

CULTURE OF EQUALITY

INTEGRATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES INTO THE WORK OF CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS¹

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Abstract: The identity of people with disabilities is largely determined by society's attitude towards them. The way society talks about them, perceives their needs and allows them access to education, culture, healthcare and employment, defines their further position and equality in the community. Therefore, those who work in the field of culture have a great responsibility in relation to the position of persons with disabilities, to perceive them not only as objects, but as subjects in cultural activity – as creators, consumers or employees.

The legal framework, international and national, has determined the prohibition of discrimination against persons with disabilities, equal opportunities for them and the enjoyment of all the rights of persons without disabilities. It provides a good basis for cultural institutions in the integration of persons with disabilities. Through culture, every individual can realise themselves professionally, receive an education, enjoy leisure time, and create and exhibit works.

The paper will present Culture of Equality research conducted on a sample of 159 cultural institutions in Serbia at the national, regional and local levels, and providing quality data on the position of people with disabilities in the cultural community and the opportunities for their integration. Its findings point to potential use of action targeted at integrating and employing people with disabilities into the operations of cultural institutions.

Key words: cultural institutions, museums, people with disabilities, employment, accessibility

INTRODUCTION¹

In the first half of 2022, the Culture of Equality's Accessibility of Cultural Institutions for People with Disabilities Survey was conducted. The questions were formulated in three categories:

1. accessibility of facilities and premises;
2. accessibility of institution's content;
3. engagement of persons with disabilities.

The goal of the research was to determine the factual situation regarding the fulfillment of the legal norms and international standards of ensuring the accessibility of cultural institutions to persons with disabilities, and the inclusion of persons with disabilities into the work of institutions.

¹ This paper was written as part of the 2023 Research Programme of the Institute of Social Sciences with the support of the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia. Translation into English: Slađana Bojković (Historical Museum of Serbia).

The imperative of a democratic society and countries that accede to the European Union, and especially of the signatories of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* adopted by the United Nations (UN 2014), is to provide equal opportunities to all members of society. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that persons with disabilities enjoy to a considerable extent social benefits, and therefore belong to the category of the unemployed population (Olsen 2022, 2).

The paper will analyse the factual situation regarding the possibilities of persons with disabilities to participate in the work of cultural institutions, either as employees or as users of services. In his work *Disability, culture and normative environments*, Jens Ineland (2004) states that the responsibility for persons with disabilities achieving inclusion and greater employment rests on the society as a whole, but that ultimately it is the responsibility of the state, local authorities and

public institutions. Museums and libraries have great importance in the cultural life of the community and as such can represent a good example of support for the creation of an inclusive society. However, the research results showed the opposite (131–135).

BINDING FRAMEWORK

In the study² prepared for the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, the author of this paper and Aleksandar Bogdanović from the Center for the Development of an Inclusive Society stated that “the principle of modern human rights law rests on the basis that all people are equal. Accepting people’s inequality destroys the concept of human rights. The source of the right to equality that human beings possess is precisely the fact that they are human beings”.

The authors further state that the basic principle of the modern protection of human rights and freedoms is the principle of non-discrimination – of equality and harmony in differences. The principle is legal, political and moral. The idea of equality occupies a central place in the protection of human rights. If equality of rights is not ensured, then it means that human rights are not guaranteed.

The principles of equality and non-discrimination are dealt with both by domestic and international law. In both these branches of law, distinctions are made between the beneficiaries of the rights, and when these differences turn into prohibited discrimination.

In order to harmonise legislative and judicial practice and apply the same legal standards, European countries have adopted certain legal acts on the rights of persons with disabilities and their position in society. Following the examples of EU countries, Serbia has adopted *The Law on Prevention of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities*. This is the basic law that defines potential cases of discrimination in terms of the right to work and employment of persons with disabilities (Articles 22 and 26). In addition to this law, the general *Law on Prohibition of Discrimination* (was also adopted, which elaborated the forms of discrimination. Then *the Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment* was adopted, to define in more detail the measures and policies that should directly affect the increase in the employment of persons with disabilities.

The Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities was adopted in 2009 and amended in 2013. The law creates favourable conditions and provides a stimulus to include people with disabilities in the labour market to the greatest extent possible, and to make use of their abilities in accordance with their capabilities. The law foresees a number of measures aimed primarily at employers and institutions, and includes stimulus for employment, regulation of work ability assessment procedures, and the obligation to employ persons with disabilities; it also prescribes the conditions for the establishment and the carrying out of activities of companies for the professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities. *The Report* (WFD, Committee 2020) on this disability law stated that the legislative framework concerning the improvement of the employability and professional training of persons with disabilities did not provide sufficiently clear results as regards the efficiency of the process of determining work abilities, the sustainability of employment incentive measures, the removal of physical and organisational obstacles to the inclusion of everyone in training programmes, and the monitoring of the quality of workplaces, as well as the fact that the relationship between the training provided and the demands of the market was not sufficiently visible in practice.

Based on Article 45 paragraph 1 of *the Law on Government* (Official Gazette of the RS, nos. 55/05 and 71/05 – correction), the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the *Strategy on Improving the Position of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia*; on the basis of Article 38 paragraph 1 of *the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia* (Official Gazette of the RS, no. 30/18), the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the *Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2020 to 2024*.

The starting point of the *Strategy* was to improve solutions in the field of raising the position of persons with disabilities to the level of equal citizens who enjoy all rights and responsibilities. A special task of the *Strategy* was the development of effective legal protection, along with development and implementation of plans for the prevention of discrimination against persons with disabilities.

² crid.org.rs, accessed the website on 25. 04. 2023.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The questionnaire was sent to 170 addresses of cultural institutions at the national, regional and local levels. Responses were submitted by 159 institutions.

The institutions which participated in the research are financed from public revenues. Those at the local level either have regional importance or are competent for different fields of cultural heritage.

Among those who responded were 63 libraries, 50 museums, 22 historical archives, 11 institutes for the protection of monuments, 4 galleries, and 4 cultural centers, while the rest included orchestras, and the guardians of monument complexes (Table 1).

Methodology:

The questions were formulated to provide answers to the essential issues of implementing inclusion in cultural institutions and enabling participation in all cultural activities for persons with disabilities, not only as users, but also as potential organisers, employees or collaborators. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of research results led to certain conclusions.

The results:

A positive answer to the question, “Are you familiar with the standards for ensuring accessibility?” was given by 48% of respondents; 33.8% answered that they were partially familiar with them, and 18.2% that they were not familiar with them at all.

When it came to the standards for ensuring the accessibility of business premises, offices and work space, only 40% were aware of such standards, while 32% were partly aware, and 25% not aware.

This means that an awareness of this nature, as well as the attitude of the employees in the culture, is far from inclusive – that is, that the conditions have not yet been created to ensure the presence of persons with disabilities among employees.

More than 55% of the institutions that participated in the research were not familiar with the current standards and legal framework for ensuring the accessibility of cultural institutions, i.e. public institutions, for persons with disabilities. A quarter was aware and 20% of them were partly aware.

Those who answered positively also indicated the exact legal act. For most of them, it was *The Law on Prohibition of Discrimination*. Almost no one is familiar with the content of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and other legal acts.

Furthermore, the research reveals interesting data regarding the accessibility of cultural institutions.

Only 6.3% of institutions are fully accessible (with ways of access to all facilities), while most of them, over 70%, only offer access to the buildings. The others do not have conditions for the use of their premises by persons with disabilities (Table 2).

