CULTURAL HERITAGE 2.0

YOUR GUIDE TO ACCESSIBILITY

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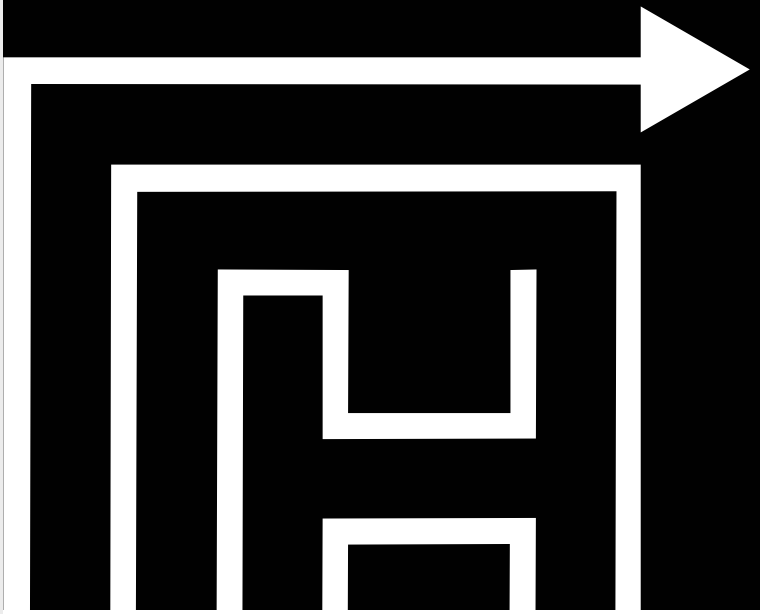
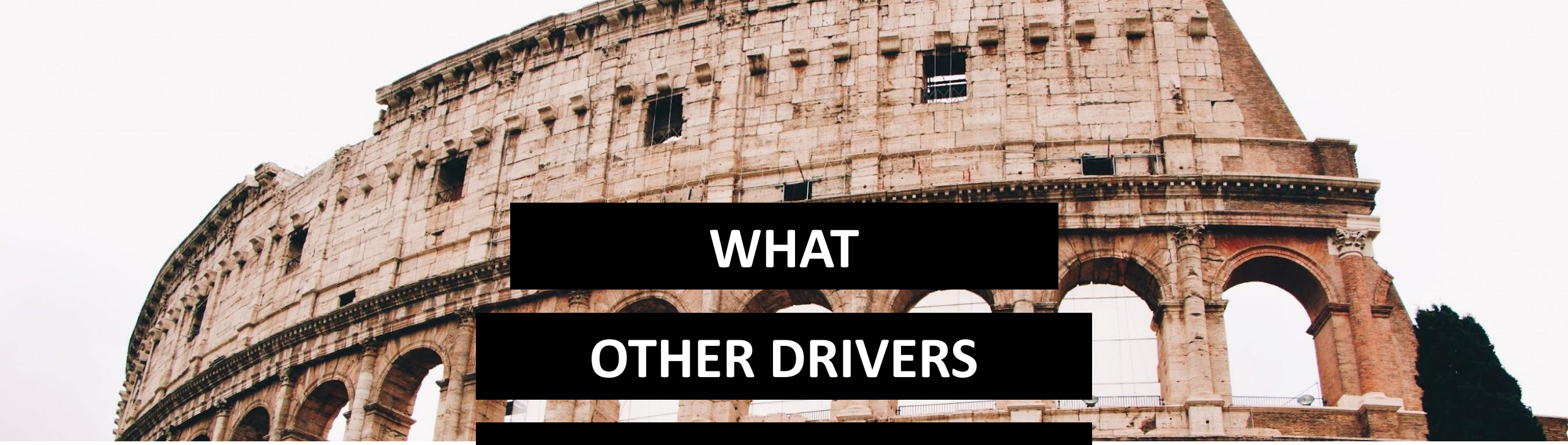


INTRODUCTION

Cultural policies in the European context

Various drivers have stimulated the awareness on the importance of accessibility for cultural heritage management. Changing cultural policies are one of these, in particular the programs of Creative Europe.

https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe



WHAT OTHER DRIVERS ARE ENCOURAGING CULTURAL HERITAGE ORGANISATIONS TO EMBRACE ACCESSIBILITY?

