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The Value of Validating a Participatory Project¹

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Abstract. The following paper is based on the experiences gathered during the European participatory research project ARCHES (Accessible Resources for Cultural Heritage EcyoSystems). The project was 3-years long during which participants with different access needs associated with communication, perception, memory and cognition designed and developed museum and technological resources. This paper will share the evaluation framework by which we evaluated the process of working together. It will also highlight the key lessons learned from the collaboration with participants, technology and museum partners related to:

1. The need to be open to change
2. The need to be patient and manage time flexibly
3. The need to disseminate the project from the beginning of the project

Keywords: accessibility; museum; evaluation framework; participatory research;

[es] El Valor de Validar un Proyecto Participativo

Resumen. Este artículo se basa en las experiencias recogidas en el proyecto europeo de investigación participativa ARCHES. ARCHES (Accessible Resources for Cultural Heritage EcyoSystems) fue un proyecto de tres años en el que participantes con diversas necesidades de acceso asociadas con la comunicación, la percepción, la memoria, y la cognición diseñaron y evaluaron recursos para museos y tecnologías accesibles. Este artículo tiene como objetivo compartir el marco de evaluación que utilizamos en el proyecto para valorar este proceso de trabajo colectivo. Asimismo, se destacarán los aspectos clave extraídos de la colaboración entre los participantes, los socios tecnológicos y los museos en relación con tres aspectos:

1. La oportunidad de estar abiertos a posibles cambios.
2. La necesidad de ser paciente y flexible con los tiempos.
3. La importancia de difundir el proyecto desde el inicio del mismo.

Palabras clave: Accesibilidad, museo, marco de evaluación, investigación participativa

Sumario: 1. Introduction. 2. Our ways of working. 3. Our evaluation framework. 4. Conclusion. Reference List.

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1. Introduction

The term co-creation and co-production has been used in recent years particularly around projects with local and refugee community groups. Issues around access barriers are often seen as marginal and are part of learning strategies which are developed for disabled people within a deficit model of disability. The activities are delivered according to impairment categories. These provisions have little to no evaluation of their educational use (Hayhoe, 2017). Parallel to that there has been an increasing awareness in the value cultural heritage sites have to disabled people who wish to learn and socialise (Hooper-Greenhill et al., 2002). Foley states that there is a growing appreciation that disabled people should be involved in assessing heritage site provisions (Foley & Ferri, 2012).

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Nina Simon (2010) identifies three main reasons why cultural institutions should engage in co-creative projects:

1. 'To give voice and be responsive to the needs and interests of local community members
2. To provide a place for community engagement and dialogue
3. To help participants develop skills that will support their own individual community goals.'

Giving disabled people the opportunity to co-create a project is not enough to ensure it will be a successful learning experience. Evaluation is a standard practice within museums with typically three different stages; front-end evaluation (which takes place while early ideas for the project are being developed); formative evaluation (this tests out a prototype of the project/exhibitions/displays) and summative evaluation (this evaluates the impact the display/exhibition/prototype has had on the visitors) (Heath & Davies, 2012). However, more often teams disassemble before or during the summative evaluation process (Simon, 2010).

At the time of writing this article the ARCHES project was in the final disseminating stage. We wanted to gather and share our summative evaluation process and the lessons learnt from it. ARCHES (Accessible Resources for Cultural Heritage EcoSystems) was a Horizon 2020 funded project, which involved partners in Heritage and Technology across Europe. Its aim was to make museums accessible to all through participatory research methodology and the development of accessible resources (see table 1). The consortium consisted of six museums; The Victoria and Albert Museum, the Wallace Collection (both in the UK), Kunsthistorisches Museum (in Austria), Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum, Museo Lázaro Galdiano and Museo de Bellas Artes (all three in Spain), five technology companies; VrVis, SignTime (both in Austria), ArteConTacto (in Spain) and Coprix (in Serbia) and two universities; the Open University and Bath University (both in the UK).

Table 1. Technology set out to be developed during the ARCHES project.