In their paper Maayan Agmon, Amalia Sa’ar, and Tal Araten-Bergman (2016) emphasised the impor-

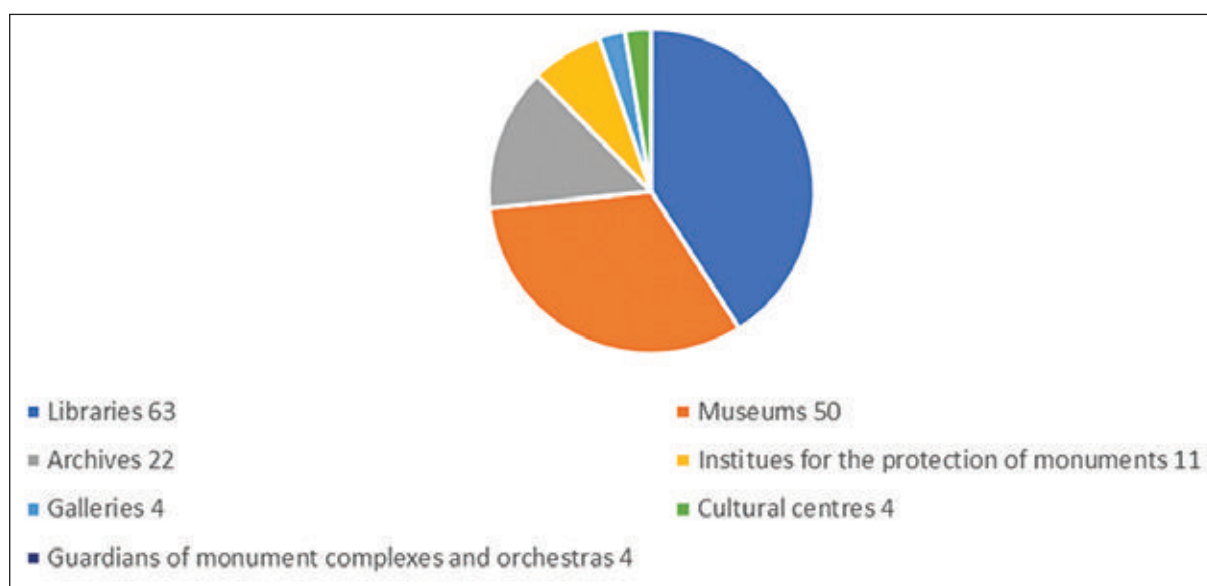


Table 1

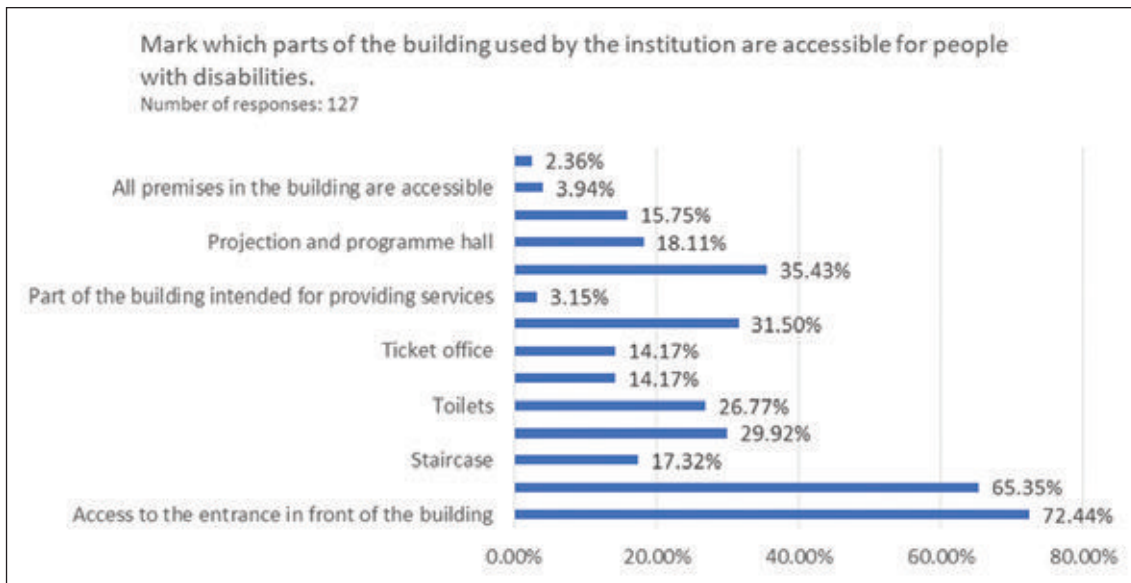


Table 2

tance of connecting culture and the treatment of people with disabilities, because the observation and classification of persons with disabilities as those whose physical injuries have a disqualifying effect leads to the situation in which society in general does not see them as whole persons, psychologically or socially (2–11).

Comparing their views with the research findings, it is clear that the inaccessibility of cultural institutions results in the development of inequality and discrimination both at the level of society and at the level of the individual. Inaccessible spaces create a barrier between the museum and the potential audience; this is reflected in the positioning of the individual in relation to society in terms of a weakening of self-confidence, a feeling of not belonging to society, and of rejection, with further consequences for the person-

ality in psychological, emotional and social contexts. At the individual level, the inability to participate in cultural life is reflected in the individual’s awareness of the impairments they have and their inability to perform certain actions in interactions with professionals, and in their overall experience with public institutions.

The situation is not better with the training of employees to work with people with disabilities: 4.2% have completed additional training, while the rest are not trained.

This issue is directly related to cooperation with associations of persons with disabilities: 55.3% of cultural institutions do not cooperate with PWD associations (Table 3). Cooperation with PWD associations is crucial for adequate, rational and proper implemen-

