

# Inclusive Customer Journey in Museums: Enhancing the Museum Visitor Experience for Generation Z individuals with Specific Learning Disorders<sup>1</sup>

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## *Inclusive Customer Journey in Museums: Enhancing the Museum Visitor Experience for Generation Z individuals with Specific Learning Disorders*

Despite their significance as institutions of cultural preservation and education, many museums remain inaccessible to individuals with specific learning disorders (SpLDs), particularly Gen Z, who may face challenges in processing visual cues. This study explores the barriers that Gen Z individuals with SpLDs encounter in art museums. Through semi-structured interviews and eye-tracking studies, the research identifies key pain points. The article outlines barriers in museums, highlighting Gen Z's perceptions and experiences. It features a case study of visitor journeys during an exhibition at Gočár Gallery in Pardubice, Czechia, offering recommendations for fostering a more inclusive and enriching museum experience.

Keywords: audience, specific learning disorders, Gen Z, museum, accessibility

## Introduction

Museums have long been bastions of cultural heritage, preserving and showcasing the wonders of the past. However, in today's digital age, where information and entertainment abound, museums face the challenge of evolving their engagement strategies to remain relevant. This challenge is further emphasised by the changing demographics of their audiences, highlighting the need to cater to diverse visitor needs.

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Historically, museums transitioned from elitist institutions to spaces for public education and aesthetic appreciation.<sup>2</sup> However, achieving true inclusivity remains a challenge, as highlighted by sociological perspectives. Bourdieu's work on art galleries exposed the unequal distribution of cultural capital, revealing how museums can inadvertently perpetuate social and cultural divisions.<sup>3</sup> Language barriers, feelings of exclusion and physical or non-physical accessibility issues all contribute to hindering engagement across various demographics.<sup>4</sup>

This article specifically addresses the gap in inclusive practices for individuals with specific learning disorders (SpLDs), particularly Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012) visitors who may face difficulties processing visual information in art museums. By exploring the barriers faced by this group, the study aims to identify pain points (something that causes inconvenience, dissatisfaction, or difficulty) that hinder inclusive experiences during the visitor journey through the exhibition *Nový pokus o maximální přiblížení KE 3171 O 96 | Interpretace zřetězení* by Gočár Gallery in Pardubice, Czech Republic. These barriers can also be interpreted through the lens of the “contextual model of learning”, developed by Falk and Dierking,<sup>5</sup> who argue that museum learning emerges from the interaction between personal, sociocultural and physical contexts. Elements such as sensory overload, unclear spatial orientation or overly complex text panels disrupt the physical context of learning and disproportionately affect visitors with SpLDs. More broadly, Black emphasises that truly inclusive museums must intentionally design for diverse audience needs and remove barriers that prevent full engagement.<sup>6</sup> The findings of this study confirm that the general principles of audience-centred museum practice – clarity, wayfinding and accessibility – require even greater attention when addressing the needs of Gen Z visitors with SpLDs. Based on this research, the authors propose a comprehensive model for an inclusive customer journey, emphasising the need to adapt visual communication strategies for visitors with SpLDs. By implementing these recommendations, museums can create a more welcoming environment and ensure a positive experience for all visitors, including Gen Z with SpLDs.

### Social model of disability

In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in understanding disability from the perspective of a medical model to a social model. The social model of disability posits that disability is not solely an individual's impairment but rather a result of societal barriers and attitudes that limit the full participation and inclusion of individuals with disabilities.<sup>7</sup> This model emphasises the importance of removing barriers and creating environments that accommodate diverse needs,

<sup>2</sup> KOTTOVÁ, Karina. *Instituce a divák*. Praha: Display, 2019, p. ??.

<sup>3</sup> BOURDIEU, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p. ??.

<sup>4</sup> GEA, Miguel; ALAMAN, Xavier; RODRÍGUEZ, Pilar; MARTINEZ, Vicente. TOWARDS SMART & INCLUSIVE SOCIETY: BUILDING 3D IMMERSIVE MUSEUM BY CHILDREN WITH COGNITIVE DISABILITIES. In: *EDULEARN16 Proceedings*, 2016, pp. 5260–5268; MULLENS, Francisca; GLORIEUX, Ignace. No interest, no time! Gendered constraints to museum visits in Flanders. In: *Loisir et Société / Society and Leisure*, 42, 2018, No. 2, pp. 244–265.

<sup>5</sup> FALK, John H. and DIERKING, Lynn D. (2013). *The Museum Experience Revisited*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press. ISBN 978-1611320458.

<sup>6</sup> BLACK, Graham (2020). *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement*. London: Routledge. ISBN 978-1138646311.

<sup>7</sup> OLIVER, Mike. The Social Model of Disability: Thirty Years On. In: *Disability & Society*, 28(11), 2013, pp. 1024–1026.

thereby enabling individuals with disabilities to fully engage in society. Museums play a vital role in shaping cultural narratives and identities, and their accessibility practices can either reinforce or challenge societal perceptions of disability.<sup>8</sup> This aligns with constructivist interpretations of museum learning, as described by Hooper-Greenhill<sup>9</sup> and Hein<sup>10</sup>, who stress that meaning-making in the museum is dependent on accessible interpretive structures. For visitors with SpLDs, high cognitive load, dense texts or insufficiently structured environments can severely hinder the learning process, reinforcing the need for multimodal and inclusive communication.

## Regional approaches to accessibility

### The United States

In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act establish clear mandates for accessibility in museums, ensuring that individuals with disabilities have equal access to programs and facilities. Additionally, accreditation standards set by organisations such as the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) incentivise museums to prioritise inclusivity. The ADA's influence has spurred significant improvements, including physical modifications and targeted programmes. Beyond legal mandates, the concept of universal design, which emphasises designing exhibits to be usable by everyone, is gaining traction in US museums, benefiting all visitors. Examples include the Metropolitan Museum of Art<sup>11</sup> and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum's<sup>12</sup> accessible tours.

