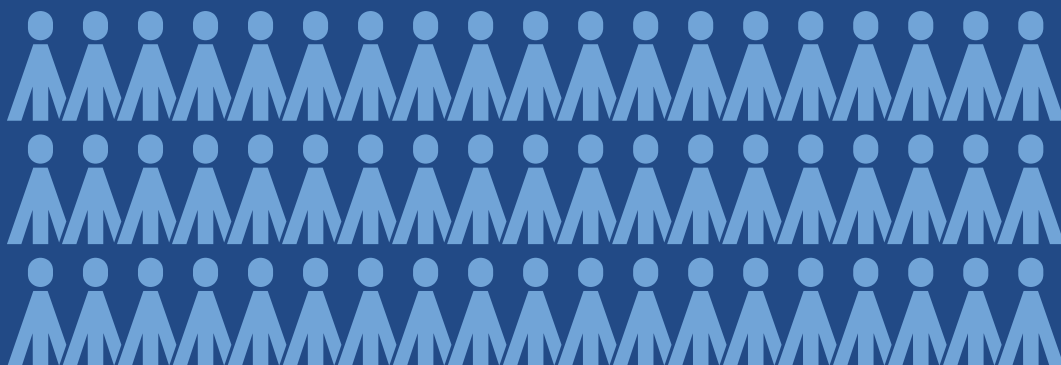


A REPORT

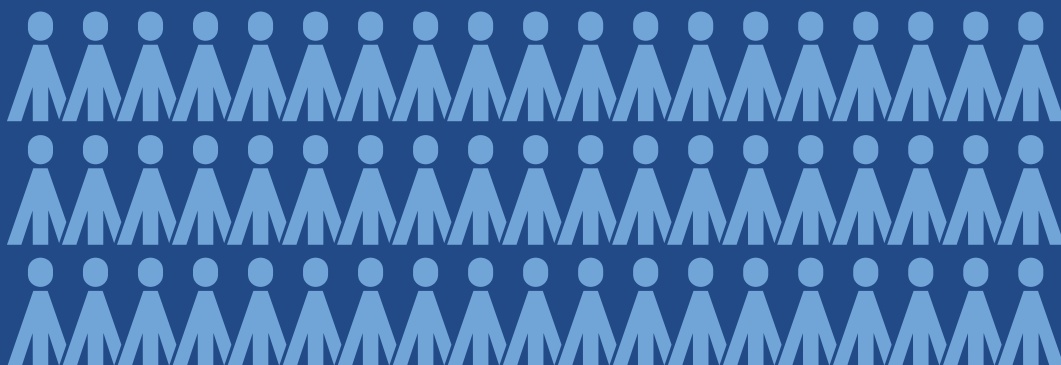


INCLUSION IN CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS



COMMUNITY & CULTURE

CO-CREATING SPACES OF BELONGING



15 NOV
2024



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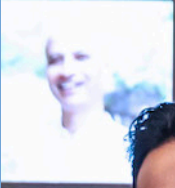
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This report summarises the key learnings, discussions, and recommendations from the second annual conference on 'Inclusion in Cultural Organisations' held by the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP) on 15th November 2024. It aims to document actionable insights and strategies shared during the conference to foster and nurture more inclusive cultural spaces.

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM	REGISTRATION	
9:00 AM – 9:15 AM	OPENING REMARKS	Harish Vasudevan, Acting Director, MAP Carolina Artegiani, Head of Inclusion and Memberships, MAP
9:15 AM – 9:30 AM	KEYNOTE ADDRESS	Arman Ali, Executive Director, National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP)
9:30 AM – 11:00 AM	ACCESS: THE AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE The session will offer an insight into the experiences of diverse visitors.	Moderator: Zahra Gabuji, Thematic Lead, Storytelling, Point of View Panelists: Pragya Singh, Founder, Atijeevan Foundation Dr. Deepa Srivastava, Director, VIDYA South Zone Jeeja Ghosh, Mission Leader for Persons with Cerebral Palsy, Enable India Dr. Alim Chandani, Mission Leader, Hear a Million, Enable India
11:00 AM – 11:45 AM	COFFEE/TEA BREAK	
11:45 AM – 1:00 PM	FESTIVALS OF FRONTIERS: HOW FESTIVALS GROW COMMUNITIES This panel discussion will look at festivals that have successfully built vibrant, lasting communities.	Moderator: Abhinandita Mathur, Festival Director, MAP Panelists: Brinda Miller, Chairperson, Kala Ghoda Manjiri Dube, Head of Programmes, Khoj International Artists' Association Veena Kulkarni, Co-founder, Maya Bazaar Vishnu Soman, Founder, Smileys India
1:00 PM – 2:00 PM	LUNCH	
2:00 PM – 3:30 PM	SHARED EXPERIENCES An opportunity to join fellow participants in a facilitated group conversation about how we can foster stronger relationships with diverse communities.	Facilitators: The ReReeti Foundation
3:40 PM – 5:00 PM	RAISING THE BAR: SUCCESS STORIES AND NEW IDEAS This panel brings together professionals who will share their experiences of working collaboratively with the community and propose new ideas for a more inclusive cultural sector.	Moderator: Aastha Chauhan Curating Public/Community Art projects, Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology Panelists: Preema John, Director, India Music Experience Padmini Ray Murray, Founder and Director, Design Beku Varun Kurtkoti, Filmmaker, Community Artist and Arts Educator Poornima Sukumar, Founder and Director, Aravani Art Project
5:00 PM – 5:15 PM	CLOSING REMARKS	Feroze VR, Founder, India Inclusive Foundation
5:15 PM – 6:00 PM	NETWORKING	

