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Collaboration between schools and museums for inclusive cultural education: Findings from the INARTdis-project

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The increasing heterogeneity in our communities is a reality and a foundational element of modern societies. This article deals with different aspects of political, social and cultural participation, processes of integration and inclusion. The aim of inclusion of all marginalized groups, among others integrating migrant communities, has to be a process of involving all sides—the local communities with publicly funded cultural institutions, the marginalized groups like migrant communities and the educational institutions in the local area. Therefore, the local community and schools have to be willing to make efforts in addressing interests and needs of all people, especially migrants or persons with disabilities. This paper presents the findings of the data collection in the project INARTdis in the countries Austria, Spain, North Macedonia and Portugal. Firstly, educators from the school and extracurricular sector as well as people from the fields of culture were asked to answer the question: *What is inclusive arts education and how can this be promoted through cooperation?* The analysis of inclusive access to cultural institutions and arts education was conducted in 2021 using a mixed-method design. Secondly, during museum visits, results on the learners' perspectives were collected. The aim was to find out *what makes it easier for visitors to access the museum?* The results show that, although the institutions and their professionals assume the principles of inclusion, their implementation is complex, either due to a lack of resources or due to the organizational structure of the arts institutions. All professionals consider that arts education promotes inclusive spaces as it allows for the participation and free expression of its participants. Likewise, they consider that accessibility is not really implemented and that the implementation of activities in arts institutions should favor the participation of users. In conclusion, there is a need to train professionals in inclusive arts education, to encourage collaboration between professionals and to implement inclusive strategies to promote participation and social inclusion.

KEYWORDS

cultural education, heterogeneity, participation for all learners, inclusive art education, collaboration between schools and museums

Introduction

In the European Union, it is enshrined in legislation that the values of democracy and human rights play a guiding role in all partner countries. Here, it is ensured that the governments regulate the processes of integration for marginalized groups to enable full (social) membership for all (Hjerm, 2005).

While the term *integration* is still mainly used in socio-political contexts, here in particular also in the migration discourse (Treibel, 2015). It has increasingly been replaced in the school context or in the pedagogical discourse by the term *inclusion*, which promises to be less exclusionary. For some time now, (educational) institutions in particular have understood inclusion as a broad concept in the context of a pedagogy of diversity. A school of diversity explicitly includes various dimensions of heterogeneity, exemplified by disabilities, special starting conditions, e.g., language, social living conditions, cultural and religious orientations, background of migration, gender and special talents and religious orientations (Löser and Werning, 2015). Consequently, this broader understanding of inclusion includes all groups that are threatened by marginalisation within society.

In the school context, the latter basically means individual support within the framework of “learning together” or, in general, a new concept of social participation for all compared to integration—without judgmental labeling (Siedenbiedel, 2015b) or the idea of homogenization. Both terms have a variety of connotations (Werning, 2017) and are used in different ways, depending on whether—in a narrower version (Kuhl et al., 2015)—people with disabilities or—more generally—people with ascribed foreignness (which can also result from migration) are in focus. In any case, its use raises the dilemma of first affirmatively perpetuating classifications of heterogeneity in order to then, in a second step, overcome them through critique and inclusive strategies. Thus, it must be endured “that categories are reproduced through their thematization, but also that no critique of categories is possible without thematization, as early gender research already noted” (Schieferdecker, 2018, p. 197). In order to make the initial picture appear as little polarized as possible in this context, it was suggested to start mentally from a model of manifold overlapping lines of difference (Lutz, 2001) and to conceive of their intersections as intersectional connections (Schieferdecker, 2018) in order to correspond to the multi-layeredness of socially constructed notions of difference.

On the one hand, participation is understood as a precondition for inclusion, on the other hand, inclusion is understood as a means to achieve (political) participation. In general, “inclusion” seems to be more related to educational discourses, while the term participation also refers to a soft method of exercising power (Tiedeken, 2020), which makes the term participation for all a broader one that is more suitable in socio-political contexts. These and further aspects are involved and discussed through the main impulse of this article: The INARTdis EU-project, which reports on opportunities and barriers to social inclusion in the arts from the perspectives of teachers, museum staff and young visitors from

inclusive classes in museums. The purpose of this article arises from research being carried out in a European project. “Fostering social inclusion for all through artistic education: developing support for students with disabilities - INARTdis” is a project co-funded by the Erasmus+ program. The main purpose of the INARTdis project is to bring art and culture closer to students with disabilities in order to develop social inclusion through artistic creation spaces and to facilitate inclusion processes. This paper presents the findings of the data collection in the project INARTdis in the countries Austria, Spain, North Macedonia and Portugal. Educators, teachers, disabled and non-disabled students from socio-educational and artistic institutions participate in this project. Through a mixed and participatory methodology, the results obtained from the interviews, questionnaires and focus groups are analysed.

Participation in inclusive societies

In the process of participation, schools and other organizations of communities can offer learning experience for developing practical skills of democratic participation on the base of collaborative learning (Lee et al., 2021). Dealing with arts can contribute to this with its language of addressing both affects and knowledge.

Political participation and voter turnout

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities contains the central provisions for their political participation. According to these provisions, persons with disabilities must be actively involved in all decision-making processes that affect them through the organizations that represent them on the one hand, and on the other hand, the entire electoral process (including polling stations) must be barrier-free (Forschungsbüro Menschenrechte, 2018). The voter turnout of persons with disabilities in Austria is lower than that of the total population (Forschungsbüro Menschenrechte, 2018). Of those who said they did not always (often, rarely, never) vote, the following reasons were given (multiple answers were possible): there is no interest, too little information, they do not feel represented in politics and the polling stations are not adequately accessible. Accessible information for all also was mentioned: more information, information about politics in simple language—so that everyone understands it, laws in simpler language, easier language in general (Forschungsbüro Menschenrechte, 2018).

Another aspect of political participation is the target group of migrants. According to Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers are included within the term “persons with migrant background.” What they have in common is that they set their residence in the new home country for a minimum of 12 months (Eurostat Migration, 2021). People with migrant background are not represented in parliaments and governments; the voter turnout is

low (Bekaj et al., 2018). Since many people with migrant or disability backgrounds are excluded from formal political activities, the need to build non-formal opportunities of participation related to the process of integration is large (Bekaj et al., 2018). Civil society organizations like networks of associations, charities or grassroots initiatives can be alternatives and give voice to marginalized groups (Bekaj et al., 2018).

Social participation in communities

Integration policy as a legal framework that ensures equal treatment and equal participation in political and cultural life not only for people with migrant backgrounds but also for the needs of all groups of society (European Commission, 2018). Civil society organizations can cover a variety of interests of people with migrant or disability backgrounds, from humanitarian movements and environmentalist movements to forms of other neighborhood communities. Here, interaction and building bridges between the local community and the migrant group can be realized through inclusive work in communities. The first step towards realization is information for all about possibilities of non-formal participation, support in learning the language of the new home country and, at the same time, financial resources for integration are relevant (Bekaj et al., 2018).

The European Commission (EC) declares that Europe is built on migration, the heart of the EU is solidarity; therefore, inclusive societies have to be built to ensure equal participation in political and cultural life for everyone (European Commission, 2018). Intersectionality as the interaction of several disadvantageous factors means that, e.g., migrants are more often affected by these risks of social exclusion. Inclusive societies give a “fair share” to excluded groups, including key areas such as education, language learning, building of bridges between and within communities (Huddleston, 2009).

Participation in communities leads to an understanding of values and respect of cultural differences of both sides, so involvement is always a two-way process. The earlier the process of participation and integration starts, the greater the likelihood that people will engage constructively with the community (Huddleston, 2009). Therefore, the local community and schools have to be willing to take efforts in addressing interests and needs of all people, especially migrants or persons with disabilities (Brown et al., 2020).

