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Touching the Past: Inclusive and Performative Archaeology

Abstract: Archaeology is often perceived as a discipline that is difficult for people with disabilities to access. This is because it traditionally relies on visual observation, physical fieldwork, and conventional ways of presenting material culture. This paper explores how sensory approaches, applied through inclusive and performative archaeology, can make archaeological research and heritage more accessible while enriching interpretations of the past. This paper draws on a thematic review of recent literature and examples of inclusive archaeological and heritage practices, combined with a practical multisensory demonstration presented at a conference. It examines how multisensory methods and participatory activities can reduce barriers for people with different physical, sensory, and cognitive abilities. The paper argues that including people with disabilities is more than simply an ethical or social responsibility, also serving as a way to expand archaeological interpretation. Different embodied experiences can contribute to broader archaeological perspectives by drawing attention to sensory experience, movement, material engagement, social interaction, and other aspects of how people experienced and shaped their environments. Examples of good practice are discussed, including tactile exhibitions, multisensory museum displays, adapted archaeological activities, and accessible fieldwork. The described case studies highlight the importance of integrating accessibility into the earliest stages of archaeological research and heritage presentation. Inclusive and performative approaches not only open archaeology to wider audiences but also offer new ways to understand and communicate the past.

Keywords: inclusive archaeology, sensory archaeology, performative archaeology, disability, heritage accessibility, archaeological interpretation

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in
– Leonard Cohen, Anthem –

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1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, inclusion has emerged as an increasingly vital topic in archaeological research and heritage practice. The need to involve local communities, Indigenous groups, ethnic minorities, women, and other traditionally marginalised groups in the interpretation and presentation of the past has been widely recognised (Gilchrist 1999; Smith 2021; Aguilar 2024; McLellan and Woolsey 2024; Moen and Pedersen 2025; Palincaş and Martins 2024). Consequently, inclusive archaeology has developed into a broad field that seeks to make archaeological knowledge more accessible, participatory, and socially impactful.

Despite the growth of this research field, people with disabilities are still notably underrepresented in archaeological discussions, with disability often treated as only one aspect of diversity. Studies that directly address issues of accessibility, multisensory engagement, and the active participation of people with disabilities in archaeology and heritage remain limited. This gap is particularly conspicuous when contrasted with the extensive literature dedicated to community engagement, public archaeology, and social inclusion (Agbe-Davies 2010; Díaz-Andreu and Ruiz 2017; Funari, Garraffoni and Almeida 2018; Douglass et al. 2019).

Archaeology is frequently perceived as a discipline predominantly visual in nature (Barceló 2010; Balm 2016; Pettitt, Meyering and Kentridge 2020). Archaeological sites, museum exhibitions, maps, drawings, photographs, and digital reconstructions typically rely heavily on sight as the primary conduit for accessing information about the past. Such an approach can unintentionally exclude people who experience heritage through different sensory pathways, limiting opportunities for broader participation. At the same time, it may also restrict the ways in which archaeologists themselves interpret and communicate the past.

This paper explores how sensory approaches, used in inclusive and performative archaeology, can help render archaeological research and heritage

more accessible. It supports the view that accessibility involves not only removing physical barriers (Tesser and Rosato 2026), but also creating different ways to engage with archaeological knowledge. By analysing examples from recent international literature, the paper discusses how multisensory and participatory approaches can facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities while offering new perspectives on the interpretation and presentation of the past.

More broadly, this paper aims to contribute to ongoing discussions of accessibility and inclusion within archaeology and heritage studies, with particular relevance to the context of Serbia and Southeast Europe (Anđelković Grašar and Plemić 2022), where these topics have received comparatively limited academic attention. Previous research in Serbia has primarily examined the physical accessibility of archaeological heritage for people with disabilities, including access to museums and archaeological sites, ramps, accessible paths, Braille materials, audio guides, and other forms of infrastructure and interpretation (Plemić 2022). This body of research also highlights the differences between mere physical accessibility and the availability of interpretative content tailored for people with disabilities. Plemić (2022) notes that individuals with disabilities must carefully plan their visits to heritage sites and points out that information about accessibility on the websites of museums and institutes managing these archaeological sites is often scarce or insufficiently visible. The legal framework recognises the need for museums to make collections accessible to people with disabilities, where possible and in forms suitable to their needs (Law on Museum Activity, Article 69 – *Zakon o muzejskoj delatnosti 2021*). Rather than providing a comprehensive overview of existing regional practices, this paper discusses these approaches and considers their potential application within the local context. Our aim is to show that the practice of manipulating material remains – whether during archaeological research or later heritage presentation – can become more open to multivocal experiences, abilities, and ways of knowing.

This paper is based on a thematic review of recent literature concerning inclusive, multisensory, participatory, and performative approaches in archaeology and heritage. The literature was selected around the main topics discussed in this study, including accessibility, sensory experience, participation, performance, and the direct involvement of people with disabilities. Relevant examples are used to illustrate the different ways in which these approaches have been applied, as well as to evaluate their possible relevance for the local context. The relationships between these concepts and their application across different domains of archaeological and heritage practices are summarised in Figure 1.

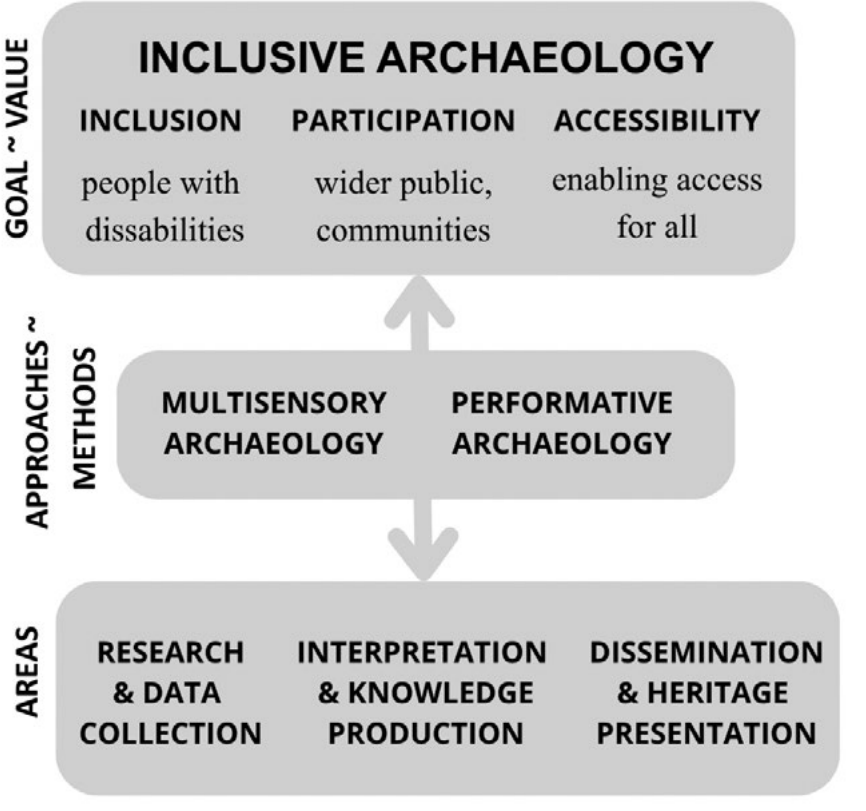


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of inclusive approaches across archaeological and heritage practice

2. Disability: Definitions and Archaeological Perspective

Within the traditional medical model, disability is perceived as a consequence of an individual's physical, mental, or sensory impairment. Under this framework, it is viewed as a state that requires diagnosis and treatment in order for the person to restore normal functioning (Shakespeare 2014). However, the understanding of disability has evolved considerably over time. Different disciplines have contributed to a broader definitional scope to include the social and cultural contexts in which people live, rather than focusing entirely on their personal health (Shakespeare 2017[27]). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), disability is not merely a medical condition, but the result of the interaction between a person's health condition and environmental and personal

[27] For extended discussion, see Davis 2017.

factors (WHO 2002, 2013). WHO's *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (ICF) states that the concept of disability includes a person's medical condition and the way this condition affects everyday activities and participation in society. Therefore, disability can involve physical or mental impairments, as well as difficulties in performing activities and participating in social life. Additionally, the role of environmental factors is stressed, as they can influence whether a person experiences limitations or receives support for active participation (WHO 2002, 2013). Similarly, the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol* (2006) frames disability not as a medical problem of a person, but as something created when social and physical barriers prevent people with impairments from participating equally in society.

