СОЦИОЛОГИЯ ЗДОРОВЬЯ

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ОПЫТ ЛЮДЕЙ С ОГРАНИЧЕННЫМИ ВОЗМОЖНОСТЯМИ ПО ЗРЕНИЮ В ИНКЛЮЗИВНОЙ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ И КРЕАТИВНОЙ ИНДУСТРИИ: БАРЬЕРЫ И СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ

Аннотация. Несмотря на растущее внимание во всем мире к инклюзивности в сфере культуры и творчества, люди с ограниченными возможностями зрения в России по-прежнему сталкиваются с системной изоляцией, которая выходит за рамки барьеров физической доступности. В то время как российская литература об инклюзивности в искусстве устанавливает основополагающие принципы инклюзивности, в ней в основном применяется медикализированный, ориентированный на реабилитацию подход, а искусство людей с ограниченными возможностями рассматривается как зависимая область художественного творчества от доминантной культуры. Это исследование направлено на то, чтобы представить жизненный опыт людей с нарушениями зрения, фокусируясь на том, как они интерпретируют инклюзивные творческие практики и вовлекаются в них в более широких социальных и культурных рамках. Оно направлено на выявление ключевых барьеров — поведенческих, социальных и институциональных, — которые сами участники определяют как препятствующие их полному включению в культурный опыт. Изучив опыт участников инклюзивного культурного и креативного производства, исследование стремится внести вклад в разработку более значимых и ориентированных на участников стратегий инклюзивности в культурных и творческих пространствах.

Ключевые слова: инклюзия, культура, люди с ограниченными возможностями по зрению, креативная индустрия

Introduction

People with visual impairments in Russia experience systemic exclusion that extends beyond physical accessibility restrictions, despite growing international awareness of the importance of inclusivity in the cultural and creative industries (Pronchev et al. 2017). The underlying frameworks for accessibility were developed by Russian literature on inclusion in the arts, but it primarily took a medicalized, rehabilitation-focused approach rather than viewing popular art as a separate field of creative performance. Moreover, even though the topic of inclusion has been the subject of a sizable amount of research not much is done to learn about the first-hand experiences of the people it is being used for. The unique goal of the study is to shed a light on artistic engagement of the visually impaired artists as well as capture the main barriers faced by them and outline recommendations for the creative and cultural spaces. The study seeks to answer the following research questions: How do people with eyesight disabilities experience participation in inclusive creative production? What are the key barriers that hinder full inclusion in creative production?

The purposes of the research are to analyze inclusivity in the cultural and creative sphere in terms of its application on work with the disabled, describe techniques which the disabled use to produce and consume art works, analyze firsthand experiences including barriers and problems which are faced by the blind in cultural and creative spheres. Simon Hayhoe (2017) in his book uses the term "ableism" — a type of discrimination in which able-bodied people are seen as normal and superior to people with disabilities, leading to prejudice against the latter. In the research, ableism will be taken into consideration as well in order to know whether it exists in the cultural sphere and whether it produces any discrimination, as well as the existence of other phenomena will be investigated in the realm of art production and consumption of visually impaired people.

Literature Review

The experience of cultural perception among individuals with eyesight disabilities is a critical area of study that intersects with various disciplines, including sociology, psychology, and cultural studies. This literature review

aims to analyze the barriers faced by people with visual impairments in accessing cultural institutions, as well as the socio-cultural aspects that influence their adaptation to these environments. Despite advancements in technology and increasing awareness of inclusivity, significant obstacles remain in the way cultural content is delivered and experienced. Existing literature highlights a range of challenges, from physical accessibility and inadequate sensory engagement to societal attitudes and institutional practices that often overlook the needs of this group. By examining these barriers and the adaptive strategies employed by individuals with eyesight disabilities, this review seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of their cultural experiences and the implications for cultural institutions striving to foster inclusivity.

1.1. Disability and Stigma

Erving Goffman, a prominent sociologist, defined stigma in his influential work, "Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity" (1963). He described stigma as an attribute that discredits an individual, leading to a devaluation of their social identity. Goffman categorized stigma into three main types. The first one — physical stigma includes visible physical deformities or disabilities that can lead to negative perceptions and discrimination. Character stigma refers to perceived flaws in an individual's character, such as mental illness, addiction, or criminal behavior, which can result in social rejection. Group stigma pertains to the stigma associated with belonging to a particular social group, such as race, religion, or sexual orientation, which can lead to widespread prejudice and discrimination.