MA disability one, you are never part of any culture. And for me in particular. I am known For my... hardcore approach towards disability inclusion, disability rights. That's what I do 24 seven.

Opening Remarks



HARISH
VASUDEVAN
Acting Director,
MAP



ANALI
Inclusion
ships,





Harish Vasudevan

Acting Director, MAP

Inclusion was highlighted as a core value of MAP, emphasising its integration into all institutional efforts.

Why this conference?

1. MAP has embraced inclusion as a core principle, embedding it into every aspect of its work—from exhibitions and talks to community programmes, and also in terms of infrastructure, demonstrating a commitment to creating spaces of belonging.
2. This conference serves as a platform to share, learn, and refine the evolving concepts and vocabulary around inclusion, providing new perspectives and actionable strategies for cultural organisations.
3. While inclusion is an ongoing journey, this conference acts as a meaningful pit stop—a space for individuals and organisations to gather, connect, and collaborate around their shared purpose in fostering truly inclusive communities.



Carolina Artegiani

Head of Development and Inclusion, MAP

Carolina introduced the theme of co-creating inclusive spaces by transforming historically exclusionary cultural spaces into ones of belonging through collaboration with communities. She emphasised the need for museums, galleries, and cultural spaces to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve by embracing their stories and cultures. Accessibility measures, such as ISL (Indian Sign Language) interpreters and discreet assistance through booklets, were highlighted to ensure inclusivity for all attendees.

*"If you want to walk fast, walk alone.
But if you want to walk far, walk together."
An African Proverb*



Arman Ali

Executive Director, National Centre for Promotion of Employment of Disabled People (NCPEDP)

KEY MESSAGE

1. He emphasised that People with Disabilities (PwDs) often remain excluded from cultural participation, highlighting the need for inclusion that ensures everyone feels welcomed and valued in artistic and cultural spaces.
2. He underscored that these elements are integral to bringing people together, as illustrated by the Assam Movement, which united 29 ethnic groups and cultures despite their differences.
3. PwDs seek participation without being a “discomfort” to institutions, urging organisations to embrace accessibility as a fundamental value rather than an afterthought.

CHALLENGES

- **Inadequate infrastructure:** Museums, and other cultural spaces often lack essential accessibility features such as ramps, elevators, tactile pathways, or seating arrangements suitable for PwDs. Without these, accessing these spaces becomes impossible.
- **Attitude:** Disability is often misunderstood, with negative perceptions rooted in superstition or ignorance, such as viewing wheelchair users as “impure” to participate in religious events. Many public and religious spaces often deny entry to PwDs under stigmatised beliefs.
- **Unmet needs:** Beyond physical barriers, cultural venues often fail to consider the needs of diverse audiences, such as providing captioning for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HH) or ISL interpreters for performances.
- **Isolation:** Continuous exclusion reinforces feelings of alienation, reducing the desire or confidence of PwDs to participate. Over time, this can lead to a disconnect from cultural and social activities, depriving them of opportunities for enrichment and belonging.

“If you hold on to what you believe in, nobody can take it away from you.”

SOLUTIONS AND CALLS TO ACTION

- A broader need for cultural institutions to prioritise accessibility as a right rather than a convenience or optional feature was established.
- Article 30 of the UNCRPD affirms that PwDs have the right to fully participate in cultural life. Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PwD) Act, 2016 calls for cultural practices and spaces to be made accessible to PwDs.
- Arman's personal account of refusing manual assistance to board an aircraft and demanding a ramp highlighted the importance of asserting one's right to dignity.
- Ensuring accessibility measures such as ramps, seating arrangements, and pathways are standard practise in public and cultural institutions.
- Making it a prerequisite for cultural spaces to adapt their policies and attitudes will guarantee dignity and belonging for all individuals, irrespective of their ability.

“ We didn’t go to the stage,
nor were we called.
With a wave of the hand
we were shown our place.
There we sat
and were congratulated,
and “they”, standing on the stage,
kept on telling us of our sorrows.
Our sorrows remained ours,
they never became theirs.
When we whispered out doubts
they perked their ears to listen,
and sighing,
tweaking our ears,
told us to shut up,
apologise; or else...”

WAHARU SONAVANE



And the other question that came in was even important? What is the point of it? Okay. The third one which I got. that a the elitist.