In recent years, the discipline of archaeology has grown increasingly aware of the importance of including people with disabilities across different stages of archaeological practice, including fieldwork and data collection, interpretation and knowledge production, and the dissemination and presentation of archaeological findings and heritage. These forms of inclusion involve different types of activities, each requiring different forms of accessibility and participation. A key figure in driving this development was Theresa O'Mahony, a British disabled archaeologist and accessibility advocate. In 2015, she published *Guideline 41: Enabled Archaeology* (O'Mahony 2015), one of the first practical guides on accessibility in archaeology. In it, she provides practical recommendations for rendering archaeological fieldwork, museums, and heritage activities more accessible, with the core idea of removing barriers and enabling people with disabilities to participate fully in archaeology as students, professionals, researchers, and volunteers.

This foundational work catalysed the *Enabled Archaeology* movement, which later evolved into the *Enabled Archaeology Foundation* in 2019. While their earlier publications used the terms 'dis/Ability' and 'dis/Abled' to emphasise people's abilities rather than their limitations, the movement has since adopted the term 'disabled', reflecting the preference of many disabled people to reclaim the term rather than replace it with euphemisms (EAF 2023). At the same time, the descriptor 'enabled' remains an important framework cantered on enabling both disabled and non-disabled people and creating equal opportunities to participate in archaeology. More recently, *A Guide to Disability Inclusion in Archaeology* (Fitzpatrick et al. 2025) brought together practical recommendations for archaeological fieldwork, museums, workplaces, and education. The guide emphasises that accessibility is the responsibility borne by the entire archaeological community.

This development is also reflected in recent archaeological research. Sneed and Shrader (2024) argue that the traditional medical model has driven the ex-

clusion of disabled people from archaeological fieldwork and from the broader production of archaeological knowledge. Instead, these authors support the social model of disability, which focuses on identifying and removing barriers that limit participation. Collectively, these initiatives and publications show that archaeology is progressively transforming into a more accessible and inclusive discipline, one where disabled people are recognised not merely as passive visitors, but also as active archaeologists, researchers, and contributors to archaeological knowledge.

3. Beyond Vision: Archaeology as a Multisensory Discipline

Archaeological work involves touching, handling, hearing, moving, and experiencing material remains, not only seeing them. However, archaeological research has traditionally relied primarily on visual observation and interpretation as the chief method for producing archaeological knowledge. As Balm (2016) points out, the discipline has long operated under the assumption that the past can be comprehended mainly through sight. Nevertheless, seeing is not simply a biologically neutral act, but rather an interpretative process shaped by cognition, prior experience, cultural traditions, and professional training (Balm 2016, Janik 2020). Moreover, rather than being objective records, archaeological images are interpretative constructions that shape how the past is imagined and communicated (Balm 2016).

Archaeological interpretation is therefore created through more than vision alone. It develops through embodied engagement with material culture that encompasses touch, movement, interaction, dialogue, and personal experience (Shanks 1992; 2016). If archaeology has historically privileged vision as its dominant mode of knowledge production and communication, then individuals who experience the world differently reveal not only barriers to accessibility but also alternative avenues for understanding the past. Joyce (2011) asks how archaeology (of religion) might look from the perspective of a blind archaeologist, arguing that archaeological knowledge is not created through sight alone. Instead of asking what an object looked like, other questions come to the fore: How does it feel? What is its weight? How was it handled? In what ways did individuals move through a place and experience it with their bodies? This perspective shows that archaeological interpretation is not dependent solely on vision but can also be developed through touch, movement, and embodied experience. Despite growing theoretical interest in the senses, recent discussions within sensory archaeology show that archaeology still remains largely a visual

discipline. Skeates (2026) contends that sight continues to dominate archaeological research and interpretation, whereas other senses, movement, and bodily experiences still receive far less academic attention. This persistent visual dominance may limit our understanding of how past human communities actually experienced the material world.

Research on perception in archaeology, particularly within the phenomenological tradition introduced by Tilley (1994), laid the groundwork for the development of sensory archaeology (Day 2013; Skeates and Day 2019; Hamilton 2025). Rather than studying individual senses, sensory archaeology explores how people experienced objects, places, and landscapes through the dynamic interaction of different senses. As Skeates (2026) points out, human experience is always multisensory, involving not only sight, but also touch, sound, smell, taste, movement, memory, emotions, and social interaction. He further distinguishes between the terms *sensory*, which refers to bodily perception, and *sensorial*, which refers to the cultural and social meanings attached to sensory experience.

Over recent decades, sensory archaeology has become a well-established field within broader archaeology. An extensive body of books, edited volumes, and journal articles has explored themes of embodiment, materiality, sensory experience, and human interaction with objects and places (Day 2013; Hamilakis 2014; Pellini, Zarankin and Salerno 2015; Skeates and Day 2019; Pellini 2020; Jordan, Mura and Hamilton 2025). Although sensory archaeology has expanded considerably over the last three decades, Skeates (2026) cautions against characterising it as a 'sensorial revolution'. Instead, he sees it as the gradual development of an important research field that continues to grow alongside other archaeological approaches. In his view, while sensory archaeology has enriched archaeological interpretation, it has not fundamentally transformed archaeological practice, which remains largely centred on vision. Although phenomenological approaches have faced methodological and epistemological criticism – including regarding their limited replicability (Brück 2005; Barrett and Ko 2009; Moyes 2023) – they have opened many innovative directions for archaeological research. Some authors have also developed more systematic and reproducible approaches (Hamilton et al. 2006). Research on emotions and the senses is closely tied to embodied archaeology, where the body is treated as a critical locus for experiencing and interpreting the material world (Hamilakis, Pluciennik and Tarlow 2002). Price (2026) argues that sensory archaeology must look beyond what people in the past experienced through their senses, to what those experiences meant within a particular cultural context. She suggests that sensory experiences are shaped by both biology and culture and that archaeologists can use material remains alongside critical imagination to investigate these past

experiences. Skeates (2026) emphasises that sensory archaeology is not meant to replace traditional archaeological methods. Instead, it complements them by asking new questions regarding how people experienced everyday life, material culture, and landscapes in the past.

Recognising archaeology as a multisensory discipline carries profound implications for accessibility and inclusion. Because archaeological knowledge is created through diverse forms of perception rather than through vision alone, individuals with different sensory abilities can contribute to archaeological research in meaningful ways. Sensory diversity is therefore not merely a matter of equal participation but rather a valuable source of new archaeological perspectives. This suggests that heightened attention to multisensory experience can foster not only richer archaeological interpretations but also a more accessible and inclusive archaeology.

Sensory approaches have similarly influenced heritage interpretation and museum practice through the emergence of sensory museology (Howes 2014). Challenging the traditional view of museums as places where objects are primarily observed, Howes argues that museums can be transformed into environments where knowledge is created through embodied and multisensory experiences. In these settings, visitors do not simply look at museum objects; instead, they engage with them through touch, sound, movement, smell, memory, emotions, and personal experience. Rather than isolating individual senses, sensory museology recognises that perception is always multisensory and culturally shaped, thereby allowing different people to experience and interpret the same heritage in different ways. These ideas have influenced numerous studies on heritage interpretation and museum practice (Wang 2020; Cho 2021; Kanari, Souliotou and Papaioannou 2022; Murillo and Williams 2025; Han, Gault and Pullin 2026; Kartal and Kartal 2026). By encouraging engagement through multiple senses, these approaches offer new ways of experiencing and understanding the past, and so promote more active participation in heritage interpretation. Howes and colleagues (2018) further argue that multisensory engagement is not simply a matter of adding different sensory elements to museum exhibitions – rather, it is about transforming the relationship between visitors, museum objects, and the production of knowledge itself. This is particularly important in discussions of accessibility, as it creates opportunities for people with different abilities and ways of perceiving the world to engage with archaeological heritage. Ultimately, multisensory interpretation benefits not only visitors with disabilities, but all audiences by creating richer, more meaningful, and more inclusive experiences of the past.

