

# **(In)visible Audiences: From Inclusivity and Access to Caring Museum Practice**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to propose a novel framework for cultural participation and museum policy, contextualizing accessibility and inclusion within the purview of care ethics. The study involves a comparative analysis of programs designed for people with disabilities, centering on three case studies: the Gallery of Matica Srpska, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, and the Museum of Yugoslavia. The methodological approach involves qualitative data collection through desk research and semi-structured interviews with cultural professionals associated with the respective institutions. An important aspect of the methodology is the attempt at an interdisciplinary approach, gleaning and connecting concepts from the fields of political philosophy (politics and ethics of care), cultural policy and cultural rights, museology, and critical disability theory.

As examples of good practice, three museum programs are analyzed beyond existing legal paradigms for accessibility and inclusion, but within broader discourses of care ethics, social regeneration, and museum care. The proposed framework serves as a potential guide for museum policies, transcending the mere elimination of physical barriers to foster enhanced cultural participation and interdependence between museums and historically marginalized, underrepresented, and invisible audiences.

## **Keywords**

Ethics of care, inclusivity, accessibility, museum practice, visibility

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## Introduction

The rights and opportunities for persons from marginalized groups often indicate the general state of equality and human rights. The right to take part in the cultural life of the community is guaranteed to everyone by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights<sup>1</sup>. Rights to access to cultural heritage are also included in the 2005 Faro Convention<sup>2</sup>. While these frameworks stand to protect equal cultural participation for all members of society, their implementation depends on each signing party, meaning that different countries have different policies and instruments that tackle access to cultural institutions and cultural participation.

The main documents that guarantee inclusiveness and equal rights for people with disabilities in Europe are the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities<sup>3</sup>, the European Accessibility Act<sup>4</sup>, the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan<sup>5</sup>, and the European Disability Strategies<sup>6</sup>. Many states have implemented actions to ensure access to culture for people with disabilities, but there is a lot of work to be done on the cultural policy level. The majority of activities and advocacy in Serbia are done by the civil sector (see Lazarević et al 2022).

In line with the UN Convention, cultural institutions should work towards removing physical barriers and adopting accommodations in their spaces and curatorial concepts. This includes ensuring accessibility to buildings for wheelchair users and people with physical disabilities, training staff, including detailed information about accessibility on websites and pamphlets, providing adequate translations and interpretation for deaf and visually impaired communities, introducing adequate spaces for rest, and including different inclusive, multisensory experiences into their annual programs.

Despite having ratified all relevant legal documents, over 80% of cultural institutions in Serbia have not included accessibility in their strategic documents, procedures, and

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1 OHCHR. *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. Adopted 16 December, 1966. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>.

2 Council of Europe. *Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society Details of Treaty No.199*. Entried in force 01 Jun 2011. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=199>.

3 United Nations General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Adopted 13 December, 2006. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>.

4 European Commission. *European Accessibility Act*. Adopted June, 2019. [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/disability/union-equality-strategy-rights-persons-disabilities-2021-2030/european-accessibility-act\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/disability/union-equality-strategy-rights-persons-disabilities-2021-2030/european-accessibility-act_en).

5 European Commission. *Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities: a European Action Plan (2004-2010)*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/equal-opportunities-for-people-with-disabilities-a-european-action-plan-2004-2010.html>.

6 European Commission. *Union of equality: Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030*. Adopted March, 2021. [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/disability/union-equality-strategy-rights-persons-disabilities-2021-2030\\_en#:~:text=In%20March%202021%2C%20the%20European,Europe%20and%20around%20the%20world](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/disability/union-equality-strategy-rights-persons-disabilities-2021-2030_en#:~:text=In%20March%202021%2C%20the%20European,Europe%20and%20around%20the%20world).

practices; less than 10% of museums and galleries have accessibility plans, and only 17% of them employ persons with disabilities as full-time professional staff (Milankov, Opačić, and Subašić 2022).

As the social and economic rights of marginalized groups are still an outstanding issue, cultural rights are yet to be adequately prioritized, and a large portion of society has limited access to culture.

An estimated 15% of the global population has some form of disability, and this proportion will continue to grow (Milankov, Opačić, and Subašić 2022). With this in mind, the fact that Serbia's cultural institutions have thus far failed to adapt their facilities and programs to the needs of persons with disabilities means that at least 15% of their audiences remain invisible.

While the rule of law, the human rights approach, and a wider socio-economic and cultural shift that occurred globally over the last decades have brought significant institutional and conceptual changes to the cultural sector, it has become increasingly evident that the paradigm of equality and universal rights does not provide sufficient care to the most vulnerable. In light of the recent health crisis, growing economic inequality, the rise of populism, and the inevitable consequences of climate change, scholars have started discussing what is becoming known as the crisis of care (Chatzidakis et al. 2020). This paper aims to consider a new framework for cultural participation and museum policy that conceives access and inclusion within the context of care ethics.

## Methodology

Considering the growing body of research on issues of accessibility and inclusion in cultural institutions in Serbia, the aim of this paper is to analyze the practices of specific museums as examples of good practice and evaluate them through the lens of care ethics. The core is a comparative analysis of three programs developed by the Gallery of Matica Srpska in Novi Sad, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, and the Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade. Namely, 1. the project Sign Museum developed by the Museum of Yugoslavia from 2017 for the Deaf community in Serbia (Sopić 2020); 2. the interdisciplinary project In Touch With developed by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade in 2019 for visually impaired audiences (Ristivojević 2020); and 3. the 2022–2023 exhibition Uroš Predić for All in the Gallery of Matica Srpska, which includes tactile installations and audio tours for visually impaired audiences, as well as programs and accommodations for elderly audiences, children, the Deaf community, and persons with learning disabilities.

The methodological approach starts from **desk research** focused on international and national legal documents and policies that ensure the cultural rights of persons with disabilities in Serbia. Qualitative data about the current state of accessibility policies and strategic documents of cultural institutions in Serbia was also gathered through desk research focused on recent publications, reports and the museums' online platforms. Qualitative data about museum programs and values was collected through **semi-**

**structured interviews** with the cultural professionals involved in the development of the specific projects in question.

In order to have a wider perspective on accessibility in Serbian cultural institutions and better assess the success and sustainability of the programs/case studies, an additional interview was conducted with a researcher from the Institute of Cultural Development Research and co-author of *Culture of Accessibility* (Milankov, Opačić, and Subašić 2022).

