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Inclusive Museum Management Strategies: An Exploratory Study of Visitor Experiences for People with Disabilities

Halid Hasan[1], Farika Nikmah[2], Ellyn Eka Wahyu[3], Mahmudatul Himma[4]

[1,2,3,4]Department of Business Administration, Politeknik Negeri Malang, Indonesia

Corresponding author: halid.hasan@polinema.ac.id

Abstract

Everyone, including people with disabilities, especially the blind, has the right to visit museums. Museums, as public spaces, provide a variety of information based on their collections. The Brawijaya Museum, located in Malang, East Java, houses a collection of artifacts from the Indonesian Army's struggle. Visitor services at the Brawijaya Museum have not yet implemented inclusive services. Therefore, this study attempts to address several issues, such as the lack of universal design, limited access to information, and inadequate staff skills to provide inclusive services. This explorative study used a qualitative approach. Data were obtained through observations and interviews with museum staff, academics, and blind visitors. The study focused on addressing the issue of limited access to information for visually impaired visitors to enjoy the collection. Therefore, this study proposed a solution: creating braille labels for the collection. This will provide an interactive browsing experience for the blind, while they are passive when information is presented through audio. The experience of browsing with braille will provide a lasting and lasting memory after visiting the Brawijaya Museum. Inclusive services can be implemented gradually; the important thing is that there is an effort to achieve it.

Keywords: Inclusive, disabilities, blind people, explorative study, Brawijaya Museum

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INTRODUCTION

Law Number 8 of 2016 mandates that persons with disabilities are required to receive equal opportunities in all aspects of state and community governance, respect, protection, and fulfillment of the rights of persons with disabilities, including the provision of accessibility and adequate accommodation. Regulations for the implementation and fulfillment of the rights of persons with disabilities aim to realize a higher quality of life for persons with disabilities, which is fair, prosperous physically and mentally, and dignified. The implied meaning of the law is that persons with disabilities are required to receive the same opportunities as other members of society, including in obtaining adequate public services. These include health services, education, access to information, and other equal rights.

For example, for information services, the public can find them in libraries, museums, and other information centers. Museums provide historical information to the public, so it is appropriate that the services provided by museums are inclusive, that is, friendly to vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities. In accordance with Law No. 11 of 2010, a museum is an institution that functions to protect, develop, and utilize collections, in the form of objects, buildings, and/or structures that have been designated as cultural heritage or not, and communicate them to the public. The public here is interpreted as all levels of society, including people with disabilities.

Museums are important for people with disabilities because they are places for contemplation and learning (Raksapati, 2020). The value of museums depends not only on the cultural significance of the objects on display, but also on other factors such as their accessibility and interpretation, including the provision of information through means such as guided tours and audio guides (Dimitrova-Radojichikj, 2017). Therefore, it is crucial for museum managers to find ways for visitors with disabilities to access museum collections (Permana, 2024). An inclusive approach needs to be implemented by considering the needs and attitudes of a broad audience with different ages, interests, skills, expectations, and cognitive and physical abilities. This can be achieved through the principles of universal design, advanced technology, and museum content tailored to the needs of visitors with disabilities. Universal design means that exhibitions and programs in a museum should be designed so that everyone can use them.

This research was conducted at the Brawijaya Museum in Malang City by limiting the problem to fulfilling the right of persons with disabilities (specifically blind persons) to obtain information on collection objects in exhibition rooms 1 and 2, by providing narratives using braille. This research was conducted with the consideration of developing

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research that has been conducted by previous researchers, Meirta & Hardiman (2023), explaining museum inclusion services with a focus on the layout of a museum that is friendly to disabilities. Museum design components to provide inclusion services must meet friendly access elements such as the availability of parking, toilets, roads for disabilities, buildings/buildings designed with spacious spaces, the presence of audio guides, and buildings that have the ability to adapt according to the needs of disabilities in the future. Permana (2024) stated in his research that inclusion services in museums can be done by providing additional services for visitors with disabilities in the form of tour guides or audio guides placed in certain places. Based on these two previous studies, this study attempts to further explore museum inclusion services in other forms, such as fulfilling the right to information for people with disabilities, especially the blind, by providing museum collection labels in braille.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Person with Disabilities