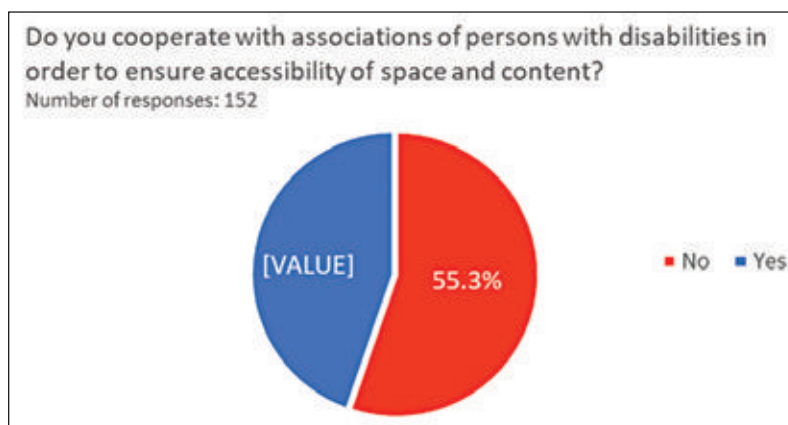


Table 3

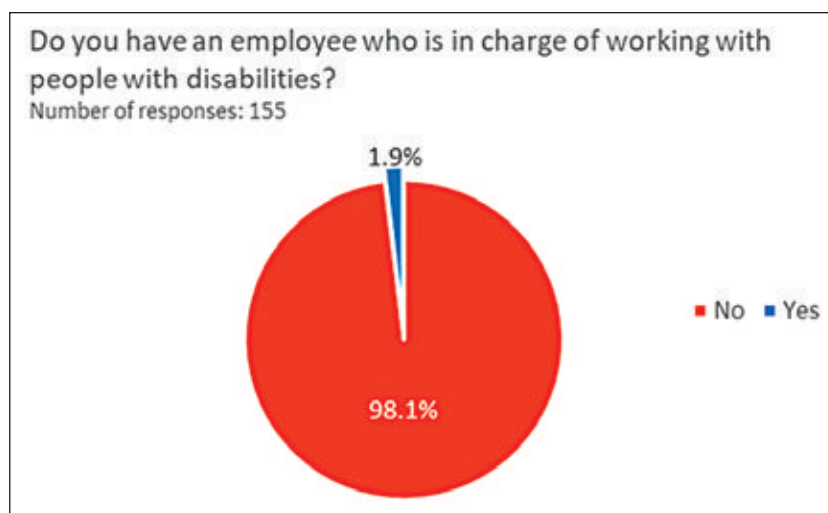


Table 4

tation of standards. PWDs know best what their needs are. Consultation and cooperation with associations of persons with disabilities are crucial for the establishment of an inclusive society. Such a cooperation at the level of the society and its members can be realised through several instruments: workshops, interviews, focus groups, professional consultations, etc. (Masliković 2015, 226–241).

It is a devastating fact that 98.1% (Table 4) did not have a person employed or in charge of working with PWDs.

When we talk about employment or engagement of PWDs, the situation is no better than that of ensuring accessibility. In addition to the fact that *The Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities* foresees a quota of PWD employees in relation to the total number of employees in cultural institutions, only 27% meet this norm. A total of 42 people with disabilities have been employed in 159 of the institutions that participated in the research.

Work is an important factor in the development of each individual and of the society as a whole. Apart from the fact that work provides the material conditions for life, it is also an important factor in socialisation. This is of special importance for people with disabilities (Ebrahim 2022, 317–329).

The normative basis for greater inclusion of persons with disabilities was created by the introduction of *The Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities* (Official Gazette