Company	Proposed technology
Coprix Media	Interactive games
Zentrum für Virtual reality und Visualisierung Forschungs GmbH (VrVis)	Context-sensitive tactile audio guide Relief printer prototype
Sign Time GmbH (SignTime)	Text to Sign Language conversion Avatar
Treelogic Telemática y Lógica Racional para la Empresa Europea S.L.	Accessible Software platform Applications for handheld devices (OurStory and Museum Routes apps)

We had four participatory research groups across Europe called Exploration Groups, each of which was regularly attended by fifteen to twenty-five people with sensory and/or cognitive impairments and a range of supporters. Each of these participatory research groups visited the museums weekly or bi-weekly to improve the accessibility and develop new technological or multisensory resources. Following the participatory research method, each group conducted its own research taking into account participants' interests and the cultural context. A main focus of the project was to learn and share knowledge gathered in the sessions and thus we developed a rigorous data collection and evaluation process. ARCHES developed an emergent approach to data analysis, using ongoing participant verification and participant representation of data, with all stakeholders collecting data depending on their interests and undertaking its evaluation within the sessions. However, in order to assess the validity of the overall process a retrospective analysis was undertaken using more traditional observational and interview processes. In this paper we will look at the evaluation conducted at the end of the project by the researchers and also include observations from the museum educators which arose during the project.

2. Our ways of working

ARCHES adopted the social model in terms of its language and its understanding of disability (Garcia Carrizosa, H., Diaz, J., et al, 2019a). The participatory research project comes under the broad umbrella of emancipatory disability research (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003). By using methods that seek to ensure that the research findings are relevant to the cultural and environmental context, it aims to produce accessible knowledge (UKDPC, 2003). This type of

research also aims to be accountable and open throughout the process to a group run by disabled people with the support of researchers when needed (Barnes, 2003).

When the recruitment process of the project started, we wanted to ensure that all people involved in the project would be equal participants and have an equal voice. Throughout the project from its conception to the dissemination stage, disabled participants have been represented and have voiced themselves. Though this worked in some cases, it also caused some tensions around the notion of hierarchies. We will return to this issue later in this article.

Around 212 voluntary participants joined the project throughout its lifetime. In total 169 sessions were conducted between all the groups. We recognised that the process of collecting and analysing the data had to be straightforward and accessible. From the Exploration Groups perspective, we ensured that different processes needed to be in place to be flexible enough for everyone to take part. These processes had to give participants the assurance that we were not going to operate in top down manner according to a hierarchy of skills and knowledge. From the beginning of the first session it was made clear to the participants the vital role they had in the research and evaluation process. Small activities allowed participants to recognise the everyday nature of different methods of collecting data such as interviewing each other and creating surveys. Through constantly encouraging the participants to take notes, photos and audio recordings for the feedback part of the sessions, participants started creating their own roles within the groups such as notetaker and describer.

An early activity was finding a way to evaluate the group’s identity and how they wanted to present themselves to the outside world. This involved the development of a demographic questionnaire. Participants chose the wording of the questions; the most noticeable of which was the question around ‘access needs and preferences’ (see figure 1). This was chosen rather than identifying people by impairment categories, because no two people are alike and that one cannot predict the needs of someone based on a category. Below is a chart that shows the variety of participants’ needs and preferences.

