask one another and slow down recognition, especially when viewed from a distance or at the edge of the field of vision. This effect is more pronounced in people with dyslexia, but it affects all readers.

The German standard DIN 1450, which addresses the legibility of typefaces in wayfinding and orientation systems, sets specific minimum values for letter and word spacing in printed and spatial applications. Unlike recommendations designed for digital environments, it reflects the conditions of physical reading: greater viewing distance, variable lighting, and divided attention.

The overarching principle inferred from the research is clear: increased spacing between letters and words measurably improves readability and reduces cognitive load, especially for longer blocks of text in an exhibition setting.

What has a major impact

- **Font size:** a cap height of at least 7–9 mm, for reading from a distance of 1 to 1.5 meters.
- **Line spacing:** at least 1.5 times the font size.
- **Contrast:** ideally black text on a light background, with a minimum contrast ratio of 4.5:1.
- **Line length:** no more than 45–60 characters.
- **Lighting:** poorly lit text may be legible on paper but won't work in a physical space
- **Letter and word spacing:** follow the DIN 1450 recommendations.

How does text in a physical space differ from text on a screen? (DIN 1450 vs. WCAG 2.1)

In digital environments (websites, apps), accessibility follows the WCAG 2.1 standard, which recommends, among other things, adjusting letter and word spacing for better readability. A museum's physical space has its own specifics.

The DIN 1450 standard focuses on the legibility of text in public spaces and highlights the importance of factors like font size, contrast, line length, letter and word spacing, viewing distance, and lighting conditions. In practice, when designing info panels in a museum, applying slightly increased letter and word spacing has proven useful, which can reduce the effect of visual crowding and make reading easier, especially in less ideal exhibition conditions. Nevertheless, specific values should always be checked in the actual space and tested with audiences.

The accessibility of a museum's website as a communication channel is covered in the "Marketing Communication" chapter.

What has less impact than we assume

Research and practice both show that the choice of font itself isn't a key factor. What matters more than the specific font is its legibility at a given size, adequate spacing, and consistency across the exhibition.

Similarly, a font's weight, roundness, or fine details have less impact than is often assumed. Low contrast or small text will make audiences skip a text altogether, while choosing between two similar fonts makes almost no difference.

What the research says

The research team tested fonts specifically recommended for people with dyslexia: Dysfont, Open Dyslexic, Sassoon, and Sans Serif (Outfit Bold). The selection was made together with graphic designer Martin Pyšný, who has dyslexia himself and has worked on accessible typography for years. The goal was to check whether fonts designed specifically for people with dyslexia actually lead to better readability and user comfort. The results showed that the highest-rated font across respondents, both with and without dyslexia, was the control font, Roboto Flex. The research didn't confirm that any of the specialized dyslexia-friendly fonts were universally better suited than commonly used typefaces.

At the same time, it's important to note that many of the existing dyslexia-friendly fonts were developed primarily based on their creators' own experience and personal preferences, and their benefit can be perceived differently by different groups of readers. For readability in a digital environment, the following factors proved more important: adequate font size (at least 38 px), wider line spacing (48 px), a sans-serif typeface, sufficient contrast, a clear content structure, limited use of italics, and a reasonable text length.

The survey conducted within the Museums Without Barriers project found that respondents rated text sized at roughly 38 px the highest, which, for the typography used in the gallery's physical space, corresponds to a cap height of roughly 7 mm. This finding is consistent with the DIN 1450 standard's recommendation to scale font size to the expected reading distance. For reading from a distance of roughly 1 meter, the recommended cap height is about 7 mm. At a greater reading distance, font size should be increased proportionally. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Text structure: the key factor

The real difference between a text that works and one that doesn't work doesn't lie in the content itself. It's in the structure. Audiences don't read text in a straight line, so texts must allow for quick orientation and selective reading.

What you can do specifically

- Write short paragraphs instead of continuous blocks: no more than 5–6 lines per block.
- Separate sections visually, with gaps between paragraphs of at least half the font size.
- Put the main message first, since audiences don't read all the way to the end.
- Write simple sentences, use plain language, and avoid technical jargon.
- Don't justify text; keep it left-aligned.
- Set multilingual text in side-by-side columns, not stacked.

What the research says
Breaking text into short paragraphs improves readability (54% of respondents), as does putting key words in bold (30%). Dense, unstructured text (41%) and overly technical language make text harder to understand. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Text in physical space: what else works

Lighting at eye level is essential. Glare or shadows on info panels can be a major barrier. Insufficient contrast or dark corners cause audiences to overlook text entirely. Labels placed too low (below objects) force people to bend down and discourage reading.

Pictograms and text

Pictograms can make wayfinding and navigation much easier. They work best when they are simple, familiar to the reader, paired with text, and high-contrast. The "Wayfinding and Navigation" chapter covers pictograms in detail.

Curators: Have someone outside your field read the introductory text for your exhibition. A colleague from a different department will do. If they don't understand it, or don't finish reading it, revise it. Then repeat the test.

Graphic designers: Print an info panel at full size and hang it up. Step back 1.5 meters. Try reading the first sentence. If you can read it without moving closer, the typography is working.

Management: Make text testing a standard step in exhibition preparation, just like proofreading. It costs almost nothing, and the results are immediately visible.

You'll find checkpoints for this area in the "Checklist," under "Text and Typography."

Key points

- Five sentences that audiences actually read do more than 20 sentences they skip.
- Text in an exhibition isn't the dominant medium. Together with objects, images, space, and interactive elements, they form a set of inputs that audiences need to understand.

- The need for clearer, better-organized text isn't limited to people with diagnosed dyslexia. It helps a much wider part of the audience.
- The biggest impact comes from font size, contrast, and text structure—not the choice of font.
- Writing text correctly is not enough. You need to test it in the actual space too.
- A pictogram without accompanying text only works for people who already recognize the symbol.

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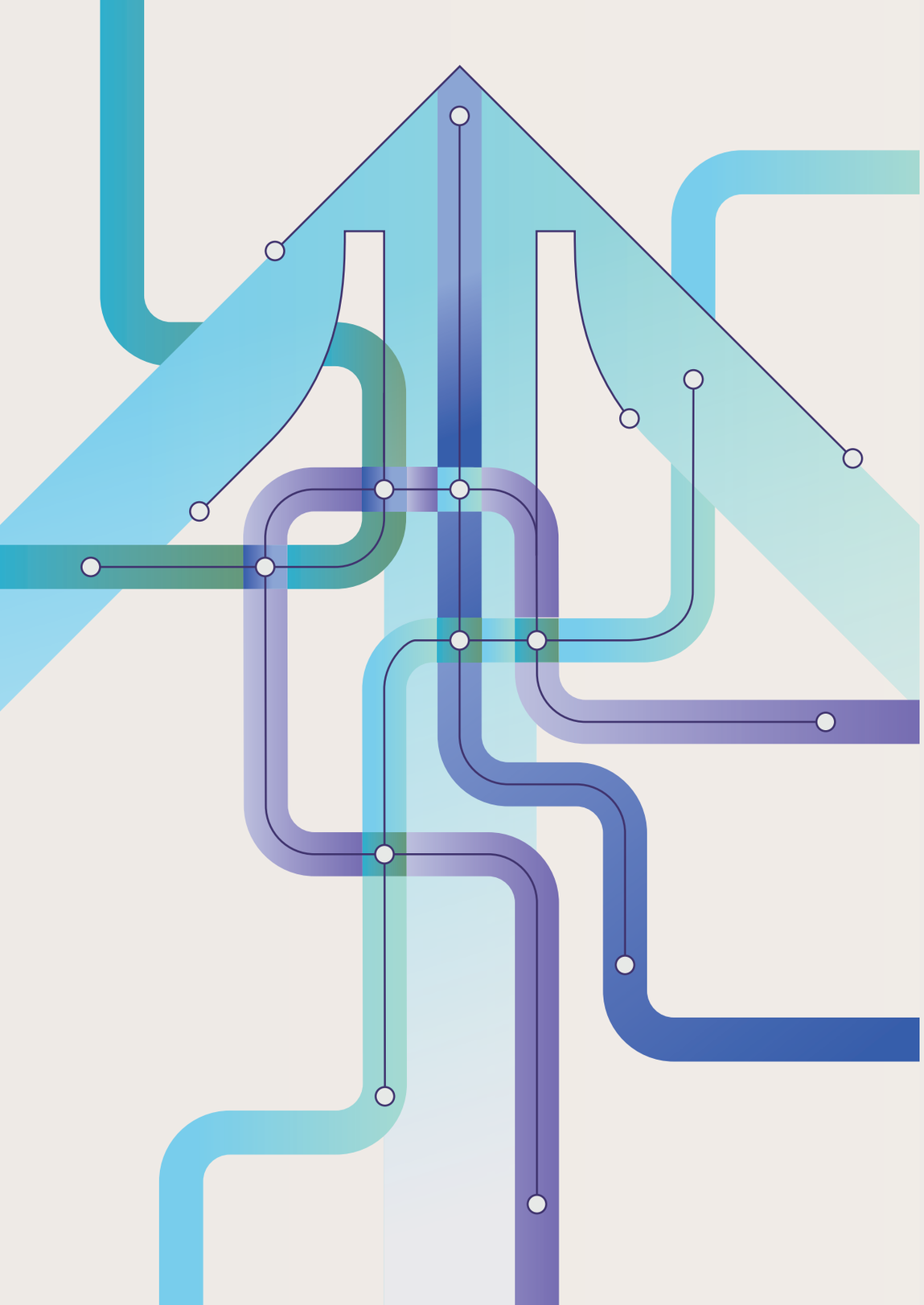
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5.3 Wayfinding and Navigation

Romana Zábojová

Museums and galleries can be hard to find your way around. Visitors might struggle finding the entrance, the ticket office, restrooms, or a specific exhibition. A confusing space can also generate uncertainty or even stress. This chapter covers wayfinding and navigation in museums and galleries. It offers recommendations that can give audiences feelings of safety and independence in the physical space.

How audiences find (or lose) their way

A good wayfinding system reduces the stress of losing your way. A poor one amplifies it. What helps people with dyslexia ultimately helps other audience groups too. A good wayfinding system is built on realizing where audiences move through and where they get confused.

To support clarity, a good practice is to follow the rules and conventions already common in public spaces. People need information arranged in a logical manner. Navigation elements should provide continuous reassurance that they're headed the right way. In stressful situations or when dealing with cognitive or health issues, it's important for audiences to understand the space intuitively. Clear physical wayfinding elements help to achieve that.

What the research says

- In spatial orientation theory, Golledge et al. (2000) distinguish between navigation and wayfinding. Navigation refers to movement along a predetermined route. Wayfinding is the situational process of piecing together a route from different segments, using the cues a space offers. Wayfinding also answers a fundamental question: "How does a person understand a space and know where to go?"
- Movement through an exhibition isn't random. It is governed by several factors, which include the spatial arrangement of the gallery or museum, the location and attractiveness of displays, exhibits, and entrances and exits, and the intent with which a person visits the exhibition. (Davey, 2026)
- For universal points of interest like restrooms, elevators, basic services, or emergency exits, it's best to use standardized, internationally recognizable symbols. (ISO, 2019; ISO, 2023)
- Different strategies come into play when moving through multi-story buildings. When in doubt, people typically default to what's known as a central point strategy: they choose familiar spaces, even if that means a longer route. (Hölscher et al., 2006)

Digital technology helps

Digital technologies should work as invisible guides, helping remove barriers and amplifying visitor experience. Their main contribution lies in breaking down the "text barrier" and replacing it with more accessible formats.

