

**SUPSI**

## **Cultural and artistic activities in Ticino: the experiences and expectations of the blind and partially sighted public**

Preliminary survey abstract

Survey carried out as part of the "Cultural mediation inclusion" project, supported by the Confederation of Switzerland (FBED - Federal Bureau for the equality of people with disabilities), Canton Ticino (Division of culture and university studies – Swisslos Fund), the Lorenzo and Elsa Cattori-Stuerm Foundation, the Credit Suisse Foundation, the Pasquale Lucchini Foundation in Lugano, the Lake Maggiore Tourism Foundation, and the Per cento Culturale Migros institution.

This preliminary survey is freely accessible, released under Creative Commons licenses, and can be downloaded from the project's online platform [www.mci.supsi.ch](http://www.mci.supsi.ch).



Dr. Jean-Pierre Candeloro  
Head of the visual culture laboratory  
[jeanpierre.candeloro@supsi.ch](mailto:jeanpierre.candeloro@supsi.ch)

Valeria Donnarumma  
Coordination and editing  
[valeria.donnarumma@supsi.ch](mailto:valeria.donnarumma@supsi.ch)

Luca Morici  
Supervision of analysis and editing  
[luca.morici@supsi.ch](mailto:luca.morici@supsi.ch)

Gianluca Vignola  
Data analysis and editing

Scuola universitaria professionale della Svizzera italiana (SUPSI)  
Dipartimento ambiente costruzioni e design  
Laboratorio cultura visiva  
Campus Trevano  
CH-6952 Lugano-Canobbio  
+41 (0)58 666 62 81  
[info-lcv@supsi.ch](mailto:info-lcv@supsi.ch)

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## 1. Premise

Through an action research approach, the project seeks to identify easily scalable and reproducible solutions, in order to make the major art museums in Ticino accessible to persons with visual impairments, thus furthering the free access to the world of art and culture. The theoretical research element of the project will include in-depth studies of the subject, a mapping of Swiss and foreign good practices, and an in-depth survey of the blind and visually impaired public cultural practices. In addition, over the course of 2017, the project will also involve a well-structured series of practical trials, particularly by conducting multiple inclusive cultural mediation activities organised in collaboration with the project partners.

In order to test the identified solutions, it will be necessary to work on specific places and objects, studying them in detail from the artistic, conceptual, and material point of view. The cooperation of our museum partners is essential for this purpose: m.a.x. Chiasso museum, the Civic Museum of the Villa dei Cedri in Bellinzona, the Municipal Museum of Modern Art and the Castle Museum of San Materno in Ascona, the Art Museum of Italian-speaking Switzerland (MASI) in Lugano, the Vincenzo Vela Museum in Ligornetto, the Giovanni Züst Cantonal Pinacoteca in Rancate, and the Mendrisio art Museum. Involving several institutions will enable the specific mediation solutions to be tested and adapted not only to diverse spaces, but especially to a variety of art forms belonging to various historical periods. The project relies on a wide network of prestigious museums that are representative in terms of openness to experimentation, the quality and variety of cultural mediation experiences, the diversity of the types of art collections, and geographical coverage of Italian-speaking Switzerland.

Alongside the work on spaces and artworks, the needs and specific expectations of the blind and visually impaired public will be investigated in depth. The collaboration with Unitas, the Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired of Ticino, plays a key role in developing, testing, and promoting solutions capable of meeting the needs of people with visual impairments.

It is in this context that the present preliminary survey is situated: it helps to lay the foundations that allow for the development of all the activities planned under the project.

The main objective of the preliminary investigation was to investigate the general interest of blind or visually-impaired people in the cultural and artistic offering. In particular, the investigation focused on past experiences and expectations of the public in relation to museums. Only in some cases was a direct reference made to the cultural offering of the museums of Italian-speaking Switzerland.

The first part of the survey focused on past experiences: the aim was to understand the extent to which the blind or visually impaired public took part in cultural and artistic activities and, in particular, in those offered by museums. We then wanted to know which were the most common ways of participating in museums (organised visits, independent visits, etc.).

The second part of the survey focused on expectations: in the first place we wanted to identify the extent to which the blind or visually impaired public want to become more involved in cultural and

artistic activities and, in particular, in those offered by museums. We then wanted to know which types of museums (art, history, etc.) aroused the greatest interest in the public with visual disabilities and to understand which ways of visiting museums were of the greatest interest (organised visits, independent visits, etc.).

Finally, the blind or visually impaired public were invited to express their opinion on the current level of accessibility of museums in Ticino, as well as their wishes for the future.

## 2. Methodology

The survey was conducted by the SUPSI's visual culture laboratory between October and December 2015. The data were collected by telephone using a structured questionnaire<sup>1</sup>. The data were processed using the programme SPSS. The list of persons to be contacted was provided by UNITAS and included contact details for a total of 55 people who regularly participate in cultural activities offered by the Association.

The questionnaire is structured in two sections: one with questions for respondents who indicated that they had visited at least one of the types of museums on offer in the last three years (called "visitors"), and one with questions for respondents who said they had not visited any type of museum on offer in the past three years (called "non-visitors"). Forty-four interviews were successfully completed; of the rest, 8 people were unable to be contacted and 3 declined the invitation to be interviewed. The data collected have been processed to ensure the anonymity of the respondents.

## 3. Overview of results

The analyses carried out have revealed interesting aspects related to the experiences and expectations of blind or visually impaired people with respect to the cultural and artistic offering of Italian-speaking Switzerland and in particular with respect to museums. Among the blind or partially sighted people interviewed, there seems to be a good level of participation in museum activities. In fact, 75% of the people interviewed said they had visited at least one Museum in the last 3 years.<sup>2</sup> In particular, art museums are most frequently visited and visited by a greater percentage of visually impaired people.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, lack of interest and lack of opportunities are the most common reasons why some respondents have not visited museums in the last three years. Developing a vision problem does not always reduce museum attendance; indeed for some respondents, it is actually increased.<sup>4</sup>

An important result is that 60.2% of blind or visually impaired people interviewed said they

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<sup>1</sup> See complete preliminary survey report (ITA), Attachments, p. 26-30.

<sup>2</sup> See complete preliminary survey report (ITA) - Table 2, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> See complete preliminary survey report (ITA) - Figure 9, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> See complete preliminary survey report (ITA) - Figure 11, p. 15.

wanted to visit museums even more often.<sup>5</sup> Although there does not seem to be a marked preference for a type of museum among those on offer, art museums (painting, photography, sculpture, etc.) and archaeological or history museums are the ones the respondents would like to visit the most.<sup>6</sup>

As regards ways of participating, organised visits or guided tours emerged as the way in which past experience and respondents' desires most converge. In fact, 84.8% of "visitors" says that they already knew about this way of visiting museums and that they were interested in experiencing it more.

Encounters with artists and creative workshops are activities that are not participated in much but that a relatively large number of people would like to experience.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the level of satisfaction with the accessibility of the museum offering in Ticino was positive for 72.4% of respondents. However, nearly all respondents (96.8%) believe that museums should make their cultural offering more accessible for people with visual disabilities.<sup>8</sup>

People with vision problems thus seem to have a marked interest in visiting museums, especially art museums. Implementing a greater number of good practices in the museums in Ticino able to facilitate access to art museums and to the works kept in them could therefore represent a concrete response to the interests and effective needs of the blind or partially sighted public.

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<sup>5</sup> See complete preliminary survey report (ITA) - Figure 14, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> See complete preliminary survey report (ITA) - Figure 14, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> See complete preliminary survey report (ITA) - Figure 16, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> See complete preliminary survey report (ITA) - Figure 18, p. 22.