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

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

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## 1. Executive Summary

The present Intellectual Output (O2: 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.

Based on the Needs Assessment Study (Intellectual Output O1) the joint syllabus (Intellectual Output O2) was developed for the training of the museums’ staff that participate in the BaGMIVI project; that is, Muzeul Etnografic al Transilvaniei (Romania), City Gallery Szekesfehervar (Hungary), Nicholas and Dolly Goulondris Foundation Museum of Cycladic Art Museum (Greece), and Galeriya Rakursi OOD (Bulgaria). In general, the syllabus includes three main axes: (a) the objectives of the training as well as the learning outcomes, (b) the thematic areas and the content in each area and (c) the assessment methods to examine whether the objectives have been met. Furthermore, the syllabus may be used in the future by the trained museums’ staff who want to organise in-service training seminars for museums staff either from their or from another museum.

Normally intended and joint-designed syllabuses frameworks are designed and implemented, but then evolve and change as they are interpreted and implemented at different levels and in different contexts (it is meant to be museum contexts). A syllabus framework is usually a single document which is supplemented by other materials to guide the implementation of specific parts of the framework. These may give more detailed specification or guidance by individual year, subject or learning area, addressing the requirements of the museum system, the cultural centre as well as taking into account the needs of individuals with visual impairments. The aforementioned documents may include programmes of study, year plans and educational plans.

In the context of Intellectual Output 2, a syllabus framework was developed which can work as:

- A technical tool which establish parameters for the development of other activities which concern 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), and

- An agreed social document which defines and expresses national priorities for the educational and social role of museums with impact to cultural accessibility for individuals with visual impairments. For example, a Policy recommendations and Guidelines Report may constitute a brief summative report, which would include recommendations and guidelines for policy makers. Generally speaking, a syllabus framework based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as based on Disability Action Plans may compose a comprehensive framework committing the Commission to empowerment of people with disabilities to enjoy their full rights, and to removing everyday barriers in life and culture.

Table 1 includes components which are flexible in terms of the number of its main points as well as regarding the span of their content. These main components compose the main axes of the syllabus framework as mentioned above (i. e. objectives – thematic areas – assessment procedures) and are presented in detail after Table 1.

Table 1: Main components of the Syllabus Framework regarding training of the museum staff.

Main Components	Brief Description
<b>Introduction: Scoping</b>	Reflects the findings of the contextual scoping. It describes the social and cultural environment in which the present training and learning occur
<b>Social model of Disability: Characteristics and Consequences</b>	Describes the features of the Social Model of Disability and its influences in research and practices
<b>Brief Statement of Broad Thematic Areas and Learning Objectives. Expected Outcomes for each Thematic Area</b>	Describes what trainees should know and be able to do when they complete their training. Outcomes should be expressed in a range of domains, including knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies, values and attitudes
<b>Structure of syllabus content</b>	<p>Describes the organization of content within the syllabus framework and the extent to which museums and cultural centres can make choices. It might describe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pattern of thematic areas to be studied and analysed.</li> <li>• A brief description of each thematic areas outlining the rationale for its inclusion in the syllabus and the contribution it makes to the achievement of the learning outcomes defined in Main Component 3</li> </ul>
<b>Training/Teaching methodology</b>	<p>Describes the range of training approaches that might be employed in the implementation of the syllabus framework</p> <p>The proposed number of hours to be assigned to each thematic area</p>
<b>Assessing trainees' achievement</b>	Describes the importance of assessing the extent to which trainees achieve the outcomes established for each thematic area, and recommends or prescribes types of assessment strategies (such as written, oral, performance and practical skills demonstration)

## **2. Introduction: Scoping**

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. As “audience-centered” spaces, museums are interested not only for their collections but also for their audiences. At 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., in order to reach and contact different people and respond to contemporary social changes. Furthermore, intensive discussions and relative research have revealed the role of museums and their responsibility towards social inclusion.

During the last decades, access for people with disabilities is a central topic of discussion in museums, archaeological/historical sites and monuments around the world. This increasing interest for the access of people with disabilities to museums is attributed to changes regarding the social and educational role of museums but also to changes regarding the way that disability is perceived within the context of the social-anthropological model (e.g. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). The discussion about access of people with disabilities to museums and to culture in general, concern various organizations and associations such as museums, school settings, clubs as well as policy makers.