### Europe

While Europe lacks a single comprehensive piece of legislation specifically targeting museum accessibility, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the European Disability Strategy provide overarching frameworks that influence accessibility measures. Various directives and national legislations within the European Union, coupled with cultural conventions, encourage museums to prioritise inclusivity.

The UK's Museums Change Lives initiative highlights the transformative potential of museums in promoting social justice and inclusion.<sup>13</sup> Sweden emphasises universal design principles and tailored programming for diverse audiences.<sup>14</sup>

## Challenges in the Czech Republic

Despite these exemplary models, the Czech Republic lags behind in fostering inclusive museum practices. Our research (2023–2024) indicates that while Czech museums recognise

<sup>8</sup> SANDELL, Richard and NIGHTINGALE, Eithne (eds.). *Museums, Equality, and Social Justice*. New York: Routledge, 2012, p. ??.

<sup>9</sup> HOOPER-GREENHILL, Eilean (2007). *Museum and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*. London: Routledge. ISBN 978-0415353861.

<sup>10</sup> HEIN, George E. (1998). *Learning in the Museum*. London: Routledge. ISBN 978-0415093859.

<sup>11</sup> LACHHMAN-PERSAD, Lakshmee. *Accessible Guide to the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York City Tourism, 2023. <https://www.nyctourism.com/articles/accessible-guide-to-the-met/>.

<sup>12</sup> ZEIRA, Ellysheva. *Accessibility at the Tenement Museum*. Tenement Museum. <https://www.tenement.org/blog/accessibility-at-the-tenement-museum/>.

<sup>13</sup> *Museums Change Lives – Campaigns*. Museums Association. <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/museums-change-lives/>.

<sup>14</sup> ERDTMAN, Emil, RASSMUS-GRÖHN, Kirsten and HEDVALL, Per-Olof. Universal Design as Guiding, Striving and Unifying: A Qualitative Study about how Universal Design is Understood, Practised and Realised in Contemporary Sweden. In: *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 23, 2021 pp. 158–168.

the importance of inclusivity, there is a significant gap in implementing concrete measures due to limited resources and support. Despite efforts to foster inclusive practices, museums and galleries in the Czech Republic, including university galleries, face significant challenges.<sup>15</sup> While there is a growing recognition of the importance of accessibility and social justice, the implementation of concrete measures is hindered by limited resources and support.

### Specific needs of Generation Z with SpLDs

Understanding the specific needs<sup>16</sup> of Generation Z regarding visual information processing within museums requires a nuanced approach that considers both the characteristics of this demographic cohort and the challenges faced by individuals with learning disorders. Gen Z, often characterised as “digital natives”, possesses a high degree of visual literacy and Gen Z individuals are typically accustomed to processing information rapidly through digital platforms. However, individuals with learning disorders, such as dyslexia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, may face additional challenges in processing visual information. Incorporating universal design principles, such as offering multiple entry points and providing alternative formats for information presentation, can ensure that museums are accessible to individuals with diverse learning needs.

### The Museum Without Barriers initiative

Our exploratory research consisted of 12 interviews with museum representatives was conducted in 2023. It revealed that none of the interviewed institutions had specific programs for people with SpLDs and/or for the target group of Generation Z. In response to this, we developed the Museum Without Barriers project. This initiative aims to bridge the gap for visitors with SpLDs by exploring the specific challenges faced by this audience and detailing the project’s framework, drawing on insights from the field of SpLDs and best practices in museum accessibility.

### Using a design approach to creating visitor experiences

The current design approach in many service industries emphasises customer experience as a means to achieve competitive advantage.<sup>17</sup> Studies focused on designing/creating customer experiences point to the fact that organisations are unable to offer customer experiences directly. Rather, their role is to “create or stage the prerequisites that enable customers to have the desired experiences.”<sup>18</sup> This is no different in galleries and museums. Service providers design and implement incentives aimed at target customers within the process of service delivery as well as communication, while customers gain value and benefits through their interactions with

<sup>15</sup> GARTNEROVÁ, Eva. Typology and Audience Engagement of University Galleries. In: *Muzeológia a kultúrne dedičstvo*, 9(1), 2021, pp. 119–134.

<sup>16</sup> In this paper, the term “specific needs” is used as a broader umbrella category referring to students who require particular forms of educational or access-related support. This includes, for example, students with visual impairments, hearing impairments, or other physical or sensory needs. The term SpLDs (specific learning difficulties) is used in a narrower sense and refers exclusively to diagnosed learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthographia or dyscalculia.

<sup>17</sup> VOSS, Chris, ROTH, Aleda V. and CHASE, Richard B. Experience, Service Operations Strategy, and Services as Destinations: Foundations and Exploratory Investigation. In: *Production and Operations Management*, 17(3), 2008, pp. 247–266.