4. Archaeology as a Performative Practice

Performative archaeology developed alongside the theoretical shifts introduced by post-processual archaeology during the 1980s and 1990s. Scholars such as Erving Goffman, Victor Turner, and Richard Schechner argued that social life is created through actions, interaction, and embodied practice rather than being determined only by social structures (DeMarrais 2014; Hughes-Freeland 2015). These perspectives prompted archaeologists to pay closer attention to the relationships between people, material remains, landscapes, and present-day communities. Pearson and Shanks (2001) argued that archaeology itself is a performative practice, given that archaeological knowledge results from interaction with places, objects, and people. Consequently, archaeological sites were no longer seen only as places where evidence is collected; they became places where the past is interpreted, experienced, negotiated, and constantly recreated through excavation, public engagement, and heritage activities. Moving through space, handling objects, and making various gestures facilitates a distinct kind of understanding, one based on experience rather than only the interpretation of texts or images. In this sense, performance functions as a method of thinking, not a mere form of representation. The key difference is that these activities are not employed simply for public entertainment or recreation of the past; they are grounded in archaeological evidence and used as a means of exploring archaeological questions, testing interpretations, and generating new knowledge. Along these lines, Shackell and Zorzin (2025) distinguish three main modalities connecting performance with archaeology: as a vehicle for presenting archaeological knowledge, as a perspective for interpreting archaeological evidence, and as a research practice for investigating past performances.

The core idea of performative archaeology is that knowledge about the past is generated through lived experience and participation, not merely by studying archaeological remains. Within this framework, performance functions as a research method that helps archaeologists explore how people in the past may have interacted with places and objects. A diverse array of embodied practices, such as experimental archaeology, historical re-enactments, movement, role-playing, etc., allows researchers to investigate non-material aspects of the past, such as gestures, sensory experience, emotions, practical skills, and social interaction. Their purpose and aim are not to recreate the past exactly as it happened, but to generate new questions and bring up alternative interpretations that cannot be objectively measured or recovered from the archaeological record (DeMarrais 2014; Trimmis and Kalogirou 2018). Growing interest in embodiment has also significantly influenced archaeological fieldwork. Hamilakis and Theou (2013) describe archaeological sites as performative spaces where archaeologists, local

communities, volunteers, artists, and visitors all contribute to the production of archaeological knowledge. Their fieldwork at the Neolithic site of Koutroulou Magoula in Greece perfectly illustrates this. Excavation was combined with theatre, storytelling, music, communal meals, and artistic activities, transforming the archaeological site into a shared social arena where different experiences, memories, and interpretations could meet. The activities were closely linked to the archaeological work at the site. The 2011 performance, executed during the excavation season, drew on archaeological and ethnographic findings. It included a site-specific performance, music, cooking, and a shared meal, with local members of the community taking part as both audience members and participants. Shanks (2004) argues that the discipline of archaeology is inherently performative because it does not simply recover or reproduce the past. Instead, every archaeological interpretation constitutes a new act of re-working, re-mediating, re-presenting, and re-storing the material traces that remain (Shanks 2004). From this perspective, archaeology is not about producing final or definitive interpretations, but rather an ongoing process through which the past is continuously revisited and understood anew.

Performative thinking has also strongly shaped the presentation of archaeological heritage. Rather than treating heritage as a collection of preserved monuments or museum objects, scholars approach it as an ongoing social and cultural process that creates meanings through active participation, memory, and experience (Smith and Waterton 2009). Museums and heritage institutions engage the public through various participatory activities such as performances, storytelling, historical re-enactments, experimental demonstrations, and interactive exhibitions. Beyond communicating archaeological information, these institutions also aim to encourage people to experience the past in a more active and personal way. Bagnall (2003) argues that visitors are more than passive consumers of heritage. He describes emotional mapping, a process he observed based on his interviews and while watching visitors at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester and Wigan Pier in Wigan, England. Visitors were encouraged to relate the exhibited past to their own memories and emotions, using the museum space as a starting point for personal interpretation rather than simply receiving a fixed historical narrative. This serves as an excellent example of a performative approach applied in a heritage or museum context, rather than a direct example of performative archaeology. Visitors create meaning through movement, interaction, and imagination, turning personal emotions and memories into an important part of experiencing and interpreting heritage. As he notes, ‘emotions and the imagination are key dimensions of contemporary audience activity’ (Bagnall 2003, 87).

Furthermore, performances at heritage sites encourage visitors to connect archaeological narratives with their own personal and familial memories, ren-

dering the past far more meaningful and personally relevant. In this way, heritage interpretation becomes a collaborative, embodied process rather than a one-way transmission of expert knowledge. This approach relates to sensory archaeology because it invites visitors to use multiple senses instead of relying entirely on visual observation. A similar perspective appears in *Theatre/Archaeology* by Pearson and Shanks (2001), who argue that archaeological places can themselves function as spaces of performance. Landscapes, monuments, and archaeological sites are not passive settings but active participants in the interpretation of the past. Movement through these spaces, direct interaction with material remains, and the presence of diverse audiences all become part of the archaeological experience.

Like other theoretical approaches, performative archaeology has faced its share of criticism. One main concern among critics is that the concept of performance has become so broadly applied that it risks losing its analytical precision. Some scholars argue that not every human activity should automatically be described as performance and that clearer distinctions should be maintained between ritual, theatre, everyday practice, and performative action (for discussion, see Hughes-Freeland 2015). Others question whether reconstructed performances can produce reliable archaeological knowledge, since they inevitably reflect present-day interpretations and experiences.

Proponents of performative archaeology acknowledge these limitations but argue that exact replication is not the primary purpose of the approach. Instead, performance offers a way to explore possibilities and test interpretations. A compelling case study that utilised drama, a performative application, as a research and teaching tool in archaeological contexts in the caves of Santorini yielded positive outcomes (Trimmis and Kalogirou 2018). The authors proposed the '3E method' (Exposition, Exploration, Exhibition) as a structural framework for using drama in archaeological inquiries. During the exploration phase, participants used movement, drama, and embodied activities to engage with the archaeological spaces and develop interpretations from their experience of the caves. The aim was not to reproduce a past performance, but to use embodied practice to explore archaeological questions and generate interpretations. Through these introductory activities, embodied exploration, and collaborative presentations or storytelling, participants actively engage with archaeological evidence to develop their own interpretations. In this way, performance becomes a tool for research, learning, and interpretation, described by the authors as a 'third research paradigm'. In this sense, performative archaeology complements rather than replaces traditional archaeological methods. A comparable approach is presented by Ahola and Lassila (2022), who explored the performative potential of the Mesolithic Lepaa artefact from Finland. Using experimental archaeology, artistic research, and 3D technologies, they investigated how this

specific object functioned when activated through movement and light. These experiments were carried out in collaboration with a professional shadow puppetry artist whose experience helped evaluate the performative possibilities of the artefact. Although the artist concluded she would not personally use the object as a puppet in a contemporary performance, she observed that the artefact cast expressive animal-like shadows when illuminated, supporting the idea that it could have played a role in storytelling or ritual performances. Ultimately, the experiment treated the artefact not merely as an object to be observed, but as one whose potential uses and meanings could be dynamically explored through embodied experimentation. The study illustrates how performative approaches can generate novel interpretations of archaeological objects that extend beyond their physical appearance.