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, 1999). 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.

The present Intellectual Output (O2) supports all issues about the rights of people with disabilities for access to museums and culture and put emphasis on features which have the potential to develop actions in the context of Universal Design with the aim to contribute to social inclusion and the combating of social exclusion. The long-term aim of this training programme is to improve access, information, education and participation of people with visual impairments to museums and social life.

### **3. Social model of Disability: Characteristics and Consequences**

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 (Argyropoulos & Kanari, 2015; Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 1999; Oliver, 1990; Moussouri, 2007).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the social model of disability has influenced research – such as paradigms – education as well as personal and global approaches. The chief feature of this model is the existence of many realities. According to this model no human attitude toward reality can be rejected. As Pagliano (1999:139) argues, “these realities are integral and cannot be subdivided”. As a consequence, all approaches in training, education in general should be considered as multi-dimensional, recognising that historical and societal formations play a significant role in ethics, morality and politics. The social model of disability incorporates strands of socio-anthropological approaches which allowed to adopt the view that there is no objective, absolute truth, and events are meaningful or



meaningless in relation to the ways that are interpreted and performed by individuals, “...to realise his vision of his world” (Malinowski, 1922:25). The previous perspective gave the opportunity to scientists and policy makers to conceive or at least to interpret that the vast majority of the barriers and the limitations that people with disabilities face do not constitute an individual matter and a “personal tragedy; on the contrary constitute a social matter. In this line, Warren (1994) pointed that:

“The development of all children is governed to some degree by maturation, and since development occurs within environment that, though they differ in specifics, has major domains in common, we should expect some basic commonalities among all children...the principles and basic dynamics of development are fundamentally the same for all children with and without visual impairments” (pp. 4-5).

#### **4. Brief Statement of Broad Thematic Areas and Learning Objectives. Expected Outcomes for each Thematic Area**

##### **4.1 Broad thematic areas**

The broad thematic areas of the syllabus are expected to be as following: a) the heterogeneity of individuals with visual impairments and the existing disabling barriers in their access and inclusion, b) haptic apprehension, haptic memory and mental maps, c) the accessible museums’ programs for individuals with visual impairments, and d) the principles of differentiation and design for all and its implications for museums.

##### **4.2 Learning Objectives**

It is suggested that an ideal way to meet the objectives of the proposed syllabus is to conduct workshops in conjunction with discussions or power point presentations by experts. In a nutshell, the following constitute the learning objectives of the proposed museum staff training:

- Familiarization of the museum staff with orientation and mobility issues. All members of the museum staff (including those who work as security guards and visitors’ services staff) will have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge about the significance of skills and concepts that people with visual

impairments need to develop within their homes, community in order to be safe, independent and efficient. It is expected that within this stage of the syllabus, workshops will take place and will equip the museum staff with basic techniques of escorting a person with blindness and also the workshops in question is expected to contribute towards their perspectives and beliefs about inclusion and inclusive museum.

- Involvement of the museum staff in workshops. The workshops of this part of the training programme will focus on “Design of tactile educational material: the case of museums and the usage of appropriate tactile material for educational purposes”. It is expected that the museum staff will come across chief principles of designing haptic material which will be graspable, sensible and approachable to individuals with visual impairments. It is also expected that the workshop will put emphasis on multi-sensory environments and provide examples from museums and form other cultural centers.

- Initiatives by the museum staff in actions at local or regional level. It is expected, that based on the whole training programme, the members of the museum staff will be able to propose alternatives to enhance the accessibility within their museum and share with discussion with the museum stakeholders and principles.

## **5 Structure of syllabus content and learning areas**

As mentioned above, the broad thematic areas of the syllabus lie in four main strands which are the following: a) the heterogeneity of individuals with visual impairments and the existing disabling barriers in their access and inclusion, b) haptic apprehension, haptic memory and mental maps (i. e. schemata), c) the accessible museums’ programs for individuals with visual impairments, and d) the principles of differentiation and design for all and its implications for museums.