<sup>18</sup> ZOMERDIJK, Leonieke and VOSS, Chris. Service Design for Experience-Centric Services. In: *Journal of Service Research*, 13(1), 2010, pp. 67–82.

the tangible and intangible aspects of these elements.<sup>19</sup>

The customer journey model has its origins in the ideas of service blueprint and customer experience mapping, as described by Shostack<sup>20</sup> and other authors.<sup>21</sup> The customer journey starts before the visit. As the available literature<sup>22</sup> suggests, the prospective phase includes the process of information searching, decision making and ticket purchase. In the second active phase, the customer is present on site and experiences interactions with the layout, the content itself and the overall environment of the gallery or museum. This phase has the most intense impact on the customer experience, and the overall impression (value to the customer) is co-created through their participation and engagement.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the reflective phase involves evaluation, recalling the experience, satisfying expectations and recounting memories (e.g., by recommending the experience to others). Researchers argue that all three phases must be properly managed and oriented towards the target customer.<sup>24</sup>

In summary, the customer journey model involves monitoring and optimising expectations, the visitor's arrival at the exhibition, the exhibition itself, reflection, and the recollection and sharing of experiences.<sup>25</sup> Outside of the commercial sphere, this model has been applied in several studies in different settings, such as:

- in the context of experiential service innovation in general<sup>26</sup> and in a specific case where insights into customer attitudes towards responsible tourist experiences were analysed;<sup>27</sup>
- to verify the influence of smart technologies on customer journey in tourist attractions;<sup>28</sup> and
- in the context of learning from customers<sup>29</sup> or in the context of creating customer value.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>19</sup> ROTH, Aleda and MENOR, Larry. Insights into service operations management: a research agenda. In: *Production & Operations Management*, vol. 12, 2003, No. 2, pp. 145–164; LEMKE, Fred; CLARK, Moira; WILSON, Hugh. Customer Experience Quality: An Exploration in Business and Consumer Contexts Using Repertory Grid Technique. In: *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 39, 2011, pp. 846–869.

<sup>20</sup> SHOSTACK, G. Lynn. Designing services that deliver. In: *Harvard Business Review*, 62, 1984, pp. 133–139.

<sup>21</sup> BITNER, Mary Jo. Managing the Evidence of Service. In: *The Service Quality Handbook*. New York: AMACOM, 1993, pp. 358–370; SHAW, Colin and IVENS, John. *Building Great Customer Experiences*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> MALONE, Sheila, MCKECHNIE, Sally and TYNAN, Caroline. Tourists' Emotions as a Resource for Customer Value Creation, Co-Creation and Destruction: A Customer-Grounded Understanding. In: *Journal of Travel Research*, 57(7), 2017, pp. 843–855; BUHALIS, Dimitrios and SINARTA, Yeyen. Real-Time Co-Creation and Nowness Service: Lessons from Tourism and Hospitality. In: *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 36(5), 2019, pp. 563–82.

<sup>23</sup> YACHIN, Jonathan M. The 'customer journey': Learning from customers in tourism experience encounters. In: *Tourism Management Perspectives*, vol. 28, 2018, pp. 201–210; BUONINCONTRI, Piera; MICERA, Roberto. The experience co-creation in smart tourism destinations: a multiple case analysis of European destinations. In: *Information Technology & Tourism*, 16(3), 2016, pp. 285–315.

<sup>24</sup> SHAW, *Building Great ...* p. ??.

<sup>25</sup> DAVIS, Scott M. and DUNN, Michael. *Building the Brand-Driven Business: Operationalize Your Brand to Drive Profitable Growth*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002, p. ??.

<sup>26</sup> VOSS, Chris and ZOMERDIJK, Leonieke. Innovation in Experiential Services – An Empirical View. In: *Innovation in Services*. London: DTI, 2007, pp. 97–134.

<sup>27</sup> INGRAM, Claire, CARUANA, Robert and MCCABE, Scott. Participative inquiry for tourist experience. In: *Annals of Tourism Research*, 65, 2017, pp. 13–24.

<sup>28</sup> SHEN, Shiwei, SOTIRIADIS, Marios and ZHANG, Yuwen. The Influence of Smart Technologies on Customer Journey in Tourist Attractions within the Smart Tourism Management Framework. In: *Sustainability*, 12(10), 2020, pp. 1–18.

<sup>29</sup> YACHIN, The 'customer ...' pp. 285–315.

<sup>30</sup> MALONE, Tourists' Emotions ... pp. 843–855.

Other studies have focused on applying the customer journey model to cultural products and services. Rawson et al. argue that “research on the customer experience should move from a touchpoint to a journey orientation.”<sup>31</sup> Other available studies in cultural settings fail to provide a thorough understanding of how customers treat multiple touchpoints in a service system and how they build their journeys.<sup>32</sup> This is confirmed by Goulding,<sup>33</sup> who focuses on the issue of orientation and navigation in museums. She stresses the importance of directing customers and referring them to key exhibits, for example by using maps and signage, so that visitors do not feel disoriented or confused. As Addis et al.’s research<sup>34</sup> suggests, “museums should:

- emphasise the social dimension of the visitor experience,
- enrich their offerings by presenting various short and thematic experiences,
- track individual visitors to gain a comprehensive understanding of their multidimensional reactions;
- aim at making the museum visit easy and user-friendly.”

Some prominent museums have attempted to explore and profile the customer journey, such as the Van Gogh Museum<sup>35</sup> and the Smithsonian Museum.<sup>36</sup> However, none have done so from the perspective of specific groups.

Many software tools have been developed to provide a graphic representation of the customer journey.<sup>37</sup> We can also find a range of methodological approaches to the design of the customer journey itself. The more detailed ones, for example, not only map the experience that the customer has but also articulate what the service provider would like the visitor to experience.<sup>38</sup> For example, they use other design thinking tools, such as empathy mapping.<sup>39</sup> A finished map provides insights into customers’ actions, processes, goals, needs, channels, emotions and many other aspects shaping the customer experience.<sup>40</sup>

As the abovementioned studies suggest, gallery management should choose relevant research methods and procedures to capture the key touchpoints, barriers and opportunities that can make the customer experience more enjoyable for more educated Gen Z individuals with specific learning disorders (SpLDs), as we can see a significant growth in the size of this group, as evidenced by the internal statistics on the number of students with specific needs in Tab. 1.

<sup>31</sup> RAWSON, Alex; DUNCAN, Ewan and JONES, Conor. The Truth About Customer Experience. In: *Harvard Business Review*, 91, 2013, pp. 1–10.