Recent research confirms that performative archaeology remains an active and developing field. The examples discussed above show that researchers are increasingly combining artistic expression and creative experimentation with more structured methods and practical guidelines. Janik (2020), for example, suggests that sustained collaboration between archaeology and contemporary art can broaden archaeological interpretation. Artists often focus on ambiguity, multiple meanings, and emotional engagement, encouraging archaeologists to look beyond purely descriptive analytic tools. This allows performance to be deployed not merely as a creative activity, but as a systematic research tool. Similarly, Witelson (2025) shows that performance theory can reinterpret archaeological evidence and prompt new research questions. Rather than focusing exclusively on what archaeological images represent, his work explores who created them, who experienced them, and how they functioned within a community. An important element of every performance is the audience. Meaning is created through the interaction between performers, observers, and the place where the performance occurs. Applied to archaeology, this suggests that rock art was not simply a record of past events but rather part of a social process through which communities expressed identities, negotiated relationships, and created shared meanings.

A complementary example is the Toumba Serron project in northern Greece, which brought together archaeology, performance, and ethnography to explore possible experiences of Neolithic life (Shackell and Zorzin 2025). Rather than reconstructing a specific Neolithic ritual, the project used movement, sound, speech, storytelling, and other performative activities to explore broader questions about life, death, water, ritual, and relationships with the environment. Local community members participated actively by sharing their knowledge, memories, and experiences. Importantly, because the archaeological site was difficult to access, the performance was staged inside a laboratory setting. This case study illustrates beautifully how changing the setting and format of an ac-

tivity can render archaeological practice more accessible and inclusive. One of the most comprehensive examples of performative archaeology is the work of Dawn Adrienne Saliba, who combines her professional background in theatre with experimental archaeology. Saliba (2025a) developed and applied an experimental method during research at the Ħal Saflieni Hypogeum, a UNESCO World Heritage prehistoric underground temple and Neolithic burial complex in Malta. The performances took place in different chambers of the monument, allowing participants to explore how movement, sound, visibility, light, and spatial organisation interacted with the site's architecture. Grounded in archaeological evidence and the architectural characteristics of the monument, the experiments applied standardised performance protocols. Each performance included predefined movements, vocal activities, spatial positions, and duration, and was subsequently followed by phenomenological evaluation from all participants, including both performers and observers. Rather than attempting a literal reconstruction of prehistoric rituals, the aim was to investigate how embodied experience, acoustics, movement, and sensory perception can enrich archaeological interpretation while remaining grounded in archaeological evidence (Saliba 2025a,b).

Another important aspect is that performative approaches open archaeology to more inclusive participation. Because knowledge is produced through engagement and action, people with different abilities, sensory experiences, and disabilities can contribute to the generation of archaeological knowledge in different ways. This reduces the exclusive dependence on sight, inviting a broader sensory involvement in archaeological practice. This encourages more participatory ways of interpreting the past – ways that extend far beyond observation alone.

5. Inclusion and New Interpretations of the Past

Inclusive archaeology has developed in response to more traditional approaches in which archaeological knowledge was primarily produced by experts and presented to the public as a finished interpretation. In this context, inclusion and participation are related but distinct concepts. Inclusion refers specifically to removing barriers and enabling people with disabilities to access and contribute to archaeological activities on an equal basis. Participation has a broader meaning and refers to the active involvement of individuals, communities, and wider audiences in archaeological activities and knowledge production, whether or not these activities are specifically designed around disability. In recent decades, many scholars have argued that archaeology should become more collaborative, where different communities act not only as audiences but also as active participants in creating knowledge about the past (Matthews, McDavid

and Jeppson 2011; Douglass et al. 2019). Recent approaches emphasise that archaeology can extend beyond documenting and preserving the past by actively engaging with contemporary communities. Inclusive participation, collaboration, and shared decision-making are increasingly recognised as key elements of sustainable archaeological practice (Kanungo, Smith and Choksi 2024).

A key idea of inclusive archaeology is that genuine inclusion extends beyond merely ensuring access to archaeological sites, museums, or heritage information. Edwards-Ingram (1997) describes this through the concept of 'true acts of inclusion', emphasising the benefits of giving different groups the opportunity to contribute to interpreting the past rather than passively receiving information about it. This approach challenges the traditional division between experts and the public, fostering a dialogue between academic and local knowledge. Matthews, McDavid and Jeppson (2011) argue that inclusion within archaeology involves much more than improving public access to archaeological knowledge. Inclusion can instead occur at different stages of archaeological work: from research and raw data collection to the production and interpretation of archaeological knowledge, and finally to the presentation and communication of heritage. Through this framework, archaeology becomes a collaborative process in which different forms of knowledge and perspectives contribute to a better understanding of the past. Douglass and colleagues (2019) express similar ideas, stressing collaboration, shared authority, and the importance of community participation throughout the research process. In their view, communities are not only sources of information but partners in the production of archaeological knowledge. Funari, Garraffoni, and Almeida (2018) further argue that archaeology can actively advance social justice by creating opportunities for dialogue, learning, and participation among groups often excluded from dominant historical narratives.

An essential point raised by these authors is that communities are never homogeneous entities. Different people inherently bring different experiences, identities, interests, and expectations. Inclusive archaeology therefore requires continuous communication and flexibility rather than the application of a single model expected to work for everyone. Participation can take many distinct forms, and different groups will engage with heritage in different ways. Yet, while community participation has become an important part of inclusive archaeology, much less scholarly attention has been dedicated to how disability itself can contribute to archaeological interpretation. People with disabilities are not only audiences in need of access to heritage; their experiences can offer valuable perspectives that deepen our understanding of the past (Hunt and Kitchen 2022).

Alternative ways of moving, sensing, communicating, and interacting with the environment can bring to light questions that traditional archaeological narratives often overlook. These perspectives matter not only for the study of disa-

bility in the past, but also for broader archaeological questions concerning material culture, sensory experience, movement, social interaction, and the diverse ways people engaged with their environments. Evaluating the past through the lens of disability does not mean embarking on a simplistic search for evidence of impairment. Instead, it encourages archaeologists to actively think about how different-abled individuals experienced their surroundings and participated in prehistoric social life. An illustrative example is found in the Barcelona project focused on so-called 'forgotten collectives' (Gibaja et al. 2021), an initiative that included people with physical and/or intellectual disabilities, mental health conditions, older adults, and other socially marginalised groups. Grounded in the social model of disability, the project approached disability not simply as an individual phenomenon but as a condition resulting from social and institutional barriers. The authors argue that genuine inclusion requires more than inviting people to participate in existing activities. Archaeological practices themselves may need to adapt to allow meaningful participation. Throughout the project, the team modified activities by simplifying language, adapting communication, adjusting workshop duration, and changing the way archaeological information was presented. These changes improved participation, demonstrating that inclusion requires reshaping archaeological practice around participants rather than expecting them to adapt to pre-existing models.

Phillips and Gilchrist (2012) contend that the primary barriers to inclusion in archaeology are often created by the discipline itself, rather than by disability. They suggest that we need to think in terms of how to organise archaeological education, fieldwork, and employment to recognise individual abilities and remove unnecessary barriers. To demonstrate this approach, they present the *Inclusive Accessible Archaeology* Project, developed at the University of Reading, England, in collaboration with Bournemouth University. The project involved students with different disabilities participating in archaeological field schools. Rather than simplifying fieldwork, the project modified working methods, assessed individual abilities, and removed unnecessary barriers to facilitate equal participation. It also produced good practice guidelines and accessibility assessment tools for archaeological field training, which were later adopted by other institutions. The initiative demonstrates that genuine inclusion is achieved not by lowering academic or professional standards, but by restructuring archaeological practice so that people with different abilities can participate on equal terms. O'Mahony (2015) further argues that inclusion begins long before archaeological fieldwork actually starts. Careful planning, open communication with participants, and consideration of individual needs before excavation can pre-emptively eliminate many barriers, creating a more inclusive working environment. Within this framework, accessibility becomes part of project design rather than a response to problems encountered during fieldwork. A central idea

of *Enabled Archaeology* (O'Mahony 2015) is that inclusive fieldwork does not necessarily require expensive equipment or major structural changes: relatively simple adjustments, such as flexible task allocation, accessible excavation areas, appropriate tools and supportive teamwork, can make archaeological fieldwork accessible to a much wider range of participants.

