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Abstract

In the UK, accessibility for blind and partially sighted people in museums and cultural heritage sites has seen substantial progress thanks to the civil rights movement and the Equality Act of 2010. In recent years, there has been significant development of projects in UK museums for disabled people that aim to be socially inclusive. The concept of "motivation", coming from Museum Studies literature, is central to understanding blind and partially sighted visitors' experiences. This paper aims to investigate the motivation and expectations of blind and partially sighted visitors, providing a general understanding of why they decide to visit museums and how accessible resources affect their experience. Findings show that participants have multiple motivations for visiting, and they do not consider different motivations to be conflicting. The social and educational aspects seemed to be the most valued elements regarding visitors' experience. The analysis suggests clear links between the way participants use resources in the museum and their motivation for visiting museums. The results show that the use of accessible resources has the potential to enhance the museum experience of blind and partially sighted people.

Keywords

accessibility, motivation, museums, learning, disability

Zusammenfassung

In Großbritannien hat sich die Zugänglichkeit für blinde und sehbehinderte Menschen in Museen und Kulturerbestätten dank der Bürgerrechtsbewegung zusammen mit dem Equality Act von 2010 erheblich verbessert. In den letzten Jahren wurden in mehreren britischen Museen Projekte für behinderte Menschen entwickelt, deren Ziel es ist sozial inklusiv zu sein. Das Konzept der „Motivation", das aus dem Feld der Museumsstudien stammt, ist zentral, um die Erfahrung von blinden und sehbehinderten Menschen zu verstehen. Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, die Motivation und die Erwartungen von blinden und sehbehinderten Besucher*innen zu untersuchen, um ein allgemeines Verständnis dafür zu schaffen, warum sie sich für einen Museumsbesuch entscheiden und wie barrierefreie Ressourcen ihre Erfahrungen beeinflussen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Teilnehmer*innen mehrere Motivationen für den Besuch haben und dass sie die verschiedenen Motivationen nicht als widersprüchlich betrachten. Die sozialen und pädagogischen Aspekte des Besuchs scheinen die Elemente zu sein, die die Teilnehmer*innen in Bezug auf ihre Erfahrung am meisten schätzten. Die Analyse legt nahe, dass es klare Zusammenhänge zwischen der Art und Weise, wie die Teilnehmer*innen die Ressourcen im Museum nutzen, und ihrer Motivation für den Museumsbesuch gibt, und dass die Nutzung von barrierefreien Ressourcen das Potenzial hat, das Museumserlebnis von blinden und sehbehinderten Menschen zu verbessern.

Schlagwörter

Barrierefreiheit, Motivation, Museen, Lernen, Behinderung

Introduction

In the past 30 years, physical access to archaeological and cultural heritage museum collections has been discussed in the Western context regarding accessibility for disabled people (Candlin 2010; Bieber and Rae 2013; Ginley 2013; Hayhoe 2017; Sandell 2017; Kleege 2018; Weisen 2020). In the United Kingdom, accessibility for blind and partially sighted people in museums has developed considerably thanks to the civil rights movement and the Equality Act of 2010 (Wadham et al. 2012). The advocacy for equal opportunities, accessibility, empowerment, and inclusion was translated into social support, overcoming physical and mental barriers, discrimination, and prejudice (Barnes and Mercer 2010: 34). Additionally, following the publication of the 2015 'Code of Ethics for Museums' (Museum Association 2015) and the 2019 'Museum Accreditation Standard' (Arts Council England 2019), museums in the UK have started to develop projects for disabled people that aim to be socially inclusive.

The term "accessibility" has been traditionally associated with the more structural sphere of the issue (Appleton 2001; Weisen 2020; Silverman 2010). It is usually concerned with removing the elements that physically obstruct access to buildings for visitors with special needs (Dodd and Sandell 2001). However, over the past three decades, there has been a significant shift in values associated with accessibility, following the social model of disability (Pye 2007; Ginley 2013; Hayhoe 2017; 2019; Chatterjee 2020; Cecilia 2021a). Accessibility does not only concern the removal of physical barriers; it also discusses obstacles of a different nature impeding access to contents, materials and information, and access to tangible and intangible values embodied in artefacts. These barriers create disabling museum experiences which undermine blind and partially sighted visitors' confidence and empowerment.

The most apparent access barrier that blind and partially sighted people face is that objects are usually perfectly visible but placed in a physically separate context from the visitor, usually behind glass cases or similar structures. Furthermore, barriers also limit access to areas and create navigation and wayfinding problems. Approaching an unknown space can be distressing and intimidating, especially for people with visual impairments (Bieber and Rae 2013). Museums are called to break down the barriers that prevent blind and partially sighted people from getting a clear idea of a museum's interior, understanding the galleries' structure, and how objects are organised (Davis 2001).