<sup>32</sup> MINKIEWICZ, Joanna, EVANS, Jody and BRIDSON, Kerrie. How do consumers co-create their experiences? An exploration in the heritage sector. In: *Journal of Marketing Management*, 30(12), 2014, pp. 30–59.

<sup>33</sup> GOULDING, Christina. The museum environment and the visitor experience. In: *European Journal of Marketing*, 34(3/4), 2000, pp. 261–278.

<sup>34</sup> ADDIS, Michela, COPAT, Valentina and MARTORANA, Cecilia. Museum experience and its impact on visitor reactions. In: *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing*, 29(1), 2023, pp. 1–13.

<sup>35</sup> See <https://blog.museunacional.cat/wp-content/uploads/Van-Gogh-Museum.jpg>

<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.customerbliss.com/podcasts/smithsonian-built-journey-map-samir-bitar-cb4/>.

<sup>37</sup> An overview of popular tools can be found at <https://mopinion.com/top-20-customer-journey-mapping-tools-an-overview/>.

<sup>38</sup> See <https://www.behance.net/gallery/65685241/User-Experience-Map>.

<sup>39</sup> DAM, Rikke Friis and TEO, Yu Siang. *Empathy Map – Why and How to Use It*. Interaction Design Foundation – IxDF, 2024. <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/empathy-map-why-and-how-to-use-it>.

<sup>40</sup> MCCAY, Arthur. *How to Create a Customer Journey Map — Guide + Examples*. UXPressia Blog, 2024. <https://uxpressia.com/blog/customer-journey-map-guide-examples>.

## Methodology

With this in mind, the main objective of this study is to identify and analyse the content, communication and orientation touchpoints that influence (and barriers that limit) the customer experience of people with SpLDs and, based on these findings, design the visitor journey of the target group, that is, the pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages.

Sixteen university students were chosen as the subjects for this study. Students were divided into two groups: a target group of ten students with SpLDs and a control group of five students without SpLDs. The first group consisted of students or recent graduates who, based on a screening questionnaire,<sup>41</sup> reported signs of specific learning disorders, in particular dyslexia and dysgraphia. The screening questionnaire is based on the principle of self-assessment scales and can be used when considering indications for diagnosis. We decided to focus on students with SpLDs due to the substantial growth in both the absolute number and proportion of the student population registering as having specific needs at Tomas Bata University, as shown in Table 1.

Academic Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Total number of students with specific need at TBU</b>	10	35	46	60	74	100	134	162	183
<b>Number of students with SpLD at TBU</b>	1	13	23	17	44	69	79	101	114
<b>v %</b>	<b>10,00%</b>	<b>37,14%</b>	<b>50,00%</b>	<b>28,33%</b>	<b>59,46%</b>	<b>69,00%</b>	<b>58,96%</b>	<b>62,35%</b>	<b>62,30%</b>

**Tab. 1:** Number of students with specific needs and SpLDs at Tomas Bata University in Zlin<sup>42</sup>

As Table 1 shows, the number of students with specific needs enrolled at Tomas Bata University in Zlin has increased almost 20-fold in eight years, with the proportion of people with SpLDs within the student body growing from 10% to 60%. A similar trend is being reported on the national scale, as statistics provided by the Ministry of Education show: in 2012, 854 students with specific needs were reported to be studying at Czech universities (representing 0.28% of all students), while in 2020 the number had grown to 2,916 (1.1% of all students). Within this 1.1%, the largest group is students with specific learning disorders (43%).<sup>43</sup>

The following research question was posited: *What barriers and limitations can negatively affect visitor experience at an exhibition and, conversely, what touchpoints contribute positively to visitor experience among members of Generation Z who report having a specific learning disorder?* For this study, a combination of qualitative research (individual interviews) and observation using eye-tracking glasses Tobii Pro Glasses 2 was employed. Subsequent analysis of the captured footage was conducted using Tobii Pro Lab software.

A total of 16 students or recent graduates participated in the survey. Two identified as male and fourteen identified as female. Before the start, all participants were asked to take a screening

<sup>41</sup> Available at <https://www.teiresias.muni.cz/dytest/>.

<sup>42</sup> *Výroční zprávy*. UTB. <https://www.utb.cz/univerzita/uredni-deska/ruzne/vyrocní-zpravy/>.

<sup>43</sup> KUCHARSKÁ, Anna et al. *Studující se specifickými potřebami na vysokých školách*. CRP rozcestník. <https://rdvs.cz/article/129>.

questionnaire aimed at assessing their perceived specific learning disorders. Participants were then labelled as follows:

- D – diagnosis (1 participant);
- S – self-assessment (4 participants);
- D+S – both diagnosis and self-assessment (5 participants);
- N – no specific learning disorders reported or diagnosed (6 participants).

The first part of the survey focused on testing the digital communication tools of the selected gallery and its exhibition (website and Instagram profile). Eye-tracking glasses were already being employed at this stage. Subsequently, each participant visited the exhibition and their behaviour was observed, especially in relation to a series of checkpoints, which are described further below. The last part of the survey was an interview that assessed each participant's experiences after the visit, including perceived barriers and the positive elements of the exhibition layout. Data from the eye-tracking survey carried out during the exhibition visit and takeaways from the follow-up interviews were used to shed light on the barriers to the visitor journey.

Due to a technical error, the eye-tracking data of Participant 13 (D+S) were corrupted and had to be excluded from the results. The eye-tracking data of Participants 7 (N), 12 (D+S), and 15 (D) were partially corrupted and may yield only limited results.

The survey was conducted in House U Jonáše of Gočár Gallery in Pardubice, Czech Republic, during an exhibition entitled *Nový pokus o maximální přiblížení KE 3171 O 96 | Interpretace zútlíš.* The layout of the exhibition, including all the different elements that were observed as part of the survey, is shown in Figure 1.