of the Republic of Serbia, No. 36/2009, 32/2013). Specifically, the provision of Article 24 of this law prescribes that the Employment Obligation, according to the sense of this law, includes the obligation of every employer with at least 20 employees to employ a certain number of persons with disabilities. An employer with 20 to 49 employees is obliged to employ one person with a disability. An employer with 50 or more employees is obliged to employ at least two disabled persons, with one disabled person more for every subsequent 50 employees.

An employer who does not employ persons with disabilities in accordance with Article 24 of this law is obliged to pay a tax to the amount of 50% of the average salary per employee in the Republic of Serbia according to the latest published data of the authority responsible for statistics for each person with disabilities whom he did not employ. By paying these funds, the employer fulfills the employment obligation (Art. 26).

The small number of employees in cultural institutions is the result of several factors. In his work *Employers: influencing disabled people's employment through responses to reasonable adjustments*, Jason Olsen (2022) lists several reasons for low employment of such persons in museums. The author claims that employers have a problem with finding disabled people who want to work, and that employees do not report their disability, if they have it. He goes on to state that "employers are often not familiar with the types of disabilities and the need to adapt workplaces". The author also cites the reasons related to people with

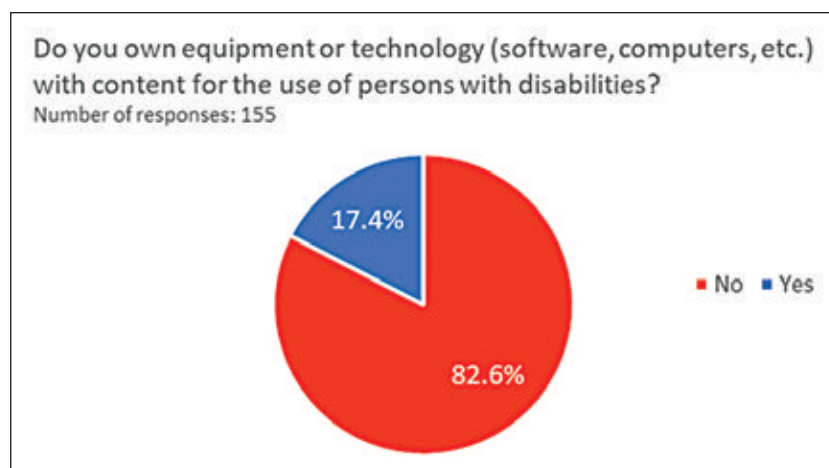


Table 5

disabilities who are afraid to request job adjustments and thus burden the employer with costs and reduce their chance of being employed (3–16).