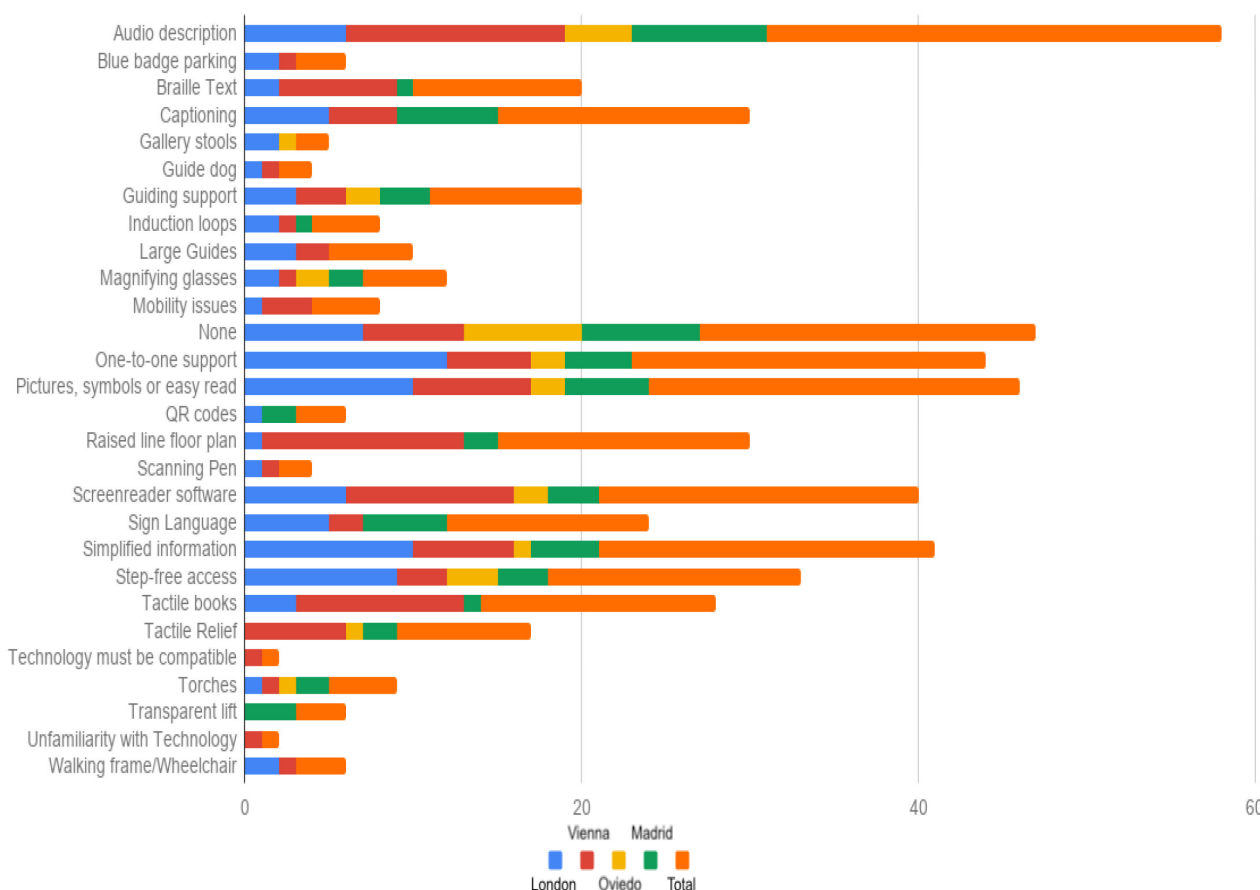


Figure 1. Demographic question ‘Please indicate your access needs (You may tick more than one)’.

Guided analysis was also undertaken with participants occasionally. In the London Exploration Group a small group project became a micro-evaluation of their journey over one and a half years. Guided by a researcher, the group looked back at photos, videos and notes whilst interviewing themselves. The participants expressed the results via I-Poems, body maps and a tapestry (Seale et al., In Press). These informal exercises served as the first evaluation of the participatory nature of the project and informed discussion around the formal evaluation.

3. Our evaluation framework

We continually assessed the validity and strength of the participatory research process to learn and improve the collaborative nature of the project. In order to do so, we adapted the framework proposed by the International Collaboration for Participatory Health Research (2013) and argued that it was applicable to non-health contexts due to the ‘consideration of ethics’ (Seale, 2016). This is an important aspect of the project and like the ICPHR we believe that participatory research in this project required researchers to ‘address the collective process of knowledge production and in particular the issues of power and status differentials’ (Seale, 2016, p. 227).

In this evaluation framework, the analysis was organised by six categories of validities.

- Intersubjective validity: the extent to which research is viewed as being credible and meaningful by the stakeholders from a variety of perspectives.
- Contextual validity: the extent to which the research relates to the local situation.
- Participatory validity: the extent to which all stakeholders are able to take an active part in the research process to the fullest extent possible.
- Catalytic validity: the extent to which the research is useful in terms of presenting new possibilities for social action.
- Ethical validity: the extent to which the research outcomes and the research has increased empathy among participants.
- Empathetic validity: the extent to which the research has increased empathy, respect and understanding among the participants.

These six validities acted as markers that orientated researchers interviewed staff and participants as well as reflected upon the project (ICPHR, 2013). Across a four-month period over 50 participants were interviewed, with at least 10 in each city. This involved: one regular attending supporter, one occasionally attending facilitator, five disabled participants (incl. diary keepers, the museum research coordinators and a museum manager). We also interviewed 2 developers and a manager from the technology companies and the research assistant who had worked across all sites.

In this paper, we use these six evaluation indicators to address the main lessons learned from the collaboration between the Exploration groups, technology companies and museums and to explore the outcomes of the project. We will present the validities in both a positive and negative light, even though the majority of reported experiences were far more positive than negative and do so using observations from the museum educators as well as from the researchers. In addition to the interview that were conducted on a one-to-one basis with the aim to gather qualitative data, we also surveyed participants who left mid-way through the project to judge their experience according to the validity markers. The surveys were sent to the participants via email collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. We identified patterns within the data as well as used grounded theory to support this. 13 participants across the different groups responded to the survey. All groups were asked the same questions but at different stages of the group’s lifespan (see table 2). We will also draw on this data collected here when applicable.