Barriers to information constitute another layer of difficulties that blind and partially sighted people encounter in the museum space. Museum visitors often report difficulties in accessing the language used in written interpretation such as labels and panels. The language of labels can often be perceived as a barrier due to jargon or outdated vocabulary. Blind and partially sighted people experience further difficulties concerning labels and panels. Written information is usually inaccessible for blind visitors unless it is translated into a Braille format (assuming that the blind visitor can read Braille), visitors are accompanied by companions or a guide who can read labels and panels to them (Garip and Bülbül 2014), or they have access to technology that can scan and magnify or read the labels to them.

The international debate on the use and potential of accessible resources and assistive technology to overcome existing cultural heritage barriers is very active and controversial. Scholars, museum professionals, and technology developers often discuss technology developments (Sensing Culture 2018; Cecilia 2019; Museum Association 2019; Museum Computer Group 2019). Improvements in understanding the potential of accessible resources are essential if museums are to develop full access to archaeological collections and artworks and create truly inclusive environments. An audience-centred approach looking at the museum experience of blind and partially sighted people, their motivation to visit museums and what they expect to do in the museum space is crucial to develop accessible and inclusive exhibits and resources.

This study contributes to the large-scale debate on disabilities and access in museums and archaeological collections. It presents findings from the visits of five blind and partially sighted people to the Victoria & Albert Museum (London) between December 2017 and February 2018. The analysis begins by presenting the self-reported expectations of participants before the visit. It then discusses participants' motivations throughout their interviews, drawing from the motivation framework identified by Moussouri and her colleagues (Moussouri 1998; Moussouri and Roussos 2013; Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018). The paper provides baseline research to develop long-term solutions that would encourage blind and partially sighted people to visit museums, and to make their experience equal to that of sighted visitors in terms of opportunities.

Methodology

This paper presents initial findings on the motivation of blind and partially sighted visitors to visit museums. Furthermore, it analyses how the presence and the use of accessible resources affect their motivation. The study is part of a broader analysis of the museum experience of blind and partially sighted visitors, which was carried out as part of my PhD research project at the UCL Institute of Archaeology (Cecilia 2021a).

The nature of this research is qualitative, which allows for a holistic analysis of the social context based on deep, varied, and detailed data (Mason 2002; Silverman 2006). The methodology used is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This orientation describes a specific phenomenon or experience from specific participants' perspectives (Cresswell 1998). It facilitates addressing the meanings and perspectives of blind and partially sighted participants, as I look at the museum experience from the perspective of those who act, while they act, by using descriptions and quoting them directly (Firestone 1987; Schwandt 2000). Participants were recruited using a snowball approach, and they were free to visit the museum when, how, and with whom they wanted.

Analysis

The point of departure for this analysis is that motivation is at the core of the museum experience. Participants mentioned several factors that prompt them to visit museums. These motivations are related to perceived values of museums and their roles in the participants' lives, which further informs visitors' use of museums as a resource (Falk et al. 1998). "Motivation" here is understood as the intersection between personal and contextual factors that arise when visitors act in a sociocultural context (the museum) and encounter artefacts. In order to analyse visitors' motivations, I adopted the coding framework suggested by Moussouri and her colleagues (Moussouri 1998; Moussouri and Roussos 2013; Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018), based on Macdonald's concept of cultural itineraries (Macdonald 1992). Information on motivation was collected as part of the semi-structured interviews both by directly asking participants to express their reasons and expectations for coming to the museum and by indirectly asking questions about the perceived benefits and the role museums play in their lives, which were not related explicitly to the purpose of their visit to the Victoria & Albert Museum. In the following sections, I present visitors' expectations and their motivation classified as cultural itineraries. I explore initial relations and connections between visitors' expectations, motivations, and the context of their visit.

Expectations

The presentation of findings begins with the analysis of visitors' expectations before their visit, namely what they wanted and expected to do or see in the museum and how they felt while preparing for their visit. Expectations are understood here as an element of the visit that influences visitors' motivation. They contribute to an understanding of the context and the identity that visitors bring with them when they enter museums. They shed light on visitors' personal and social context and the background against which they compare and experience the visit. While expectations have a direct effect on participants' motivations, they vary from motivations in several ways. Motivation is conceptualised here as the reasons and influential factors why blind and partially sighted participants decided to go to museums. On the other hand, expectations are beliefs that something will happen or is likely to happen, in this case, what blind and partially sighted participants believed they would do in the Victoria & Albert Museum, and the emotions derived from these beliefs. Therefore, it is crucial to look at expectations first in order to understand how motivations unfolded during participants' visits. Table 1 presents the expectations identified in the participants' responses.

Educational	• To be able to touch artefacts. • To have accessible information in large print. • To be able to obtain audio descriptions or guided tours without relying on heavily visual language. • To learn about history and archaeology. • To see "sensational" archaeological artefacts. • To learn about non-Western cultures.
Personal expectations	• To not feel bored. • To be able to easily navigate the space and access resources. • To feel welcome and avoid uncomfortable situations.
Social outcomes	• To not be constantly dependent on the help of companions. • To be able to share their experience. • To enjoy time with their companion.

