



Access in Museums in South Asia

Learning from the Commonwealth Association of Museums'
Regional Workshop 2016, in partnership with
the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum Trust

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Editors: Mrinalini Venkateswaran, Catherine C. Cole, Giles Tillotson



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Foreword

I became disabled at the age of 22. At the beginning of my career, freshly graduated from college, I felt invincible. The feeling was short lived, as I was involved in a car accident 10 months later. From being an outgoing and confident person, I changed overnight. I wanted to hide away somewhere forgotten by all. Nothing was the same, and it all seemed to be so because of my disability. It took years for me to realise that the reason I no longer seemed to fit in was not because of my disability, but rather the environment, which was designed for non-disabled people. Looking back, I can confidently say that it wasn't being disabled that was dreadful, but the pitying attitudes of people coupled with inaccessible environments, that prevented me from flying.

Poor attitudes and inaccessibility are two important factors that result in discrimination against persons with disabilities. According to the World Bank more than 15% of the world population is composed of persons with disabilities. Two thirds of them live in Asia. It is recognised that community facilities and services are not inclusive and responsive to their needs. This has resulted in the neglect and isolation of a large population.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by 167 countries (as of 25 October 2016), addresses these issues. All the South Asian countries have ratified it. The Convention brings a paradigm shift in the way disability is viewed and requires governments to focus on the removal of barriers to enable full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in society. Article 30 of the Convention very specifically elaborates on the need to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to enjoy cultural life, leisure and sports. There is a lot to be done on the ground to really achieve this.

Today, if I went to visit a museum or a heritage site there is no guarantee that I would be able to really enjoy myself and benefit from what it offers. Very often I continue sitting in the car while my family or friends go visit a place because it is inaccessible to me. Or at times I have been lifted and carried in. Both of these are hopeless situations. The only way to be more welcoming to persons with disabilities is by working on improving accessibility, increasing awareness and sensitivity of staff through training, and having service standards or guidelines to assist visitors with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities are a very diverse group with varying accessibility needs. For instance, persons with physical impairments require the built or natural environment to be made accessible. Persons with visual impairments require orientation guidance and information in tactile and audible formats. Persons with cognitive disabilities may require information and environments that are easy to comprehend. Persons with hearing impairments may require visual information and language accessibility. And so on.

Service providers or museum management may think that there is too much effort required to provide all this; but the fact remains that improving accessibility would make it more comfortable not just for persons with disabilities but for many other visitors. People with temporary impairments or illness, the elderly, parents with small children, and language impaired persons are just a few categories of people who would find visiting the museum more meaningful and satisfying if accessibility is provided.

There is a long way for us to go to achieve universal accessibility for all visitors, and it isn't something that can be achieved overnight. But each step takes us closer to our goal. The CAM workshop for inclusion was a step in the right direction that gave a platform to a number of like-minded people to come and discuss how to create inclusion in their areas of work. As a person with disabilities, I hope that the future will be more inclusive, and that I will not need to think several times before heading off to a heritage site or museum, worried that it will be inaccessible.

I wish all the participants of the workshop the very best in their journey to make their environment more inclusive.

Shivani Gupta


Founder of Access Ability and author of *No Looking Back: A True Story* (Rupa, 2014)
Keynote speaker, Workshop on Access in Museums in South Asia



Introduction

This publication is the outcome of a workshop on Access in Museums in South Asia organised by the Commonwealth Association of Museums (CAM) and the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum (MSMS II M) from 25th – 28th March, 2016 at the City Palace Jaipur.¹

¹ The programme committee consisted of: Mrinalini Venkateswaran (Consultant, MSMS II M & Board Member, CAM), Dr Giles Tillotson (Consultant Director, MSMS II M), Catherine C. Cole (Secretary General, CAM), Bess Forrestall (CAM Outreach Intern), Siddhant Shah (MSMS II M Access Intern). The workshop was supported by: Mehrangarh Museum Trust, ICOMOS India, and The Gem Palace in addition to ICOM Canada and ICTOP, who have supported this publication. Associate support included Jaigarh Public Charitable Trust, General Amar Singh Kanota Library and Museum Trust, and the International Institute for the Inclusive Museum.



The workshop addressed the challenges of making buildings and collections physically and intellectually accessible, with a special focus on historic properties and collections.

It had two main aims:

1. To sensitise museum professionals to the needs of differently abled audiences.

Training in this area is not a part of museum studies programs in South Asia. Museum professionals come from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines so the workshop sought to include as diverse an audience as possible to collectively learn and think about issues of access. Participants represented a wide range of museum roles: education officers, collections teams, senior management, architects, exhibition and graphic designers, and others.

2. To use activity-based workshops and learnings to develop a set of practical suggestions as a reference tool, for further reflection, application and development – which is this publication.

The call for facilitators foregrounded these themes:

- **Mobility** – solutions that facilitate physical access to heritage, addressing the needs of stroller and wheelchair users, the elderly, etc.

- **Interpretation** – solutions that address the interpretation of heritage to audiences that may have one or more special needs (in addition to, or other than, the above)

- **Heritage spaces** – solutions that facilitate access to, and interpretation of, spaces and sites that are themselves of heritage value, whilst safeguarding the space or site itself

The facilitators were:

Partho Bhowmick, Photographer,
Founder, Blind With Camera and Beyond Sight
Foundation, Mumbai, India

Siddhartha Chatterjee, Exhibition Designer
and Director, SeeChange, New Delhi, India

Catherine C. Cole, Secretary-General, CAM,
and Consultant, Canada

Dr Amareswar Galla, Visiting Professor and International Curator
at the Don Bosco Museum and University, Shillong, India
and Vice President, CAM

Dr Asma Ibrahim, Director, State Bank Museum & Art Gallery,
Karachi, Pakistan

Deepak Kalra, Director of UMANG Jaipur, India

Dr Rachna Khare, Head, Architecture Department,
School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal, India

Siddhant Shah, Heritage Architect, Mumbai, India
and MSMS II M Access Intern

Meenakshi Srivastava, Inclusive Education Specialist,
Jaipur, India

The immediate outcome of the workshop, the Jaipur Declaration, is reproduced in full in this publication. The Declaration is a summary of the current status of accessibility and inclusion, especially in museums and heritage spaces in South Asia (particularly India and Pakistan), and makes recommendations that serve as a point of reference to all those working in these fields. Although written at the end of the workshop, the Declaration also effectively summarises the rationale for museums engaging with issues of access, and by extension, this publication. The document was drafted by all delegates to the workshop, and has been endorsed by the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum as well as ICOMOS India - which means that these institutions are committed to following up on the recommendations of this document in their own work.

This publication does two things. First, it summarises the workshop activities, both to act as a record, as well as a guide so that others can structure similar sessions if desired. The content is based on the presentations and discussion to which all facilitators and participants contributed; individuals are thus not credited but thanks and acknowledgements are due to session facilitators in particular. Secondly, it distils the workshop experience and learning into simple tasks or activities that individuals and institutions can undertake to improve their accessibility. They mainly address mobility, interpretation and design as those were the areas focused on during the workshop. It is crucial to recall that the workshop was intended - as is this publication - as a starting point. It is not a comprehensive guide to improving access: our understanding of how to do so is an evolving one, like our understanding of disability itself.

Many of the suggestions and questions that institutions and individuals might wish to ask themselves will appear simple, or easy to do. This was part of the purpose of the workshop; for all participants to understand for themselves how easy or difficult becoming more inclusive really is. The short answer: easier than you think. There are many things that one can do almost immediately, but to become truly inclusive as an institution or to make it a part of professional practice requires genuine commitment. This is because it involves changing the way we think and approach our work, which is not necessarily difficult, but simply requires awareness; the challenge often lies in convincing others of the need to do the same. We were delighted by the interest shown in this workshop, and the participation of so many colleagues and institutions, and hope that this publication helps to disseminate and share our experience with the wider museum and heritage community.

Mrinalini Venkateswaran
Catherine C. Cole
Giles Tillotson

October 2016

The Jaipur Declaration on Access in Museums

We the delegates

of the Commonwealth Association of Museums workshop on "Access in Museums in South Asia", meeting from 25-28 March, 2016 at the City Palace, Jaipur;

Recalling the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) which affirms that: "disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others";

Recalling the International Council of Museums (ICOM) definition of museums², and the ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter (2010);

² A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

hold that:

- Museums retain knowledge and resources for society and have the power to influence it; and all persons have the right of access to them.
- For the purpose of this declaration, access means the ability of persons with disabilities to engage with museum spaces and collections in ways which provide an enjoyable and educational experience, with dignity, safety, independence, and exercising choice.
- Access includes, but is not restricted to, intellectual, physical and sensory access, with the aim of enabling exploration and social learning. It includes access to knowledge and experience both on site and online (real and virtual).
- Providing access acknowledges the unique needs and expectations of diverse audiences and institutions.
- A high proportion of museums in India and Pakistan occupy heritage buildings, thus presenting heightened challenges for the provision of access.
- There is currently minimal collaboration between museums and relevant stakeholders in the provision of access. There is minimal awareness of the need for participation and continuous engagement in the process.

We recommend that:

- Museums in India and Pakistan must regard the provision of access as a non-negotiable matter of human rights and entitlements.
- Museums should embed accessibility into their policy framework, including developing and implementing minimum standards and guidelines, treating it as an ongoing and incremental process.
- Museum professionals, including but not restricted to policy-makers, curators, administrators, designers, architects, and educators, should collaborate in providing and improving access.
- To improve access, all museum professionals should consult and collaborate with individuals and organisations comprising or representing the differently-abled; and with appropriate educational institutions and professional bodies.
- Museums should minimise the disabling effects of existing barriers to access by implementing human-centred design. This encompasses design of systems, products and spaces, for use by all people as independently as possible, and signage in Braille and other forms that are easy to understand.
- Museum educational programs, along with live interpretation and other forms of assistance and support should seek to engage persons with disabilities.

- Museums should sensitise all staff to issues of access and facilitate behavioural change through special training.
- Museums should commit to providing competitive employment opportunities across the spectrum of staff posts to persons with disabilities.
- With respect to heritage structures and spaces, conservation concerns must not always take priority over access. We recommend consideration of the current use and users of the building, while respecting international guidelines on conservation.
- Museums should adopt website accessibility standards as per W3C, the World Wide Web Consortium. In keeping with this, museums should support the design, development, production and distribution of relevant technologies and information systems at an early stage, so that they become accessible at minimum cost.
- Museums should identify the unique challenges that persons with disabilities might encounter during emergency and evacuation situations and develop a risk management strategy accordingly.