The drivers of accessibility

TECHNOLOGIES
Technological innovations and the digital world

BEST PRACTICES
and debates on the agency of culture

THE ECONOMY
More competition in the market

AUDIENCE COMPOSITION
Lack of audience diversity means lack of social relevance

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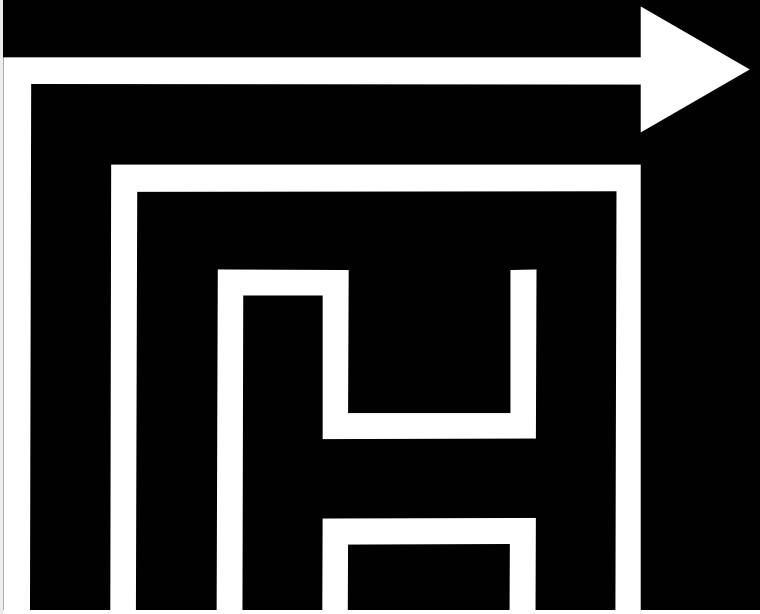
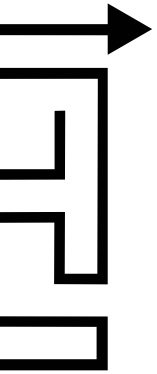


WHAT IS ACCESSIBILITY?

Accessibility

Accessibility has been defined in many ways. The backbone of its conceptualization is:

Accessibility is the practice of making something (heritage) usable by as many people as possible. It means that everyone can understand and access a museum, library, heritage tool and actively interact with it. Accessibility is vital: it is about removing barriers and meaningful cultural, cognitive and sensorial interaction. Accessibility impacts on the experience of visiting of everyone.



Evolution in the debate on accessibility

Earlier conceptualisations of accessibility focused on the removal of physical barriers (like stairs etc…). While this remains an important area of work, the understanding of accessibility needs to be more holistic and account for cognitive, cultural and emotional aspects as well. In addition to this, accessibility does not only benefit people with disabilities. Accessibility is for everyone.

Accessibility and diversity in museums

The new definition of museums approved in Prague in 2022 firmly places accessibility, diversity and inclusion at the hearth of what museums should be about:

“A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”

https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-approves-a-new-museum-definition/