## **5.1 The heterogeneity of individuals with visual impairments and the existing disabling barriers in their access and inclusion**

It is interesting to present the recent key facts addressed by WHO (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en/>) because it provides a global overview of the present situation regarding the population of Individuals with Visual Impairments (VI).

### **Key facts**

- 285 million people are estimated to be visually impaired worldwide: 39 million are blind and 246 have low vision.
- About 90% of the world's visually impaired live in low-income settings.
- 82% of people living with blindness are aged 50 and above.
- Globally, uncorrected refractive errors are the main cause of moderate and severe visual impairment; cataracts remain the leading cause of blindness in middle- and low-income countries.
- The number of people visually impaired from infectious diseases has reduced in the last 20 years according to global estimates work.
- 80% of all visual impairment can be prevented or cured.

(cited from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en/>)

There are many differences amongst people who have severe VI. They are a heterogeneous group with a wide range of educational, developmental, and physical abilities and needs which require specialized supports and services (Candlin, 2003; Huebner, 2000· Scholl, 1986· Schulz, 1980). The element of heterogeneity is reinforced by the fact that even two individuals have exactly the same degree of vision loss, they may have tremendous differences because the way in which an individual uses whatever vision he or she has is unique (e. g. individual characteristics of people with visual impairment, visual loss, low vision, chronological age of visual loss). It is the so-called functional vision and plays crucial role in all aspects of life (Best, 1992· Corn, DePriest & Erin, 2000).

## 5.2 Haptic apprehension, haptic memory and mental maps

Perception by touch requires many factors to be considered; and this is because there are many sources which provide information. Tactual perception is a complex issue which does not encompass only touch. Instead, it has to be considered as a kind of multi-factor processing. Touch, posture and movement are the main complementary sources and the balance between them formulates the presuppositions for spatial coding and in turn de-coding and interpretation (i. e. apprehension). The types of objects for exploration, prior knowledge, linguistic aspects and task conditions in terms of the balance of complementary sources converge to produce the outcome which is the haptic perception (Millar, 1997).

Katz (1989) in his work entitled “The World of Touch” asserted that touch is a complex conglomeration of functions operating in a converging way. According to him, touch is not a single sense modality for it is inadequate to refer to it as a skin sensation. He roughly divided touch into three kinds: surface, immersed and volume touch (p.50-52) stressing the numerous inputs which can arise from vibrations (spaced pulses), pressure (hardness or softness) or skin sensations which provide impressions of such things as roughness or smoothness, wetness or dryness, hot or cold surfaces. With respect to the volume touch he pointed out the following example:

“In medical practice, volume touch plays a certain role, without to be sure, receiving great notice as such. By palpation, the physician “touches” the internal organs through the skin and cushions of fat in order to detect pathological changes in them. The attention is directed at the organs themselves, and not on what lies between them and the feeling hand and is given as volume touch” (p53).

Memories constitute intellectual structures called schemata. These mental structures organise events as they are perceived by the organism and classified into groups, with respect to common characteristics. Schemata are repeatable psychological events by which every similar stimulus is classified in a consistent manner (Wadsworth, 1989). Therefore, regarding individuals with visual impairment, the frequency of haptic stimuli determines the stability of schemata, shapes their memory (haptic memory) and this is important for their understanding and comprehension. Schemata do not remain constant; instead, they keep changing from structures to superstructures (Van Hiele, 1984).