Mobile apps and QR codes let people adjust written text on their phone screen to fit their specific needs. Complex concepts can be grasped more easily through visual animation and augmented reality (AR), which can turn abstract text into vivid and immersive experiences. The digital dimension's major upside is that it provides visitors with the ability to choose whichever sensory channel works best for them. The "Tools and Practical Measures" chapter covers specific digital tools, like QR codes or text-to-speech.

What the research says

Digital technology makes it possible to tailor how information is presented to an audience's individual needs, language level, or expertise. By linking a virtual information space with the physical environment, digital content becomes more tangible and intuitive. (Tselios et al., 2008).

The natural pull to the right

Both research and practice suggest that the majority of audiences tend to automatically turn to the right. This pattern shows up repeatedly in galleries, museums, and other exhibition spaces. Despite not planning a route consciously, audiences intuitively turn right upon entering and move through the space in a loop-like pattern. This tendency may be connected to everyday experience with right-hand traffic, or to general habits of moving through space.

What the research says

One participant in our research described her movement through the gallery like this: “I kind of intuitively went right. I mean, in this gallery I usually go right, so I make a loop like this and only get to the left side afterwards.” It’s important to plan for this behavior when laying out a route, placing objects, and positioning wayfinding elements. It’s best to place introductory panels on the right-hand side. The first third of a route should offer the widest corridors to avoid stressful chokepoints. For the same reason, this part should never feature the key exhibit. (Bitgood, 2011)

The secret to managing visitor flow is respecting the audience’s natural instinct to turn right and move counterclockwise. Both slower and faster walkers need enough room to pass safely. In a circular space, audiences usually gravitate to the walls. Exhibits are therefore best placed along the outer perimeter, while a rest area may work best in the calm center of the room.

Inclusive signage

An inclusive approach to signage builds on the principles of universal design. From the outset, these principles are meant to work for as wide a range of people as possible, so that no extra adjustments for specific groups are needed later. In a cultural institution setting, that means combining text and image elements. Texts should use simple, clear language (plain language). Use the same names and terms consistently across the whole wayfinding system. Inclusive, multimodal signage can also include acoustic wayfinding elements, such as audio beacons, which help audiences find important locations. Acoustic information complements visual and tactile signage and expands wayfinding options, especially for people with visual impairments. Combining multiple ways of conveying information makes a space more accessible and easier to understand.

What the research says

Research on both traffic signage and public indoor spaces consistently shows that lowercase letters work better for information systems than uppercase. Because of their ascenders and descenders, lowercase words form a distinctive shape that makes it possible to recognize whole words faster. Text set in all caps loses this silhouette, which slows reading down. (Oderkerk and Beier, 2022).

Staff as a key point of contact

For audiences, members of staff are an important point of orientation and support, as they help people find their way around a space, answer questions, and make it easier to access services and programs. Reaching out to the staff is often the fastest and most reliable way to receive information or assistance. Support staff also include security personnel, who can help audiences find their way, answer basic questions, or refer them to further assistance. When staff communicate in a welcoming way that's easy to understand, the overall visitor experience can be greatly improved, fostering feelings of safety and acceptance.

Staff are more than just a point of orientation. They also play a role in determining how people feel at an institution and how well they understand the content. The "Tools and Practical Measures" chapter covers how to train staff in inclusive communication and involve them in preparing exhibitions.

What the research says

- Research confirms that what experts (management, curatorial teams, specialists) consider interesting often doesn't match what audiences expect or want. In one study, only one in six audience members picked up on an exhibition's "main story." And even then, their interpretation did not match what the curatorial team had intended, since the exhibition had been organized around themes of craft, creative process, and interpretation. (Spiro et al., 2025)
- Best practice at the Moravian Gallery shows that the key to success is involving the education team as early as the concept stage of an exhibition, not just afterwards as guides for a finished show. That way, the exhibition is built from the ground up to be understandable to the public. (Kaňkovská and Rozbořil, 2023).

Floor plans and tactile plans help visitors get their bearings and plan their route. Sensory maps, on the other hand, focus on sensory stimuli rather than the route, and are covered in detail in the "Physical Space" chapter.

Pictograms

Pictograms are great for marking universally recognizable points of interest (restrooms, elevators, emergency exits. They perform much worse when they need to denote technical and specialized places that lack a common and unambiguous symbol. Our own research highlights the importance of pictograms. To make them as clear as possible, it helps to pair the symbol with a short text description. This combination reinforces the importance of the symbol and leaves less room for misunderstandings.

At the same time, it's important to use simple, widely recognized symbols that build on how people generally interpret images. For the graphic design itself, simplicity, high contrast, clarity, and consistency are essential.

What the research says

- Research participants distinguished color pictograms better than black-and-white versions. Only 5% said they had noticed only the symbol and not the color. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)
- In our research, how participants viewed color in pictograms had nothing to do with their level of dyslexia. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)
- A majority of respondents said clear restroom signage should be the standard, regardless of gender. Yet among the options presented, only 2% identified gender-neutral symbols as helpful.
- Most people (55%) prefer traditional symbols. Figure 3 shows the

pictograms that performed best in testing.

- As for the pictogram for the elevator, the version that was deemed the most understandable in testing was the one with a person inside a square elevator cabin. The pictogram showing doors was confusing for participants, who mistook it for a regular entrance or a freight elevator. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)
- The Accessible Icon Project shows that even seemingly simple information symbols can carry significant cultural and social meaning. Among other things, the project introduced a modified wheelchair-user symbol that emphasizes activity and autonomy for people with disabilities. The goal isn't to change what the pictogram means, but to strengthen the sense of activity and independence it conveys. (Accessible Icon Project, 2026)



Figure 3: Examples of pictograms (elevator, no photography, emergency exit) that research respondents identified as clearest (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Arrows and signage

The need for a wayfinding system is proportional to the size of the gallery or museum space. Smaller, easy-to-navigate exhibitions usually do not require fixed signage. However, if a route is more complex or less straightforward, signage can serve as a useful tool. Numbering exhibits or individual stops can help audiences. So can arrows, which are also useful for pointing to a recommended direction of travel and make a route easier to follow. This helps audiences understand the structure of an exhibition and track their progress along the route. A wayfinding system also reduces uncertainty or the stress of getting lost.

On the other hand, an excess of arrows, directional instructions, and other navigational elements on the floor can create unwanted visual pollution, where an excess of information competes for attention and disrupts the clarity and aesthetic quality of the exhibition. Instead of supporting wayfinding, these elements can end up contributing to information overload, where audiences pay more attention to navigation than to the exhibition's actual content. The exception is exhibitions deliberately designed for free wandering and independent discovery.

Brochures and maps

Brochures and maps are an essential part of wayfinding systems. In larger exhibitions especially, they help audiences get a better sense of the space, which allows them to plan their visit with more ease and feel more confident. For people with specific learning difficulties, brochures containing a map are an invaluable aid. Our research suggests that visitors with no diagnosis tend to refer to the map to confirm they've seen every part of the exhibition. People with dyslexia

or other reading difficulties can make use of it to better understand both the content and the spatial layout of an exhibition.

What the research says

Our research shows that only a small share of visitors revisits printed materials they take home from an exhibition. One participant put it this way: “I take it, but more as a souvenir, not something I’d go back to and flip through.” (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Another tool that can make a visit easier for people is a detailed guide, for example in PDF form, with a step-by-step walkthrough of the entire visit, from arrival and parking to the cloakroom and quiet zones (see the “Tools and Practical Measures” chapter). It reduces uncertainty and anxiety and supports a smoother, calmer visitor experience.

Tactile plans can also help audiences find their way. They make it easier for people with visual impairments not just to navigate a space, but also to get a better sense of the objects on display. A tactile plan can show the layout of individual rooms, a visit route, or important landmarks. Alongside wayfinding and tactile plans, there are also sensory maps, which capture information about noise, bright light, and quiet zones. These are covered in detail in the “Physical Space” chapter.

What the research says

- Among younger people (ages 12–27), the research confirmed that the more often someone struggles with reading, the less often they visit cultural institutions. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)
- Maps of exhibition spaces can improve visitor experience. Roughly a third of respondents said information materials, flyers, and brochures would improve their visit. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)
- Despite clear instructions, roughly three-quarters of our research participants stopped at the ticket desk to confirm the direction of the tour. The staircase also caused uncertainty, even though participants had been told beforehand not to use it. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Curators: The team of curators is responsible for the way audiences “read” an exhibition and its logical sequence. Ask an outsider to go through your exhibition and describe their experience. Evaluate whether your test subject felt confident in every section, found everything they needed, and understood correctly what you had intended

Graphic designers: Simplify complex routes. If a route is complicated, use arrows and object numbering to make it easier to follow along.

Management: Staff are a key point of orientation and act as active guides. Invest in their training. Gallery attendants need to know how to give directions to and communicate with different audience groups. Welcoming, clear communication from the team directly affects how safe people feel. Walk the entire route, from the public transport stop or parking lot to the last room, together with someone from your audience. They’ll immediately show you where your wayfinding stops making sense. Fixing it doesn’t cost much, but it substantially improves the visitor experience.

You’ll find checkpoints for this area in the “Checklist,” under “Wayfinding and Navigation.”

Key points

- A good wayfinding system doesn't just convey information: above all, it reduces audience stress and uncertainty.
- Information about the layout of a space or the exhibition route should be available before the visit.
- Audiences don't move through a space randomly. Most people intuitively turn right and, when uncertain, return to familiar points.
- Pair symbols with text. A standalone pictogram with no text works only for those already familiar with its meaning.
- In more complex spaces, using exhibit numbering or arrows showing a recommended direction helps audiences understand the structure of an exhibition.
- Maps and brochures can help audiences plan their routes and make sure they haven't missed any parts of the exhibition.
- Elements that help people with dyslexia ultimately make wayfinding easier for everyone.