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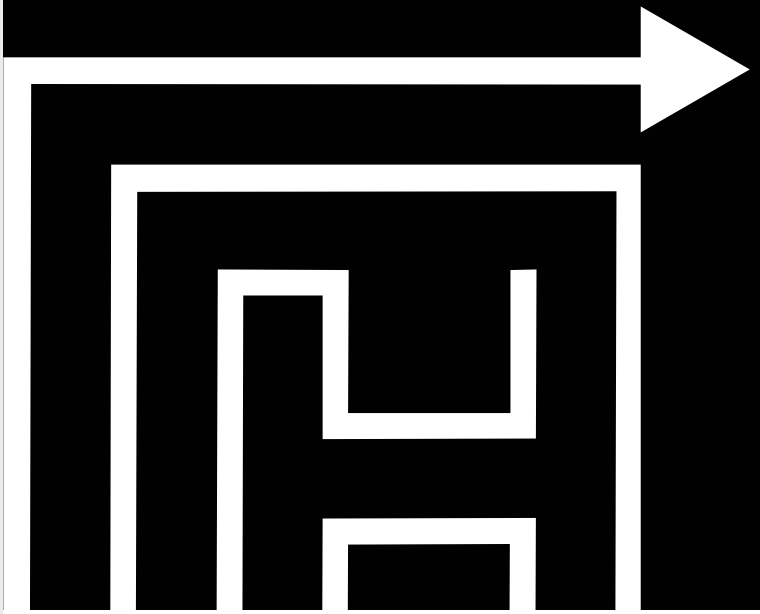


ACCESSIBILITY IN PRACTICE

Removing barriers

The practice of accessibility requires to identify and remove all kinds of barrier. Like physical barriers:

- Remember that mitigating and removing barriers benefits everyone. In this case elevators would make the visit more pleasant and accessible for a large group of audiences.

- Remember that not all impairments and permanent and visible.

Linguistic and cultural barriers

Linguistic barriers often coincide with cultural differences. Mediating content is not only a practice of translation, but it requires interpretation to make it more relevant and accessible to people with different backgrounds. Think about the potential to share responsibilities and expertise with different community groups. The meaning of heritage is multilayered and ever evolving.

“Il mio correr” project

Financial barriers

Yes, of course financial barriers are crucial. Hence, marketing should take accounts of people diverse economic backgrounds. Not only ticket sales impact the cost of visit but also public transports etc…

Gender inclusive signage

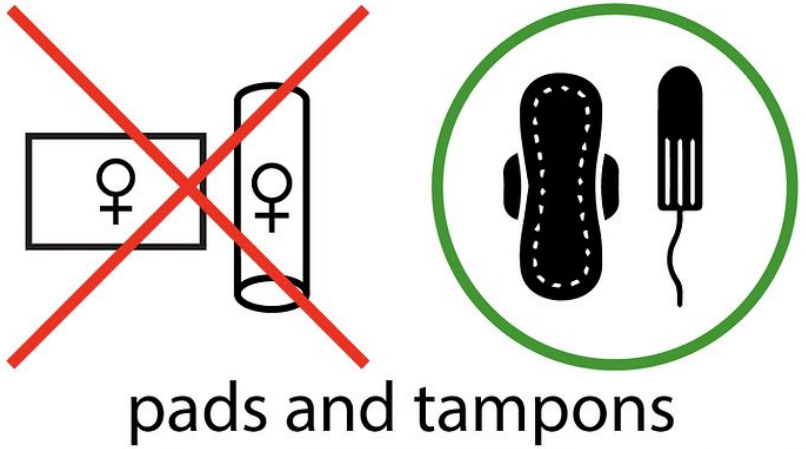
What is your voice?

Inclusive signage and labels can be a good tool to play with language and communicate the tone of an institution in truly welcoming ways…

Facilities

The key of accessibility is to always think holistically and identify stereotypes, such as:

Dads with toddlers need changing rooms too!



Trans men and non-binary people also can have periods!

Via *https://www.margaretmiddleton.com/post/gender-inclusive-signage*

Technology

Technologies such as this robot can unquestionably help institutions to remove barriers. Think carefully about resources and maintenance as technological tools tend to be obsolete rapidly.

Creativity and innovation

Accessibility offers endless opportunities for creativity and innovation, especially in terms of new partnership and tools.