Table 2. Survey questions sent out to participants who left during the project.

Validity	Question
Intersubjective validity	Why did you join ARCHES?
Contextual validity	Were you able to make decisions about what went on in the ARCHES project?
Participatory validity	Were you actively involved in the sessions?
Catalytic validity	Did ARCHES make things better or worse for people inside and outside the project?
Ethical validity	Did ARCHES treat you fairly and with respect?
Empathetic validity	Did ARCHES help you understand the access needs of others?

3.1. Intersubjective validity

'I want ARCHES not to be a utopia but a reality' (Madrid Exploration Group Participant, 2017)

This validity focuses upon the extent to which the research has been credible and meaningful to the stakeholders. Figure 2 outlines participants main motivations for joining the project and is taken from the demographic questionnaire designed by the participants to identify themselves with the outside world. The biggest motivation was to improve accessibility in museums followed by the motivation to advocate for the disabled community, and then a desire to learn about museums. What quickly became clear was that participants did not know how to improve the accessibility in museums without relying heavily on the technological resources the project was going to produce (see table 1). This became noticeable especially at the beginning. As coordinators of these sessions we concluded that the technological aspect had been 'sold' to the Exploration group more than the collaboration and research process. Consequently, the participant's impatience blurred their focus on the collaboration and research process. It also potentially closed down people's thinking in relation to how they might fulfil the motivations they had.

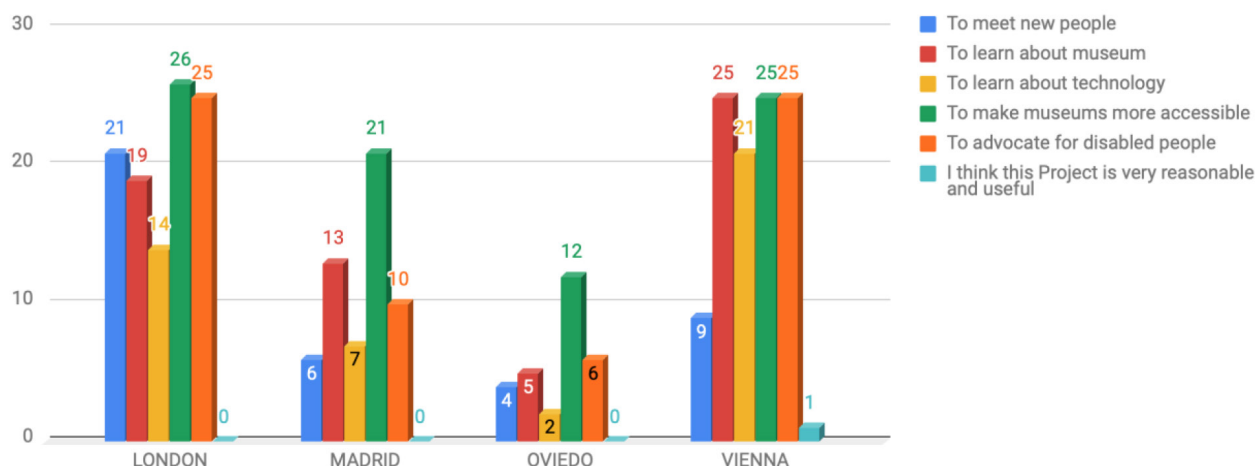


Figure 2. Diagram showing the reasons why participants joined the project.

Between the project start and the first session of the pilot group coordinators had three months to prepare materials and develop activities that would allow participants with different access needs to work together. Museum educators had no prior experience of working with a mixed ability group before. There were concerns regarding the tailored activities and the support that could be provided. Resistance also came from and within all the groups themselves. In most of the Exploration Groups, members who identified with particular impairment group felt that they were being 'discriminated' against as they were asked to ensure conversations were accessible to other participants. This perception led to participants encouraging a hierarchy. The initial rush to develop technology added to some participants conviction that a division between disability groups would be more efficient. The constant debate was on whether it was possible to create a technological resource that would target and provide all the different access needs. It was through the development of various activities by various participants, involving conversations on different access needs that participants started to learn the similarities in access needs and preferences that everyone had. The educators also appreciated the value this approach brought to their practices and new creative activities were developed to explore this (Garcia Carrizosa et al., 2019a). Participants understood through these activities that the research was not just single-folded and that it had other credible and meaningful sides to it. As the groups 'bought' into this view of the project they were better able to create their own projects and with that go some way towards achieving their overall aim to make museums more accessible.