The simulation exercise aimed to sensitise participants to the needs of and challenges faced by disabled visitors by placing them in situations that limited the use of their senses, or limbs, and required them to perform activities or tasks that they would not normally think twice about.



Simulation

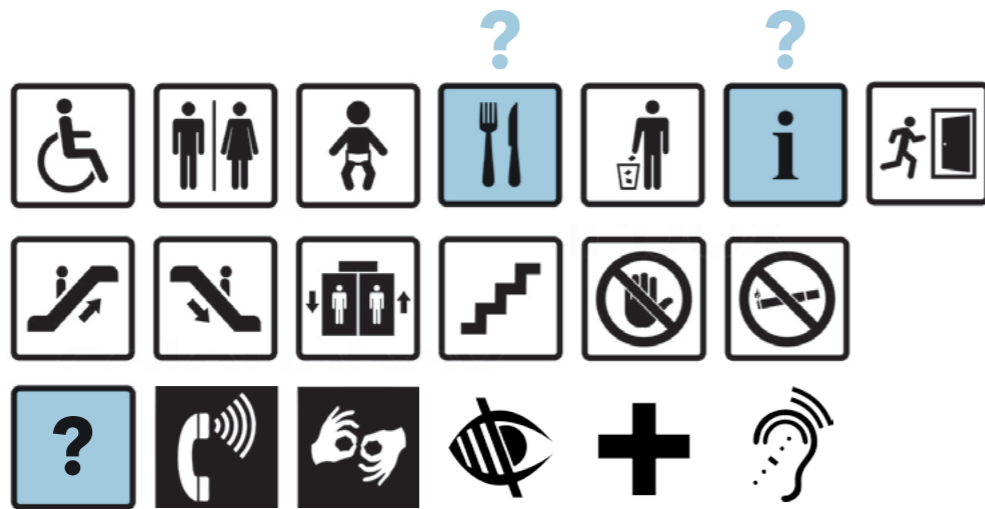
Workshop activity

Participants were asked to either:

- Sit in a wheelchair,
- Be led around the museum blindfolded, or
- Wear spectacles that limit vision.

Further, with the assistance of a colleague as attendant, they were asked to attempt varied tasks including:

- Purchasing a ticket from the ticket counter,
- Moving around the major circulation spaces of the museum,
- Visiting a specified gallery within the museum,
- Visiting an administrative office, and
- Using a lavatory.



Icon recognition depends on each visitor's visual literacy, which is historically and culturally specific

In each case the exercise instantly communicated the challenges faced by visitors with disabilities better than any verbal descriptions would have done, as participants experienced these for themselves. In particular, the following factors came into focus:

- The different surfaces throughout the museum are not all appropriate for wheelchair use as well as for the visually impaired, and in many cases are quite unsuited, potentially causing great discomfort (for example uneven paving in some areas can leave wheelchairs stuck between slabs or hard to manoeuvre).
- The absence of directional clues or signage for the visually impaired and for carers of visitors with disabilities (for example the provision of a ramp on one side of a low platform was not signposted anywhere; nobody found it, so it failed to serve its full purpose).
- A major factor in accessibility lies in the awareness and helpfulness of gallery staff who were variously willing/ unwilling and competent/ incompetent in offering help and guidance to visitors with disabilities and their carers.
- There was nothing for visually impaired visitors in particular to experience as everything is oriented towards sight.
- Participants were encouraged to reflect on how the exercise made them feel.



Experience

Participant experience varied. Some colleagues were initially hesitant, even reluctant, about using a wheelchair, being blindfolded or wearing vision-impairing spectacles. Some found the experience uncomfortable and unsettling. However, even those who protested learned from the experience – on further reflection and discussion, everyone realised the obvious but frequently forgotten point that visitors with disabilities do not have the power to exercise a choice in the matter. It required a personal experience to understand this in a meaningful way. The inconvenience caused by unsympathetic attitudes on the part of some staff – including, for example, some members of the security personnel – encouraged people involved with administration to address such shortcomings. These learning outcomes could not have been achieved in such an impactful way without a simulation exercise. Experiencing a disabling environment first-hand provides personal understanding; it may also generate the desire to address it for the benefit of others.

Repeating the exercise during the workshop along with participants from other disciplines and backgrounds provided useful feedback on the curatorial team's early ideas, as well as generating new ones.

Some of the steps taken or identified for action post-workshop as a result of the simulation exercise:

- The wheelchairs were replaced with newer models to provide greater comfort and safety
- A lavatory for disabled users is under construction
- A text-only version of the Braille guide has been made available to visually impaired visitors at cost, and free copies have been mailed to local organisations that care for the blind, with a follow-up planned to national organisations
- Free provision of the audio guide to visually impaired visitors
- Training and sensitisation of gallery attendants and of staff at ticket counters
- Enhanced provision of ramps at key locations, including ticket counters
- Progressive introduction of tactile materials into the museum's galleries to enhance visitor experience, especially for those who are visually impaired
- Long term plan for an Inclusive Access Policy

Building Partnerships

The simulation undertaken at the beginning of the workshop was planned and led by representatives of a local organisation called Umang, which cares for children suffering from a variety of disabilities. The need for a simulation exercise and for expert guidance in planning it, established a partnership between the museum and the locally-based Umang which will be taken further in future activities to our mutual benefit.

For example, the use of the museum as a learning experience for the children of Umang is an area to be explored. In a similar way, the decision to produce a Braille guidebook established a working relationship between the museum and Rajasthan Netraheen Kalyan Sangh, a Jaipur-based school for the blind. The museum has benefited from the expertise and guidance (on matters such as Braille printing) from the staff of the blind school, and has provided workshops for the school's students using tactile materials. The museum also helps support the organisation through print orders for its Braille publications.

General conclusions and questions

- If you decide to undertake a simulation, can you identify a local partner who works with persons with disabilities to work with and whose experience will benefit your institution? If not, and even if your institution does not own a wheelchair, it is possible to attempt some of the simulation exercises undertaken during the workshop (listed previously).
- When gathering and analysing feedback from the simulation, consider the following. Some of these may also be relevant to discuss as part of the exercise so that solutions emerge from the group.
 - o What personal experience do museum staff members have in dealing with issues of physical or visual impairment?
 - o Is awareness of the needs of physically and/ or visually impaired visitors equally understood by staff of different categories, such as curatorial, security and administrative staff?
 - o How can their levels of understanding and engagement be assessed?
 - o What are the specialist and generic skills that emerge as requirements?
- What training programmes for staff would enhance the visitor experience for the visually impaired and wheelchair users?
- Are there opportunities for partnership with local organisations in enhancing facilities for visitors with special needs?
- What provision for wheelchair users does the museum make in terms of equipment and suitable surfaces for its use?
- What initiatives has the museum made to enhance the experience of visually impaired visitors? How and where is Braille text used in the museum? What are the uses of tactile aids?



Image: Vincilla Pereira (early blind), Source: Blind With Camera

The workshop for me was insightful with regard to accessibility especially in heritage sites and monuments, given the complexity of spaces there. The blindfold exercise made a great impact on my thinking process, and threw open many challenges related to special needs visitors...Definitely it will show in the work process gradually. [I've] been more proactive in creating awareness on the subject to students of design. And we've run tactile sessions too, the first art gallery to do this regularly.



Supriya Consul, Head of Outreach,
Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi, India



Image: Mahesh Umrannia (late blind), Source: Blind With Camera

Thinking Inclusive

Blindfolded Photography

Blind With Camera (www.blindwithcamera.org) is an initiative of the Beyond Sight Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation that seeks to make the practice of art - in this case photography - inclusive. The Foundation offers workshops and training programmes to teach photography to the visually impaired, and provides a platform to showcase and disseminate the resulting work. Through this it advocates for equal rights for the visually impaired, helping to empower them, providing them earning opportunities and facilitating their socio-cultural inclusion. The organisation also seeks to sensitise the public to the abilities of the visually impaired, as much as their disabilities, and to experience the world in a different way by conducting blindfolded photography sessions as well as more intensive sessions where the sighted and unsighted work together to make pictures.



How do the blind access and enjoy pictures?

Image: Lux Perfume Portrait video, Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsz_6HvDd5E

A blindfolded photography session was conducted for all workshop participants in addition to a short presentation on the Beyond Sight Foundation's work, and the work of photographers it has trained. Included was a moving short film sharing the experience of born blind photographer Bhavesh Patel, who shot an ad campaign for the international beauty products brand LUX. You can watch the video on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2NbWcqAGso>).

Workshop activity

- This requires cameras, preferably simple point-and-shoot cameras, or mobile phone cameras.
- Participants were split into pairs, with each taking turns to be blindfolded.
- While blindfolded, each person was tasked with taking a photograph of:
 - o Something they smelt
 - o Something they heard
 - o Something they touched
 - o A picture of heat and shade
 - o A picture of a part of their body

Try it!

Experience

After the spending an hour wandering around the City Palace in search of these images, participants exchanged pictures and shared what they had captured. Many of the photographs were unusually composed, and were all the better for it. There was a general feeling of revelation as the experience of using senses other than vision to capture images (such a quintessentially sight-based activity) brought home the immense possibilities that exist for inclusive art. All participants ranked this session highly.



I am basically from a geology background and it's the first time I attended a museum related workshop; initially I faced difficulties in catching up...but finally I gained a lot of multi-disciplinary knowledge... The blindfolded photography session as well as the roles played as differently-abled persons to access the museum were very interesting and greatly influenced me. This physical exercise for accessing the museum made me realise, how and what are the difficulties of the differently-abled persons in the real field.