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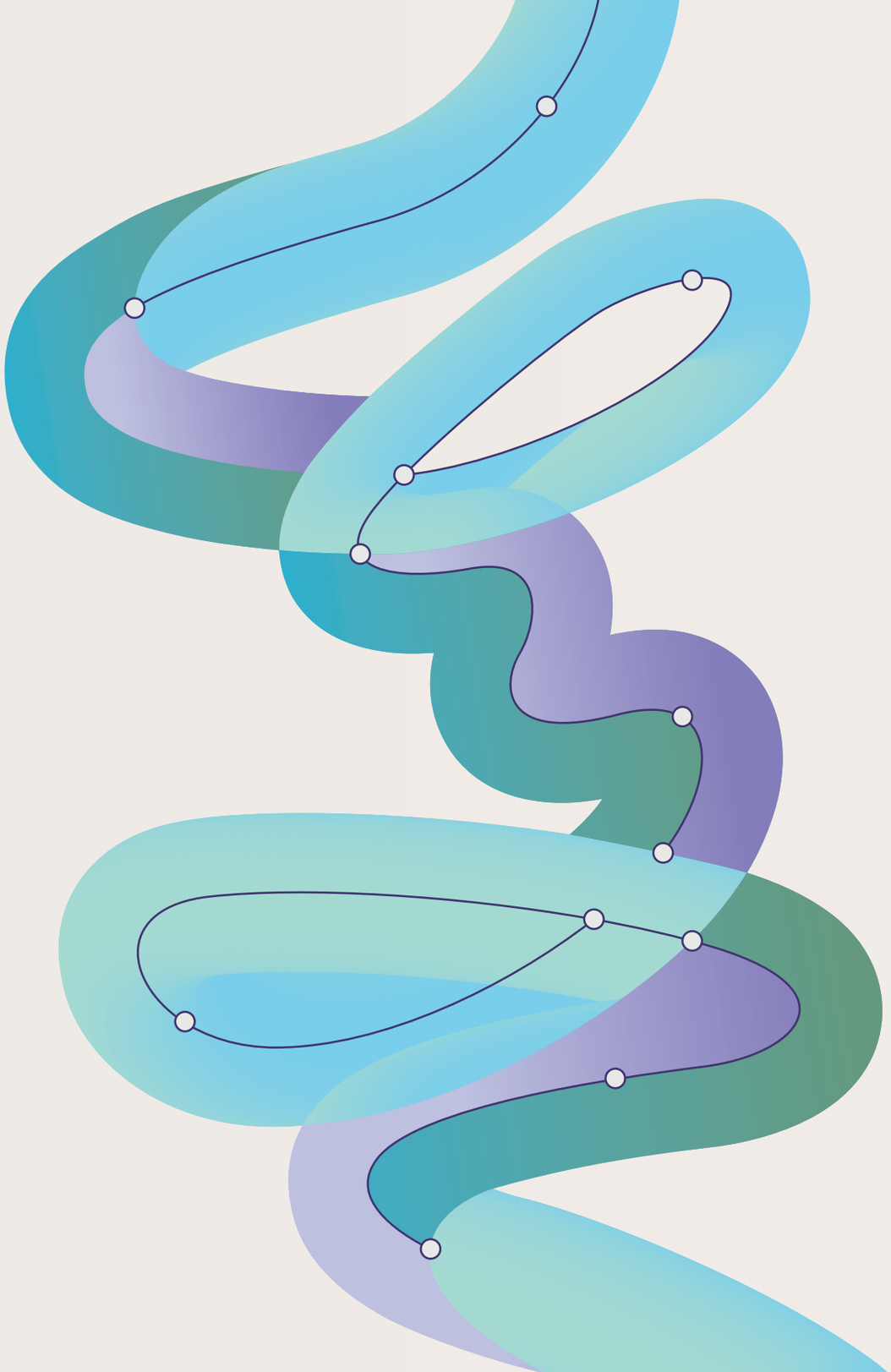
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5.4 Interactive elements

Martina Juříková

Interactive elements help turn a visit to a museum or a gallery from passive observation into an active experience. They can take the form of tactile models, screens, videos, sound installations, or activities that invite audiences to explore and get involved. They help people understand exhibition content better, remember it longer, and form their own relationship with it.

Interactive elements only serve their purpose when they can be used and understood easily. This chapter shows how to design them for as wide a range of people as possible, emphasizing simple controls, clear instructions, video and audio controls, engaging multiple senses, and avoiding overload. It also shows how interactive elements support audience independence, comfort, and active engagement.

Simple and predictable controls

Interactive elements work best when they are simple, intuitive, and predictable. Audiences should not have to think about how to use the technology but rather be able to focus on the actual exhibition content. Uniform modes of control across the entire exhibition help build a sense of confidence when using both digital and physical elements. If one screen employs horizontal scrolling, other interactive devices should follow suit.

Simple controls help people who have limited experience with digital technology. That includes older adults, people with specific learning difficulties, or audiences who don't normally encounter more complex digital tools. In this context, interactive elements aren't meant to be technical showpieces. They're supposed to help people access information more easily and understand exhibition content better.

What the research says

- Complicated or inconsistent interfaces increase cognitive load and pull attention away from exhibition content. (Marconcini, 2022)
- Complicated controls can create new barriers, especially for less tech-savvy audiences. (Avni et al., 2025)
- Consistent, predictable controls support a sense of control, independence, and safety when visiting cultural institutions. (Cerdan Chiscano and Jiménez-Zarco, 2021)

Clear prompts and instructions

If it is unclear at first glance how an interactive element works, a simple and clear explanation is needed. People should be able to grasp quickly what they are allowed to do, how to use the element, and what happens once it starts. Short, specific instructions work best.

Museum and gallery visitors are accustomed to not touching exhibits. Unless it is clearly stated that an interactive element can be used, they may worry about causing damage or breaking the rules. Clear instructions and visible prompts inviting them to interact give them confidence and make it easier to engage with the exhibition.

Unambiguous prompts work to assure the audience that they are allowed to touch or use an element. Such messaging works against uncertainty and supports active engagement with the exhibition. Direct prompts are most effective, such as "Touch me", "Swipe right", "Tap to start." Specific commands are much clearer than more vague prompts, such as "Explore" or "Discover more."

What the research says

- People often choose not to interact with the elements due to being unsure whether they're even allowed to and worried about damaging the exhibit. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)
- Fear of improper use or breaking an institution's rules showed up across different audience age groups. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)
- User testing revealed that prompts like "Explore me" were too ambiguous for part of the audience. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)
- Academic studies confirm that clear instructions reduce uncertainty and support active audience participation. (Hodson, Svanda, and Dadashi, 2023)

Engaging multiple senses

Today's exhibitions increasingly make use of multisensory elements. Alongside the visual, these elements also engage sound, touch, movement, or smell. Engaging multiple senses helps make content accessible to a broader range of audiences and makes for a deeper visitor experience.

Multisensory elements also allow audiences to engage with the content in a way that suits them best. Some people remember information better through sound, others through touch or movement. However, too many stimuli can easily overwhelm people, so careful attention to the amount of stimuli prevents that.

What the research says

- Engaging multiple senses in an exhibition strengthens both memorability and the intensity of the experience. (Falk and Dierking, 2013)
- Engaging multiple senses, such as sight, hearing, or touch, helps make information accessible in several ways at once. That lets people choose whichever approach suits them best. (Ji et al., 2024)
- People with dyslexia, for example, intuitively make use of tactile elements, which help them understand content better and remember information. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)
- Too many different stimuli at once, such as sounds, texts, videos, and interactive elements, can overwhelm audiences and make it harder for them to concentrate. (Mesquita, Caldeira and Carneiro, 2022)
- On the other hand, combining multiple types of interaction accounts for the diversity of visitors and preferences for how content is perceived. (Fang, Xia, and Diao, 2025)

One example of good practice is the Multisensory Met project at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which engaged sight, hearing, touch, and smell. The goal was to expand the traditional museum experience, built mainly around observation, and offer audiences more ways to experience and interpret works of art. The project showed that engaging multiple senses can deepen a visitor's connection to the objects on display and support a more intense experience.



Figure 4: A visitor experiencing Multisensory Met at the spring 2015 MediaLab Expo. Engaging smell heightens their experience of the work.

Image description: A visitor smells a painting inside an exhibition room.

An example of good practice in the Czech context is the **tactile model of the National Memorial at Vítkov**, created by the National Museum in collaboration with accessibility experts. The model combines tactile and visual information and helps visitors with visual impairments find their way around the space independently.

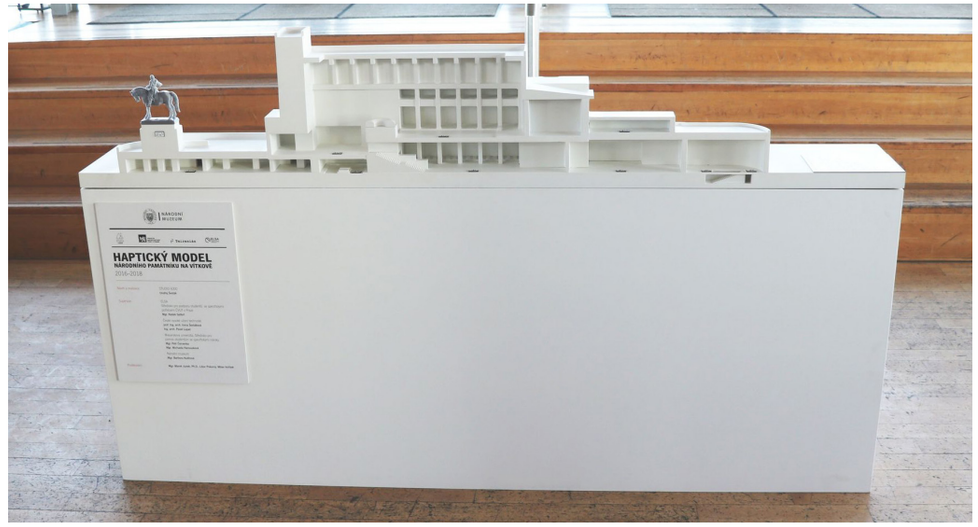


Figure 5: Tactile model of the National Memorial at Vítkov.

Image description: A white tactile model of the National Memorial at Vítkov on a tall white pedestal. The model captures the building's articulated roof with terraces and a grid of windows. A small equestrian statue stands on the left side of the roof. On the front of the pedestal is a plaque reading "TACTILE MODEL" in Czech.

Another example is the new **Město v čase (City in Time) exhibition at the Museum of Prague**, which combines digital models, interactive elements, projections, and spatial sound. Both projects show that engaging multiple senses can help not only people with specific needs, but also improve the visitor experience for a broader audience.



Figure 6: Město v čase exhibition at the Museum of Prague

Image description: A dark hall with a ceiling fresco and a circular skylight. A visitor stands with her back to the viewer in the center, facing three large round projection screens. They show a panoramic projection of the city. A semicircular bench sits in front of the projections. The installation is part of the Město v čase exhibition at the Museum of Prague.

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- Město v čase exhibition, Museum of Prague: https://www.muzeumprahy.cz/vystavy-a-akce/expozice-mesto-v-case-pribehy-z-19-stoleti-ozivaji

Interactivity supports a personalized experience

Interactive elements let people move through an exhibition at their own pace and choose how to engage with content based on their individual needs and preferences. Audiences become not just recipients of information, but active participants in the visitor experience.

When given the freedom to choose for themselves how to work with an interactive element, people feel more confident and comfortable during a visit. They have more control over what and how they explore, and they engage more with the exhibition. Interactive elements thus become not just a technical add-on: they help make content accessible to different audience groups and support their active participation in the visitor experience

What the research says

- Current approaches in museology treat audiences as active co-creators of an exhibition's meaning. (Hashim, Mohd Taib, and Alias, 2014)
- Research shows that the potential for active participation increases engagement, attention, and how well content is remembered. (Derda, 2024)
- Being able to choose how to interact supports a sense of independence and comfort when visiting cultural institutions. (Hodson, Svanda, and Dadashi, 2023).