Table 1. Expectations of participants.

Participants based their expectations of what they were going to find or to do in the space, primarily on their needs related to their impairments. All participants mentioned the desire to feel physically comfortable. Three of them expressed the general hope that they would feel included, while the other two spoke about specific expectations in terms of independence and accessibility. Two hoped to touch objects and get audio descriptions, as they considered the combination of touch and audio the only way they could access the museum's contents. One expected to move independently in the space and feel welcome due to her guide dog. This participant did not mention expectations about the content of the museum:

> "[I hoped that] she [her guide dog] was going to be accepted. Sometimes in other places, they have been difficult about it. You know, restaurants, shops… I also need to feed her. I hoped I could in a fairly easy way." [Female, 22 years old]

Two participants are frequent museum visitors, and they revealed expectations closely related to previous visits to the same and other institutions. Their expectations were content-related and subject-specific:

> "I thought this gallery was going to have some of the nicest objects in the museum. I was hoping it would be easy to find the objects related to the audio and the large print guides. I wanted to get as much information as I could." [Male, 32 years old]

> "I think I want to learn more about Islamic archaeology. Some of the objects here are quite impressive, and I always find the archaeological accounts interesting." [Female, 34 years old]

Another participant hoped to share her experience with her sighted friend and for them to learn about the objects together. She mentioned that she was particularly interested in ceramic artefacts and ancient manufacturing techniques. She pointed out that touching objects allowed them to be explored by her as a partially-sighted visitor and by her companion at the same time. This prevented her from feeling excluded or marginalised. She referred to previous experiences (for instance, a touch tour at another museum) where she felt that her friend acted more as a carer than as a companion due to the fact that contrary to herself her friend was not permitted to touch artefacts.

Expectations seemed to play a crucial role in the participants' decision to "do the visit." They influenced their motivations and how they navigated the space, used different resources, and encountered objects. While these findings suggest that expectations seemed to be connected with the participants' personal and physical needs, the following sections show how motivations are deeply rooted in the perceived values that participants associate with museums as institutions.

Motivation

Following Moussouri's framework, the categories of motivation (or cultural itineraries) identified were social event, education/participation, entertainment, place, therapeutic, and political/participation (Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018: 253; see also Moussouri 1998, 2003).

Social event

All participants highlighted the value of the social aspect of the museum experience in their interview responses. "Social event" itinerary is the category Moussouri and her colleagues defined as "a special social experience to be shared with family or friends" (Moussouri and Roussos 2013: 25; see also Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018: 253). Participants considered the museum experience a special social experience. It was seen as one of the options visitors have with their family, partner, friends, or social groups when they want to spend time doing something meaningful or pleasurable together.

"Social event" was the predominant motivation for two participants. They kept referring to it throughout the entire interview. One person stated clearly that all she hoped for was to spend a pleasant evening with her boyfriend, relax after work, and do something different from their usual routine. While they did wander around the galleries and looked at a few objects, they also spent time in the café, had a drink at the museum's bar, and listened to some music. Similarly, another participant mentioned how important these visits are for her, as they are the only times she manages to spend with her former university best friend. She was nostalgic and happy to perform similarly in the same social context with her friend as she had done before her sight loss. Being able to spend time together seemed to be highly significant for her.

Another participant explained that he had already visited the Victoria & Albert Museum as part of an organised visit:

> "It was a couple of months ago, actually. It was an organised tour – a trip actually for special needs and visually impaired. I didn't get, to be honest, a proper guide. But they took us on a tour with other people, helping each other." [Male, 35 years old]

He valued the opportunity that the museum offered to get together and explore the collection. During this particular visit, he toured the museum with a professional guide. In the interview, he compared his experience with a knowledgeable guide to the one that he usually has with his family:

> "When I go with family, it's not like that. Because everyone is busy to look at their own things. It wouldn't have been as with professional people. They might help me, but it wouldn't be like today's experience. I would still enjoy it, I like spending time with my family, and it's good to be in a museum with them. But it would not be the same thing." [Male, 35 years old]

The social element also emerged when two participants explained the value of visiting museums as part of guided tours specifically designed for blind and partially sighted people organised by VocalEyes (a UK-based company that provides audio description services in museums) and other social groups. In particular, one said:

> "It's been a big social part of my life. More than I expected. Especially like these VocalEyes tours and things. It's a great way of meeting new people. Because everyone comes here for a common reason, because they enjoy visiting museums and learning about art, history, and archaeology. You're going to an exhibition because you want to look at something. You have a common interest in things with people. So, you actually get chatty about it with them." [Male, 32 years old]

Another participant explained how assistive resources could be detrimental in that they can have a negative effect on the desired social experience. He compared two visits to the British Museum (London), one with family members, and the other one with a friend. In the first case, he was disappointed about the experience. He felt "dragged" by family members who only looked at artefacts rather than spending time with him. He said that while he had an audio guide for himself, his relatives did not have one and only looked around. The audio guide (specifically designed for blind and partially sighted people) made him feel isolated and detached from his family. He focused on those negative feelings rather than enjoying the encounter with the collection.