Recent discussions on enabled archaeology further argue that inclusion must extend beyond merely upgrading physical access to archaeological sites and museums. In this view, accessibility is about more than removing barriers; it is about cultivating opportunities for meaningful participation in the production of archaeological knowledge. This perspective has been further developed by the Enabled Archaeology Foundation, which promotes disability inclusion across all stages of archaeological work. Rather than treating accessibility as a series of individual adjustments, the Foundation positions it as a core principle of archaeological practice. Its guidelines highlight that inclusive archaeology must be embedded in project planning and maintained throughout excavation, post-excavation work, heritage interpretation, and public communication. According to this approach, accessibility is most effective when integrated into everyday archaeological practice rather than introduced after barriers are already in place (Fitzpatrick et al. 2025). Similarly, Heath-Stout (2022) shows that inclusion must also account for archaeologists with non-apparent disabilities, whose needs frequently remain overlooked in a discipline that often assumes non-disabled practitioners.

As stressed across numerous studies, true accessibility entails not only facilitating physical access but also accessible communication, digital technologies, and opportunities for active participation in heritage interpretation (Plemić 2022). Many museums have already begun to implement these principles through multisensory exhibitions and co-design approaches. Examples, which will be presented in more detail later, include the Taizhou Museum in China, where visitors were invited to explore a reconstructed fishing village using sound, smell, touch and interactive environments (Wang et al. 2020); the National Gallery in London, where blind and partially sighted participants collaborated with museum professionals in designing more inclusive museum experiences (Han, Gault & Pullin 2026); and the Philippine National Museum of Natural History, where researchers evaluated visitor perception regarding different multisensory dimensions of museum exhibitions (Murillo and Williams 2025). Collectively, these examples suggest that inclusive archaeology is more than the removal of barriers; crucially, it involves recognising diversity as a valuable source of archaeological knowledge and creating heritage experiences that can be shared by a wider range of people.

The key value of an inclusive approach is that accessibility benefits all participants, not only disabled archaeologists (O'Mahony 2015; Fitzpatrick et al.

2025). Clear communication, flexible working practices, and supportive team organisation improve collaboration and create a safer and more effective working environment for everyone involved.

6. Good Practices

In recent years, a growing number of archaeological and heritage projects have explored innovative ways of rendering archaeology more accessible to people with different abilities and needs. These initiatives show that inclusion does not necessarily require expensive technologies or major structural changes. In many cases, relatively simple adjustments can make archaeological sites, museums and heritage activities more welcoming, engaging, and meaningful for a wider range of participants. At the same time, these projects demonstrate that accessibility is not merely a practical issue, as it can also serve as an opportunity to rethink how people experience, interpret, and engage with the past. One of the most obvious ways of how this shift can be made is the use of tactile materials. Because original artefacts often need protection, many museums provide high-quality replicas that visitors can handle and explore through touch. Although these resources are particularly vital for blind and visually impaired visitors, they also encourage all visitors to engage more actively with material culture. Similarly, multisensory exhibitions deliberately combine visual information with sound, smell, tactile elements, movement, and interactive experiences. Rather than relying exclusively on sight, these exhibitions recognise that people perceive and understand heritage through different senses. Participatory activities – such as experimental archaeology, object-handling sessions, workshops and community projects – further expand these opportunities by encouraging visitors to become active participants instead of passive observers. Zanier, Senica and Dolinar (2022) also emphasise the value of multisensory interpretation. They suggest using tactile reproductions, audio-visual media, and even smells related to archaeological evidence, such as the smell of fruits whose remains were found at a site. Such approaches can enrich the visitor experience while also providing alternative avenues for accessing archaeological information for individuals with diverse disabilities.

Inclusive practices have also achieved increasing visibility in archaeological fieldwork. The Enabled Archaeology Foundation promotes the view that inclusive archaeological fieldwork begins with project planning and can be achieved through flexible working methods, accessible communication and simple adjustments to equipment and excavation practices, enabling people with different abilities to participate equally in archaeological research (O'Mahony 2015; Fitzpatrick et al. 2025). A similar approach is mentioned above in Barcelona project,

which involved people with physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, mental health conditions, older adults and other socially marginalised groups (Gibaja et al. 2021). The project showed that inclusion requires flexibility rather than a single model designed for everyone. Workshops, object handling sessions, replicas, and experiential learning proved to be much more successful than traditional lectures.

Many of these principles have also been successfully applied in museums. An interesting example is the *People at the Seashore* exhibition at the Taizhou Museum in China (Wang 2020). Instead of displaying archaeological and ethnographic objects exclusively inside glass cases, the museum recreated the atmosphere of a traditional fishing village through building reconstructions, authentic fishing equipment, recorded sounds of the sea and seabirds, scents of salty air and dried fish, and hands-on opportunities to interact with local food and material culture. Rather than merely displaying objects, the objective was to recreate aspects of everyday life and let visitors experience heritage through a matrix of multiple senses. Among the most distinctive aspects of this project was its unique methodology for the evaluation of visitor experience. Instead of relying solely on standard surveys, the researchers combined questionnaires with interviews, participant observation, and closed-circuit television (CCTV) tracking to analyse visitors' spontaneous, natural behaviours throughout the exhibition. They examined how visitors moved through the galleries, how long they lingered in different areas, whether they touched the replicas, interacted with the displays, discussed the exhibition with others or used interactive installations. Visitor experience was evaluated across three dimensions: 1) visceral experience, referring to immediate sensory reactions such as sound, smell, touch or the feeling of sea breeze; 2) cognitive experience, focusing on whether visitors gained new knowledge and a better understanding of the exhibition; and 3) emotional experience, exploring whether the multisensory environment evoked memories, emotions, or a stronger personal connection with the fishing community. This study demonstrates that multisensory exhibitions can strengthen learning, emotional engagement, and meaningful interaction with cultural heritage while simultaneously enhancing accessibility.

A different but equally vital approach was presented by Han, Gault and Pullin (2026) through the *Making Sense* project. While many museums attempt to improve accessibility by curation first and subsequently adding features such as audio guides, Braille labels, or tactile replicas, the *Making Sense* project involved blind and partially sighted people from the very beginning through an active co-design process. Working with Dundee Sight Support, North East Sensory Services, and Dundee Contemporary Arts, the researchers organised workshops where participants identified barriers, shared their experiences, and proposed new ways to engage with artworks. Their ideas were then transformed

into multisensory prototypes through an ongoing collaboration between users and designers. Instead of treating blind visitors as end users who are brought in simply to evaluate completed exhibitions, the project framed them as active contributors whose knowledge and lived experiences shaped the final museum experience. This case illustrates that accessibility operates most effectively when it is integrated into exhibition design from the very beginning, rather than introduced as a late-stage adaptation.

Other recent museum studies support similar conclusions. Tesser and Rosato (2026) explored museum accessibility through a methodology combining participant observation and interviews with adults with Down syndrome during their visits to the *Banksy and Friends: The Art of Rebellion* exhibition at JMuseo in Jesolo, Italy, and the interactive *Museo Illusione tra Arte e Scienza* in Verona. The participants demonstrated a much greater level of engagement in the interactive museum, where movement, touch, and direct participation constituted an essential part of the visit. Likewise, Kartal and Kartal (2026) utilised sensory walk activities at the Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture to demonstrate that lighting, movement, textures, and haptic experiences significantly influence how visitors perceive museum spaces. Collectively, these studies indicate that cultivating accessible museum experiences depends not only on basic physical accessibility but also on sensory design, interaction, and opportunities for active participation.