Control over video and audio

Audiovisual elements are an important part of today's exhibitions. Visitors often walk up to video content that has already started playing, which causes confusion. Hence, visitors should be able to restart a video from the beginning, pause it, or adjust the volume. A clear playback progress indicator is also helpful.

Captions also help audiences navigate content. In practice, local language audio often lacks closed captions, even though these help deaf and hard-of-hearing people, as well as audiences in noisier spaces. For foreign language audio, providing both local language and English captions is ideal. Additionally, a written transcript allows visitors to process the content at their own pace.

Similarly, audio guides work best when they offer more than one way to use them. Some people prefer their own headphones; others prefer small speakers. When people have a choice, they can adapt a visit to their own needs and preferences.

What the research says

- Research participants repeatedly reported frustration with videos that couldn't be restarted or whose volume couldn't be adjusted. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)
- Some visitors see value in audio guides as "a rest for the eyes," while others experience cognitive overload when looking at an exhibit and listening at the same time. (Mesquita, Caldeira, and Carneiro, 2022)
- Audiences need to be able to process information and revisit content at their own pace. (Hodson, Svanda, and Dadashi, 2023)

Sometimes less is more

A well-designed interactive element does not overwhelm the visitor with too much information or too many stimuli. A balance of text, image, sound, and movement centers focus on the exhibition content. Audiences shouldn't be asked to track several different sources of information at once. If an interactive element combines text, image, sound, and active controls, visitors should be able to engage with them one at a time, at their own pace.
The placement of interactive elements within a space matters too. If too many interactive installations are concentrated in one place, their sound, light, or movement effects can interfere with one another and pull attention away from the exhibition content. With enough distance between them, interactive elements don't compete with one another and let audiences have a focused, undisturbed experience.

What the research says

- Combining multiple stimuli without a clear structure can overwhelm audiences and make it harder to understand content. (Marconcini, 2022)
- Cognitive overload occurs especially in situations where people have to look at an image (the artwork), read text, and listen to audio all at once. (Mesquita, Caldeira, and Carneiro, 2022)
- Audiences need to be able to process information and revisit content at their own pace. (Hodson, Svanda, and Dadashi, 2023)

Interactive elements need long-term maintenance

Interactive elements aren't a one-time investment. To serve audiences well throughout an exhibition's run, they need regular checks, maintenance, and clearly assigned responsibility for their operation. A broken screen, a dead battery, or damaged headphones can block access to content and reduce the quality of a visit.
When planning an interactive element, galleries and museums must therefore plan not just for its purchase, but for its life cycle, servicing, and staffing. The plan should answer the question of who will perform regular checks, how often maintenance will happen, and how the institution will handle technical issues.

What the research says

- The long-term sustainability of interactive elements depends not only on the quality of the design, but also on the organizational and staffing arrangements behind their operation. (Marconcini, 2022)
- Studies on inclusive design stress that accessibility has to be part of a service or product's entire life cycle, not just the design phase. (Cerdan Chiscano and Jiménez-Zarco, 2021)

Curators: When designing interactive elements, observe whether audiences quickly understand what they're supposed to do with them. Test your interactive installations with people outside of the preparation team and watch where they hesitate or need additional clarification. If people get stuck, simplify the controls or the instructions.

Graphic designers: Design instructions so that they are visible and legible within the exhibition space. Test whether users find it easy to locate any buttons, instructions, or audio and video controls. Important information should be brief, high-contrast, and placed near the interactive element.

Production staff: Create a simple operating plan for every interactive element. Define who checks that it's working, who changes the batteries, who handles technical issues, and how quickly problems need to be fixed. Test interactive elements under real operating conditions: check that a video can easily be replayed, the volume adjusted, or a digital interface used intuitively. Also watch whether the technology responds quickly enough and doesn't create frustration.

Educators: When working with interactive elements, account for different ways of learning and processing sensory input. Combine image, sound, touch, or movement so people can choose whichever way of engaging with content suits them best. At the same time, avoid overwhelming people with too many stimuli at once.

Attendants: Notice which interactive elements people most often struggle or need help with. These situations can point to unclear instructions or overly complicated controls. Feedback from audiences can help you adjust and improve interactive elements.

Management: Before acquiring an interactive element, ask yourself: “Who’s going to look after it in six months?” Budget not just for the purchase, but for servicing, updates, spare parts, and maintenance capacity. Build testing interactive elements into standard exhibition preparation. Just as texts or graphics get checked, it’s important to verify how clear the controls, instructions, and overall visitor experience are. Even small adjustments can substantially improve accessibility and visitor comfort.

You’ll find checkpoints for this area in the “Checklist,” under “Interactive Elements.”

Key points

- Interactive elements help audiences understand content better and actively engage with an exhibition.
- Interactive elements work best when they’re simple and intuitive. Clear instructions reassure people that they’re allowed to touch and use them.
- Engaging multiple senses, such as sound, touch, or movement, enhances memorability and makes content accessible to different audience groups.
- Too many stimuli or complicated controls can overwhelm audiences and pull attention away from the exhibition content.
- The ability to choose and control an interaction supports a sense of independence, safety, and comfort during a visit.

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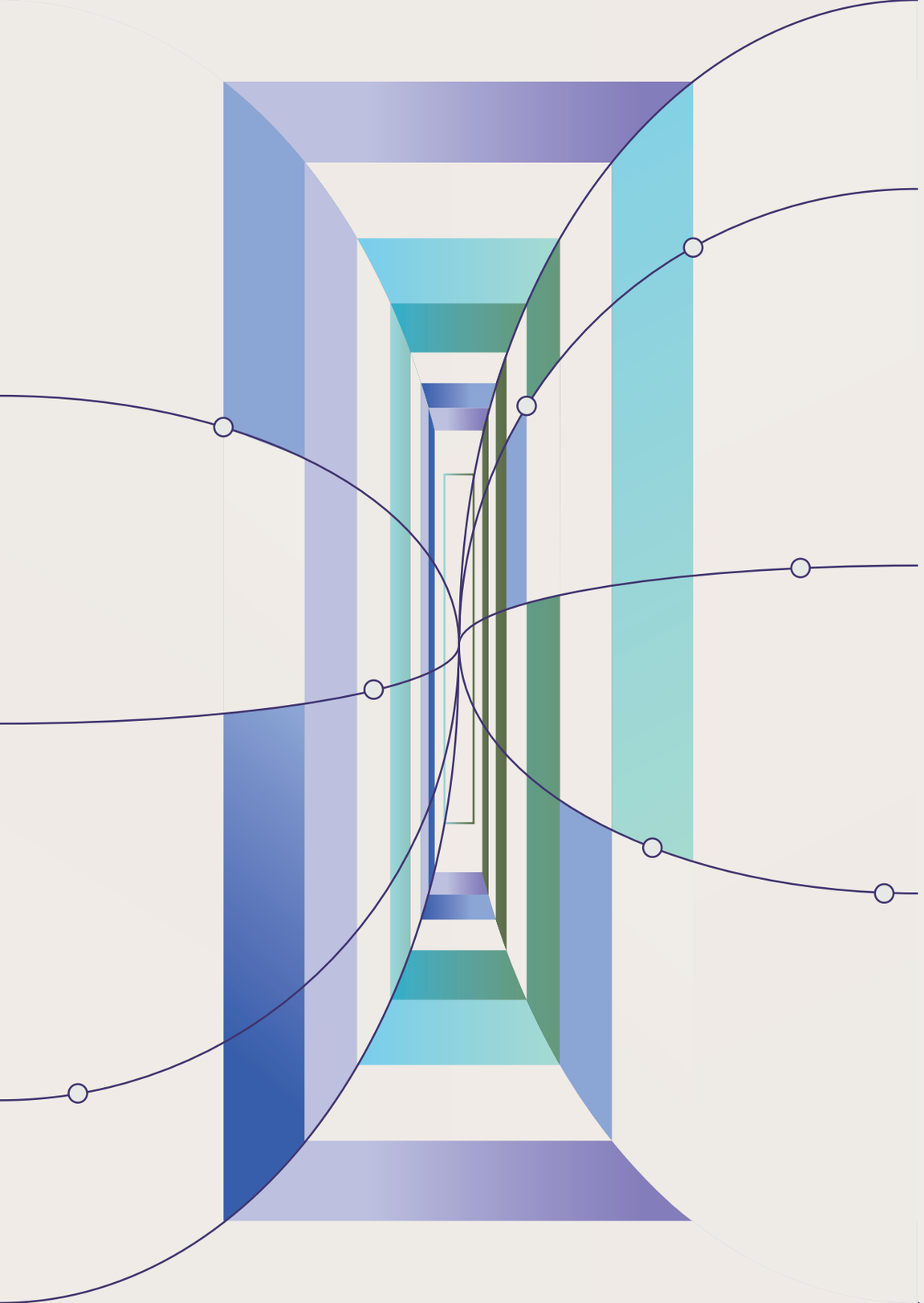
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5.5 Physical Space

Romana Zábojová

Your space speaks to your audience even without any text present. Light, sound, and the shape and arrangement of a space create what we call the passive environment, and that, in turn, shapes how people experience an exhibition. A well-designed passive environment leads visitors intuitively with no extra effort. At the same time, it determines the accessibility of an institution to different audience groups. This chapter shows how to read and adjust a space so that everyone feels safe in it and can find their way around easily.

How to create a supportive space

Art can be an instrument of care, support, and mental restoration. It helps people feel better and works as a place where they can relax, recharge, and regain focus and emotional balance. But that potential depends directly on the quality of the space: excessive noise, visual overload, or poor lighting weaken it considerably

What the research says

- Research has documented the link between the quality of a space and psychological wellbeing in museums: an environment that overwhelms the senses weakens art's capacity to serve as a source of recovery. (Šveb Dragija and Jelinčić, 2022)
- Research participants named the biggest barriers to visiting as an abstract topic with no clear message, too many people, a busy environment, noise, visual chaos, and poor spatial orientation. "When there are crowds, I don't feel like going at all." (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)
- By contrast, young adults expect a visit to offer inspiration, creativity, inner calm, emotion, reflection, and the discovery of something new. "I want to be touched by it somehow, to be made to think and to feel something." (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

The first step is to reduce noise and create calmer areas. It's also important not to overload audiences with too many stimuli. That means less text, a clear layout, and enough open space that doesn't feel overwhelming. Lighting plays a major role too: it should be soft, even, and not too harsh.

To increase comfort, consider adding rest areas, where people can sit down and just be still for a moment. Clear signage and a logical exhibition layout help reduce stress and uncertainty.

Sensory accessibility

Sensory overload is one of the most significant, and most systematically underestimated, barriers. The sensory properties of public spaces, such as light intensity, noise, or crowding, can be seriously limiting. The aim of sensory accessibility is not to remove all stimuli altogether. It strives to create an environment where people have more control over the way they use and experience the space.

