

**Dorina Xheraj-Subashi**

ICOM Albania-Board Member  
ICOM-Co-Chair of National Committee Working Group  
ICTOP-Member  
MuZEH Lab Director  
[dorixhe@gmail.com](mailto:dorixhe@gmail.com), [muzehlabdirector@gmail.com](mailto:muzehlabdirector@gmail.com)

## **Learning spaces, fostering inclusiveness-Westerns Balkans between challenges and lesson learnt**

As the development of museums is happening at different speeds, they themselves are facing the biggest challenges, from issues completely related to the colonial past, as well as with urgent topics such as global climate changes. From this point of view, it seems that some museums have the advantage of taking care and actions of the above-mentioned topics considered a priority for the globe as a whole. Instead, other museums focus in topics related on educational based approach, inclusion and wellbeing. However, it seems clear that although museums progress towards to different topics, the use of technological tools in museum premises remains as the most used in museum exhibitions. Considering that the high use of technology in European museums, many thematic museums, historicals, memorials have included technology as an interpretation/catching tool for visitors of different ages, the same approach cannot be the same with Western Balkans countries museums. Despite their efforts, the museums of this region encounter several difficulties to pursue the same developments in museum field, which slow the interest of cultural life participation, as in most museums are missing services universally designed. In this context, museums are facing the gap of reaching visitors/tourist due to miss creating equal conditions in heritage/culture participation. In other words completing their rights to recognition and experience (Reyes-García, et al., 2021). In this regards, museums must provide an approach that adapt/create exhibitions and programs with the aim that everyone will be able to use them (Dimitrova-Radojichik) in order not to face social exclusion. As a fact, technology appears to be a key and bridge to weave a meaningful aspect of inclusion known as accessibility. Museums have the social responsibility of becoming a center of cultural production and ensuring that everyone has the *right* to participate. In this way, museums must promote, through their work, the processes of *creating value* for their local territory and help that part of community that, for various reasons, is detached from the museums' traditional reach, to become active parts of the society. (Solima & alt.,2021)

Although, the presentation is addressed to a specific area of the Western Balkans (*including six countries (Northern Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro)*) where all together make up a region but diverse in terms of economic and social development unlike other dynamics related to social/cultural development. Therefore, the analysis has be understood as a continuous effort of the museums of this area that, although it groups several countries, has separate achievements in the field of museums from one another.

There are four main dimensions to accessibility, which can be economic, physical, cognitive or digital (Solima & alt.,2021), but over the past twenty years, the sense of sight has been strongly affected by technological progress.

From several years, many museums in the Western Balkans has considered using technology, as through digitization, enables unconditional access. This has led, on the other hand, to museums and their staff facing challenges of acquiring new competencies towards the digital world, and uplifting digital skills by curating digital archives on the other hand, but also seeing them as a source that will connect with visitors. The digital tools with new technologies, and duly implementing them in the marketing strategies of cultural institutions, are an important tool to strengthen the presence of museums in the lives of citizens. In the other side, digitization contributes to the conservation and preservation of heritage and scientific resources; it creates new educational opportunities; foster citizen appreciation to their patrimony, and if appropriately content used it encourage tourism; as it provides ways of improving access.

*In the digital approach, the term used like virtual museums is quite a new form of cultural heritage presentation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Museums has worked through projects, some supported also from Balkan Museum Network, where the new advanced technologies used are multimedia, clips, animations, 3D collections and audio (Rizvic and alt.,2011). Their advancement goes towards the creation of digital collections through 3D model technology or laser scanning, referring the mostly reenactment and interpretation of public histories.*

Instead, Serbia brings us another approach and model to attract especially younger visitors in the museum. In this case, the use of technology in museums was as an alternative, by using it as a marketing strategy tool to increase the number of visitors (Zoran Radosavljević & Tijana Ljubisavljević, 2019). They also have approached to offer virtual tours, storytelling, augmented reality and video games among the models close to youth preferences to push them visiting museum spaces, thus playing the video games are considered the most popular attracting format model for learning about heritage, especially if are proposed local historical themes.

