



Erasmus+



**BaGMIVI – Bridging  
the Gap between  
Museums and  
Individuals with Visual  
Impairments**

**KA2 – Cooperation and  
Innovation for Good Practices**

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# The BaGMIVI Consortium

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## **1. Executive Summary**

The present Intellectual Output (O1: Needs Assessment Study Syllabus) constitutes part of the activities of a European Project entitled “BaGMIVI: **B**ridging the **G**ap between **M**useums and **I**ndividuals with **V**isual **I**mpairments” with code number: “2014-1-EL01-KA200-001631. The coordinating partner is the University of Thessaly and Dr. Vassilios Argyropoulos, acts as the Coordinator of the project.

According to the approved proposal of BaGMIVI Project the first intellectual output (IO1) is a needs assessment study which included the following phases of activities:

### **1<sup>st</sup> Phase: Literature Review Part.**

Review of the relevant literature review with research data and theoretical perspectives regarding museums and people with visual impairments. This research was conducted at local and international level through reports, books and journals.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Phase: Research Part**

This phase includes the development of two semi-structured interview guides and the conduction of this interview with individuals with visual impairments and teachers of students with visual impairments to explore their experiences and perspectives regarding the level of accessibility and inclusion of students with visual impairments the museums. Also in the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase the development of a questionnaire is included which referred to the museum staff of all museum partners to explore their needs and experience regarding visitors with visual impairments.

The chief participating organisations of Intellectual Output O1 (including the leading organisation) are:

- 1.UNIVERSITATEA BABES BOLYAI
- 2.BULGARIAN ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN
- 3.SOFIISKI UNIVERSITET SVETI KLIMENT OHRIDSKI
- 4.EOTVOS LORAND TUDOMANYEGYETEM
- 5.UNIVERSITY OF THESSALY (Coordinator)

The analysis of the obtained data led to the completion of Intellectual Output 1 (O1) which is the needs’ assessment. The following sections include the literature review and the research via semi-structured interviews and questionnaires.

### 2. Theoretical Framework of the BaGMIVI Project

Relevant literature review has revealed some basic topics and key points which shape the theoretical framework of the BaGMIVI project:

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>2.1 The rights of people with disabilities – Social model of disability</li><li>2.2 The educational and social role of the museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century</li><li>2.3 Issues of accessibility</li><li>2.4 The relationship between museums and individuals with visual impairments</li></ul> |
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**Box 1. Basic topics of relevant literature review regarding O1**

#### 2.1. The rights of people with disabilities – Social model of disability

The improvement of access to museums for individuals with visual impairment is the aim of the BaGMIVI project and is expected to be a step toward the implementation of the right of all people for access to cultural goods. As Weisen (2008:249) states the “ethical argument” for the right of all people for access to cultural goods has found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948:

*“Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits”*

(UN, 1948, article 27:1)

Similarly, access to culture has been recognized as a right of people with disabilities in the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

*“States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities: a. Enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats; b. Enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats; c. Enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance”.*

(UN, 2006, article 30:1)

A key topic of the theoretical basis of the BaGMIVI project is the social model of disability. The adoption of the social model of disability in contrast to the individual or medical model of disability had a significant impact on policies and practices towards disability,

including those of museums. The prevalence for many years of the individual or medical model of disability imposed the notion of disability as an individual matter and a “personal tragedy”. This notion contributed to the perpetuation of various stereotypes and to the consideration of people with disabilities in terms of therapy or treatment ignoring the role of the society and the barriers that may affect and shape the experience of disability. The social model of disability stresses issues like the failure of the society to respond to the needs of people with disabilities, the barriers and the limitations of the society which isolate and exclude people with disabilities from equal social participation. Such an example constitutes the interaction between museums and people with disability (Argyropoulos & Kanari, 2015; Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 1999; Oliver, 1990; Moussouri, 2007).

## **2.2.The educational and social role of the museum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

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

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

As Black (2005:4) states, museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are expected to be, among others, “promoters of social cohesion and inclusion, resources for structured education, agents of physical, economic, cultural and social regeneration” and of course “open to all”. In this “audience-centered” approach, museums are interested not only for their collections but also for their audiences. In this framework museums are interested for the development for new relationships with their audiences. The term “audience”, according to Hooper-Greenhill (1999a) describes all visitors, current and potential, those who visit museums but also those who do not use to visit museums, those who would like to visit museums but they face different



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

It seems that the idea of a “general audience” has been rejected by most museums recognizing the need for audience research, visitor studies and evaluation. Questions such as “Who visits the museums? What are the museum visitors’ expectations, motivations and needs? How do museums improve and expand their activities in order to get in touch with their audiences? Or “what are the motivations of not visiting museums?” may be a good starting point to tackle critical issues in the BaGMIVI project. Audience researches are valuable for the museum audience development because as Hooper-Greenhill (1999a: 25, note 1) states, *“planning just for existing visitors runs the risk of perpetuating unacknowledged discriminatory practices”*.

### **2.3.Issues of accessibility**

The need of museums to address and develop new audiences – some of them traditionally excluded - and the need to build sustainable relationships with their audiences, have led museums to investigate the nature of access or in other words to identify different barriers to access. Access to museums is a multidimensional reality (EBU, 2012; Weisen, 2008) or in other words there are different types of access such as the physical access, sensory, intellectual, emotional/attitudinal, financial, cultural, digital access etc. (Dodd & Sandell, 1998:12-14; Weisen, 2008:247). As a consequence museums have to remove many different barriers which are not only multidimensional but also interdependent (Weisen, 2008:247). In the above it can also be added the “lack of choice” and the “lack of educational opportunity” (Weisen, 2008:247) and from audience point of view, the “perception of irrelevance, the sense of feeling unwelcome” or the “sense of cultural exclusion, the lack of time, the lack of intellectual access”, etc (Black, 2005:55; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999a: 8).

Facing different types of barriers to museums may lead people – and people with disabilities - to construct negative perceptions for the museums or more negative emotions:

*“Repeated experience of unnecessary barriers leads to frustration, anger, resignation and finally cultural exclusion”.*

(Weisen, 2008:247)

Regarding access of people with disabilities to museums, it is true that access for people of disabilities is a central topic of discussion in museums around the world. Also many steps have been made toward a wider accessibility of people with disabilities to museums such as: guidelines for an accessible environment in the framework of Universal Design (e.g. Smithsonian Accessibility Programme), the introduction of legislation against discrimination in different countries (see for example the legislation in United States (ADA, 1990) and UK (DDA, 1995), initiatives and relevant research of a number of associations for people with disabilities for the improvement of their accessibility, etc. However, there are a lot of differences among different countries and museums since there are varying levels of commitment and success for the achievement of access (Sandell & Dodd, 2010:10). Furthermore there is more attention of enhancing physical access and to a lesser extent to other types of access like sensory access (Boussaid, 2004; Sandell & Dodd, 2010:10). As Weisen (2008:245) states the *“uncomfortable truth”* is that people with disabilities still face many barriers to their access in museums and to cultural life. It seems that despite the intensive discussions about access to cultural goods for people with disabilities their cultural rights are poorly implemented (EBU, 2012).

Speaking of barriers of access to culture, as it was mentioned above a significant barrier is also the lack of educational opportunities (Weisen, 2008:247). One of the main aims of BaGMIVI Project is to shape and promote strategic partnerships between museums and schools. Also, one set of activities in a next level of our project includes visits of schools or associations of the individuals with visual impairments to the participating museums and vice versa and the development of a best practices guide. Indeed, access to culture is related to access in education (Dufreney-Trinchinetti, 2004).

Undoubtedly, education plays a crucial role at many levels regarding the bondings between museums and schools. In order to build bridges between society and museum we should consider the relationship between education and museums. Participation in cultural activities presupposes cultivated and well informed societies (Smith & Smartz, 2000:25-35) and a wider cultural education for all. This cultural education and the educational opportunities are not provided only by museums but also in schools. In this direction, teachers' role is

significant since they can bring to museums children from different backgrounds and children with different needs. Also, teachers may contribute to meaningful learning experiences in museums and positive social experiences. They can also transmit to their students' positive attitudes encouraging them to participate in different spaces and actions and cultivate different skills (Pearson & Aloysious, 1994; Vemi & Kanari, 2008). In this way, teachers contribute to their students' future relationship with museums as adults. Similarly, a recent research for the current accessibility practices in cultural sectors for individuals with visual impairment in Europe (EBU, 2012:30) stresses the importance of education supporting, among others, that cultural accessibility and *“societal change should start with raising awareness of disabled people equity in schools”*.

Finally, it seems that teachers' experience regarding inclusive practices in special or/and mainstream schools may also provide valuable information to museums' staff and enrich their practices (Shepherd, 2009:140). On the other hand school visits in museums may enrich and support school life and practice in relation to various learning goals (Kanari, 2014).

#### **2.4.The relationship between museums and individuals with visual impairments**

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

According to Csordas (1994) or Merleau-Ponty (2000) peoples' bodies are the ground of culture and thought. Physical intelligent and bodily learning have become accepted within educational theory (Gardner, 1993 in Candlin, 2004). This means that children and pupils with visual impairment need special environment for learning and getting information. Whatever blind or partially sighted children's level of skill, touch forms a primary means of learning about

art objects and artefacts. For museums need to make sure that the displays are usable to a wide range of age and social-cultural backgrounds (people with basic knowledge or highly educated people). By introducing sensory and interactive components into exhibitions and events programmes, museums hope to encourage both learning generally and those visitors who would be put off by scholarly approaches' (Candlin, 2004: 72). Museums should be interactive for children/people with visual impairment. They need museums where it is allowed to touch selected objects from the collection in supervised circumstances without any control over what and how they touch. For blind children/people, original objects are the best to learn and gain new and special information or knowledge. Museums have to pay attention about the followings:

*'Despite touch being an important and at times irreplaceable way of understanding art objects and artefacts, museums rarely encourage it outside designated handling sessions or occasional touch tours. Many artefacts are far too fragile to be handled regularly and even relatively sturdy art objects can be adversely affected both by the erosion of repeated handling and by the residue of sweat and oil from people's hands'*

(Candlin, 2004:75).

The role what museums play is not limited to education and information to blind students. Museum educators, along with school staff, can help creating an atmosphere of opportunity for blind students by making contact with active, competent blind adults, learning positive attitudes about blindness, and encouraging independence and full participation on the part of blind students. In the other hand they can provide dynamic encounters with peers which many blind students may miss (Axel and Levent, 2003).

In Art Beyond Sight handbook, Carol Castellano gives practical, easy to understand advices to enable museum experience and learning accessible for visually impaired pupils (<http://www.artbeyondsight.org/handbook/az-museum-school.shtml>). She divides the duties of Museum – School partnership in the Start-up Plan in four lesson blocks: Learning how to touch, Materials and Learning, People in Places: Narrative and Environment, Maps and Spaces. She puts emphasis on preparation to museum tours. We all know that good touch skills are learned and in development during school age. Some students who have difficulties in tactual perception might need even more time and support to build up and reach good active touch skills and strategies. Reading maps, tactile diagrams, raised line drawings are not given for blind students. It is necessary to improve these abilities during school years. Considering the social role of museums, seniors and veterans can be in focus too.

Another role of the museums is to show art works of blind and visually impaired artists. Thus there is a new opportunity making wider range of inclusive practices that will enrich the culture at large. If the slogan, ' Nothing about us without us' is kept in front of the museums eyes, they can actively seek input from blind and visually impaired artists, scholars or pupils.

For example there was a course organized in 2012 involving visually impaired and sighted students working together in groups, studying in a museum, and creating art work at schools for the blind. Sighted and visually impaired students could each learn about the other group's perceptual similarities and potentials by working together, and that art was a particularly effective medium for developing this understanding. The visually impaired students had as much potential to develop art works as their sighted counterparts (Hayhoe, 2013). We can see that museums after adaptation are able to play an important role in many ways in social integration.

Indeed, since museums cannot ignore the access to people with visual disabilities are organizing a variety of activities and facilitations: touch tours, touch collections, verbal descriptions, tactile material, educational programs for students and adults with visual impairments, workshops, information in Braille or in large print, etc. (see for example Axel & Levent, 2003; Candlin 2004).

Access programs for people with blindness and low vision fall roughly into two categories: verbal description tours and touch tours. Verbal description of museum objects may be included as an additional track on an audio guide, or downloaded on a smart phone (Levent, Kleege & Pursley, 2013).

Touch tours may offer participants the opportunity to touch original works of art, or else models and facsimiles, or handling objects somehow related to the visual material, as well as raised-line diagrams and drawings. The wall text and labels in the galleries can be made accessible through Braille, large-print versions of labels and texts, pamphlets, as well as magnification software on iPads. Often, docent-led touch and verbal description tours are only available by appointment or scheduled at certain times (Levent, Kleege & Pursley, 2013).

Tactile maps are important to check out the exhibit. It has to be ensured that visitors will be able to easily locate interesting exhibits and other destinations, like restrooms, cafeteria or the gift shop (Landau, 2010). Tactile representations, especially when combined with audio and visuals, can provide print disabled individuals with an improved impression of spaces they occupy and move through (Jones & Lederman, 2006). The most obvious way to provide spatial information for people with visually impaired visitors is to offer portable raised-line and tactile maps. Fixed position maps is able to make out various materials, from plastic to

photographically-etched magnesium metal, cast metals and resins, and 3D printing. These maps have the advantage that they can be affixed in the environment where they can be found by the person with vision loss and positioned in the correct orientation. Placement on a horizontal surface provides the map reader with a real world orientation. Maps should be large enough to provide sufficient scale for detail, but not so large that the map reader has to change their position or reorient themselves (Ziebarth, 2010).

Talking three-dimensional map models with descriptive information are useful for orientation and navigation. Tactile exhibit elements should have carefully scripted audio information, description, or interpretation that is explicitly connected to the tactile experience of the tactile element. When possible, the audio information should be accessible on a hands free basis allowing tactile exploration with both hands (Ziebarth, 2010).