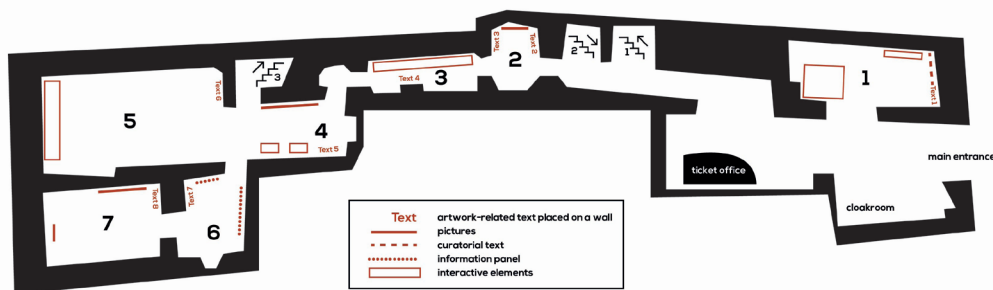


Fig. 1: *Exhibition layout.* Source: own work.

## Results

The results of the survey reported in this study are arranged in chronological order based on how participants experienced the exhibition, followed by an analysis of post-visit interviews. Key touchpoints evaluated throughout the journey are highlighted in bold.

### Entrance hall

Upon entering, participants headed to the ticket counter to purchase a ticket. The ticket counter offered *brochures* related to the different exhibitions taking place in the gallery. Some of the participants (4 individuals: 1 D, 1 S, 1 D+S, 1 N) only skimmed through the brochure, while others engaged in more detailed reading. Just under half the participants (7 individuals: 1 D, 1

S, 4 D+S, 1 N) used the brochure as a navigation guide. Among participants with a potential SpLD, there were differences in how the brochure was approached. Some focused on reading the texts, while others used the brochure primarily as a *map*.

### Room 1

The main focal point of the room was an elevated drawing board more than 2 m<sup>2</sup> in size with a sheet of paper rolled out onto it. A large pencil about 2 m long suspended from the ceiling was propped up against it. In Text 1, visitors were invited to draw their own still life on the drawing board. A characteristic of Room 1 is that it had *a lot of visual and auditory distractors*, which had a negative effect on participants' ability to focus on the different elements of the exhibition. As the eye-tracking analysis confirmed, most participants simply skipped the initial *curatorial text*. All participants, despite having been provided with detailed instructions, seemed to encounter *orientation difficulties* when moving between Room 1 and Room 2.

### Rooms 2 and 3

The footage showed that five of the six participants in the control group exhibited predictive eye movements in Room 3, with participants moving through the series of paintings and systematically fixing their eyes on the *taptic elements* (elements of the exhibition intended to be touched or interacted with), suggesting systematic viewing of the images. Participants with a potential or diagnosed SpLD (4 S, 4 D+S) demonstrated a preference for visual over textual elements.

### Rooms 4 and 5

All participants paid considerable attention to Text 5, as evidenced by the high completion rate. Its content, inviting visitors to interact with the video recording and watch the black and white reproduction of the image, effectively directed visitors' attention to the key elements of the exhibition in Room 4. Wall texts placed in these transition zones were more likely to be noticed.

Conversely, Texts 1 and 6 were read the least. Text 6 was completely overlooked by four participants (4 N), and one participant (1 N) interacted with it only after being alerted by the *gallery attendant*. Insufficient *lighting* of the panel or its location in a darker area led to it being completely overlooked by many visitors. This could suggest that participants with a potential or diagnosed SpLD pay more attention to exploring the space around them.

The placement of the *interactive word cloud* on the back wall of Room 5 may have acted as a visual anchor that drew participants' attention away from the transition between Rooms 4 and 5. However, the lack of an explicit invitation to interact led to some participants (5, of whom 1 D, 2 D+S, 2 N) engaging with it only on a surface level. Text 5 successfully elicited initial interest in the *audio recording* for most participants (14 of 15, with 1 N showing no interaction). However, the way in which participants interacted varied considerably. The majority (14 of 15) of participants focused on the *dynamic element*, i.e. the video, which is consistent with the general expectation that *audio tracks are closely associated with moving images*.

### Room 6

The overall conclusions on panel placement and readability in Room 6 can be summarised in the following points:

- *Avoiding texts:* Participants most frequently avoided the longest paragraph in the middle of the panel and the paragraphs in the top right corner.
- *Effect of placement:* The location of the text had a significant effect on whether it was read. Paragraphs following each other and the paragraph below the heading were read more often.

As for the difference between participants with SpLDs and the control group, the following can be inferred:

- *Length of interaction:* 5 of 15 participants spent more than the average time at the panels (almost 7 minutes, with the average being less than 5 minutes) and interacted with them more intensively. Four-fifths of participants (12 of 15) spent the longest or second longest time on these panels compared to other elements of the exhibition.
- *Reading Patterns:* Most participants, regardless of which group they belonged to, showed similar tendencies to avoid certain types of paragraphs, but some participants with SpLDs (4 D+S) had a stronger tendency to skip entire paragraphs.
- *Effect on reading:* The written over a background picture was read significantly less often by participants belonging to subgroups D+S, D, and S.

## Room 7

Participants spent significantly less time in the last room than in the other exhibition spaces. This may have been due to several factors, such as fatigue, the order of the tour, or the nature of the exhibits. After noticing Text 8, not all participants read it. Of the total, only 3 (1 S, 1 D+S, 1 N) continued on to the images without detailed interaction with the text.

## Partial Findings from the Eye-Tracking Survey

The *ticket office attendant* and *gallery attendant* provided a crucial throughline of the visitor experience, guiding visitors through the exhibition. Participants with dyslexia showed increased interaction with the provided brochure. The higher rate of interaction with printed materials may be understood as a need to focus more intensively on text comprehension.