Participation can also be encouraged through movement and performance. Franco (2021) describes the *Dance Well* project, an initiative developed at the Civic Museum of Bassano del Grappa in Italy as part of the European *Dancing Museums* network. Rather than simply visiting galleries, people living with Parkinson's disease, their families and members of the local community participated in regular dance sessions inside the exhibition spaces. Through movement, shared bodily experiences, and social interaction, participants built stronger connections with the museum, with one another, and with the cultural heritage on display. The project illustrates that museums can transform into inclusive social spaces where participation itself becomes part of the heritage experience.

Analysing the Serbian context, Plemić (2022) points to the potential of virtual archaeology, 3D modelling, virtual tours, and 3D-printed replicas to improve public access to archaeological sites and artefacts. These technologies can offer alternative modalities for experiencing archaeological heritage, especially in situations when direct physical access is difficult. In this sense, digital technologies are a vital means that support more inclusive and participatory ways of presenting archaeological heritage.

Collectively, these examples demonstrate that accessibility is not achieved through a single solution but through a combination of flexible approaches tailored to different people and contexts. Accessibility is most effective when it

is considered from the earliest planning phases rather than introduced retroactively, after projects or exhibitions have already been completed. Elements such as clear communication, simple language, tactile materials, multisensory interpretation, participatory activities, and collaboration with users all contribute to more inclusive archaeological and museum practice. Importantly, many of these measures improve the experience not only for disabled visitors but for all audiences. Finally, these good practices illustrate the close relationship between inclusive, sensory, and performative archaeology. By encouraging touch, movement, interaction, and active participation, they create multiple ways of experiencing and interpreting the past. Accessibility, therefore, extends beyond removing physical barriers. It also expands the ways archaeological knowledge can be produced, communicated and experienced, allowing a broader diversity of people to participate in understanding and interpreting cultural heritage.

7. A Practical Demonstration of Inclusive, Multisensory and Participatory Archaeology

As a straightforward illustration of the principles discussed in this chapter, the author substituted a traditional conference presentation with a practical multisensory demonstration. The activity was designed to encourage active participation and to illustrate how inclusive, sensory, and participatory approaches can be seamlessly implemented within everyday archaeological practice. Rather than explaining these concepts only through theory, the demonstration invited participants to experience them directly. During the conference *Serbian Archaeology Between Theory and Facts XIII: The Social Importance of Archaeology*, held in Belgrade on 29–30 May 2026, the author conducted a practical demonstration entitled *Touching the Past: Archaeology as Inclusive and Performative* (Mitrović 2026).

Before the presentation, the author prepared small balls of dried dough and enclosed them in candy wrappers to keep the contents hidden. At the beginning of the session, the audience was invited to volunteer, as the activity focused on inclusion and everyone could choose whether to join. Around 20–30 participants – including archaeologists, university lecturers, researchers, museum professionals, and students – were asked to close their eyes. Each participant received one wrapped ‘candy’ and was encouraged to use senses other than vision to explore, recognise, describe, and identify the object. At first, they were not allowed to open the wrapper. Later, they were invited to unwrap, smell, and even taste it, after being reassured that it was safe.

Due to the packaging and the soft texture of the contents, most participants initially assumed the object was a real candy. However, upon opening it, they

discovered it was merely a piece of plain dough. Many expressed surprise and disappointment, having anticipated a sweet taste only to experience something completely different.

A spontaneous, unplanned, and partly moderated discussion ensued following the demonstration. Several participants noted that the activity prompted them to reevaluate perception from a different perspective and the importance of integrating senses other than vision. In this sense, the demonstration never intended to simulate disability or recreate an archaeological experience, but to encourage archaeologists to challenge the dominant role of sight in archaeological inquiry and consider how diverse sensory and embodied experiences can enrich archaeological interpretation. The activity thus effectively connected inclusive practice with a broader methodological question: how can archaeology produce and communicate knowledge through a more than one sensory perspective? Furthermore, the demonstration highlighted that genuine inclusion must look beyond the basic requirement of making archaeological heritage physically accessible. It must also encourage archaeologists to engage with different ways of perceiving, interpreting, and understanding the past, as important aspects may remain unnoticed when archaeological evidence is filtered solely through familiar perspectives. At the close of the session, the participants were served actual candies. This small gesture created a positive emotional conclusion and made the experience more memorable.

8. Discussion

The studies examined in this paper demonstrate that inclusive archaeology is much more than the mere improvement of physical access to archaeological sites and museums. Instead, it represents a broader transformation in the ways archaeology is practised, interpreted, and shared with society. Recent approaches increasingly recognise that archaeological knowledge is created not only by specialists but also through collaboration with different communities, whose unique lived experiences and perspectives can contribute to a richer understanding of the past (Matthews, McDavid and Jeppson 2011; Kanungo, Smith and Choksi 2024). In this sense, archaeology is progressively shifting from an expert-centred discipline to a more collaborative, participatory practice.

This shift is also reflected w the realm of community archaeology. Moualla and McPherson (2019), through their fieldwork at Tell Mozan in Syria, demonstrate that collaboration with local communities can strengthen cultural identity, cultivate a sense of shared responsibility for heritage protection, and forge stronger connections between archaeological research and contemporary society. Similar conclusions follow from the work of Nalda (2005), who argues that

the discipline benefits when local communities become active partners in the interpretation and management of archaeological heritage. Although these studies focus primarily on local and Indigenous communities, the same principles apply directly to disability inclusion. Inclusive archaeology recognises that different communities bring distinct forms of knowledge, experience, and interpretation that can enrich broader archaeological research.

Recent discussions within the Enabled Archaeology movement expand upon this perspective, arguing that accessibility is only the first step towards inclusion. According to the Enabled Archaeology Foundation, accessibility must be considered at every stage of archaeological work, from project planning and fieldwork to museum interpretation and public engagement (O'Mahony 2015; Fitzpatrick et al. 2025). Hunt and Kitchen (2022) similarly argue that disabled people should not be viewed only as museum visitors or audiences but also as archaeologists, researchers, museum professionals and heritage specialists whose lived experiences contribute valuable perspectives to archaeological interpretation. Consequently, participation transforms from a simple matter of equal access to a mechanism that generates diverse perspectives, questions, and interpretations in archaeological research.

This perspective is particularly critical given that the many barriers faced by disabled archaeologists are organisational rather than individual in nature. Recent studies show that exclusion often stems from assumptions regarding who is fit to participate in archaeological work rather than from disability itself (Clements, Fitzpatrick and Hunt 2023). Heath-Stout (2024) arrives at a similar conclusion, demonstrating that women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalised groups continue to face significant barriers when attempting to enter and advance within archaeological careers. True inclusive archaeology therefore involves not only improving access for museum visitors but also cultivating equal professional opportunities within the discipline itself.

One of the main contributions of inclusive archaeology is shifting the focus from access to participation. The objective is not simply to make archaeology available to people with disabilities but to recognise their capacity to contribute new ideas, ask different questions, and directly participate in the production of archaeological knowledge. Kajda, Michalik and Kobiałka (2015) demonstrate this dynamic particularly well through their work engaging people with intellectual disabilities. Rather than interpreting and navigating the past through chronological historical narratives, many participants understood archaeological heritage through the lens of personal memories, everyday experiences, and emotional connections to objects. These alternative perspectives raised questions and interpretations that might otherwise have remained obscured within mainstream discourse. As the authors state, *"The so-called intellectually disabled persons are very able. It is we, archaeologists, historians and heritage special-*

ists, who are rather unable to conceive of their creative and specific abilities" (Kajda, Michalik and Kobiałka 2015, 153). These examples show that inclusive approaches do more than allow more people to participate in archaeology, also influencing the questions we ask and the way we understand archaeological evidence. Alternative sensory and embodied experiences can draw attention to aspects of objects, spaces, activities, and social relationships that are frequently overlooked from a mainly visual or expert perspective. This does not imply supplanting established archaeological methods; rather, it involves adding new perspectives and questions that can be examined through archaeological evidence. Furthermore, performative approaches serve to highlight the interpretive nature of archaeology. Instead of presenting archaeological interpretations as fixed facts, they can carve out space for dialogue, participation, and different ways of understanding the past (Shackell and Zorzin 2025).