Goffman emphasized that stigma is not just about the individual who bears it but also about the societal reactions to that individual. He introduced the concept of "spoiled identity," highlighting how stigma can lead to a loss of social status and self-esteem. Individuals may engage in various strategies to manage their stigma, such as concealing their stigmatized attributes or trying to distance themselves from the stigma through social interactions. Stigma is tightly connected with disability, influencing lives of the impaired people significantly.

The experience of disability is often intertwined with societal perceptions and attitudes, which can significantly shape the lives of individuals with disabilities. Stigma, in particular, plays a critical role in this dynamic, influencing how people with disabilities are viewed and treated by others. Rooted in misconceptions and negative stereotypes, stigma can lead to discrimination and social exclusion, creating barriers that hinder access to essential resources and opportunities. One of the main problems

encountered by disabled individuals is that their disability oftenly outshines their identity (Susman 1994). This statement points to the fact that usually in communication with the disabled other people see only a disability itself, not a person's personality, thus limiting both people from making functional communication, which is talking to each other without tailoring a conversation to certain needs of a partner. Moreover, disability groups can experience stigma and sequential pigeonholing not only on individuals but also on a country level. For instance, Gliedman and Roth (1980) in their study of handicapped children in the USA state that the way disabled children get cured is a "national disgrace" since what had been done was not enough for their treatment. However, one important statement is made by Douglas Biklen (1988) about the necessity of prescribing the disabled a status of a minority group, thus helping them to receive more institutional attention in terms of treatment and legislation. However, on one hand, it is actually needed since status of a minority group can increase volumes of aid received by the disabled, on the other hand, it can badly influence self-esteem of the impaired resulting in feeling discriminated against and suppressed by being called a minority group.

Bridgit Rohwerder (2018) in her research in Sub-Saharan Africa has analyzed the effects which stigma can have on individuals. Several of the main resulting effects are the following — people get mistreated because of perceiving them as not humans but as a special kind of people, misconceptions about the cause of the disability, which usually is blamed on supernatural forces and witchcraft, the nature and abilities of people with impairments, discrimination policies and legislations. Moreover, females are more influenced by stigma as it also implies that an impaired woman is unable to produce children, which is her main responsibility.

1.2. Definition of Blindness

To understand the specificity of the state of a person who is lacking vision it is needed to identify what blindness is. Sudhir Bhagotra et al. (2008) define blindness as a "devastating physical condition with deep emotional and economic implications". The authors make an accent on the vivid emotional effect of a person who is faced with the disability, as well as highlighting the role of an economic part of a person's life, which is likely to be steeply changed. Undoubtedly, the people who had vision once in life and suddenly lost it are faced with an enormously hard change in their life, which can affect their physiological state since losing vision enforce people to learn to live in a new way, therefore making it hard for a person to adapt to so many obstacles, starting from getting ready in the morning and cooking

for themselves, ending up with more complicated things such as dealing with previous work or finding new working place. However, blindness is not only defined just by a lack of vision. There are different types of being blind, ranging from total lack of sight to seeing light and different colors. Mark Hollins (2022) names different types of vision abilities — residual vision, perception, and projection. The last two types describe an ability to see something, however, it will have no sense and give no information to a person, thus making this ability unfunctional. Hollins also raises an important question about who to call blind since he argues that even people who can see blurred shapes are called blind, so that it is not clear yet to what extent a person has to see less to be called visually impaired.

1.3. Factors Influencing Creativity

The intersection of socioeconomic status (SES) and artistic expression is a critical area of exploration, revealing how financial and social factors influence creativity and art production. SES encompasses various dimensions, including income, education, and access to cultural resources, all of which can significantly impact an individual's ability to engage in and contribute to the arts. Understanding these dynamics is essential for recognizing the barriers some individuals face and the opportunities available to others in the creative landscape.