What the research says

- The physical environment directly determines how much attention audiences can give to exhibits. Poor lighting, acoustic noise, or a confusing spatial layout pull attention away from content and lead to so-called museum fatigue before any deep engagement is achieved. (Bitgood, 2013)
- In museums and libraries, key measures include adjustable lighting, reduced visual noise, and a predictable layout. These don't just benefit autistic visitors; they benefit everyone with heightened sensory sensitivity. (Svaler, 2024)
-

Museums and galleries respond to these needs in different ways. Some adapt the spaces themselves; others offer aids for greater comfort. In practice, that means things like a clearly marked, easy-to-understand layout, quiet zones with dimmed or adjustable lighting, the availability of sensory aids, and trained staff.

The most common sensory aids include:

- **Noise-canceling headphones**: these can dampen loud sounds in galleries and ease the strain on people's ears.
- **Sensory maps**: a floor plan of the gallery that shows areas with a lot of noise or light as well as quiet zones. The goal is to help audiences understand the environment in advance and plan a visit that's pleasant and manageable. While their use in Czech contexts is being explored, they are considered standard practice at museums worldwide. One example is the Science Museum in London, which offers a sensory map as a "survival guide." It uses simple icons for crowded spots, noisy exhibits (for example, where engines are running), and harsh or flashing light. Link to the map: https://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/sites/default/files/2026-03/SensoryMap.pdf

Sensory aids can be made available at the ticket office, often in the form of sensory bags. These measures work best when they're introduced together, forming one interconnected system of support.

What the research says

Sensory maps are simple floor plans of a space. They show which sensory stimuli audiences will encounter in different places, along with quiet zones, louder areas, and strong light sources. People can use them to plan a route based on their own needs. (Watchorn et al., 2025b)

A sense of safety and concentration

The basic strategies for reducing cognitive load in museum settings complement each other. They include quiet zones (also known as calm rooms) and quiet hours, dedicated times with reduced sensory stimulation.

These measures are especially useful for audiences who process sensory input differently and need a calmer, less disruptive, and more predictable environment. Nevertheless, they can also add to the overall comfort and deeper experience of anyone who prefers a calmer setting.

Audiences appreciate when museums and galleries clearly state when quiet hours take place on their website. Another helpful tool is showing current visitor count on the website.

What the research says

- Spending time in an environment with reduced sensory load has been shown to lower cortisol levels and support mental recovery. (Powers Tomasso, Białowolski, and Spengler, 2025)
- Quiet zones are dedicated spaces with a deliberately reduced intensity of stimuli: dimmed lighting, sound-absorbing materials, comfortable seating, and a calm environment free of outside noise. (Watchorn et al., 2025a)
- Quiet hours extend this logic to the entire institution. During quiet hours, a museum deliberately dims both noise and lighting, limits the number of visitors, and makes quiet zones available. (MacLennan et al., 2023)

Spatial layout and barriers to movement

The spatial layout of a gallery or museum has a direct effect on how easily and comfortably audiences move through it. Rather than making people adapt to the space, the space should be designed to meet their needs.

What the research says

- The prospect-refuge principle plays an important role: the sense of safety that comes from having your back covered while still having an open view ahead. This principle has been shown to evoke calm and reduce anxiety. (Dosen and Ostwald, 2016)
- Frequently occurring physical barriers include stairs with no accessible alternative, narrow passages next to display cases, exhibits placed at extreme heights, a lack of places to rest, or confusing restrooms. An institution should ensure sufficiently wide, passable routes, accessible elevators, and barrier-free restrooms. Seating with a range of heights and support types is also important to accommodate wheelchair users, people with strollers or walkers, and people with chronic pain. (Prandi et al., 2023.

Engaging the senses

A multisensory approach engages several of our senses at once. Alongside the exhibits themselves, audiences can hear sounds, touch selected materials, move through a specifically adapted space, or pick up on scents connected to the exhibition's theme.

Keep in mind, though, that scents can also be harmful to some people. Strong smells cause issues for people with asthma, allergies, or sensory overload. So, warn audiences before the visit:

- **On the website:** Write a clear warning in the section containing practical information about the exhibition. That lets audiences prepare for the eventuality, or decide to skip that part of the exhibition.
- **At exhibition entrance:** Place a visible sign or pictogram on the door or wall right before the exhibition begins. That gives audiences one last chance to turn around and avoid the space.

What the research says

- A multisensory approach draws on the synergy of sight, hearing, touch, and smell, and strengthens both overall attention and the memorability of the content. Scent reinforces memory traces, music adds structure to the spatial experience, and tactile elements substantially enhance engagement for people with limited vision. (Luo, Doucé, and Nys, 2024)
- Accompanying programs, such as hands-on workshops or guided tours, can elevate the experience. More than 40% of our research participants said these kinds of accompanying programs would improve their experience of an exhibition. (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

This way of presenting art helps people understand the works on display more fully and experience them more deeply. At the same time, it makes the gallery environment accessible to a broader audience, including people for whom purely visual inputs are less natural or more draining. A multisensory approach supports a deeper experience and makes a visit clearer, more engaging, and more open to different ways of experiencing the world.

Lighting

Lighting has a major effect on how audiences see a space and the artworks themselves. It's not just about being able to physically see the exhibits. What also matters is how people feel in the space, how they find their way around, and whether they move through it with confidence.

Different types of lighting can significantly affect the mood of an exhibition. Light that is too harsh or too high-contrast can be unpleasant, tiring for the eyes, and pull focus away from the exhibits. Very dim or uneven lighting, on the other hand, can make navigation in the space more difficult and lead to audiences missing or skipping parts of the exhibition.

Making sure transitions between different parts of the exhibition are smooth also plays a major role. Sudden changes in lighting, such as a shift from a very bright space to a dark one, can be unpleasant and disorienting for some people. Gradual, gentle transitions, by contrast, help maintain a sense of comfort and safety.

A well-thought-out lighting design is not just an aesthetic decision. It affects accessibility, how legible a space is, and the overall visitor experience. Lighting in Czech museums and galleries is governed by a technical standard, which gives museum practice a clear methodological framework.

Czech technical standard for indoor exhibition lighting
ČSN P CEN/TS 16163: Conservation of Cultural Heritage – Guidelines and Procedures for Choosing Appropriate Lighting for Indoor Exhibitions. (Česká agentura pro standardizaci, 2015)

Working with sound

People generally perceive gentle background music positively, as it can help create a calm atmosphere and support the overall experience of a space. Loud videos placed near info panels, on the other hand, act as a significant distraction and make it impossible to concentrate on reading. High video volume makes it considerably harder to understand curatorial texts and accompanying materials. For that reason, it's essential that music not be treated as a mandatory component of the environment, but as a supporting element. That means giving audiences the option to turn music off, or avoid it altogether. It's equally important to inform audiences before they enter, so they can choose the setting that works for them. As such, music isn't a universal standard for exhibitions, but an optional tool.

What the research says
Research participants positively evaluated the option to engage more senses: "I see it as a big plus when any additional senses get engaged; when an exhibition allows for it, like some video or an audio guide, or when I can touch something. I don't find using my eyes tiring. I think it's better when it's combined. I think I engaged my sense of touch on my own, actually, when I touched that seat." (Museums Without Barriers project, 2023–2026)

Audio guides seem to be a reliable way to deliver interpretation, but having a choice matters here too: while a part of the audience likes using audio guides, others prefer silence or reading texts. That's why it's good to give audiences a choice of several ways to get information, such as info panels, brochures, or QR codes. Audio guides are covered in detail in the "Interactive Elements" chapter. An audio guide should be part of a balanced environment, one that

doesn't feel overwhelming or disruptive and lets people take in content at their own pace.

Scent

Engaging smell can trigger an immediate emotional response and a deep experience. However, caution is advised when applying such elements. Scent has the power to carry an audience through time. A faint whiff of tar and smoke in an exhibition about the industrial revolution, or the scent of dried herbs in a historical pharmacy, can add to the atmosphere better than a thousand words. Olfactory stimuli shouldn't be allowed to drift freely through the entire space either. For people with sensory overload, asthma, or allergies, an intense scent can be a barrier.

Comfort

Audience comfort affects how long people remain within an exhibition, how they perceive it, and how likely they are to return to the space. That includes having somewhere to sit, rest during a visit, or take a break when an exhibition is longer or more demanding. For this reason, make sure seating is available wherever that need can be anticipated (for example, near projections). Seating areas need to be clearly marked, though, as people are often unsure whether something is an exhibit or a rest area. It's also important to ensure enough room to move, so no one has to squeeze past others in tight spots.

Every person's needs are different. Some prefer moving through an exhibition quickly; others like to take it slow and examine every detail. A comfortable environment should accommodate both, without pressure or stress. In this way, comfort is no add-on but a basic part of a good visitor experience.

Curators: Younger generations see abstract topics with no clear messaging as problematic. Look for ways to connect content with emotion and reflection. Introduce quiet hours and dedicated times with reduced stimulation, which benefit not just neurodivergent groups, but anyone looking for peace and calm.

Graphic designers: Minimize visual noise. Too many stimuli and visual chaos lead to fatigue and reduce the ability to take in exhibits.

Management: Adapt the gallery or museum space (clearly marked seating, managing noise and light). Introduce organizational changes (such as quiet hours) and offer audiences sensory aids. A financially modest investment in these measures, and in staff training, will help create a place where art genuinely helps people recharge.

You'll find checkpoints for this area in the "Checklist," under "Physical Space.".

Key points

- A space speaks even without words: light, sound, and layout either intuitively support audiences or create barriers for them.
- People feel calmer in more varied spaces where they have their back covered and an open view ahead.
- Noise, visual chaos, and crowding are major barriers, not just for people with specific learning difficulties, but for more sensitive audiences in general.
- Engaging multiple senses (hearing, touch, smell) alongside sight has been shown to strengthen the memorability of the content and reinforce memory traces.
- A museum or gallery can support psychological wellbeing when it works as a space for restoring attention and emotional balance.

