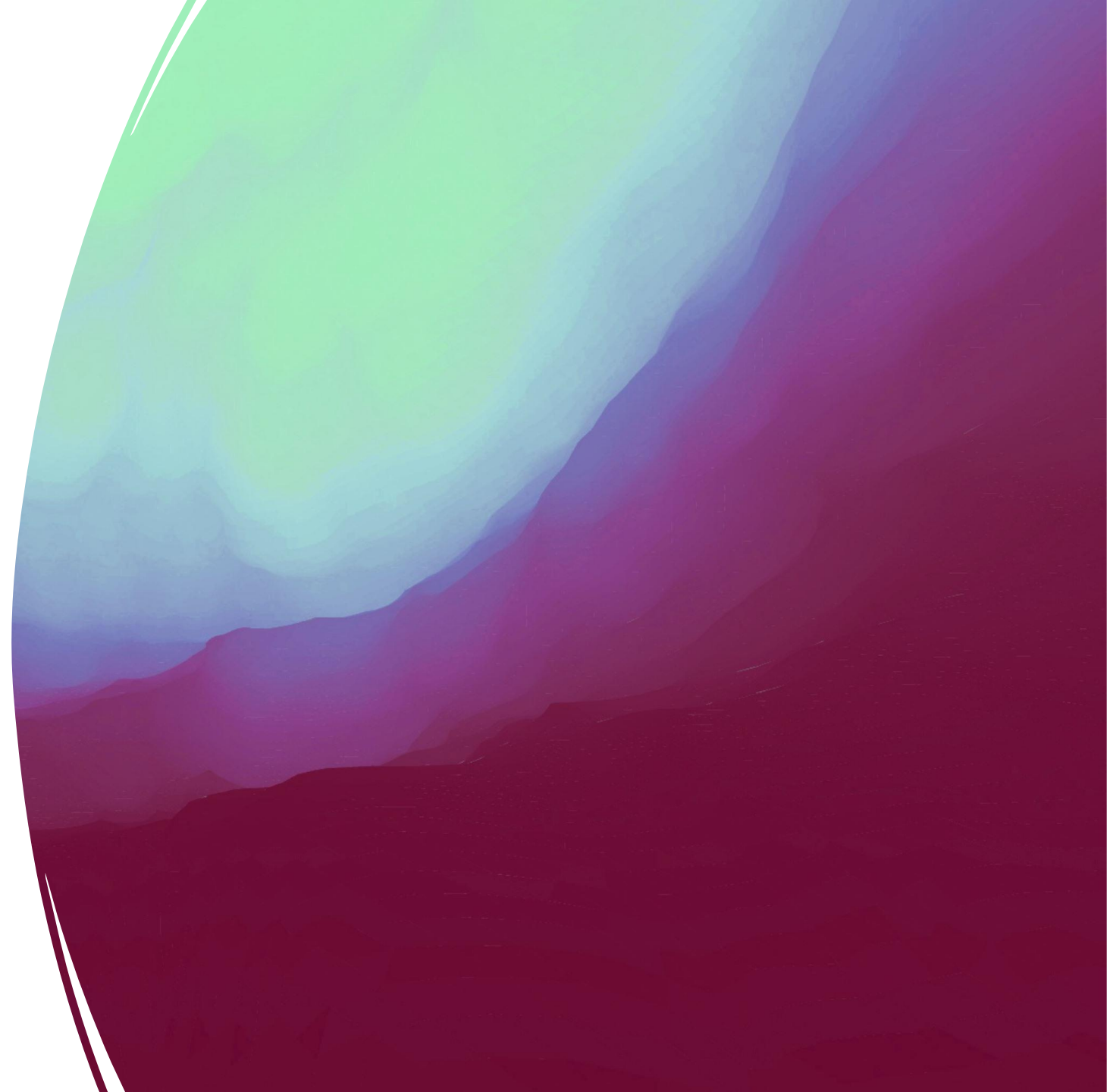


# Cultural accessibility strategies and museum AD in Italy: A (belated) emerging practice?

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ARSAD 2023



# Definitions

- “**Museum audio description** (AD) is a verbal description that seeks to make the visual elements of the diverse contents of museums and galleries accessible to blind and partially sighted people.” (Hutchinson and Eardley, 2019: 42)
- “**Descriptive guides**” (Neves, 2015: 68) or “**Verbal Description**” (Giansante, 2015: 1)
- Newly approved definition of “**museum**” (ICOM, 2022):  
“a not-for-profit, permanent institution **in the service of society** that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, **accessible and inclusive**, museums foster **diversity** and sustainability. They operate and **communicate** ethically, professionally and with the participation of **communities**, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”

# Starting points

- Museum AD as an instance of **museum translation**
  - Museum translation: more emphasis on interlingual translation practices (Liao, 2018) than other practices (e.g., intersemiotic)
  - “Expertise anxiety” (Neather, 2012: 261): museum translation involves an anxious negotiation of differing expertise deficits
  - Both intersemiotic and interlingual practices may be involved
- Museum AD for all: “guided looking” (Hutchinson and Eardley, 2021) for non-sighted and sighted visitors
- Museum AD in the Italian context (Pacinotti, 2018; Spinzi, 2019; Taylor and Perego, 2020): an emerging practice?