## Ethics of Care

The idea of an ethics of care was first proposed by feminist scholars in the 1970s-80s, as a form of resistance to traditional theories of moral development. In her groundbreaking work *In a Different Voice* (1982), American psychologist Carol Gilligan opposed the idea that morality depends on abstract, universal principles, an 'ethics of justice', asserting that moral reasoning is always contextual (Gilligan 1993). Gilligan emphasized the significance of emotional connections, relationships, empathy, and interdependence.

The ethics of care framework was further developed by feminist philosophers and educators Virginia Held, Nel Noddings, Joan Tronto, and Berenice Fischer (Held 2006; Noddings 1986; Tronto 1993). It rejects the dominant idea that abstract reasoning and impartiality lead to better solutions to moral dilemmas, and dismisses the dominant divide between the "private" and "public" spheres—underlining the moral significance of family and friendship, as they play a crucial role in human development. Tied to (neo) liberal, capitalist values, traditional moral theories rest on the idea of individuals as rational, mutually indifferent, and equal in terms of rights. In contrast, the ethics of care sees persons as relational and interdependent rather than self-sufficient, and recognizes the intersections of gender, race, class, and ability.

As Held puts it, (the ethics of care) "calls on us to take responsibility, while liberal individualist morality focuses on how we should leave each other alone" (Held 2006, 15). Held argues that the ethics of care have implications that go beyond interpersonal relationships, expanding our notions of care to communities, society, and the environment, and posits that caring relationships need to be cultivated on all levels—legislation, public policy, and government: "Before there can be respect for rights there must be a sense of social connectedness with those others whose rights are recognized." (Held 2006, 125)

The ethics of care propose an emphasis on meeting needs rather than simply respecting rights. Instead of simply respecting the rights of abstract, rational agents (i.e. *leaving each other alone*), this approach takes into consideration cultural differences, diversity of experiences, multitude of needs, and intersectionality.

Tronto explored the intersection of ethics and politics, and advocated for the integration of care into political discourse. Moral boundaries, as Tronto defines them, refer to the boundary between morality and politics, between the private and the public, and the notion that moral judgements require distance and impartiality. It is her

understanding that moral boundaries serve to maintain unequal relations of power, while the work of care remains in the hands of the marginalized (Tronto 1993).

Tronto described four phases of caring: "caring about, taking care of, care-giving, and care-receiving." **Caring about** refers to the recognition that care is needed, while **taking care of** someone or something means assuming some level of responsibility and determining the right kind of response to their needs. **Care-giving** involves physical labor and direct contact with the person or object being cared for. The final phase, **care-receiving**, refers to the response to care, underlining the necessity of evaluating whether needs are actually met. Often gendered and racialized, caregiving is devalued, whereas the idea of taking care of is associated with business, public decision-making, and male positions of power. Vulnerability and dependence on care are seen as weaknesses in societies that value power above all else, which often leads to the perception of elderly and disabled citizens as a burden, stripping away their dignity and agency.

Tronto's position is that human needs have to be prioritized **within a political context**. In her view, the ethics of care are "incomplete without a political theory of care" (Tronto 1993).

In *The Heart of Justice*, political scientist Daniel Engster posits that every individual has a **moral obligation to care** for others. Part of our moral obligation, Engster asserts, is fulfilled through caring relationships in the private sphere, but much more can be achieved through **collective care, caring institutions, and caring policies** (Engster 2007). Like Tronto, Engster underlines the importance of trust and compassion, especially between citizens and social institutions: "compassionate individuals construct institutions that embody what they imagine; and institutions, in turn, influence the development of compassion in individuals" (Engster 2007, 199). Without caring institutions and policies, governments implicitly tell citizens that their needs are unimportant and constitute private matters.

While care ethics center on expanding our notions of wellbeing and social inclusion rather than thinking solely in terms of rights, cultural rights are part of the political, social, and emotional conditions that allow us to thrive. Without universal care at the cultural policy level, there can be no democratic society. If we consider public institutions as part of the *geographies of care* (Morse 2021) that provide us with the space we need to cultivate caring relationships, museums have a significant role in the journey toward more democratic, inclusive, and caring societies.

## Critical Disability Theory and the Ethics of Care

The dependence on care that often comes with disability has traditionally been pathologized both politically and morally (Chatzidakis et al 2020). Historically, the pathologization of disability has led to an association of disability with pain and suffering—a lack that renders one incapable of having an active role in society, and should therefore be *fixed*.

In recent years, many authors have advocated for a different understanding of

disability, suggesting that impairment is an issue of embodiment, whereas disability, as bioethicist Rosemarie Garland Thompson<sup>7</sup> explains, is the "experience of being non-normate." Ableist culture, in other words, is what leads to the social exclusion of people with disabilities.

The pathologization of disability is rooted in the medical model of disability, and unfortunately, this model remains widely accepted today. Social theories of disability were developed from the 1970s by activists who mobilized to raise awareness about social exclusion and conceptualize disability as a minority identity (Reynolds 2022). The social model turned disability into a question of politics, pointing out environmental and systemic factors that contribute to the lack of agency and opportunity for people with disabilities.

The social model, however, is not without its flaws—in *Returning the Social to the Social Model*, Tobin Siebers<sup>8</sup> outlines three major issues: ignoring the body, objectifying disabled people as targets of disabling environments, and not allowing agency because "the environment is everything" (Siebers in Mitchell, Antebi, and Snyder 2019, 39–48). Siebers proposes a reconceptualization of the social model with respect to the complexity of embodiment, understanding that body and environment are mutually transformative.

Despite the difficulty of defining disability due to the heterogeneity of experiences it entails, philosopher Joel Michael Reynolds argues that the social aspects of disability have allowed society to recognize harmful ableist practices and stereotypes, and that it is still necessary today. While certainly heterogeneous in their embodied knowledge and experiences, people with disabilities share the experience of oppression and exclusion that comes with living in an ableist society (Reynolds 2022).