The idea that the technological resources would be best researched by impairment categories, was also a notion the technological partners had. Like participants and museum educators it was the first time that they had worked in this collective way. Therefore, they requested technology to be tested by impairment category. This was particularly for the context-sensitive tactile audio guide and the text to sign language avatar. However, a visit to meet and engage with the groups convinced these partners that the approach of working by access needs and preferences could work for them too. Once this approach was adopted by technological partners, the Exploration groups were divided into access needs to test particular aspects of the technology like the functionality of VoiceOver or the display time of subtitles.

The desire to create change was still evident during the final sessions with the groups. Educators had many discussions with the groups as to how the results would be embedded into the everyday practice of the muse-

ums within and outside of the consortium. Participants were worried that although personally the project had been meaningful to them, it might become yet another project. As part of the dissemination workshops and written resources have been shared which specifically outline the vision of the Exploration groups as well as the activities they developed. The museums within the consortium are also committed to implementing the technologies as well as resources made by the participants as much as possible. However, it is only with time that we will be able to see how fruitful the research was. (We will return to this issue when we discuss Catalytic validity.)

3.2. Contextual Validity

“In ARCHES you get cultured, you value yourself as a person. And then, the satisfaction that gives you that in years to come people with disabilities will have things easier than what we have had us.” (Madrid exploration group)

One of the aims of a participatory project such as ARCHES is to have an impact on the personal life but also on the communities which they belong to and the institutions that are part of. This validity focuses upon the extent to which the project enabled this.

The relevance of this project to local needs is evident in how individuals' skills were recognised within their communities. Some got a new job during or after the project, others became deeply engaged in the fields of Arts and Culture and/or Accessibility. All these experiences are personally relevant to them but also reflect their relevance to cultural and social institutions. For example, one participant from Oviedo got a scholarship in an important museum in Madrid, another participant from Madrid will study a specific course in cultural work training for people with disabilities. In the field of Accessibility, one participant from Vienna was elected the best junior journalist in this sector and another has been an accessibility advisor on several projects; and from the London group a participant moved on to be an object handler guide at another museum.

As it has been previously said, the biggest motivations to joining the project was to improve accessibility in museums and to advocate for the disabled community. Many participants wanted their voices to be heard “to make museums accessible with us, not for us”. For this reason, they actively participated in disseminating the project to the wider community. They have presented the project to the media and at academic conferences, organised public events for museums and social professionals and some have managed the group's social networks. The active role of participants in these experiences did not just mean an experience of self-empowerment for them but also enabled them to highlight the wider relevance of what they were doing. Museum educators embraced this idea of empowering participants and engaging with local need through a range of related activities. In London, for instance, the group was involved in several mystery shoppers to museums to change communities understanding of museum visits. Participants created a ‘checklist’ to evaluate museums and give them advice on accessibility issues and produced fully accessible videos, in order to share their findings with the disability community in London. Eight museums were tested (including V&A and WC) and two videos produced. The Wellcome collection were interested in incorporating the results into their next projects. In the last months of the project, the main ideas and complaints were collected to make a manifesto. These ideas were shared among all the groups resulting in a European collective manifesto, however local context-specific manifestos were also produced.

Participants also wanted the project to have a direct impact on their closer communities. For this reason, several outreach sessions were held to share experiences, activities and resources and some participants invited their centres to the museum, organising special sessions in collaboration with the educators. In London five outreach sessions were carried out in three different institutions. In Oviedo one group invited their center to play with the interactive ARCHES game, and in Madrid three participants were museum guides for several groups of their centers. In this way, the project allowed the museums to become resources for some disability institutions, opening up new possibilities for future collaborations between these institutions.

The value of these actions has been different in each of the local communities. In small communities such as the Oviedo museum, the impact of an international project such as this may bring greater changes than in other contexts. However, we should not underestimate the impact that these actions have had in larger contexts.