Law No. 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities defines a person with a disability as any person experiencing long-term physical, intellectual, mental, and/or sensory limitations, which can hinder and hinder full and effective participation with other citizens based on equal rights in their interactions with their environment. This condition is often exacerbated by social and physical environments that are not conducive to growth and development, participation and social roles, and a reasonable and decent life and livelihood (Andriani, 2016). The stigma that people with disabilities have limitations in understanding and learning leads society to underestimate the importance of education for them (Bouillet & Kudek-Mirošević, 2015). Barriers to mobility also lead society to view people with disabilities as troublesome when engaging in activities with the general public (Andriani, 2016). People with disabilities are also considered unproductive, making it difficult to find employment. Ultimately, these stigmas and stereotypes give rise to discrimination and marginalization (Lamichhane, 2013). People with disabilities are excluded from social life, having to attend special schools, live in rehabilitation centers, and work in limited fields specifically designed for them. In reality, people with disabilities often experience barriers due to limitations on their mobility, such as difficulty accessing information, the lack of employment opportunities for people with disabilities, the lack of disability-friendly public services, and the unavailability of other services (Oyugi et al., 2018); (Hasan, Nikmah, & Pribadi, 2024). Many public places and facilities remain inaccessible to minority groups, including people with disabilities (Thohari, 2014).

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The Role of Museum

A museum is an institution that collects, cares for, presents, and preserves the cultural heritage of past societies. It is also a non-profit institution that provides services to the public (Oktaviani, Umasih, & Kurniawati, 2020). The services provided relate to providing information about the museum's collections. Museums also serve as reminders for the public to preserve and safeguard cultural heritage from the past.

In general, a museum is a place that stores and exhibits collections depicting the journey of humanity, nature, and culture, both synchronically and diachronically, reflecting both contemporary and historical aspects of humanity, its natural environment, and its culture. Museums are not merely places for collecting objects; they must be utilized for scientific purposes, educational purposes (formal and extracurricular), and educational tourism (Sutaarga, 2000). Museums have the task of preventing a nation from cultural poverty, advancing folk arts, and expanding knowledge on a mass scale. They can be used didactically and methodically for school visits and as a venue for scientific inquiry. Furthermore, museums also aim to provide a nation with an understanding of the culture that once existed in their country, which can be used as a manifestation of the nation's personality (Aji, 2022).

Judging from its function and use, museums themselves can manage material evidence of cultural heritage that is used as a means to learn, understand, and study history (Farhan, 2024). Museums are an interesting source of historical information because visitors can not only read the information presented but also see historical relics directly. In fact, in today's digital era filled with technological advances, especially among the younger generation who are accustomed to technology, museums have a great opportunity to integrate it with technology in conveying information. Museums can adopt various types of media, including virtual reality, augmented reality, and smartphone applications, to improve the quality of information delivery (Simaremare et al., 2023).

Inclucive Service in Museum

Inclusive services are services that are accessible to all citizens (inclusive) in the public service sector (Zakiyah, Husein, & Muzwardi, 2016). Public services, such as museums, are still far from inclusive. Optimal accessibility to museums and documentation centers is crucial to ensure that all members of society, regardless of age, ability, or background, have equal opportunities to experience and learn from their rich cultural heritage.

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Museums should strive to eliminate physical, sensory, and cognitive barriers that can hinder the full participation of all visitors. This includes providing ramps and lifts, multisensory exhibits, written materials in various formats, sign language interpreters, and staff trained in inclusive practices. Museum visitors with disabilities still experience significant obstacles in their daily activities due to complex factors such as a lack of accurate information and inappropriate attitudes from staff (Permana, 2024). Many museums in Indonesia still fail to provide comfort and the right to access information due to a lack of accessibility for people with disabilities.

Information in Braille

Braille is a tactile writing system that converts letters, symbols, and typography into a system of raised dots (Dolphin, et al., 2024). Invented in 1821 by Louis Braille, this system is now accepted as a form of written communication for those without sight because it does not rely on the eyes and the use of touch. Braille allows users to recognize various aspects of writing, such as punctuation and paragraphing, that cannot be explained through auditory feedback. Braille is a resource that blind people can utilize to meet their information needs (Dzunurain & Wasisto, 2022).