Critical disability theory, as outlined by Canadian legal scholars Dianne Pothier and Richard Devlin, has several common points with the ethics of care. According to them, critical disability theory is not a question of the medical or social construction of disability, but rather one of politics and power—lessness, power over, and power to (Pothier and Devlin 2006). Much like the ethics of care, critical disability theory is concerned with the liberal emphases on able-bodiedness, independence, and productivity as essential aspects of individual capacity and personhood. It warns us that an individualist understanding of disability puts the primary responsibility on the disabled person, whereas an understanding of the socially created obstacles inherent to an ableist society shifts responsibility to the community at large—i.e. point towards our mutual interdependence and the urgent need for universal and collective care.

In their essence, both critical disability theory and the ethics of care call for a radical reorganization of society that traverses our relationships, policies, communities, institutions, and ideologies, a systemic detachment from the neoliberal dictates of productivity, self-reliance, and competition.

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7 Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie, via Reynolds, Joel Michael, 2022.

8 Tobin Siebers is an American professor of literature, art, and design at the University of Michigan, whose work has contributed greatly to the development of disability studies.

## The Museum as a Space of Social Care

Until the emergence of new museology in the 1980s, the role of the museum was centered on being a repository of objects (Vergo 1989; Hooper-Greenhill 1994; Bennet 1995; Sandell 1998; Silverman 2010). An implicit role was in the collection's capacity to display individual or national wealth and political power.

With new museology, museum theory started unveiling the hegemonic nature of museums and their position as gatekeepers. This paradigm shift, or **cultural turn**, as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill called it, demanded that museums look both **inward** to their collections and organizational structures, and **outward** to their audiences and communities (Hooper-Greenhill 2007, 2). The public role of museums was emphasized due to an understanding that museums shape knowledge, and that the way heritage is displayed and talked about is inevitably political. As Hooper-Greenhill indicated, "ideology is the metaphorical sea within which we swim, the social air that we breathe" (Hooper-Greenhill 1994, 3).

Participation, representation, and accessibility became central demands for museums that hoped to stay relevant to increasingly politicized audiences. Decolonial perspectives also became prominent as museums were called out to include and contextualize multiple historical narratives, cultural backgrounds, and address burning social issues.

Many authors believe that museums must become "agents of social inclusion" in order to rectify both the historical institutionalized exclusion of society's most vulnerable communities from their narratives, displays, and buildings, and the structural exclusion that affects them in all other domains outside of arts and culture. For British scholar Richard Sandell, social inclusion within the museum can be achieved through three pillars – representation, participation, and access (Sandell 1998). By reimagining its identity, organizational structure, goals, and values, and opening up to audiences, the inclusive museum becomes an "agent of social regeneration and broader social change" (Sandell 1998).

For a museum to stay relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it must become a space of social responsibility and open dialogue, fostering relationships, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking.

In the view of Lois H. Silverman, the most essential work of museums is to "benefit human relationships and, ultimately, repair the world"<sup>9</sup>—a notion not far from the central tenets of care ethics. In today's context of overlapping crises, the museum must cultivate strong social bonds and acknowledge the social issues that affect communities, from poverty, unemployment, migration, and structural racism, to gender-based violence, ableism, ageism, and intergenerational trauma. As Silverman explains, "the greatest treasures of culture are not sculptures or specimens, but rather, human relationships" (Silverman 2010, 155).

If both museums and communities are to coexist and thrive in the upcoming decades, a universal approach to museum care that transcends old paradigms of (curatorial)

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9 See Silverman 2010.



care for objects is crucial. Drawing on the ethics of care concept of feminist scholars, researcher Nuala Morse proposes a new approach to museums as "spaces of social care". Care has always been a fundamental feature of museums, but it was focused on caring for objects –what Morse suggests is the expansion of the museums' practice of care from objects to people (communities, audiences, but also staff), ideas, societal issues, stories, and places (Morse 2021). Without **care thinking**, she argues, initiatives to democratize museums are superficial and likely to fail. Current approaches to community engagement are tied to institutional **logics of contribution**, rather than the **logic of care**. While developing inclusive programs and trying to reach out to audiences, museums continue to act from a place of authority and invisible power, focusing on top-down approaches. The logic of contribution sees participation through the lens of what audiences can bring to the museum—their experiences, perspectives, interpretations, or concrete objects, stories, and new research trajectories. The logic of care, on the other hand, starts by asking what the museum can do for the communities, and what the benefits are when it comes to community wellbeing and outstanding structural issues such as social exclusion, racial injustice, or the climate crisis (Morse 2021).

Care thinking means that inclusive programs are created interdependently, as collective endeavors. Rather than doing things **for** communities, museums are invited to co-create *with* them in such a way that the institution itself is transformed from within.

The museum as a space of care recognizes our interdependence, the fact that some members of society are more vulnerable than others, and that public institutions should not act from a position of paternalism and tokenism: "in the logic of care, participants are not the 'target group' [...] rather they are partners in the practices of care and the practices that make the museum" (Morse 2021, 191).

According to Tronto's framework, Morse describes what the different phases of care mean for museums: caring about relates to recognizing the different cultural, physical, social, and emotional needs of different audience members; *caring for* means making sure different needs are met through providing accessible spaces free of stigma and judgment. The hands-on phase of *caregiving* is marked by the efforts of staff members to develop inclusive programs and creative activities with competence, and in collaboration with civil society, social and healthcare workers. The final phase of care receiving comes in the form of responsiveness to interests and feedback from audiences for whom museums develop their programs (Morse 2021).

## Accessibility and Inclusion in Museums in Serbia

In *Inclusive Museums of Serbia*, researchers from the Institute for Cultural Development Research assessed 97 museums and galleries according to physical, communicational, strategic accessibility and inclusive program development, unfortunately showing that only 20% of the institutions could be considered fully accessible<sup>10</sup> (Milankov, Opačić, and Subašić 2022). The authors outlined three main obstacles to the better implementation

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<sup>10</sup> The results refer to the period between June and October 2021.



of accessibility standards: 1. a lack of official monitoring of the application of laws and regulations; 2. a lack of education; and 3. the fact that museums don't form enough partnerships with civil society organizations. They also mention other factors, including a lack of understanding of the terminology and standards of accessibility, the experiences of disability and appropriate ways of communicating with different audiences, and a lack of recognition of people with disabilities as potential audiences.