Young learners’ civic learning opportunities and participation in public life relate to structural inequality and to migration (Lee et al., 2021). Through arts-based approaches, young people can be engaged in civic learning in addition to the cognitive approach.

Cultural participation

The terms *participation* and *culture* denote interdependent phenomena or ideas, especially when *culture* is understood as the

totality of discourse and *participation* is understood not merely as passive consumption but as active participation. A particularly close link between participation and culture arises when the latter addresses socio-political interests or in the case of those contemporary formats of culture that are to be addressed as “art,” especially those that contribute to a disarmament of the concept of art in the sense of a critique of its sublimity, in other words, to a “lower hanging” art (Ullrich, 2003). Especially with the performative turn in the second half of the 20th century, new art forms such as actions, performances or happenings were established, whose focus is process-and action-oriented instead of result-or work-oriented. This has also softened the separation between actors and audience (Fischer-Lichte, 2004), which allows participation to be understood not only as passive participation in the reception of cultural phenomena, but also as participation in their creation, which also makes any humble attitude towards artists and their products, as claimed by Ullrich (2003), superfluous.

Legal framework

Committed to the guiding principle of inclusion, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2019), calls on all states to create socially inclusive measures for persons with disabilities to enable them to “participate fully and effectively in and be included in society” (Art. 3) – e.g., including in the areas of culture, leisure and sport (Art. 30). This first human rights convention of the 21st century was seen as having great potential for innovation (Bielefeldt, 2006). It builds on the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and can be seen not only as a pragmatic adaptation of legal frameworks, but also as a normative guideline for social transformations (Dietze et al., 2020).

Participation barriers and requirements

In the case of people with disabilities, access barriers or discrimination primarily concern the use of the physical environment and communication, but also, of course, access to information, education and culture. Accessibility is thus, as the evaluation of the National Action Plan on Disability in Austria for 2012–2020 states, a cross-cutting issue [BMSGPK (Bundesministerium Soziales, Gesundheit, Pflege und Konsumentenschutz), 2020] that needs to be considered in all areas of life and whose focus is mostly limited to physical accessibility without sufficiently considering awareness-raising measures. As far as leisure activities in general are concerned, their accessibility is still described as insufficient.

Cultural institutions are particularly challenged to promote the understanding of cultural diversity in a globalized world and to help break down all barriers and exclusions against the unfamiliar. In accordance with the UNESCO General Declaration on Cultural Diversity, this should be understood more and more as a common heritage of mankind or as a basic principle of the same (UNESCO-Generalkonferenz, 2001). Intercultural openness should be a cross-sectional task of all museums (Rahn, 2016) or cultural institutions.

The exclusion of disabled people leads to relegating them to “special worlds” of ambivalent character – between spaces of protection and integration and structural exclusion (Aichele, 2020). Moreover, this exclusion often results in further discrimination (Ruškus, 2020). With disabled people, people with a migration background share the fate of being considered deficient or the fate of being placed in exclusive spaces and taught in special schools. They achieve lower educational standards (Biffel and Skrivanek, 2011).

As far as cultural participation in museums and exhibitions is concerned, the prerequisites for this are beneficial in view of the fact that, compared to other art forms, accessibility is in principle more broadly effective and multiple, and thus in principle offers more variable possibilities for reception. In addition, however, art and culture are often seen as areas where the integration of migrants is most easily implemented. In general, the communication in artistic forms of expression, which sometimes transcends language barriers, and the creativity that is effective in the cultural sector are seen as having great potential with regard to social integration processes (Ziese and Gritschke, 2016a). In England, for example, the Code of Ethics developed by the Museums Association stipulates that everyone is treated “equally, with honesty and respect” (Museumsassociation, 2014). Checklists that consider different aspects of accessibility can easily be found, for example in the Creability Handbook (Reuter, 2020). A prerequisite for improved inclusion, both with regard to people with disabilities and with regard to people with a migration background, is that representatives from the respective group are involved in the conception of inclusive measures (Metzger, 2016). This shows that accessibility and participation are also mutually dependent. In particular, projects that see themselves as participatory art also aim decidedly at questioning positions of power and reducing prejudices against different identities (Ziese and Gritschke, 2016b).

In school contexts, inclusion implies responding to the heterogeneity of students through specifically adapted learning opportunities, at best in interdisciplinary teams that have factual, didactic and diagnostic competencies (Loffredo, 2016). Unlike the concept of integration, with *inclusion* the attention falls less on homogenization of students and more on their diversity. Thus, the idea of inclusion encompasses everyone, including the highly gifted or those who do not have special needs (Siedenbiedel, 2015a). A synesthetic or poly aesthetic approach, which includes music, dance as well as visual arts, not only promises new spatial or self-experiences, but thus enables learning that builds on bodily experiences (Schnabl-Andritsch et al., 2018). In any case, to consider the inclusion to be realized in art classes as preparation for cultural participation and involvement (Loffredo, 2016) outlines the great responsibility that schools have in the social context.

Cooperation between museums and schools

European museums undertake different efforts to overcome structural barriers and to engage with the diversity of society in

general, also in particular to engage elderly people or disabled persons, migrants or refugees (Sergi, 2021). This includes the museum’s work towards meeting needs and interests of all this groups as well as actively working with persons outside of this groups in the contexts of Art (Sergi, 2021). Addressing diverse communities and involving all people in cultural life brings benefit to all persons of communities and can help to increase human and cultural capital (Brown et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the question of how far all groups are represented in products of modern art is relevant in order to help all visitors to rethink prejudices and to promote conversation about marginalized groups. If diversity of our society is visible in collections and artworks, museums meet their responsibilities not to continue generating further mechanisms of exclusion (Sergi, 2021).

The enormous number of migrants also calls upon memory: cultural and historical memory of the countries of birth for themselves and the generations of children born in the new home state (Asri, 2019). Transnational identities and core values of Europe can only be secured if all know about their roots. Therefore, museums should make the identity and memory visible, also for excluded groups, and they should map actual heterogeneity.

Participation in museums and collaborative production of exhibition can be successful if the creation happens at an equal level (Lynch, 2017). This aspect has to be considered also in work with people with disabilities as well as people with migrant backgrounds. Nobody wants to be a “beneficiary”; everyone wants to decide self-determinedly and to be seen as an expert of their own belongings. The experience of exclusion in the neighborhood and community should be made visible within the museum’s walls (Brown et al., 2020). If this reality of prejudice is not addressed, the groups will not feel represented.

For schools, collaborations with museums can provide access to the community for all and open up new social spaces for marginalized groups (Sanders-Bustle, 2020). Through the participation of all learners in cultural life, school communities can help to realize the right of all to participate in society and to contribute to the realization of equitable and fair education.

Arts education: Importance in the formation of the person

Understanding art as a holistic element integrates all the possible ways of representing society and oneself, and which bases the critical and ideological value towards culture and visual and artistic education (Departament d’Ensenyament, 2017). Understanding the visual arts as a nucleus of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary training means that a multitude of disciplines are related in the training of people, so that the most common technologies such as painting, sculpture, drawing, photography or video form part of projects closely linked to science, literature, anthropology and sociology including contemporary discourses that will allow us to address the key issues of our present.

Contributions of arts education to the development of personality

The arts play a fundamental role in the education of children and young people, and the role of teachers. For this task, professionals who positively value diversity, who can design inclusive educational interventions, who conduct them with dynamic methodologies that encourage the participation of all and evaluate them formatively, are needed. These competences can be developed through the arts. Arts activities (i.e., visual arts, music, dance, drama) are part of the basic components of the curriculum from an early age and are inherently inclusive because they do not depend, to a large extent, on language proficiency or oral language skills (Barton, 2015).