The WHO also states that the lack of participation of people with disabilities in the labour market can lead to them living in poverty.

According to *The Report* (<http://www.parlament.gov.rs>), one of the four biggest challenges that companies face with when hiring people with disabilities is the lack of knowledge on the part of employers about disabilities. However, there are benefits, i.e. subsidies. The National Employment Service provides subsidies for adapting workplaces for people with disabilities. The problem of educating employers and employees to accept colleagues with disabilities remains. It is also necessary to change the legislative framework in order to include the workplace accessibility clause as mandatory in job catalogues and recruitment contests.

Using Digital Technologies

ICT has the potential to improve the experience of museum visitors and facilitate access for people with disabilities, as well as the work of employees with disabilities in museums.

All museums and galleries have internet presentations and accounts on social networks; some also have a YouTube channel. In the last five years, there has been an accelerated growth of multimedia applications used in museums. They provide information to visitors and even become a means of informal learning through digital and multimedia guides, mobile devices

and interactive screens. All these technologies were developed to enable the development and installation of accessible content for people with disabilities in a simple and fast way. However, the number of examples of accessible content is small (Table 5).

The limited accessibility of internet presentations is the first obstacle to people with disabilities getting information.

In *The Guidelines for Creating Web Presentations of State Administration Bodies, Territorial Autonomy Bodies and Local Self-Government Units version 5.0* (<https://arhiva.ite.gov.rs>) the Office for Information Technology and Electronic Administration has defined the technical, technological and visual characteristics of accessible websites of state bodies and public institutions with the possibility of validation, i.e. self-assessment of the accessibility of the internet presentation.

Analysing the internet presentations of the museums that participated in the research, only the Museum of Vojvodina and the National Museum of Serbia have accessible websites in accordance with the *Guidelines*; the other museums either also have these, but to a lesser extent, or do not have accessible internet presentations at all.

In his paper *Digital access to culture* Markus Weisen (2012) presents several interesting examples of accessible digital content, stating that “it is not uncommon to find audio guides for the visually impaired in larger museums, but it is unusual that almost all of them are intended as a special service for the visually impaired”.

This clearly indicates the fact that the awareness of inclusive services is not sufficiently developed.

He also states that information storage and memory are not a problem with present-day technology; the only reason why a “special” service is provided is that the cultural institutions and audio guide producers do not think about disability-inclusive services. An audio guide is the closest tool to a personal guide through a museum exhibit, and is a possible starting point that must be taken into account for all types of visitor (163–165).

In the paper *Capacity of Digital Technology in Development of an Inclusive Society*, the author (2016) proving four hypotheses, presented a conclusion that unequivocally establishes that digital technology, in other words, information and communication technology, has the capacity to improve the lives of people with disabilities. The improvement is shown in the fields of education, information, employment and leisure activities (50–88).

All the mentioned fields can also be observed in the participation of people with disabilities in the work of cultural institutions: through free time activities, education, information and finally employment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research results presented, analysis of the legislative framework and scientific literature, a conclusion can be drawn and recommendation made to cultural institutions for the greater engagement of people with disabilities in the work of cultural institutions, ensuring their employment and accessibility, i.e. creating an inclusive society.

The paper *Elements for the Implementation of Inclusivity*, authored by Dejan Masliković (2015) and published in the scientific journal *Kultura* (issue 147), gave recommendations to cultural institutions on how to ensure the availability of spaces for people with disabilities, either as visitors or employees. The author presented the possibility of dividing the notion of accessibility into architectural accessibility and that of accessibility to an information-content-programme (226–241).