As Marijana Milankov reported<sup>11</sup>, the goal of the research was to show that while the cultural interests of people with disabilities in Serbia are not homogenous, it is important to have options for participating in cultural life. What culture brings to the table when it comes to social inclusion is a significant increase in quality of life. In the words of Milankov:

*"culture is an ideal testing ground if we want to assess the inclusiveness of a society—not confining inclusion only to the sectors of education, healthcare, and social services. [...] People with disabilities should be seen in cinemas, museums, theaters, because then they truly become part of the dynamic pulse of the city and become visible. When we reach the point of stepping out into public spaces, visiting institutions, and not just focusing on rehabilitation, we begin to breathe freely."*<sup>12</sup>

Cultural institutions have a duty towards the public, and making their facilities and programs accessible helps them fulfill their social role. Museums become more interesting when they adapt their spaces and programs to the needs of people with disabilities as it allows all audiences to experience art in a new way.

While Serbian cultural institutions still have a long way ahead when it comes to inclusivity and collective care, several institutions are making great efforts towards opening up to audiences, accepting feedback, and initiating collaboration. The following case studies can serve as a reference point for caring practices, and a guideline towards creating a wider network of care in cultural and other public institutions. To paraphrase Daniel Engster, compassionate cultural professionals construct cultural institutions and policies that embody what they imagine, and those institutions and policies, in turn, influence the development of compassion in audiences and communities.

## Practicing Care in the Museum—Case Studies

### *In Touch With—Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade*<sup>13</sup>

In 2018, curators Senka Ristivojević and Katarina Krstić from the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade (MoCAB) initiated the project In Touch With together with the Union of the Blind of Serbia and the Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade.<sup>14</sup> Instead

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<sup>11</sup> Based on a semi-structured interview conducted by the author on March 3rd, 2023, Belgrade.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Based partially on an interview with Senka Ristivojević, curator of the Museum's Depot, and Katarina Krstić, senior curator / museum librarian conducted in August 2023.

<sup>14</sup> <https://msub.org.rs/exhibition/u-dodiru-sa/>

of acquiring traditional accommodations like tactile diagrams and reliefs for blind and visually impaired audiences, the curators invited senior students from the Faculty's Sculpture Department to create three-dimensional interpretations of works from the MoCAB collection. After several months of collaborative curatorial work with students, professors, and Boris Dončić, chief librarian of the Union of the Blind of Serbia, the exhibition *In Touch With* was held in 2019, comprising eleven works<sup>15</sup> from the permanent collection and their interpretations by students from the Faculty of Fine Arts.

The goal was to bring works of visual art closer to blind and visually impaired audiences by putting young artists in the role of art mediators, interpreting the original works through their personal understanding and media of choice. The works included tactile sculptures, audio works, spatial installations, and performances that allowed both visually impaired and sighted visitors to experience contemporary art through different senses and direct interaction.<sup>16</sup> The works were accompanied by explanations in Braille and large font letters, tactile paving and audio descriptions.<sup>17</sup>

*In Touch With* was conceptualized as an interdisciplinary experiment, bringing together formal arts education, museum pedagogy, arts mediation, and audience development. The students involved were given an opportunity to get to know local cultural heritage, discuss influential artists, get to know the needs of different audiences, and develop their professional skills. While the curators made a selection from the Museum's permanent collection, the students were free to decide which work they would interpret. The process placed collaborative and community work at the front by allowing young artists to develop the field of arts mediation with their own distinct voices (Ristivojević 2020).

According to Ristivojević and Krstić, the project's initial goal was to develop alternative ways of interpreting works instead of acquiring traditional tactile diagrams. The curatorial team proposed a collaboration with professors Mrđan Bajić and Radoš Antonijević from the Faculty of Fine Arts, and their project was incorporated into the school curriculum.

*"It was important for us to involve the students because of the discontinuity we have between the museum and younger generations [...]. It was a chance to develop a closer relationship with them and give them a sense of the museum as a familiar place of their own." –Senka Ristivojević<sup>18</sup>*

The curatorial team included Boris Dončić from the Union of the Blind from the very beginning, including project planning, selection of students' works, and group discussions over the course of one semester, giving the participants a chance to better understand the needs of their audience. Most of them had no prior experiences with blind and visually impaired audiences. The focus was placed mainly on interpretation, collaborative work,

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15 Namely, the works of artists Kosta Miličević, Rihard Jakopič, Vane Bor, Pivo Karamatijević, Ivan Tabaković, Petar Lubarda, Radomir Reljić, Bora Iljovski, Petar Omčikus, Zoran Popović, Tomislav Peternek, and Vladimir Miladinović.

16 <https://msub.org.rs/exhibition/u-dodiru-sa/>.

17 Ibid.

18 Based on a semi-structured interview with Senka Ristivojević and Katarina Krstić conducted by the author in August 2023, Belgrade.

learning, and (re)evaluating their artistic practices.

It was MoCAB's first ever exhibition for blind and visually impaired visitors, but it also provided a chance for others to experience the works in a new way, using different senses and interacting directly. Seven guided tours were organized for groups from civil society organizations, schools, and social spaces for persons with disabilities, as well as group discussions, two workshops, and an expert panel, during which audiences had a chance to share their experiences, thoughts, and questions.

The implementation of *In Touch With* provided a chance for MoCAB staff to learn more about the accessibility tools and accommodations used in different museums, such as tactile paving, annotations and a publication in Braille, and audio descriptions which were also available on a downloadable app called *Guide Me*. The museum had no formal systematic handbook on accommodations for blind and visually impaired audiences, so the curators tried to involve as many experts from the community as possible, with Dončić providing feedback and ideas on all aspects of the exhibitions, and Violeta Vlaški<sup>19</sup> preparing and recording audio descriptions. Audio descriptions were an important aspect for both curators, because they offered a new approach to the interpretation of art works that relies more on everyday language than on theoretical backgrounds, meaning it brings an additional value to wider audiences.

The interest of the museum staff in accessibility and the positive experiences from the exhibition *In Touch With* continued over the next years, and a follow-up project was developed between the years 2022 and 2023. Education is the central role of the museum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, according to the interviewees. While they believe that museum practice in Serbia is far behind international standards, relying on resources on new museology from the 1980s, they see the situation changing towards museums becoming **resource centers** for the local community.