Braille is read from left to right and can represent letters, numbers, punctuation, symbols, and more. In today's era of rapid technological advancement, blind people can meet their information needs in various ways, such as through digital talking books, which are books containing audio recordings that read the information contained within. However, for the sake of museum collection information, it is still necessary to compile information in written braille to provide an experience of exploring historical content.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed an exploratory design, which is research conducted to investigate an undefined problem. This research was conducted to gain a better understanding of the problem at hand (Richard, 2018). The purpose of exploratory research is not to provide final and conclusive answers to research questions, but rather to explore the research topic in depth. It has been stated that exploratory research is preliminary research that serves as a foundation for more conclusive research (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). Exploratory research designs focus on collecting secondary or primary data in an unstructured format and interpreting it using informal procedures (Bernd, 2017). This study employed an exploratory qualitative approach to obtain in-depth insights into the accessibility rights of people with disabilities when visiting the Brawijaya

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Museum. Data were obtained through interviews with visually impaired people visiting the Brawijaya Museum in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. This study sought information related to the accessibility rights of people with visual impairments when visiting the Brawijaya Museum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Government Regulation Number 19 of 1995, a museum is an institution for the storage, maintenance, security, and utilization of material evidence of human culture, nature, and the environment to support efforts to protect and preserve the nation's cultural heritage. The Brawijaya Museum is a national type A museum, a military museum of the Indonesian Army (TNI) and was inaugurated on May 4, 1968. Its primary collection consists largely of historical objects, including combat and military equipment from the Indonesian struggle for independence from Dutch and Japanese colonial rule.

The Brawijaya Museum serves as an educational facility, a recreational facility, a scientific research facility, a place for fostering a spirit of struggle and passing on the values of the '45 and TNI '45 for TNI soldiers and the general public, and as a place for fostering a spirit of struggle for regional development. Furthermore, the Brawijaya Museum also houses a library, which houses a collection of books and documents on the history of the TNI's struggle, general works, and references related to service to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

This study explores the relationship between the Brawijaya Museum management and its visitors, the visually impaired. The study found that it is challenging for the Brawijaya Museum management to implement an inclusive framework to meet the needs of this population segment, the visually impaired. This is due to two main factors:

1. First, it is not always easy for the Brawijaya Museum management to understand the needs of the visually impaired.
2. Second, the Brawijaya Museum management is not trained to provide inclusive services. This lack of awareness stems in part from the fact that the social model of disability is still relatively new, and a large portion of the public is still unaware of disability or still experiences negative stigma.

Three factors influencing an inclusive museum experience were identified from the collected data (Chiscano & Jiménez-Zarco, 2021):

1. Awareness of universal design accessibility requirements.

   It is important to provide a positive perception of inclusive museum facilities for visually impaired visitors. This should be addressed starting from the museum

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entrance. These include dedicated parking spaces for people with disabilities, connecting paths to museum spaces, and handrails. If these facilities are not met at the outset, people with disabilities will likely be reluctant to visit the museum. Next, the universal design of the core of the Brawijaya Museum building. Many of the walkways are stepped, without ramps, and there are no floor markings for the visually impaired. Restrooms are still shared with visitors without disabilities, and many facilities still need to be adapted to provide inclusive services. One visually impaired visitor complained:

> *"I think the Brawijaya Museum is still very inattentive to our needs. We don't want to be singled out, but that's just who we are. We have limited mobility, which isn't really a barrier for us if we have facilities that can minimize our limitations. We wouldn't be so dependent on others if we were provided with facilities that allow us to carry out our activities independently. However, the reality is still far from meeting our needs".*
>
> *"The Brawijaya Museum actually has a great collection. Many of the exhibits tell the story of Indonesian heroes' struggles for independence. However, we didn't enjoy the trip, as we felt tired and frustrated by the lack of attention to some of the facilities".*

This research also examines the perspective of the Brawijaya Museum administrators. They also have hopes for inclusion. However, there are obstacles. Government funding is only sufficient for operational maintenance of the collection.

> *"We're just here to implement. If the funds are available, we'll implement them. So, everything depends on budget availability. We do have ideas, but none of those ideas can be implemented without funding, that's just the way it is".*

Funding plays a crucial role in the success of inclusive services, across all sectors. Adequate and well-distributed funding is essential to providing the resources, support, and training necessary to create truly inclusive environments. In fact, museum budget constraints are a classic problem and occur in almost all museums. Museums must boldly transform themselves, no longer merely as institutions providing information, but as agents of change. Collaboration is no longer an option but a necessity, as visitors demand more representative museums (Balan, 2024). In this context, raising additional funds through corporate partnerships is one way museums

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can forge partnerships with institutions and academic fields outside their own, demonstrating openness and a desire to expand beyond outdated museum definitions.