Access: The Audience Perspective



**MODERATOR
ZAHRA GABUJI**
Thematic Lead,
Storytelling,
Point of View



**PANELLIST
PRAGYA PRASUN**
Founder, Atijeevan
Foundation



**PANELLIST
DR DEEPA
SRIVASTAVA**
Zonal Director,
South Zone



**PANELLIST
JEEJA GHOSH**
Mission Leader
for Persons with
Cerebral Palsy,
EnAble India



**PANELLIST
DR ALIM
CHANDANI**
Mission Lead
Hear a Million
Able India



The panel discussion aimed to go deeper into the lived experiences of PwDs, to foreground their challenges and recommendations to make institutions better.

**PANELLIST****DR ALIM
CHANDANI**

Mission Leader,
Hear a Million,
EnAble India

**PANELLIST****JEEJA GHOSH**

Mission Leader
for Persons with
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**PANELLIST****DR DEEPA
SRIVASTAVA**

Zonal Director,
VIDYA South Zone

**MODERATOR****ZAHRA GABUJI**

Thematic Lead,
Storytelling,
Point of View

CHALLENGES FACED BY MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES IN ACCESSING CULTURAL SPACES

Dr. Alim Chandani

Attitude: Art and culture are often perceived as exclusive, reserved for the elite, wealthy, and well-educated, which prevents marginalised groups, including PwDs, from engaging with these spaces.

There are widespread misconceptions that accommodating disabilities in cultural spaces is prohibitively expensive. This attitude needs to be addressed to support and promote more inclusive practices where deaf people not only can visit but also be employed.

Accessibility: There is a lack of accessibility for deaf individuals at cultural venues and the importance of ISL and subtitles in cinemas, museums, and other cultural spaces.

The deaf community is spread across a spectrum, and a blanket accessibility guideline may not work for all of them. For instance, it is important for institutions to keep in mind the background of their visitors, and question if there is a class, generational, or cultural gap.

Positive Experience: Dr. Alim curated an exhibition for deaf artists at Chitrakala Parishath, but acknowledged that significant challenges still remain for underrepresented groups such as the deafblind.

Jeeja Ghosh

A primary challenge for many individuals is getting out of their homes. Access becomes a huge barrier, especially for wheelchair users. There are the more obvious physical inaccessibility of public and cultural spaces, but at the same time, there are also social barriers where participation, interaction, and communication becomes inaccessible. Then there are the digital barriers for people with visual impairment.

Pragya Singh

Art and culture can be powerful healing tools, but without inclusive practices, PwDs may feel alienated. Lack of trauma-informed staff and inaccessible spaces further exacerbate feelings of exclusion.

Marginalised individuals, such as burn survivors, face both physical and emotional challenges when accessing cultural spaces, and they often avoid such spaces due to fear of judgement or intrusive questions by people.

Pragya shared the emotional toll of being unrecognised by a classmate at an airport, highlighting the psychological and identity challenges faced by burn survivors. She avoided cultural spaces for years due to the fear of being judged or pitied.

Pragya also shared her difficulty in getting an otherwise easy procedure of buying a sim card for a phone. The process of buying a sim card requires one to blink into the camera as part of the application verification. As Pragya is unable to blink in one eye, she is being rejected by mobile companies for sale of a sim card. At the age of 40, she is asked to rely on a relative to buy her a sim card, and that is a battle she will continue fighting for.

Dr. Deepa Srivastava

Information is often provided in English and Hindi, excluding those who speak regional languages. This limits accessibility for a significant portion of the population.

While digital platforms can improve access, they also pose challenges for those with visual impairments or other disabilities, demonstrating the need for more inclusive digital content.

SOLUTIONS FOR INCLUSIVE CULTURAL SPACES

PwDs must be included in the planning and execution of cultural events, ensuring that accessibility measures are not only present but are meaningful and practical.

Allocate adequate funding for accessibility needs, including interpreters, assistive technologies, and physical accessibility infrastructure.

Provide trauma-informed training to the entire staff to ensure that visitors feel welcomed and respected, and create an environment of empathy and understanding.

Make efforts to reduce financial barriers, such as waiving off or reducing entry fees for marginalised groups and providing transportation assistance.

Evaluate if the food at the venue is affordable, if there are dietary options, or if there are affordable places close by to go eat in.

Use regional languages and simplify text in museum displays. Additionally, make content available in multiple formats—audio, video, and text to make them more accessible to diverse audiences.

Long-term community arts engagement such as art making, art therapy etc., to guide healing, acceptance, and confidence building of PwDs. This will also prove effective in the arts reaching a diverse audience.

EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE CHANGE

A.R. Rahman's Concerts: The inclusion of ISL interpreters at A.R. Rahman's concerts were a notable example of making music accessible to the deaf community, showing how small steps in accessibility can create significant impact.

MAP's Inclusive Initiatives: MAP's work in ensuring inclusive representation of PwDs, such as curating accessible exhibitions and providing ISL interpreters, was highlighted as a positive model for cultural institutions.