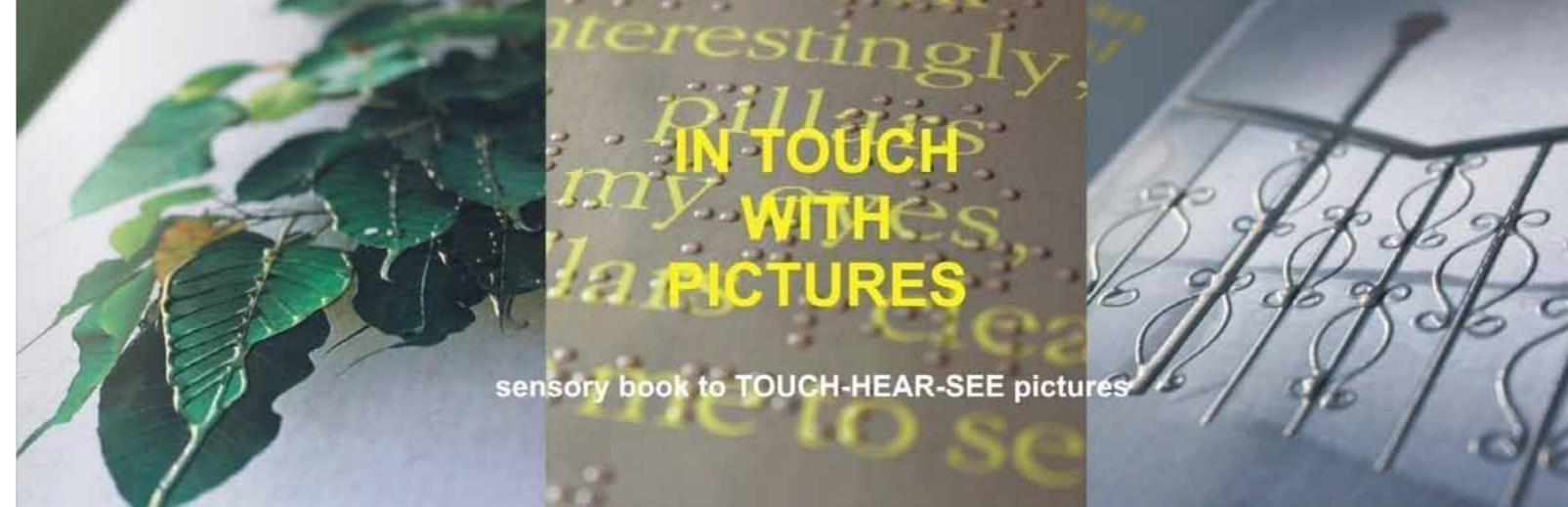
Dr Chaitra Dhar Taye, Dibrugarh University,
Dibrugarh, India

How to Write a Guidebook for Visually-impaired Visitors

THE MSMS II MUSEUM EXPERIENCE

The pre-workshop simulation exercise was a catalyst in developing a Braille guidebook for the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum. Creating a Braille guidebook is not difficult, but it also requires museums to know when to reach out to other domain experts to help with the things they are not equipped to do. The following section summarises the museum team's approach and learning.

- Before you start, familiarise yourself with the official guide to your museum. Identify the highlights of the collections, the buildings and the experience for visitors, and prioritise what is important for you to share. Many museums in South Asia are based in historic buildings. Even if your guide doesn't say much about them or if your museum isn't especially known for them, try and find out about the buildings and spaces that visitors walk through.
- Next, undertake a simulation exercise blindfolded through your museum, from entry to exit, via all the galleries. You will need a partner for this exercise to help guide you. You may wish to carry the official guide and ask your partner to read out the relevant sections, to find out what you are missing.



- Being blindfolded is a useful way of identifying what else there is to experience in a space. For example, walking blindfolded through the Sarvato Bhadra (originally the hall of private audience) of the City Palace of Jaipur in the heat of the day provided welcoming coolness. This led to a discussion about why it was suddenly cooler (Answer: strong shadows, interior of cool marble), about the materials used in the space, what the space itself is used for, the typical sounds one might hear, decoration or decorative elements, and whether any of these could be touched.
- It is also useful for identifying the practical facilities information that you – and therefore a visually impaired person – would like to be told when one cannot rely on sight.
- When thinking about other ways of experiencing objects and spaces, ask yourself whether there is anything that you can use your other senses to perceive. For example:
 - o *Is there anything I can touch in the Sarvato Bhadra?* Answer: the plastered exterior walls, the carved marble columns. Also, one can feel the difference in temperature when stepping in, the heat and shade.
 - o *Is there anything I can smell?* Answer: Not always, but when there are celebrations or festivities (which it is still used for), you may smell flowers or incense.
 - o *Is there anything I can hear?* Answer: The traditional announcement of noon takes place with the beating of drums called nagaras.
 - o *Is there anything I can eat?* Answer: Sadly not, but for the annual Makar Sankranti festival, kites are flown from the roof and museum visitors are invited to participate with yummy snacks served.

All these answers provide content you can include.

- There are many kinds of visual impairment, but as you will probably be writing only one Braille guidebook, you will have to assume that your visitor is blind from birth and thus would not be able to understand colour, perspective, or distance – so avoid using the word ‘see’ in anything that you write.
- When writing content, try and relate everything you say to things that can be understood through touch – so for instance, when describing a square courtyard, suggesting it is like a square box without a lid will communicate the idea better than simply saying it is a square courtyard that is open to the sky.
- Another useful point of reference is one’s own body. For example, when describing a pillar, it is better to say it is taller than an adult/you are, rather than saying it is 10 feet high.
- Keep each section of text no more than 300-400 words. This is because Braille printing takes up much more space than regular printing – so 300-400 words in English (less than a page) can run into several pages in Braille. In order to help you do this, it is useful to identify no more than one or two highlights per space or gallery (which can also include the building/ architecture) and stick to them.
- Include a brief introduction at the start to tell your readers about what the publication covers, the facilities provided in your institution, and any information you wish to provide. You can also say something about the history of your institution, and an overview of the galleries (including how many).

- Once you have written your text, go around the galleries blindfolded once again, and have your partner read the content out to you and follow the instructions to touch (where applicable) to test whether it works.
- As you work on your text, identify a local organisation working with the visually impaired who can give you feedback on what you have written, to make sure that it makes sense to a visually impaired person. You will also need their assistance to identify a Braille printer to produce your guide. If you are working in Jaipur, you may wish to contact Rajasthan Netraheen Kalyan Sangh (www.rnks.org), the museum's partners. Museums need this expertise; but before you initiate a dialogue, try and identify ways in which you can contribute to their goals. For example, the MSMS II Museum helped sponsor a photography workshop for RNKS students.
- Printing Braille matter is not the same as printing books or from a desktop printer. The page format and size are different, and you will need to work with your printer to understand the logistics and put the publication together – you are unlikely to be able to simply email your text and have it printed. Factor this into your work process, as well as staff time spent on site with the printer (depending on whether your printer is in the same town).
- The full version of the MSMS II M guidebook includes tactile illustrations but this is not compulsory. However, it will hugely improve the quality of your communication to your visitor. If you would like to include them, it is simple to do: identify key images with clear outlines, print them, and have them outlined by a good henna artist with polyplast ink; this is what the museum used but you may wish to explore all options. It is also possible to print photographs on special papers that swell. It may be a good idea to find a designer with experience of fabrication who can work with you to identify suitable material options that you can test and discuss with your local partner working with the visually impaired (if you have one). Keep in mind basic concerns such as sharp edges or splinters, how materials respond to the environment, durability, and cost.

Here is a small section of text from the MSMS II Museum's Braille guidebook about the Sarvato Bhadra to give you an idea of how content can be created:



“The Sarvato Bhadra of Jaipur is built on a plinth or platform, with marble pillars that hold up the roof – just stepping inside makes you feel cooler. You can touch the pillars from top to bottom and feel the different geometric patterns that have been used to decorate it in a simple, elegant way. The scalloped arch pattern used on the base is similar to the shape of the arches over your head, holding up the flat roof. The rest of this building, and the courtyard around it is built with ordinary stone pieces, finished smoothly with plaster – but it is still not as smooth as marble! Touch and feel the difference for yourself.”

From the Braille guidebook to the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum,
Siddhant Shah and Mrinalini Venkateswaran, March 2016



Soon after the workshop Siddhant Shah and I started working on the Braille book for the State Bank Museum...the photography workshop we did was so interesting for me, it is added to my developmental projects of 2016-17, and I am in touch with several blind schools in Pakistan who will be participating in this workshop.

Dr Asma Ibrahim, Director State Bank
Museum & Art Gallery, Pakistan



Objects form an integral part of the museum experience but most museums instruct visitors not to touch. We cannot allow handling of rare, valuable or fragile artefacts but touching objects can be an important way of experiencing them. It makes it doubly challenging therefore to interpret objects, especially to visitors with visual impairments.

Interpreting Objects



People relate to artefacts based upon their experience and how familiar they are with that type of object generally, for example whether they have seen one before, owned one, used one, or made one. Whether visitors are blind or have limited vision, are in a wheelchair or are hard of hearing impacts how they relate to objects. Children's eye level is lower than that of adults so they see exhibitions differently; they also would have a different experience of the object depending upon whether it is something usually used by children or adults. These are all things to consider when interpreting artefacts to visitors with disabilities. The basic principles of artefact interpretation are: to relate to the visitor's experience; to reveal information about artefacts; to be creative; to provoke a response; to present as complete a picture as possible about the artefact; and to approach children differently than you would adults.



Images: Dr Asma Ibrahim

Workshop activity

Below are a few general examples of the types of questions you can ask yourself—and visitors—to help them to appreciate the artefacts. Each type of artefact provides unique interpretation opportunities.

- It is easier to work with artefacts that may be handled rather than with those that are behind glass or mounted a few feet away. For artefacts that are not physically accessible, think about whether it would be possible to create a reproduction or to have samples of the raw materials or construction techniques that visitors could examine more closely. Can you create a touch artefact for visually impaired people with raised decoration to give them a deeper appreciation of your descriptions?
- If you have artefacts that may be handled, allow visitors to smell, taste, touch and listen to the objects. Ask them to think about whether or not they would make a noise when in use and whether that is important.
- Think about the size and what that says about the artefact. Describe its shape, colour and any decoration and talk about why that is significant. Keep in mind whether your visitor is able to relate to descriptions of 'seeing'. Is it functional or purely decorative? Has the size and shape been determined by the materials used and method of construction or by function? Have any other factors determined their shape? Where did the designs come from? Do they have any significance?