Ginley (2013) writes that so much of what is presented in the galleries is visual and presenters have to find ways for visually impaired people both for the interpretation and for the physical accessibility. The policy goes beyond labels and panels to include new media that invite touch, action, analysis and reflection. This is a move away from the traditional way where museums have hidden objects in glass cases, inaccessible to many people — especially those who cannot see. There has been much debate in the museum sector as to whether original or replica objects should be used as tangible objects (Ginley 2013). Much has been learned by experience and research in the Victoria and Albert Museum about how objects for touch and Braille information should be designed into a display. It was found that Braille panels next to objects should be laid flat, occasionally, panels have also been designed to pull out from under the object where space has been a factor, both of these solutions allows visitors of all heights to read comfortably (Ginley, 2013). There are suggestions for requirements producing Braille text and management of the installation process in Ginley's article just as for audios and audio description. Tactile books should be also mentioned. They can be used for understanding and following the layout of the exhibition and also about the objects. There are also interesting ideas to plan and run touch tours. Ginley is a blind employee of the Victoria and Albert Museum and takes part in the accessibility planning of over 7 miles of exhibition area of the museum. Although Ginley basically focuses on Braille production, it is worth to mention that several other media might be necessary to meet the divers' needs of visually impaired visitors such as e.g. enlarged print, talking computer, magnification devices, additional tactile illustrations, etc.

Indeed, museums have to put some questions about their exhibition for the visitors with special needs: what kind of program design will attract people with low vision or blindness; what kind of information people with visual impairment are able to get by the museum; is the

program interesting and usable for both people with visual impairment and for sighted people, as well; does the program increase social inclusion, etc. Although many steps have been made towards the accessibility in museums for individuals with visual impairment, there are a lot of differences among museums regarding the type of services for access and their systematic character (EBU, 2012; Sandell & Dodd, 2010:10). As a result for people with visual disabilities there a lot of restrictions (EBU, 2012).

For example people with visual disabilities may face difficulties due to lack of permanent access facilitations. Many of these practices such as touch exhibitions may be temporary and limited in terms of the exhibits (Boussaid, 2004; Candlin, 2003; Weisen, 2008). Limited choices for people with visual impairments do not only concern the number of museums which offer special provisions or other programmes and facilities. Limited choices concern also the kind or the number of available objects to touch:

*“Usually, only a selection of objects, exhibitions and spaces are, to a greater or lesser extent, barrier-free to disabled people... the information that is accessible to visually impaired people only represent a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of all the information provided by museums”.*

(Weisen, 2008:247)

Of course, many museums are willing to adapt their programs to the needs of the group of people with visual impairments or offer a touch tour if requested and if there is an appointment. But in these cases there are other limitations. For example is difficult for a blind person to decide spontaneously to visit a museum or to enjoy a visit in a museum as member of a sighted company or as an independent visitor without prior arrangements (Boussaid, 2004; Reich et al., 2011). Choices for people with visual disabilities are conditional and not unconditional and people with visual disabilities do not have the same choices as the sighted people or they have to make a lot of arrangements for a visit to a museum. Recent research of EBU (2012:19) confirms that for people with visual impairment *“choice in museums is poor and that it bears no relationship with the extraordinary cultural significance held in the world museums”*. It is important to note also that often museums seem to ignore that people with disabilities are not a homogeneous group. People with visual impairments are different not only in terms of visual impairment (e.g. blind, partially sighted, congenitally blind or late blind) but also as individuals with different characteristics (different interests, different educational, social, cultural backgrounds, etc (Candlin, 2003; De Coster & Loots, 2004).

Other limitations may concern the low degree of satisfaction on the part of people with visual impairments According to Candlin (2003:102) museums often offer programmes

specifically for blind people. In order not to exclude anyone these programmes (or classes) have a low level and this is not enough for people who have expectations for something more interesting or more sophisticated. Other difficulties may concern the lack of museums' staff training in order to support or to address people with visual impairments (Reich et al.; Lisney et al; Weisen, 2008), the lack of access to information or the lack of publicity. As Candlin (2003:105) refers people with visual impairments do not want to spend their time trying to find the resources of a museum or arguing and explaining their case. Also, few museums provide accessible and clear information on their websites which make more difficult and complicated the decision to visit a museum (EBU, 2012:19).

### **3. Greek Context**

#### **3.1 Relevant legislation**

Regarding the Greek context it is important to note that the rights of people with disabilities are constitutionally protected (Hellenic Parliament, article 21:3, 6). Recently, Greece has validated by relevant law the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Law 4074/2012). Regarding museums the very concept of access to cultural heritage is also a key component for its protection (Law 3028/2002). One of the most important steps towards accessibility in Greece – including museums - was definitely the initiative for an accessible built environment. The introduction of relevant legislation and instructions in the 1980s according to the idea of designing for all towards an accessible environment had a significant impact on museums as public spaces (Kanari & Vemi, 2012; Polychroniou, 2004).

#### **3.2 Issues of accessibility with emphasis on educational and social role of the museums**

For people with visual disabilities one of the first important steps for access to culture and museums was the foundation of the Tactual Museum in Athens by the Greek Lighthouse for the Blind during 80s. The collections of the Tactual Museum consist of replicas from important artifacts of different historical periods (Asideri, 2004; Benaki, 1991; Argyropoulos & Kanari, 2015). As far as the educational dimension of access is concerned, museums in Greece have expressed their interest for access for disabled people and children mainly with the development of educational programs. Generally speaking, Greek museums at first got interested in educational programs for school children. Some of them have carried out educational programs for children with disabilities and special educational needs from the 1980s and 1990s (Kanari



& Argyropoulos, 2014; Kanari & Vemi, 2012; Ministry of Culture, 2004; Velioti-Georgopoulou & Tountasaki, 1997). Those first initiatives were important steps towards access if we consider that in Greece the museum educational programs for school children appeared almost at the same time - in the early 1980s - and were expanded during the next decades (Kanari & Argyropoulos, 2014; Kanari & Vemi, 2012).

Gradually, there was a more intense interest for the access of people with disabilities to museums in Greece and especially during the 2000s when the proclamation of 2003 as the European Year of People with Disabilities and the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Athens in 2004 had a great impact on museums to issues such as the accessibility (Argyropoulos & Kanari, 2015; Kanari & Argyropoulos, 2014; Levi, 2005; Tsitouri, 2004).

Over the past years Greek museums have developed various activities for people with visual disabilities as for example: educational programmes for schoolchildren with disabilities (Kanari & Argyropoulos, 2014; Kanari & Vemi, 2012; Tsitouri, 2004), accessibility programs<sup>1</sup>, participation to international initiatives such as “Art Beyond Sight Awareness Month” of the International Organization Art Education for the Blind (AEB)<sup>2</sup>, temporary tactile and multisensory exhibitions and programs (Chaitas & Trada, 2010; Emmanouil & Avgoulas, 2011; Kalou, 2012), touch guided tours and permanent touch tours (Konstantios, 2008), as for example the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens (Argyropoulos & Kanari, 2015). It is worth mentioning that in the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens there is a permanent touch tour since 2007, with selected original artifacts in the main collections (EBU, 2012; Konstantios, 2008). Also, it has to be mentioned that museums often ask to collaborate with associations for the blind and individuals with visual disabilities in order to develop programs, services or material accessible to blind visitors such as information in braille, tactile diagrams, touch tours, etc (Emmanouil & Avgoulas, 2011; Kalou, 2012; Konstantios, 2008). In addition, Ministry of Culture has given directions for the improvement of access to museums for people with visual disabilities such the permission for touch regarding selected objects or exhibits in open spaces of museums, the permission for guide-dogs in museums, the information in braille or the creation – if this is possible – of spaces of touch or touch tours.

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<sup>1</sup>See: State Museum of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki and the program titled “Touching Art” for people with visual disabilities (<http://greekstatemuseum.com/kmst/education/accessibility.html>, (accessed February 23, 2015).

<sup>2</sup>See: National Archaeological Museum in Athens (<http://www.namuseum.gr/museum/pressreleases/2009/pr05-2009/pressrelease05-gr.html> (accessed, February, 23, 2015).

**However**, people with visual disabilities face many difficulties in Greek museums since the majority of tactile exhibitions are temporary, rare and usually take place in big cities such as in Athens and in Thessaloniki and less in province. Also, published studies for the evaluation of these activities are very limited as well as vague. Regarding the development of museum educational programmes for schoolchildren with visual impairments, museums in Greece seem to confront many difficulties – especially in province - such as the lack of infrastructure, financial resources and training in disability issues (Kanari & Argyropoulos, 2014).

## **4. Bulgarian Context**

### **4.1 Relative legislation**

There are mainly two fundamental Laws that secure the rights of Visually Impaired individuals (adults) in Bulgaria, in general:

1. Law for Protection, Rehabilitation and Social Integration of 1996 and its newest revision known now as Law for Integration of Individuals with Disabilities of 2010.
2. Law for Protection from Discrimination of 2009.

The first Law is directly connected to the different rights of all people with disabilities, including those with visual impairments to all aspects of societal life.

The second Law ensures the lack of segregation or any form of discrimination of any citizen, including the Visually Impaired.

According to the Law for people with disabilities since 2004 the Ministry of Education provides a supportive environment for integrated education of children with disabilities. According to Section (Art) 20, high schools provide a supportive environment, special equipment, suitable teaching materials and additional instruction, supporting the process of training and assessment of people with disabilities. Section 4 is specifically dedicated to creating accessible living environment. According to Section (Art) 33 Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works creates conditions for accessible living and architectural environment for people with disabilities by developing regulations, rules, norms and standards for:

1. Urban area and its elements;
2. Buildings, facilities and their components;
3. The elements to adapt existing public buildings and surrounding environment.

According to Section (Art) 34, the Ministry of Transport creates conditions for access of disabled people to transport, developing specific regulations and standards in this regard:

1. Providing accessible transportation for public use;
2. The introduction of technical devices in public space and public transport to facilitate movement of people with disabilities;
3. Providing special conditions for movement, stopping, parking and stay on road vehicles driven by people with disabilities or transporting people with disabilities;
4. Provide easy access to public transportation for people with disabilities, accompanied by guide dogs.

In 2009 Decree № 4 of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works was published. It deals with the design, implementation and maintenance in accordance with the requirements for accessible environment for the whole population, including people with disabilities.

In 2006 the UN adopted a very important document – the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It was ratified by the European Union in 2010, and by Bulgarian National Assembly in 2012. The Convention gives active role of people with disabilities and raises the slogan: "All for us, only with us." The document provides definitions of such key concepts related to the adaptation of the environment, such as: facilities, universal design and so on. Multidirectional Convention regulates the access to the environment of persons with disabilities.

Regarding issues of accessibility for individuals with visual impairments in Bulgaria the dominance of specialized institutions and the isolation of the country during the totalitarian regime kept adapting the environment for people with disabilities in the background. However, as a beginning in this area can be considered the color marking of taxis and setting guide rails on the sidewalks in front of the new building of the Union of the Blind in Bulgaria. Using the English experience in 1979 the staircases, railings and floors with of two buildings were marked with colors and with Braille signs – these were the Central Council of the Union of The Blind in Sofia and the National Rehabilitation Center in Plovdiv. The first comprehensive concept regarding the adaptation of environment was implemented in the construction of the new building of the school for visually impaired children in Varna, which was opened in 1985. For the first time in the country in its construction were realized basically the standards for special lighting, special visual and tactile signs and markings, staining the walls and layout of the yard lanes.

In 1987 the Union of the Blind in Bulgaria made proposals to the management of Sofia metro regarding the design of the subway to bear in mind a special mark for the visually impaired. Unfortunately almost nothing in this direction was done then. After the

commissioning of the first stations of the subway, Bulgarian Association for Education of Visually Impaired Children (BAOZZD), together with the Sofia regional organization of the Union of the Blind in Bulgaria introduced a new concept, the result of which was the special marking of the metro stations: the first and the last steps were colored, the approaches to the platforms were also marked through yellow tactile safety line of 80 cm. from the edge of the platform. In addition, elevators for people with physical and multiple disabilities were placed in the metro stations. Recommendations are also given for the renovation of the building of the central train station in Sofia.

The mid 80s of the twentieth century on the entrances of the buildings of the Union of the Blind in Bulgaria were placed the first sound beepers. In 1986 in Sofia the first sound beeper on a traffic light in Sofia was installed. Later this initiative has found application in other large cities. In the late 90s of last century began the process of chamfering of the sidewalks at intersections of major streets and boulevards in Sofia. A notable progress in adapting the environment occurred after the entry of Bulgaria into the European Union in 2007. Braille signage on elevators, enlarged numbers of the vehicles of public transport, verbal messages at key stops, as well as modifications of the environment in public schools were provided. However, much remains to be done to overcome physical barriers that visually impaired face in the country.

In 2008 under a Leonardo da Vinci project, called PROTECT, where Sofia University was a partner, few check-lists were developed, one of which is directed to the access to University buildings by visually impaired students (see Annex 9.1). A recent publication in Bulgarian language regarding the issues of access of visually impaired people to the environment includes the “Handbook for adapting the school environment for the visually impaired” by Tzvetkova-Arsova & Radoulov (2013) (published in Sofia by Phenomenon publ. house).

#### **4.2 Issues of accessibility with emphasis on educational and social role of the museums**

As mentioned above, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been ratified by a national Law on 26.01.2012, and was published in the Governmental official paper in issue 12 / 10.02.2012. Art (section) 30 in it guarantees the principle of equality and non-discrimination through different measures.

Some of the Key strategic documents adopted by the Government of Republic of Bulgaria in connection with the policies related to people with disabilities are:

- **Strategy to ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities 2008 - 2015;**
- **Action Plan on equal opportunities for people with disabilities 2014 - 2015.**

#### **4.2.1 Strategy to ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities 2008 - 2015.**

The national policy for people with disabilities is governed by the National Strategy for equal opportunities for people with disabilities 2008 - 2015, which was updated in 2012 in accordance with the mechanism for monitoring the implementation of guidelines to ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The strategy contains 8 goals. Goal 7 “Ensuring equal opportunities for sport, recreation, tourism and participation in cultural life” includes the following texts:

- Participation in cultural events and entertainment;
- Conditions for development and integrated training in the field of science, art, sports for children with disabilities;
- Creating conditions for development of talented children with disabilities by encouraging their creativity and stimulating art schools and creative unions of artists, musicians, artists, museums, galleries and cultural institutions to implement programs involving children disabilities;
- Availability of artistic works;
- Ability of people with disabilities to create and develop their creative skills;
- Trained staff available for sports, entertainment, tourism, culture and other communication with people with disabilities;
- Development of projects for art, culture and sport for people with disabilities and their organizations;
- Recreation, sport and tourism such as hotels, beaches, sports centers, gyms and others made accessible to persons with disabilities;
- Promotion of sports organizations to create opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in sports activities designed special schemes and sports games;

- Creation of both specialized teams composed only of people with disabilities, and mixed teams of people with and without disabilities;
- Preparation of athletes to participate in European, World Paralympics and Special Olympics. Provision of facilities, coaches and financing;
- Recognition of sport achievements of people with disabilities adequately to other athletes;
- Established system for the promotion of public and private organizations in the field of culture, sports, leisure and tourism to undertake regular training on awareness of disability for their staff as a mainstream activity;
- Creation of incentives for public and private media to actively discuss issues in their programs on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities and non-discrimination against them.