Through arts, we learn to value the artistic and cultural heritage of all, to know the artistic languages, to understand the visual world from theory and practice and to learn to express ourselves freely with them, to develop critical and creative thinking and teachers learn creative methodologies that use the arts as a transversal axis to develop the competences of all areas (educating through the arts). Arts education (subsequently abbreviated as AE) has two types of justifications: those coming from the contextualist theory, who choose the AE curriculum based on the needs of the target group to achieve benefits at a psychological and social level; and those coming from the essentialist theory, who seek through AE to enhance those contents that contribute towards experience and knowledge, that only art can offer us.

AE, understood as a discipline, promotes the global learning of art: the conceptual, the critical and the productive elements. Thus, artistic or productive creation is an important part of AE that develops a series of competences on a cognitive, personal and social level in human beings, which are essential for the development of individuals. Iwai's report (2002), carried out at the request of UNESCO, *The Contribution of Arts Education to Children's Lives*, sets out the results on the aspects developed by AE: aesthetic development, socio-emotional development, socio-cultural development, cognitive development and academic progress.

Cognitive psychology, which deals with the mental processes involved in knowledge, includes, among others, thinking, problem solving and creation. Psychologists in this field have investigated the importance of AE in the development of the person in these areas and, more specifically, how artistic creation enhances a series of skills in these areas that help the formation of the individual. It follows from these statements that the individual will not be able to generate his or her own knowledge if he or she is not able to think, solve problems and create (Garcés, 2020).

Artistic activities are beginning to be understood as regulating mechanisms of emotional and creative energies that favor a profound contact with oneself and with the world. Through them, human beings can fully realize themselves, without abandoning certain aspects: they are heart and not only reason and feeling, spirit and thought, sensation and language, perception and expression (Freire, 2008). Rorty (2008) explains that education

must cover two processes that seem totally opposed, although they are complementary: socialization (social skills, interpersonal intelligence) and individualization (personal skills, intrapersonal intelligence). The first process, according to Rorty, is the process by which a person learns the customs of his or her environment, while individualization is the ability to separate oneself from the influences received and to assume or reject them from one's own personality. The important thing to underline is that without socialization there can be no individualization.

Below, we set out the capacities, skills, and attitudes that AE develops, both from the point of view of the contributions of cognitive psychology and from the point of view of the processes of individualization and socialization, which are embodied in different types of intelligence according to Gardner's (1994) theory – the cognitive level describes abilities such as perception, analytical thinking and imagination. At the personal level we find self-confidence, aesthetic experience and initiative/decision making: Who am I in the world and where do I stand? The perceptions and attitudes that people have in relation to their possibilities have an impact on their lives; for example, there are people who do not act because they think that they are not capable or that they cannot influence their environment. Artistic creation can contribute to changing these perceptions and attitudes while at the same time increasing their sense of freedom, self-knowledge and self-expression. On the social level, AE enables the development of a series of social skills and attitudes that help the formation of an individual to be able to participate actively in society and to be critical of those aspects that violate human rights (Mesías, 2019). We also consider art as a basic tool for the acquisition of other educational competences, as advocated by education through the arts movement – which considers artistic creation as the engine of the teaching-learning process. An education that uses creative and artistic pedagogies to deliver the whole curriculum is desirable, from an interdisciplinary perspective, with the aim of achieving supra-educational goals, not exclusively instructional ones, which have more to do with improving the quality of people's lives. As Hernández (2003) explains, AE allows us to understand the visual world, which students consider artistic manifestations as part of cultures and societies, because the manifestations are mediators of meanings.

Contributions of arts education to foster an inclusive society

Arts Education contributes to education in general a series of basic elements to favour a democratic, equitable, inclusive, free and critical society. The process of creation shows us that there is more than one solution or answer to a problem, question or conflict, which stimulates divergent thinking; there can be numerous results to a proposal (diversity and variability), all of them are valid if the person has really been involved in it (non-competitiveness). AE is based on a vision of democracy as respect for differences. In this context of democratic participation,

the free expression generated by the artistic creation of one's own individuality is considered a fundamental right of every human being, as it gives an outlet for the intrinsic potentialities of each individual and pursues the full development of his or her singularity, conscience and social reciprocity (Freire, 2008).

In education, there is a tendency to emphasize exactitude, concreteness; to undervalue and minimize the imaginative processes that are so characteristic of children's cognitive life; imagination in artistic creation has a license to fly (Eisner, 2004). It also exalts experience as a way of acquiring knowledge. Experiences must be connected to each other and to the learner's prior knowledge (meaningful learning). The process of creation, seen as a place and a time to freely express people's desires and concerns, brings us closer to a concept that seems to have disappeared from school nowadays: freedom of action and thought, far from conventions, opinions and prejudices. The aim of AE is to offer freedom to develop creativity in all human beings (and not exclusively to geniuses) and to extend it to other areas of education and culture.

In AE, processes are valued as learning spaces; the joy comes more from the journey than from the exclusive fixation on the destination (Eisner, 2008). What is important is the process, the immersion in the activity itself and the quality of life that emerges from the experience (Eisner, 2008). The ability to read artistic languages is a form of literacy that education must develop in order to enable learners to access and express themselves through the content and by promoting ethical values in the sense of a democratic, tolerant and respectful society (Iwai, 2002).

AE is a universal right for all learners, including the most vulnerable groups such as immigrants, cultural minorities and people with disabilities. AE should contribute directly to the solution of social and cultural problems facing the contemporary world, valuing the contribution of AE to health and therapy, strengthening and protecting community identities and cultural heritages, motivating learners to stay in school and curbing school drop-out through the Arts, or taking responsibility for social cohesion by promoting peace and intercultural dialog and mobility (Martínez, 2006).

Inclusive museums

One of the objectives of museums is the conservation of cultural heritage and its communication to the citizenship. Although museums originally had an exclusive character – only for some – advances in the democratization of culture have made it possible for them to establish spaces that seek to allow any citizen to access and to appropriate cultural heritage. This aim – to reach everyone – helps to understand the important changes that have been taking place in cultural and artistic centers for years. Many museums are immersed in an evolutionary process that tries to respond to new social realities.

Several issues are important when we talk about inclusive museums – firstly, accessibility, secondly experience for the visitors and finally, the opening of museums to everyone.

Accessibility and inclusion in museums

Inclusion is a philosophy, a frame of reference or theoretical model based on inclusive values such as sustainability, collaboration, respect for differences, trust and participation (Booth and Ainscow, 2015). It is a way of thinking and being in the world that guides the decisions that are taken in museums, both by professionals – curators, managers, cultural mediators and room supervisors – and visitors and that conditions what happens in this cultural space.

As opposed to the idea of a closed product (i.e., something regulated by law), inclusion refers to a process that each cultural institution carries out with the ultimate goal of reaching all citizens (Rieger et al., 2022). As Asensio et al. (2016) describe, an inclusive museum would be one that is proactively sensitive to diversity in all its areas of action – heritage, collections and their messages; public and educational functions, participants and programs; management of human resources, movable and immovable property and economic resources.

Accordingly, it is possible to think of an open and unfinished plan, extending over time, in which museums reflect on how to bring the contents, structures, services or actions that are valued closer to everyone – regardless of their age or social and economic situation. Therefore, after guaranteeing access, the cultural institutions make successive approaches that allow anyone to appropriate the contents that the museum hosts and to act on the museum environment. In the words of Benente and Minucciani (2020), it is possible to speak of appropriation when physical, cognitive or social and cultural accessibility have been previously satisfied.