Image: Siddhartha Chatterjee



- Think about what materials were used to make it and how they were they acquired. Could you acquire the materials yourself? Are they made of renewable resources? Why were these particular materials chosen, what are their advantages and disadvantages?
- How long do you think this object would last in use? How would you care for it, or repair it and what would you do with it after it was worn out, can it be re-used?
- Is the artefact made by hand or by machine? What do you know about the person who made it, e.g., when, where, male or female, skill level?
- How does it compare to similar types of objects in use today? What does this artefact tell us about the people who made it, used it and about their society in general?

Developing tactile interpretive material

THE MSMS II MUSEUM EXPERIENCE

The Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum committed to a pilot project of developing tactile aids and reproductions in its new Painting and Photography gallery, in the lead up to the workshop. They are now installed. As with the Braille guidebook, most of the development can be done in-house; but the museum does need to engage with experts and partners to achieve these goals. The following section is based upon the way the museum team approached this project, and provides guidance to others wanting to develop tactiles.



- The difference between a tactile aid and a tactile reproduction is small. They are both tools to help communicate an object by touch. The only difference is that the reproduction replicates the object in materials, size and scale; whereas an aid may not do so, and may only reproduce a detail from a painting, for instance.
- Begin with a single gallery.
- Familiarise yourself with the background and rationale of the gallery – what story is being told? Is there more than one? How does it fit into the larger story your museum is telling?
- Identify the key objects that you think communicate your story or stories.
- Walk around – preferably with a colleague, so that you can discuss ideas – and look at these objects on display. Talk about the key points of each object and discuss how you could communicate them in ways OTHER than a visual description. Use the list of questions listed previously to help you think about the object.
- In a similar exercise conducted during the workshop, participants came up with at least two other ways of interpreting each object to visitors. The easiest was through a reproduction, although it was not always the most feasible. Sometimes it can prove too expensive, or the materials or technology used might not be available today. Remember that converting all the elements of a painting or photograph into a textured tactile surface may produce a confusing mess of too many patterns. Think about what you want to communicate about a particular image – is it the outline? The quality of finish? The texture of the materials used? The size? Narrowing down the unique aspect that you want to communicate in this way will help to create a tactile aid that communicates what you want it to.



- It may not be possible to communicate every single element of a work of art. That is alright.
- It may be a good idea to find a designer with fabrication experience who can work with you to identify suitable options that you can test and discuss with your local partner working with the visually impaired (if you have one). Keep in mind basic concerns such as sharp edges or splinters, how materials respond to the environment, durability, and cost. You can also talk to artists and craftspeople. Explore all the options around you. For example, henna artists outlined tactile aids to create the raised surfaces required. In another instance, laser cutting was employed, and 3-D printing was the right solution for yet another aid. The questions you have answered before will also help you choose the right fabrication method in each case.

For example, one tactile aid recreated an 18th century map of Jaipur. Although the original object was flat, the team felt that it was important to communicate a sense of depth and scale to convey aspects of that particular object; so 3D printing was chosen.

- Identify places near the original objects to place your aids.
- Remember that these aids will be viewed and enjoyed by all visitors to your gallery - particularly children - so make sure that they are durable, well produced and fit into your gallery's design scheme. Fix them to the exhibit so they cannot be removed.



The workshop carried out a variety of dynamic experimental sessions that encouraged participants to engage more fully with the power of their sense of touch, appreciation of other senses and awareness about others with vision loss and other sensory impairments... we learned how to re-approach, intimately engage with and see art pieces with our other senses. The exercises performed in TOUCH broke down many pre-conceptions about the accessibility of both experiencing and creating art. It was energetic, informative and thoroughly unforgettable event.

Shetalika Awasthi, Curator, MSMS II Museum, Jaipur, India

1:14 - OK

1:12 - OK

1:12 ~ OK

1:10 - NOT

A session of the workshop entitled 'Engaging Universal Design for Exhibition Audiences' addressed strategies in museum and exhibition design that can be used to maximise access for visitors with disabilities, within the broader context of access for all. Design here includes layout, movement, graphics, lighting, signage, and interpretation.

Universal Design

The aim of any exhibition is education and empowerment for all. Addressing universal needs includes special needs but is not limited to them. Accessible design both includes more users along the ability spectrum and enhances individual experience: more people having better experiences.

The goal is the ability for every visitor to participate on an independent basis, with dignity. The question to ask ourselves as designers is therefore: what kinds of assisted independence do we all need?

**" NOTHING ABOUT US,
WITHOUT US. "**

Disability community slogan

from http://www.unicef.org/disabilities/files/General_Suggestions_for_Disability_SITANS.pdf

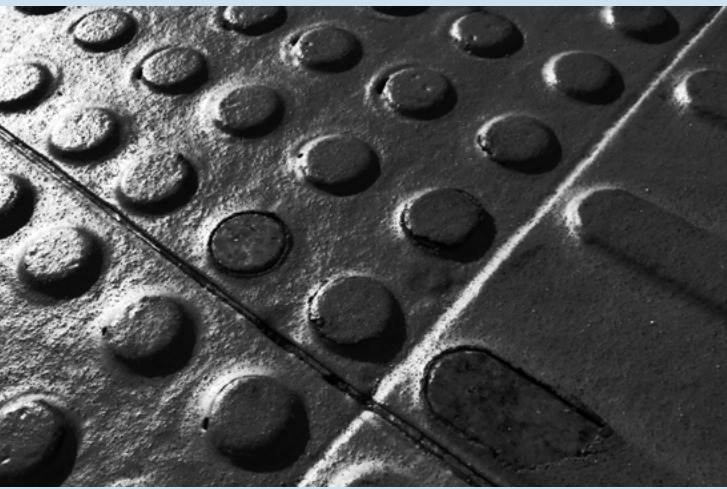
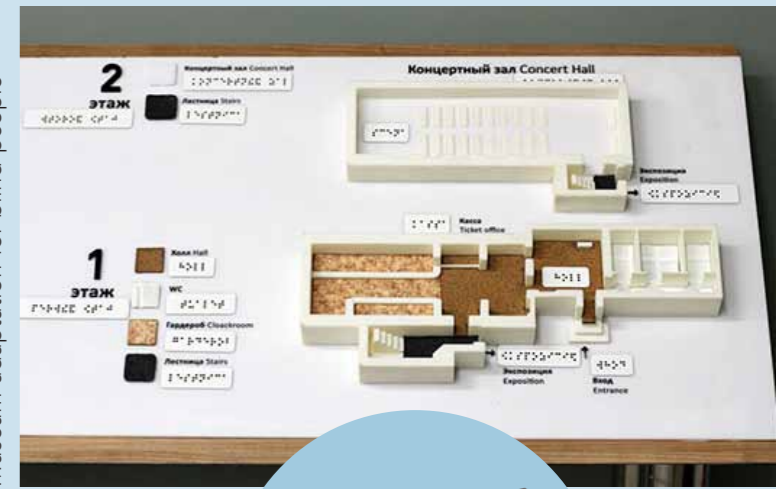


Image: T. Imai, Source: Flickr

Source: <http://www.universaldesignstyle.com/leverus-extra-length-door-lever/>Source: www.behance.net/gallery/18642065/Museum-adaptation-for-blind-people

CAN WE CREATE AN INTERACTIVE TOUCH-MAP WITH EMBEDDED FLOORING MATERIALS, TEXTURES, BRAILLE, + AUDIO CUES?

Seven Qualities of Universal Design

The Centre for Universal Design (NCSU, 1997) researched and produced a checklist of seven qualities of Universal Design.³ The labels of these qualities have been adapted here to form the acronym SEE-EASE in order to assist recall.

In its appeal and use, Universal Design is:

Simple (intuitive),

Easy (low effort),

Error tolerant,

Efficiently-scaled,

Adaptable (flexible),

'Sensible' (i.e. perceptible, can be sensed) and

Equitable (fair).

The following points, explain the checklist with examples, and suggest the kind of questions you can ask to evaluate a space.

- **Simple** (intuitive) refers to design that employs archetypal associations, recognisable patterns and natural forms.
- **Easy** (low effort) poses the question: How easy is it to understand it and do it? This involves the principle of affordance. Affordance describes the ability of an environment or design feature to communicate and encourage a particular user response, and perform its function. Buildings suffer from poor affordance when you cannot identify the door, or how to open it, when there are no sight lines to your destination, or when attached buildings connect only on certain floors.
- Examples of **Error tolerant** design qualities are rounded, child-friendly edges and soft surfaces to avoid injury, large lever handles for easy use by those with motor impairment, and easy grips.
- **Efficiently scaled** means addressing our sense of safety and comfort in a space: to what degree it is open, uncluttered. It means catering to children as well as adults.
- An example of **Adaptable**/flexible is a touch map/plan with embedded flooring material and Braille that can be read by either hand or eye.

³ The Principles of Universal Design, Version 2.0. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State University (© 1997 North Carolina State University, The Center for Universal Design)

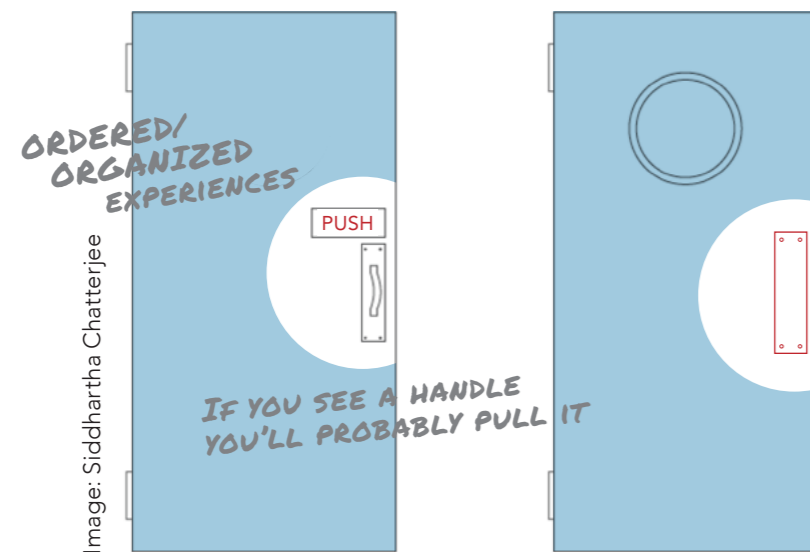


Image: Siddhartha Chatterjee

SO DON'T ADD 'PUSH' SIGNAGE. REMOVE THE HANDLE.