QUESTIONS RAISED

A member of the audience questioned the limited ground-level action on inclusion despite extensive corporate PR campaigns, particularly in the private sector. Arman Ali highlighted several key points:

While disability is acknowledged in the private sector, meaningful inclusion remains superficial, with a lack of genuine investment and understanding.

Even within the disabled community, limited understanding of the politics of disability hinders collective advocacy efforts.

Although disability-related issues have some scope for recognition in big cities, the stigma and exclusion are far more severe in rural regions. There is no focus on disability in rural areas in India.

Arman stated, "There is money to include PwD, not knowledge." Token inclusion efforts often lack depth, and fail to address the nuanced needs of the community.

Without a seat at the table, decisions affecting PwDs are often made by people who lack lived experience or true understanding of disability.

Another audience member also noted that - Unlike sports, which have seen progress in inclusion through initiatives like the Paralympics, arts and culture still lack visibility and meaningful inclusion for PwDs.

MA honorary chairperson of the Kalagoda Association, she also looks into the restoration of the monuments in this famous heritage art district of Mumbai. Manjiri Dubey is the head of programs at

Festivals of Frontiers:
How Festivals Grow
Communities



**MODERATOR
ABHINANDITA
MATHUR**
Festival Director,
MAP



**PANELLIST
BRINDA MILLER**
Honorary
Chairperson, Kala
Choda Association



**PANELLIST
MANJIRI DUBE**
Head of
Programmes,
Khoj International
Artists' Association



**PANELLIST
VEENA KULKARNI**
Co-founder,
Maya Bazaar



**PANELLIST
VISHNU SO**
Founder,
Smileys Indi



This panel discussion aimed to highlight the role of festivals as powerful platforms for cultivating connections, promoting inclusivity, and celebrating diversity. The discussions were steered towards showcasing the success stories of various festivals and their impact in building enduring, inclusive communities.

**PANELLIST****BRINDA MILLER**

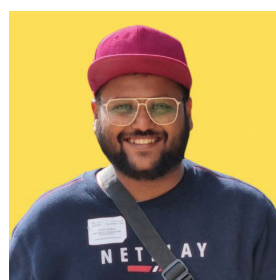
Honorary
Chairperson, Kala
Ghoda Association

**PANELLIST****MANJIRI DUBE**

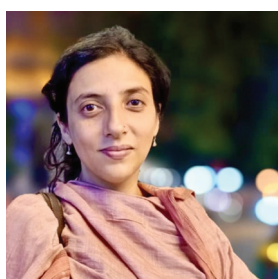
Head of
Programmes, Khoj
International Artists'
Association

**PANELLIST****VEENA KULKARNI**

Co-founder,
Maya Bazaar

**PANELLIST****VISHNU SOMAN**

Founder,
Smileys India

**MODERATOR****ABHINANDITA
MATHUR**

Festival Director,
MAP

SUCCESS STORIES AND STRATEGIES OF FESTIVALS IN BUILDING STRONG COMMUNITIES

Kala Ghoda Arts Festival (KGAF)

The festival has remained free, ensuring access for people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and has gained substantial support from Mumbai's residents, contributing to its success and global recognition.

Impact: The festival has successfully attracted over 2 million visitors, with the area becoming a must-visit cultural district. Funds from the festival go toward restoring local heritage buildings, cementing its role in community development.

Khoj's initiatives in Khirkee area

Khoj, located in the multicultural urban village of Khirkee in South Delhi, has spent nearly three decades promoting and sustaining community engagement through art. The neighbourhood, home to migrant workers, refugees, and displaced Afghans, was an area of racial and cultural tension, which Khoj addressed through its art projects.

The DeshDak Festival celebrated multiculturalism by showcasing food, art, and stories from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Africa, breaking stereotypes and celebrating cross-cultural connections.

Success Story: Khoj collaborated with the Goethe-Institut to establish the Afghan Cultural Centre, empowering Afghan women through media training to document their life stories, amplifying marginalised voices and cultivating a sense of ownership within the community.

Thaandav Festival - Breaking Barriers Through Dance and Volunteering

The Thaandav Festival, led by Vishnu Soman, aimed to unite people through dance, eliminating judgement and competition. The festival's inclusivity was demonstrated by the involvement of PwDs as both participants and volunteers.

Impact: The festival provided a platform for PwDs to lead and volunteer, breaking stereotypes about their abilities and promoting a culture of inclusion.

"I learned inclusion through the disabled volunteers," showcasing the power of mutual empowerment and community service.

Maya Bazaar

Maya Bazaar started as a safe space for LGBTQIA+ individuals, providing a platform for self-expression and community building. It also put the spotlight on the community members who were artistic and small business owners. It evolved from a small event in Goa to a travelling marketplace across India.

Impact: The festival created a sense of belonging for marginalised individuals and provided opportunities for economic empowerment through a marketplace.

“I can go to Goa, because it feels safe, because my family is not there,” highlighting the importance of creating safe, sound and stable spaces for marginalised communities.

STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

The success of these festivals was shaped by strategies that focussed on inclusivity, collaboration, and community involvement.

Inclusivity and Accessibility

Kala Ghoda Festival: Free entry made the festival accessible to all socio-economic backgrounds, guaranteeing widespread participation.

Maya Bazaar: Prioritised safety and inclusivity by choosing venues and vendors who were inclusive, ensuring LGBTQIA+ individuals could actively participate.

Thaandav Festival: Infrastructure modifications, such as accessible toilets and wheelchair-friendly setups, ensured that all participants, regardless of physical abilities, could engage fully.

Collaboration with Local Communities

Kala Ghoda Festival: Mumbai residents were actively involved in funding and contributing to the event, which in turn went into local heritage restoration, creating a sense of ownership and pride.

Khoj: They collaborated with the local community of Khirkee, inviting them to participate in projects and provide ideas, transforming them into active collaborators.

Thaandav Festival: PwDs volunteered to support others within the community, a groundbreaking initiative that empowered individuals, and shattered stereotypes about their capabilities.

Art as a Tool for Breaking Barriers

Kala Ghoda Festival and Khoj: Both festivals used art to challenge societal norms and hierarchies. The Kala Ghoda Festival brought art to public spaces, while Khoj's participatory art helped address cultural tensions in Khirkee.

Khoj: The Afghan Cultural Centre provided skill-building opportunities for displaced populations, highlighting how art can be a tool for education and cultural diplomacy.

Thaandav Festival: The absence of winners or prizes allowed participants to focus on their shared love for dance, breaking down hierarchical barriers.

Sustained Media Engagement

Kala Ghoda Festival: Increased visibility through local newspapers and social media.

Khoj: Established Khirkee Voice, a publication that shared local stories and strengthened the community narrative.

Maya Bazaar: Used social media as an effective platform to reach their audience about the festival.



In the session on exploring inclusivity in cultural spaces, participants shared a wide range of perspectives, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of what cultural spaces represent. Their ideas emphasised not only the function of cultural spaces but also how they should be experienced and shaped by diverse communities.



FACILITATORS
REREETI
FOUNDATION



FACILITATOR
TEJSHVI JAIN
Founder-Director,
The ReReeti
Foundation



FACILITATOR
KALPANA
PURUSHOTHAMAN
Adjunct Professor,
Indian Institute of
Psychology and
Research



FACILITATOR
SANGITHA
KRISHNAMURTHI
The Teachers
Collective

PARTICIPANTS' DEFINITIONS OF CULTURAL SPACES

"Cultural space means anything and everything around."

"Where most diverse life forms can come together and be themselves."

"Where stories are shared."

"Where we don't know each other and are yet comfortable, open to learning, and looking through various perspectives."

"Where expression is uninterrupted and unquestioned."

"As much as it is art and inspiration, it is also the things that make you uncomfortable, critical arguments – to grow and co-exist."

"Where culture and community express and interact."

"Where there is more collaboration and less cut-throat competition."

"A refuge from society."

These descriptions highlight the fluidity of cultural spaces that are not just static locations but dynamic settings for expression, collaboration, and personal growth. They serve as places where people are encouraged to be themselves, share stories, and engage in meaningful dialogue, even if uncomfortable or critical.

A participant from Bengaluru shared that the Madiwala market served as a cultural space for them—not because it was housed within a traditional building, but because it was a space of exchange, where people from diverse backgrounds came together, shared stories, and engaged in a shared experience.

Similarly, Cubbon Park's open-air theatre rehearsals became a cultural space accessible to all, regardless of socio-economic status.

COMMON CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING CULTURAL SPACES

Several common challenges emerged during the discussion regarding the accessibility and inclusivity of cultural spaces.

Representation and Curation

Participants highlighted the importance of community representation in the curation of cultural spaces. The lens through which cultural narratives are portrayed significantly impacts how welcoming and relevant these spaces feel. They questioned if cultural spaces such as MAP were truly accessible to their hospitality and security staff, and to their families, to access as an audience.

“Who is curating and what they’re portraying” matters in creating spaces that truly reflect the diversity of those who visit or inhabit them.

Barriers to Entry

Cultural spaces often have implicit or explicit barriers that determine who can participate. Participants noted the importance of recognising how certain spaces may alienate people who don’t fit particular societal moulds or expectations.

“Who/what you need to be, to be a part of that culture” is a recurring challenge, as it shapes how accessible and welcoming the space feels to different groups.

Inclusivity of Thought

The way a space accommodates diverse thought processes, affects how comfortable and easy it is for people to visit and engage. Inclusivity is not just about physical access but also about ensuring that different perspectives are embraced. Participants specified that how others perceive them based on their cultural affiliations or identity, can influence whether they feel comfortable accessing a particular cultural space.

“How welcoming a place is to diverse thought processes contributes to how easy and comfortable the visitor experience would be.”