D. Dai et al. (2012) in the study of factors influencing creativity have examined that education has the strongest influence on performing creativity. In other words, in their study they have examined children from various socio-economic backgrounds and concluded that socio-economic status (SES) does affect a level of creativity which a child has, however, it can be significantly compensated by school as it can provide a person with all the needed resources such as art classes and creativity development lessons. Therefore, it can be concluded that school compensates for a lack of art education at home in developing art skills and taste of a child. Moreover, engagement with arts at an early age can help to better develop cognitive and emotional skills (Sousa 2006). However, if to talk about whether people who visit cultural places differ from those who do not attend, for example, art exhibitions, and therefore the important question raises — do people who visit museums have some common dominants like having art education at school or at home or do they not stand out from the non visitors? To delve into this question it is needed to look at the paper by Paul DiMaggio (1996). In his work he investigated whether visitors of art-museums are different from non-visitors. It was concluded that they are more prone to be attracted to high-culture. Concerning political views, they are more supportive of non-conformist political ideas and scientific benefits,

i.e. that science is capable of making right decisions for humanity, compared to non-visitors of museums. However, they also comment that faith should be taken into account too in life thus coinciding with non-visitors. These results do not give any evidence that visitors and non-visitors of museums differ in terms of any socio-economic dominant but the results from this paper provide an insight that visitors are not categorical in their thinking, which can be linked with a flexibility of their mind and critical thinking ability. From this insight it can be inferred that these features could be obtained through some kind of education or learning. While DiMaggio was more interested in political views distinctions amongst visitors, Hei Wan Mak and Daisy Fancourt (2021) were curious about social determinants of art adherence. They have researched children from different SES backgrounds and their art participation inside and outside of school. The conclusion from the paper was that children from lower SES levels were less likely to go to museums or to produce art works outside of school. Moreover, this type of art affiliation can be transferred to the next generation of the family. They have also examined that parental social status is one of the most significant dominants in art engagement, while also the findings indicated that parental involvement during childhood is a strong indicator of whether or not kids participate outside of school, particularly when it comes to arts, crafts, and design projects as well as visits to archives, museums, or historical sites. Nonetheless, a significant predictor of children's involvement outside of school is the parents' present level of involvement. This may imply that kids who participate in the arts on a regular basis are more likely to interact with their parents, who are more inclined to support and promote participation. Besides, the role of teachers is equally significant as shown in the study of Beausaert et al. 2013, which highlights the importance of student-centred approach which makes students get deeper knowledge and develop creativity. These results are highly important in the current research of the blind people since it becomes a vital moment in the lives of people. Adherence to art before and after receiving a disability is crucial in understanding the art role for people — for example, whether nothing has changed after becoming a disabled in terms of art consumption, i.e. a person had always been interested in arts and remained interesting at the same level after a trauma or a person had not been interested in art and, for example, took up art in order to express emotions during a traumatic period of life.

1.4. Art Creation and Disability

In the beginning of the 20th century there has been a significant change in the attitude towards the art of the disabled. This was the time of ideological transformations, rethinking the patterns of human consciousness and new

cultural phenomena mostly due to publication of Zigmund Freud's works such as "The interpretation of dreams" (1900), which has become a solid background for many researchers to form new practices to explore the nature and behavior of a human. Norms of an art become to change, implying that the transformation of early set rules is now not the one and only paradigm of making art (Suvorova 2022). Patients of psychiatric hospitals started to be viewed not as ill people who needed cure but as painters, whose works were exhibited in art galleries and exhibitions. The art of patients has revolutionized the art world of the 20th century, thus revealing a new realm of art creation. The works of the "ill" were valued for giving birth to a new way of depicting reality, which was needed at that time due to an oversaturation of society with the previous classical styles of painting. As Suvorova states in her book, strangeness of paintings of outsiders like adding surreal elements to paintings and not preserving academic style was valued and in demand by society at that time. Art of ill people became a positive characteristic of art creation, meaning that disability started to be accepted as a tool of making unconventional works. For example, if one takes a look at the art career of Frida Kahlo, it is noticeable that disability plays the main role in her paintings. According to N. Heinich (1997), the audience might prescribe a certain value to art creation, when the role of suffering and marginality becomes a central theme of an artist's career. The fact of knowing about personal troubles of an artist pushes people to ponder about a certain painting more, thus thinking that the craftsmanship of the artist is at a high level and that is why it should be highly evaluated and recognized more.