The *level of visitor interaction with the exhibit descriptions* varied significantly depending on their location and graphic design. The data point to a major *influence of location, lighting, and graphic design* of the labels on their effectiveness and suggest that participants tend to pay more attention to information associated with distinctive or contextually important exhibits.

Table 2 provides an overview of how visitors interacted with the visual environment. The data collected allow us to interpret visitor preferences. As the data show, the most notable elements of the exhibition were the audio track (24%) and the text on the information panels (21%), while only 12% of the visitors' attention was directed to the paintings themselves.

**Tab. 2:** Eye-tracking data showing frequency of interaction with the visual environment. Source: own work.

D	Textual Content				Exhibition Content				Total		Total (s)
	Texts	Labels	Brochure	Info Panels	Paintings	Television	Audio	Interactive	Textual	Exhibitor	
15*	15,00%	0,71%	0,35%	29,79%	14,44%	0,00%	33,83%	5,87%	45,86%	54,14%	1615
<b>Average (D)</b>	15,00%	0,71%	0,35%	29,79%	14,44%	0,00%	33,83%	5,87%	45,86%	54,14%	1615
<b>S</b>											
8	19,78%	0,71%	0,41%	16,73%	14,71%	29,11%	5,27%	13,29%	37,63%	62,37%	1210
9	13,01%	0,92%	11,75%	8,98%	12,09%	24,77%	23,01%	5,46%	34,68%	65,32%	1069
14	13,79%	0,76%	15,56%	18,53%	13,54%	12,02%	19,73%	6,07%	48,64%	51,36%	2034
16	31,72%	2,04%	1,61%	18,28%	10,00%	1,61%	25,91%	8,82%	53,66%	46,34%	1179
<b>Average (S)</b>	19,58%	1,11%	7,33%	15,63%	12,59%	16,88%	18,48%	8,41%	43,65%	56,35%	1373
<b>D+S</b>											
2	12,35%	1,13%	8,01%	10,37%	19,42%	2,17%	44,30%	2,26%	31,86%	68,14%	1171
4	15,10%	1,18%	1,18%	28,73%	11,08%	7,75%	10,49%	24,51%	46,18%	53,82%	1738
10	9,56%	1,23%	1,96%	24,51%	9,13%	19,73%	28,74%	5,15%	37,25%	62,75%	1915
12*	15,55%	0,26%	1,94%	29,81%	6,71%	4,06%	30,19%	11,48%	47,55%	52,45%	2050
<b>Average (D+S)</b>	13,14%	0,95%	3,27%	23,36%	11,59%	8,43%	28,43%	10,85%	40,71%	59,29%	1719
<b>Average (D, S, D+S)</b>	16,21%	0,99%	4,75%	20,64%	12,35%	11,25%	24,61%	9,21%	42,59%	57,41%	1553
<b>N</b>											
1	15,09%	0,18%	6,55%	15,09%	5,18%	18,82%	32,64%	6,45%	36,91%	63,09%	1285
3	21,10%	2,12%	4,25%	33,85%	17,14%	18,27%	1,56%	1,70%	61,33%	38,67%	957
5	7,10%	1,17%	1,89%	20,98%	9,97%	26,32%	20,85%	11,73%	31,14%	68,86%	1746
6	18,52%	1,93%	1,39%	34,57%	13,19%	6,17%	15,43%	8,80%	56,40%	43,60%	2123
7*	13,84%	1,36%	14,91%	0,00%	13,07%	1,16%	45,40%	10,26%	30,11%	69,89%	1352
11	9,29%	0,78%	0,26%	31,07%	15,11%	16,35%	23,54%	3,60%	41,40%	58,60%	1799
<b>Average (N)</b>	14,16%	1,26%	4,88%	22,59%	12,28%	14,52%	23,24%	7,09%	42,88%	57,12%	1544
<b>Total Average</b>	15,39%	1,10%	4,80%	21,42%	12,32%	12,55%	24,06%	8,36%	42,71%	57,29%	1550

### Post-visit phase (interviews)

The post-visit phase focused on evaluating visitors' experiences with the interactive exhibition. All 16 participants were interviewed. The main aim of this phase of the research was to explore visitors' perceptions of different aspects of the exhibition, including orientation in the space, use of informational resources, and the extent of their interaction with multimedia and haptic elements.

### Pre-visit, general orientation

All participants reported that the behaviour of the ticket office attendants at the entrance was very friendly. They were offered a brochure with information about the exhibition and a

map. Readers of the brochure were more likely to be those who did not show any signs of SpLDs (7, of whom 4 N, 1 S, 1 D, 1 D+S). In cases where the participants reported that they experienced difficulties with orientation (6, of whom 4 D+S, 2 N), the problems were mainly in the first part of the exhibition.

### Textual content

None of the visitors read the entire introductory curatorial text for the exhibition. The golden colour of the typeface, combined with the angle of the lighting, reportedly made it difficult to read. It was also noted that the video playing in the vicinity of the main text was distracting to respondents, as they preferred to focus on it rather than the introductory curatorial text. One distinct problem that emerged in interviews was the placement of the labels. People reported that they had to bend down to get a good view of the smaller texts, as they were placed below the paintings or even in places where participants missed them (5, of whom 1 S, 2 D+S, 2 N). Some works had labels that also provided instructions for their interactive elements, which was a problem for several participants who did not read the instructions and thus did not interact (6, of whom 1 D, 2 D+S, 3 N).

The textual content of the exhibition appears to have generated barriers that many research participants were not able to overcome. The length, structure and placement of the texts, as well as the lighting of the panels, were all aspects participants found problematic when approaching the large text panels in Room 6. As a result, in many cases participants did not pay attention to them, meaning they did not read some texts fully or at all (6, of whom 2 S, 2 D+S, 2 N).