“How someone else would see me if I associate/identify with a certain culture or space also decides whether I go to the place or not.”

Atmosphere and Vibe

“The overall experience of a place matters... over sterilisation of places (like no touching, no noise, this is a structure) tends to put off.” The general atmosphere of a place—its vibe—plays a critical role in how welcoming it feels. Overly sterile or controlled environments can detract from the inclusive experience.

Participant Reflections

IMPACTFUL ANECDOTES SHARED BY PARTICIPANTS

Several participants shared personal experiences that illustrated the challenges and potential rewards of engaging with cultural spaces.

"I received appreciation for my art not for how it is technically done, but what kind of story it conveys; how objective technicalities are overshadowed by the impact created." This anecdote underscores how cultural spaces can become more meaningful when they focus on the stories behind art and experiences, rather than on rigid technical standards.

Another participant from the session shared their frustration about the absence of art spaces for mental health patients at NIMHANS, a mental health institution in Bengaluru. This highlighted the need to integrate art and culture into healthcare spaces, offering individuals a chance for self-expression in therapeutic settings where they may feel silenced or marginalised.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUSIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT

Participants proposed a number of solutions to improve the inclusivity and engagement of cultural spaces.

"Places should allow more engagement and interaction for a wholesome experience." This recommendation focusses on making cultural spaces more interactive, fostering a deeper connection between visitors and the culture or art being presented.

"A little more familiarisation with the content/culture adds meaning to the otherwise passive experience." Participants suggested that providing context about the culture or art beforehand could enrich visitors' understanding and enhance their experience.

"Everything is not just a showpiece... the stories must be told, the relationship between the stories being told and the people." The idea here is that cultural spaces should not merely showcase objects but also provide meaningful narratives that connect the audience with the culture being represented.

"Food is very important to be made accessible". Participants emphasised the importance of ensuring there are adequate food options in or around cultural spaces, alongside ensuring connectivity and accessible facilities.

"The immediacy of experience is also important. I don't want to see or read the rest of it later, or in some other section—I want to know now." This speaks to the desire for real-time, engaging experiences that don't require waiting or fragmented experiences, such as when a QR code is given instead of an explanation to an artwork.

"Enhance engagement with children, in a way that they also understand and develop their interest." Encouraging engagement with younger audiences can help build a foundation for future participation and interest in cultural spaces.

"Can the community become a part of how things are planned; co-curating?" Involving communities in the curation and planning of cultural spaces ensures that their voices and needs are reflected in the infrastructure, design, and programming.

REFLECTIONS ON SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

The session prompted many participants to reflect on their ideas of inclusivity and cultural spaces, and several noted shifts in their understanding.

Participants expressed a greater appreciation for the diversity of thought and experiences that shape cultural spaces, with one remarking, "Many of us may have not spoken to each other if not for this activity." This shift highlights the importance of dialogue and shared reflection in shaping more inclusive and welcoming spaces.

As participants explored what inclusivity truly means, many noted that "Inclusivity is not just about one way of experiencing the world; it accommodates diverse needs." This realisation underscores the complexity of creating inclusive spaces that truly welcome and represent diverse communities.

One participant shared, "Understanding differences makes me feel less alone in my own opinions," reflecting the power of shared experiences and mutual respect in fostering a sense of belonging.

"Inclusivity begins with accepting ourselves and changing our own attitudes," one participant observed, recognising that the journey toward inclusivity starts with personal reflection and responsibility.

Another key observation was the importance of staff training and community engagement. Participants emphasised the need for cultural organisations to invest in comprehensive training for their staff, ensuring they understand and can address the diverse needs of visitors.

MA this project working with neurodivergent communities in the cultural sector is not really the norm. And it is important. It was very important for us to do extensive

CC

ing the Bar:
ss Stories and
ideas



**MODERATOR
AASTHA
CHAUHAN**
Artist, Curator and
Professor, Srishti
Manipal Institute
of Art, Design and
Technology



**PANELLIST
PREEMA JOHN**
Director,
India Music
Experience



**PANELLIST
PADMINI RAY
MURRAY**
Founder,
Design Beku



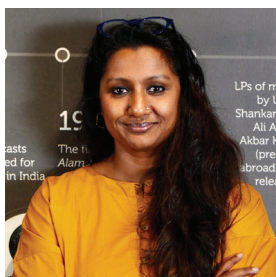
**PANELLIST
VARUN KURTKOTI**
Filmmaker,
Community Artist,
Arts Director,
Design Beku



**PANELLIST
POORNIMA
SUKUMAR**
Founder and
Director, Aravani
Art Project



A vision for an inclusive cultural space was discussed by the panellists in this section. They highlighted the importance of creating spaces that actively reflect the voices of underrepresented communities while fostering collaboration, accessibility, and shared ownership.