*"I believe in the educational and cultural role of the museum [...] The 21<sup>st</sup> century museum is a space in which we can all participate, which was one of our goals with these exhibitions. If we can participate in the museum, we can take a more active role in everyday life—the museum is a form of simulation in that sense. Despite the numerous worn-out phrases we have been using for decades, I think critical thinking is something that can be achieved through participation and the inclusion of people."—Senka Ristivojević<sup>20</sup>*

When it comes to the perception of persons with disabilities, the interviewees believe there is a general lack of education among the population. Instead of creating an exclusive program that would further marginalize the blind and visually impaired community, the goal of *In Touch With* was to create a new experience for everyone. A big issue in the opinion of the interviewees is the fact that MoCAB no longer has a department for arts education in their organizational structure, nor a curator who works solely on this topic.

19 Philologist, accessibility advocate, and audio description expert associated with the Union of the Blind of Serbia.

20 Based on a semi-structured interview with Senka Ristivojević and Katarina Krstić conducted by the author in August 2023, Belgrade.

Museum workers from different sectors within the organizational structure deal with inclusion and accessibility based on their personal interest and enthusiasm. Care is not incorporated into museum practice because museums have had a long history of being self-sufficient and closed-off.

*"It is important to open up museums towards the audience, because that's how we ignite critical thinking, start to learn and look at things differently. There used to be so many barriers between the museum as an elitist institution and the public, which was not allowed into the discussion. This is not the way; museum workers and cultural workers need to remove those boundaries and communicate with the audience."*—Katarina Krstić<sup>21</sup>

Much like other museums and galleries in the country, MoCAB lacks an official strategic document pertaining to accessibility and inclusion, on top of not having staff appointed specifically to the work of arts education and mediation. In that sense, the pioneering exhibition *In Touch With* is an example of the individual enthusiasm, experience, and inclination towards care for visitors' needs on behalf of the curators. However, it is worth mentioning that other than the appointment of Boris Dončić in the curatorial team of the project, the collaborative aspects of caring with (Tronto 2013), were focused mainly on the young artists involved, and their learning process.

When it comes to inclusivity, more could have been done in terms of including members of the blind and visually impaired community and civil society organizations in the whole process, rather than simply creating **something for them** and presenting them with the end result. In terms of what Nuala Morse refers to as the **logic of contribution** versus **the logic of care**<sup>22</sup>, the projects developed in MoCAB didn't move far from the question of what the community<sup>23</sup> can give to the museum, rather than what can be co-created with the community. The wider blind and visually impaired community had a twofold role in the project: as passive recipients of the art works, and as a resource to the cultural creators within the institution (curators, artists, etc.) whose experiences can help develop the Museum's curatorial approaches, theoretical concepts, and the participants' artistic practices. While the aspects of good care described by Tronto were present, the final phase of **care receiving** and the recognition of the interdependence between the institution and the audience could be found as lacking. That said, as initial steps towards inclusion and reconceptualising MoCAB as a space of care, these two exhibitions raised important questions and started building a network that has a chance at growth.

### *Sign Museum –Museum of Yugoslavia*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> See Morse 2021.

<sup>23</sup> By community, we refer here to the target audience, not the arts students who participated in the project implementation, who were given a chance to work from within the institution, but who as (future) cultural workers are not far from what would constitute the professional art scene rather than simply the audience.

<sup>24</sup> Based partially on an interview with Sara Sopić, museum curator and educator of the Museum of Yugoslavia, conducted in August 2023.

In 2015, members of the Deaf community in Belgrade approached the Museum of Yugoslavia with the idea of organizing a guided tour of a temporary exhibition<sup>25</sup> devoted to everyday life in Yugoslavia. While the initial idea was simple—translating an existing guided tour into Serbian Sign Language, the initiative was significant because it came from the community itself.

Sara Sopić, museum curator and educator, saw potential in the partnership and didn't wish for the initiative to end after one guided tour that simply adapted existing narratives. Sopić conducted interviews<sup>26</sup> with members of the City Organization of the Deaf of Belgrade and the Association of Serbian Sign Language Interpreters, and joined their weekly meetings to better understand their experiences. The time and effort spent in getting to know them allowed members of the community to feel more empowered to express their needs and make suggestions about future programs. With The Association of Sign language interpreters, The City Deaf Organization, The Cultural Artistic Society for Deaf as project partners, the Museum of Yugoslavia started developing the *Sign Museum* project in 2015.

The one-year project consisted of six museum programs translated into Serbian Sign Language and one seminar for museum professionals. Each program was followed by evaluation meetings and interviews, which gave the community a sense of belonging and agency within the museum (Sopić 2016). They took an active role in each step of the project development, deciding what they wanted to see in the museum, asking questions, and providing feedback. According to Sopić, the meetings gave individuals more confidence to visit other exhibitions in the museum outside of the specific programs for the Deaf community, as well as express negative feedback.<sup>27</sup>

The follow-up and evaluations resulted in a new goal: training a member of the Deaf community to become a curator. Instead of having someone from inside the institution greet visitors, a person from the community could now make them feel like the museum is a place of their own. Mihailo Gordić, a prominent activist from the City Organization of the Deaf, was trained in 2017 to conduct guided tours of the permanent collection of the Museum of Yugoslavia.

The important thing, according to Sopić, was that it was not purely a translation of the regular curatorial tour, but a 6–8 month process during which Gordić spent time in the museum, exploring the collection and creating his own tour and narrative<sup>28</sup>. The result was an authentic tour not only in Sign Language but from the perspective of the Deaf community. Gordić became a regular part of the Museum's structure, and the tour developed in 2017 was incorporated into the annual program—both for Deaf audiences and hearing audiences who are interested in learning more about the perspectives of

25 *They Never Had it better?—Contemporary Life in Socialist Yugoslavia (27.12.2014-17.02.2015)*. Curated by Ana Panić. <https://www.muzej-jugoslavije.org/exhibition/nikad-im-bolje-nije-bilo/>.

26 The evaluation included questions like *Have you ever visited the museum or any other museums in Belgrade? Were you able to follow the guided tour without issues? Which part of the tour did you find most interesting? Did you find the duration adequate? Would you take part in similar programs in the museum?* (Sopić, 2016)

27 Based on a semi-structured interview with Sara Sopić, conducted by the author in August 2023, Belgrade.

28 Ibid.

people with disabilities in Yugoslavia.