Essential are the measures in Objective 1 “Creation of environment adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities”, which includes an accessible environment for people with disabilities, accessible information and communication, training of stakeholders and institutions on accessibility issues at points A and B affecting people with disabilities, and to develop applied research activities for the development of goods, services, facilities and equipment with universal design within the meaning of the definition of Section 2 of the Convention of UN.

#### **4.2.2 The action plan for equal opportunities for people with disabilities 2014 - 2015.**

The action plan for equal opportunities for people with disabilities 2014 - 2015, plant to adopt a strategy to ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities. It provides measures on participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. Of particular importance are the activities foreseen for the provision of public awareness on the problems of people with disabilities. The specific measures in the plan are related to:

- Ensuring physical access to public buildings, housing, open spaces and workplaces;
- Ensuring equal opportunities for sport, recreation, tourism and participation in cultural life;

- Increasing the level of public awareness of the problems and opportunities of people with disabilities and change public attitudes towards them.

In the section related to the museums (A) the text postulates:

Museums and art galleries operate on providing equal access of visitors to the museum spaces. Starting point in this direction are the texts of the Cultural Heritage Act, which oblige cultural institutes to provide appropriate conditions for access to museum exhibitions to people with disabilities (Section 186 of the Law on Cultural Heritage).

Children, students and people with disabilities pay reduced prices or are exempt from payment of an admission ticket (Sections 185-187 of the Law on Cultural Heritage).

Important is also Regulation № 4 of the Ministry of Regional Development from 01.07.2009 for the design, construction and maintenance of buildings in accordance with the requirements for accessible environment for the population, including people with disabilities.

Museums should work not only for the physical access of people with disabilities to exposures, but also on educational impact of exhibits on people with disabilities.

It is necessary to carry out an amendment of regulations to regulate access to the museums of accompanying persons with disabilities and the development of models of movable cultural property for blind visitors.

In the field of the **international cooperation**, it should be noted that on 28.07.2013, Bulgaria acceded to the Treaty of Marrakech of the World Organization of Intellectual Property to facilitate access to published works/materials for blind and visually impaired persons or for people with other visual disabilities that prevent them from reading printed publications.

In November 2014 the Ministry of Culture in Bulgaria accepted an official Concept with concrete proposals for improving the current legislation. Section A is dedicated to the field of culture.

#### **A. In the field of culture:**

In order to update the current legislation and to provide greater access for people with disabilities changes in the following directions are necessary:

1. Providing free entry to museums to companions of people with disabilities (sighted guides) and provision of texts for blind visitors;
2. Publishing of methodological guidelines for the implementation of the Cultural Heritage Act in order to provide access for people with disabilities to the movable and immovable cultural assets;

3. Changes to be made in order to provide visual or other appropriate forms of architectural access to cultural values suitable for blind visitors;
4. Collection of statistics from the Register of museums in order to collect information of visits of children, students and adults with disabilities. To collect statistics about the staff qualified to serve people with disabilities;
5. Creation of copies and replicas of cultural values or other forms especially for the blind;
6. Establishment of a special award for achievements in the field of culture and arts for people with disabilities;
7. Annual changes for updating the rules which are implemented in order to encourage people with disabilities to participate in cultural life as anticipating sensory forms of theater, introducing different approaches and forms for museums diversify their perceptions of exposures for people with disabilities;
8. Cultural organizations to hire specialists trained in audio descriptions and other forms needed for the activity to attract a larger audience, including people with disabilities;
9. Preparation of guidelines or recommendations to the community centers indicating that in activities with children with disabilities qualified persons are recommended to be engaged in the work with these children and assist them in carrying out creative activities;
10. Creating a regulation on online access to libraries by changes in the Public Libraries Act;
11. With the adoption of the Marrakech Agreement (27/06/2013) The World Organization for Intellectual Property, aimed to facilitate the access to published/written materials for the blind, low vision people or persons with other disabilities who cannot read ink-print, and defines a set of international rules to ensure that at national level there will be some limitations or exceptions to the copyrights in favor of these persons. The agreement requires each country to provide in their national copyright laws limitations or exceptions to the right of reproduction, distribution etc. in order to improve the availability of texts and written materials in



an accessible formats for people with disabilities. Copy in an accessible format (eg. paper book, e-book, audio-book etc.) should be made in alternative type and format so the access to this written material is as convenient as to the sighted persons. Upcoming is the pending ratification of the Agreement by the local parliaments of the Member States. Requirements laid down in the Marrakech Agreement, should become part of the Bulgarian copyright law by the end of. July 2015.

## **5 Hungarian Context**

### **5.1 Relevant legislation**

The Basic Law (Constitution) of Hungary is declaring the rights of people with disabilities among which the right for equal opportunities in access and participation in culture. There are three other Acts in relationship with equal opportunities of people living with disabilities all of them referring to access and participation directly or indirectly in cultural life.

In chronological order, the first law is the Built Environment and Conservation Act LXXVIII 1997, the second one is the Rights and Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities Act XXVI 1998 and third one is the Equal Treatment and Promotion of Equal Opportunities Act CXXV 2003.

The National Disability Council of Hungary declares several rights, including the right to cultural opportunities of citizens with disability in its National Disability Program.

Further, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN 2006 was ratified and signed by Hungary in the first among other nations. The Hungarian Parliament accepted it in the XCII Act 2007 and together with the Optional Protocol it was announced on 06 07 2007.

This was printed in Braille, in easy language for those with intellectual and with reading disability and in sign language for deaf people in 2014.

The above mentioned Acts and the relating rules and provisions had several modifications during the last years since November 2011. The goal of all these modifications was to reach more sophisticated content.

### **5.2 Issues of accessibility with emphasis on educational and social role of the museums**

In museums and cultural facilities the physical environment and services should be created in such a way that as many people as possible can gain access to culture. For this purpose a short publication was published in Hungary in 2008. In the publication rehabilitation engineers, museum experts and special education professional were expressing attitude, knowledge and practice about open access participation to exhibitions. The approach was integrating all aspects

of individuals living with diverse special needs including blindness and low vision (Arpassy, Gyorgy, Kormanyos, Pandual, & Pronay, 2008).

Visits to museums and participation in museum programs is based on the accessibility of the built environment and the access to service and information offered there (Arpassy, Gyorgy, Kormanyos, Pandual, & Pronay, 2008). For testing accessibility and participation we have to judge 3 aspects: the public transport to and recognition of the building, the access to and within the building and access to service and information offered in advance and within the building.

When assessing the built environment we meet the unique specialty that most of the museums are situated in buildings which were built centuries ago. It is a basic aspect “how an historic building which was not designed with disabled people in mind can be made into an accessible environment for all users in the twenty first century” (Ginley, 2013). From physical aspects we have to focus on transportation, recognition of the building and the entrance, barrier free location and orientation inside the building. For orientation and location of the exhibits to those with functional vision, suitable lighting is necessary. The type, placement and illumination of signage used are crucial (Calori, 2007). Personal assistance and help provided by the exhibition depends on attitude and knowledge of employee about special needs. In Hungary, we organize a 4 day course for museum staff on skills to assist visitors with different disabilities in museums. One of the most successful courses is “Do you understand? Yes, I do! How to have visitors with disability in museums? (in Hungarian: "Érted?! - Érttem!" Hogyan fogadjuk fogyatékos embertársainkat múzeumainkban? <http://mokk.skanzen.hu/erted-ertem-hogyan-fogadjuk-fogyatekos-embertarsainkat-muzeumainkban.html>) organized by the Museum Education and Training Center (Múzeumi Oktatási és Képzési Központ). Topics, such as equal opportunities to access information, physical accessibility, and cooperation with interest groups of people with disability, special needs of those with visual, hearing and physical impairments, complex activities for individuals with intellectual disabilities are all included in the training course.

Several exhibitions were created for people with visual impairment in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. In the exhibitions, copies of objects, dresses and models were combined with written descriptions (“The time of Sigmund”, “Copts in Egypt”). In one of these exhibitions (“... and then the Inca’s arrived”) special descriptions of objects were audio taped for audio guide use. One of the latest events was a 5 days exhibition in cooperation with the Miro Museum of Barcelona to exhibit tactile versions of Miro’s pictures. The last exhibition ran for 5 month and included 8 tactile and reduced in size versions of Rembrandt’s pictures together with models of typical objects of the time. The last two exhibitions were sponsored by the 90 decibel

Foundation. This foundation is also preparing audio narration to films and theater performances for visually impaired visitors ([www.90decibel.hu](http://www.90decibel.hu)). A travelling exhibition is organized by the Kezzelfogható Foundation (Tangible Foundation) since 2013 (<http://kezzelfogható.hu>). There are several other examples of different approaches of accessible exhibitions all over the country. Some of these exhibitions mentioned here are successful and/or got a lot of critical comments by visually impaired visitors. Cooperation and joint programs of museums and schools are getting more and more popular in Hungary. Unfortunately we cannot report in detail because there is not enough information about the ratio of pupils with special educational needs who visiting these events.

## **6 Romanian Context**

### **6.1 Relevant Legislation**

Regulation no.89/ 05.02.2010 for the modification and completion of the Methodological norm of applying the regulations of Law no.448/2006 regarding the promotion and rights of people with disabilities, approved by the Government Resolution no.268/2007 (Official Gazette no.103/15.02.2010).

Order no.369/ 17.08.2009 of the president of the National Authority of People with Disabilities regarding the approval of the methodology of monitoring the implementing projects in the domain of protection of people with disabilities (Official Gazette no.611/08.09.2009)

Order no.590 from 12.10.2008 regarding the approval of Instructions for the application of article no.78 from The Law no.448/2006 of the protection and promotion of the rights of people with disabilities.

Order no.11/09.01.2008 of the president of the National Authority for People with Disability regarding the development of the Evaluation Methodology of the projects and criteria used to select the projects in the field of protection, integration and social inclusion of people with disabilities ( Official Gazette no.29/15.01.2008)

Law no.448/2006 regarding the protection and promotion of rights of people with disabilities.

Government Resolution no.1175 from 29.09.2005 regarding the approval of the National strategy for the Protection, integration and social inclusion of people with disabilities during 2006-2013.

Although in theory the legal framework-The Law no. 448/2006, regarding the protection and the promotion of equal rights for persons with disabilities, contributes to the implementation of the European regulations which refer to the accessibility in public places, in

practice, this law is not correctly applied. The lack of economical resources is the main argument underlined by the management staff of the public institutions regarding to the fact that places are not accessible.

### **The Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union:**

Art.1 - “Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected”

Art. 21 –“Any discrimination based on disability should be prohibited”

Art.26 - “The Union recognises and respects the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational inclusion and participation in the life of the community”. (available on <http://eur-ex.europa.eu/ro/treaties/dat/32007X1214/htm/C2007303RO.01000101.htm>).

The Law no.221/2010 for ratification the UN Convention of the rights of people with disabilities, adopted in New York at the General Assembly of the United Nations at 13 December 2006 was signed by Romania in 26 September 2007. The Convention refers to the following information at article 30.

### **Article 30 - Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport**

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities:

- a. Enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats;
- b. Enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats;
- c. Enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance.

2. States Parties shall take appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities to have the opportunity to develop and utilize their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society.

3. States Parties shall take all appropriate steps, in accordance with international law, to ensure that laws protecting intellectual property rights do not constitute an unreasonable or

discriminatory barrier to access by persons with disabilities to cultural materials.

4. Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture.

5. With a view to enabling persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities, States Parties shall take appropriate measures:

- a. To encourage and promote the participation, to the fullest extent possible, of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels;
- b. To ensure that persons with disabilities have an opportunity to organize, develop and participate in disability-specific sporting and recreational activities and, to this end, encourage the provision, on an equal basis with others, of appropriate instruction, training and resources;
- c. To ensure that persons with disabilities have access to sporting, recreational and tourism venues;
- d. To ensure that children with disabilities have equal access with other children to participation in play, recreation and leisure and sporting activities, including those activities in the school system;
- e. To ensure that persons with disabilities have access to services from those involved in the organization of recreational, tourism, leisure and sporting activities. (Available at <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>).

In the following we will present the report elaborated on the base of official information collected by the Institution of Public Policies in Bucharest using the law no.544/2011 regarding free access to information of public interest. The information refers to 2011-2012 period and realises the monitoring of the implementation of the convention that is article 9- Accessibility, article 13-Access to justice, article 19- Independent life and inclusion into community, article 27- Work and inclusion in work. The report analyses the first two years after the implementation of the convention, saying that Romania has not been done significant progresses regarding the implementation of the legal and present norms in the sense of assuring equal access of the individuals with disabilities to all domains of social- economical life. The report states that if at the previous report there was distinguished a low capacity of our country to implement concrete measures for an effective implementation of the Convention, at this moment an

inertness of the public authorities can be named as cause of the lack of implementing the obligations of assuring equal participant of people with disabilities to social life. (Monitoring Report of Implementation of UN Convention of people with disabilities in Romania, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, art.9, art.13, art. 19, art.27, Institute of Public Policies in Romania, December 2012).

The Law no. 448/2006 republished in 2008, the law which refers to the protection and the promotion of persons with disabilities rights is the most important law that refers to the rights of people with disabilities in Romania. (Available on <http://www.anph.ro/admin/doc/upload/serviciu/LEGE%20nr.%20448-2006%20%20vers.%20consolidata%2026072012.doc>). The law contains information regarding access of people with disabilities at the public, cultural and social life under section 4. Section 4 is comprised of three strands: Culture, sport, and tourism.

#### **Art. 21**

(1) The responsible public authorities must facilitate the access for the persons with disabilities to the cultural values, to the main heritage places from the tourism and sportive fields and to places for spending free time.

(2) To ensure the access to cultural, sportive and tourism places the authorities of public administration have to:

a) facilitate the participation of the persons with disabilities and their families to cultural, sportive and tourism events;

b) organize in collaboration or based on partnership with judicial, public or private persons, cultural, sportive, tourism or for spending free time activities or events;

c) ensure the possibility to practice different sports for persons with disabilities;

d) support the activity of the sportive organizations which represent persons with disabilities.

(3) The child with disability as well as his accompanying persons has free access to different spectacles, museums, artistic or sportive events.