Image: Josephine Browne, Source: <http://topografik.co.uk/cutter-museum-woodhorn/>



THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (NEW YORK)'S 'ART INSIGHT' IS A PROGRAM FOR THOSE WHO ARE BLIND OR PARTIALLY SIGHTED... HIGHLIGHTS SPECIFIC THEMES, ARTISTS, OR EXHIBITIONS THROUGH VERBAL DESCRIPTION OR TOUCH.



Image: Michael Nagle, Source: <http://zeroproject.org/practice/inclusive-art-education-at-the-moma-new-york/>

- **'Sensible'** refers, among other things, to signage (often non-verbal) that is easily recognisable and visible. Signage should be simple and intuitive. For example, equipping a forward opening door with a handle is not good practice as we tend to grasp and pull any handle. Adding a notice instructing us to 'Push' just confuses the matter. It is better to have a simple plate as we all instinctively know to push this.

- o Directional signage involves
 - (1) identifying and marking spaces;
 - (2) grouping spaces coherently;
 - (3) linking and organising spaces; and
 - (4) communicating this information to users.
- o Each type of space brings its own challenge. Built landscapes and exteriors present larger, contiguous fields of perception. Interiors are discreet, disconnected from the outside. How do we denote indoor and outdoor spaces, boundaries and transitions? How do we mark features as uniquely as possible? We should aim to distinguish entrances if they are many, demarcate clear circulation patterns, connect paths and corridors at clear, perceptible angles, and provide sufficient lighting at destinations, intersections and landmarks.

Exhibitions in urban india tend to exhibit barely any Hindi, rarely any regional languages, and several competing font technology standards.

KOHINOOR DEVANAGARI EXEMPLIFIES SOME VERY READER-FRIENDLY UNICODE FONT FAMILIES. IT WAS DESIGNED AND DEVELOPED BY SATYA RAJPUROHIT, FOUNDER OF INDIAN TYPE FOUNDRY, AHMEDABAD.

- With respect to **Equitable**, a significant problem in India is language: the large number of regional languages and the tendency not to use them (or even Hindi) in major exhibitions in urban India leaves exhibitions not equally accessible to all.

Kohinoor Devanagari About Styles Glyphs PDF Tester

Sample text Case Size Leading Text color Background

Enter your text to preview AA Aa aa 40 50

Light सभी मनुष्यों को गौरव और अधिक

Book सभी मनुष्यों को गौरव और अधिक

Demi सभी मनुष्यों को गौरव और अधिक

Medium सभी मनुष्यों को गौरव और अधिक

Bold सभी मनुष्यों को गौरव और अधिक

Source: <https://www.indiantypefoundry.com/fonts/kohinoor-devanagari>



Source: <http://aasarchitecture.com/2013/05/art-gallery-of-ontario-by-frank-gehry.html>

FRANK GEHRY'S SNAKING 'BAROQUE' STAIRWAY + RAMP TURNS A NECESSITY INTO AN ATTRACTION, AT THE ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO, CANADA



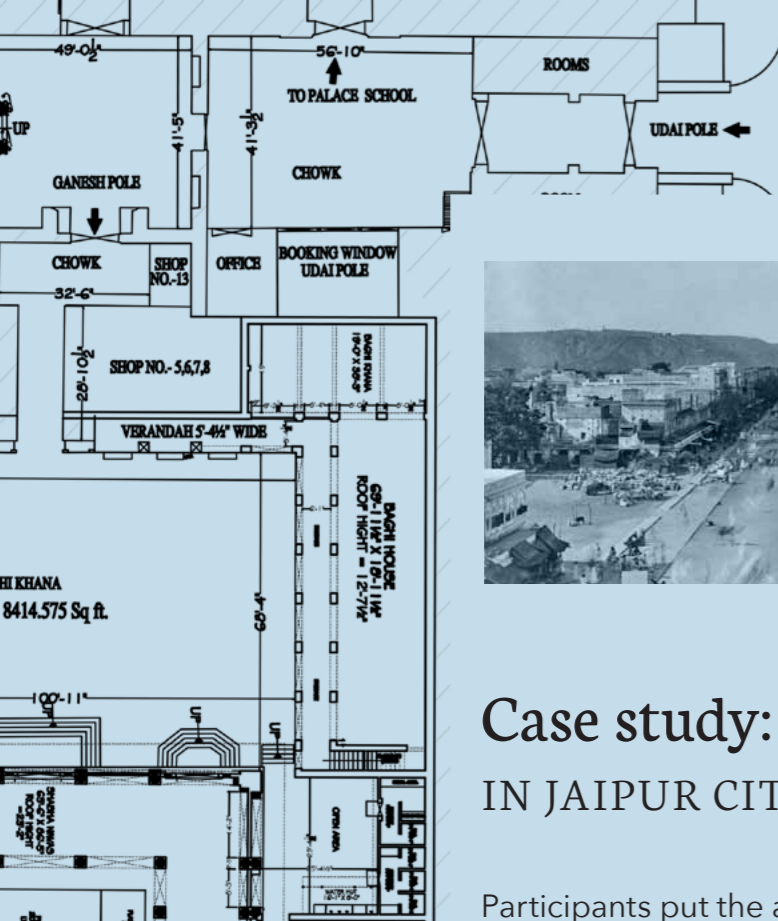
THE ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO'S 'BARNACLE STAIRWAY' ISN'T QUITE UNIVERSAL DESIGN, BUT OFFERS SPECTACULAR VIEWS. HYPOTHETICALLY, WOULD YOU RETROFIT A STAIR-LIFT?

Source: <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-DalwM5K1LxQ/UY0J-xWx-fl/AAAAAAAAAgs8/aF1pibZkdGs/s1600/Art+Gallery+of+Ontario+by+Frank+Gehry14>

Source: <http://www.architectural-review.com/buildings/andalusias-museum-of-memory-by-alberto-campo-baeza-granada-spain/8600956.fullarticle>



THE SIGNATURE RAMPS OF ALBERTO CAMPO BAEZA'S GRANADA MUSEUM OF MEMORY ARE FRIENDLIER. WOULD YOU FEEL AT RISK USING IT IN A WHEELCHAIR?

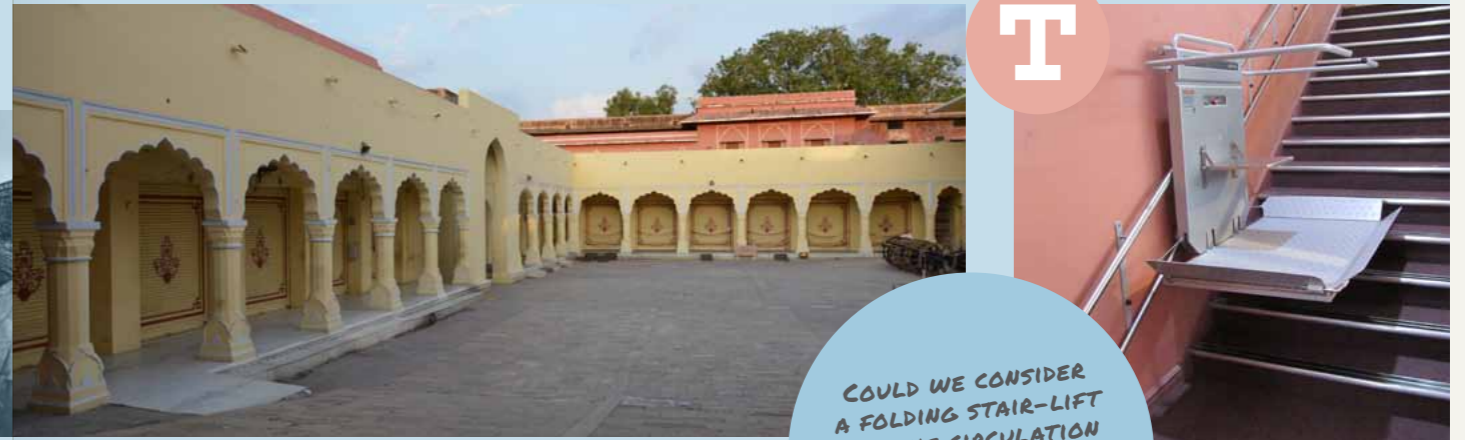


Case study: THE TRANSPORT GALLERY IN JAIPUR CITY PALACE

Participants put the above guidelines to the test by visiting the proposed Transport Gallery, along with the gallery design consultant, to understand the design challenges and opportunities available and evaluate and comment on the proposed design. The group began the walk at the Udai Pol entrance, observing key environmental features, limitations, pain-points and potential for improving accessibility.

For example, we first noted that ticketing presents numerous barriers - including a steep and discontinuous approach ramp, a counter window that is too high for wheelchair users, and some ad hoc signage that could be simplified. We noted that the next courtyard could accommodate a tactile map of the City Palace to the left of a gate that is currently used for crowd management. We discussed a set of guide rails or ropes as way-finding aids for visually challenged visitors. As another way of streamlining visitor movement and providing tactile feedback, we considered tactile treatments such as carpeting for the pathway, in lieu of tactile paving which may not be appropriate in this heritage context. Such measures would also help alleviate the bottleneck currently caused by security scanners. We found the location of signage identifying the Baggikhana (or transports) Gallery and restroom facilities questionable. Temporarily without electricity and water, the restrooms were judged wanting in both access and comfort.

Moving towards the gallery, we observed nearly all visitors using the steps up to the high plinth, as the steel ramp (intended



COULD WE CONSIDER
A FOLDING STAIR-LIFT
FOR THE CIRCULATION
RAMP EXIT IN THE CITY
PALACE MUSEUM'S
NEW TRANSPORT
GALLERY?

primarily to move transports) is too steep and slippery to aid visitor access. Participants made a number of observations from the viewing corridor and within the gallery. Notable was the complaint that they could not see some of the exhibits, packed with considerable density into this space, as visitors are barred from entry in the present scheme; and because of the poor lighting, especially in one corner. We discussed how a gently inclined internal ramp (moving clockwise around the back wall) might enable visitors to appreciate the exhibits at greater proximity and from better vantage points.

Participants shared practical concerns about viewing distances and turning space for wheelchair movement. The need for better interpretation - through labels and visual aids - was noted, flagging that the vehicles lack a context for understanding their significance, and need to be more cognitively accessible. The designer also suggested including tactile models in a few places, as part of the ramp handrail for instance.