On the other hand, when he visited the same museum with a friend, his experience was different, as they actively explored the museum together and his friend described objects to him. While the type of assistive resource he used in the first visit is specifically designed to widen access to the collection, it has a negative impact on the social aspects of the museum experience. The tool's design and the audio guide's content can create a barrier to a meaningful social experience. Bulky headsets or headphones can isolate the visitor and make it hard to interact with companions. Moreover, having audio guides with descriptive audio content specifically designed for visually impaired people can be disruptive if the other members of the same group do not share the same audio guide. This is the case when sighted companions are offered mainstream audio guides, which differ in length and content.

Findings above show that museums are seen as places to meet new people, share meaningful experiences, and explore common interests. The museum visits are also occasions that can reinforce existing relationships and help the visitor feel part of family activities. Museums have a direct effect on building relationships, creating bonds, and associating with different people. Findings suggest that visitors' and groups' agendas are constructed, negotiated, and refined before, during, and after the visit.

Education/participation

The education itinerary is defined as "learning something in particular, more often just learning in general" (Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018: 253; see also Moussouri and Roussos 2013: 25). For the purpose of this research, I have refined the category by dividing it in two: a general interest in learning and exploring something new and a specific interest in the content and subject matter presented in the exhibition.

All participants expressed the desire to find out more and were interested in learning about archaeology, history, and the museum content. They were interested in acquiring information about a specific period or object, or they were simply interested in learning something new. Participants were either interested in the topic of their visit because they had previously studied it, read about it, or experienced it in different contexts (such as travels, books, or movies), or because they were willing to explore something that was new for them. Learning was clearly stated as the primary motivation for visiting the museum by two participants. However, while one expressed her interest in the Victoria & Albert Museum's specific ceramic collection, the other participant emphasised that he simply enjoyed the overall learning experience. Finding out about new things is, in general, the reason he would visit any museum.

The first participant spoke of how these visits encourage her to continue learning about archaeology and, specifically, ceramic archaeology. She emphasised how enjoyable it was to prolong the experience and read about what she had seen. The second one expressed similar feelings. He seemed enthusiastic about the idea of revisiting the museum. He explained how he values the memories he created in the space:

> "You can't always take it all in, and remember. It would be nice to come back and refresh the memory as well. […] I will go back and look at everything else. It's just a matter of time. You do get absorbed. Everything is so unique and interesting. I'd be sorry to miss anything, to forget anything." [Male, 32 years old]

These findings refer to the sociocultural concept that learning is gradual and does not occur only across one visit. The intention to return to the same museum space and the desire to prolong the visit are the effects of the intense encounters that both participants had in the environment with the artefacts. These encounters generated a sense of "troubling incompleteness" (Carr 2001). The intersection between the education itinerary, the emergent motivation during the visit, and the environment provoked a feeling of incompleteness, a longing to prolong the experience. This suggests that meaning-making happened while the visitors were performing in the environment that led to open-ended experiences.

The second participant decided in advance which area of the museum he wanted to explore. He spent 2 hours and 12 minutes exploring one gallery. He observed and read the large-print labels for every artefact in the gallery, and he listened to all the audio descriptions available. Additionally, after this particular visit, he returned to the museum on two other occasions to explore the rest of the galleries. He expressed how much he valued putting into context the things he looks at instead of simply appreciating the aesthetic of objects:

> "It's ok to say 'oh that looks nice', but putting it in context, understanding what you're seeing and the story behind it makes it so much more interesting." [Male, 32 years old]

He praised how technology usually facilitates his experiences, as it allows him to quickly and effectively access content:

> "I think technology is very helpful. You see? Having the audio guide on my phone made it easier. I didn't have to carry around heavy and large things. It was all there, very quick, nice and easy." [Male, 32 years old]

Additionally, he often spoke of the connections he made between what he was seeing and his lifestyle:

> "Yeah I did – it's interesting to see how people used to live and to see the things that they used to have in their homes. And to compare it with what we have today. Things today are a lot simpler, I think. A lot more functional rather than fancy in appearance. I mean you can still get artistic decorative things, but obviously a lot of people can't afford those things these days, so you just have much simpler, cheaper things." [Male, 32 years old]

He also made specific connections between artefacts from the display that reminded him of objects from his background:

> "There was a table in there that actually is a little bit similar to a table that we've got at home. You can pull each end to extend the table. It made me think and compare it to something at home. That was quite nice." [Male, 32 years old]

Meaning-making took place by connecting his prior knowledge with what he experienced in the situated context. It is essential to highlight the situated nature of meaning-making: it occurred between the pre-visit agenda and the situated emergent motivation triggered by the environment. While immersed in the experience, the participant reflected on previously-held knowledge. He performed in a specific space and was reminded of how he used similar objects in another context. In the example of the table, he interacted directly with the object. He engaged with the information provided by the museum. At the same time, he made references to both visual and non-visual aspects of the objects. The parallel he made was grounded in the artefact's kinaesthetic qualities: how it functioned and how he used it. The meaning he found in the object did not rely on the explicit visual values enforced by the museum's display but instead on the bodily interaction he had with a similar artefact in his life. He initially drew meaning from the information retrieved through the digital tools but then reflected on how his experience was related to the object's materiality. In this case, technology was not detrimental to the objects' encounter: instead, digital tools helped the participant access the information effectively, but they did not distract him from the object itself and its materiality.