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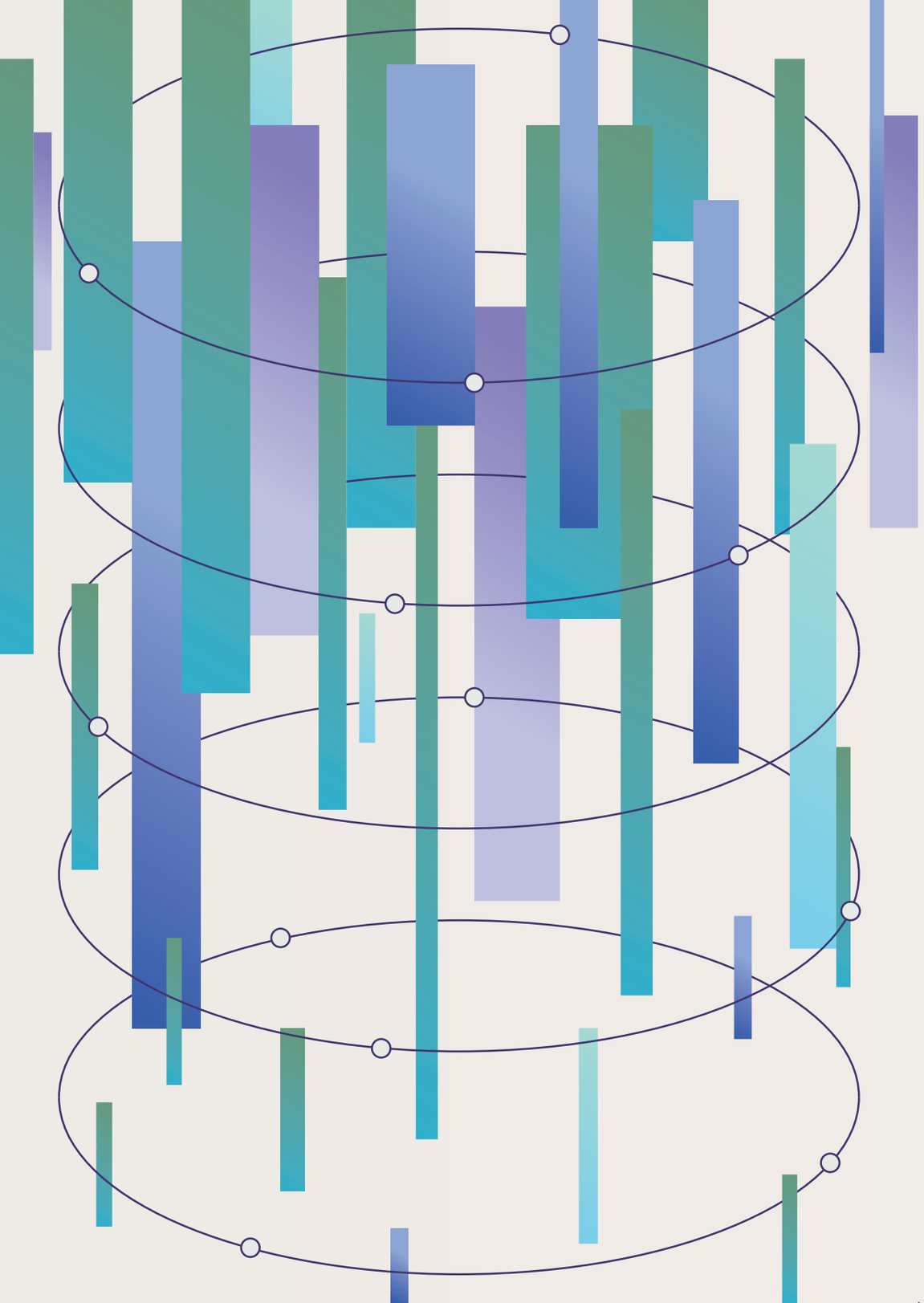
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6 Legal Framework

Nicole Fryčová

This chapter provides an overview of the legal framework, from the UN Convention to Czech laws, that sets out the obligation to ensure accessibility in culture. For management and curators alike, this material is essential: it explains that accessibility isn't just a matter of goodwill, but a binding legal obligation, and that failing to meet this obligation can be seen as discrimination.

Readers will take away practical tools for clear communication, digital accessibility, and removing physical barriers in line with current technical standards. Understanding the difference between universal design and reasonable accommodation will also let you plan inclusive programs more effectively and build an institution that's genuinely open to everyone.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter "the Convention") is currently the most significant instrument of international law in the area of disability rights. It's a comprehensive document that addresses every area of life of people with disabilities, with each area covered in a separate article.

Origin and legal mandate of the Convention
The Convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 13 December 2006, as the eighth human rights convention, in response to the fact that people with disabilities continued to face discrimination despite earlier conventions. On 30 March 2007, the Convention was adopted by the Czech Republic, where it entered into force, following ratification, on 28 October 2009. That made the Convention a binding legal instrument for the Czech Republic, one that takes precedence over other legislation, which must conform to it. Therefore, it is not merely a set of recommendations.
Source: Article 10 of the Constitution of the Czech Republic.

Under Article 1 of the Convention, persons with disabilities "include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." This is a very broad definition, not limited to a medical diagnosis. It covers everyone who, due to their health, faces obstacles in everyday life that prevent them from reaching their potential and being fully included in society.

The entire text of the Convention has to be understood keeping in mind the core values it's built on. Under Article 3 of the Convention, these include respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, independence of persons, and non-discrimination. This list is rounded out by principles such as equality of opportunity and accessibility.

All European and domestic legislation as well as all strategic materials should be grounded in the provisions of the Convention, since the European Union as a whole is itself a party to it.

The European Union as a party to the Convention
The European Union acceded to the Convention as a party in 2011.

Accessible culture under the Convention
Accessibility in the broadest sense is addressed in Article 9 of the Convention. It establishes an obligation for states to ensure equal access to, among other things, the physical environment, information, and services. In a cultural context, these measures mainly concern removing barriers in publicly accessible buildings such as museums,

theaters, and galleries, and ensuring accessible information and communication.

Building on the general provisions on accessibility, Article 21 guarantees freedom of expression and access to information through forms of communication of one's own choosing. For cultural participation, the key requirement is to provide information in accessible formats and technologies suited to audiences with different needs, at no additional cost to them. These forms include, for example, information in plain language or easy-to-read format, and other alternative formats accessible to people with visual impairments (such as Braille, large-print, or digital text) or hearing impairments (such as sign language interpretation).

Article 30 of the Convention then provides specific rules guaranteeing participation in cultural life. States that are parties to the Convention are required to ensure access to cultural materials, television programs, films, theater, and other cultural activities in accessible formats.

States must also ensure access to places for cultural activities, such as theaters, museums, cinemas, libraries, and tourism services, and, as far as possible, access to historical monuments and sites of national cultural heritage. Accessibility requirements also apply to historical and protected monuments.

The UN Committee's General Comment on accessibility

General Comment No. 2 (2014) of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on Article 9, Accessibility (hereinafter "the General Comment"), was published on 22 May 2014. Among other things, it states that it makes no difference whether the operator of a cultural venue is a private or a public entity.

All entities that provide services to the general public, including online, are called on to provide information and services in accessible and usable formats for people with different needs.

The General Comment also addresses the difference between accessibility and reasonable accommodation. Broadly speaking, both accessibility and reasonable accommodation aim to help people with disabilities realize their rights.

Here's a concrete example to illustrate the difference. Accessibility means that a visitor with a severe visual impairment walks into a gallery and automatically finds a description of a painting in Braille, large print, and another alternative format. Reasonable accommodation, by contrast, would be a gallery allowing a visitor, at their specific request, to touch a sculpture that isn't normally meant to be touched.

Accessibility and reasonable accommodation: what's the difference

Accessibility can be understood as a duty to ensure a barrier-free environment, information, communication, or services, with an emphasis on universal design (the ability to use an environment or service, receive information, or communicate without further special adaptations, for as broad a range of users as possible). Reasonable accommodation, by contrast, means special adjustments for a specific person with specific needs. Ensuring accessibility is therefore a broader concept than providing reasonable accommodation.

Source: General Comment No. 2 (2014) of the UN Committee; the Public Defender of Rights.

So far, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has only dealt with questions of cultural accessibility in individual complaints to a very limited extent. Most of the Committee's work related to Article 30 has been confined almost entirely to general

recommendations issued to individual states as part of its regular monitoring.

In the past, these recommendations have also often focused narrowly on copyright law and the implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty, which facilitates access to literature for blind people. In the academic literature, Article 30 is accordingly considered one of the least explored rights in the entire Convention.

Henley v. Australia
Practically the only significant case to address this topic directly was that of an Australian woman named Henley. She complained about the lack of audio description in television broadcasting. Even in that decision, though, the Committee focused primarily on the general duty to ensure accessibility under Article 9, rather than a deeper analysis of the specific right to participate in cultural life.

Source: decision of the UN Committee, Henley v. Australia.

The Marrakesh Treaty

The Marrakesh Treaty is a landmark legal milestone in inclusive access to cultural and scientific heritage. Its core mechanism is a mandatory, harmonized exception to copyright law. This exception allows authorized entities to produce, distribute, and share copyrighted works internationally in accessible formats (such as Braille, audiobooks, or specific digital formats) without needing prior consent from rightsholders.

The treaty's key societal impact extends far beyond the community of people with visual impairments. Its legal definition of beneficiaries explicitly covers a wide range of users. This includes people with specific learning and print disabilities (such as severe dyslexia), as well as people whose physical abilities make it difficult to handle a printed book in the usual way, such as turning a page or keeping their eyes on the text.

The Marrakesh Treaty: key dates
The Marrakesh Treaty (officially the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled) was adopted by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in 2013. In the Czech Republic, as an EU member state, the Marrakesh Treaty has been in effect since 1 January 2019, following its ratification by the European Union as a whole in October 2018. It was incorporated into Czech law, specifically the Copyright Act, through an amendment that took effect in February 2019.

Accessibility under European Union law

This section covers only the legislation relating to the accessibility of information.

The Web Accessibility Directive

The Directive on the accessibility of websites and mobile applications requires public sector bodies to keep their websites and apps accessible to all users: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. That lets people with disabilities use them effectively with assistive technologies or specialized programs available to them. The directive doesn't apply to private operators.

Adoption of the directive
The Web Accessibility Directive was adopted on 26 October 2016.

Source: Directive (EU) 2016/2102.

The directive was transposed into Czech law by the Czech Act on the Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications. This is covered in more detail in the section on Czech legislation.

At the European Commission level, a range of guidance documents exist on how to write clearly. These mainly concern official texts, but the same rules can be applied in other areas too, including culture.

A practical guide: How to Write Clearly
The guide "How to Write Clearly" was published by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation. It has been officially translated into all official languages of the European Union. It includes concrete recommendations, such as keeping sentences short and simple, preferring active verbs to passive, cutting out excess nouns, and always naming the agent.

Source: European Commission Directorate-General for Translation.

Cultural accessibility under Czech legal and advisory documents

Digital accessibility in culture
The Act on the Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications has a major effect on the digital presentation of cultural heritage and public sector institutions such as museums, galleries, and libraries. The act requires these entities to keep their digital platforms perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. For users with specific needs, the principle of understandability is especially important: it requires that people be able to easily read and understand information and interface controls.

Exceptions for collection items; oversight
In the cultural sector, the act defines specific exceptions for "items of cultural heritage collections" (which it defines to include cultural monuments, museum collection objects, library documents, and objects of cultural value). These items don't have to meet accessibility requirements where doing so would be incompatible with preserving their originality and authenticity, or where the technology needed to automatically convert text from historical manuscripts isn't available.

For all other content, the obligation to remove barriers applies. Compliance by cultural institutions run by the state, a territorial self-governing unit, or a legal entity established by law is overseen by the Digital and Information Agency, which acts as the supervisory body in this area. The act doesn't apply to private operators of cultural institutions.

Private operators of cultural venues are, however, subject to the Anti-Discrimination Act.