### Video content

Room 1 featured a video playing basic information about the exhibition. Some participants, specifically Participants 1 (N) and 14 (S), appreciated the pleasant voice used for the voiceover. On the other hand, some felt that the content of the video was not new to the participants, reducing its usefulness. While most participants welcomed videos as a pleasant addition, no such consensus was reached for audio recordings. As for the use of audio guides, the general consensus was that they would not take advantage of this option. Respondents felt that the listening would affect the pace of their visit and as a result they would pay more attention to the audio than to the artwork (7, of whom 1 D, 3 D+S, 2 N).

### Interactive elements

The use of interactive and sensory elements was welcomed by many participants (12, of whom 3 S, 3 D+S, 6 N). Apart from vision, participants said they would also not be opposed to auditory stimulation, smell or touch. The involvement of each sense would depend on the particular use, the artwork in question, and the space in which it was used. Visitors without a diagnosis undoubtedly benefited from engaging with the interactive elements, and the same was true for most visitors with SpLDs, but not for all.

### Overall impression and recommendations

The overall impression of the exhibition was positive among the research participants. The concept, content, interactivity, and length of exhibition were all rated positively, alongside its overall structure (numbering), high educational value and interactivity.

Overall recommendations for improving the exhibition included solving the aforementioned issues with the audio recording by adjusting its length or turning it into a podcast for listening at home. In relation to the wording of the labels, which included instructions for the interactive elements that ended up being missed by many participants, it would certainly be preferable to use headings and more colour in the text panels to differentiate the different phases of the exhibition.

## Discussion of results – comparison of participants with and without SpLDs

The information brochure was found to be useful by all participants. Participants with SpLDs made good use of the exhibition map, which made it easier for them to find their way around. Participants without a diagnosed SpLD did not find the map very useful for orientation. Only a small portion of visitors read the text in the exhibition brochures (or did so at home).

Only one-third of the participants in the eye-tracking survey expressed interest in the information displayed on the screen above the ticket counter. It can therefore be deduced that it might be worth considering modifying the design, content or location of the screen to make it more engaging and usable for visitors.

The interviews revealed that no participants read the entire curatorial text because of the quantity. Regardless of the type of participant, long curatorial text is inappropriate and in this case was poorly lit. This, combined with the colour of the typeface, made the text difficult to read. The length and amount of text was also rated negatively by all participants in the case of the large information panel in Room 6. The labels and texts related to the paintings were rated positively by participants; however, their placement was rated negatively, regardless of the type of participant.

The use of audio guides is a point of contention for both groups, but more so for those with SpLDs. It may be that the use of multiple senses at once causes sensory overload in visitors with a learning disorder. Based on the eye-tracking data, it cannot be conclusively stated that there is a link between the length of time spent watching the video and having a SpLD, particularly dyslexia. To avoid distracting visitors from other elements of the exhibition in the vicinity of the screen, the way the video is displayed and played needs to be adapted.

Participants generally evaluated length, concept, structure, and content of the exhibition positively, as well as its degree of interactivity and educational benefits. However, some perceived the exhibition space negatively. Almost all participants with dyslexia or SpLDs interacted with the haptic elements. Our research findings are consistent with those reported by other authors. For example, according to Šobáňová,<sup>44</sup> interactive elements in exhibitions increase visitor engagement, allowing for active exploration, manipulation of exhibits, content choices, and experimental activities, which enhance the quality and significance of the visit. Conversely, more than half the participants with no SpLD diagnoses or self-assessment did not touch the haptic elements at all.

The results of the eye-tracking survey further revealed that visitors often adjusted their reading strategies according to their own preferences and interest in specific parts of the text, or did not feel sufficiently oriented in the space. Similar behaviour is confirmed in a study by J. Falk, who found that the quality of exhibitions, interaction with exhibits and educational strategies (e.g., thematic arrangement, clear informational texts) are important and that

<sup>44</sup> ŠOBÁŇOVÁ, Petra (2014). *Muzejní expozice jako edukační médium* (1st ed.). Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci. ISBN 978-80-244-4302-7.

personalising the experience according to the visitor's needs is an effective way to facilitate the visit and enhance its value.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, the curators of the exhibition studied here should opt for a simpler and more intuitive solution, where visitors continue reading to the right. Whenever a discomfort, barrier or flaw in the exhibition was agreed upon by a large proportion of respondents, those identified as having a SpLD predominated – particularly regarding the orientation and use of the map, and also the pace of the audio guide. For the text panel, surprisingly, it was often the respondents with symptoms of a SpLD (3 S, 2 D+S, 1 N) who had a more positive response. The panel was skipped or misunderstood by almost half of the respondents (1 D, 2 D+S, 5 N).

The limited number of participants may affect the reliability of the data obtained and makes it difficult to interpret the results, especially when it comes to identifying statistically significant differences between groups. Although many of the identified accessibility barriers have been described in previous visitor studies, this research makes a unique contribution by combining eye-tracking analysis with the perspective of Gen Z visitors with SpLDs – a demographic that remains significantly under-researched. The methodological integration of real-time gaze data and post-visit interviews provides new insights into how visual load, spatial navigation and interpretive structures affect this specific audience.