3.3. Participatory Validity

‘Oh, I’m just a simple rank and file participant.’ (Vienna Exploration Group Participant, 2018)

This validity focuses upon the extent to which all participants were able to take an active part in the research process to the fullest extent possible. The project claimed to be participatory but in writing the bid for the project, the proposal had to provide details on who would be part of the consortium and what technology would be developed, and consequently excluded the participatory groups and the majority of the museum educators. This limited who the participants could work with and what many of the outputs could be. However, within these constraints, there was a flexible approach taken by all stakeholders to facilitate genuine participation.



Figure 3. Group of participants sitting and voting around tables by holding up different coloured and shaped cards.

The process of enhancing the participatory nature of research became a challenge itself. Three layered examples of this challenge stood out to the museum educators:

1. Defining a way of working with the different access preferences;
2. The extent to which people were free to direct process as they wished;
3. The notion of experts versus non-experts.

All of these layers were interrelated. The first layer was primarily dealt with the creation of activities that allow people to get to know each other and work collaboratively. However, though many participants wanted museum educators to provide predetermined activities and services, there was an equal desire for freedom to ‘do one’s own thing’. Flexibility within the session styles and set up was a response to this challenge (Garcia Carrizosa et al., 2019b), but it also required patience and persistence with clear communication from both sides.

A systematic literature review undertaken as part of ARCHES showed that there are underpinning tensions evident in relation to participatory research between power, voice and support (Rix, J., Garcia Carrizosa, H. et al, 2019). This was in evidence in all the groups too, and on occasion lead to people leaving the project. In Vienna some participants were asked for advice more often and encouraged to produce more challenging materials by themselves. In London a group of dominant voices, gradually left the project only to be replaced by others. In Madrid, a group of participants felt that their access preferences were not being supported enough and that others were being favoured in this regard. The tensions had to be managed carefully. As a result, each case had its own solutions, but all required clear communication, and was generally a result of logistical circumstances.

‘The key issue was the fluid attendance of participants (me included) and the fact that often needs had to redefined depending on who was there. Also, despite the willingness by those involved to engage and facilitate frequently technical or practical assistance was not available’. (Madrid, leaver survey)

Solutions to these challenges generally came from within the groups. So, for example in London a buddying up systems was introduced and in other cities volunteer supporter became linked to particular participants or to smaller groups.

The second layer around freedom of decision making was equally complex. Many participants, even at the end of the project, did not recognise how much freedom they could have had, but were quite content to have been guided by other people’s ideas. This was perhaps due to the technology having been largely defined at the outset of the project. It was also perhaps due to financial issues. In all the sites, the museum educators were confronted by participants regarding the budgeting of materials and resources. Money seemed to be a symbol of power and control. Giving participants control over a budget or aspect of it had not been in the initial proposal and was not allowed by the museum nor by the EU. In the interviews it was evident that people felt uneasy about this but largely accepted the reality of it. This may have been connected to another recognition in the interviews that people’s ideas had been recognised and built upon. Interviewees across the interview sites were very clear that people’s thoughts and feelings had been acknowledged, listened to and not closed down. This was perhaps an important factor in the success of the smaller group projects which arose from the group and depended a lot on the group’s dedication to the cause.

The third layer around expertise was particularly ironic given the underlying premise of this participatory project being the need to build on the experiences of users. During the recruitment of the group's participants were not expected to have any previous experience of knowledge with museums and/or technology. The aim was to get a wide pool of skills and interests. So, supporting participants to use their strengths and own experience was key. Some participants did not feel knowledgeable enough to give feedback and even less to provide training to others and to staff members and until the very end had to be encouraged to speak out loud. In the interviews, too, people talked about there being 'real experts', particularly from the Universities, even though within the groups there were also disability advocates who worked with national disability and accessibility charities. Some, but not all, of these advocates felt that their voices should be given priority and embedded more strongly within the project. The solution, as with most of the challenges on the project, was to find ways to enable to focus on the smaller group projects and what could be achieved through them.

3.4. Catalytic validity

'It is important that all museum staff have a clear concept of accessibility and that they all have a basic training on how to support visitors with access needs.' (Oviedo Exploration Group Participant, 2019)



Figure 4. Two participants presenting the ARCHES project at an event in Madrid. They are supported by the educator and a sign language interpreter on the theatre stage.

Catalytic validity focuses upon the extent to which the research presents new possibilities for social action. For some people, the project was a personal journey that helped them to gain confidence or improve their personal skills. Working in a mixed ability group in a museum environment was a new and enriching experience for the majority of participants and it had a positive effect on many of their lives. However, during the project there were also moments of frustration and impatience:

'Before the project people looked enthusiastic and excited to be contributing to the improvement of accessibility but throughout these months, I have seen certain disillusion in the participants in getting ideas translated into something tangible.'