The tradition of Albanian museums and their models towards engagement, interpretation and engagement with visitors remain in parallels similar to the region. Lately, several projects were designed for enriching digital cultural life participation by experiencing immersive experience and VR. This is the case of digital exhibition of Sister Zenga and VR technology inside the Venetian Tower. Two different historical content experiences based in advanced technology participation, supported by European Commission. Both them are considered as a new path toward the digital presence in museums to enrich either historical knowledge about history and archaeology, as a new offer for culture heritage on site, but also as means of interaction to encourage young people to actively participate in cultural life.

Same examples comes from Kosovo, with the virtual model of Monastery of Archangels Michael and Gabriel.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, has introduced other digital means for participants enhancement experience as Player's Movement interaction in Virtual Reality with Sarajevo War Tunnel VR using controller movement imitating hand movements while walking and in The Battle on Neretva VR application enabled the users to experience events from historical periods presented in museum exhibitions (Okanovic & alt.,2022) In the Admotum installation exhibition the users were able to walk through virtual environments, collect objects, and hear the stories. After all objects from one location were collected, other locations were unlocked for exploration. The interaction was gesture-based. Instead, in the Sarajevo 5D Tour Guide, which is a tracker-based application, additional information is presented to users on-demand. This interaction is standard for all mobile phones and tablets, which is why it is easily understandable for the user.

Although the above cases show the efforts and challenges of museums, they also show us perspectives based on different social contexts. However, several other museums in the region have moved towards providing digital access, especially for individuals with disabilities.

“A Mobile Museum – a Museum for All, a project by Homeland Museum Knjazevac-Serbia, was designed for the creation of an accessible digital website. A guide through the museum, which makes it possible to view parts of exhibitions and collections unavailable to persons with limited mobility. There are guides in Braille, a video guide in sign language and audio guide in Serbian and English, their contribution to have a digital website supporting the navigation in the digital content of it. Bitola Museum-Northern Macedonia designs a good case of digital accessibility website, as the interface of webpage is created purposely for individuals with visual impairments.

The return to access through technology is slowly becoming part of the applications in cultural institutions, to not only adapt their efforts to social innovations and the absorption by young people, but also because on the other hand they awaken curiosity, stimulate sensations and increase the time spent in the museums.

## References

Daniela Dimitrova-Radojchikj, Museums: Accessibility to visitors with visual impairment, Museums Accessibility, Conference: Национална научна конференция с международно участие по проект ВаGMIVI на програма Erasmus+ Достъп до изкуството на лица с нарушено зрение“ At: Sofia, Bugaria, January 2017

Ludovico Solima, Mario Tani, Pasquale Sasso, Social innovation and accessibility in museum: some evidence from the SoStare al MANN project, «Il capitale culturale», n. 23, 2021, pp. 25 DOI: 10.13138/2039-2362/2518

Okanovic and alt., Interaction in eXtended Reality Applications for Cultural Heritage, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.3390/app12031241>

Reyes-García, M.E.; Criado-García, F.; Camúñez-Ruíz, J.A.; Casado-Pérez, M. Accessibility to Cultural Tourism: The Case of the Major Museums in the City of Seville. Sustainability 2021, 13, 3432. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13063432>

S. Rizvica , A. Sadzaka, B. Ramic-Brkic, V. Hulusic, Virtual Museums And Their Public Perception In Bosnia And Herzegovina, International Archives of the Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences, Volume XXXVIII-5/W16, 2011, ISPRS Trento 2011 Workshop, 2-4 March 2011, Trento, Italy

Zoran Radosavljević & Tijana Ljubisavljević, Digitization Of Cultural Heritage as a Potential for Increasing Museum Attendance in Central Serbia, *BizInfo (Blace)*, 2019, Volume 10, Number 1, pp. 53-67

<https://acc.muzejknjzevac.org.rs/cir/zavicajni-muzej-knjzevac>

<https://muzejbitola.mk/en/welcome/>

<https://muzejbitola.mk/en/increased-accessibility-and-improved-interpretation-of-ni-institute-and-museum-bitola-with-new-services-for-visitors/>