*"Having a member of the Deaf community in the team generated new areas of research, new information, and even new additions to our collection. It was an entirely new perspective within the museum, and a complete paradigm shift: instead of adapting the existing content to the needs of the Deaf community, the community itself was empowered, given a voice, and included as equal, creating new narratives and leading the process."*—Sara Sopić<sup>29</sup>

The methodology developed throughout the Sign Museum project was included in the inclusion strategy of the museum, so all future projects involving marginalized communities will start from getting to know members of the community and working alongside them instead of creating a program for them. This methodology combines a bottom-up and top-down approach, as it gives marginalized communities the space to shape museum programs, engage in dialogue with the institution, but also supports their civic engagement and cultural activities by giving them legitimacy and official recognition (Sopić 2016). This fully participatory approach gives agency to marginalized communities while allowing the museum to fulfill its role as a mediator and to advocate for social inclusion. Strong partnerships with local non-government organizations and activist groups are necessary if the museum hopes to truly be an open and inclusive space.

*"I believe there is not enough awareness when it comes to working with marginalized communities; we still talk about accessibility as if it is only a matter of physically accessing museum buildings. It is also more difficult to work in this participative way, the process takes longer, you have to be more flexible, and you cannot allow yourself the arrogance of thinking you know what a specific community needs."*—Sara Sopić<sup>30</sup>

Over 300 local and foreign members of the Deaf community have visited the Museum since 2018, as they can now regularly book guided tours in both Serbian and International Sign Language (Sopić 2020). There is a team of people who get compensated based on the number of guided tours they lead, and this is funded by the Museum, so it is sustainable and no longer linked to specific project-based funding.

The museum collection is envisioned as a laboratory, constantly changing, but the curator Mihailo Gordić is always consulted before any changes are made. The museum staff have now become accustomed to the presence of members of the Deaf community. The process is not linear, but the goal is to make sure people feel welcome and safe in the museum. Part of Sopić's approach was to open up the museum for non-formal gatherings, picnics, birthday parties, and summer programs so that audiences and especially marginalized communities would create familiarity with the space and staff. In her opinion, the success of the Sign Museum project was due to a combination of the collection, initiative, and openness of the museum's staff members:

*"The inclusive politics of certain museums depend mostly on the attitude of*

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29 Based on a semi-structured interview with Sara Sopić, conducted by the author in August 2023, Belgrade.

30 Ibid.

*individual cultural workers, their interest and devotion to this specific topic and the flexibility of the organizational structure. In the Museum of Yugoslavia, any staff member can approach the team with a topic they find interesting, choose relevant external collaborators, and usually they get support and freedom to take a step further. This kind of freedom sometimes allows significant change in museum practice... The Sign Museum was a successful project mostly because we had plenty of space and time to devote to the topic of inclusion, and thus do it properly with equal participation of the Deaf community."*—Sara Sopić<sup>31</sup>

Rather than assuming a position of higher authority and enforcing traditional paradigms, the *Sign Museum* project was one in which museum staff and the Deaf community were co-creators, engaging in an open dialogue as equals. The reciprocal relationship brought new value to all stakeholders, strengthening the bonds of interdependence between museum and audience. From the perspective of care, the project set attentiveness and responsiveness as central values through the ongoing process of evaluation, recognizing the importance of caring with the community in order to create new narratives and allow collective growth and change. Instead of assuming how the cultural needs of a specific community should be met, and simply adapting existing practices, the museum became a space in which heritage can be reconceptualized and questioned, and the comfort, safety, and individual agency of everyone involved is prioritized.

*"The point of participation is to allow (communities) to change the institution itself, shifting things from the inside. Otherwise, the museum doesn't make a difference, projects happen, but structures stay the same, prejudices remain, the curator(s) still have the main say. You have to be open and ready to learn from the communities, to let them adapt the institution to their own needs instead of just translating the existing content."*—Sara Sopić

While the Museum of Yugoslavia gained new perspectives, epistemologies, programs, and even new additions to its permanent collection through the collaboration with the Deaf community, the central question of the *Sign Museum* project was never what the community can do for the museum. The logic of care was mainstreamed into the institution's strategic approach to accessibility and inclusion thanks to the methodology that developed naturally in cooperation with different stakeholders. The approach of Sopić and other staff members of the Museum of Yugoslavia embodies *the practice of care in the museum* as Nuala Morse understands it, through providing emotional support, listening, encouragement, and kindness, as well as opportunities for the development of new skills and interests (Morse 2021). While simply aiming to positively respond to the requests of the community and provide them with space, the Museum became an agent of social inclusion, breaking down boundaries between public institutions of culture and the public, and acting as a force of social and political change in the local context. This becomes clearer if we take into account what Sopić, who is now one of the museum

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31 Based on a semi-structured interview with Sara Sopić, conducted by the author in August 2023, Belgrade.



curators and educators, sees as the role of the museum in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

*"Museums are not a political institutions, and they have to accept the important role they have in society. Every narrative that takes up space in a museum has a certain level of power and importance, and that power should be used to give voice and visibility to those that don't have them— that's the museum's main role."* –Sara Sopić.<sup>32</sup>

Sopić's understanding underlines the political and social role museums have in terms of their capacity to create meaning through their displays, and their responsibility towards expanding narratives to include those stories and voices which have been erased and marginalized throughout history. On the other hand, expanding the idea of heritage to what communities find important shows an understanding of the museum as interdependent with the community it belongs to, rather than a paternalistic institution that imposes certain narratives and creates exclusive ideas of what constitutes heritage.

### *The Gallery of Matica Srpska, Uroš Predić for All*<sup>33</sup>

Over the last decades, the Gallery of Matica Srpska has updated its goals and practices to keep up with the latest standards in museology and heritage studies, including a multidisciplinary approach, increased participation, accessibility, and inclusion. The building was reconstructed in 2017 with physical accessibility in mind. The Gallery's most demanding and large-scale inclusive project was implemented in 2022, on the occasion of the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the institution. The exhibition *Uroš Predić: A Life Dedicated to Beauty and Art*, held between October 2022 and February 2023, was made available to diverse audiences through the project *Uroš Predić for All*. The exhibition included tactile models, audio descriptions, annotations and a publication in Braille for blind and visually impaired audiences, guided tours in Sign Language organized with the Association of Sign Language Interpreters, and creative workshops for people with mental disabilities organized in collaboration with Per.Art<sup>34</sup>. The program also included specific educational programs for children and youth, as well as *Uroš Predić in a Suitcase*, a part of the exhibition that went outside of the museum in order to reach elderly audiences in retirement homes. GMS collaborated with the Art History Museum in Vienna and the Typhlological Museum in Zagreb, institutions known for their long-standing work on developing inclusive programs. As part of the project, members of the museum staff were provided additional training on accessibility, and the museum hosted the conference *Museums and Inclusion* to spread examples of good practice and the experiences among other museologists, activists, researchers, and cultural workers.