Perhaps more than in any other of the validities, the relevant results began to emerge towards the end of the project, largely as a consequence of the individual group projects and the interactions that the groups had with each other.

‘To advocate for people with disabilities’ was one of the most important reasons why participants joined the project in the first place. The Exploration groups took on two shared projects to speak out loud about their expectations, hopes and wishes for accessibility within museums. One was the creation of a shared manifesto and the other was a series of actions undertaken for the International Day for People with Disabilities (3rd December 2018).

The idea of creating a manifesto arose towards the final six months of the project, with the decision to create both a collective and local version and to use video to spread the message across their networks and beyond. Participants shared their top 3 priorities amongst each other and also amongst each other (see figure 5), in order to create the manifesto, which then became a key part of the overall project dissemination strategy.

Museums within the consortium picked up on the desire of participants to have a direct voice too. In Oviedo, for example, participants provided training in disability awareness and Madrid decided to follow suit. At the time of writing, both these museums are also considering creating an access board where participants on a regular basis review the accessibility status of the museum. The Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna has allocated money towards free accessible tours on a monthly basis as well as the production of 100 sign language videos for the website and a thermal printer. Moreover, there are current plans on the way of creating a step-free main entrance. These changes were all provoked by the group’s joint efforts.

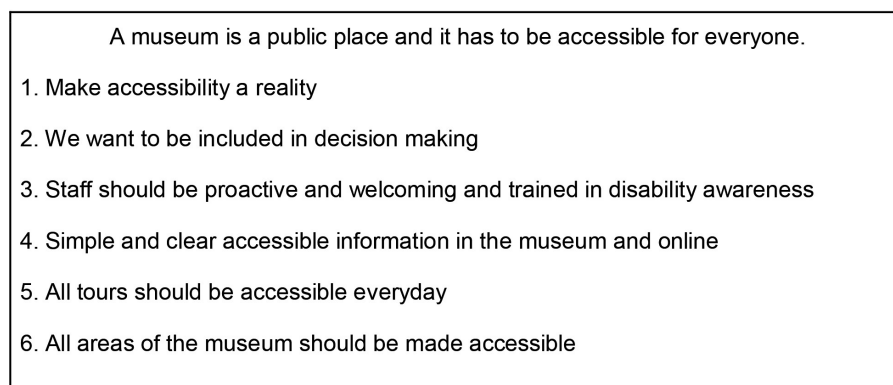


Figure 5: Joint ARCHES Group manifesto

The second shared project was developed individually within the groups but presented simultaneously. The group in Madrid decided to host a local event where participants took over and presented to 75 museum practitioners and social workers how a mixed ability and participatory research group can work. In Oviedo and Vienna political statements were shared on social media and in London the group posted a video on social media calling for accessibility in museums.

As mentioned above, the primary source of change has been the mini projects. These have allowed for tailored resources to be designed by the groups within their museum context. Some of these projects more than others allowed participants to spread the word and use it in different contexts. For example, in Oviedo the group decided that the biggest need for the museum was to train their staff on how to support people with different needs. The group decided to train the museum staff but also to publish parallel to it a manual that could be handed out to new staff (ARCHES participatory research group, 2019). A member within the participatory research group worked as director of the D/deaf association of Asturias and decided to post it online on their official website and disseminate through their channels. Another example is the Madrid group who created accessible videos (one for each museum) that describe how to get to the museum and what access offers there are. This video was produced with and for disabled people and has been uploaded on their official museum websites from where other organisations will be able to see and learn from it. As discussed in the Intersubjective Validity section above, we have also seen participants developing personal journeys influenced by their involvement in ARCHES.

Overall, the project has been actively spreading the messages through different social media channels. Two groups even decided to have their own account. London used Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, whilst Madrid was on Twitter and Facebook. The groups decided to have their own channels to have their individual voices heard and also as a direct way to communicate amongst each other. Overall the two groups plus the official ARCHES account have on Twitter 615 followers and on Facebook 228 friends. Tweets have between 4-7 retweets demonstrating that the messages are being shared beyond the project.

Perhaps technology is one aspect within the project that did not provoke as much social action as imagined (or has not at the time of writing). Yet, the process of researching and creating a technological piece that could be enjoyed by multiple people has had an impact on communities. In addition, the research and development processes are currently being shared through articles and workshops and their impact may continue in ways we cannot predict.