Another major element of the education motivation that emerged from the experiences of other participants was the possibility of learning as a result of touching artefacts. Two of the participants requested a guided touch tour of the artefacts. They both mentioned that they wanted to hear more about the museum and have a general tour of the collections. They were both given touch tours of highlight objects by two trained guides from the museum. One enthusiastically interacted with his guide. He asked her questions about the museum's history, each objects' history, the materials, and the shapes. He thoroughly touched each object, kneeled, bent, and stretched to acquire as much information as possible. He explained in the interview that touch and sound are his primary means of access to most information:

> "I can feel the object on my own, but I would like to know (be told) what this means, what's the significance, the history. Like different things that mean something else that someone would have to describe. But I could feel the object on my own. I like to hear where the object was found, by whom. What is the history?" [Male, 26 years old]

He clarified that the combination of touch and description was essential in creating a valuable experience for him. He compared it with previous experiences that had either audio or touch only, describing them as "pointless" and "frustrating." In this case, learning can be understood not just as cognitive and factual but also as embodied. The way he performed in the space, interacting with his guide, touching objects, and moving around, was an act of exploration and an affirmation of self-presence. His body was performing a social activity by exploring the physical environment. He negotiated his identity as a visitor in relation to the objects, the environment, and his guide. He made meaning through the unwavering connection between his body and the world, bringing about an "intense feeling of self-presence" (Rees Leahy 2012: 79).

Another participant mentioned that museums often do not have tactile resources, making him feel marginalised and unwelcome. He pointed out that he understood that most archaeological objects are fragile and valuable and cannot be touched for conservation reasons. However, he also added that the lack of tactile objects negatively affects his decision to visit a museum, as he feels that there is "nothing for him to learn there." He suggested the use of technology to create accessible tactile resources such as 3D prints:

> "If they had at least 3D printed some of the objects it would have been a lot easier. Touching anything adds a lot more to it. 'Cause describing doesn't really go that far. You really need a combination of both things. Just touching without the audio wouldn't be any good either. The best thing is to have just about the combination of talking as well as touching. Because you wouldn't appreciate it otherwise. You need the context." [Male, 26 years old]

However, another participant seemed less enthusiastic at the possibility of touching replicas:

> "Sure, I guess [touching replicas] it's ok. It's better than nothing, I guess. The reality is that I really like touching the real thing. I don't know… it makes me create a connection. It feels special because it's ancient and maybe it was made a thousand years ago, and you can actually feel that it was used a thousand years ago. It's special!" [Female, 34 years old]

The debate around the tangible and intangible values of replicas vs. "authentic" objects has gained prominence in museum studies and public archaeology in the past 20 years (Pye 2007; Hampp and Schwan 2014; Schwan and Dutz 2020). While this paper does not explicitly focus on the debate, it is essential to highlight that the two participants mentioned above, with similar visual impairments (they are both congenitally blind), similar ages, and similar backgrounds, presented two diametrically opposing reactions to the possibility of touching replicas of archaeological objects. While one was enthusiastic about the idea of being able to explore material properties such as shapes, dimensions, and sizes, the other focused on the intangible values embedded in the artefact. While the discourse around replicas and "authentic" objects is complex, these findings show that both tangible and intangible values represented in the form of replicas and original objects create a meaningful experience and facilitate learning.

Entertainment

The entertainment itinerary is defined as "seeking fun, an enjoyable thing to do" (Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018: 253; see also Moussouri and Roussos 2013: 25). While most participants expressed the desire to spend an enjoyable time in the space, entertainment was the main cultural itinerary identified by one of the participants in this study. This itinerary is directly related to, and it happened in conjunction with, the social one. She came to the museum seeking fun and pleasurable things to do. She arrived at the museum with her partner and her guide dog, and they went straight into the museum café, where they got beverages and fed the dog. They did not pick up a map but instead casually explored the ground floor of the museum. Her partner made her touch several architectural features (doors, walls, a marble balustrade). She later explained that he is an architect and was very impressed with the architecture of the place. They also came across two tactile archaeological artefacts (two Chinese vases), touching them together. They spent the majority of the time chatting and laughing together.