Concerning the blind, it must be addressed in the following research whether artists feel that they are not truly evaluated by people and investigated whether they try to settle their disability in the first place for any reason.

1.5. Disability, Art, and Representation: Tensions Between Identity and Inclusion

There has not been that much research made investigating how the disabled produce artworks. It is also unclear to what degree they are motivated to create work that reflects the expressive growth of a self-identity shaped by experiences of impairment and disability. One of the main important questions in investigating the role of art in the life of the disabled is to understand the reasons for taking up arts. Taylor (2005) states that it is highly important for the disabled people to engage into art since visual art can help them to acquire skills which are needed to understand visual language which is used in multicultural context which celebrates

difference and uniqueness of every person. He emphasizes that art becomes a tool for both the disabled and healthy people to learn about diversity and that "we are all a part of a spectrum of difference". This can be referred to as an emotional need of the disabled as, affected by stigma, the impaired feel down and suppressed, thus needing emotional help and fulfillment.

However, there comes an inconsistency in the initial purpose of making art by the disabled of whether to celebrate a difference or to ignore it, i.e. not pointing out a disability in art and position oneself solely as an artist, not a disabled artist. There is a question of whether a person wants to express a trauma which they have got in their art or to make art in order to forget it, to become a certain kind of a healthy person without disability through an art process. Finkelstein (1987) in her article divides disabled people into two "worlds" — the one which tries to focus on abilities rather than disabilities and the second which focuses on disabilities. Principal issue in making focus on abilities rather than disabilities is an inclination to the dominant culture. Finkelstein argues that during a conference which was aimed at promotion of abilities of the disabled people the organisators of the conference made an accent on dominant culture values, thus ignoring the needs of the disabled, even that the conference was not available for wheelchair users. Author states that when promoting the ability of the disabled artists they often get referred to as having art-ability, thus making people strive to meet the standards of the healthy, able-bodied people simultaneously discouraging them from promoting their own identity. Therefore, even when disabled artists strive for not highlighting their disability in their work and society, they usually get referred as disabled, by reviewing their artworks as excellent for people with disability, thus making an accent on the latter. Moreover, Chandler et al. (2018) tell about a canadian project Re-Vision which is an arts-based research initiative designed to challenge and reshape perceptions of disability through creative expression. It employs multimedia storytelling and theater workshops specifically tailored for deaf and disabled individuals. The methodology of this project was the following: the participants engaged in creating 3–5 minute digital stories that reflect their experiences with disability, utilizing a range of media forms. This method allowed them to receive diverse expressions and it emphasized the constructed nature of representation. The artworks produced serve as tools for public pedagogy, prompting audiences to reconsider their understanding of disability. Presentations of these works have been shown to shift perceptions among viewers. This project could be perceived as an attempt to challenge the norms of dominant culture in art as was discussed by Finkelstein in order to create a new branch of art which would not be claimed as outsider art.

1.6. Inclusivity

The research which is conducted aims at understanding inclusive principles of the modern world and the way they influence the implementation of different inclusive programs in creative and cultural industry. To understand this, the definition of inclusivity needs to be outlined. Foreman (2008) talks about inclusivity in education as a principle which extends beyond accommodating students with disabilities, advocating for inclusive education where all schools should aim to deliver the best possible learning experiences for every student, regardless of their background, identity, or abilities. Therefore, inclusivity means that no factor should have an influence on getting education by an individual. When discussing principles of inclusivity, Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) consider a competency-based approach which means that students are viewed as adaptable learners capable of transferring and applying their knowledge to novel contexts. In this analysis this concept will be seen as a central one when analyzing interviews since this approach seems to most genuinely describe the core of inclusivity. To boost quality indicators of inclusive education, a sophisticated culture promoting open communication, collaboration, and continuous dialogue is necessary (Ferguson 2019). Therefore, it can be concluded that to succeed in implementing any inclusive programs or processes, no restrictions must be put on participants, which could be expressed in discriminatory attitudes from teachers or classmates when communicating with the disabled. Another scholar who investigates organizational inclusion concludes that notwithstanding different perspectives posed on the question of inclusivity, there is always the same trait in understanding it: inclusion can exist only when there is a lack of exclusion (Dobusch 2020). This point of view contributes to the argument of the previous debate on inclusivity, highlighting the importance of not leaving out individuals from any process. Shore, Cleveland, and Sanchez (2018) highlight that organizational inclusion research marks a transition — from focusing solely on preventing discrimination against marginalized groups to actively fostering inclusive workplace environments. These scholars delineate how the implementation of inclusivity has changed over time. Before it was primarily centered on compliance with diversity policies and legal mandates, but contemporary approaches emphasize creating a culture of belonging, where all employees feel valued and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives. The authors argue that this shift reflects a deeper understanding of inclusion as a dynamic, multilevel process involving leadership commitment, structural equity, and everyday interpersonal interactions.