3.5. Ethical validity

I have learned the value of disability as an element to enrich ourselves, other communities and society, when we are able to transform disability into a source of ideas and not live it only as a limitation in our lives. (Madrid Exploration Group Participant, 2019)

This validity focuses upon the extent to which the research process has been just for participants and if they were treated fairly. More than 200 volunteers have participated in ARCHES project. Their commitment was high as they were asked to participate for 2 to 5 hours weekly/bi-weekly for up to 30 months. This called for an important commitment from participants and also raised issues around how to reward participants' voluntary work.

Overall, all leavers and interviewees noted that they felt they were treated fairly and equally. Yet, from the beginning of the project, some participants believed they should all be paid for their contribution. This demand was expressed more vocally in some local contexts, however, due to the international character of the project, the different subsidy systems in each country, and the need to be equitable the project could not budget for these payments. From the beginning to the end of the project, therefore, it was important that the museums recognize the volunteer's efforts by granting them some benefits such as a private view of the exhibitions, behind-the-scenes activities or Museum memberships. Some participants felt that their contributions to the museum and the project were so important that they should receive some recognition in return. Museums have tried to respond to some of these demands by offering special activities and certificates to recognise their work. They have made it clear too, that where it is possible too, in future projects they would want to ensure fair rewards that avoid this kind of frustration.

Another important ethical issue was to assure that participants felt that they had been treated equally during the group sessions. In participative projects there are always people who have stronger voices or different rhythms of work. When working in mixed abilities groups this can be seen as a more difficult challenge; for example, some participants may need more time than others or need to have seating arranged so they can see the sign language interpreter. However, by creating together a set of values and ways of working, participants have reflected together on each other's needs and how to work in a group with mixed abilities. This evidently helped people to empathise and collaborate with each other, and to feel confident, safe and listened to within the group sessions.

3.6. Empathetic validity

'I never wanted to put people into, "all blind people are the same". But it did, yeah, those conversations have helped a lot, and I've learned a lot from individuals. Not just people with disabilities, also a lot from supporters and parents, yeah absolutely.' (Oviedo Exploration Group member Participant, 2018)

Empathy was one of the strongest elements of participation during this project. It is closely related to all the other markers. Validating the extent to which the research has increased empathy amongst participants is difficult to judge, as it is a matter of personalities working together over a certain period, gaining confidence and better understanding of others. This is something that can or cannot grow in any group. What a museum educator can enable is the process of getting to know each other through different icebreakers. There was resistance, particularly from people who came with friends to the sessions to break out and get to know others. Some educators initially insisted that as the participants were adults, things would work out organically. Yet, on many occasions it was necessary to put different people into different groups. Participants felt that by working together on different tasks for the same common goal they could explore commonalities amongst each other. Even if some remained skeptical about whether they could fully understand and support other people's access needs, they were supported to be open-minded and flexible.

Allowing people to become confident to express who they are and for others to empathise with them was important too. This was one reason why museum educators were happy when different people chose to lead the sessions, particularly in London. Witnessing personal growth overtime also influenced group dynamics, so people could celebrate when other participants started to come to the museums by themselves.

Across the interviews participants were very clear that working in this way had been a catalyst for generating empathy and was one of the best things about the project. They had had the time to get to know each other. It meant that their emotional investment in the project was not going to be wasted.

4. Conclusion

This article highlights the importance of the evaluation process during a participatory project such as ARCHES. Along the way we have learned numerous small lessons and some larger ones, but in summary we would suggest there are three major elements that affected how people felt about the value of the project and its success.

1. The assurance that results were being disseminated and meaningfully integrated within museums. As such we invited volunteers to participate and demonstrate our project results within workshops across Europe, included them in scientific publications and social media posts.

2. Impatience with the process and the need to trust oneself and others. As such we invited volunteers to participate and demonstrate our project results within workshops across Europe, included them in scientific publications and social media posts. To build up trust and work together effectively museum coordinators created group activities at times created and led by participants (Garcia Carrizosa, H., et al. 2019 b).
3. Working with a group of mixed needs, skills and interests - both as a challenge and the greatest reward.

In recognising these elements and in response to their ongoing reflection, the museum educator sought to adapt their ways of working to maintain a balance between the power, voice and support within the group. They sought to ensure that all the participants recognised the need for flexibility and the importance of constant evaluation for each individual and for the group as a whole.

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