(4) The adults with disabilities will have the possibility to participate in spectacles, museums, artistic and sportive events as it follows:

a) the adult with severe and profound disabilities and the accompanying person will enter free of charge at the above mentioned events;

b) the adult with moderate and mild disabilities can buy entrance tickets in the same conditions as pupils and students.

(5) The sum of money corresponding to the rights mentioned in paragraph (3) and (4) is covered from the state budget, through the budget of the Ministry of Culture and Cults, of the

National Agency for Sports, through local budget, or depending on the case, through the budgets of the public or private organizers.

One of the documents of major importance is the **National Strategy of Social Inclusion for people with disabilities 2014-2020 developed by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly issued in 2014 in Bucharest with the title “Social policies from the rehabilitation of the individual to the reform of the society”**. (Available at [http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/protectie\\_sociala/DPPD/2014-01-](http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/protectie_sociala/DPPD/2014-01-31_Strategie_DPPD-2014-2020.pdf)

31\_Strategie\_DPPD-2014-2020.pdf ). According to the report the society has the obligation to eliminate all the barriers that prevents or limits the inclusion and active participation of people with disabilities to social life. The accessibility of the common resources of the community (facilities, services and products related to housing, health and rehabilitation, education and vocational training, work, politics, sports) for the use of people with disabilities represents the essence of an open society. The scope of the strategy sustains the increase of quality of life of people with disabilities in respect with independence, security, dignity, decision and personal responsibility.

The report states that accessibility is not just the first of the eight domains of reference of the European Strategy, but also a precondition of the other seven: Participation, Equality, Employment, Education and training, Social Protection, Health, External action. The National Strategy specifies under the Accessibility section specific objectives for Information and Communication, from which we select the following two:

16. the assurance from the public authorities of modalities of accessible information and communication for people with disabilities ( sign-language interpreting, accessible formats of public documents, public display, such as Braille, audio records, simplified versions, large characters, accessible web pages).

17. the assurance from the art and cultural institutions of accessible modalities of presentation for people with sensory disabilities or learning disabilities (tactile maps, audio/video materials).

According to the Law no.448/2006 regarding the protection and promotion of people with disabilities, accessibility is the ensemble of measures and adaptations of physical, informational and communication environment according to the needs of people with disabilities, essential factor in exerting the rights and fulfils the obligations of people with disabilities in the society.

The law through which it is mandatory to lay out public, cultural, sportive institutions, or institutions designated for spending free time, houses built from public funds, means for public transportation, public telephones cabins and access ways in order to be accessible for persons

with disabilities is Government Emergency Ordinance no. 102/1999 (paragraph 11) with the subsequent amendments. The specific requirements regarding the persons with disabilities refer to their safety while using the public spaces. The authorisation for building the above mentioned spaces can be obtained only if the projector follows the Norms regarding adapting civil builds and their corresponding urban space to the special needs of the persons with disabilities, indicator NP 051/2000, approved through the Order 649/2001.

When the old builds go through a process of modernization, of rearrangements, of consolidation or of repairing and there is impossible to fallow all the performance level established by the above mentioned Norms, compensatory measurements are required to be adopted to ensure the best possible protection solutions. An exception from the stipulations of the above mentioned norms is the personal buildings and their annexes.

The following categories of beneficiaries are to be considered: persons with motor disabilities, persons with visual disabilities, persons with hearing disabilities. All the arranged parking lots will provide reserved and signalled places by using the international sign, at least 4% from the whole amount of the parking spaces, but no less than two free of charge parking spaces designated for persons with disabilities and their means of transportation (art. 16).

In the following we present also the Order no.559 from 22.10.2008 regarding the Specific Quality Standards for residential centres, daily centres and protected shelters and home for adults with disabilities, that specifies at Module 5 the standards for Social Inclusion. This is important as it specifies that residential institutions must approach and support the access to the life of the community. Standard no.14 stipulates that the residential centre assures the beneficiaries with conditions of participating in activities of inclusion/ re-inclusion and as a result the beneficiaries are encouraged and supported to participate to the social life of the community. In the following we present some of the minimum conditions that will support access to the social life of the community.

- 14.1. The residential center assures services of inclusion in the family and community based on the Individual Program of Social Inclusion.
- 14.2. The residential center assures to the beneficiaries support to access the community, services of education, information and counseling, sign language interpreting, judicial representation and counseling, vocational counselling, social assistance.



- 14.3. The residential center encourages and supports the beneficiaries to maintain relations with the family, legal representative, friends- through correspondence, visits and community activities.
- 14.6. The residential center assures the information of the beneficiaries on the values promoted by the community regarding obligations and rights as citizens.
- 14.8. The residential center supports the beneficiaries to know and use community services: mailing and communication, education, public transport, medical and rehabilitation services, vocational services, according to their needs and individual options.
- 14.9. The residential center encourages beneficiaries to express their opinions and preferences in projecting and organizing social activities, their opinions being taken into consideration for their daily programs.
- 14.11. The residential center assures to the beneficiaries the necessary conditions for organizing social and leisure time activities: human resources, equipment and materials, means of transportation.

## **6.2 Issues of accessibility with emphasis on educational and social role of the museums**

### **6.2.1 Relevant Projects about accessibility and museums**

**The Association for the Urban Development has carried out the project with the title „Feel Art in 6 museums” financed by Orange Foundation, a project that had as main objectives:**

- The introduction in the museums of equipments and services adapted to people with disabilities ( dedicated tangible exhibitions, catalogues, Braille maos, tactile carpets, audio guides, sign lanfguage interpreters)
- Organization of visits and free workshops
- Awareness and increase of oportunites for access to museums of people with disabilities. (<https://simtearta.wordpress.com/>, <http://www.simtearta.ro>).
- (see also Annex 9.2)

**InclusivART at the Art Collection Museum: a project to facilitate access to art for people with special needs**

The National Art Museum of Romania is has organized in 2013 the ***InclusivART*** project addresses to people with sensory, motor, cognitive, emotional disabilities and disorders. Within

this project financed by the Administration of the National Cultural fund, at the Art Collections Museums there will be a space dedicated for people with special needs, a space with materials and products that will increase awareness for the target groups regarding museum and art collections, history of art. The tactile gallery of the Art Collections Museum will be a permanent explorative and interactive space that will contain replicas and tactile diagrams of the art works exhibited in the museum, kits and multisensory models and also a Braille catalogue. The project also aims to develop an educational program adapted by content and format for different categories of people with disabilities.

**Second edition of the exhibition: REHA for the Blind in Romania (29-30 May 2014):  
The world through touch and sound organized by Chance for the Blind.**

Foundation in partnership with National Library of Romania and National Council of Disability. The activities proposed in this edition refer to:

- Meeting of people with visual impairment together with support services and organisations to find solutions for a better independence
- Presentations of organisations and companies that offer services for people with disabilities
- Exhibition with international participation with modern technology for the use of people with visual impairments
- Movie presentation with audio description for people with visual impairment
- Sport and recreative activities for people with visual impairment (<http://www.mnar.arts.ro/inclusivart/galerie-tactila>).

## **7 Overall Conclusions**

So far, a review of the literature (e.g. reports, papers) was conducted with research data and theoretical perspectives regarding museums and people with visual impairments. A thorough search of databases (e.g. Ebsco. Eric) took place to search for publications relevant to the topic of BaGMIVI project. Also, local search was conducted regarding the Greek, Bulgarian, Romanian and Hungarian contexts through local journals and books, which often cannot be traced through databases. Each participant country provided evidence of important steps that were made throughout the year in regard of accessibility, mainly talking about legislation and the ratified Convention of Human Rights that become operational and visible in

all National Policies and Action Plans. There are examples of judicial regulations, projects developed by public institutions and NGO's, organized activities within educational institutions and associations, campaigns in term of accessibility, publications and studies carried out by researchers, all of these proving the interest in this matter. However, important issues remain uncovered and not approached such as permanency, expertise in the field, professional training and self-determination

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### **Open Educational Resources**

Act XCII and Optional Protocol (Ratification of the „Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN 2006, by the Hungarian Parliament) (2007) [http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=A0700092.TV#lbj5param](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A0700092.TV#lbj5param) Downloaded: 31.03.2015.

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International Council of Museums, <http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition/>  
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State Museum of Contemporary Art,  
<http://greekstatemuseum.com/kmst/education/accessibility.html> Tactual Museum,  
<http://www.tactualmuseum.gr/> 90 Decibel Foundation [www.90decibel.hu](http://www.90decibel.hu) Downloaded: 03.04.2015.

## 9. Annexes

### 9.1 Bulgarian Context

#### Check-list on Easy Access to University Buildings for Visually Impaired

Access to environments and buildings is the right and the physical ability to reach any environment needed without any difficulties, independently, effectively, in a socially prestigious and valuable way. The concepts “environmentally-friendly” and “universal design” are commonly adopted lately to show the need of adaptations and modifications required for all people with disabilities, incl. Visually Impaired.

Item	Very good	Good	Un satisfactory
<b>Visual access</b> 1. Contrast in complex areas: halls, intersections etc. 2. Contrast of particular facilities e.g. bathrooms 3. Contrast in hazardous areas and objects 4. Contrast of light switches 5. Contrast of doors 6. Good illumination of corridors 7. Good illumination of stairs 8. Highlighting potential hazards 9. Avoiding glare 10. Avoiding shadows 11. Gradual change of lightening levels 12. Specific lightening of special areas as waiting areas, bathrooms, end of corridors etc. 13. Use of appropriate and different colors in halls, classrooms, bathrooms and other facilities 14. Coloring of stairs curbs 15. Coloring of top and bottom of ramps 16. Coloring of telephone boots <b>Tactile Access</b> 17. Tactile indicators on handrails 18. Tactile warning strips at the top and bottom of stairs 20. Tactile warning strips of top and bottom of ramps 19. Use of leading handrail for main corridors or directing to main offices 20. Use of embossed letters for indication of important places as offices, classrooms, facilities etc. for non-Braille users <b>Use of Special Signs and Landmarks for Visually Impaired</b> 21. Use of strip lines in corridors 22. Appropriate signs' size (about 18 cm for a 5 m distance of viewing) 23. Appropriate placement of signs – hanged on walls, panels, boards etc. on height between 0.9 m and 1.8 m			

24. Easy access to lift call buttons 25. Use of special indicators in lifts – large print, Braille signs or talking version 26. Use of the universal accessibility logo: accessible services for Visually impaired, Braille symbols etc. 27. Braille signs at important places 28. Presence of Braille, embossed letters and large print orientation charts/panels/boards			
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## 9.2 Romanian Context

Order for Evaluating and Monitoring Accessibility in Public Space based on Order 189/2013 through which NP051/2012 norms were approved- Published in Romanian Official Gazette, Section I, no. 121 bis/5.III.2013 (available at <http://www.infocons.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/NP-051-normativ-privind-acesibilizarea-spatiului-urban.pdf> )

No.	Types of analyzed aspects	Possible solutions
<b>Accessibility in urban space</b>		
<b>Walking area</b>		
1.	Is the walking space-street, sidewalk, footpath free of obstacles?	- put away the obstacles.
2.	Are there height differences at the street level for which the solution was the curbstones or the stairs?	-providing alternative passing ways with ramps -smooth the walking ways in order to eliminate the curbstones
3.	The walking way has corresponding dimensions?	-make the necessary adjustments
4.	The walking surface of the foot access way is plane, smooth, rigid and stable or has non-slipping pavement?	- adjusting the walking access ways
5.	If the walking way is on slant, is it adequate built?	-adjusting the way
6.	Can the surface around the walking way be considered dangerous for falling down?	-providing safety elements for walking
<b>Parking lots</b>		
7.	Are there any opportunities for parking places especially created for persons with disabilities?	-adjusting the parking lots, providing at least two special places designated for persons with disabilities
8.	Are the parking places addressed to the persons with disabilities adequate signaled?	- the special parking places should be adequate signaled so that the other users to be aware about the fact that those places are special places reserved for persons with disabilities .
9.	Are the parking places reserved for persons with disabilities situated close to the main entrance point?	-locating the parking places for the persons with disabilities close to the main entrance or close to the entrance especially created for them
10.	How many parking places are reserved for persons with disabilities reported to the total amount of the parking places?	- if the parking lot has less than 50 parking places, at least two different places should be reserved for persons with disabilities
<b>Public transportation</b>		
11.	Does public transportation offer access to the main reference points?	-placing the stations for the public transportation as close as possible to the main reference points (Chapter IV, Section 6).

12.	Are the vehicles and their stations adequate equipped to be accessible for persons with disabilities?	-assessing if public transportation vehicles are adapted to the persons with disabilities special needs.
13.	Do the buses or the mini-buses equipped to ensure transportation for persons with disabilities have proper and accessible parking lots?	-reserving adequate parking places for the buses or the mini-buses which are provided with the necessary equipment for ascending or descending persons using wheel chairs.
<b>Accessibility in buildings</b>		
<b>Building access-ramps for wheel chairs users</b>		
14.	Is there a complementary way for the stairs through which the different heights levels are adjusted?	-providing ramps installed adequately
15.	Is the wheelchairs ramp adequate inclined so that persons with disabilities to be able to use it (the slope should be no more than 5%-8%).	-re-designing or re-locating the wheelchair ramps and the landings
16.	Are there intermediate platforms to rest and wait when the wheelchairs ramps are longer than 10.000 m? Do they have the correct dimensions?	- re-designing or re-locating the wheelchairs ramps and the landings
17.	Do the wheelchairs ramps have handrails and borders when their height is over 30 cm?	-the ramps should be provided with adequate handrails. -lateral borders with h=10 cm should be made
18.	Is the ramp pavement non-slipping?	-non-slipping pavement should be ensured for the wheelchairs ramp, for the intermediate platforms, as well as for the entry and exit areas around the ramps
19.	Is the ramp surface free of any obstacle?	- put away the obstacles.
20.	Is the ramp easy to locate as it is correctly signaled?	-ramps should be signaled by using international symbols and marking signs
21.	Do persons with motor disabilities have access in the building?	-providing a complementary access way with ramps or elevating equipment
<b>Stairs</b>		
22.	Do the stairs have a marking hand sign on both sides?	-providing marking hands signs considering the stairs widths
23.	Is each stair width adequate?	-re-designing stairs
24.	The stairs and the risers dimension are adequate?	-the width of the stair should be no more than 34 cm, the height of the stairs maximum 16cm
25.	Is the finishing of the stairs and risers skid-proof?	-to put skid-proof textures on the stairs and risers -to have skid-proof strips along the stairs

		-to have tactile and visual cues to signal stairs and raisers, cues that are also skid-proof.
26.	Are there any platforms to rest after 12 stairs?	-there won't be more than 12 stairs one after another, with platforms in-between to rest
27.	Are the visual-tactile cues adequate?	-they are arranged adequately
<b>Equipment for vertical movement</b>		
28.	Is there the possibility of access on different floors of people with motor disabilities?	-to have platforms and elevators
29.	Is there enough space for moves in front of the elevators or platforms?	-to verify the dimensions necessary for open spaces
30.	Is the cabin of the elevator allow the access of the individual with disability?	-adequate elevator cabins
31.	Are the commands of the elevator accessible for use?	-accessible elevator commands
<b>Halls- horizontal movement</b>		
32.	Are there any obstacles or stairs in access halls?	-according to norms
33.	Have the halls adequate dimensions?	-according to norms
34.	Is there enough space for maneuvers?	-according to norms
35.	Is the floor skid-proof?	-according to norms
36.	Is there an adequate illumination?	-according to norms
<b>Doors</b>		
37.	Do the doors have adequate width?	The doors need to have a width of 85 cm.
38.	Is the direction of opening the doors adequate?	The direction of the opening of doors will not block movement.
39.	Are there doorways > 1.5 cm	-according to norm
40.	Are there any accessible systems for opening and closing doors?	The opening and closing doors will be adequate and accessible.
41.	Is there enough space for maneuvers in front of the doors?	Access need to be established
42.	Are there any textures on the doors?	-textures on the doors can be used as cues to avoid accidents
43.	Is there any glass part of the door?	-glass will be signalled
<b>Sanitary places</b>		
44.	Is there a sanitary place accessible for people with disabilities?	-in public places there will be at least one accessible sanitary place
45.	Is the way to the sanitary place accessible?	-the level of accessibility will be verified.

