Museum Accessibility Conference
From Barriers to Belonging: Accessibility in Museum Practices

Case Studies Session 4
Heritage, Outdoor & Climate-Sensitive Contexts

Date and Time:
Thursday, November 5th , 2026
10:35 – 11:35 am

Guiding Question:
How can museums and heritage sites deliver meaningful accessibility across outdoor, historic and climate-sensitive environments while balancing conservation, safety and visitor experience?

Facilitator:



Tahani Alashqar

Tahani Alashqar is a museum professional specialising in community engagement, accessibility, and the design of inclusive learning programmes and cultural experiences. She has developed engaging experiences for diverse audiences, including people with disabilities, senior citizens, and the wider public. Her career includes contributions to leading cultural institutions and events across the region, including Sharjah Art Foundation, Dubai Design Week, Al Shindagha Museum, and Tashkeel. Tahani currently works as a Community Engagement and Accessibility Specialist at Zayed National Museum.

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متحف زايد الوطني

Session Schedule:

Time slot	Paper Title	Paper Abstract	Name/Country
10:35 - 10:50 am	Accessibility Without a Museum: Lessons from the Seychelles Natural History Museum.	The closure of the Seychelles Natural History Museum in 2019 for what was initially presented as a temporary renovation resulted in the suspension of public museum services. The building was subsequently reassigned to another government entity with the expectation that a new purpose-built facility would be provided. Seven years later, no replacement museum has materialised. Collections remain largely packed in storage, public exhibitions have ceased, access to specimens has become increasingly restricted, and the museum's visibility within the national cultural landscape has steadily declined. This prolonged displacement has raised questions about institutional resilience, heritage preservation, and the place of natural history museums within national priorities. For a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) such as Seychelles, where financial, spatial, and human resources are limited, the loss of a dedicated museum required a fundamental rethinking of accessibility. Rather than defining access through a physical building, the museum shifted towards community-centred engagement. A key initiative was the Museum in a Box, a portable educational resource containing museum objects and interpretive materials representing Seychelles' unique biodiversity and ecosystems. The programme enables museum educators to deliver tailored learning experiences directly within schools, community settings, and residential care facilities for older persons, adapting activities to different audiences and educational needs. By taking the museum to its audiences, access to knowledge and natural heritage has continued despite the absence of permanent galleries. The museum also delivers outreach programmes and holiday activities that encourage children, educators, and families to explore biodiversity through hands-on learning and environmental stewardship. Visits to forest restoration sites, coastal ecosystems, and protected areas allow participants to experience biodiversity in its natural environment. Inclusive programmes developed with organisations supporting people with visual impairments encourage participants to experience nature through touch, sound, smell, and texture, demonstrating that engagement with natural heritage extends beyond sight.	Nicole Sabrina Barreau, Seychelles National Museums, Sychelles

		Partnerships with local and international organisations have strengthened these programmes through technical expertise, shared resources, and collaboration despite ongoing constraints, including limited funding, high equipment costs, climate-sensitive environments, and shortages of specialist personnel. We examine how the loss of a physical museum compelled a transition from a building-based institution to a mobile, community-focused model of engagement. While accessibility cannot replace the value of a permanent museum, meaningful public participation can be sustained through outreach, collaboration, and innovative educational practice. We also reflect on the long-term risks that prolonged institutional displacement poses for collections, research capacity, and the safeguarding of Seychelles' natural heritage.	
10:50 – 11:05 am	Accessibility in Monument Museums (Dar Si Said Museum, also known as the National Museum of Weaving and Carpets, Morocco)	Accessibility remains a major challenge for monument museums installed within historic buildings, where heritage conservation requirements often limit architectural adaptation and visitor services. This paper examines accessibility issues in Moroccan monument museums through selected case studies, focusing on the balance between preserving historic authenticity and ensuring inclusive access for diverse audiences. In Morocco, many museums are housed in historic palaces, kasbahs, and riads whose architectural configurations—stairs, narrow passages, uneven floors, and fragile decorative elements—create obstacles for visitors with reduced mobility and other accessibility needs. The study approaches accessibility not only from a physical perspective, but also through cultural and intellectual dimensions. It analyses how Moroccan museums attempt to improve visitor accessibility through mediation tools, multilingual interpretation, guided tours, digital technologies, and adapted exhibition design, while respecting the constraints imposed by protected heritage structures. Particular attention is given to experiences developed within museums managed by Fondation Nationale des Musées, including Musée Dar Si Saïd, where recent museographic projects have raised important questions concerning accessibility and inclusion. Methodologically, the paper combines field observations, professional museum experience, and analysis of museographic practices, while also drawing on international discussions related to accessibility in heritage institutions. The research highlights the need to consider accessibility as a broader museological approach rather than solely a technical issue.	Khalid Loukid, National Museum of Weaving and Carpets Dar Si Said, Morocco