Continuing in a wrap-up session, we discussed the (potentially productive) tension between heritage conservation and adaptive intervention to improve accessibility. We revisited the value of the multi-sensory exercises in empathy, and the contribution that Universal Design approaches could make towards revitalizing the experience of a wider range of visitor abilities than are typically served at the Jaipur City Palace, and in other unique museum and heritage environments.

General conclusions and questions

How can you, as a curator, designer, or commissioning client of an exhibition, ensure that universal design principles are followed in your gallery? Legal standards are often vague and professional adherence is consequently low. Regulation itself is often a pragmatic response to political concerns. So how do we encourage a sense of priority?

- Access is better planned at the inception of a project. The alternative is often a costly and unsightly later re-adaptation.
- It is a mistake to overlook 'lay' knowhow, or to assume a few sizes fit all. There is a need to work directly with disabled groups and individuals.
- How can we plan for early sensitisation, consultation and participative development, leading to a localised and long-term plan?
- The onus lies on local authorities to frame expectations, communications, and understanding between stakeholders. However, local authorities frequently respond when there is a demand. Could you, perhaps in partnership with other similar institutions push your local authorities to come on board and offer support, or platforms for interaction?

- There are few if any public subsidies to incorporate access to sites of Indian heritage. Even if you are not in a position to offer public subsidies, incentives are a powerful way to change behaviour. What incentives can you provide in your museum to encourage the adoption of universal design and access in your institution's practices?
- Do not be misled by cost/ benefit evaluations, which are less constructive than capabilities framework and rights-based approaches.
- Access and aesthetics are often seen as mutually exclusive items. This is false: both demand high quality. We must recognise that access is better served when we provide more equitably for the enjoyment and engagement of all audience members.
- 'Disablism' is institutionalised. Overcoming this requires sensitisation above all.
- Designers need to be continually adapting to current needs. Clients need to be equally current, and should be clear with their design brief and what they require of their designer.



Image: Dr Asma Ibrahim

Many museums in South Asia are housed in heritage buildings of varying importance. Many of them, such as forts, were originally built to prevent easy access; but their purpose and use have changed, making access both a necessity and a challenge.

Heritage Structures

The Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum is housed in a palace complex dating substantially from the 18th and 19th centuries, making parts of it currently over 250 years old. The buildings are a core component of what the museum seeks to preserve and the public visits to see. Compared with a modern purpose-built museum (or even a purpose-built museum that has acquired heritage status) it faces an additional challenge: not only must the museum care for its collections, but it must also preserve the structural and aesthetic integrity of the original buildings.

Standard access solutions such as permanent ramps would affect the structure and aesthetics of the buildings and therefore cannot be unthinkingly adopted - they have to be adapted. Improving access to an historical architectural experience while fundamentally changing the building itself would be self-defeating, destroying or at least spoiling the very thing that people come to see. Therefore, alternative solutions have to be found which allow improved access while respecting the integrity of the historical buildings and preserving the authenticity of the experience.

Participants were invited to consider this issue, in the light of the following case studies, the learnings from the simulation exercise, and the fact that access is a human right.

Case Studies

Udaipur City Palace

is a comparable palace museum in a heritage structure. It so happened that an early 20th century ruler, Maharana Bhupal Singh, had himself been a wheelchair user (as a polio victim from childhood). As a result, two lifts had been installed in the palace complex in the early 20th century. In the process of enhancing museum facilities, it was decided to preserve one of these, for display, as an example of a heritage lift mechanism, and to replace the second with a modern lift, to enhance wheelchair accessibility for visitors. It is clear that two mutually-exclusive needs were perceived: to preserve a historic mechanism and to enhance accessibility. In this case, the conflict between them could be resolved as there were two lifts, allowing the museum to meet both these requirements.



Image: Eric Parker. Source: https://c1.staticflickr.com/9/8036/8017690814_39163eb0fa_b.jpg



Jaipur City Palace

has a major ceremonial hall, the Sarvato Bhadra, which stands on a platform that is three feet high. The hall can be approached on all four sides by steps and ramps that are integral to the structure of the platform. The ramps were not originally meant for wheelchair users, but rather to facilitate the maharaja being carried into the hall in a palanquin. As this historical function was no longer required, large stone ornamental planters had been placed on the platforms at the top of each ramp, thus blocking the passage they originally provided. Over time, the planters, along with other additions such as the ornate 19th-century lamp-posts at the corners of the platform, came to be regarded as parts of the architectural scheme, which had to be preserved. Therefore, wheelchair users, delighted at finding a space accessible by ramp, would reach the top - only to find their way blocked. So it was decided to shift one pair of planters by a few feet, to allow free passage. The pair chosen faced a wall that did not contain major entrance gates to the courtyard, thus preserving the historic appearance as visitors approached. The result is an acceptable compromise: a minor adjustment to the architectural scheme which is not a fundamental aesthetic change, but which crucially enhances accessibility.

Image: Dr Giles Tillotson



One of the workshop site visits was to the **Jal Mahal**, a small 18th-century palace built in Man Sagar Lake. For a long time in a state of near terminal decay, this historic monument was restored through a public-private partnership in 2005-12. Originally a pleasure resort for the exclusive use of the ruler of Jaipur, the building was re-imagined as a cultural centre for public performance of music and dance. Adaptive re-use was considered essential to the long-term survival of the monument, as simply restoring it without future use would lead only to renewed decay. Adaptive re-use was seen as a way to generate attention and income that would guarantee its future maintenance. Given the proposed public use of the building, an access policy was developed as part of the process; it was decided to provide lift access from the water-level point of entry up to the garden terrace level at the top. The insertion of a modern lift into an 18th-century historic structure generated some controversy locally. However, discussion on site led to the conclusions that the structural intervention was minimal and was justified because of the benefits of allowing public access. Structural intervention in historic monuments is generally considered taboo. However, the reasoning in this instance was that the pros outweighed the cons, especially as the monument was not ranked in the top grade. Although the historic significance of some monuments is such that any structural intervention is impossible, this was one of many cases where adaptive re-use and its consequences were unavoidable, and even desirable.

Image: Dr Giles Tillotson



Reflecting discussion of these issues, the Jaipur Declaration contains, as its 9th recommendation:

With respect to heritage structures and spaces, conservation concerns must not always take priority over access. We recommend consideration of the current use and users of the building, while respecting international guidelines on conservation.

General conclusions and questions

The following general points might prove useful in thinking through and balancing priorities of conservation with those of access in other heritage museum contexts:

- What is the relation of the museum buildings to the collection as a whole? Are the buildings component parts of the heritage collection and experience or do they exist mainly to house the collection and experience? Do visitors come to see and experience the buildings (a) primarily (b) additionally or (c) incidentally?

- What is the historical and aesthetic significance of the buildings in relation to other heritage structures in the region? Are the buildings of such outstanding heritage value that permanent intervention and structural change would be considered inappropriate? At one end of the scale are buildings such as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, which usually require conservation or restoration but are not suited to adaptive re-use. At the other end are buildings which are considered less important and can be adapted for other uses, thus increasing their chances of long-term survival. At what point on such a scale does your museum building stand?
- If the heritage value of the buildings is such that structural and aesthetic changes cannot be made, are there existing features (like the old ramps at the Saravato Bhadra in Jaipur) that can be adapted for new access purposes? Are there older interventions (like the lift shafts in Udaipur) that can be re-used?
- Where there are no such existing features, is there nevertheless scope for inserting access facilities with minimal structural change (as at the Jal Mahal)?
- If not, would it be better to add a separate external and obviously modern feature (for example by attaching a lift to the building's exterior) rather than make structural changes to the building itself?



Image: Dr Asma Ibrahim


There can be no single answer to that question as in each case it will be a matter of weighing the disadvantages of structural and aesthetic change against the modern needs of inclusion.

- Conservation strategies in general aim to preserve not only structural and aesthetic elements but also the experience of architecture. But experience for whom? Is experience to be preserved for all or for some? What compromises are justified in the pursuit of inclusiveness?
- We must remember that buildings were made to be used; if the uses of buildings can change to meet different needs over time then surely there is scope for them to meet the need of our time: inclusive access.



Being an architect and conservation architect, access for me was confined to providing physical access. Although we frequently use the term inclusive design, the CAM workshop enabled me to redefine access and inclusive design.

Yash Pratap Singh Shekhawat, Conservation Architect;
Head, School of Planning & Architecture, Poornima University, Jaipur, India



An Access Audit is an assessment of a building, an environment or a service against best practice standards to benchmark its accessibility (physical and intellectual) to persons with disabilities. In other words, and in the context of a typical museum, it is an investigation that helps a museum determine whether its buildings, collections and the museum experience are able to be enjoyed by visitors with disabilities.

Access Audit

The workshop explored this in two ways: first an audit in the form of a checklist and second through roleplay. The checklist method simply requires someone to walk around a facility with a detailed checklist that lists the ideal requirements that will ease the movement of wheelchair users: doorway and landing widths for wheelchair clearance, the height and angle of ramps, the height of toilets, bolts and taps in washrooms, and light switches, labels and exhibits. One thing stands out immediately: these provisions do not assist only wheelchair users, but can also assist the elderly, parents and their small children (e.g., ramps and the height of displays for instance), thereby allowing us to widen the range of visitors we include. Crucially, it changes the emphasis to inclusive access, rather than disabled access.

The second way of conducting an audit is through a roleplay. Participants assumed the roles of foreigners who couldn't read the language, visitors with baggage and children, and elderly visitors, for example, and walked through a given site in groups, imagining the experience and needs of their role in each space. This exercise too drove home the understanding that disability is not simply an accident of birth, or because of accidents later in life. Impediments to an individual's enjoyment or experience of something may also occur as part of the normal process of age (elderly or children) or circumstance (e.g., a traveller or parents with young children). Recognition that there is a spectrum of both potential problems as well as solutions is important.

The general experience during the workshop was that a combination of the checklist and roleplay was the most effective way to understand the requirements of visitors with disabilities in particular and for a more inclusive approach in general. Accordingly, the suggestions below take both these into account.