Appropriation occurs when an aspect of the exhibition comes into direct and deep contact with the most intimate and personal spheres of the visitor. It is essential to identify what the visitors' wants and needs are, what kind of relationship they are looking for and that it offers them unique and personally valuable experience (Cerdan and Jiménez-Zarco, 2021).

Undoubtedly, this presents important challenges for cultural spaces. Responding to human diversity requires reviewing the ways in which museums promote the encounter and participation of all, while at the same time articulating programs that attract minority groups that still today come little closer to museums.

The inclusive model recognizes that human beings are intersected by many different social organizers – gender, ability, culture, social origin, and economic level – that condition visitors' biographies; therefore, knowledge of their interests or desires cannot be explained primarily or exclusively by one of these organizers. This fact demands that each museum space think about processes that guarantee access to any person and the design of situated responses, as opposed to actions designed and aimed at specific groups of visitors (Benente and Minucciani, 2020). According to some authors, one should “be very careful about establishing normative guidelines that end up turning against the person and diversity itself” (Asensio et al., 2016, p. 44). Therefore, a balance is needed between the development of activities aimed at recognizing group

identities and building public loyalty, and proposals that focus on designing specific activities to cater to particular social groups, which feeds the development of segregating practices and hinders mutual understanding and social and cultural exchange.

This diversity of audiences and heritage assets invites museums to diversify and become more flexible in their proposals. In addition to traditional forms of dissemination such as exhibitions, workshops, shows or conferences within museums, new proposals are being added thanks to information and communication technologies. According to Fontal (2020), there are two important and innovative areas in the creation of apps: the digitalization of content and the use of virtual reality. These experiences facilitate greater interaction with museums inside and outside them and an increase in communication between visitors and cultural spaces. However, as the author points out, the use of technology in heritage environments has to make sense within an intentional teaching process, and its purpose has to be related to the aims of social science teaching, which are none other than to understand social reality; to train critical and creative thinking; and to intervene socially and transform reality, in a continuous process of improving democratic life (Fontal, 2020).

Museums – Diverse spaces

Museums reinforce social divisions and reflect inequalities in society (Newman, 2013; Vermeulen et al., 2019) or they can be part of change that promotes greater knowledge about human diversity and greater social cohesion. Museums are vital public spaces and should be places that are open to all and committed to physical and cultural access to all, including disadvantaged groups. They can constitute spaces for reflection and debate on historical, social, cultural and scientific issues. Museums should also foster respect for human rights and gender equality. Member States should encourage museums to fulfill all of these roles (UNESCO, 2016).

Undoubtedly, all this poses important challenges in which each museum must identify, review and assess the conditions or processes that promote access and experience for any visitor (called levers or facilitators of museum inclusion), as well as the elements that limit or impede it (barriers). Some of these barriers are easily identifiable because they have to do with physical elements – e.g., absence of ramps at the entrance for people who use wheelchairs to get around or seating areas in the rooms for those who cannot stand for long periods of time – but others have to do with physical elements associated with the type of relationships that are established, e.g., the difficulty for cultural mediators to adjust the language they use or the contents they deal with to the needs of visitors – or with the contents that the museum hosts – e.g., the scarce presence or visibility in permanent or temporary exhibitions of alternative cultural movements or “quoted” artists.

The review process must also include visitors, making them participants in the improvement and transformation of cultural centers. In this process of greater involvement, the role of cultural mediators will be nuclear, tracing paths that emerge from the

museum and occupy the streets or are born in the neighborhoods and enter the museums.

About the project

The purpose of this article arises from research being carried out in a European project. “Fostering social inclusion for all through artistic education: developing support for students with disabilities - INARTdis” is a project co-funded by the Erasmus+ program, under the Key Action 3: Support for policy reform. Social inclusion and common values: the contribution in the field of education and training. This started in December, 2020 and will finish in November 2023. The consortium of partners includes organizations from five different countries: The Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) in Spain is the project coordinator, Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa (Portugal, IPL), Pädagogische Hochschule Steiermark (Austria, PHSt), Association for Promotion of Education, Culture, and Sport EDUCATION FOR ALL Skopje (North Macedonia, EfAS), Universidad de Cantabria (Spain, UC) and Thikwa Werkstatt für Theater und Kunst der Nordberliner Werkgemeinschaft gGmbH / Nordberliner Werkgemeinschaft gGmbH (Germany, NBW) are collaborating on it. The main purpose of the INARTdis project is to bring art and culture closer to students with disabilities in order to develop social inclusion through artistic creation spaces and to facilitate inclusion processes.

This general objective of the INARTdis project is in line with four of the priority areas of the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020: *accessibility* (making goods and services accessible to people); *participation* (ensuring that all people enjoy all the benefits of EU citizenship, removing the barriers to equal participation in public life and leisure activities, promoting the provision of quality community-based services); *equality* (combating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities), and *education and training* (promoting inclusive education and lifelong learning for all students). The objective is also in the direction of the new EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030, especially related to the point 5.5 on improving access to art and culture, recreation, leisure, sport, and tourism, and it is also aligned with the 2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015) that promotes building inclusive societies that are open to diversity and offer equal opportunities for all people.

Therefore, the specific objectives pursued by INARTdis project focus on promoting inclusive education and training and fostering education of disadvantaged learners. This is done by supporting educational staff, dissemination and scaling up of inclusive good practices, and developing and implementing inclusive methodologies through AE.

Objectives

This article covers two of the objectives pursued in the project: *What is inclusive arts education and how can this be promoted*

through cooperation and participation? How do we facilitate access and participation of all people in arts institutions? According to the research objectives and questions, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used. The quantitative methods were used for gathering descriptive and objective data. The qualitative methods were used for in-depth analysis of these characteristics, keeping in mind different points of view (teachers, educators, etc.) in different artistic and socio-educational institutions. A survey, interviews, focus groups, observation (videos), photovoice and field notes were used as data collection methods in the research. However, only the results obtained from the survey, interviews and focus groups are presented in this article.

The research process was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, objectives were identified with the participation of professionals from arts institutions (museums, performance, theater,...) and socio-educational institutions (primary and secondary schools, special education schools and occupational centers). In the second phase, objectives were identified with the participation of professionals from art institutions and students.

Methodology

The selection of the sample was non-probabilistic, purposive. It consisted of professionals in the socio-educational and artistic institutions ($n=388$) and students ($n=408$) of the regions to which the partners belong.

In the first phase, three instruments were used to collect data: a survey, interview and focus group. A survey was conducted to gather quantitative and qualitative data from the target audience, professionals of both educational and cultural institutions. The survey used an online questionnaire composed of a set of 10 questions comprising open-and closed-ended questions. The online questionnaire was sent to the management teams of the educational and artistic institutions in the partner countries, who later distributed it to the relevant type of employees/professionals in their institutions. Below is an example of the survey questions related to the concept of inclusion (see [Table 1](#)).

In sum, 388 professionals from the five participating countries completed the questionnaire. 78% of the participants were women and the rest were men. Only 15% had backgrounds related to inclusive education and 25% had studied art education. Likewise, 21% had specialized backgrounds in art and inclusion. 35% worked in arts institutions and the rest in socio-educational institutions.

Prior to using it for the survey, the questionnaire underwent a process of inter-judge validation. A total of 37 experts (professors, teachers, educators in educational and cultural institutions, Master's and PhD students in the fields of art and education) from all the project partners' countries revised the questionnaire according to three criteria: important, relevant, and univocal, and then adapted it to each partner's context. The

reliability of the questionnaire was acceptable with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.86.