		The paper argues that monument museums can develop more inclusive experiences through interpretation, mediation, and visitor-centered practices, even when structural modifications remain limited. By examining the Moroccan context, this contribution seeks to reflect on the possibilities and challenges of making historic museums more accessible while preserving their architectural and cultural significance.	
11:05 – 11:20 am	Niche History Through Accessible Practices: A Case Study of a Special Exhibition at Nanjing Museum (Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Science, Russia)	Throughout the last several decades exhibitions and separate installations for people with special needs have become a common phenomenon among numerous historical, art and municipal museums around the world. Nevertheless, most such spaces are centered around rather broad topics (e.g. history of a country/city throughout a very long timespan) at the same time providing relatively narrow range of accessible practices (typically limited to Braille writing system and interactive tactile displays) which significantly reduces lived experience for disabled people. In this regard, a certain exhibition at Nanjing Museum 南京博物院 stands out from the rest. The term chosen for this space – boaiguan 博爱馆 (literally "exhibition of vast love") – is intriguing, with a clear allusion to both modern inclusivity and to ancient Chinese philosophical school of Mohism. Its overall theme through which communication with the visitors is conducted is highly unconventional: it is entirely devoted to a unique Nanjing copy of the Matteo Ricci's world map Kunyu Wanguo Quantu 坤輿萬國全圖 of 1608, hence, simultaneously addressing both local and world history. The exhibition's displays engage four senses – sight, hearing, smell, and touch – thus allowing people with different special needs to interact with the installations. In March 2026 I had a rare opportunity to examine this exhibition personally and communicate with the local staff in order to get a better understanding of the arrangement of this space. Therefore, in this presentation I aim at demonstrating in detail how this exhibition effectively utilizes different accessible practices and special features of Nanjing copy of Matteo Ricci's world map in order to provide a wider audience with an opportunity to interact with it and learn more about geography, trade and interaction between the East and the West in that time period. For example, unlike other surviving copies of the map, the Nanjing one has many drawings of real and imaginary creatures on it, which is the main topic of one of the installations: the visitors are invited to press a button in order to listen to the sound of one of the animals as well as to touch an artificial piece of its	Ilia Kolnin, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IOS RAS), Russia