The Anti-Discrimination Act

The Anti-Discrimination Act guarantees equality under Czech law and protects people from discrimination in the areas it specifically (exhaustively) defines. These areas include, among others, access to services for the public. This rule applies absolutely strictly in the area of cultural accessibility. The law treats what cultural institutions offer, along with theater and concert productions and the operation of heritage sites, as the provision of public services.

The Anti-Discrimination Act in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic adopted the Anti-Discrimination Act in 2009.

The Anti-Discrimination Act also defines refusing or failing to provide reasonable accommodation as indirect discrimination on grounds of disability. Anyone with a disability necessarily needs this kind of accommodation to make full use of public services. The act does allow an exception where doing so would represent a disproportionate burden, but that assessment is subject to a strict proportionality test.

The proportionality test: four criteria

The law requires a provider to assess four things at once:

- the benefit the accommodation would bring to the person with a disability,
- whether it's financially feasible,
- whether financial or other assistance is available to implement it,
- whether an alternative measure would meet that person's needs.

All four have to be weighed together, not considered separately.

Source: the Anti-Discrimination Act.

The act also explicitly states that a measure an entity is required to carry out under a specific legal regulation (for example, under the technical standards of the Building Act) is never considered a disproportionate burden. In this way, the law turns the removal of barriers in culture from a mere social gesture or act of charity into a clearly defined, enforceable legal duty.

One example of reasonable accommodation is a mid-sized museum preparing a permanent exhibition on the history of the city. In that case, it's entirely appropriate for the exhibition to include texts in plain language and easy-to-read format, for exhibit labels to include Braille, and for them to feature QR codes linking to digital versions of the information.

The disproportionate burden exception, by contrast, would apply to a small volunteer-run association putting on a weekend exhibition of historical texts. In that case, the requirement to make the exhibition accessible would represent an unreasonable financial burden that, given the exhibition's very short run, can't reasonably be expected of a small association.

The physical accessibility of a cultural institution

For a cultural institution to be genuinely accessible, it has to meet numerous requirements for architectural accessibility. In the Czech context, these are set out in detail in the Decree on Construction Requirements and the Czech technical standard Accessibility and Barrier-Free Use. Both documents provide technical specifications for the layout of any space intended for public use.

Advisory documents on plain language and easy-to-read text

Accompanying texts are part of any institution, not just a cultural one. It's essential to write them clearly, and a narrower segment of the audience will also appreciate having them in easy-to-read format. No Czech legislation directly regulates plain language or

easy-to-read formats, but this obligation follows directly from the Convention. That's why several advisory documents have been published in recent years.

An advisory document from the Public Defender of Rights
One such advisory document is the Office of the Public Defender of Rights' publication How to Write Official Texts Clearly. As the title suggests, the publication focuses on official texts, but the rules it sets out can be applied to any text, including accompanying texts for exhibitions, plays, and other cultural events.

Source: the Public Defender of Rights: How to Write Official Texts Clearly.

Simplified language, easy-to-read, plain language
This publication uses the term "easy-to-read" (in Czech public administration also called "simplified language"). It's a narrower, stricter methodology than plain language. You'll find a detailed definition of both terms, along with guidance on how to create such texts, in the "Tools and Practical Measures" chapter.

Source: Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic.

Management: Check whether every space in your institution allows people using wheelchairs, or accompanying a child in a stroller, to move around independently. Check whether your institution's website and mobile app are understandable and operable for people with different needs. Take a proactive approach to different audience needs through support measures. Digitize all printed materials (or arrange for them to be digitized), so they're accessible to audiences with disabilities.

Conclusion

- Ensuring accessibility in culture isn't just a gesture of goodwill. It's a binding legal obligation, and failing to meet it can be treated as unlawful conduct under the Anti-Discrimination Act.
- Cultural institutions should apply universal design principles as a first priority, so their spaces, information, and services can automatically be used by the widest possible range of visitors without a need for further adaptation.
- Information accessibility requires providing texts and digital content in understandable formats, such as plain language for the general public or easy-to-read formats for people with cognitive disabilities.
- The obligation to remove barriers covers not just architectural changes, but also digital accessibility and reasonable accommodation for the individual needs of specific people.
- A genuinely open institution actively removes physical, informational, and communication barriers, enabling everyone, without exception, to fully participate in cultural life.

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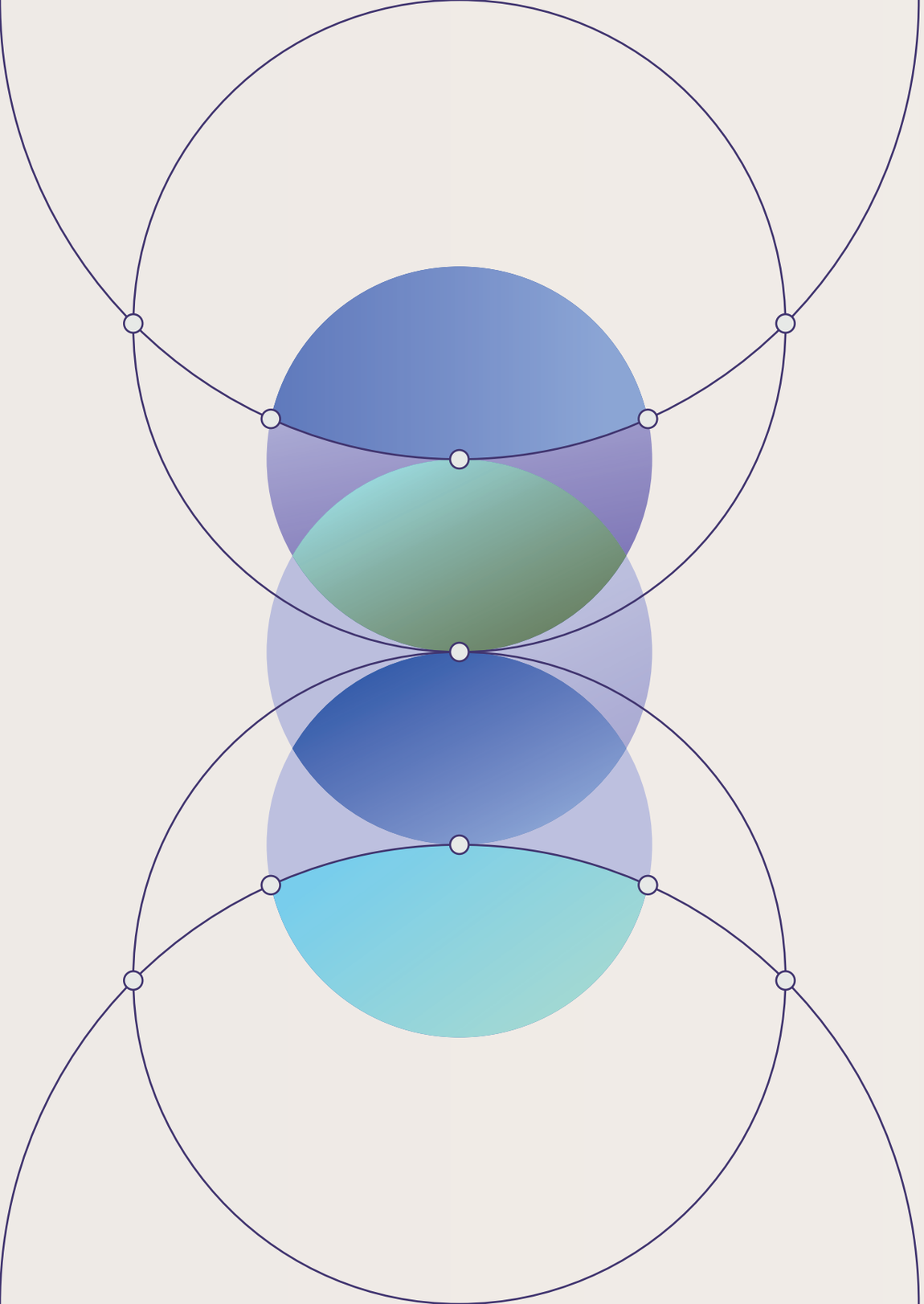
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7 Tools and Practical Measures

Eva Vázalová Gartnerová

Knowing that your texts fail is only half the story. This chapter shows what to actually do about it. Whether you manage a large gallery or a small regional museum, you'll find measures here that don't need a big budget, even some you could implement as soon as tomorrow.

Accessibility as better communication

International practice shows that accessibility for people with specific learning difficulties isn't about simplifying content. It's about finding forms of communication that allow the widest possible audience to understand it.

Inclusive design helps break down unnecessary barriers and enables more people to understand content independently. Its goal isn't to strip content down but to make it accessible without unnecessary frustration, uncertainty, or a sense of failure.

Plain language: a standard, not a compromise
One of the most effective tools for making content accessible is plain language. It's an approach that helps people quickly find, understand, and use information without unnecessary effort.
Plain language doesn't assume readers have specialist knowledge or plenty of time. Instead, it accounts for the fact that people read in different situations, with different levels of concentration and different backgrounds.
Basic principles:

- One sentence = one piece of information.
- Active verbs instead of passive constructions.
- Concrete words instead of abstract concepts.
- Short paragraphs and a clear text structure.
- Lead with the key message.
- Everyday words instead of technical jargon.

Easy-to-read text: when to go further
Easy-to-read is a specialized methodology aimed mainly at people with intellectual disabilities or significant difficulty understanding text. Compared to plain language, it uses stricter rules for language, structure, and visual presentation, and often involves testing with the target group. If a museum is preparing materials specifically for this group, it's worth working with easy-to-read methodologies and their national adaptations.

Plain language is a broader approach than easy-to-read, and it suits most museum texts aimed at the general public.

A version "for everyone": one text, not two
A frequently occurring mistake is when institutions prepare two parallel versions: an expert one and a simplified one. This leads to creating two separate groups within the audience and a sense of inequality. A more effective approach is to write one version with a clear hierarchy that works for both: lead with the essential, leave the details for the end or supplemental materials.

Digital tools: what works and how to use it

Digital tools can significantly expand accessibility without any physical interventions to your exhibitions.

QR codes with audio recordings
Record an audio version of each main text and place a QR code next to the exhibit. Audiences can play the text on their own phone, at their own pace, without having to read.
Examples of text-to-speech tools (as of 2026):

- Natural Reader
- Speechify
- ElevenLabs

These tools are examples of available solutions, not a recommendation of any particular commercial product.

Text-to-speech on the website
Enable the read-aloud feature on the museum's website for content such as articles, exhibition descriptions, or the blog. That allows people to "read" about the exhibition before the visit in the comfort of their homes.
Examples of text-to-speech for websites (as of 2026):
- Read Aloud (Chrome extension): free, simple, works on most websites;
- Speechify: a more robust alternative with more features;
- Natural Reader: available in both web and desktop versions.

These tools are examples of available solutions, not a recommendation of any particular commercial product.
Ways to implement this:
- an integrated text-to-speech solution built directly into the website (such as ReadSpeaker);
- using the read-aloud feature available in modern web browsers;
- automatically generated audio versions of texts using AI tools.

Wayfinding: seeing means understanding

Navigating a museum space is one of the most common barriers for people with dyslexia or ADHD.