The interviews were composed of 20 questions that aimed to obtain information regarding inclusive processes related to art: barriers and opportunities and key elements to implement inclusive art projects. Interviews with educational and cultural institution professionals were conducted in all the consortium partner countries either in person or *via* online communication platforms. The length of the interviews ranged from 27 to 80 min and were audio and/or video recorded. In total, 52 interviews were conducted. Below is an example of the interview questions related to the implementation of inclusive arts projects (see [Table 2](#)).

The focus groups were organized around the key question: How do you understand an inclusive art project? In total, 8 focus groups were held, with participation from 56 professionals. The focus groups were mixed, including professionals from artistic and socio-cultural institutions. The focus groups were conducted by one or two members of each project partner, they ranged in length from 52 to 90 min and were audio or video recorded.

In the second phase, tours to cultural and arts centers were organized with an aim to explore with visitors – inclusive groups of students accompanied by project partner organizations' representatives – the aspects that could be improved in the cultural or artistic centers regarding the barriers to access and/or the experience of visiting the cultural space and the activities that can be identified as good practices. The visitors were people with and without disabilities from different educational and training stages (primary and secondary school, occupational centers, special schools, self-advocacy movements, co-researcher groups or artists with intellectual disabilities).

Different qualitative techniques were used for data collection. Specifically, two interviews were designed – one for the visitors ($n=408$, students) and the other for the professionals ($n=85$). The visitor interview was designed to be used in two ways. For smaller groups of visitors (6–7 persons), the interviews could be conducted during the visit to the cultural center, whereas for larger groups or guided tours, it could be conducted at the end of the visit. The interview script for the visitors included a total of 36 questions. Before the visit to the artistic institution, the visitors and their families were informed about the objectives of the project and the informed consent document was signed. Below is an example of the interview questions related to physical accessibility (see [Table 3](#)).

In addition, interviews with professionals affiliated with the cultural/arts centers were performed with an aim to find out what cultural centers do to facilitate access and the participation of all people and what issues they find important. Another goal was to reflect on the good practices and possible improvements in cultural spaces. Each interview consisted of at least 2 or 3 staff members from each of the artistic or cultural spaces visited. The defined duration of the interviews was one and a half hours. The questions were organized around 3 sections: Values and rights related to inclusion; management and organization for inclusive artistic projects; and the experience of inhabiting the cultural

TABLE 1 Example survey questions: concept of inclusion.

2.- CONCEPT OF INCLUSIVE PROCESSES LINKED TO ART

9. Please indicate three characteristics/features that you think can boost and facilitate art projects based on the promotion of participation and accessibility for all, in the cooperation between equals and in the recognition and value of the differences between people.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

10. Please indicate three barriers that you perceive related to the implementation of art projects based on the promotion of participation and accessibility for all, in the cooperation between equals and in the recognition and value of the differences between people.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

space. The interviews were audio or video recorded and later transcribed. Below is an example of the interview questions related to management and organization (see Table 4).

The statistical analysis of the data obtained by the questionnaire was performed using the SPSS (v24) software. The descriptive analysis of the received quantitative data was carried out: frequency tables and grouped bar plots were used to summarize the data, a description with the mean was obtained for quantitative variables, open-end responses were categorized.

The qualitative analysis of the data gathered from interviews and focus groups carried out the discourse analysis technique through the elaboration of a hermeneutic matrix. Dimensions and categories followed a mixed process, deductive and inductive. The dimensions originated from a theoretical framework and the categories (b.2 and c.4) were emergent from the field research and incorporated to the matrix. The coding of the categories was carried out by the NVivo software (v1.5). The dimensions and categories used for the analysis of the data collected in the research are presented below (see Table 5).

Results

The results presented here do not claim to be representative: The selection of the participants in the questionnaire survey (388 responses) was random (snowball system); for the qualitative survey (52 interviews and 8 focus group discussions), people were chosen in part by being able to contribute experience and knowledge to the subject area. In the course of the project, the institutions and individuals who tended to be addressed and to

be more willing to cooperate were those who did not have substantial deficits in their awareness of and approach to inclusion. Furthermore, the diversity within the two groups focused on here (people with disabilities and/or with a migration background) must also be pointed out, which makes it difficult to give all related problem situations the same attention.

As the results show, arts institutions organize a variety of activities in order to bring art and culture closer to society as a whole and are aware of the transformative power they have in favor of social inclusion. In general, arts institutions are open to suggestions for improvement, putting people and their needs at the center. However, in order to have a more accurate picture, the results have been grouped from the perspective of professionals and from the perspective of students.

Perspective of professionals

Although arts institutions claim that they are making a great effort towards full inclusion, there is still a long way to go. Many of these institutions consider that the concept of inclusion is linked to certain vulnerable groups. Hence, sometimes exhibitions are organized for certain groups of people, e.g., immigrants, people at risk of social exclusion. Moreover, these exhibitions are also conditioned by the perspective of the author of the exhibition, so *“you cannot do anything if the author does not take into consideration all human diversity”* (UAB-FG-05). What does seem evident is the opening of cultural institutions to avant-garde movements that bring these institutions closer to the most vulnerable groups, bringing art and culture closer to society as a whole in order to promote social inclusion, since *“all citizens, regardless of their characteristics and ways of doing things, are therefore entitled to exercise citizenship in an active way as full citizens”* (IPL-interview-04).

In this sense, professionals from cultural and socio-educational institutions consider that inclusion is directly related to the recognition, acceptance, and value of differences between people within society, where everyone is valid and *“all people must be treated equally and included in society itself”* (EfAS-interview-04). It is a matter of law (*“It is actually a human right”*) in which society must provide opportunities for the development of each person, regardless of individual characteristics or particularities and the society must provide equal opportunities for life for all of us. So, professionals affirm that inclusion must permeate all levels of society, including the cultural level. They therefore confer on it a status of universality, where all people can actively participate in the development of a more equitable society: *“it suggests openness to me, it suggests two words: openness and sharing (...) inclusion is more than opening and welcoming, it is sharing and understanding”* (UC-interview-06).

Besides, all professionals consider that arts education creates in its essence spaces that promote inclusion as they are spaces where participation is facilitated, and people can express themselves freely. Everyone feels accepted and valued. There are no predetermined

TABLE 2 Example interview questions: implementation of inclusive arts projects.

11. What are the key aspects to consider in the design of an artistic project that promotes inclusion processes? Who benefits? Why?
 12. How do you think the beneficiaries, including vulnerable people, of the project should participate in the design, development and evaluation of the inclusive art project?
 13. What methodologies should be used in artistic projects to encourage the participation of everyone? Which ones could you use?
 14. Do you feel confident in the use of different artistic languages? In what?
 15. How do you carry out collaboration between professionals to facilitate inclusive arts projects? Can you explain characteristic features (or main aspects) of a positive collaborative experience regarding inclusive artistic projects?
 16. How would you create spaces to work on inclusive artistic projects?
 17. Do you feel capable of making inclusive art projects dynamic? Can you explain why?
-
18. What are the personal traits that limit / empower you in the development of inclusive artistic projects?

prejudices. Everyone has a place. All professionals define arts education as “*an activity that promotes an expression that can be shared, and that includes everyone, and leaves no one behind*” (IPL-FG-01). Moreover, arts education promotes the integral development of the person both cognitively, emotionally and socially, as it increases self-confidence, self-esteem, self-knowledge, creativity and the sense of belonging to a group: “*[it] allows for the expression of thoughts, feelings and knowledge, as subjectivity is involved in each of them*” and “*artistic activities often have an enormous impact on their personal identity, on their self-confidence, on their own creativity and on their imagination*” (PHSt-FG-07).

