

Open Museums

Inclusion, education,
social justice, accessibility
in museums

THE PROJECT'S AIM

The project aims to promote the cultural heritage in the existing museum collections by enhancing accessibility and initiating future development of museum programs for improving inclusion of vulnerable groups in society - children with autism and their families. The "Open museums" project is the first of its kind in the Republic of North Macedonia that approaches the integrated treatment of this issue by emphasizing the importance of families in this specific field of interest.



INTRODUCTION

Museums are vital public institutions that should be open and committed to physical and cultural access to everyone. The inclusion of children/ adults with autism and their families in cultural and educational activities in Republic of North Macedonia is at a very low level. This poster reports upon a one-year project focused upon improving access by developing materials, undertaking a workshop with children with autism, their families and providing training for museum workers.

METHODS

The project was funded by the European Union as part of the activities of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018. Preliminary research was undertaken to identify the current level of inclusion of children/people with autism and their families in museum activity in the Republic of Macedonia, by using all the related available data. This indicated the necessity of creating a strategic program/strategy to establish positive practices in the creation of cultural policies, through an inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach to the development of programs for children/adults with autism and their families.

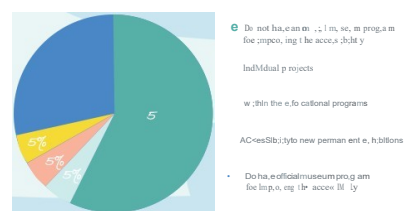


Figure 1. Absence of an official museum program for improving the accessibility of cultural heritage for vulnerable categories in the society in the Republic of Macedonia

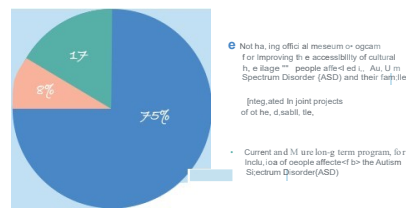


Figure 2. Extent of an official museum program for improving the accessibility of cultural heritage for people affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families

PROJECT ACTIVITIES:

- For the first time in the Republic of North Macedonia a seminar was organized for museum workers on the topic of work and inclusion of children with autism;
- Parents participated actively in the seminar and they expressed an affirmative and positive attitude towards the efforts towards the realization of this project;
- Lectures, presentations and discussions by experts, special educators and rehabilitators;
- Practical training: workshop with children with autism and their families.

RESULTS OF THE PROJECT:

- Creation of a museum program for children/adults with autism and their families for NI. Museum of the Macedonian Struggle - Skopje through the implementation of sensory-rich exercises created on the basis of various methods that provide visual support, communication through image exchange, materials and memory games;
- For the first time in Republic of North Macedonia a practical informative guide/educational toolkit was published (available in the in Macedonian, Albanian and English languages). This educational toolkit provides guidelines for adaption and implementation of museum program for children with autism and their families in museums in the Republic of Macedonia;
- Improved awareness: post-training questionnaires identified that autism awareness had increased within the museum staff team;
- Promotion of the social inclusion of this particular group into museums and their program.

CONCLUSION

During the lifespan of this project, the knowledge and practical experience of specialists in the fields of special education and rehabilitation and museology were combined to ensure the museum's accessibility through the provision of sensory-rich activities based upon good autism practice. Knowledge was effectively exchanged between complementary professionals. This will continue to provide opportunities for the active involvement of individuals with autism in cultural activities, with the museum playing a key role in developing social interaction and communication skills.