Her understanding of the museum as an institution before visiting it was connected to the institutionalised image she carried from her childhood visits. She imagined museums as authoritative learning places ingrained in visual culture to which she did not belong because of her lack of interest in the subject matter (archaeology and design, in this case) and the absence of accessibility. The entertainment itinerary played a crucial role in choosing which museum to visit, as she was attracted by the activities offered during the late opening of the museum in the evening:

> "I really just wanted a nice date with [her partner], it's nice to be romantic sometimes and this seemed a good place. I like the fact that you can come here at night. We got a drink as well. That was cool. I didn't realise you could chill and drink in a museum." [Female, 22 years old]

Objects and, in general, the museum collection seemed to play a marginal role in her visit. She used them to engage with her partner and fulfil her desire to do something different and pleasurable.

Therapeutic

The therapeutic itinerary refers to "reasons related to one's physiological condition" (Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018: 253; see also Moussouri and Roussos 2013: 25). This cultural itinerary was identified only in the experience of one participant. Unlike the others, she seemed to be extremely conscious of and concerned about her condition of sight loss throughout her visit and during the interview. Her impairment affected her motivations, her visit strategy, how she used the space, how she interacted with objects, and the meaning she made of her experience. The museum seemed to be the element that allowed her to embrace her experience of sight loss, turning it into a positive one. Her body in that space was no longer defined by her impairment but rather by the opportunities to perform positively.

She pointed out that her visits to archaeology museums made her feel a connection with the life she led before she started losing her sight. The encounters with objects made her actively re-discover and embrace part of her past identity as an art history and archaeology learner:

> "I wanted to study archaeology and art at university […] I lived […] near a museum, and we used to go there during on Fridays when I was a child, with other children. […] When I lost my sight, I had to accept that I couldn't do it anymore [studying at university]. […] It was quite sad. […] I did English literature at Uni in the end. I quite enjoyed it, so it's not too bad. But it's nice to be able to come back to these places [museums]. I always loved it when I was younger." [Female, 34 years old]

From her words, it is clear how the act of being in the space was part of her meaning-making experience:

> "When you feel down, museums are good locations where to go and feel that not everything is terrible and you can still spend some time to learn about new things, and look at art, history and archaeology […] and be surrounded by beautiful, precious, and ancient objects. Everyone deserves a break; I think it's important for everyone to have some time to themselves every now and again. I personally love going to galleries. It helps to relieve all those negative thoughts and forget about the world around me for a while." [Female, 34 years old]

In this case, her identity can be seen through sociocultural lenses: it was constructed as she acted in this specific context of her social life. The entering-identity was dynamically and constantly reshaped by her physical and social interaction in the environment. Through the visit and the encounter with objects, she re-discovered her passion and interest and established a connection with her life before losing sight.

Political/participation

The political itinerary refers to the desire of visitors to act in a way to fight discrimination or exclusion by actively participating (Moussouri and Roussos 2013: 25; Hohenstein and Moussouri 2018: 253). There is an outspoken purpose on the visitor's part to raise awareness to bring about change (Moussouri and Roussos 2013: 25). It is closely related to the identity of the visitors and their background. The political motivation was evident in all the interviews, as participants kept referring to the value of raising awareness about the needs of blind and partially sighted people.

The following quotes show that self-advocacy was the most common motivation for participants to be interested in taking part in this research. Improving accessibility and contributing to the creation of independent experiences for blind and partially sighted people were the common reasons articulated by the participants:

> "I like visiting museums anyway. So, if I can help someone else do research to disability and things is always great, and making museums easier to navigate and to understand what you're looking at is always great." [Male, 32 years old]

> "I am always very interested in anything to do with [accessibility and] visual impairment. Any kind. […] I really appreciate the brilliant work that you are doing and it's really interesting that you have a genuinely passionate for accessibility. People don't really understand what sight impairment or even disability means." [Male, 26 years old]

> "And of course, if I can be helpful for someone in their study, why not? I can take part. Now I know more about the study so I'm glad because it's going to improve accessibility and lots of other things. You know, giving feedback and being involved is good." [Male, 35 years old]

In general, the participants were in favour of using their experience to enhance the wellbeing of other blind and partially sighted people. They appreciated the possibility of helping to enhance inclusion and access for others through their input. They often mentioned other collaborations with institutions such as the Royal National Institute of the Blind (a UK charity that supports people with sight loss) or Metro Blind Sport (a UK based charity that opens doors to sport for all visually impaired people, regardless of age or sporting ability) to improve accessibility and inclusion.

In addition, empowerment was another common theme throughout the interviews. The participants mentioned specific elements that triggered empowerment in their experiences, which were often linked with their identity and motivations. All the participants are active advocates for the rights of blind and partially sighted people in their daily lives. They blog and tweet about their disability, volunteer for charity organisations, raise funds, play sports, and participate in focus groups to improve accessibility.

