

Results of survey on universal design of museums in the Kinki region , Japan

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ICOM approved new museum definition including “Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability” in 2022.

The Japanese government intends to further promote the realization of a universal society in which all citizens, regardless of disability or age, can live together in harmony by enacting the "Act on Comprehensive and Integrated Promotion of Measures for a Universal Society" (2018) and amending the "Act on the Promotion of Smooth Mobility for the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities" (2022) , etc..

Japan's Kinki Regional Administrative Evaluation Bureau¹, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications conducted a survey of 8 National Museums ² established by Independent Administrative Agencies, etc. located in the Kinki region on the state of facilities and equipment, information provision via websites, and implementation of exhibition innovations and support for appreciation with the aim of contributing to the promotion of universal design in museums.

The Bureau notified each museum of their suggestions for improvement in August 2022. According to the survey results, 76 cases in 8 museums had insufficient support for barrier-free facilities and equipment.

For example,

- Intercom installed too high for wheelchair users.
- Trench cover with too wide a gap
- Toilets without Braille indications on each button.
- Lifts without Braille blocks to indicate the location of boarding buttons.
- Signage makes it difficult for wheelchairs to pass through aisles
- Protrusions in the passage.

And 23 cases in 7 museums³ had insufficient support for web accessibility on their websites.

¹ Jurisdiction Fukui, Shiga, Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo, Nara, Wakayama Prefecture

² National Museum of Art, Osaka, National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Kyoto National Museum, Nara National Museum, Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (Asuka Museum and Heijo Palace Site Museum, Fujiwara Palace Site Museum), National Museum of Ethnology

³ Except for Fujiwara Palace Site Museum

For example,

- Information on holidays and events displayed on the calendar is shown only in different background colors, so visually impaired people with low vision who use high contrast screens (screens with increased contrast between background and text) are unable to grasp the content.
- The control buttons for stopping content operation are small and difficult to operate for people with physical disabilities who use a trackball (a device in which a ball placed on a pedestal is operated by rolling it with the equality of the hand) instead of a mouse.

Although most of their suggestions raised relate to hardware, it is significant that the Administrative Evaluation Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, rather than the Agency for Cultural Affairs which is in charge of museum administration, conducted the survey based on requests from users and made specific points.

On the other hand, there are some examples of initiatives that take into account diverse users, such as persons with disabilities.

For example,

- Exhibition of replicas which every visitor can touch and Appreciate
- Captions and explanations of the work in easy-to-understand language for children and foreigners.
- Volunteer guided tours for visually impaired person
- Wheelchair with variable seat height arranged
- After reading a picture book (also in sign language), which is an introduction to art appreciation, parents and children can enjoy the art appreciation together.

The Bureau has also published a "Support Book for Universal Design Promotion in Museums," which includes the results of a questionnaire survey of museum users and case studies of efforts by museums to promote universal design. (Unfortunately, it's only Japanese)

Also, The Bureau conducted a questionnaire survey for 208 people, including people with disabilities, older people aged over 70 and households with children, and summarised what people with disabilities and others expect from universal design initiatives in museums. Based on these results, museums will promote universal design.