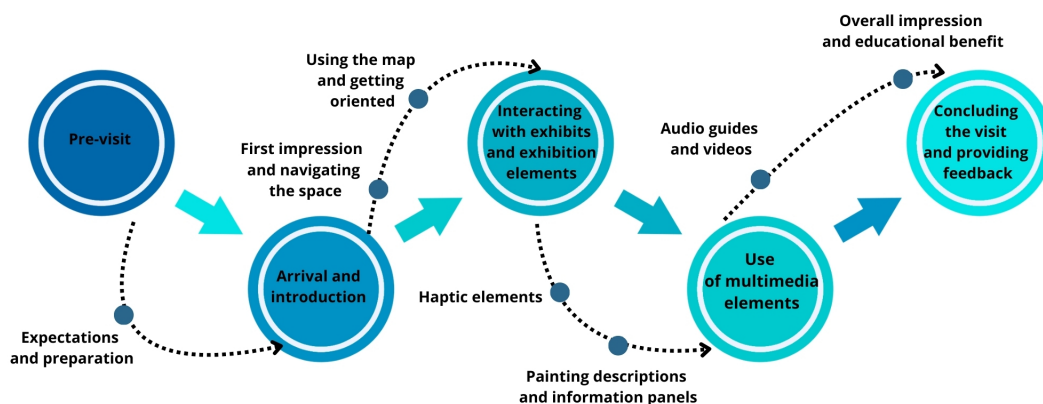
## Conclusion

The results have shown that orientation skills are strongly individual and not directly dependent on a diagnosis of dyslexia or any other specific learning disorder. The information brochure about the exhibition is essential—it serves not only as a source of information but also as an aid to orientation (a map for visitors with SpLDs). The placement and amount of text is crucial, namely in the case of labels for the paintings on display, curatorial text and information panels. Long, poorly arranged or poorly placed and unreadable texts created barriers in the visitor journey for both groups studied. The use of video or audio was evaluated positively, but visitors need to be sufficiently and appropriately informed about viewing/listening instructions and options for adjustment (volume, starting point). Interviews with participants revealed that the inclusion of interactive and haptic elements was welcomed by a large portion of participants with learning disabilities. Participants without a diagnosis all appreciated this option. However, only visitors with a diagnosis of dyslexia actually touched the interactive elements of the exhibition. This difference suggests that participants with SpLDs may prefer tactile sensations and intuitively use haptic cues to deepen their understanding or retention of information, which may be important when designing inclusive exhibition spaces or educational materials for people with specific needs. The results of this research provide valuable insights for future improvements to exhibition spaces and educational elements.

The findings highlight that the customer journey model should reflect the key stages, difficulties and potential pain points, interactions and perception of the exhibition, with a focus on feedback from Generation Z and on the impact of specific learning disorders such as dyslexia.

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<sup>45</sup> FALK, J. H. An identity-centered approach to understanding museum learning. In: *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 49(2), 2006, pp. 151–166



**Fig. 2:** *Customer journey model for the examined exhibition.* Source: own work.

1. Pre-visit:

- Expectations and preparation:
  - Generation Z visitors are used to digital interactions, which can include online invitations, information on social media or interactive apps.
  - For participants with learning disorders, it may be important to have clear and concise information about the exhibition in advance (ideally in an accessible format, such as audiovisual content).

2. Arrival and introduction:

- First impression and navigating the space:
  - This is where issues can first arise, especially for visitors with dyslexia and other learning disorders who had difficulty orienting themselves in space. Long and complicated texts on information panels can confuse them.
  - Visitors often changed their reading strategies based on personal preference or in response to discomfort with orientation. This problem may be more pronounced for visitors with learning disorders.
- Using the map and getting oriented:
  - Visitors with learning disorders had problems with maps and navigation. This suggests that the space and visual aids should be more intuitive and easier to understand.

### 3. Interacting with exhibits and exhibition elements:

- Haptic elements:
  - Haptic interactions were particularly positively rated by participants with dyslexia, who were more likely to touch these elements than participants without learning disorders.
  - This suggests that engaging multiple senses (such as touch) may have a positive effect on this group's perception of the exhibition.
- Descriptive labels for paintings and information panels:
  - While the descriptive labels for paintings were rated positively, the placement of the labels was uncomfortable for visitors, regardless of whether they had learning disorders or not.
  - The lengthy curatorial texts were inappropriate for all exhibition visitors. These texts were poorly lit and difficult to read due to a combination of length, amount of text, and inappropriate typeface colour.

### 4. Use of multimedia elements:

- Audio guides and video:
  - The use of audio guides garnered mixed reactions. Participants with learning disorders, had difficulty multitasking (listening and taking in visual cues at the same time), which led to a greater strain on their attention.
  - Consideration should be given to longer pauses or the option to turn off the audio to allow visitors to take in the exhibition at their own pace.
  - The videos were generally rated positively, but participants recommended that they be shorter and have the option to be restarted.

### 5. Concluding the visit and providing feedback:

- Overall impression and educational benefit:
  - The exhibition was positively evaluated in terms of length, concept, structure, content, and interactivity. The educational benefit was clear, but some visitors found certain parts of the exhibition (e.g. text, navigation) incomprehensible or frustrating.
  - Visitors with learning disabilities rated the tactile and interactive elements positively, but in terms of texts and visual orientation, adjustments would need to be made for better accessibility and user experience.

#### Suggestions for improvement:

- Texts and information:
  - Shorten and simplify curatorial texts, ideally adapting them for different groups of visitors (e.g. in audiovisual format).
  - Provide better lighting of texts and contrast between background and typeface for better readability.
- Navigation:
  - Improve orientation in the exhibition with simpler and more intuitive maps and signage.
- Audiovisual content:
  - Ensure that videos are shorter and allow visitors to adjust the volume and restart playback.
- Interactive and haptic elements:
  - Further develop and emphasise haptic interactions, especially for visitors with learning disorders who make more use of these elements.

Overall, the exhibition resonated well with Generation Z, but several key factors impacted their experience, particularly the accessibility of texts and ease of navigation within the space. Feedback indicates that visitors with learning disorders tend to favour tactile and interactive elements, while traditional textual and audiovisual components could benefit from adaptations to enhance usability and engagement.

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