Likewise, professionals believe that arts education allows for the use of different forms of expression, of different languages in a collaborative environment, where each person has the possibility to live, experiment and participate according to his or her abilities in an absolutely free way:

“*People can express themselves in many ways, in many forms, and everyone can have their own opinion, where they can develop better, where they will feel better. One will feel better at drawing, another will feel better at singing. And the point is that we can feel good as people by doing one of these activities, which helps us to grow as people*” (UAB-FG-07).

On the other hand, participation is seen as an opportunity to generate collaborative spaces in which each person with his or her individual characteristics contributes to the integral development of all people, and to the society as a whole. However, it is necessary for people to empathize, be sensitive to and understand the needs and characteristics of their fellow citizens.

Nevertheless, for active participation to be facilitated, it is essential to give people “*a voice and be able to express it in different ways ... and that’s why I would want everyone to have this voice and be able to show and express what they want to express*” (PHSt-interview-01); professionals consider that the participation and

TABLE 3 Example interview questions: physical accessibility.

13. Open question: What have you seen at the museum/cultural/artistic space?
 14. How is the entrance to the museum/artistic/cultural cultural space? Did you use stairs, lift..?
 15. Did you leave your things at the entrance? Why?
 16. Did you do things on your own at the museum/artistic/cultural space? Which ones?
 17. Was it easy to move around the museum/artistic/cultural cultural space? Why?
 18. What were the signs like (to move around the museum/artistic/cultural space or to find the toilets)?
 19. Were you able to touch things at the museum/artistic/cultural space? Which ones? What did you think?
 20. Was there a place to rest at the museum/artistic/cultural cultural space? Where?
 21. Did you use the toilet? Did you have any difficulties? Why?
 22. Were there fountains (drinking water) in the museum/artistic/cultural cultural space?
 23. Were the museum spaces adequate for the number of visitors?
 24. Were the signs easy to read? Were they at your height? Was there enough light?
 25. Closing question: What could the museum/artistic/cultural space staff do to improve it?
-

inclusion of all people do not seem to be clear priorities in several of the institutions analyzed, so the content of the exhibitions or the interaction established with the works does not ensure an inclusive experience for all, and the design of websites, the type of existing brochures or explanatory posters are not fully inclusive.

Professionals at the institutions found it difficult to specify how to incorporate inclusion and/or participation in the cultural activities during the entire process (e.g., design, implementation, dissemination, etc.):

- o Resources (material and human) were not always available to ensure that all people feel welcome (e.g., sign language interpreter, videos with subtitles, posters and signage, etc.).
- o Some institutions stressed the importance of knowing in advance the specific needs and characteristics of individuals in order to provide the necessary support and ensure that all participants have equal opportunities for access.
- o Some institutions highlighted the importance of reviewing ratios for working with small groups to facilitate more personalized support.

In fact, it is a question of “*[making] it accessible to everyone, [being] inclusive is to put the focus on the person, [being] the protagonist of what we want them to develop*” (UC-interview-03).

Although art institutions advocate making accessible spaces, this intention is often subject to the institution’s own organization and its awareness of this issue: “*it is important, but not a priority.*”

TABLE 4 Example interview questions: management and organization.

The organization and management of the budget is a complex issue. However, we wonder if there is a budget line aimed at accessibility in the center?

Is there a person in charge of accessibility in the center? What kind of actions or functions do they perform?

Is it possible to implement changes or improvements at any time? Who participates in the decisions that are made? How are improvement proposals valued or analyzed? Who are the people involved in these decisions?

Are proposals for citizen participation launched from the center? (e.g., type of events, schedules, organization...) How often are they held? what methods are used?

Specifically, are working groups developed with associations or entities that work with people with disabilities and with other socially vulnerable groups?

Is there a training plan for the staff? How are the contents of the plan selected?

Are collaborations developed with professionals from other disciplines to adopt other approaches?

If so, what is being considered?

If not, why do you think it is missing?

Are exhibitions or cultural proposals that support culture as a tool for social transformation included? (e.g., awareness raising, visibility..) Are there any activities or workshops that address socially relevant topics?

TABLE 5 Dimensions and categories.

Dimensions	Categories
a. Concept of inclusion and the processes linked to art	a.1. Concept of inclusion: values and rights a.2. Contribution of art to inclusive processes a.3. Opportunities to promote inclusion through arts projects a.4. Barriers to promote inclusion through arts projects
b. Key elements to implement inclusive arts projects	b.1. Design of inclusive art projects b.2. Identify people's specific needs b.3. Methodology in the development of inclusive artistic projects b.4. Organizations of the spaces for the development of inclusive artistic projects b.5. Support (knowledge, mastery and access to resources and support in the context).
c. Experience of living artistic institutions: Good practices and opportunities for improvement	c.1. Physical accessibility. c.2. Access to information. c.3. Content. c.4. Educational activities c.5. Interaction with the professionals.

we go little by little" (UAB-interview-03). As the professionals of the art institutions state, physical accessibility sometimes requires *"a strong economic investment because the museum occupies an old building where this accessibility for all was not contemplated."*

In several cultural institutions, the need for illuminated signs to indicate the way on the floor and/or to relocate exhibited works located in the middle of the rooms has been

included in the feedback given by users. In various cultural institutions, users highlighted the need for spaces to sit and/or rest.

In regard to cognitive accessibility, information was not presented in different formats (e.g., tactile models, Braille, font size on signs, easy to read language on posters, etc.), or with audio to accompany the explanatory texts on posters/signs. Besides, in some institutions, there was not an intense interaction with the display material, neither in terms of the presentation of real material, nor in having a sufficient quantity for everyone to interact with.

Some professionals considered that *"sometimes the web or brochures use too much technical language which makes them difficult to understand and makes them less interesting for users"* (EfAS-interview-02). And this is more evident in arts institutions that do not have a specialized accessibility department within their organization. Within institutions with a department specializing in accessibility, they make sure that the content is accessible when designing activities; in institutions that do not have such a department, they do what they can, and it is not a priority.

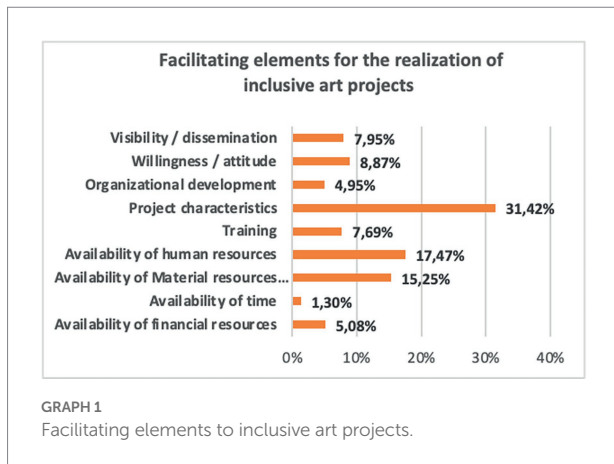
Professionals recognize that there are a number of barriers as well as facilitators to implementing truly inclusive arts projects. From the results of the questionnaire, the professionals state that the key elements that facilitate the development of inclusive arts projects are the characteristics of the project itself with an inclusive approach and the availability of human and material resources (see [Graph 1](#)).

In this sense, professionals consider that for an artistic project to be inclusive, it must be accessible, participatory, person-centered and encourage creativity and experimentation, in such a way that *"it could be of great benefit to all, and the community could provide quality programs, projects where everyone could take an equal part and benefit"* (EfAS-interview-02).