Pictograms and iconography
Pictograms can make wayfinding inside buildings and within exhibitions easier. Use recommendations set out in chapter "Wayfinding and Navigation" when designing them. Focus mainly on using them consistently throughout the space and aligning them with the museum's navigation system.
Sources for pictograms:
- ARASAAC: a large free library, well suited to inclusive communication;
- Widgit: commercial, but very high quality and widely used across Europe;
- Flaticon: a broader selection of icons, suited to digital outputs.
-

Color-coded wayfinding
Use contrasting colors and a consistent color code. For example: blue for entrance, green for restrooms, yellow for the ticket desk. This helps people with specific learning difficulties and ADHD get their bearings quickly without having to read every label. When selecting colors, keep in mind that some color combinations are hard to tell apart for people with color blindness: most often red and green. Always complement your color coding by another visual distinction, such as shape or an icon.

Floor-based wayfinding
Another effective wayfinding tool are floor guide lines: colored strips (decals) or graphic elements placed directly on the floor that intuitively lead through the exhibition space. They work independently of someone's ability to read and navigate by conventional labels, which makes them especially useful for people with dyslexia, ADHD, or impaired spatial orientation. To work properly, they need to contrast clearly with the floor, stay consistent throughout the space, and ideally align with the color coding used in the wayfinding system as a whole.

Pre-visit phase: reduce uncertainty ahead of time

For some people with specific learning difficulties, the biggest barrier isn't the exhibition itself but the uncertainty of the visit: not knowing what to expect, how long it will take, or where things are.

Pre-visit materials

Consider making the following materials available, either on the website or to pick up on-site:

- a simplified map with color coding and pictograms;
- a visualized schedule of the visit: what audiences will see and in what order;
- a short preview video or series of photos showing what to expect at the museum. Floor plans and tactile plans are covered in detail in the "Wayfinding and Navigation" chapter.

For inspiration: Museum of Brisbane and Tate Modern offer detailed pre-visit guides directly on their websites, including photos of the spaces, information about noise levels, and rest options.

Inspirace: **Museum of Brisbane** nebo **Tate Modern** nabízejí podrobné přednávštěvní průvodce přímo na webu – včetně fotografií prostorů, informací o hluku a možnostech odpočinku.

Visual stories

Visual stories (sometimes also called social stories) are short visual narratives that describe a museum visit step by step. They originated in Carol Gray's work with autistic children, and today they're also used in many other situations where they help people prepare for a new or unfamiliar environment. A visual story doesn't have to be complicated: five to ten images with short sentences are enough. "You arrive at the entrance. A guide greets you there. You buy a ticket. Then you go into the first room."

Space and rest

Quiet zones

Provide a place free of strong visual or auditory stimuli where people can rest. Mark this spot with a clear pictogram and include it on the pre-visit map.

Quiet zones, quiet hours, and sensory aids are covered in detail in the "Physical Space" chapter.

Multimedia elements

Provide information also in the form of animations, short videos, or interactive screens. A diversity of sensory channels enables understanding and allows people to choose whichever approach works for them (see chapter "Interactive Elements").

Why this works

Dual coding theory (Paivio, 1971) holds that combining visual and verbal information processing substantially improves understanding and memory, across the whole population, not just for people with specific needs.

People: the tool that gets forgotten

No pictogram or QR code can do the job of a well-trained person. Staff are part of accessibility and one of the tools you can improve without investing in technology.

Training in inclusive communication
Train your guides and attendants in ways to communicate with people with specific learning difficulties:

- Speak in short sentences and check for understanding.
- Don't be afraid to repeat information differently, not louder.
- Offer an alternative: "Would you like to see it on the map?"
- Don't assume what someone else needs. Ask.

Training doesn't need to take days. A half-day workshop with practical scenarios is enough for a basic shift in approach.

You'll find checkpoints for each area in the "Checklist."

Key points

- Accessibility means designing content and services in a way so as many people as possible can understand and use them.
- The cheapest intervention is editing your texts. Technology helps, but it doesn't work without good content.
- QR codes with recorded audio and text-to-speech on the website are the bare minimum standard.
- A pictogram without text isn't accessible. Always combine the two.
- Staff are part of accessibility. Training in inclusive communication belongs in exhibition preparation just as much as installing info panels.
- Pre-visit materials reduce anxiety and increase the odds of people returning.

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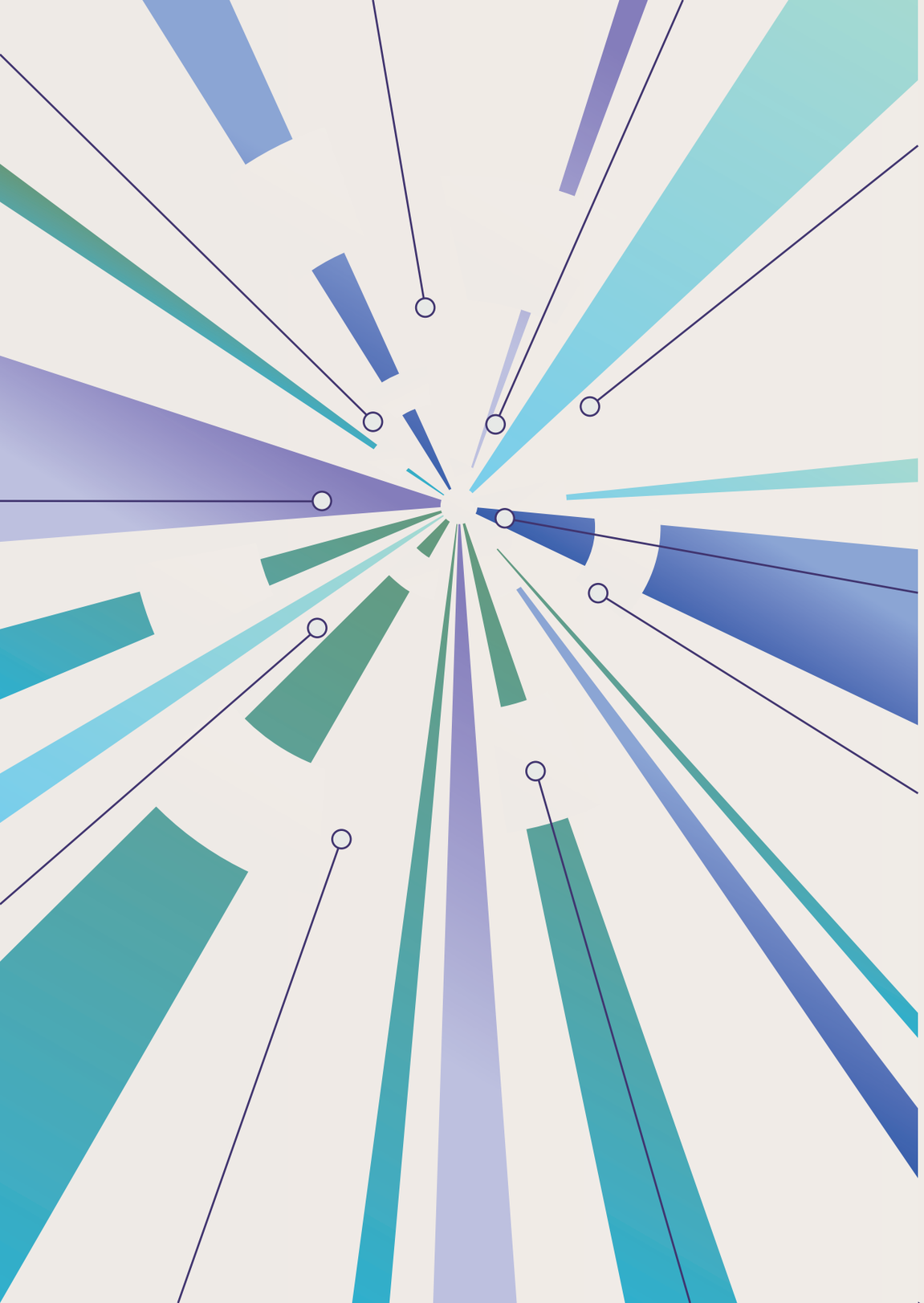
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8 Conclusion

Josef Kocourek

This toolkit is a call to action. Using this practical guide can change a lot. All it takes is small changes that stack up. A barrier never originates in a person. **A barrier arises in an improperly designed environment, poor use of text, or ineffective communication**. As a result, cultural institutions often unknowingly exclude part of their audience.

Inclusive design eliminates these issues from the start. An adjustment for one person benefits all. Short sentences and images make life easier. Five sentences that the audience reads do more than 20 they skip.

One of the topics covered is effective communication tools. The road to inclusion starts with online communication. Keep in mind that the marketing team is part of the preparation team and is involved in planning early. It makes sure the website gives clear answers to everything audiences are looking for. The most important information audiences look for includes opening hours, price, and location.
A consistent visual style for the exhibition builds strong trust. **Simple, clear communication goes a long way towards helping people understand content.** Consistency and professionalism in communication ease visitor concerns and increase success.

The next topic covered deals with understanding text. Short text that your audience finds attractive is essential here. Almost no one reads long curatorial texts. Five sentences read beat indifference. Testing text in the actual space gets results. Large type and contrast ensure legibility. Our research findings confirm that Roboto Flex beats specialized fonts. Remember: **a well-edited text doesn't cost a thing.** If anything, it raises the odds of the whole exhibition succeeding. Where technology is involved, it only works with good content.

Wayfinding and navigation in institutions can bring about many barriers. One of the chapters presents a range of recommendations that are easy to put into practice. **Moving through a space with clear wayfinding removes the stress of the unknown.** Remember that people intuitively turn right upon entering. When in doubt, people head back to familiar spots.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been binding for the Czech Republic since 2009. Accessibility isn't charity, and it isn't goodwill. The law requires creating accessible formats. You'll find many of them in this toolkit.

Plain language works as the standard for modern communication. The difference between plain language and easy-to-read formats is covered in "Tools and Practical Measures."

A shift in mindset and approach doesn't rest on big decisions or big budgets. It starts wherever museum and gallery teams have the motivation and the will to change something. Try one of these tips:

- Walk the route to your institution through the eyes of someone visiting for the first time, from the public transport stop to the first room.
- Have someone outside your field read your introductory text. If they don't finish it, shorten the text and test it again.
- Print an info panel at actual size and read the first sentence from 1.5 meters away.
- Add QR codes with audio versions next to your main texts.
- Run a half-day staff training session in inclusive communication.

The checklist can serve you as a tool for putting ideas from this toolkit into practice.
It was created to help practically remove barriers in institutions. It's a practical guide for your day-to-day work in museums and galleries.

Institutions create inclusive spaces for society. Inclusion can turn an institution into a better place. A trained staff, the heart of the whole gallery, is the foundation of a successful exhibition. Investing

in people brings the biggest change. Every step you take can help build accessibility that actually makes sense. The future of galleries lies in openness and accessibility to their audiences. **Change at an institution can start right here, right now**. Audiences will appreciate it.

Without Barriers

A practical toolkit for more accessible museums

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Without Barriers