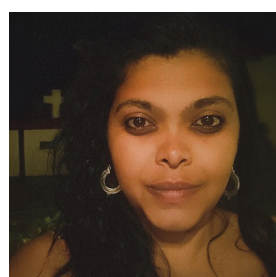
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**PADMINI RAY
MURRAY**
Founder,
Design Beku



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VARUN KURTKOTI
Filmmaker,
Community Artist,
Arts Educator,
Design Beku



PANELLIST
**POORNIMA
SUKUMAR**
Founder and
Director, Aravani Art
Project



MODERATOR
**AASTHA
CHAUHAN**
Artist, Curator and
Professor, Srishti
Manipal Institute
of Art, Design and
Technology

DOCUMENTING PRINCIPLES OF COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITIES

Community-Centric Collaboration

A pedagogical balance of facilitating, rather than imposing, is crucial in interventions. For instance, in addressing critical issues such as personal financial management or caste-based usage of a public space, the emphasis is on understanding the community's autonomy while sensitively addressing the issue.

Panellists emphasised that collaboration must prioritise the voices and needs of the community involved. The Aravani Art Project, for example, ensures transgender community involvement in decision-making regarding mural projects, allowing the community to guide the artistic and advocacy directions.

Shared ownership was highlighted as a vital factor for successful collaborations. In initiatives like Belaku Studio, marginalised communities, including caste-based folk performers, were integral to the creative process, encouraging a sense of agency and recognition.

Innovative Practices for Inclusivity

Technology for Accessibility:

Zomato's screen reader feature for visually impaired users exemplifies how technology can bridge the accessibility gap. However, challenges such as the high cost of inclusive technologies and the potential for digital exclusion due to social media algorithms were also discussed.

Infrastructure for Neurodivergent Individuals:

The IME museum has started incorporating calming zones and sensory rooms for neurodivergent individuals. These spaces, which feature tactile elements and serene environments, are crucial for reducing sensory overload and promoting inclusivity.

Project Svaritha by IME used the joy of music as a way of support for children from underrepresented communities, highlighting the potential of art to act as a tool for inclusivity. Collaboration with mental health workers ensures that the interventions are community-driven rather than imposed by neurotypical facilitators.

Inclusive Artistic Expression:

The Aravani Art Project demonstrates the power of culturally sensitive design. By selecting colours based on their staff's preferences, the project fosters visibility and solidarity within the community. This inclusive approach to art has the potential to bridge gaps and challenge societal norms.

**Lessons Learned
and Visionary
Insights:**

One recurring challenge in community collaboration is bureaucratic hurdles, such as the complex GST, TDS, and VAT systems, which hinder the sustainability of initiatives, particularly for marginalised groups. For instance, transgender groups, often lacking formal educational and/or employment structures, face significant barriers to obtaining financial literacy support.

Belaku Studio showcased how art can transcend caste-based limitations. By offering marginalised performers a platform, the studio helps challenge traditional norms and empowers individuals, demonstrating the potential for cultural spaces to nurture unity and creativity while respecting diverse identities.

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology brings both opportunities and challenges. While AI can help improve accessibility, it also raises concerns about copyright and ownership, especially when it comes to folk art forms. The importance of collaboration between designers, technologists, and communities was emphasised to ensure that marginalised groups are not excluded or further alienated by technological advances.

Active involvement of neurodivergent individuals in designing interventions is critical to creating effective and inclusive spaces. Participatory approaches were seen as essential to avoid disconnects between the intentions of organisers and the lived experiences of the communities they aim to serve.





Feroze VR, Founder, India Inclusive Foundation

delivered the closing remarks at the conference, reflecting on the evolving role of museums, inclusivity, and societal change. Drawing from his personal experiences, philosophical insights, and the societal challenges around inclusion, Feroze's remarks were both a call to action and a reflection on how institutions like MAP can lead the way in spearheading and fostering inclusivity.

Museums as Catalysts for Social Change: Feroze emphasised that museums are much more than curators of art; they are transformative spaces capable of societal change. He highlighted MAP's ongoing efforts to create inclusive spaces for marginalised voices, acknowledging that inclusivity is an ongoing journey rather than an inherent quality. Museums, he stated, must evolve beyond physical accessibility to address psychological, emotional, and cultural aspects. Through collaborative storytelling and participatory programmes, institutions hold the power to invite communities to lead conversations and shape narratives.

Personal Reflections: Feroze shared a deeply personal story about his non-verbal 15-year-old son, using it to illustrate his journey through grief and his eventual commitment to promoting inclusivity. He reflected on how, during his struggle with depression, he chose to move beyond victimhood and embrace the role of a leader in the inclusivity movement. This journey of self-acceptance spotlighted the importance of embracing imperfections and the continuous process of learning, adapting, and acting with humility.

Insights from Phil Zimbardo's Research: Feroze invoked the work of Dr. Philip Zimbardo, renowned for the Stanford Prison Experiment, which explored the darker aspects of human behaviour. Zimbardo's later shift to studying heroism resonated deeply with Feroze, who shared Zimbardo's view that "the opposite of a hero is not a villain, but a bystander." Feroze challenged the audience to move beyond passive observation and become active agents of change, emphasising that heroism often comes from small, everyday actions that contribute to the betterment of society.