Full poster available at:
https://ceca.mini.icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/07/poster-interactif-Eng.pdf

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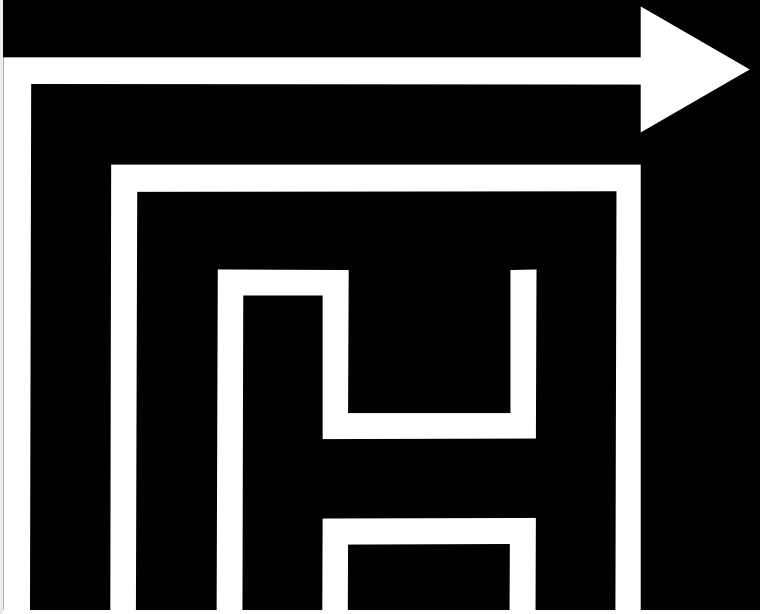

MANAGING ACCESSIBILITY

Who should be responsible to manage accessibility?

Everyone.

The idea that the managerial responsibility of accessibility should rely fully on the shoulders of single offices/teams is detrimental. Accessibility is about values, visions and strategies. But accessibility is also about daily engagement with visitors/users onsite and online.

Everyone should be involved in the delivery of accessible heritage practices.

One resource for planning

This is a helpful conceptual and practical step by step guide to think about how to implement accessibility in organisations. Managing accessibility requires careful planning, implementation and facilitation.

Personas

Personas are fictional characters based upon research that can represent different users.

Using personas can be helpful to identify users needs and barriers.

Personas are key tools in user centred design.

They help to focus on needs rather than on stereotypes about social groups.

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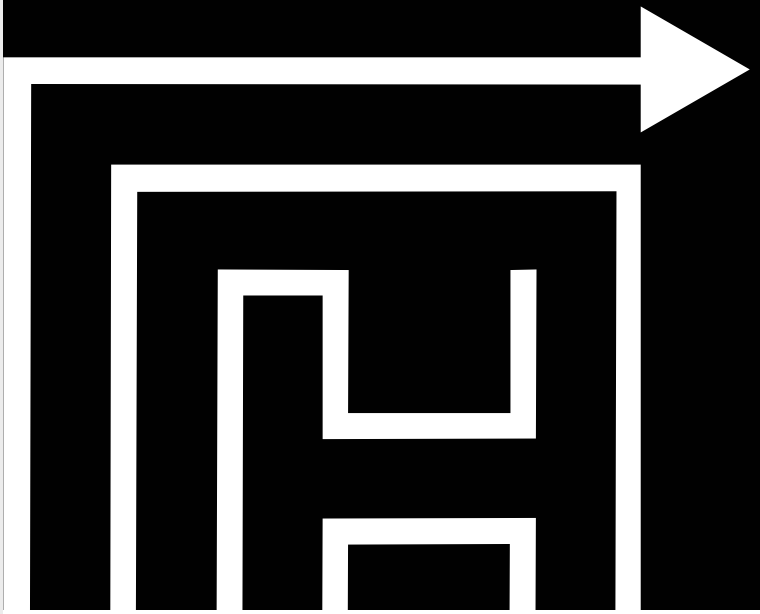

IS ACCESSIBILITY ALWAYS EXPENSIVE?

Change of mindset above all

A common stereotype relating to the field of accessibility is that this is an expensive area. This presentation has highlighted that accessibility is about changing mindsets first. Accessibility is not about making new investments in expensive tools. But it requires planning and implementation. Accessibility is a circular process based on users' needs, hence it is often a slow process that requires organizational change.

Accessibility is a managerial area of change that can foster creativity and innovation.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

www.culturalheritage.eu

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