46.	The sanitary objects are adequate to be used by people with disabilities?	-must be according to norms
47.	Is the floor skid-proof, even if wet?	-only skid-proof textures will be used
48.	Are there any signaling or warning cues?	-alarm systems are obligatory, can be used even if the person has fallen on the floor
49.	Is there enough space for maneuvers?	-adequate dimensions for space
50.	The direction of opening the door of the sanitary place or bathroom arranged and equipped for accessibility is outwards.	The doors of the sanitary places or bathrooms arranged and equipped for accessibility will always open outwards in order to facilitate a minimum space of maneuver or to allow access if a person is has fallen on the floor.



### 10. Research conducted for Intellectual Output O1 (Needs' Assessment Study)

#### 10.1 Introduction

The improvement of access to museums for individuals with visual impairment is the aim of the BaGMIVI project and is expected to be a step toward the implementation of the right of all people for access to cultural goods. Indeed, as Weisen (2008:249) states the “ethical argument” for the right of all people for access to cultural goods has found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (UN, 1948, article 27:1). Similarly, access to culture has been recognized as a right of people with disabilities in the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006, article 30:1). A key topic of the theoretical basis of the BaGMIVI project is the social model of disability. The adoption of the social model of disability in contrast to the individual or medical model of disability had a significant impact on policies and practices towards disability, including those of museums. The prevalence for many years of the individual or medical model of disability imposed the notion of disability as an individual matter and a “*personal tragedy*”. This notion contributed to the perpetuation of various stereotypes and to the consideration of people with disabilities in terms of therapy or treatment ignoring the role of the society and the barriers that may affect and shape the experience of disability. The social model of disability stresses issues like the failure of the society to respond to the needs of people with disabilities, the barriers and the limitations of the society which isolate and exclude people with disabilities from equal social participation. Such an example constitutes the interaction between museums and people with disability (Argyropoulos & Kanari, 2015; Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 1999; Oliver, 1990; Moussouri, 2007).

BaGMIVI Project is also an initiative which is expected to contribute to the educational and social role of museums with impact to cultural accessibility for individuals with visual impairments. The above is in line with the development of the role of museums as cultural institutions. Museums in the 21st century are not considered only as spaces of collection, preservation and display of objects but institutions with a wide educational and social role (Black, 2005; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, 2007; Sandell, 2002). In this direction museums develop a wide range of services, activities and practices such as educational programmes for schoolchildren and other groups, workshops, seminars, educational material, publications, outreach programmes, loan services, etc. It is important to note that museums have recognized

that their audience is not homogeneous or “general” but consists of different people with different and various needs, different ages, different social, educational, religious or ethnic backgrounds, different interests and expectations (Black, 2005; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999a). The recognition of the heterogeneous audience in combination with the finding that museums traditionally were addressing limited social groups (Merriman, 1999), have led museums to redefine their relationship with their audiences and their social and educational role in order to contact different people and respond to contemporary social changes. In this framework the needs’ assessment study is considered a basic starting point to tackle critical issues in the BaGMIVI project.

The need of museums to address and develop new audiences – some of them traditionally excluded - and the need to build sustainable relationships with their audiences, have led museums to investigate the nature of access and identify different barriers to access. Access to museums is a multidimensional reality (EBU, 2012; Weisen, 2008) or in other words there are different types of access such as the physical access, sensory, intellectual, emotional/attitudinal, financial, cultural, digital access etc. (Dodd & Sandell, 1998; Weisen, 2008). In the above it can also be added the “lack of choice” and the “lack of educational opportunity” (Weisen, 2008:247), the “perception of irrelevance, the sense of feeling unwelcome” or the “sense of cultural exclusion, the lack of time”, etc (Black, 2005:55). As a consequence museums have to remove many different barriers which are not only multidimensional but also interdependent (Weisen, 2008). Facing different types of barriers to museums may lead people – and people with disabilities - to construct negative perceptions for the museums or more negative emotions (Weisen, 2008).

Regarding access of people with disabilities to museums, it is true that access for people of disabilities is a central topic of discussion in museums around the world. Also many steps have been made toward a wider accessibility of people with disabilities to museums such as: guidelines for an accessible environment in the framework of Universal Design (e.g. Smithsonian Accessibility Programme), the introduction of legislation against discrimination in different countries (see for example the legislation in United States (ADA, 1990) and UK (DDA, 1995), initiatives and relevant research of a number of associations for people with disabilities for the improvement of their accessibility, etc. However, there are a lot of differences among different countries and museums (Sandell & Dodd, 2010). Furthermore there is more attention of enhancing physical access and to a lesser extent to other types of access like sensory access (Boussaid, 2004; Sandell & Dodd, 2010). As Weisen (2008:245) states the “*uncomfortable truth*” is that people with disabilities still face many barriers to their access in

museums and to cultural life. It seems that despite the intensive discussions about access to cultural goods for people with disabilities their cultural rights are poorly implemented (EBU, 2012).

Speaking of barriers of access to culture, as it was mentioned above a significant barrier is also the lack of educational opportunities (Weisen, 2008). Undoubtedly, education plays a crucial role at many levels regarding the bonding between museums and schools. In order to build bridges between society and museum we should consider the relationship between education and museums. This cultural education and the educational opportunities are not provided only by museums but also in schools. In this direction teachers' role is also significant because they can bring to museums children from different backgrounds or different educational needs and they may contribute to meaningful learning experiences in museums and positive social experiences for their students. Teachers can also transmit to their students' positive attitudes encouraging them to participate in different spaces and actions and cultivate different skills (Pearson & Aloysious, 1994; Vemi & Kanari, 2008; Kanari, 2014), contributing in this way to their students' future relationship with museums as adults. Similarly, a recent research for the current accessibility practices in cultural sectors for individuals with visual impairment in Europe (EBU, 2012:30) stresses the importance of education supporting, among others, that cultural accessibility and *“societal change should start with raising awareness of disabled people equity in schools”*. The above issues shape a critical theoretical framework for one of the main aims of BaGMIVI Project which is to promote strategic partnerships between museums and schools.

Attempting to define this gap it is important to note that in case of individuals with visual disabilities the request for access to the exhibits of museums is in contrast with one of the most important “missions” of many museums: to display artworks and museum objects and protect them at the same time. This characteristic of museums as *“spaces of seeing”* and of *“the do not touch”*, is in the heart of many discussions about blind people access to museums since museums prohibit touch to all and historically assumed that people go to museums to “see” the collections (Hetherington, 2000, 2003). However, touch constitutes a significant channel for people with visual impairments to grasp information from museums and their exhibits.

Since museums cannot ignore the access to people with visual disabilities are organizing a variety of activities and facilitations: touch tours, touch collections, verbal descriptions, tactile material, educational programs for students and adults with visual impairments, workshops, information in Braille or in large print, etc. (see for example Axel & Levent, 2003). However, there are a lot of differences among museums regarding the type of services for access and their

systematic character (EBU, 2012; Sandell & Dodd, 2010). As a result for people with visual disabilities there a lot of restrictions (EBU, 2012).

For example people with visual disabilities may face difficulties due to lack of permanent access facilitations since many of them – e.g. touch exhibitions - may be temporary and limited in terms of the exhibits (Boussaid, 2004; Candlin, 2003; Weisen, 2008). Limited choices for people with visual impairments do not only concern the number of museums which offer special provisions or other programmes and facilities but also the number of available objects to touch (Weisen, 2008).

Many museums are willing to adapt their programs to the needs of the group of people with visual impairments or offer a touch tour if requested and if there is an appointment. However in these cases it may be difficult for a blind person to decide spontaneously to visit a museum or to enjoy a visit in a museum as member of a sighted company or as an independent visitor without prior arrangements (Boussaid, 2004; Reich et al., 2011). Choices for people with visual disabilities are conditional and not unconditional and people with visual disabilities do not have the same choices as the sighted people or they have to make a lot of arrangements for a visit to a museum. It is important to note also that often museums seem to ignore that people with disabilities are not a homogeneous group. People with visual impairments are different not only in terms of visual impairment (e.g. blind, partially sighted, congenitally blind or late blind) but also as individuals with different characteristics (different interests, different educational, social, cultural backgrounds, etc (Candlin, 2003; De Coster & Loots, 2004). According to Candlin (2003) museums' programmes (or classes) specifically for blind people often have a low level – in order not to exclude anyone – but this is not enough for people who have expectations for something more interesting or more sophisticated. Other difficulties may concern the lack of museums' staff training in order to support or to address people with visual impairments (Reich et al., 2011; Lisney et al., 2013; Weisen, 2008), the lack of access to information or the lack of publicity. Also, few museums provide accessible and clear information on their websites which make more difficult and complicated the decision to visit a museum (EBU, 2012).

**To conclude**, the above literature review was based at national level of the participating countries (i. e. Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary) and at international level as well, regarding initiatives towards equal participation of people with disabilities in social life. This review revealed that a lot of basic steps have been made especially towards education and relevant legislation. Although remarkable initiatives have been taken into account there are still many barriers for people with disabilities and especially for individuals with visual

impairments. It is conjectured that there is a lack of research regarding the needs of individuals with visual impairments. The following sections describe the research that has been conducted for the needs assessment study and the main results that have been revealed. The above literature review and the results of the research constituted the basic framework of Intellectual Output 2 (O2: Syllabus) of the BaGMIVI Project.

The research has been conducted in 2014-2015 in three fields: a. Special schools for blind students and more specifically special education teachers of these schools (silent partners of the BaGMIVI Project), b. Individuals with visual impairments and c. Museum staff (partners of the BaGMIVI Project).

## **10.2 The aims of the research**

The research aims were the following:

- a. To investigate the experiences and the needs of special education teachers regarding school visits in museums with students with visual impairments.
- b. To investigate the experiences and the needs of individuals with visual impairments regarding visits in museums.
- c. To investigate the needs of museums' staff regarding issues of accessibility for people with visual impairments.

## **10.3 Method**

### **10.3.1 Sample**

As it was mentioned above the research has been conducted in three fields. The sample for each field was the following:

- a. Special education teachers from special schools for blind students. The participants in this research were in total 50 special education teachers. The participants were working in special schools for the blind which are the partners of the BaGMIVI Project in four different countries: Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary (see Table 1):

**Table 1: The sample of the research: Special education teachers**

<b>Greece</b>	<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Romania</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>50</b>

- b. Individuals with visual impairments. The participants in this field of research were in total 71 persons with visual impairments from four different countries: Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary (see Table 2).

**Table 2: The sample of the research: Individuals with visual impairments**

	<b>Greece</b>	<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Romania</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>N Participants</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Age range (yrs)</b>	<b>18-35</b>	<b>11-19</b>	<b>15-26</b>	<b>12-18</b>	
<b>Gender M=Male F=Female</b>	<b>9F +11M</b>	<b>12F+9M</b>	<b>8F +7M</b>	<b>9F+6M</b>	<b>38F+33M</b>

- c. Museum Staff. The participants in this field of research were individuals from the staff of the museums which are partners of the BaGMIVI Project in four different countries: Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. The participants were in total 41 persons with different duties in the museums such as museum educators, other scientific staff and security guards (see Table 3):

**Table 3: The sample of the research: Museums staff**

<b>Greece</b>	<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>Romania</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>55</b>

### **10.3.2 Instruments and research design**

The data for the development of the needs assessment study were obtained via semi-structured interviews in case of special education teachers and individual with visual impairments. This type of interviews has been organized on an interview guide with some basic axes/issues. The basic axes of the interviews were the following:

- A. Experiences and perceptions for museums

- B. Issues of access (facilitations or barriers)
- C. Social interaction (with the museum staff, other visitors)
- D. Suggestions

The suggested questions of the semi-structured interviews were organized around the above axes. However, this type of interviews provide to the researchers the flexibility for further questions, clarifications, etc. and at the same time provide to the interviewees the freedom to express their opinions or describe their experiences (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Two interview guides were proposed. In case of semi-structured interviews with special education teachers the first interview guide referred to teachers of students who had visual impairments and had experience of museum school visits (see Annex 11.1) and the second one referred to those who had students with visual impairments and did not have any experience from museum school visits (see Annex 11.2). Similarly, in case of semi-structured interviews, two interview guides were also proposed. The first one referred to individuals with visual impairments who have visited museums (in other words have some kind of experiences from museum visits) (see Annex 11.3) and the second one referred to those who have no experiences from museum visits (see Annex 11.4).

The interviews were conducted at the participants work places (e.g. special schools), clubs (e.g. associations for the blind) or at their homes. All the participants were informed about the BaGMIVI Project, the aims of the research and of course about the anonymity and the confidentiality of the data. After the transcription and the translation of the data the analysis of the qualitative data (semi-structured interviews) was held with content analysis (Dey, 1993). Regarding the third field of the research which is the museums' staff (partners in the BaGMIVI Project) the data were obtained via questionnaires. The questionnaires consisted mainly by closed questions (see Annex 11.5).