This implies that the activities incorporate appropriate communication systems for all users as well as the use of inclusive language. It is important that methodological strategies and techniques for self-expression through artistic languages as well as educational strategies are used for accessing culture and art (e.g., tactile models, easy to read texts, etc.), including the creation of facilitating resources for cultural inclusion. The use of participatory methodological strategies, both for training and for working with visitors in cultural spaces or using different cultural spaces in the community (e.g., urban gardens or public parks) is essential.

Professionals consider that, through methodological strategies for active participation, inclusive arts projects should be open, flexible and dynamic proposals which recognize the interests of the participants and are flexible according to their needs, identifying and addressing barriers to access and ensuring dissemination is accessible.

However, in order for the development of the inclusive artistic project to be adequate and existent, close collaboration with socio-educational institutions is necessary, and this implies:



- o Advance notice would facilitate the preparation of visits and the anticipation of participants' needs.
- o Knowledge of activities would be useful in order to anticipate some elements or prepare students in schools.
- o Finding out from the professionals of the cultural spaces what educational resources would facilitate the group's access to culture.
- o Encouraging the participation of accompanying external professionals in the activity.
- o Preparing closing activities to allow for reflection on the activity (this aspect is emphasized in some sites).

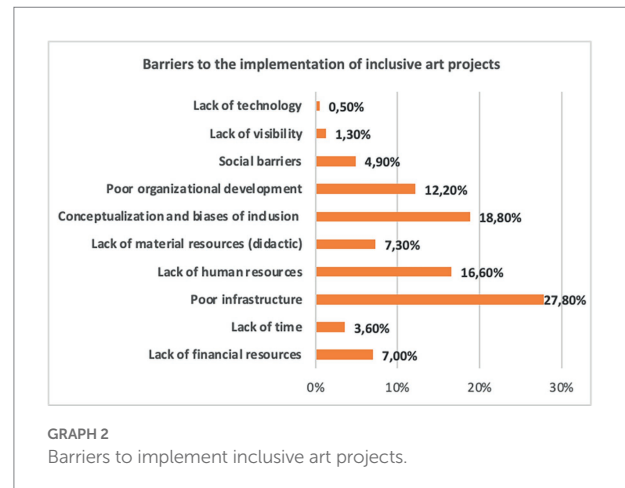
On the other hand, professionals consider that the lack of adequate infrastructure and organization of cultural institutions, as well as a lack of human resources, hinders the implementation of inclusive arts projects (see [Graph 2](#)).

It is particularly relevant that professionals also see a lack of consensus in defining inclusion as a barrier to developing inclusive arts projects: "Unfortunately, when we think of inclusion, we always think of the fact that there are people with disabilities whom we want to integrate in some way or who can participate, but actually inclusion means everyone" (NBW-interview-01).

Although they all assume that inclusion refers to facilitating the participation and learning of all people, when developing inclusive arts projects, they end up adapting them to a specific vulnerable group.

Without a doubt, developing inclusive processes in society requires a strong belief in the principles of inclusion, social justice and equity. This is not a voluntary, charitable act towards a group of vulnerable people but a firm belief that these principles should permeate society as a whole: "For me, it is basic that [inclusion] cannot depend on the voluntariness of anyone. There has to be a commitment that facilitates visibility and participation. (...) there has to be commitment, that's fundamental" (UC-FG-02).

This commitment directly involves the organization and management of arts institutions. According to the professionals, the management teams of these institutions should be aware of the benefits of the inclusion process in their institutions and



offer material and human resources to facilitate it, implementing training plans that include aspects related to the recognition of human diversity and social inclusion and participation. Currently, there is no recognized network of professionals with whom to share information, hold regular meetings or exchange information on promoting inclusion in cultural spaces.

One aspect that professionals consider key is the establishment of collaborative processes between institutions. Some institutions have training spaces for sharing best practices among professionals from different institutions. In some cases, regular meetings are established between the cultural institution and the groups of self-advocates with the purpose of expressing their needs and evaluating exhibitions. Some of the cultural institutions are focused on inclusion with people with disabilities, generating specific lines of work on this. They are conceived as experimental fields for inclusive educational work in museums. Working groups have been developed with different representatives (people with and without disabilities and educational, artistic and cultural institutions) to explore the creative potential of inclusive educational processes and sustainable collaboration between inclusive schools and museums. These are interdisciplinary and action-focused exchanges. They also generate weekly workshops for families and children with and without disabilities. These collaborative experiences between artistic spaces and different organizations working with children and adults with disabilities (e.g., visual impairment, hearing impairment, etc.) improve accessibility and/or participation.

From this collaborative perspective, professionals consider that it is important to:

- o develop teams in cultural spaces with a high awareness of accessibility.
- o create teams with different professionals promoting inclusive cultural projects.
- o involve visitors in the collaborative construction of creative products.

- o generate interdisciplinary and diverse workspaces, with professionals from different fields and with different skills, where artists have a relevant role.

Perspective of students

Undoubtedly, the activities carried out during the visits with the students were the most highly valued by the students. During the visits to the art institutions, the activities prepared for the group of students were spaces for participation where the students felt very empowered doing lots of things, experimenting, manipulating objects: *“I liked the fact that we built the boxes the most. We worked with drills, I liked that very much”* (NBW-interview-03). In fact, the students showed that it was the activities that they liked most about the visit, as *“they let me express myself as I wanted to”* (UC-interview-02). For some students, this means the possibility of exchanging ideas with other classmates, creating with different materials, or *“using their imagination to create things”* (EfAS-interview-03).

In all the art institutions, the educators welcome the participants in the hall of the institution, giving a brief explanation of the art institution and the visit: *“they explained to us what we were going to see, where we should go and the rooms we would see”* (UAB-interview-04). The way in which the educators of the artistic institutions transmit the information has also had a significant influence on the access to it. It has been observed that many of these educators interacted a lot with people, questioned them, gestured a lot and adapted the vocabulary: *“The guided tour was very cool and fun. We were also asked if we liked it”* (PHSt-Interview-03).

Although methodological strategies promote active participation, they should be more open, flexible and dynamic, which recognize the interests of the participants and are flexible according to their needs, identifying and addressing barriers to access. In this sense, some students point out the need to diversify the activities and the methodologies used. There have also been visits in which students have said that they have felt bored at times because the dynamic was not very participatory, with more emphasis on explanations.

“I would like to spend more time in the museum space, involved in other tasks, different from those that the institution already offers” (IPL-interview-01).

“I hate reading and cannot read the small print. Listening would be great, then I understand it. It would be good for those who cannot or do not want to read...be able to touch more works to understand the works better” (PHSt-interview-02).

“..they teach few things, and I would have liked them to have taught more... It would have been nice to be able to play and do something more interactive” (UAB-interview-06).

“We are children, and we want to touch everything (..)” (UC-interview-04).

From this point of view, students express the need to adapt the time of activities (*“I was trying to read things, but we were going so*

fast and between looking, I did not have time” (UC-interview-05)) and to have spaces for play and interaction (*“More cool things, it’s already cool here, but more cool rooms where you can also have fun inside. Like with the carpet room, where you can play as well”* (PHSt-interview-03)).

Accessibility was also considered, although it was not always fully guaranteed (e.g., external access, parking spaces, spaciousness of the rooms, lighting, suitable positioning/hanging height of the works of art, etc.). Artistic and cultural spaces, exhibitions, etc., were often not suitably prepared for the enjoyment of everyone. Some students point out the need for signs to guide them through the museum (*“I would have liked someone to show us the way when we arrived. Or even signs and arrows to know where to go”* (PHSt-interview-05)), as well as the use of alternative communication systems, especially for students with sensorial disabilities:

“They could have someone to explain things using sign language and braille, so we know who it’s by (referring to the authorship of the works) (..) I think the first thing is that we put that in for the signing, because we also have a classmate from the other class who’s deaf” (UC-interview-03).