### **5.3 Accessible museums' programs for individuals with visual impairments**

It seems that over the last years museum access movements struggle to find the balance between the treasure that are entitled to protect and the right of visual impaired people to have access to works of arts by touch. On this ground many steps were done to the direction of orientation and mobility inside the museums such as: embossed floors, audible warning systems, guide dogs (Boussaid, 2004; Tsitouri, 2005) as well as to the direction of blind individuals' accessibility to works of art such as: touch collections, touch exhibitions, touch tours, audio guides, verbal descriptions, handling sessions, three-dimensional models, replicas, relief sculptures, information in Braille, large print, tactile diagrams, workshops, etc. (Axel & Levent, 2003; Levi, 2005; Tsitouri, 2004). The aforementioned measures and facilities vary from museum to museum and from country to country, all depending on the complexity of the issues surrounding museum policies and/or pieces of relevant legislation. The feedback which was provided during the Needs Assessment Study (O1) pinpointed mainly two issues: the feasibility of haptic access and b. the necessity and significance of museum staff training and awareness regarding disability. These findings are also in line with similar research (Handa, Dairoku, & Toriyama, 2010), which considers that the level of the staff training towards disability and their awareness regarding positive attitude, appropriate adaptations and accommodations constitute a significant criterion for individuals with visual impairment to visit or not to visit a museum (Reich et al., 2011). It is strongly believed that museum services in general have a great impact on people's construction of active knowledge contributing to the consolidation of notions such as social integration and awareness regarding better accessibility (Dodd & Sandell, 2001; Sandell, 2002).

## 5.4 Principles of differentiation and Design for All

Designed educational programmes are very important and museums have to respond to the diversity among learners in more inclusive ways. For this reason museums should incorporate a variety of methods and materials in their educational programmes for all visitors especially for cases of school groups consisted of children with and without visual disabilities. The development of collaborations and partnerships between museums and schools, museum educators and school teachers, is considered to be crucial for the evaluation and improvement of relative activities, the diffusion of good practices towards inclusion and the equal opportunities to cultural goods for all. For this, it may be argued that the underpinning of all effective types of intervention have to be based on the concept of differentiated instruction, according to which instruction is planned in such a way to meet the needs of all learners and maximizing their capacity (Van Gardener & Whittaker, 2006).

According to Tomlinson (Tomlinson, 2000c· Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003· Tomlinson & Strickland, 2005) educators have the option to differentiate at least four classroom elements based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile: that is, *content* (i. e. what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information; *process* (i. e. activities in which the trainee or the student engages in order to make sense of the content; *product* (i. e. the ways that the trainee or the student respond, rehearse, apply, or even extend what he or she has learned during the process; and last but not least the *learning environment* (i. e. the way the classroom works, collaborates and responds to all interactions that take place during the learning activities).

All the above can be incorporated in a broader concept and that is the notion of the Universal Design. The implementation of the principles of the Universal Design is in line with the users' real needs irrespectively of the environment (e. g. learning, technical, cultural, entertaining, etc.). The general policy of Universal Design was planned to respond to the widest possible audience with the minimum possible adaptations and the highest possible access (Stephanidis et al., 1998; Tokar, 2004).

In addition, the implementation of the concept of the Universal Design in terms of learning environment and learning procedures led to the notion of the

“Universal Design for Learning - UDL” (Heacox, 2009). According to Heacox, the Universal Design for Learning incorporates trainees’ (or students’) readiness, interest, or learning profile, and also accommodates a variety of formal and informal assessments. By using the principles of UDL, educators and trainers can plan a “Differentiated Learning Programme” consisting of stages differentiating content, process, and product as well as learning environment. The more organised in terms of UDL a teaching process is, the more effective can be considering the differences in terms of participants’ readiness, interest and learning profile (Broderick et al., 2005; Voltz, Sims, Nelson, & Bivens, 2005). Otherwise all “ex post” interventions will hardly succeed because of the absence of universal design elements (Hart, 1992a).

Finally, many researchers have conducted studies linking UDL to assistive technology and self-esteem which is worth taking into account in syllabus framework and educational interventions as well (Murray et al., 2004; Terwel, 2005).

## **6 Training/Teaching methodology**

It is suggested that the Museum Staff Training should include seminars and workshops. In this way, all trainees would have the opportunity to combine theory and practice and reflect on their own background. This phase is important for the participating museum members of the BaGMIVI project because it will help them to develop differentiated and accessible museum programmes.

The construction of a training programme is entirely up to the museum management. It might be more feasible and functional though to spread the whole training programme within a week time. Nevertheless, each museum is in charge to organize the training programme according to its availability regarding schedules and obligations.