The Way Forward: Feroze concluded by stressing that inclusivity is a continuous journey, not a final destination. As society changes, the approaches to representation and access within cultural spaces must also change. He urged MAP and similar institutions to remain committed to the process of inclusivity, emphasising that it involves unlearning outdated practices while embracing new perspectives.

Feroze ended with a poignant quote from Anaïs Nin: "We do not escape into philosophy, psychology, and art—we go there to restore our shattered selves into whole ones."



Inclusion is not just a checkbox or add-on but a fundamental principle that should influence every aspect of cultural organisations, from their programmes to their infrastructure.

Representation matters at every level. Inclusion is most effective when people from underrepresented groups are not just participants but also contributors, leaders, and decision-makers.

Building inclusive spaces requires genuine and consistent collaboration with marginalised communities. This involves actively listening to their needs, honouring diverse cultural narratives, and ensuring their voices are represented in curation and decision-making processes.

Accessibility extends beyond physical infrastructure to include social, emotional, and communication elements. Making spaces accessible creates a sense of dignity and belonging for all participants.

Discussions illuminated the importance of addressing intersecting identities such as disability, gender, food preferences, class, caste, and ethnicity. For instance, marginalised communities often face compounded barriers, such as financial constraints and cultural stigma.



To create inclusive environments that reflect diverse narratives and foster a sense of belonging, cultural institutions can adopt the following strategies:

Enhance Accessibility in Physical and Digital Spaces

- Ensure infrastructure such as ramps, elevators, and tactile pathways adheres to universal design principles.
- Provide digital accessibility tools, including screen readers, ISL interpretation, and captions for virtual events.
- Offer museum materials in regional languages and accessible formats (audio and visual aids) to cater to non-native speakers and individuals with learning disabilities.

Encourage Community Participation

- Actively involve underrepresented groups, particularly persons with disabilities (PwDs), in planning and executing exhibitions and programmes.
- Create advisory panels comprising diverse voices to guide cultural relevance and accessibility efforts.
- Collaborate with local communities to co-curate exhibitions and events, ensuring shared ownership of the creative process.

Invest in Training and Awareness Programmes

- Train staff to engage empathetically with visitors, addressing the needs of those with physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges.
- Conduct ongoing workshops to challenge biases and create a culture of inclusivity.
- Develop trauma-informed approaches to enhance visitor experiences, particularly for individuals with histories of trauma or disabilities.

Promote Inclusive Design and Engagement

- Use art and culture as tools for healing and advocacy, integrating participatory projects to foster individual empowerment and social cohesion.
- Enhance engagement with children and neurodivergent individuals through sensory-friendly spaces, calming zones, and interactive programmes.
- Address barriers such as over-sterilised environments by creating spaces that encourage interaction and collaboration.

Adopt Flexible Pricing Models

- Offer tiered or subsidised ticket pricing to individuals from marginalised backgrounds.
- Partner with NGOs to sponsor visits for underprivileged groups, ensuring financial barriers do not hinder access.

Celebrate Representation and Diversity

- Actively showcase works by artists from marginalised communities in exhibitions and festivals.
- Highlight success stories of inclusion in institutional communications to inspire broader adoption of inclusive practices.

Build Strategic Partnerships

- Collaborate with advocacy groups, schools, and technology innovators to expand reach and impact.
- Develop accessible solutions like virtual tours with ISL interpretation and community-driven projects to increase participation.
- Partner with organisations to integrate art therapy and inclusive artistic expressions, ensuring programmes address the specific needs of diverse groups.



Diversify Session Formats:

- Include more interactive workshops, panel discussions, and experiential learning sessions to engage participants actively.
- Integrate breakout sessions for smaller, focussed discussions on specific themes like digital accessibility or intersectionality.

Increase Accessibility Measures:

- Provide live ISL interpretation and multilingual materials during all sessions.
- Offer pre-recorded and live stream materials in accessible formats for attendees who may not be able to participate live.

Expand Topics for Discussion:

- Explore emerging areas such as the role of AI in cultural inclusivity or the impact of climate change on marginalised communities.

Strengthen Feedback Mechanisms:

- Create avenues for participants to share feedback throughout the conference to continuously improve the experience.
- Act on suggestions to build trust and demonstrate a commitment to improvement.

Create Networking Opportunities:

- Facilitate connections between participants, advocacy organisations, and industry leaders through dedicated networking sessions or digital platforms.

Publicise Success Stories:

- Document and share stories of positive impact and inclusion from past conferences to inspire broader adoption of inclusive practices.



Established in 2015 and headquartered in Bengaluru, India, ReReeti Foundation is a pioneering organisation dedicated to transforming the museums in India into vibrant hubs of learning, delight, and meaningful engagement for all.

Guided by the core principles of inclusivity and participatory development, the interdisciplinary team collaborates closely with cultural organisations to understand their unique needs and develop customised solutions that maximise their impact.

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