#### **10.4 Results of the research**

The following sections include the main results of the research in each field (special education teachers, individuals with visual impairments and museums' staff) regarding the needs of stakeholders for the improvement of access in museums of people with visual impairments.

#### **10.4.1 Special education teachers (special schools for the blind)**

More than half of the participants reported that they had experiences from school visits in museums with their students with visual impairments. The majority of the special education teachers who had experiences from school visits in museums reported that they have visited the museums following a guided tour (special or general) or an educational programme.

Regarding the special education teachers who had not experiences from school visits in museums with their students with visual impairments it seems that the main reason for not visiting museums is related with issues of specific administrative roles in their schools which means that school visits in museums were not part of their duties. Other reasons for not visiting museums are related with the special educational needs of the students (multiple disabilities) and the lack of appropriate educational programmes for students with visual disabilities and multiple disabilities, the age of children, the lack of access or the teaching subjects which according to teachers' opinion do not require visits in museums:

*"I work mostly with MDVI students and the access to museums for them is not good enough". (Bulgaria)*

*"The educational programmes of museums are not appropriate for students with multiple disabilities" (Greece).*

*"The school subject I teach does not require museum or gallery visits". (Hungary).*

*"Because the children are preschoolers and at this age they can hardly assimilate the complex information of the exhibits in a museum" (Romania).*

*"We haven't organized a museum visit because the students could not have access to some exhibits and also because of the specific issues of some of the students" (Romania).*

According the answers of the special education teachers who had experiences from school visits in museums, the main factors that facilitated the access of their students with visual impairments were the following (See below Table 4):



**Table 4: Facilitating factors of access to museums for schoolchildren with visual impairments**

Accessibility provisions/facilitations	Haptic access
	Verbal descriptions
	Audio guides
	Information in Braille
	Museum area lighting
	Provisions for orientation
Museum staff's positive attitudes	
Educational programmes/guided tours	Variety of activities
	Various senses
	Interactive exhibitions
Support of other persons	Teachers
	Escorts

#### ***10.4.1.1 Accessibility provisions/facilitations***

All the special education teachers who had experiences from school visits in museums with their students with visual impairments reported various facilitations or provisions on the part of museums for the access of the students to the museum collections.

The main facilitation was the **tactile exploration** of exhibits, replicas or other objects in the museum or in special areas in some museums:

*“They had the chance tactually to explore the exponents” (Bulgaria). “They had to have direct access to different objects”. “He has also allowed them to touch the exhibits and that was extremely relevant for the children” (Romania). “They could touch some exhibits or replicas” (Greece). “Our students had access to the exhibits due to the special area designed for the visually impaired people” (Romania). “The only special element I’ve met was that some exhibits could be touched, in line with the rules of the museum” (Hungary).*

As it was mentioned above the majority of the special education teachers who had experiences from school visits in museums reported that they have visited the museums following a guided tour (special or general) or an educational programme. Besides the guided tour or the educational programme, an important facilitating factor is the **verbal descriptions**. Also, it was mentioned the information given to students with legends or stories:

*“The guide usually gave detailed information about the exhibits”* (Romania). *“They were describing the exhibits to the students very well”* (Greece). *“Telling information through stories or legends”* (Romania).

The **audio tours/guides** are also a facilitation that has been reported from some of the participants as well as **information in Braille**.

*“They had educational program and seldom audio descriptions”* (Bulgaria). *“In the museums where there are audio guides they (the students) have been instructed to listen to those”* (Romania). *“In some places there were Braille labels”* (Bulgaria). *“In some cases there were tags in Braille”* (Hungary).

Also there were some references about the role of **light** in the area of museums or other **facilitations for the orientation** in museums:

*“The [...] Museum is exceptional. There was an exhibition with ... proper lighting, information in Braille, tactile exhibits...”* (Hungary). *“There were TGSIs or roll-up carpets”* (Hungary). *“There was even audio maps facilitated children’s orientation”* (Hungary).

#### ***10.4.1.2 Museums’ staff positive attitude***

An important factor that has been reported by special education teachers for the facilitation of the access of students with visual impairments to museums is the attitudes on the part of museums’ staff. The positive attitudes in combination with the communicational skills, the support and the detailed description had impact to the access of students with visual impairments to the museums:

*“Some of the museum staff had very positive attitude to the visually impaired students and helped them”* (Bulgaria). *“The staff was very patient with us”* (Romania). *“Besides the access*

*through touch, I think the role of museum staff is very important. In [...] museum the staff communicated with children very well and they were very friendly” (Greece). “Some staff members were really nice and helped children sit in it. They saw we were with children with visual impairments, so they were helpful” (Hungary).*

#### ***10.4.1.3 Educational programmes/activities***

Special education teachers also reported the significant role of the educational programmes, their content and others activities which are included in the educational programme in addition with verbal explanations and descriptions or the access through touch. There were also references to other ways of access using different senses like smell or sound (e.g. museum with instruments) or references to interactive exhibitions:

*“In the [...] children took active part in experiments” (Hungary). “Some museums have organized very nice educational programmes. The children can touch various objects, exhibits or replicas but also they play, they do various activities” (Greece). “A positive factor is the possibility to contribute to the making of a product inside the [museum] (pots and ceramics)” (Romania). In the [...] we took a pot and smelt lavenders” (Hungary). “It was an exhibition on nature, mostly physics and chemistry and it s interactive... There’s an exhibit they (children) loved” (Hungary).*

#### ***10.4.1.4 Support of other persons***

Special education teachers also pointed out their own role or the role of other persons regarding access to museums:

*“[The access was facilitated] by the help of the museum guide and also by the help of the teacher” (Bulgaria). “A couple of times our teachers prepared and guided the children. In these cases they were familiar with the exhibition and knew how to present it to blind students” (Hungary). “Additional guide was provided by the company which organized the visit” (Bulgaria).*

In contrast, according the answers of the special education teachers who had experiences from school visits in museums, the main factors that hindered the access of their students with visual impairments were the following (see Table 5):

<b>Table 5: Hindering factors of access to museums for schoolchildren with visual impairments</b>	
Lack Accessibility provisions/facilitations	Restrictions for haptic access
	Barriers to physical access
	Lack of accessible information
Museum staff's attitudes/information	Museums staff behavior
	Lack of a systematic policy for accessibility
	Lack or misunderstandings in information
Educational programmes/guided tours	Lack of educational programmes
	Lack of adjusted educational programmes
	Duration of the guided tour
	Complicated information
	Crowdie and noisy environment

#### ***10.4.1.5 Lack of accessibility provisions/facilitations***

The main barrier in museums for the access of students with visual impairments is the lack of accessibility provisions and mainly the **restrictions for access through touch**. Teachers reported this barrier in combination with the museums' exhibitions where all the objects are in showcases. Furthermore, teachers reported that in some museums the number of available objects for haptic access was limited:

*“The glass cabinets, which do not allow any tactile contact with the exponents”* (Bulgaria).

*“Exhibits were often behind glass, often there were only images we described verbally”* (Hungary). *“There are museums that we would like to visit with the children, but they do not allow touching the objects, they do not have infrastructures for blind individuals”* (Greece). *“Access to different objects was possible only in some cases”* (Romania). *“Sometimes the available objects are very few”* (Greece).

Apart from sensory barriers teachers also reported **barriers to physical access** especially for children with visual disabilities who use wheelchairs.

*“The building was accessible for wheelchair users, but they can’t get near all exhibits”* (Hungary). *“Some museums have stairs and this is difficult for some children”* (Greece).

Other difficulties that have been reported are related to **barriers to access to information**:

*“All the tags were written in print in poor quality, contrast is poor, too, tinny, black letters on grey background, A4 sheets full of information”* (Hungary).

#### ***10.4.1.6 Museums staff’s attitudes/information***

Although the majority of the participants recognize that museum staff tries “to do the best” there are some references for **negative behaviors**. Another thing that was reported is the **lack of a systematic policy for accessibility** on the part of the museums:

*“Some museum staff had negative attitude”* (Bulgaria). *“It really depends on the institution. In some they are really open, at other places they refuse letting people with visual impairments touch exhibits. It depends more on the person, not on the type of museum. Some museums we’ve been to several times – sometimes we could touch things, other times we couldn’t. It doesn’t count if the museum was in [...] or abroad”* (Hungary).

There was also reference for difficulties in communication regarding issues of accessibility due to **lack or misunderstandings in information** on the part of the museums:

*“Once I searched for accessible exhibitions in Google. I found an exhibition on [...] which was said to be accessible. When I phoned them, they didn’t understand what I was speaking about. It’s strange if such information is centrally generated...”* (Hungary).

#### **10.4.1.7 Educational programmes/guided tours**

One significant barrier for the access of school children to museums is **the lack of educational programmes/guided tours** in general in combination with the lack of accessibility provisions.

*“When we were at the [...], the tour has been made without a guide and the exhibits were protected by a glass so our students were not able to touch them. The explanations that the students received from the teachers were not enough because there was a lot of historical data that was difficult to process and way over their level of understanding. Their final conclusion was that they have visited a museum that displays something important from history, but they did not understand it exactly”* (Romania).

Teachers also reported the **lack of adjusted educational programmes** for children with visual impairments and children with multiple disabilities which is as it was mentioned above one of the reasons for not visiting museums:

*“The educational programmes of museums are not always appropriate for our students especially for those with multiple disabilities”* (Greece).

Some teachers reported difficulties regarding the educational programmes or the guided tours such as the **long duration of the guided tour, the complicated information or the crowdie and noisy environment**:

*“They were young children with a limited capacity. We spent an hour there and after a while they were really bored and misbehavior started. They were 5-6-year-old children with visual impairments and learning difficulty”* (Hungary). *“The information given by the guide was too complicated”* (Romania). *“It was really crowded with lots of kids and noise around,*

*especially where instruments were exhibited, it was hard to hear who was standing next to me, or which instrument the guide was speaking about at a given moment” (Hungary).*

According the suggestions of the special education teachers regardless their experiences of school visits in museums the main factors for the improvement of access in museums for students with visual impairments were the following (See below Table 6):

**Table 6: Suggestions of special education teachers for the improvement of access to museums for school children with visual impairments**

Accessibility provisions/facilitations	Haptic access Verbal descriptions Information in Braille Material in large print High contrast Accessible websites Audio guides/tours/descriptions Special areas for individuals with visual impairments in museums Museum space organization Lighting systems Orientation facilitations Other infrastructure/arrangements New technologies
Museum staff’s training/attitudes	Museum staff training in visual impairment issues Special supportive staff Activation for the development of accessibility
Educational programmes	Adjusted/designed educational

programmes for children with  
visual impairments  
Variety of educational  
programmes  
Frequency of educational  
programmes  
Variety of activities  
Different senses  
Small groups  
Economical and practical issues  
Communication/Information

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#### ***10.4.1.8 Accessibility provisions/facilitations***

The majority of the participants reported as a main facilitation for the improvement of the access to museums for children with visual impairments the **haptic access** to **exhibits** where this is possible due to reasons of objects' protection or **replicas** and **models** or other **tactile material**:

*“The students to be allowed to touch the exponents”* (Bulgaria). *“Museums must find ways in order to permit access through touch. There are ways to solve this. Exhibits or replicas or other material”* (Greece). *“To offer accessibility to the manipulation of certain objects which are similar to the exhibits”* (Romania). *“To make models of the valuable exponents which cannot be touched”* (Bulgaria). *“A higher number of exhibits should be accessible, that is a real experience for them”* (Hungary). *“Visiting a castle, for example, there could be a catalogue with different textile materials to show the material of different pieces of furniture. As for statues, at least proportions should be shown and maps of rooms to show the size”* (Hungary).



**Verbal descriptions and explanations** are also very important for the improvement of access to museums for children with visual impairments in combination with opportunities to explore objects through touch:

*“It would be important to allow the tactile exploration of the exhibits for our students together with the verbal explanations from the museum guide and to describe the exhibits using relevant comparisons”* (Romania). *“A good and detailed explanation of the exponents to be made”* (Bulgaria). *“To describe the exhibits to children with details”* (Greece). *“To offer precise information for the visually impaired preschoolers* (Romania). *“If it’s a guided visit, the guide should be able to explain in a way which is understandable for the visually impaired visitor* (Hungary).

Access to information is also important for special education teachers and for this reason they suggest labels, brochures etc in **Braille** as well as material in **large print** or with **high contrast**. There was also reference about accessible websites of the museums:

*“All museums to have materials in Braille like museum guides, brochures and others”* (Bulgaria). *“To provide information in Braille”* (Greece). *“Braille labels to be placed. More materials in large print”* (Bulgaria). *“High contrast screens with information for those with partial sight would help”* (Hungary). *“Homepage of museums should be accessible with a screen reader”* (Hungary).

Special education teachers also reported that **audio guides/tours** and **descriptions** would be very useful for children with visual impairments and that they should be offered more in museums. There was also reference about the content of an audio guide which is designed for children with visual impairments:

*“Audio guides to be offered”* (Bulgaria). *“To have audio tours”* (Bulgaria). *“Audio narration, like in films, would help”* (Hungary). *“The text of the audio guide should be put together in a clever way. Children often complain that there’s too much information to pay attention to at the same time: information in Braille, an exhibit to touch while listening to the audio guide”* (Hungary).

Another suggestion on the part of some special education teachers is the provision of **special areas in the museums** for people and children with visual impairments:

*“I would suggest special areas designed for the visually impaired people”* (Romania). *“Each museum may have special areas that are adapted to visually impaired preschoolers”* (Romania). *“It would be very useful to have specially designed areas in museums for people with visual impairments with objects available to touch, something like the Tactual Museum”* (Greece). *“I can imagine a separate exhibition accessible for people with visual impairments in a small room, but still with the same topic of the big exhibition”* (Hungary).

Apart from facilitations for access to collections, exhibits and information, special education teachers also reported issues regarding the **space of museums**, the **better organization** and **layout** of the space in museums, the **infrastructure**, the **light**, **facilitations for the orientation** or the **new technologies**:

*“To organize in a better way the internal space of the museums, so the space will be easier for moving around”* (Bulgaria). *“There should be TGSIs from the street to the entrance and also inside the building to facilitate orientation”* (Hungary). *“To have better lightening systems”* (Bulgaria). *“Inside the sectors designed for visual impaired visitors there should be hallways with tactile indicators”* (Romania). *“Lots of vertical surfaces are not solid enough. When they are only watched, it’s not a problem. Museums often don’t understand this”* (Hungary). *“It’s useful if there are at least roll-up carpets to facilitate orientation, there may be a tactile map...”* (Hungary). *“Inside a building Google-glass can make the surrounding world visible for a blind person. For those partially sighted Google glass offers high contrast and magnified images of the things in the direction of which the user is looking... All this can be combined with audio and converted to be useful for people with visual impairments, especially in museums, they would be able to walk around on their own and the glasses would read out the information from the tags. It may work in other ways, via WIFI or Bluetooth”* (Hungary).

