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ART & SIGNS

Art, Culture and Museum accessibility for Deaf audience

R1 – ART&SIGNS CURRICULUM ACTIVITY 01 – CONTEXT ANALYSIS TRANSNATIONAL REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Responsible partner: TUCEP – IT

Date: July 2022

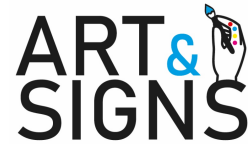
Erasmus+ - KA220 – Cooperation partnerships in vocational education and training
(Duration: 01.11.2021 – 31.10.2023)

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.
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English version

This document is the executive summary of the context analysis conducted by the ART&SIGNS partner organizations in six countries (Cyprus, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Spain). Qualitative and quantitative data are fully presented in the English version of the Transnational Report.

The context analysis was conducted through two research studies:

- 1) A **Field research** aimed at identifying the skills gap of museum operators in the communication with Deaf visitors through the administration of a double survey addressed to **museum workers** and **Deaf community**.
- 2) A **Desk research** means as a collection of existing studies and practices at national level regarding training and awareness-raising activities/experiences addressed to museum workers to make the cultural services accessible to Deaf people.

The main results allowed the partner organizations to identify the challenges related to the Deaf accessibility to the museum content as well as the competences and skills museum operators should acquire in order to ensure wider enjoyment of cultural services to Deaf people.

RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY

The partnership administrated two separate anonymous questionnaires to the project target groups: Deaf community and museum workers.

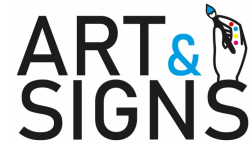
As far as the **Deaf community** survey is concerned, the partners involved a total number of **106** respondents mainly from 18 to 50 years old, mostly employed and students. The majority of respondents experienced museum visits: 52% usually visit a museum at least 1 or 2 times per year and almost 30% go to the museum 3 to 5 times per year or more. Only 18,9% of respondents said they never visited a museum. This data is important as it offers a realistic overview of the challenges and difficulties faced by Deaf people in the museums.

Most of participating Deaf people believe the museums lack video-guides in Sign Language, Deaf museum guides and hearing employees who knows Sign Language. From these answers it is clear that Deaf people expect to receive information in sign language, claiming the right to use their natural language, although it is a minority language.

It is hence understandable that one of the **main challenges** Deaf people encountered in a museum is related to the *communication area* both in terms of language (Sign Language) and skills (such as empathy, patience, problem solving). For that reason, the majority of Deaf people (77%) believe the museum operators should know the Sign Language at least at basic level to enable them to communicate with Deaf visitors.



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In addition, it would be advisable for museum workers to be able to adopt specific communication strategies and approaches which take into account the Deaf culture meant as the set of behaviours, habits and values of Deaf community.

As the Deaf community often feels that activities concerning social life are not respectful of their needs, most of them (81%) would like to be actively involved in the process of discovering sector signs for arts, history and culture.

The second questionnaire were administrated among **97 museum workers** in the partner countries. The respondents cover different roles within the museum: mainly reception and caretaker services operators, curators, museum guides and directors. More than half respondents (57,7%) encountered and interacted with Deaf visitors in the museum they are working at.

By and large, the **challenges** they faced in communicating with Deaf visitors concerned the difficulty to interact, both in terms of understanding what Deaf individual wanted to say and the inability to provide specific information and make them fully participate in the guided tour.

However, in order to overcome these challenges, the interviewed museum operators put in place specific actions such as speaking more slowly to enable Deaf people to read the lips, writing the information on a piece of paper or a mobile device, using facial expressions and gestures, used of video guides in sign language.

Although some museums where the respondents are working at have specific measures to manage the communication issues with Deaf visitors (video-guides in Sign Language, information panels, guided tours with Sign Language interpreters and subtitled audio-guides), the respondents believe that it is essential to take adequate and effective initiatives to break down the communication barriers.

In this regard, 60% of the respondents claimed that museum operators should be familiar with sign language in order to ensure the basic communication with Deaf people by making them active protagonists in the museum life, equally with hearing visitors.

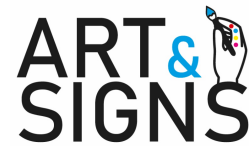
In addition to the linguistic aspect, the majority of respondents (86,6%) recognize the importance of acquiring specific knowledge about the habits and culture of the Deaf people, and consider relevant for their job to know the communication approaches and techniques to be used with Deaf people as well as the elements making up Deaf culture, understood as the set of behaviours, customs, beliefs and values associated with the experiences of the Deaf community.

Also, most of museum operators (76,5%) are interested to learn specific signs concerning the field of art and culture to be used when Deaf visitors go to the museum.

Almost the totality of respondents (88,7%) claimed their interest to attend the training course addressed to museum workers that will be organized by the partners of ART&SIGNS project and delivered as blended-learning experience.



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RESULTS FROM THE BEST PRACTICES

According to the existing good practices selected by the organisations in the partner countries, it is evident that the topic of accessibility to culture, history and art is strongly felt by the Deaf community and representatives of museum institutions. The first group, on the one hand, has always been interested in actively participating in social life and in the cultural events that are offered by the institutions in charge of culture, both public and private; on the other hand, the representatives of museum institutions, in recent years, have tried to take appropriate measures to break down communication barriers in order to make cultural content accessible to a community that is increasingly active and interested in enjoying it.

The results of the best practices show that, although there are specific measures to facilitate communication with Deaf people, mainly based on technological aids making the content accessible, there are still few projects or initiatives that provide training for museum operators to enable them to interact with Deaf visitors. More generally, it is about initiatives that enable greater usability of cultural content through the use of sign language video-guides, employment of Deaf museum guides or technological aids more suitable, nonetheless, for people with hearing impairments rather than Deaf people who use their natural language to communicate, namely sign language.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, from the context analysis carried out in the six partner countries through several methodologies involving the two main target groups the ART&SIGNS project is aimed at, it clearly and definitively emerges that there is a gap in the skills of museum operators representing a barrier to communication and accessibility to culture, history and art for Deaf people.

Basically, the skills and knowledge that the Deaf community requires from museum workers concern:

- basic knowledge of national sign language
- notions of deafness and communication difficulties faced by Deaf people
- elements of Deaf Culture
- communicative approaches to be used with Deaf people
- specific vocabulary in the field of art, history and culture
- knowing how to welcome a Deaf visitor for the first time
- available tools to make museum contents and services accessible

It is advisable to include the basics of International Signs to enable the museum operator to provide welcome and basic information to Deaf foreigners visiting their museum.



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Furthermore, as requested by many Deaf participants, the direct involvement of Deaf people during the development of the Curriculum, the discovery of sectoral signs of art, culture and history and the delivery of training is recommended. The involvement of Deaf trainers and experts will ensure greater social and labour market inclusion of Deaf people, and, at the same time, will be a much more formative experience for the beneficiaries of the training, the museum workers, who will have the opportunity to put knowledge and skills into practice already during the pilot training.

Read the complete results of the context analysis in the Transnational Report in English language uploaded in the dedicated section of the project website:

<https://www.artsignsproject.eu/outcomes-and-outputs/>