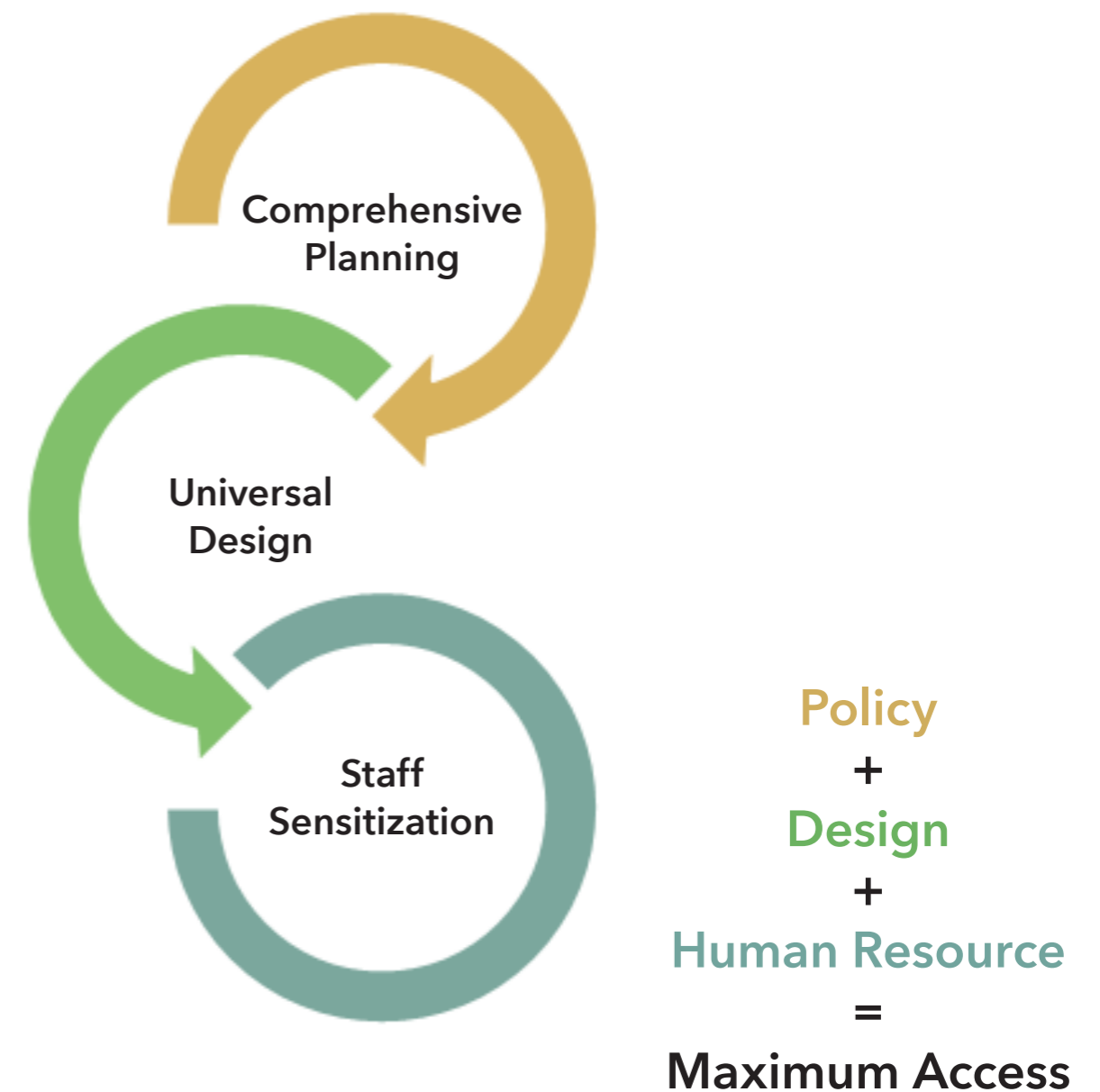
Before you start

Ensure that you have the backing of your supervisor/ senior colleagues/ management in carrying out an audit. Having institutional commitment will help you implement any changes that emerge as requirements after the audit is completed. It is also useful to establish a team – even if it is only two people – so that there is clearly established ownership as well as responsibility for the project, so that the same team can implement any changes.

Conducting an Access Audit

There are several resources available online to help you construct a detailed checklist for your audit.⁴ However, it is possible to conduct a basic audit by asking, and building on, the following questions:

- **Approach:** How do visitors approach the museum? What is the process by which they get from their mode of transport through the main door? Is there special parking? Is it a long walk? How many steps do they climb? Is there an alternative way of reaching the front door for those who might need it?



4 Access Audit Checklist
http://www.disabilityaffairs.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/Annexure_%2011%20docx.pdf
<https://schools-secure.essex.gov.uk/pupils/sen/the%20equality%20act%20and%20accessible%20schools/pages/accessauditchecklist.aspx>

Universal Design Principles
<http://www.humancentereddesign.org/sites/default/files/UniversalDesignIndiaPrinciples.pdf>
<http://www.disabilityaffairs.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/Inclusiveness%20and%20Accessibility%20Toolkit.pdf>

- **Routes and external level changes including ramps and steps:** How do visitors make their way around the museum? What route do they take, and what is the nature of that route? Is it all walking? How many changes of levels are there because of steps or ramps? How high are the steps? Is the tread at least 30 cm deep? Is the rise higher than 15 cm? Are the landings at least 1200 cm in depth to allow for the turning radius of a wheelchair? If they were blind or elderly, or small children, would they be likely to trip? Are the steps or other changes in level easily visible or discernable?
- **Reception and ticket counter:** What is the approach to the ticket counter like? If visitors are in a wheelchair, can they reach it and interact with the person inside? How are they greeted? Are they given all the information they might require, including about accessible facilities? Are staff members trained to communicate with people with disabilities?
- **Horizontal movement:** Are flat surfaces smooth or irregular? How likely are visitors to trip if they were blind or walked with a walking stick? What is it like when they move around in a wheelchair? How long are the walks around the museum? Are there comfortable places to rest in between?
- **Vertical movement and internal level change:** How do visitors make their way around the galleries? How many changes of levels are there - in the floor level, because of steps or ramps? How high are the steps? Is the tread at least 30 cm deep? Is the rise higher than 15 cm? Are the landings at least 1200 cm in depth to allow for the turning radius of a wheelchair? If visitors were blind, elderly, or small children would they be likely to trip? Are the steps or other changes in level easily visible or discernable?

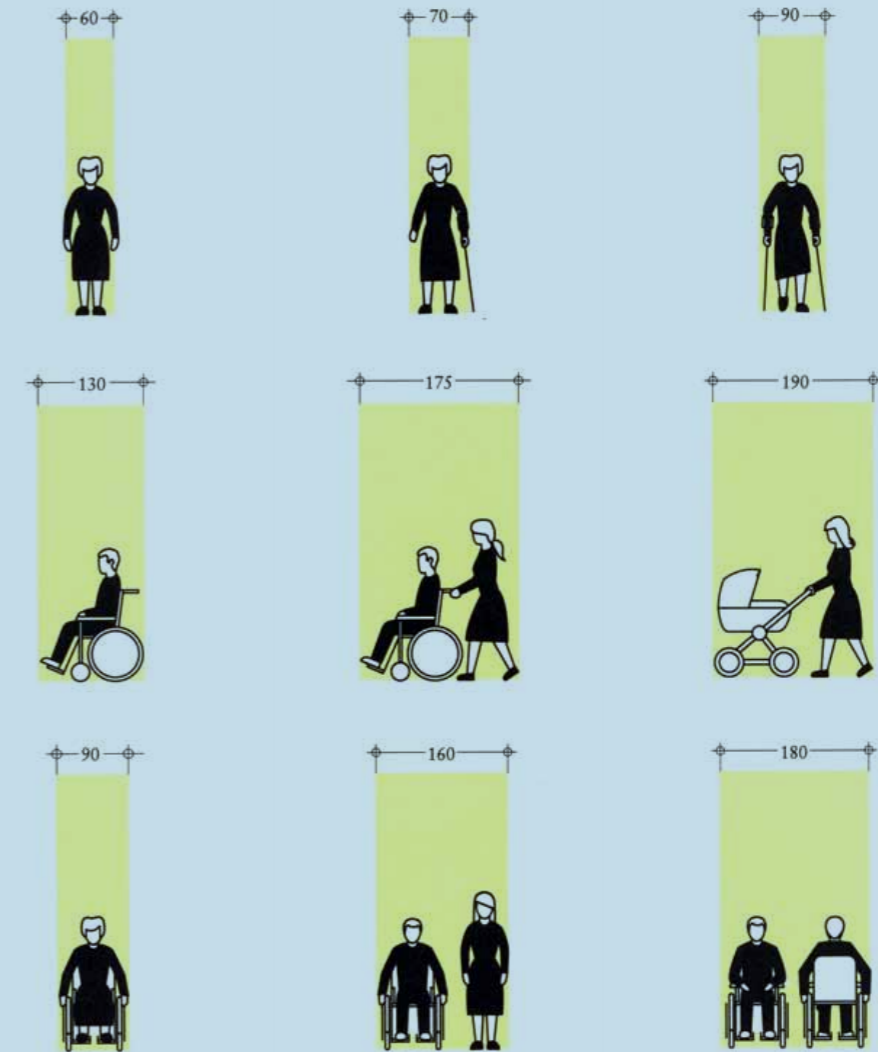


- **Doors:** Are doors wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair? Is there enough space to turn on the landing? If visitors need to push to open a door, especially emergency exits, can they do it sitting in a wheelchair? Or if they were elderly and use a walking stick, would they be able to push the door open and get through comfortably?
- **Lavatories:** All questions to do with mobility and fixtures are relevant here. In addition, are the lavatories placed at an appropriate height for transfer from a wheelchair? Are there grips and bars available to assist? Is there enough space for a caretaker to assist?
- **Fixtures (site specific):** Are visitors able to reach switches, door handles, lockers, latches/ locks, taps, tissues, water dispensers, or sit at tables comfortably when they are in a wheelchair?
- **Information:** Where are the signs placed? Could visitors read them if they were seated in a wheelchair or if they were small children, or have low vision? Is there any alternative to reading signs? Is there a way to navigate around the museum without being reliant on signs?

What to do after an Access Audit

An access audit is the first step. It will generate information needed to discuss and analyse the situation with the museum team. Many of the shortcomings thrown up by an audit are likely to be problems with simple and feasible solutions. For example, installing door locks in lavatories at a wheelchair accessible height is neither complicated nor difficult to implement. When analysing data, it is helpful to identify issues and solutions that require policy changes, and a longer period for implementation, against those that can be immediately addressed. For example, developing tactile information signage requires time; it also requires the institution to take a policy decision that commits itself to doing so in future as well. Compared to this, acquiring wheelchairs for visitor use is a decision that can be implemented quickly.