Learning was the key element that enabled empowerment in one participant's experience:

> "It just great to be able to go out and about and learn something new, see new things. It just adds a lot more of a variety to my life I think. There is a good reason to go out and look at things, learn things, enjoy things. It's great." [Male, 32 years old]

Another mentioned that the main reason why she agreed to take part in the research was:

> "… not because I was interested in the museum itself, but I wanted to prove my boyfriend wrong when he said that I could not do it – not in a bad way, but in the sense that I get frustrated quickly and usually leave if that's the case." [Female, 22 years old]

Proving her partner wrong and showing him that they could share a different but still meaningful experience was a strong motivation for her to participate in the research. She expressed how she constantly pushes herself as an athlete, is independent, and achieves excellent results. She had also gained more confidence thanks to her guide dog, as it made her feel more secure and independent. However, she still felt fearful when dealing with new environments, but she liked to prove to herself and others that she could face a challenge once she was presented with one.

Two of the participants explained about how the presence of accessibility tools such as tactile objects were a trigger for empowerment:

> "And thinking about accessibility and visual impairment, and how people can get the same enjoyment and fun as the other sighted people get. It's good. It makes you feel like you belong." [Male, 32 years old]

> "Museums definitely need to be more accessible. Like a million times more accessible. It was good to have touched objects. If you don't, you're saying 'this place is not for you'. Accessibility means that you give everyone equal opportunities. There's still so much work to do." [Male, 26 years old]

In their discourses about independence, the participants often associated empowering experiences with technology. Technology was viewed as a crucial trigger for independence. All participants used Apple iPhones with different accessibility features activated, and they used personal computers with in-built accessibility software and functions. They used this equipment for activities like work and personal communication, social networking, transport enquiries, information, taking and viewing pictures and videos. They often mentioned specific apps that facilitate their use. The following quotes show how crucial technology was in their lives:

> "[Technology] has allowed me to be more independent. It's a lot easier to go around and do lots of things I want to do. It opens up the world a lot more. I can take my phone now and plan a journey somewhere, or look something up on the internet. [I can] plan things in advance, so I know where I am going, what I will be doing, how easy it might be to find my way around. It's much easier to plan things and then it gives you more confidence about going there and doing things while I'm there. And if I need more help while I'm there, that can also help as well." [Male, 32 years old]

> "Technology has a crucial role in my life now. It allows me to be more independent." [Female, 22 years old]

> "What really gave me a bit of independence are the accessibility software. They really helped me. Other than that, it would have been a waste." [Male, 26 years old]

> "Technology is so advanced these days. Even just my phone. Accessibility has improved and there are many apps that keep coming up to make life a little easier for us [visually impaired people]. […] I'd say that we'd be lost without the tech that is available nowadays." [Female, 34 years old]

> "My phone is great! I can do everything with it. I can even call a taxi. I like to be able to do things on my own with it. I do not use it that much but it is nice to know that you are still able to do things. Computers really helped as well especially at university." [Male, 35 years old]

Without being prompted, some participants also mentioned technology in relation to the museum experience:

> "I apply it to every aspect of life, would be nice to see what it could do in museums there are so many possible applications. Even just a guide for direction. Or 3D prints?" [Male, 26 years old]

> "I personally make as much use of technology as I possibly can. Actually, I should have probably tried to use some of the apps I normally use here as well. I could have used an app that reads text aloud. Oh that would have been fun!" [Male, 32 years old]

> "The less you have to do the things yourself, the easier it is. If things can trigger automatically – it would be great if you could just walk up to an object, and as you get close to it, it just starts speaking in your ear. You don't think about these things on your own, but talking about it now – yeah it would be great!" [Female, 22 years old]

While only two participants used digital tools during their visits, it was clear that all interviewees valued technology as an essential part of their lives, and as a trigger for independence and empowerment. The participants' advocacy for a better and broader use of technology in the museum suggests that accessible and inclusive technology in the museum space can replicate empowering situations during the visitor experience.

A note on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic had a serious impact on museums and the cultural sector in the UK and across the world. New public health regulations are changing the visitors' experience and access to archaeological objects and artworks (Crooke 2020; Rees Leahy 2020).

I conducted an initial study (Cecilia 2021b) on the effect of the pandemic and the new regulations on the visit of blind and partially sighted people in the UK. Initial findings from the study showed how there was a growing concern among blind and partially sighted visitors in regard to navigation, wayfinding, access to resources, access to information, and health and safety due to new social distancing restrictions and public health guidelines (Cecilia 2021b). These findings are also consistent with data emerging from a 2020 online survey conducted by the UK-based company VocalEyes (2020).

Overall findings are consistent with the discussion presented here on how challenging approaching the museum environment is for blind and partially sighted people, and the impact this has on visitors' motivations and expectations. The combination of findings from the two studies show how navigation and wayfinding are among the primary concerns of blind and partially sighted people when they plan to visit the space. The pandemic has increased concerns around navigation due to new social distancing restrictions. Furthermore, while findings from this paper showed visitors' genuine enthusiasm at the possibility of touching artefacts (both replicas and originals), the pandemic seems to have turned this enthusiasm into another cause of worry. Blind and partially sighted people voiced concerns that museums would struggle to provide tactile access even after the pandemic due to the restrictions. This possibility seems to discourage some people from visiting museums in the future, as they valued touch as an essential resource for object and social engagement. This negatively affects the education and social motivations explored here. On the other hand, new findings show that the pandemic positively impacted the social motivation for taking part in museum and cultural heritage activities. Increased digital engagement and the possibility to participate remotely from their homes during the lockdowns were positively highlighted, confirming the social value that museums have in participants' lives, as discussed in this paper.