A useful source of recommendations is the *Culture of Equality*, a handbook published in two editions in Serbia as a translated and adapted version of the British *Disability Portfolio* (2005) edition. It is clearly stated in this edition that in order to achieve accessibility, a

complete analysis of the chain of movement is necessary, starting from the personal aspects of movement, which include public areas, public transport, means of transport, destination, the destination facility itself, the place where the task is to be performed and, finally, the task/functionality itself.

Table 2 presents the responses of cultural institutions as to which rooms are accessible. One of the methods, which is easily changeable and does not require financial or material resources, is the self-assessment of the museum or cultural institution (Pratt et al. 2005, 39–46). Following the flow of movement, business procedures, the movement of employees and visitors, as well as the use of rooms in the museum, it is possible, in consultation with people with disabilities, to define points of interest that should become accessible. This refers to architectural, informational and programmatic accessibility.

Access to the contents and involvement in the work of the museum can be achieved through the use of digital technology – of applications and multimedia content intended for cultural institutions in particular. In order to enable the inclusion of persons with disabilities into the work of cultural institutions, it is necessary that the contents, permanent and temporary exhibitions, publications, etc. be accessible, that is, presented or explained in a form that is comprehensible to persons with disabilities. It is important that the service is created through accessible digital technology, to ensure that people with visual or hearing impairments can access the content.

Duarte and Fonseca (2019) believe that providing access to multimedia content is a very relevant topic. First, because museums have a social responsibility to provide everyone with access to publicly available content, including multimedia content. The two researchers further state that services need to become standardised, and that the biggest challenge in the near future is devising ways to help create accessible services and content (1–7).

Relying on the theoretical research of Duarte and Fonseca (2019) on the use of digital content, as well as on practical experience regarding the use of applications and multimedia content, it can be concluded that one of the approaches, with the aim of standardisation, is the development of accessible platforms with

generated functions in which each museum can insert generated automatically (7–14).

While there is a need for more services in general, there is specifically a need for better, more accessible, flexible, integrated and well-coordinated multidisciplinary services, such as services for children and adults, especially in times of transition. Existing programs and services should be reviewed to assess their performance and make changes to improve effectiveness. Changes should be based on the facts and directed to the needs of society, appropriate to the goals and programmes of the museum and local community, and tested in cooperation with the community of people with disabilities (UN 2018, 63–76).

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КУЛТУРА ЈЕДНАКОСТИ ИНТЕГРАЦИЈА ОСОБА СА ИНВАЛИДИТЕТОМ У РАД УСТАНОВА КУЛТУРЕ

Резиме

Идентитет особа са инвалидитетом у великој мери је одређен односом друштва према њима. Начин на који друштво говори о њима, сагледава њихове потребе и омогућава им приступ образовању, култури, здравству и запошљавању, дефинише њихов даљи положај и равноправност у заједници.

Перцепција инвалидитета у култури сценских и визуелних уметности и медија често се заснива на представљању особа са инвалидитетом кроз фигуре трауме, трагедије, сажалења, ужаса или негативности. И данас се однос друштва према заједници инвалида карактерише као добротинство, милостиња и сажалење. Дакле, они који раде у области културе имају велику одговорност у односу на положај особа са инвалидитетом, да их доживљавају не само као објекте, већ и као субјекте културног деловања – као ствараоце, потрошаче или запослене.

Правни оквир, међународни и национални, утврдио је забрану дискриминације особа са инвалидитетом, једнаке могућности за њих и уживање свих права особа без инвалидитета. Пружа добру основу за институције културе у интеграцији особа са инвалидитетом. Култура представља значајно подручје друштвеног деловања које ствара могућности за испуњење свих потреба члана заједнице. Дакле, кроз културу сваки појединац може да се професионално реализује, образује, ужива у слободном времену, ствара и излаже радове.

У раду је представљено истраживање Културе равноправности спроведено на узорку од 159 институција културе у Србији на националном, регионалном и локалном нивоу и пружање квалитетних података о положају особа са инвалидитетом у културној заједници и могућностима за њихову интеграцију.