		skin and then tasked to guess which animal it is. Moreover, in a broader sense I will explore China's experience in creating unique, highly specialized exhibition spaces for people with disabilities and compare this with Russian attempts of similar nature.	
11:20 – 11:35 am	Making the Fort Speak: Layered Accessibility at Al Fahidi Fort Museum (Dubai Culture & Arts Authority, UAE)	This paper explores that question through Al Fahidi Fort Museum, a rehabilitated landmark cultural destination in Dubai that brings together the historic fort and a new purpose-built museum building. At this museum, accessibility is achieved not by adding more interpretation to the historic building, but by creating a new interpretive ecosystem around it: one that prepares, supports and empowers visitors so the fort itself can remain the central experience. The paper focuses on interpretive accessibility: how complex heritage narratives can be made clear, engaging and inclusive for diverse audiences without flattening their meaning. Led by Dubai Culture and Arts Authority with Barker Langham as Lead Consultant, the interpretive approach uses a new building as a research, collections and storytelling hub, allowing the fort to remain the primary artefact of the visitor journey. Rather than overloading the historic structure with interpretation, the new building provides orientation, deeper context, object-rich galleries, collections access, and spaces for learning and reflection. This enables visitors to enter the fort with a stronger understanding of its history, while allowing the architecture, materials, towers, courtyard and relationship to the city to speak for themselves. The project also addresses accessibility through a layered media strategy. Core messages are repeated and reinforced through different forms of mediation, so visitors can grasp the essential story whether they engage with text, objects, oral histories, audio-visual media, tactile elements, digital interactives or spatial experiences. Clear introductory text supports first-time and non-specialist visitors, while deeper layers offer more detailed interpretation for returning visitors, researchers and enthusiasts. Oral histories, archival material and new Islamic arms and armour collections expand the story beyond the building, connecting the fort to memory, craft, defence, trade and the wider Islamic world. The experience also recognises different sensory, cognitive and emotional needs. Captioned oral histories, accessible audio-visual interpretation, children’s text, learning-through-play and gamified	Maryam Mudhaffar and Ghaida Sawalha, Dubai Culture & Arts Authority, United Arab Emirates

		interactives create multiple ways into the content. The pacing of the journey alternates between dynamic moments of engagement and calmer spaces for observation, reflection and recovery, responding to the demands of a historic site in a busy urban setting. This creates an experience that is rich without becoming overwhelming. Al Fahidi Fort Museum demonstrates that accessibility in historic environments is not only a matter of ramps, routes or compliance. It is a curatorial and design philosophy: one that uses architecture, collections, narrative and mediation together to create a welcoming, legible and meaningful encounter with heritage.	

Presenters' Bios:

Nicole Sabrina Barreau



Assistant Museum Curator Seychelles Natural History Museum - Museum education and community outreach specialist

I'm a Seychellois museum professional with 20 years of experience at the Seychelles Natural History Museum in Victoria Mahe Seychelles My professional career at the Museum began on 04th October 2006, I joined as a Museum Assistant. In 2015 promoted to be senior Museum Assistant and on 1st October 2017 I was appointed Assistant Museum Curator a position I continue to hold till now.

I specializes in Museum Education, visitor's engagement and community outreach. My work focusses on developing and delivering educational programmes, guided visits and outreach. Activities that make museum collections and heritage accessible, meaningful and engaging to diverse audiences. I particularly interested in strengthening the relationship between museums and the community and creating inclusive learning experience for visitors of different ages and background. In my current role I assists with management and monitoring of the day to day operations and contributes to the development and delivery of educational and outreach programmes. I assist in developing temporary exhibitions and interpretation programmes that connect museum collection with visitors.

A significant part of my work involves developing partnership between the Seychelles Natural History Museum and schools, university, non-governmental organizations, day care centers, local consultants, supporting persons with special needs and any special groups in the community. I coordinates staff and volunteers involved professional knowledge in museum education, interpretation, and curriculum development and visitor engagement. I hold a Postgraduate Diploma in Museum Studies with Merit from the University of Leicester (2025) and a Certificate in General Management (CGM) from the University of Seychelles 2017-2019)I also obtained the Diplôme d'ètudes en langue francaise (DELF) A1, A2 and B1

My professional development includes several international museum and heritage training programmes In 2015 I participated in "Museum and Community Development Training" organized by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) at the National Museum of Ethnology and Lake Biwa Museum in Japan. In 2016 I completed the Training Course on Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Relics for Developing Countries in Beijing China organized by the Ministry of Commerce and Central Academy of Cultural Administration. In 2017 I attended the ICOM International training Centre (ICOM ITC) for Museum studies workshop. Entitled "My Museum, Your Museum: Developing Meaningful Experiences for Visitors of all Ages", in Beijing. In 2018 I participated in the "Empowering Women through Technical Education: Training of Trainers Programme" in Shamla Hills Bhopal Madhya Pradesh India.