The overarching idea behind the whole exhibition was to make the works of

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32 Based on a semi-structured interview with Sara Sopić, conducted by the author in August 2023, Belgrade.

33 Based partially on an online interview with museum curator Ivana Rastović and museum educator Jelena Bobić, conducted in March 2023.

34 Per.Art is a non-profit, non-government and independent art organisation that deals with production, education and promotion of contemporary performing arts.

eminent Serbian realist painter Uroš Predić available to everyone by including different stakeholders, media, accommodations, and innovative museum practices. It was also the first time the Gallery of Matica Srpska attempted to adapt paintings from their collection and the collections of other museums to blind and visually impaired visitors. A team of museum educators from within the Gallery worked together with partners from the Typhological Museum in Zagreb and the Art History Museum in Vienna to create three-dimensional relief models of five paintings<sup>35</sup>, accompanied by audio descriptions and annotations in Braille. This part of the project was challenging according to the curators, as they had no prior experience with these practices and had to rely on the expertise of the project partners, the Union of the Blind of Vojvodina, and the Milan Petrović School for Elementary and Higher Education. The gallery opted for 3D printed models in color, tactile details in different materials to better experience the textures represented in the paintings, and audio stimuli associated with the works.

*"Making a 3D model of the painting is significant, but it is not enough: without audio descriptions, the model could not convey the entire narrative of each painting. The way audio descriptions are written was new to us, and we had a lot of help from our colleagues from the Typhological Museum in Zagreb. We had to pay attention to the length of the texts, the words we used – it was a very different way of thinking compared to how we usually write about art."—Ivana Rastović, museum curator.<sup>36</sup>*

Predić's works were not only chosen from the collection of GMS, but also borrowed from other institutions – the 3D models created through the project were gifted to the respective museums as a way of incentivising them to start working on accessibility.

An innovative part of the project *Uroš Predić for All* was the segment devoted to elderly audiences who are unable to physically reach the Gallery. The creation of the *Uroš Predić in a Suitcase* program that went outside of the museum to retirement homes, and virtual tours of the exhibition expanded the staff's understanding of their audience. According to the interviewees, Bobić and Rastović, the reaction of the audience was overwhelmingly positive, and the project inspired them to **look beyond their immediate visitors** when it comes to planning future programs and understanding the potential of the museum and its importance to the local community.

One of the most significant aspects of the *Uroš Predić for All* project, apart from its holistic approach to accessibility, was the devotion to collaboration and the dissemination of good practices and experiences. The exchange of ideas and practices with other museum professionals and organizations, as well as the seminar organized as part of the project, created a network of caring institutions and actors who are likely to include the values of inclusion and participation into their practices. The interviewees believe that there are multiple reasons why cultural institutions around Serbia are not devoting more resources to the development of quality inclusive programs. Getting to know the

35 *Self-portrait, Happy Brothers, Kosovo Maiden, Young Woman at the Fountain, and An Angry Girl* by Uroš Predić.

36 Based on an online semi-structured interview with museum curator Ivana Rastović and museum educator Jelena Bobić, conducted by the author in March 2023.

needs of audiences with different types of disabilities and those from other marginalized communities takes time and dedication, and many museums in Serbia are understaffed. While most don't have employees who work on inclusion exclusively, many museum professionals believe inclusive programs require a lot of funding. The key, however, is in learning more about the needs of diverse audiences and making some initial steps.

Opening up to its audiences is the key role of the museum, according to Bobić and Rastović. And the only way to successfully create museum programs is by getting to know the audience and their needs. Once the museum recognizes the relationship of interdependence it has with the local communities, new creative challenges, values, and narratives start to arise.

In the words of Ivana Rastović,

*"Every audience group brings with it a specific challenge, but it is a positive kind of challenge that encourages museum workers to look at art works and collections in a different way... People with disabilities have the right to take part in the cultural life of their community, to visit cultural institutions, and experience art just as everyone else does. It is up to us to enable them to fulfill those rights."<sup>37</sup>*

While the curators of the Gallery of Matica Srpska also regard innovative museum practices related to inclusivity as challenges that benefit the museum in the long run, their references to the needs and experiences of diverse audiences show that their ultimate goal is for the museum to grow and *care with* local communities. The project *Uroš Predić for All* was preceded by years of systemic work on accessibility and collaborations with different stakeholders, but the fact that some of the tactile models created during the project were sent back to other museums after the project was finished and others became part of the museum's permanent display shows a dedication to inclusion that goes beyond the institution's walls and the frame of a single project. Apart from caring about the needs of audiences, the museum's organizational structure shows significant steps toward caring *with* visitors, communities, organizations, other institutions, and expanding their work to a wider network of caring museum practice.

## Discussion

The projects *In Touch With*, *Sign Museum*, and *Uroš Predić for All* differ greatly when it comes to types of displays and collections, as well as target audiences addressed. But it can be said with certainty that marginalized communities, and people with disabilities in particular, have been recognized as valuable visitors with distinct cultural needs by the institutions and their staff members.

In terms of physical accessibility, all three museums have done a great amount of work on making their spaces accessible for people with reduced mobility. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade was fully reconstructed before the start of the project *In Touch With*, while the Museum of Yugoslavia and the Gallery of Matica Srpska were continuing to make all their facilities accessible at the time of the interviews. While

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37 Ibid.

there are still no standards for creating multi-sensory displays in cultural institutions in Serbia, the accommodations that were procured and practices added during the projects have remained available for audiences –guided tours in ISL and SSL can still be booked in the Museum of Yugoslavia, audio transcriptions and tactile models are available in the Gallery of Matica Srpska, and the different accommodations for blind and visually impaired that were used in the project *In Touch With* were further developed in the MoCAB's follow-up exhibition in 2023. Accessibility information is available on the websites of all three museums, showing a long-term dedication to providing necessary information to a wide range of present and future visitors.