“..it was not very easy to understand what was being said and the child with hearing aids could not hear well...it would be appropriate that there are guides for blind people to explain and describe the pictures and sensations” (UAB-interview-06).

“..the letters were very small, and I could not read them..” (EfAS-interview-02).

On the other hand, some students say that physical accessibility, although it is very present, needs to be improved, as access to some spaces is complicated: *“At the beginning, the accessibility is very good, but the further you get into the museum, the more it decreases - doors are difficult to open and the guidance system for the blind is missing;”* (PHSt-interview-05) *“I needed support to move to the bathroom”* (IPL-interview-02) and *“..if I am not mistaken, there were only stairs to climb, then, for people who have difficulty walking or in wheelchairs, it would be difficult for them. So, I would change it so that there would be mini ramps”* (UAB-interview-07).

Another aspect highlighted by students is the possibility of having space for rest. In some of the visits, the students expressed that it would have been appropriate to take a break during the activity, mid-morning, to have something to eat: *“I would have liked to take a break for lunch..”* (UAB-interview-05) and *“there were not enough benches to sit and look at the works while on the guided tour”* (NBW-interview-03).

Discussion

Nowadays, inclusion is emerging strongly in societies and inclusion processes are becoming more visible and necessary in order to achieve fairer, more equitable, and ultimately more democratic societies. Inclusion is a continuous and constant process of transformation that includes social awareness-raising behavior aimed at overcoming the barriers that some people

encounter (Echeita, 2016). But such a process requires an inclusive vision shared by the whole community, based on respect for diversity and not homogeneity, eliminating any form of discrimination and respecting the rights of all people, in order to avoid spaces of exclusion and protection (Aichele, 2020).

Despite the commitment of national and international agencies to the development of more inclusive contexts, there is still a long way to go. Inclusion processes are never-ending and undoubtedly complex, as they require significant transformations in the contexts where they take place (Nilholm and Göransson, 2017). It is true that the ethical and moral convictions underpinning the construct of inclusion are largely accepted by society (Etxebarria, 2018), but we cannot ignore the huge global north–south inequalities and the high rates of marginalization, inequality and social exclusion in Western countries (UNESCO, 2020).

From a systemic perspective, the generation of spaces for participation in artistic contexts becomes a key element for the development of social inclusion processes, promoting an improvement in the quality of life also for vulnerable people. It is not only about making contexts accessible, but also about making them participatory. Accessibility and participation are closely linked (Rahn, 2016); a person cannot participate if he or she cannot access the exhibition. However, participation goes beyond accessibility. It is about creating spaces in which people interact with their peers, are accepted and recognized, and can make decisions on issues that affect them. However, this implies that institutions need to be aware of the specific needs of people in order to make them the protagonists of their learning within the dialogic space promoted by artistic expression (Cerdan and Jiménez-Zarco, 2021). In this sense, a key facilitator is directly linked to giving voice and actively listening to the people who participate in the projects, so that their interests, needs and motivations are taken into consideration (Robledo, 2018). This requires, among other things, that the processes of artistic creation take place at the same level between the creator and the beneficiary (Lynch, 2017).

Furthermore, the degree of accessibility of the context prevents people with some kind of limitation, whether physical, sensory or intellectual, from moving around autonomously and on equal terms with the rest of the people, which is why the implementation of the principles of universal design is required to facilitate access and participation (Alonso Arana, 2017). This includes not only facilitating physical access to the museum but also sensory and cognitive access. The diversity of people who access art institutions makes it essential that their proposals are flexible and based on collaborative methodologies. Thus, professionals in art institutions need training related to the conceptualization of inclusive art projects, which means clarifying what inclusion means, what it entails and what characterizes this type of project, from the point of view of the fusion between art and inclusion and how art facilitates the process of socialization of people (Calderón, 2014).

Experiences with art can, additionally help to build social networks that strengthen the links between people, as well as between people and the contexts in which the experiences take place. Art, understood as the set of human creations which express a sensitive vision of the real and imaginary world, and therefore arts education, acquire an extremely relevant role. Arts education not only develops a set of visual, expressive and creative abilities, but also attitudes, habits and behaviors in a means of interaction, communication, expression of feelings and emotions, which allows for an integral formation of the person.

Similarly, as Aparicio (2014) points out, art plays two fundamental roles in this search for social inclusion: on the one hand, it turns people with disabilities into agents of socialization that model and shape the paradigms of understanding disability and promote lifestyles associated with it; and, on the other, it is capable of shaping legitimate spaces of expression of, for and with people with disabilities and the communities of which they are a part.

Finally, experiences through different artistic languages can be a valuable tool for people to express what they feel or to communicate emotions, without predetermined schemes. According to Robledo (2018), in art there is no room for marginalization in expression, processes of identity and belonging to the community are promoted. As Sanders-Bustle (2020) states, collaboration between schools and arts institutions can foster the creation of new social spaces for marginalized groups and become an opportunity to express experiences of exclusion or injustice (Lee et al., 2021).

The next steps within the project presented here will be the completion of the research project and the implementation of several inclusive mediation projects and art actions which will provide the institutions with practical answers for the further development of their inclusion concepts. In addition, a handbook will be created that can accompany the implementation of inclusive projects and the topic will be further disseminated in exhibitions. A guide to the implementation of inclusive art and museum spaces will be available to museums and schools beyond the duration of the project. This is also linked to the hope of being able to sensitize even more people to the topic in the future.

Conclusion

Participation in society and exchange within society are basic human rights; various UN Conventions ensure that participation in cultural life is possible for everyone. *Culture* and *participation* are closely intertwined, but especially in contemporary formats, such as those brought about by the performative turn or a socio-politically interested art. Although there is a real motivation from international and national bodies for the development of inclusive processes in all spheres of society, especially in the social and cultural spheres, there is certainly still some way to go.

Artistic and socio-educational institutions assume inclusion as a process to be implemented in their institutions, as it is a full

exercise of the right, as set out in current legislation. Although professionals consider inclusion as a utopian concept, they state that inclusion recognizes and values the differences between people and can generate spaces for participation. In this sense, arts education contributes to the promotion of participation as it allows that all people can have free expression and develop a perception of usefulness and functionality. The implementation of inclusive artistic projects promotes the creation of spaces of freedom so that participants can choose, think, decide, solve problems, etc., promoting decision-making by the participants and developing a sense of belonging and cohesion in the group. The main element of inclusive artistic projects is the development of participatory processes. In this sense, it is essential to create multidisciplinary teams, as well as vulnerable people to foster the exchange of knowledge.

However, there are some barriers that make their implementation difficult: infrastructure in the institutions, few human resources, poor organizational development, environmental barriers, or training of professionals.

Thus, it is necessary to incorporate educational strategies for access to culture and art: alternative communication systems, universal design for learning, easy reading, information in Braille, models to access information through touch, audio descriptions, signing guides, videos with subtitles.

From a people-centered care perspective, coordination between professionals from the different institutions that accompany people with disabilities is necessary in order to truly articulate inclusive art projects. Likewise, it is essential to develop training projects that raise awareness of the processes of inclusion, which means knowing, experimenting, and experiencing inclusive processes with and for people with disabilities. But it is also essential to advise professionals to incorporate inclusive methodologies in the different artistic languages, in order to minimize the barriers that still exist in cultural contexts.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because of the confidential nature of the data and the restrictions

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agreed with the respective ethics committees. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to JMS-G, josep.sanahuja@uab.cat.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by UAB Ethics Committee. Written informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardian/next of kin.

Author contributions

MG is the leading author, planning, and coordinating this contribution. JMS-G is the inventor and coordinator of the project. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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