Developments within sensory archaeology further strengthen this argument. Sensory methodologies have demonstrated that archaeological knowledge is created through embodied, multisensory engagement with material culture rather than vision alone. Nevertheless, as Skeates (2026) observes, archaeological practice still relies predominantly on visual observation and interpretation. From the perspective of inclusive archaeology, this raises an important matter: if archaeological understanding benefits from the engagement of multiple senses, then people with specific sensory experiences must not be relegated to audiences requiring better access to heritage. Instead, they must be embraced as vital contributors whose alternative ways of perceiving the world can generate new archaeological interpretations. Along these lines, Hamilton (2023) argues that contemporary sensory archaeology and heritage studies increasingly recognise multisensory experience as an important source of archaeological knowledge, moving beyond the traditional dominance of sight. Together with the work of Howes (2014; Howes et al. 2018), these studies suggest that sensory diversity has the potential to broaden archaeological interpretation rather than simply improve accessibility.

Taken together, these studies indicate that inclusion constitutes more than an ethical responsibility or a matter of equal opportunities. It represents an opportunity to enhance the quality of archaeological research itself. Alternative bodies, senses, experiences, and ways of understanding the world may bring to light aspects of the past that remain invisible when archaeology is approached from only one perspective. Inclusive archaeology therefore broadens not only the scope of who participates in archaeology but also the very modalities through which archaeological knowledge is produced and interpreted.

The case studies discussed throughout this paper also demonstrate that inclusive archaeology is becoming increasingly visible in museums and heritage institutions. Rather than focusing only on physical accessibility, recent projects

show that inclusion involves participation, communication, and meaningful engagement with heritage. Plemić (2022), using examples from Serbia, demonstrates that accessibility, in both physical and cognitive dimensions, can be improved from the earliest stages of heritage interpretation with digital technologies and 3D-replicas.

This broader understanding of accessibility is also reflected in recent museum studies. Hutson and Hutson (2024) argue that flexible interpretation, multisensory experiences, and digital technologies can improve museum experiences for neurodiverse visitors while simultaneously benefiting a much wider audience. Rather than designing separate solutions for specific demographic groups, they propose inclusive design as a general principle of museum practice.

Several case studies demonstrate how these ideas can be applied in practice. The *Making Sense* project (Han, Gault and Pullin 2026) showed the value of involving blind and partially sighted people whose lived experiences were approached as essential source of knowledge in co-designing multisensory museum experiences. . Similarly, Wang (2020) with the Taizhou Museum example demonstrates how multisensory interpretation can improve accessibility, learning, and emotional engagement with cultural heritage (Wang 2020)..

Other studies confirm that touch and embodied interaction remain essential parts of museum learning. Kanari, Souliotou and Papaioannou (2022) observed that children visiting the Diachronic Museum of Larissa in Greece initially hesitated to touch archaeological objects, having learned to believe that museum collections should never be touched. However, once encouraged to handle authentic objects, their confidence increased, and they developed a stronger understanding of how these artefacts were manufactured and used in the past. Likewise, Tesser and Rosato (2026) found that visitors with Down syndrome naturally reached out to touch museum objects even when it was forbidden, suggesting that tactile interaction forms an essential part of experiencing heritage. Their study also shows that true accessibility begins before visitors enter the museum building through clear information, welcoming staff, plain-language communication, and overall supportive museum environments. These findings suggest that successful inclusion often depends on many minor adjustments that together create a far more comfortable and meaningful experience for all visitors.

Recent scholarship also highlights the importance of evaluating multisensory experiences rather than merely implementing them. Murillo and Williams (2025), using an Importance–Performance Analysis at the Philippine National Museum of Natural History, found that while tactile experiences were deemed highly significant by visitors, they remained less developed than visual interpretation. The study suggests that museums must identify the specific sensory dimensions that visitors value most and prioritise improvements accordingly. Cho (2021) reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that multisensory interaction

should not simply replace vision but instead translate information into other sensory modalities – such as sound, vibration or proprioceptive feedback – thereby enabling diverse visitors to access information in different ways.

These developments closely connect inclusive archaeology with performative archaeology. Hamilakis and Theou (2013) argue that performance transforms archaeological sites into shared multisensory spaces where visitors actively create new memories and interpretations instead of passively consuming information. Furthermore, contributions to the volume edited by Franco and Giannachi (2021) show that museums can promote inclusion through movement and active participation, encouraging visitors to experience heritage through their own bodies and interpersonal interactions. Along these lines, Wynants (2019) argues that performance is also a way of producing knowledge. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that embodied experience contributes to both heritage presentation and archaeological interpretation. The various studies discussed in this paper indicate that inclusive, sensory, and performative archaeology are not separate approaches but closely connected perspectives that complement one another. Inclusive archaeology broadens participation, sensory archaeology expands how archaeological knowledge is created through multiple senses, and performative archaeology emphasises active engagement and embodied experience. As a whole, these approaches encourage archaeologists to move beyond the traditional model of observing the past, opening up approaches that involve dialogue, collaboration, and shared interpretation.

At the same time, these approaches are not without limitations. Not every participatory, multisensory, or performative activity necessarily contributes to archaeological research. Some activities primarily support accessibility, learning, social interaction, or engagement with heritage. While these aims are valuable, they should not automatically be considered research methods. Multisensory and performative approaches can introduce highly subjective experiences and modern interpretations that may not directly reflect the past. Therefore, such activities should complement, rather than replace, established archaeological methods and remain tethered to archaeological evidence and clearly defined research questions. Their use may also depend on available resources, the specific type of site or collection, and the mutual willingness of researchers and participants to work together.

Within the Serbian context, the existing legislative framework provides a basis for accessibility and inclusion across different areas related to archaeology and heritage. *The Law on Cultural Heritage* recognises the right of everyone to use cultural heritage under equal conditions, including participation in cultural life, education, and scientific research. It also emphasises cultural diversity and public access to information regarding cultural heritage (Zakon o kulturnom nasleđu 2021, Articles 6–7). *The Law on Museum Activity* requires

museums to make museum objects accessible to the public through different forms of presentation and, where possible, to provide access for persons with disabilities in forms adapted to their needs (Zakon o muzejskoj delatnosti 2021, Article 69). More generally, the *Law on the Prevention of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities* prohibits discrimination in access to public services and facilities, including those related to culture and education, requiring that such facilities be accessible to persons with disabilities (Zakon o sprečavanju diskriminacije osoba sa invaliditetom 2006, Articles 13 and 16). In higher education, the legal framework also provides measures for students with disabilities, including appropriate learning conditions and adapted examination forms (Zakon o visokom obrazovanju 2021, Articles 69, 95, 96 and 105). These provisions create a legal basis for persons with disabilities to participate in higher education and to pursue professional academic training in fields such as archaeology.

These provisions bear relevance to the multiple distinct stages of archaeological work. In the realm of museums and heritage presentation, they provide a legal basis for improving physical, sensory, and informational accessibility. In higher education, they can support the participation of students with disabilities in archaeological education and training. However, the legal framework remains more ambiguous regarding the participation of people with disabilities acting as researchers or collaborators in archaeological research itself.