#### **10.4.1.9 Museums staff’s attitudes/training**

Special education teachers stressed also the importance of museum staff for the improvement of access to museums for individuals and children with visual impairments. They consider very important the **training of museum staff** regarding issues of visual disabilities:

*“Museum staff must have some kind of training, to be informed in order to know how to address children with visual impairments. Not to feel uncomfortably, to know how to talk, how to make the guided tour or to escort a person with visual impairments” (Greece). “...to have some knowledge about the tactile kinesthetic learning style” (Romania). “A better knowledge of the staff from the museums about the visual impairment” (Romania). “Staff members should be tolerant and understanding, should offer assistance and ask visitors in what they need help. Security guards should also be prepared to share information as often they are the only source present” (Hungary).*

Special education teachers referred also the need for **special supportive museum** staff in order to address children or persons in general with visual impairments:

*“To have a designated person who is capable of offering precise information for the visually impaired preschoolers” (Romania). “...and also qualified personnel to guide such groups of children” (Romania). “To have special supportive staff” (Bulgaria). “In my opinion walking around a museum alone is not easy for a person with visual impairments, and I’m not sure if it’s much fun. Personal contact with the guide or museum educator is also part of visiting a museum. This is an important part of the topic ‘visually impaired people and museums’” (Hungary). “Some staff members be responsible for accessibility” (Hungary).*

Furthermore, special education teachers reported that museums staff should be more **active** and **interested** for the development of various access facilitations:

*“The museums to be more active and to search for options to offer tours to the visually impaired; not only to wait to be contacted” (Bulgaria). “The museum staff to be more interested and more active when visits by visually impaired students are paid” (Bulgaria).*

#### ***10.4.1.10 Educational programmes***

Special education teachers reported that there is a need for the development of more **educational programmes appropriate for students with visual impairments** in different museums and more frequently. Also there were references for more educational activities during holidays:

*“Definitely more educational programmes in different and more museums” (Greece). “More accessibility to museums during holidays and vacations” (Bulgaria). “I can imagine museum pedagogical programs connected to the topic of the exhibition in a smaller room” (Hungary).*

*“The opportunity to visit an exhibition doesn’t change anything. It’s an experience which may be good, bad, genuine, if this is not embedded in the life of the museum, then it’s just something floating in space. Museums should be prepared, contacts between museums and schools should be tighter, occasions should be more frequent” (Hungary).*

There were also references about the **content** of educational programmes, the **variety of activities** in combination with opportunities to explore through touch different objects or materials, the use of **different senses** or the **small groups**. Also there were references for **individual approach** for students with visual impairments:

*“Museums educational programmes must be appropriate for children, not just a simple guided tour. To give them the chance to play, to do different activities, to learn and also to have fun” (Greece). “The students could have some activities of exploring by touch or some creativity games in certain sectors of the museum” (Romania). “... to offer different smells” (Bulgaria). “I feel guided visits in small groups are useful, and the visit would be followed by some museum education program in which they may take more active part and would allow them to get more familiar with the topic of the exhibition, for example historical events may be put on scene in role play with replicas of the special objects of the epoch (Hungary). “They could explore the exhibits individually with each child” (Romania). “There should be an individual approach to each VI student (Bulgaria).*

Also there were references about **economical** or other **practical issues** as well as for the need of **better communication** and **information**:

*“I would expect a total involvement from the staff there, meaning a very low tax for the children or even free access for them” (Romania). “The museum staff could inform the teachers from the schools for visually impaired students about the existence of some special places designed for visually impaired visitors inside their museum” (Romania). “It’s important to make registration of groups of students with visual impairment quick and easy. Institutions should be in touch, but perhaps if the museum decides to arrange accessible exhibitions, they should contact the school” (Hungary).*

## **10.5 Individuals with visual impairment**

### **10.5.1 Accessibility provisions/facilitations**

The majority of the participants in this field of research them experiences from visits in museums. The main reasons for not visiting museums is the lack of access provisions in museums for people with visual impairments, the lack of chances and opportunities for such visits or because they do not want to visit museums:

*“I simply did not want to go” (Bulgaria). “I probably didn’t get the chance. The museums I tried to visit did not allow the touching of the exhibits” (Romania). “I just did not visit any museum” (Romania). “I am not interested. Museums are for sighted” (Greece).*

According the answers of the participants who had experiences from visits in museums, the main factors that facilitated their access were the following (See below Table 7):

**Table 7: Facilitating factors of access to museums for individuals with visual impairment**

Accessibility provisions/facilitations	Haptic access
	Audio guides/Verbal descriptions
	Information in Braille
	Tactile material
Guided tours	Special guided tours
	General guided tours
	Other senses
Museum staff's positive attitudes	Attitudes/ Behaviors
Support of other persons	Family
	Friends
	Escorts

One main factor which facilitated the access of individuals with visual impairments to museums was the opportunity to **touch** some exhibits:

*“We were also allowed to touch some of the object displayed there... I enjoined mostly the exponents that I touched” (Bulgaria). “We touched various vases not the original but replicas. It was a very nice experience because we had the chance to touch objects and to discuss it” (Greece). “I had the possibility to explore tactile the exhibits during the visiting tour” (Romania). “Some things I could touch ... I was allowed to touch them and my finger was lead all around them” (Hungary).*

Other facilitating factors were the **verbal descriptions** as well as **the audio guides**. The participants reported the content of the description, the language and the rhythm of audio description:

*“We got lots of descriptions. I was very satisfied” (Bulgaria). “One man was giving us detailed description about the exponents” (Bulgaria). “I had an audio tour. I was very happy to have the audio tour by the speech pace, rhythm was good and I received nice answers to my*

*questions” (Romania). “I use to go in museums and other archaeological sites during excursions of my association (for the blind). The guide is very good. She knows how to describe the exhibits or the space so we can listen what we cannot see and understand” (Greece). “There was an audio guide and it was very useful” (Greece). “It is really useful if museums provide assistive services like tactile exhibitions or audio guiding, the latter is a very smart idea” (Hungary).*

Access to information with labels in **Braille** were also reported by participants as a facilitating factor:

*“Braille that written info were in Braille too” (Romania). “There were some Braille labels” (Bulgaria).*

Some participants reported also other tactile material like **tactile maps** in combination with other accessibility facilitations:

*“I received an audio tour and the museum tactile map. These were good things. By audio description and by tactile exploration (I had the chance to touch the tactile variants of the original exhibits)” (Romania).*

### **10.5.2 Guided tours**

Most of the participant reported the **guided tours** – general or special – as a facilitating factor for individuals with visual impairments. The combination of tactile exploration and the information of guides seem to satisfy people with visual impairments. Furthermore, for individuals with low vision guided tours are helpful not only for the information but also for the movement in museum:

*“It was a special guided tour” (Greece). “There was a museum guide” (Bulgaria). “I had the possibility to explore tactile the exhibits during the visiting tour and to have a guided tour”. (Romania). “I like to visit museums with a guided tour. I take the information I need when I see the exhibits – I still see- and I move with the group. So I’ m not afraid to lose my orientation” (Greece). “The human guide was good, I remember she told us where exhibits were, and we went to the National Museum with a big group where we could touch exhibits” (Hungary).*

There were also references to other ways of access to the exhibitions like **sound** depending on the type of exhibition:

*“There were usually tactile objects, and different noises in the Museum [...] which were meant to make us feel as if we were next to the functioning vehicles”* (Hungary).

### **10.5.3 Museum staff positive attitudes**

Museum staff attitudes and behavior in general in combination with the verbal descriptions and explanations have been reported as facilitating factors for the access to museums for individuals with visual impairments. Positive attitudes on the part of the museum staff may play an important role not only for the access and understanding of the collection but also to feel welcome in the museum:

*“Museum staff saw that my classmates were commenting everything for me, I had the white cane in my hand, too, sometimes members of the staff came there and explained more complicated things my friends couldn’t, this way we had a guide”* (Hungary). *“The staff took extra time to describe and to explain us everything and they really wanted everyone to understand”* (Bulgaria). *“The museum staff’s helpful behavior has mostly been positive, too”*. *“I remember the [...] I was really impressed by the behavior of the museum staff. They were very kind and supportive”* (Greece).

### **10.5.4 Support of other persons**

One main facilitating factor that has been reported from the participants is the support of other person who accompanies them in museums. These persons may be members of their family, friends or escorts who support them for the move in the museum but also by describing the exhibits or reading the labels:

*“When I went there with my family, my parents described things for me”* (Hungary). *“My escort helped me to move in the museums and also she was describing to me what was in the museum”* (Greece). *“My mother was explaining to me”* (Bulgaria). *“I had access through the description made by my colleagues The guide and the accompanying persons facilitated my visit* (Romania). *“When I visit museums with my friends they read the information for me”* (Greece).



According the answers of the participants who had experiences from visits in museums, the main factors that hindered their access were the following (See below Table 8):

<b>Table 8: Hindering factors of access to museums for individuals with visual impairment</b>	
Lack of Accessibility provisions/facilitations	Haptic unavailability
	Lack of assistive technology
	Inaccessible labels
	Museums' interior space
Museum policy and staff's issues	Lack of museum staff
	Lack of information
	Other restrictions
	Opening hours of museums
Other difficulties	Lack of interaction during guided tours
	Content, duration and rhythm of guided tours
	Content and function of the Available facilitations
	Crowdie environment

### **10.5.5 Lack of accessibility provisions/facilitations**

One main factor that hindered the access to museums was the **lack of access though touch** in combination with references for objects in showcases or ropes:

*“The exponents that were in glass cabinets were inaccessible” (Bulgaria). “It was a general guided tour. I asked the guided tour if there was a possibility for touch but he refused” (Greece). “I had access to all the information I wanted, but not really to exhibits” (Hungary). “Lack of accessibility for blind people” (Romania). “A large number of things are behind ropes or glass, but my mum told me about them” (Hungary). “I went to a museum with*

*daddy, there were some exhibits behind ropes and daddy was told by the guards that if I lean forward, I may be able to touch them. And though they'd have allowed daddy to put me behind the ropes, they said the alarm would turn on. So I felt that there's something but it's out of reach"* (Hungary).

There were also difficulties due to **lack of assistive technology** or difficulties to access to information like for example **inaccessible labels** or difficulties regarding the **organization of museum' space and accessibility provisions**:

*"There was no assistive technology" (Bulgaria). "Just some of the museums have assistive technologies. In some cases the written data about the exhibits were provided in very small letters so we can't explore them visually" (Romania). "It was impossible for me to read any information. I didn't even try" (Greece). It's good to have Braille information on the walls, but exhibits are not always next to the wall, you see, so I sometimes pass them"* (Hungary).

#### **10.5.6 Museum policy and staff issues**

Some of the participants reported the **lack of staff**, the **lack of clear information** about the available accessibility provisions of the museum or **other restrictions** regarding the distance from the exhibits:

*"I asked some information from the security guard but he didn't know how to help me. And there was no other person responsible to provide me assistance or information"* (Greece). *"...Other times I was told after the visit that something could have been touched"* (Hungary).

*"There was nobody to give us explanations while we had a tour around"* (Bulgaria). *"Yes. I had some difficulties as there were some exhibits that we were not allowed to touch or we were not allowed to go close enough so that I could have the chance to explore them visually"* (Romania).

Other parameters that have been reported as hindering factors is the **opening hours** of museums which do not allow people to visit museums or the days and hours of special guided tours for individuals with visual impairments:

*“Their working hours sometimes do not allow me to go there” (Bulgaria). “These activities [special guided tours] for people with visual impairments usually they are organized in working days. I work and I cannot go” (Greece).*

#### **10.5.7 Other difficulties**

The participants reported also other difficulties regarding the **content**, the **rhythm** and the **duration of the guided tour**, the **content** and **function** of the available facilitations or the **crowdie environment**:

*“We were wandering around an exhibition hall and the guide kept speaking. If that’s the situation, the guide might as well have been invited to the school to give a presentation there” (Hungary). “The guide was speaking and moving very quickly. I had not time to go closer to the exhibits since the other members of the group had already moved to another exhibit” (Greece). “I think audio guiding is a good initiative but it doesn’t always work or I don’t understand the indications” (Hungary). “When it was too crowded or when we were short of time and I didn’t get enough explanation to be able to imagine an image” (Hungary). “A difficulty is when there’s too much information, for example Braille tags and audio guiding at the same time” (Hungary).*

The main suggestions of the participants for the improvement of access to museums for individuals with visual impairments are the following (see Table 9):

**Table 9: Suggestions for the improvement of access to museums for people with visual impairment**

Accessibility provisions/facilitations	Haptic access
	Information in Braille
	Audio guides
	Museum interior space
Museum policy and staff's issues	Museums staff training in
	disability
	Escorting
	Verbal explanations
	Available staff
	Guided tours
	Accessible exhibitions

#### **10.5.8 Accessibility provisions/facilitations**

Regarding the accessibility provisions the main suggestion of the participants is the improvement of access though **touch**. Participants referred to exhibits where this is possible and to replicas:

*“It is important for a blind to touch some exhibits. Otherwise, it is like not allowing vision to sighted visitors. Of course there are limitations. We cannot touch everything. There are valuable objects but there are also solutions. I wouldn’t be so difficult to have some replicas” (Greece). “Museums should allow people to touch the objects” (Bulgaria). “To facilitate the access in the museum for visual impaired persons I consider that increasing the number of the exhibits that can be touched is a necessity” (Romania). “It’d be good to have a chance to touch everything; I don’t mean valuable things, but replicas. There should be replicas of everything, doesn’t matter what sort of material they are made from, but they should be lifelike” (Hungary). “Less exponents to be places under glass covers” (Bulgaria).*

The participants also reported the need for **information in Braille**:

*“It would be very useful to have some information in Braille. Labels or other material (Greece). “Braille labels on the artifacts and also brochures and materials in Braille” (Bulgaria). “I would like to find some information boards in Braille” (Romania). “And it’d be great to have Braille explanations, too” (Hungary).*

**Audio guides** have been also reported by the participants as a facilitating factor that it should be included in the museums’ policy for accessibility:

*“Each blind visitor should have a guide and lots of audio materials, like audio guides are needed” (Hungary). “I remember a visit in the [...] Museum and there was an audio guide. I was useful and I was more autonomous. I think this is also a good solution when it is not possible to touch or for paintings” (Greece). “Access technologies based on audio description if the exhibits are in a fragile state” (Romania).*

The suggestions of the participants for the improvement of access to museums include also issues regarding the **interior space** of the museums. The participants reported suggestions for the **light** in the museums, the facilitations for the **orientation** and the general organization of the space:

*“In museums the light should be better. Sometimes is difficult even to move in the museums because of the poor light. Museums should be aware of this and have better light” (Greece). “Better and stronger lights” (Bulgaria). “There should be directional TGSIs all around, exhibits be placed along the walls so that we could find them” (Hungary). “The place for moving around to be better organized and planned” (Bulgaria). “There should be a directional TGSI we could feel under our feet, exhibits shouldn’t be placed in the centre where we knock on them, and there should be warning signals in front of the stairs (Hungary). “Organizing exhibits in a logical, easy-to-follow way may help a lot” (Hungary).*

### 10.5.9 Museum policy and staff's issues

The participants reported the need of **museums staff training in disability** issues in order to be able to provide assistance and to address visitors with visual impairment in the museum. They also reported the need for **available staff** to give explanations and descriptions for the exhibits:

*“I think a first step is the training in disability. People in general and museums’ staff do not know how to address people with visual impairment, how to address them, to support them and generally to provide to them access” (Greece). “But I would mainly recommend that someone from the staff is available to explain to the visually impaired people everything that has to do with the space and the exhibits present there” (Romania). “I will suggest museums to want to have such visitors and to be able to explain to them well” (Romania). “A prearranged session with a human guide would definitely help me” (Hungary).*

The participants also reported the need for **more accessible exhibitions** and organized **guided tours** for people with visual impairments in a more interactive way:

*“Special exhibitions for people with visual impairment are very rare and temporary. I think museums should organize more exhibitions or guided tours for blind people so we can have more choices” (Greece). “I think that museums must be funnier and staff museum should organized them more interactively, not to be so monotonous” (Romania).*

### 10.6 Questionnaires from the staff of the participating Museums

As it was mentioned above the participants in this field of the research were members of the museums which are partners in the BaGMIVI Project. These museums – an archaeological museum, an ethnographic museum and two galleries - have different collections. The characteristics of each collection, the different infrastructure and the different experiences regarding individuals with visual impairment among museums, created a complex field.

Nevertheless, it was feasible to compose an overview regarding the difficulties that the members of the participating museums were facing in order to accommodate visitors with visual impairment and respond efficiently towards their needs.

Staff from the participant museums – scientific staff, museum educators, security guards – stressed the importance of training in disability issues and in visual impairment issues. Although, the participating museums are willing to develop provisions for individuals with visual impairment - some of them have already conducted some steps towards this direction - it seems that the need for training is very high. The answers **“training in disability issues”** and **“training in visual impairment issues”** have been selected from the majority of the participants.

Furthermore, it seems to be a lack of knowledge about various forms of accessibility such as **“tactile material** (tactile maps, diagrams)”, **“audio/verbal descriptions”** and **“information on environmental adaptations** (e.g. tactile and visual landmarks; suitable lighting, color contrast, reduction of glare, etc.)” which are very important for visitors with visual impairments.

Depending the experience of each museums it is worth mentioning that **“training in museum education”** is also a need that has been reported as well as the **“lack of organized educational programmes”**.

### **10.7 Conclusions**

The needs assessment study responds to the current practices of museums not only in direction of audience research and development but also in direction of consulting and working with different communities and audiences (Coxall, 2006).

The results of the needs’ assessment support an important aspect which is implemented through the present project, referring to the importance of cooperation between local entities and people with visual impairment as beneficiaries with the aim to improve access to cultural activities within the local community. Even though there is a continuous objective of the museums to offer accessible services for individuals with visual impairment, the main issue is that in their great majority, the visits to museum take place only if they are organized by institutions or teachers within schools, without having in consideration that the individuals with visual impairment would and should be able to have as an important component of self-determination the opportunity to have their own initiative in carrying out such activities and visits. All the partners of the present project strongly believe and support the social model of disability with concepts like quality of life, self-determination, empowerment, active participation, independence.

Each participant country provided evidence of important steps that were made throughout the year in regard of accessibility, mainly talking about legislation and the ratified Convention

of Human Rights that become operational and visible in all National Policies and Action Plans. There are examples of judicial regulations, projects developed by public institutions and NGO's, organized activities within educational institutions and associations, campaigns in term of accessibility, publications and studies carried out by researchers, all of these proving the interest in this matter. However, important issues remain uncovered and not approached such as permanency, expertise in the field, professional training and self-determination.

Even if we cannot generalize, in a great majority of situations, museums offer in a limited way access to their exponents and mostly for a certain period of time, and if it is permanent only for a certain section. There is also the discussion about training and competence of museum staff regarding accessibility, but also implications of visual impairment in regard of learning, communication, accessing the environment. The issue in discussion refers to their initial training of museum staff, as there is no related subject in their curricula as museologists referring to disability or accessibility. Having this into consideration, a training regarding this matter is of great importance and must be implemented in each museum. In regard of training and professional development, universities must develop courses through the specialists in the field, but also to carry out studies and publish and disseminate the results, not only to raise awareness on the topics, but offer quantitative and qualitative data about the effects and implication on the development and personal abilities of people with visual impairment.

In terms of self-determination, individuals with visual impairment must assume an active role of participation in all types of activities, cultural and sport ones included, without being prompted or organized, but taking in their own hands their initiatives and opportunities to spend free time according to their wishes and interests, to learn about different aspects of life, to access culture.



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## **11. Annexes**

### **11.1 Interview guide I: Teachers of students with visual impairments who DO have experiences from school visits to museums**

#### **A. School visits to museums (suggested questions)**

- What kind of museums have you visited with your students?
- Is there any procedure of choosing a specific museum to visit with your students (*any specific criteria?*)
- Did you use any special arrangements before visiting the museum with your pupils?
- Have you prepared your students in any way of what to expect during the visit?
- What kind of educational experience did your visually impaired students have during a museum school visit (educational program, general guided tour, other)?
- Are there any museums that you want to visit with your students and you end up not visiting them because of inaccessibility issues?

#### **B. Access to museums and exhibits (suggested questions)**

- How did your students manage to have access to the museum exhibits?
- Can you describe the type of access which was offered for your students during a museum school visit?
- Were there any negative factors which hindered your students' access to the museum exhibits?
- Were any positive factors which facilitated your students' access to the museum exhibits?
- Did you have any kind of collaboration with museum staff before, during or after the visit to a museum?
- Are you satisfied with the museums' staff or with the museum services?

#### **C. The role of museums in education and social inclusion (suggested questions)**

- Do you think that museum visits may contribute to the education of students with visual impairments?
- If yes, in which ways?
- If no, for what reasons?
- Do you think that museum visits may contribute to the social inclusion of

students with visual impairments?

- If yes, in which ways?
- If no, for what reasons?

**D. Suggestions (suggested questions)**

- What are your suggestions for the improvement of the access to museums for individuals with visual impairments?

- Can you describe or outline the role of teachers who have students with visual impairments within a collaborative scheme between schools and museums?

-What are your suggestions for the improvement of the collaboration between museums and teachers of students with visual impairments?

## 11.2 Interview guide II: Teachers of students with visual impairments who DO NOT have experiences from school visits to museums

### **A. School visits to museums (suggested questions)**

- For what reasons you have not yet organized a museum visit with your students?
- What is your opinion for museums regarding their relationship or interaction with people with visual impairments?
- Would you like to visit a museum with your students with visual impairments?

If yes, please explain:

If no, please explain.....

### **B. Access to museums (suggested questions)**

- What kind of activities would you like to do in a museum when among your students are also students with visual impairments?
- What kind of services do you think will be necessary for your students with visual impairment to ensure accessibility to the museum exhibits?
- According to your opinion are there any factors that they may hinder access to museums for students with visual impairments?
- What would you like most to have on behalf of the museum staff during a school museum visit?

### **C. The role of museums in education and social inclusion (suggested questions)**

- Do you think that museum visits may contribute to the education of students with visual impairments?
- If yes, in which ways?
- If no, for what reasons?
- Do you think that museum visits may contribute to the social inclusion of students with visual impairments?
- If yes, in which ways?
- If no, for what reasons?

### **D. Suggestions (suggested questions)**

- What are your suggestions for the improvement of the access to museums for individuals with visual impairments?
- Can you describe or outline the role of teachers who have students with visual impairments within a collaborative scheme between schools and museums?
- What are your suggestions for the improvement of the collaboration between museums and teachers of students with visual impairments?

### 11.3 Interview guide III: Individuals with visual impairments who DO have experiences from museum visits

#### A. Experiences and perceptions for museums (suggested questions)

- Have you ever visited a museum or a gallery or an archeological place?
- Was it organized for you or you just took the initiative?
- What makes you go and visit a museum?
- Do you prefer to go to the museum on your own or you would rather go with someone (or to go as a member of a group)?
- How often do you visit museums? (*once in a month, every 6 months, once in a year, etc*)
- When was the last time you visited a museum?
- What kind of museums have you visited?
- Did you have any positive experiences from your museum visits?
- If yes what sort of experiences?
- Were there any negative experiences?
- If yes what kind of experiences?
- What do you think about museums?
- What is your concept for this type of institutions?
- Do you believe that museums have the capacity to improve or enrich the quality of our lives?

#### B. Issues of access (facilitations or barriers) (suggested questions)

- What kind of support services have you experienced during a museum visit? (such as general guided tours, touch tours, audio description, other)?
- Were you satisfied? (*yes or no and why is that?*)
- How did you manage to have access to the museum exhibits? (*touch, other senses?*)
- Were there any barriers that kept you away from your access to the museum exhibits or to the information in general that were in the museum?
- Were there any facilitating factors that made your museum visit enjoyable and accessible (such as assistive technology for access to information)?
- What did you like most by your museum visits?



**C. Social interaction (with the museum staff, other visitors) (suggested questions)**

- With whom did you visit museums?
- Were other visitors in the museum during your visit?
- Did you have any communication/interaction with other visitors during your museum visit? Was there something in their behavior or attitude that made you feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
- Did you ask any kind of assistance or information from the museum staff?
- What is your opinion about museums' staff behavior?

**D. Suggestions (suggested questions)**

- What are your suggestions to improve access to museums for individuals with visual impairments?

#### 11.4 Interview guide IV: Individuals with visual impairments who DO NOT have experiences from museum visits

##### **A. Experiences and perceptions for museums (suggested questions)**

- Why do you think people go to the museums?
- For what reasons you haven't ever visited a museum?
- Do you think that people with visual impairment go to museums?
- What is their motive to do that?
- Generally speaking, what have you heard about museums?
- What is your personal opinion for museums?
- How do you imagine that a museum looks like?
- Do you believe that museums can improve or enrich the quality of our lives?
- Would you like to visit a museum?
- If yes, would you like to visit a specialized exhibition organized only for people with visual impairment or an integrated one?
- If yes, would you like to have an appointment/date in advance?

##### **B. Issues of access (facilitations or barriers) (suggested questions)**

- What kind of museums would you like to visit?
- What would you like to do in a museum?
- What type of services would you like to have in order to have access to the museum exhibits?
- Do you think that there might be some kind of barriers preventing your access to museums?

##### **C. Social interaction (suggested questions)**

- Who would you like to go on a museum visit with? Describe this person and say why he/she would be a good companion for you?
- What would you like to have on behalf of the museum staff?

##### **D. Suggestions (suggested questions)**

- What are your suggestions to improve access to museums for individuals with visual impairments?

## 11.5 Questionnaire for museum staff

### 1. Has the museum staff received so far any kind of training on disability issues?

Management	Yes	No
Scientific staff	Yes	No
Museum educators	Yes	No
Security guards	Yes	No

### 2. If yes, can you refer to this kind of training in more detail (time, duration, association)

Management

.....

Scientific staff

.....

Museum educators

.....

Security guards

.....

### What kind of educational activities are offered by services of the museum?

Guided tours	
Educational programs for school children	
Workshops	
Lectures/classes	
Educational resources (e.g. museum kits, resource packs, etc)	

**Other:**

.....

.....

### 3. Have you ever been invited to organize a museum educational activity for visitors with visual impairments?

Yes	
No	

#### 4.1 If yes, please define the type of those activities

.....

.....

#### 4.2 If yes, these visitors were

Groups of people with visual impairments	
School children from special schools for the blind or for low vision	
Groups of people with and without visual impairments	
School children with visual impairments who attended a local mainstream school	
Independent visitors with visual impairments	
Families with children/members with visual impairments	

#### 4. What kind of facilities did you offer to

Groups of people with visual impairments

.....  
 .....

School children from special schools for the blind or low vision

.....  
 .....

School children with visual impairments who attended a local mainstream school

.....  
 .....

Independent visitors with visual impairments

.....  
 .....

Families with children/members with visual impairments

.....  
 .....

**Did you have any difficulties with visitors with visual impairments? Please specify these difficulties below**

Lack of exhibits available to touch	
Lack of replicas	
Lack of information in Braille or enlarged print	
Lack of other tactile material	
Lack of audio description/ verbal description	
Lack of knowledge/training in issues of visual impairments	
Lack of organized educational programs	
Lack of environmental adaptations (e.g. no tactile and visual landmarks; no suitable lighting, color contrast, reduction of glare, etc.)	
Lack of staff	

**Other:**

.....  
 .....

**5. In case of school groups with children with visual impairments did you have any kind of collaboration with the teachers in advance?**

Yes	
No	

**6. If yes, can you describe this collaboration?**

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**7. In case of school groups with children with and without visual impairments did you have any kind of collaboration with the teachers in advance?**

Yes	
No	

**8. If yes, can you describe this collaboration?**

.....  
 .....

**9. Can you prioritize your needs for your museum regarding accessibility issues for visitors who have visual impairments?**

Training in disability issues	
Training in visual impairments issues	
Tactile material (tactile maps, diagrams)	
Replicas of exhibits	
Authentic exhibits available to touch	
Audio/verbal descriptions	
Training in museum education	
Organized educational programs	
Information on environmental adaptations (e.g. tactile and visual landmarks; suitable lighting, color contrast, reduction of glare, etc.)	

**Other:**

.....  
 .....

**10. Would you like to add any other comment or suggestion for the improvement of access of people with visual impairments to the museums in general or to your museum specifically?**

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 .....  
 .....