Again, it has to be mentioned that the below suggested allocation of thematic areas and hours in broader thematic domains is optional and each museum can expand, add or even modify the content of the syllabus according to its emergent needs.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Thematic Domain**

#### **«Special Education and Individuals with Visual Impairments: haptic apprehension - communicative and educational perspectives»**

The first domain of the proposed training programme includes thematic areas relevant to: a. the heterogeneity of individuals with visual impairments and the existing disabling barriers in their access and inclusion, and b. haptic apprehension, haptic memory and mental maps. It may last 6 hours and it is suggested to include lectures as well as workshops. Initially, this domain focuses on the notion of disability and inclusion. In turn, it narrows its spectrum to the area of blindness highlighting issues such as individual characteristics of people with visual impairment, visual loss, low vision, chronological age of visual loss and consequences, heterogeneity of the population of individuals with disability, myths and prejudices, as well as chief principles in communication and education of individuals with visual impairments.

The proposed workshop aims at issues of familiarization of the museum staff towards orientation and mobility. All members of the museum staff (including those who work as security guards and visitors' services staff) will have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge about the significance of skills and concepts that people with visual impairments need to develop within their homes, community in order to be safe, independent and efficient. It is expected that the proposed workshop will equip the museum staff with basic techniques of escorting a person with blindness and also the workshop in question is expected to contribute towards their perspectives and beliefs about inclusion and inclusive museum. A workshop as described above should be led by specialists and usually includes two main strands: (a) theoretical knowledge in the Orientation, Mobility and Daily Living Skills, including basic knowledge on how to escort and work with persons with blindness or low vision, and (b) practical training (e. g. techniques of the sighted guide, use and significance of the white cane, independent mobility; use of the remaining senses etc.). Also, it would be very useful to include some hints and prompts regarding basic theoretical skills on guide-dogs, environmental adaptations for persons with blindness or low vision and the like.



## **2<sup>nd</sup> Thematic Domain**

### **«Individuals with Visual Impairments and Issues of accessibility in education and culture»**

The second domain of the proposed training programme includes thematic areas relevant to: a. the heterogeneity of individuals with visual impairments and the existing disabling barriers in their access and inclusion, and b. the principles of differentiation and design for all and its implications for museums

This domain may also last 6 hours and includes lectures as well as workshops relevant to issues of accessibility. In specific, this part of the training programme highlights the multidimensional nature of the notion of access and accessibility and provides examples of best practices focusing on visitors with visual impairment. In addition, this thematic area puts emphasis on the principles of Universal Design and provides examples of implementation in the context of a museum. Finally, the museum staff will have the opportunity to think and question their viewpoints regarding concepts such as emotional and intellectual accessibility.

The workshop of this part of the training programme will focus on “Design of tactile educational material: the case of museums and the usage of appropriate tactile material for educational purposes”. It is expected that the museum staff will come across chief principles of designing haptic material which will be graspable, sensible and approachable to individuals with visual impairments. It is also expected that the workshop may put emphasis on multi-sensory environments and provide examples from museums and from other cultural centers.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Thematic Domain**

#### **«Inclusion and differentiated programmes: Contemporary perspectives»**

The third domain of the proposed training programme includes thematic areas relevant to: a. the accessible museums' programs for individuals with visual impairments, and b. the principles of differentiation and design for all and its implications for museums. It is not an exaggeration to point out that this domain is characterised by a thematic interconnection bringing together all chief features from all thematic areas. The duration of this domain may also last 6 hours and consists also of lectures and workshops. The first part refers to contemporary perspectives and interpretations of the phenomenon of inclusion within the school and the museum environment respectively. The second part is dedicated to the notion of differentiation and to its application into a variety of educational programmes in schools as well as in museums. In turn, the members of the museum staff will have the chance to get involved in the construction of differentiated museum programmes towards visitors with visual impairments.

## **7 Assessing trainees' achievement**

This phase is important in every training procedure not because for its assessing element per se. It is useful because trainees will have the chance to consolidate the new knowledge in their own way through a variety of means such as written, oral, performance and practical skills demonstration. It is essential to provide the trainees the option: a. of how to express required learning (e.g., create a museum educational programme or a museum event day or a museum newsletter and son on), b. to work in small groups on their products, and c. to create their own product assignments as long as the assignments contain required elements according to their museum needs or objectives.

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