All interviewees have organized and taken part in capacity building for museum professionals that promote the latest trends in museology, disability theory, audience development, and facilitate knowledge sharing between different institutions and cultural practitioners. Long-term partnerships have been created and fostered with civil society organizations, social entrepreneurs, and organizations that represent people with disabilities to ensure that the programs, materials, communication strategies, and physical environment suit the needs of visitors with disabilities. From a wider perspective, the projects have contributed to the creation of caring networks within the communities and between the cultural and civil sectors, fostering collegiality and openness.

When it comes to evaluation and monitoring, it is important to note that the project *Sign Museum* has made great efforts to ensure that museum activities were discussed and co-created with the Deaf community through constant debates, interviews, and follow-up programs. While this case is different than most because the initial interest came from the community itself, the curators' openness to learning and changing their approaches and narratives through collaboration is noteworthy. In the case of *In Touch With*, less structured goals were set from the onset, there was less community involvement, and systemic evaluation seemed to be less emphasized. More focused work was dedicated to the production of new pieces by the students from the Faculty of Fine Arts, but this could fall within what Sandell describes as **broad social change**, as it contributed to raising awareness of the circumstances and cultural needs of the blind and visually impaired among future cultural producers. The work of the Museum of Yugoslavia includes both elements of broader social change and social regeneration, as the Deaf community was more deeply involved in the process; and the museum became a safe space for exchange. Both MoCAB and the Museum of Yugoslavia put people from the different communities in active roles as curators, which contributed to increased confidence, visibility, and the removal of prejudices. The case of the Gallery of Matica Srpska is specific for several reasons: on one hand, collaboration with different institutions could be considered easier due to the fact that Novi Sad is a multicultural yet smaller context than Belgrade, and the fact that external funding from the European Capital of Culture expedited work on accessibility throughout the city. The Gallery also has a more traditional display than the other two institutions, housing mostly paintings and sculptures, which have more referential examples of adaptation to wider audiences on the international level, especially compared to MoCAB which attempted to adapt works of contemporary art in

more experimental ways. The Gallery of Matica Srpska, however, had the most holistic approach to accessibility within the project *Uroš Predić for All*. Different intersecting aspects of identity, such as age, ability, cognitive capacities, learning styles, and educational backgrounds were considered. Most interestingly, the concept of the audience was expanded to include visitors who are unable to physically reach the museum.

In terms of allowing long-term conceptual shifts, the Museum of Yugoslavia is an exceptional case due to institution's commitment to introducing new narratives, changing displays in collaboration with audiences, and opening its spaces to different types of activities, thus fostering a closer relationship with visitors, making new audiences feel welcome, and abandoning traditional paradigms of distance between cultural institutions and the public. In this way, the museum does not simply pay lip service to inclusion nor allow it to become co-opted by the extractivist logic of neoliberal capitalism. The logic of care is most evident in this example, which does not maintain paternalistic attitudes towards the audience and diverse cultural needs. Looking more closely towards the organizational structure of the museum, what becomes evident is the importance of horizontal relations and ample time and space for feedback and change. Both the Museum of Yugoslavia and the Gallery of Matica Srpska have made crucial steps toward becoming public, caring spaces, where different communities can develop their skills, pursue their interests, and have a greater sense of creative and social agency than what they experience in other places due to different social, economic, and political limitations.

Regardless of the extent of accessibility and inclusion that was achieved in all three cases, interviews with the curators and project coordinators have shown that each institution has undergone some level of change when it comes to openness towards audiences and different approaches to display, which will continue shaping their roles and values in the future, contributing to more inclusion and access in the cultural sector, and by extension, a more cohesive and caring society in Serbia.

## Conclusion—Towards Caring Museums

Through its capacity to engage the senses, create new experiences and ways of learning, and foster exchange, culture has an invaluable role in the regeneration of society. Museums have come a long way from being rigid and closed-off repositories of objects and gatekeepers of knowledge, expanding their social role towards the promotion of human rights, equality, social and environmental justice. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, museums have become places of experimentation, collaboration, and collective healing.

In order to address some of the burning issues in today's society, from wealth inequality, social exclusion, to the climate crisis, museums have a moral responsibility to put care in the center of their missions and activities. Efforts to remove physical barriers, social and economic limitations, and open up towards diverse audiences are a starting point toward establishing truly caring museum policies. Accessibility and inclusive programs can serve as indicators of whether museums recognize their social role and moral duty towards their communities and reflect their interests, values, and needs –

basic, social, as well as cultural.

A caring museum is one in which care is distributed promiscuously and applied to all domains—from caring spaces and infrastructures, care about and for the wellbeing, interests, and needs of staff members and audiences, to caring with communities and organizations in an effort to develop and maintain an inclusive, democratic society. Museums that care recognize that everyone deserves equal access to culture, but also that certain members of society are more vulnerable than others, and that their dependence on care should not be pathologized or treated as a lack of agency. In order to create sustainable inclusive programs and act as vehicles of social regeneration, museums have to be open to changing, caring, and growing with communities, wherein both institution and audience are seen as equal partners rather than as authoritative/active producers of knowledge and culture and passive recipients. Furthermore, inclusive programs and accessible facilities cannot be created entirely through top-down approaches aimed at 'target audiences', but rather in partnership with communities who are understood to embody their experiences, specific knowledge(s), and (cultural) needs. However, the extractivist logic of contribution that sees marginalized communities as sources of knowledge, objects, narratives, and new fields of research for institutions does not create quality inclusive programs, nor can it be considered caring museum practice. In the language of cultural management, the key components of long-term accessibility and inclusive programs in museums are openness to feedback and a dedication to evaluation; in the language of care, however, it is the communication and building of mutual trust that stems from an understanding of the interdependence of institutions (museums) and communities (audiences). Good museum care includes attentiveness to the specific cultural needs of different communities and marginalized groups, responsiveness to initiatives that come from the communities themselves, their interests, and feedback, competence that comes from openness to change, active listening, collaboration, and networks of caring exchange, and sense of responsibility towards collections, staff members, visitors, potential audiences, the wider community, and democracy itself.

The work of museum care requires ample time and resources, which means that an emphasis on care does not only start from the level of the community, but must be spearheaded by caring cultural policies, legislation and funding that recognizes the social role of museums as essential in any state that hopes to foster equality and participation for all its citizens.

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