Within the Serbian context, a more inclusive archaeological practice could develop gradually, depending on the possibilities of each project. This may depend on available resources, the proactive initiative of excavation leaders and research teams, and the collective willingness of researchers, museum professionals, and people with disabilities to take part in archaeological work. Instead of introducing formal protocols from the very outset, it may prove more useful to start with informal meetings and cooperation. This would allow both sides to get to know each other, identify potential challenges and benefits, and find suitable ways of working together. At this early stage, it is difficult to formulate specific recommendations for every individual archaeological site, research project, or approach to displaying archaeological material, as practitioners are best informed about the conditions and possibilities of their own work. They are also uniquely qualified to identify where improvements are possible and where additional support or resources must be secured. As Plemić (2022) points out, accessibility must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, carefully balancing the characteristics of each site and the needs of diverse user groups[28]. For the present, the immediate priority is to

[28] A similar issue was found in research on archaeological sites in Jordan, where visitors with different types of disabilities faced different structural barriers and required

draw attention to the different possibilities, alongside the challenges that may surface when developing a more inclusive archaeological practice. Formal recommendations, protocols, or guidelines can be developed later, informed by these experiences. A valuable set of accessibility parameters has already been proposed by Maslikoviċ and Tomiċ (2015) for cultural heritage institutions, covering accessible information, physical access, signage, facilities, and alternative formats such as Braille and audio materials[29]. They similarly emphasise that accessibility planning should consider the needs of the target users, available resources, legal requirements, and possible solutions, thereby making accessibility an integral part of heritage practice.

9. Conclusion

While this paper represents only a small step toward fostering a more accessible archaeology, meaningful systemic change often begins with small steps. When people with different abilities, experiences, and ways of perceiving the world become active participants in archaeological research and heritage interpretation, the discipline itself becomes inherently richer, more inclusive, and far better equipped to understand the diversity of both past and present societies. Ultimately, accessibility improves participation, but participation in turn fundamentally improves archaeology itself.

Izjava

Potvrđujem da je podneti članak rezultat originalnog i nezavisnog akademskog rada autora, zasnovanog na mom sopstvenom intelektualnom naporu, analizi i interpretaciji. Tokom pripreme ovog rukopisa, autor je koristila AI alatku ChatGPT za pomoć pri uređivanju radi poboljšanja gramatike i čitljivosti na engleskom jeziku. Autor je pregledala i revidirala sve rezultate iz ovih alata i preuzima punu odgovornost za konačni sadržaj rada.

Milica Mitrović

different forms of support. The study also highlights the importance of strong accessibility measures to help people with disabilities experience heritage more independently and reduce their need for help from others (Sakarneh and Katanani 2021).

[29] Çetiner's master's thesis (2018) could serve as a guide to improving accessibility at archaeological sites. In it, she developed design and management strategies to address barriers to participation, using the ancient city of Labraunda as a case study. The proposed strategies aim to improve accessibility while preserving the site's cultural and spiritual significance.

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Додир прошлости: инклузивна и перформативна археологија

Савремена археологија све више препознаје потребу да омогући ширем кругу људи да учествују у истраживању, тумачењу и представљању прошлости. У том смислу, инклузивна археологија не подразумева само уклањање физичких препрека приступању археолошком наслеђу, већ и преиспитивање начина на које се археолошко знање ствара и преноси. Овај рад представља тематски преглед новије литературе о инклузивним, мултисензорним, партиципативним и перформативним приступима у археологији и раду са наслеђем, уз разматрање њихове могуће примене у локалном контексту. Рад не тежи свеобухватном прегледу праксе у Србији и југоисточној Европи, већ настоји да различите приступе доведе у

везу и покаже њихов потенцијал за археолошку праксу. Концептуални оквир рада и односи између ових појмова и њихова примена у различитим областима археолошке праксе и рада са културним наслеђем приказани су на Слици 1.

У раду је размотрен појам инвалидитета и његов однос према приступачности и инклузији, као и нове тенденције употребе појмова у енглеском језику као што су инвалидитет, о(не)могућен и људи са различитим способностима. Инклузија се односи на уклањање физичких и других препрека и стварање услова за равноправно учешће људи са инвалидитетом у различитим аспектима археолошког рада, укључујући истраживање, образовање, рад у музејима и приступ наслеђу. Наглашена је разлика између инклузије и партиципације. Док је инклузија усмерена на равноправно учешће људи са инвалидитетом, партиципација има шире значење и обухвата активно укључивање различитих појединаца, заједница и публика у археолошке активности и процесе стварања знања.

Посебна пажња посвећена је мултисензорним приступима. Иако се археолошка пракса превасходно заснива на чулу вида, у претходних неколико деценија од развоја феноменолошког приступа, подстиче се укључивање и осталих чула: додира, кретања, слуха, просторне оријентације и других облика телесног и чулног искуства. Коришћење више чула може бити значајно за особе са различитим врстама инвалидитета, али истовремено може проширити начине на које сви учесници доживљавају и разумеју археолошки материјал и просторе.

Са тим приступом повезана је и перформативна археологија. Она не подразумева само извођење представе, већ и коришћење покрета, телесног искуства и експеримента за истраживање и тумачење археолошких питања. Примери из литературе показују да такви приступи могу бити засновани на археолошким доказима и допринети разматрању питања која се односе на кретање, простор, предмете, чулно искуство и друштвене праксе. Због тога они могу допунити, али не и заменити, традиционалне археолошке методе.

Једно од важних питања рада јесте на који начин инклузивни приступи могу допринети самом археолошком истраживању, почевши од теренског прикупљања материјала и касније анализе и интерпретације, а не само приступачности и презентацији наслеђа. Различити начини кретања, опажања и интеракције са окружењем могу отворити другачија питања и перспективе у тумачењу археолошких налаза. Искуства људи са различитим способностима могу тако скренути пажњу на аспекте предмета, простора и активности који остају мање видљиви у претежно визуелним и експертски усмереним приступима. Такви увиди не замењују постојеће

археолошке методе, већ их могу допунити новим питањима и могућим интерпретацијама које се даље проверавају на основу археолошких доказа.

Практични део рада представља демонстрација приликом представљања рада „Додир прошлости: археологија као инклузивна и перформативна", изведена на конференцији *Српска археологија између теорија и чињеница*, у Београду, у мају 2026. године. Учесници су добровољно учествовали у једноставној мултисензорној активности: затворених очију истраживали су мале комаде осушеног теста умотане у омоте од бомбона и покушавали да их препознају. Већина је очекивала праву бомбону, док се након отварања показало да је унутра тесто. У спонтаној дискусији учесници су истакли да их је активност навела да размишљају о улози перцепције, претходних очекивања и важности чула која нису вид. Демонстрација је тако послужила као једноставан пример начина на који промена уобичајеног начина опажања може отворити нова питања о археолошком искуству и интерпретацији.

У раду се истовремено указује на ограничења ових приступа. Не доприноси свака партиципативна, мултисензорна или перформативна активност археолошком истраживању или стварању знања. Неке активности пре свега доприносе приступачности, учењу, друштвеној интеракцији или укључивању публике, што су важни циљеви сами по себи. Мултисензорни и перформативни приступи могу такође укључити субјективна искуства и савремене интерпретације које не представљају директну слику прошлости. Због тога их је потребно јасно повезати са археолошким доказима и истраживачким питањима.

У контексту Србије, постојећи правни оквир (закони о културном наслеђу, о музејској делатности, о високом образовању, о спречавању дискриминације особа са инвалидитетом) пружа основу за разматрање приступачности и укључивања у областима културног наслеђа, музејске делатности и високог образовања, док нису наведени конкретни примери за научноистраживачку делатност. Ипак, конкретне могућности зависе од карактеристика локалитета, институција, пројеката и расположивих ресурса. Примери из Србије и међународне литературе показују да не постоји једно решење које одговара свим корисницима и свим археолошким контекстима. Зато би развој инклузивне праксе могао да се одвија постепено, кроз конкретне случајеве, сарадњу са корисницима и стицање искуства, на основу којег би се временом могле развијати шире препоруке и смернице.

Рад закључује да инклузивни, мултисензорни, партиципативни и перформативни приступи нису потпуно одвојене праксе, већ се међусобно допуњују. Они су значајни јер са једне стране представљање археолошког наслеђа чине доступнијим већем броју људи, али са друге стране помажу

и развој научне мисли јер отварају другачија питања, перспективе и начине тумачења прошлости. На тај начин археологија може постати приступачнија, отворенија и осетљивија на различита људска искуства, без одустајања од својих научних метода и захтева.

Кључне речи: инклузивна археологија, археологија чула, перформативна археологија, инвалидитет, доступност наслеђа, археолошка интерпретација.

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