2. Access to information resources

The availability of communication is crucial for visually impaired visitors. Through communication resources provided by museums, such as braille labels, visually impaired visitors can make informed decisions about how activities align with their interests and needs. Braille labels provide the adapted information they need to make their browsing experience a positive one. This will create a memorable travel experience. Therefore, this research designed information labels in Braille for the Brawijaya Museum collection. One visually impaired visitor stated:

> *"I feel that the Braille collection labels make it easier to identify the collections, including inscriptions, stones, and keris (swords). For each collection, I can learn about the collection, including its name, where it came from, and other information. Braille provides a learning experience. Unlike audio, the browsing experience is less engaging, as with audio, I only listen, while Braille encourages me to learn".*

Identifying visitors with disabilities is essential to effectively meet their needs. Practices that integrate and address these needs are crucial. Without inclusive strategies and practices, the process of identifying visitors with disabilities becomes meaningless. As one academic commented on the use of braille labels in museum collections:

> *"Braille labels should not simply be placed on display. Regular evaluations are necessary to ensure the evolving needs of visually impaired visitors. Braille labels should be arranged with consideration for the ergonomics of each person's body size. The Brawijaya Museum's visually impaired visitors include both adults and children, so the placement of braille labels must be comfortable for both parties to navigate and touch".*

Various communication methods can encourage people with visual disabilities to communicate actively during museum visits (Molinier, 2023). Providing Braille labels on collections is one way to meet the needs of visitors with visual disabilities. This can be seen as the communicative dimension of accessibility.

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3. Providing excellent hospitality to visitors with disabilities.

Another debilitating barrier arises in the context of staff relationships with museum visitors who are blind. It is all too common for museum staff and even other service providers to be unaware of the needs of visitors with disabilities. Several real-life examples show that people with blindness or other disabilities have had negative experiences because staff seemed to lack understanding of their communication needs, making them feel out of place in the activities. This can lead to dissatisfaction among visitors with disabilities when their access and communication needs are not adequately considered.

Museums are public spaces, meaning they are open to all. While museums were once exclusive, accessible only to a select few, this is no longer the case. Everyone can visit, regardless of physical, sensory, intellectual, or other limitations. Museums are spaces where all of society's values and cultures are integrated. Therefore, museums should be able to implement actions related to integration, accessibility, and inclusion, aiming to provide opportunities for everyone to benefit from them, regardless of disability or other limitations (González-Herrera at al., 2023). Museums are entities that imply mutual benefit, places where history is shared and culture is learned and acquired. Brawijaya Museum staff explained that:

> *"We don't restrict visitors. However, we are not skilled enough to welcome guests, especially those with disabilities. If we have guests with disabilities, such as deafness, we will have difficulty guiding them. We hope they come with their own guides to enjoy the collections here".*

In fact, in recent decades, museums have adapted significantly, establishing more diverse and heterogeneous relationships with society, creating innovative, inclusive, and global cultural spaces, with new conceptions of culture and how to access it (González-Herrera at al., 2023). Museums have transformed into adaptive institutions that respond to the needs of their visitors. Museums can be described as spaces of social empowerment, with the integration of dialogue and emotion, resulting in a progressive revolution between museums and cultural spaces, as well as an increase in the communication and interpretation of heritage, which has progressively transformed museums into agents with social responsibility (Paradas, Paradas, & Montoya, 2017).

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CONCLUSION

Everyone has the right to enjoy public facilities, including museums. Everyone has the right to visit a museum, but blind people cannot enjoy museum collections if there are no descriptions they can explore, either by touch or by hearing. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of Braille labels for museum collections. This way, blind people can enjoy various collections with a pleasant browsing experience. They can learn more calmly at their own pace, lingering, and repeating to gain the desired understanding. The interactive side is more engaging than just being passive. They have curiosity that can be answered for themselves. Next, perhaps by touching the collection, if the collection is available to touch. Convince themselves whether the understanding of the labels they have read is correct, then touch to confirm the description of the collection. This direct experience will provide a memorable and more deeply felt feeling. Then, blind visitors will be able to describe the collection to others about what they have studied. In addition to Braille labels, several museum facilities need to be considered in moving towards a universal model. This includes parking areas, paths, restrooms, and other facilities that create a comfortable environment for all people with disabilities. Improving the competence of museum staff to provide inclusive services also needs to be considered. Limited funding can be addressed by opening up to collaboration with academics and practitioners to jointly create inclusive museum services.

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