Discussion and conclusion

This study looked at motivation as a complex sociocultural phenomenon that emerges while people act within a specific context. The findings suggest that the participants have multiple motivations for visiting, and they do not consider different motivations to be conflicting. Following the framework theorised by Moussouri (1998) based on Macdonald's (1992) concept of cultural itineraries, the primary motivations identified were social event, education/participation, entertainment, therapeutic, and political/participation. The idea of cultural itineraries comes from Lave's research on how motivation and values shape people's practice during their everyday lives (Lave 1988). Macdonald (1992) and then Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri (Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri 2001a, 2001b; Moussouri 2003, 2007) elaborated the concept further and applied it to the museum context.

The social and educational aspects of the visit seemed to be the elements that participants valued the most with regards to their experience. Overall, visitors appreciated the intellectual experience that museums offer. They brought into the museum personal interests related to content, and they focused on different elements of exhibitions based on these interests. These experiences exemplify how the sociocultural context provided the resources participants used to negotiate the values and the aims that motivated them to visit and use the space in the way they did. Participants came into the museum with pre-existing values and ideas, closely connected to their pre-visit entering motivations. Those set of values and ideas came from prior experience, knowledge, emotions. They shaped the way visitors acted in the situated context, and they were directly expressed in their expectations (Doering and Pekarik 1996). The findings show that expectations are defined not only by visitors as individuals but also by the content and physical context of the museum and the social context of the visit. Expectations were mainly related to physical and intellectual needs, and they affected the meaning participants made of their visits. Expectations mostly revolved around embodied aspects of the visit and bodily comfort. They were dynamically changing: participants seemed to define them according to how they act (or acted before in similar museums) in the space and what they heard about the museum from family members or friends.

Visitors' identities and backgrounds are linked to the value they associate with museums, their expectations, the different entering motivations, the way they use the space, and how they approach museum resources. In general, different motivations, strategies, and expectations show that learning is a strong component in all the experiences. Museums are mostly perceived as places to acquire knowledge and satisfy the desire to learn about a specific topic. The diversified backgrounds, history of vision, interests, and visitors' expectations are mirrored by the different learning experiences, strategies, and outcomes they display. Learning often appeared in conjunction with the social element, and it was an element that triggered empowerment and inclusion.

The initial discussion showed clear links between the way participants use technology and their motivations for visiting museums. While all the participants were avid technology-users in their professional and personal lives, only two decided to use personal digital tools and the museum's technological resources. The findings suggest that this was due to the fact that they perceive the museum visit as something that does not relate to technology, to their personal preference for visiting the museum as a social and educational experience, or to the possibility of technology being disruptive in the space. Even though they did not use digital tools or technological resources during their visit, all the participants highlighted how technology is an essential part of their lives. They stated that it is a trigger for independence and empowerment and suggested the potential use of cutting-edge technology to enhance the museum experience of blind and partially sighted people.

The discussion showed the potential of assistive resources with regard to making the museum experience enjoyable for blind and partially sighted people. In order to fully understand the impact of resources on the visitor experience, it is necessary to carry out a deeper analysis of the way blind and partially sighted visitors navigate the museum space, how they interact with other visitors, and how they encounter objects and digital tools. Understanding the holistic experience of visitors must be the critical starting point before developing resources for museum exhibitions. Museums must listening to the voices of traditionally excluded audiences to represent their lived experiences and to build accessible resources and inclusive environments.

The initial findings about visitors' motivation presented here show how essential it is to be aware of blind and partially sighted visitors' perspectives and to understand what brings them to the museum space in the first place, to design experiences that can create a truly accessible, inclusive, and empowering experience. Findings from this

study demonstrate that creating an accessible and inclusive visit experience for blind and partially sighted people is a long process. The plurality and diversity of their motivations cannot be addressed with a tokenistic approach of short-term quick fixes. Museums should ensure that communications provided to blind and partially sighted visitors are accurate, constantly updated and consistent with what is offered to them once they enter the space. This is crucial to help visitors refine their expectations and develop their motivations. Additionally, developing resources that directly respond to blind and partially sighted visitors' motivations and expectations (for instance, tactile resources, audio descriptive content, and navigation tools) is crucial to offer an empowering and inclusive experience. These recommendations clearly show that considering blind and partially sighted people's needs and input at all stages of exhibition developments should become part of how the whole museum operates.

The initial discussion on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the expectations of blind and partially sighted visitors helps identify and address their needs and concerns in the post-pandemic museum. However, looking forward, it is necessary to perform a deeper analysis of how the pandemic affects the motivation and expectations of blind and partially sighted visitors to offer accessible, empowering, and inclusive museums experiences.

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