Khalid Loukid



Khalid Loukid has been Curator of the National Museum of Weaving and Carpet – Dar Si Saïd in Marrakech since December 2016. He holds a PhD in Arab, Muslim, and Semitic Studies from Aix-Marseille University and is a specialist in the history of public collections of Moroccan carpets, museography, and the enhancement of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.
He holds a specialized Master's degree in Museography and a diploma in Islamic Archaeology from the National Institute of Archaeological Sciences and Heritage (INSAP). He has solid experience in collection conservation, preventive conservation, and restoration, particularly of textiles and carpets. He has also participated in the design and installation of several temporary and permanent museum exhibitions in public museums in Morocco and abroad.
His research focuses on the formation of heritage collections in Morocco, the musealization of Amazigh carpets, heritage policies during and after the French Protectorate, as well as traditional knowledge and practices of weaving and dyeing. He has participated in numerous national and international conferences and has benefited from professional training programs organized by ICOM, UNESCO, ICCROM, and the National Foundation of Museums. Author of several scientific publications, he notably published Mining Heritage: Museological Approaches and Museographic Practices (European University Press, 2018). He is also involved in archaeological research, particularly on sites such as Tāmdūlt, and is actively engaged in professional training in museum-related professions.

Ilia Kolnin



I first became engaged in academic researcher during my bachelor years at NRU HSE, School of Asian Studies (2015-2020) when I started taking part in research conferences and publishing my first articles. During my internship at Nanjing University (2018-2019) I was able to gather various materials which helped me to finish my BA thesis on an ancient Chinese source on Southeast Asia, *Daoyi zhilüe*, including its full translation into Russian as a supplement. Simultaneously I was invited for a vacant position at the Chinese department of IOS RAS where I continue working up to this day. My studies continued at the MA program (2020-2022) where I was researching a wider topic – Perception of Mainland Southeast Asia in China during the Yuan – Ming Transition. This enabled me to get a broader picture of the situation both in China and Southeast Asia during this time.
In 2026 I successfully defended my PhD thesis entitled “Zheng He and Early Ming Maritime Expeditions (1405-1433) in PRC's Politics of History (1978-2025)”. A part of this thesis was devoted to analyzing modern Zheng He’s image in the form of monuments and special exhibitions throughout China, thus, this enabled me to get a broader understanding of how special museum and exhibition space is created and shaped in PRC. Since then I became interested in studying this topic and plan on publishing several articles devoted to exhibitions for people with special needs in Mainland China in comparison with Russia.

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Maryam Mudhaffar



An Emirati architect and architectural historian passionate about design, research, heritage and history. Maryam has a Bachelor of Architecture from the American University in Sharjah (2012), minoring in Design Management, and a Master of Architectural History & Criticism from the Bartlett School of Architecture at UCL in London (2015) and is currently the Curatorial & Collections Department Director in Dubai Culture & Arts Authority. Her professional experience includes working on several governmental rehabilitation projects, urban masterplans and museums. Academically, she has conducted extensive research and is published on the topic of Modernism and Modern Heritage in Dubai. Maryam aims to cohesively bring together her professional and academic knowledge to curate, conceptualize and execute projects that create a balance between the modern and the traditional both in theory and in practice – contributing to the preservation of the emirate's architectural and urban fabric through time.

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Ghaida Sawalha



Ghaida is a highly qualified museum professional with 12 years of experience working on cultural development projects in the Middle East. As Head of Narrative at Barker Langham, she specialises in content management, interpretation and audience research, applying her skills to a range of projects in the region – from science and natural history, to traditional heritage, to contemporary art and culture.