# Study design

**Aim:** to investigate the state of the art of museum AD in Italy

- **Online survey** to map accessibility services (also multilingual) and collect feedback from museum practitioners, with a special focus on museum AD (in progress)
- **Analysis of a corpus of ADs from Italian museums** with respect to guidelines for the creation of museum ADs, both at a national and an international level (next phase)



# Survey design

- **General questions**, regarding participants' familiarity with accessibility issues and services
- **Questions on AD provision and creation**, including target audience, languages, type of content described, tactile exploration, guidelines, staff involved and general approach adopted
- **Final considerations**, including possible motivations for not providing ADs, assumed importance of offering accessibility tools and facilitating factors for such provision

# Preliminary findings

## General questions

Questions	Answers
Number of respondents	14
Type of museum?	Art, archaeology, science & technology, botanical gardens, house museums
Accessibility services provided?	For physical, visual and hearing impairments, as well as other specific difficulties
Physical accessibility for blind or visually impaired visitors?	Yes (7/14); partially (5/14); no (1/14); don't know (1/14)
Opportunity to touch or manipulate objects?	No (6/14); yes, over 10 objects (5/14); yes, from 1 to 10 objects (3/14)
Familiarity with norms for cultural accessibility?	Overall familiar
Familiarity with AD?	Overall familiar *(see next slide)
Services provided/that are being designed for blind or visually impaired visitors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>ADs (7/14)</b></li><li>- Guided tours for specific needs (7/14)</li><li>- Braille material (6/14)</li><li>- Easy language material (6/14)</li><li>- Other tactile material, e.g., maps, illustrations, replicas, and books (8/14)</li></ul>

# Preliminary findings

## Participants' definitions of museum AD

- “In the case of an exhibition, this is an audio that **accompanies the tactile experience** by describing to the visually impaired person what they are touching so that they can **understand its shape** even without being able to see it and have **general and historical information.**”
- “A form of (in this case museum) **storytelling** that **facilitates and enhances** the transmission and understanding of **content.**”
- “**Descriptive verbal narration** aimed at making visual elements (**images, environments, etc.**) comprehensible to blind or visually impaired persons.”
- “Basically, it is a **compensatory tool**; in the impossibility of enjoying a work through sight, a **listenable description** is proposed. The description is designed to **translate** into words all the values of the work, including the **aesthetic ones but also the material ones**, in an **accessible language.**”
- “Describing a work of art by using **simple, non-technical language** in order to effectively reach various audiences, especially **people with different vulnerabilities.**”

# Preliminary findings

## AD provision

Questions	Answers
Target audience of the ADs provided?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Blind and visually impaired adults (6/14)</li> <li>- Sighted adults (5/14)</li> <li>- Blind and visually impaired children (3/14)</li> <li>- Sighted children (3/14)</li> <li>- All (1/14)</li> </ul>
Availability?	Streaming online (2/14), on-site through specific devices (2/14), on-site through standard audio guides (3/14), mobile app (1/14)
Available languages?	Italian (7/14), English (2/14)
Type of content for which ADs are provided?	Artworks (5/14), permanent exhibitions (2/14), temporary exhibitions (2/14), practical info (2/14), rooms (2/14), architecture (1/14), archaeology (1/14), virtual exhibitions (1/14)
Number of ADs provided?	Over 20 (3/14), 11-20 (1/14), 6-10 (2/14), 0-5 (1/14)
Combination of AD and tactile exploration?	Yes (5/14), tactile material is being developed (2/14), ADs are being developed (1/14), no (1/14), only 2 ADs (1/14), only for tactile books (1/14)



# Preliminary findings

## AD creation

Questions	Answers
Compliance with internal/national/international AD guidelines/standards?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- National guidelines (3/14)</li><li>- Internal guidelines (2/14)</li><li>- International guidelines (2/14)</li><li>- Don't know (1/14)</li></ul>
Similarities between ADs and other museum texts, such as brochures, panels and general audio guides?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- ADs draw from other museum texts (3/14)</li><li>- No similarities (2/14)</li><li>- Not yet (1/14)</li><li>- ADs are created from scratch (1/14)</li></ul>
Staff involved in AD creation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Education department (5/14)</li><li>- External accessibility professionals (5/14)</li><li>- Blind or visually impaired consultants (5/14)</li><li>- Curators (4/14)</li><li>- Communication department (2/14)</li></ul>
Preference for objective vs. subjective approach to ADs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Yes (3/14)</li><li>- Partially (4/14)</li></ul>

Preliminary findings

Participants' final considerations

Questions	Answers
<p>If ADs are not provided (*), possible motivations?</p> <p>(* only for those who replied that ADs are not provided)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lacking funds (5/14)</li> <li>- Lacking instruments (3/14)</li> <li>- Lacking staff (3/14)</li> <li>- Lacking training (2/14)</li> <li>- Lacking accessibility experts (2/14)</li> <li>- Prefer to offer ad-hoc guided tours with specialised staff (1/14)</li> </ul>
<p>Assumed importance of offering accessibility tools such as ADs?</p>	<p>Overall very important</p>
<p>Possible facilitating factors for offering ADs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National/European incentives to accessibility (10/14)</li> <li>- Training to raise awareness (8/14)</li> <li>- External support, e.g., audio describers (5/14)</li> <li>- Recruiting experts as internal staff (5/14)</li> <li>- Specific standards/norms (5/14)</li> <li>- Tutorials/guides (5/14)</li> <li>- AD templates (1/14)</li> </ul>

# Reflections and future work

- Physical and sensorial accessibility in Italian museum: still a long way to go.
- Museum professionals: generally familiar with accessibility norms, guidelines and solutions, such as ADs. Various staff members are involved in AD creation.
- More material seems to be provided than what is available online.
- ADs: mainly for artworks, but also for other heritage.
- Relevant insights into possible motivations for not providing them (mainly funds, tools, staff and specific training), although respondents consider it important to offer tools such as ADs.
- Careful consideration of the possible facilitating factors: what can research do to contribute to museum AD creation and provision?
  - Train specialised audio describers.
  - Offer specific training addressed to museum professionals.
  - Provide specific tutorials, guides and templates.

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# Thank you

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