For many institutions, conducting an access audit is a way for them to start thinking about issues of access in general. So the conclusion of an access audit is a good time to seek commitment to inclusive access at a policy level, and to spell it out in the form of an Inclusive Access Policy. It is essential that the statement not only articulate a museum's commitment to its visitors, but also to its staff members: that there is commitment to providing the training and sensitisation that the institution's own staff need in order to be able to carry out their duties.



The simulation exercises organised during the course of the workshop have left the greatest impact on me. The idea of streamlining universal access into the overall management and planning for museums should not be novel, but unfortunately it is, in India at least. Through my work at DRONAH and at NDMA, we are placing special emphasis on this right now in terms of policy formulation and working out exercises in generating awareness. I think follow up sessions on this are crucial to engage other professionals allied to museum design and management.



Vanicka Arora, Consultant (Heritage Management)
National Disaster Management Authority, New Delhi



Image: Dean Bouchard. Source: www.flickr.com/photos/deanbouchard/6160057185/

Stramp by Arthur Erickson at the Vancouver Law Courts. In addition to being an inventive and aesthetic example of universal design, the space is also multifunctional, used as an amphitheatre and meeting point.

Inclusive Access Policy

Before you start

Writing a policy and coordinating with colleagues and senior management can seem a daunting process, so it may be helpful to begin by doing a group exercise to help focus the process. During the workshop, participants were asked to complete the sentence 'Access means...' on individual cards. Sit down with your colleagues and complete this simple exercise to help focus on what you are trying to achieve. It is also a good way to have a discussion on why you are embarking on this exercise, all of which will help structure the document (by providing the rationale) and 'keep your eyes on the prize'.

The process

There are several steps involved in writing an Access Policy, as with any institutional policy:

- **Identify the 'need':** Consult board, staff, community members, in response to a specific incident
- **Preparation:** Review existing policies, written and unwritten, discuss with senior staff, management and board members, review access policies from similar organizations, write a first draft

- **Review:** Committee or board should review the draft policy and resolve any outstanding issues.
- **Revise/ review** as many times as required until there is general consensus.
- **Approval:** Senior management and/ or the governing board should approve the policy, note in the minutes, enter into a policy manual, and post publicly in the museum.
- **Implementation:** Follow the guidelines outlined in the policy.
- **Evaluation:** Set a date for a formal review of the policy and revise as required for example due to changes in legislation, public standards or political will.

What to include

Contents

The policy should include:

Title Page: Name, date, approval date

Table of Contents: If your document is more than a few pages

Preamble: Statement of intent; philosophical basis; background to policy development; expectations; review process

Some of the points to consider in the preamble are:

- The position of museums in society,
- A commitment to providing access to all,
- The importance of embedding access in the museum's policy framework and developing standards and guidelines specific to each museum's situation,
- That improving access is an ongoing and incremental process,
- The importance of working collaboratively with experts in different types of ability, and
- The particular challenges of museums in heritage buildings if appropriate.

Here, you may wish to include or adapt from the Jaipur Declaration included in this publication.

Definitions: define any key terms as they will be used in the policy, e.g.,

Access: the ability of persons with disabilities to engage with museum spaces and collections in ways which provide an enjoyable and educational experience, with dignity, safety, independence, and exercising choice; access includes, but is not restricted to, intellectual, physical and sensory access, with the aim of enabling exploration and social learning. It includes access to knowledge and experience both on site and online (real and virtual).

Museum: a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. (ICOM)

Other important terms? Include any other relevant terms

Delegation of authority: who is responsible for what, delineate responsibilities between board/ management and staff members. Indicate any restrictions or limitations; indicate where board or staff members have discretion (by using the word may rather than shall)

Adherence to local, national, international and professional laws, conventions and codes: state that the organisation will operate in compliance with any relevant laws, conventions or codes; list specific documents and identify relevant passages, i.e.,

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) which affirms that: “disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” - International Council of Museums Cultural Diversity Charter (2010).

Policy Statements/Principles: organise by subject headings if a long policy; specific statements about what should or should not happen; include only policy statements not procedures, the examples below are not policy statements, they are just examples of things that should be considered - when the museum decides how it will address each point, the policy statement should be written; separate procedures manual may be required.

Some points that should be considered for inclusion in the policy statements are:

Commitment to Accessibility:

Provision of access is a non-negotiable matter of human rights and entitlements.

Human Resources:

- Policy-makers, curators, administrators, designers, architects, educators, etc., should collaborate in providing and improving access.
- Sensitise all staff to issues of access and facilitate behavioural change through special training.
- Commit to providing competitive employment opportunities across the spectrum of staff posts to persons with disabilities.

Collaboration:

- Seek to engage persons with disabilities.
- The need to consult and collaborate with individuals and organisations comprising or representing the differently-abled, educational institutions and professional bodies.

Architecture and Exhibition Design:

- With respect to heritage structures and spaces, whether conservation concerns take priority over access, guidelines regarding current use and users, international conservation guidelines, etc.

- Minimise the disabling effects of existing barriers to access by implementing human-centred design (e.g., systems, products and spaces, signage in Braille and other forms that are easy to understand).
- Identify the unique challenges that persons with disabilities might encounter during emergency and evacuation situations and develop a risk management strategy accordingly.

Websites:

- Website accessibility standards as per W3C, the World Wide Web Consortium: design, development, production and distribution of relevant technologies and information systems.

Impact and Follow Up

Six months later, we asked participants for feedback on how the workshop had impacted their work, and have included all those who responded. Some are scattered through this publication; other are below. Their comments stress the practical value of the workshop in terms of changing or redirecting approaches and commitments and are an indication of the way in which this publication and its suggestions might prove useful and lead to change.

It was great exposure for me to listen to domain experts on the opening day and while collectively drafting the declaration on the last day. I strongly feel physical access, content access, and engagement programmes with People with Disability (PwD) and employment of PwD at different capacity based on their competence at public galleries, museums and heritage sites is the way forward for an inclusive cultural society. All these and much more was covered in the declaration at the end of the workshop.

Partho Bhowmick, Founder of Blind With Camera & Beyond Sight Foundation, Mumbai, India

The workshop brought together multi-disciplinary knowledge and multi-user perspective on Universal Access, a fundamental human right, on a single platform. A significant step in the right direction, it has encouraged dialogue, awareness and action towards empowering changemakers in the field of heritage in building an inclusive ecosystem of accessible standards. My work in areas of developing institutional policy frameworks and city heritage development and interpretation plans has been critically influenced by my learning from the workshop.

Moushumi Chatterji, Museologist and Heritage Practitioner, New Delhi, India

Exploring spaces without sight or the ability to walk - but with help - was electrifying. A directly inspired consequence this year: twice conducting short participatory exercises using blindfolds. Learning from the CAM workshop has enabled me to help broaden collaborators' perspectives on how physical textures and tactiles, audio, and simple descriptive language create more meaningful experiences. Our inclusive design and audit checklists are now more rigorous and compelling to clients. With resources, heritage and human dignity all under pressure, our collective challenge is to improve ground reality with empathy, and with all this accessibility know-how.

Siddhartha Chatterjee, museum exhibition designer,
and Director, Seexchange, New Delhi, India

The Declaration at the end of the workshop has helped me inform people that needs definitely exist and there are creative ways to address those needs. I have started making Concept Plans and Proposals for the Arts & Heritage sector with the knowledge that there are more of us in this arduous journey towards making spaces in this sector more Accessible and Inclusive.

Poulomi Das, Consultant, Museums & Heritage Spaces, Mumbai, India

We have tried to make an easy access into Maharaja Fatesingh Museum for specially abled people on the 78th birthday of H.H Maharaja Ranjitsinh Gaekwad. I also liked the blind photography session and the output of it widened my eyes. Being an Art History student it was really a great experience to me to learn about museum accessibility in a broader sense.

Sudip Das, Senior Archivist, Maharaja Fatesingh Museum, Vadodara, India

This workshop was extremely helpful to me... thank you for giving me an opportunity to share knowledge from eminent authorities from different fields towards one goal of universal accessibility. Looking at the Jaipur palace you realise that accessibility is not a new but an age old concept. The exercises designed helped me to understand the difficulties clearly.

Manda Hingurao, Secretary and Curator, Maharaja Fatesingh Museum, Vadodara, India

I have been working in the area of universal access for the last fifteen years and was happy to meet so many young heritage professionals who are interested in the subject. Our team shared the experience of working at Udaipur City Palace Complex and also conducted workshop sessions. We had an invigorating time together with participants and learned from each other's experiences. I look forward to many more national and international initiatives for awareness and capacity building to 'make the right real'.

Dr Rachna Khare, Professor and Head, Department of Architecture,
School of Planning and Architecture Bhopal, India

This workshop was extremely resourceful for me as it gave me an opportunity to meet people from various backgrounds but with the same aim of making the museums accessible...It gave me an opportunity to create Pakistan's 1st Museum Braille brochure with support from Dr. Asma Ibrahim.

Siddhant Shah, Architect and Access Consultant, Mumbai, India

We really wanted to know more about new ideas to develop our museum facilities...we got a lot of information... We not only learned, but also we implemented several new things in our museum. We are planning to make a Braille guide book on the [Udaipur] City Palace Museum... Overall, we can say that these sorts of activities should continue frequently, so that people can discuss their difficulties and benefit and make progress in implementing universal accessibility.

Hansmukh Seth and Nikhil Tamboli,
Maharana Mewar Charitable Foundation, Udaipur, India

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The new Accessible icon, developed by the Accessible Icon Project. Although a small design intervention, it radically changes the way accessibility and disability are perceived, from passive to active.

The Accessible Icon Project is an ongoing work of design activism. It starts with a graphic icon, free for use in the public domain, and continues its work as a collaboration among people with disabilities and their allies toward a more accessible world. www.accessibleicon.org



The original International Symbol of Access, designed in the 1960s by Susanne Koefoed. Its provisions are historic and profound. But its rectilinear geometry doesn't show the organic body moving through space, like the rest of the standard isotype icons you see in public space. Source: www.accessibleicon.org



Image: Siddhartha Chatterjee