In recent years, the cultural sector has increasingly recognized the importance of making art accessible to all audiences. However, true inclusion requires more than physical accommodations, it calls for a fundamental reexamination of how we approach art experiences for visually impaired individuals. Inclusion always means that some social process or event considers diversity (Bacon et al. 2023). In their research they have come to the point that diversity means intervening of different social, ethnic and economic backgrounds. Undoubtedly, to make people integrate into a certain setting recognition of their differences has to be made, otherwise, the intimidation is expected to be encountered during communication. The term "diversity" which has been borrowed from the biological realm of study of nature has been applied to organizational studies and needs to be examined nowadays because of the growing number of various diverse organizations and the following obstacles which they face with their rapid growth (Kreitz 2008). The research by Bacon also emphasizes that cultivating inclusive environments requires cultural institutions and practitioners to consciously acknowledge their inherent privileges as a necessary step toward fostering equitable participation, thus making equity another vital principle which is thought to be a part of inclusion. Equity represents a moral principle centered on ensuring just and impartial treatment for all members of society (Creary 2021). Equity should not be confused with equality since they are realised differently. Where equality distributes identical resources uniformly, equity recognizes that justice often demands differentiated approaches, providing additional accommodations or modified pathways to ensure meaningful participation for all. Another significant principle of a fully inclusive environment is accessibility, which serves as the practical foundation that transforms theoretical inclusion into lived reality. Accessibility involves creating adaptable systems and environments that can be customized to meet individual requirements and ways of engaging (Valdes 2004). Rather than offering a single rigid approach, it embraces multiple ways for participation that respect different abilities, learning styles, and interaction preferences. Shahoud (2024) in the study of components of inclusivity highlights that accessibility is viewed to be the most important principle of an inclusive environment. Having analysed these papers, here are 3 main principles of inclusivity: diversity, equity, and accessibility.

However, when considering inclusivity, the attitude of the surrounding should be considered and analysed when communicating with a minority group to which inclusive practices are focused. Theory of cultural competence developed in the US as an approach to tackling systemic disparities in healthcare through more responsive service delivery. Cross et al. (1989) originally conceptualized it as an interconnected system of adaptable

practices, professional mindsets, and organizational policies that facilitate effective engagement across cultural differences with a genuine interest in one's differences and a desire to learn the worldview of other people. This framework emphasizes practitioners' self-reflection about their own cultural positioning while cultivating an open, learning-oriented approach to understanding others' values and lived experiences.

Study of urban inclusivity by Zahrah and Gamal (2018) underscores that inclusivity can be evaluated through the dual lenses of affordability and accessibility, thus bringing in the economic aspect of any inclusive space, which can imply that people shall have no economic restrictions in accessing a certain good or experience. Another important theory under which inclusivity might be analysed is a theory explained by Viljoen of human niches (2016). The theory suggests that way of thinking shapes our attitudes and actions. Real change happens when people start thinking differently. The theory shows that with inclusive approaches and strong leadership, groups and societies can transform in lasting ways. Importantly, these "niches" aren't about how smart someone is — they're about habitual ways of thinking that develop over time. As societies evolve, new ways of thinking create new possibilities. This idea helps us understand how changing mindsets can lead to more inclusive communities and organizations.

As the current research is conducted in Russia, the need to analyse the Russian realm of inclusive art has arisen. Within the discussion of inclusive cultural practices, the work of Vishnyakova (2020) in her university textbook deserves special attention. As a practicing typhlopsychologist and typhlopedagogue, the author offers a fundamentally new perspective on inclusive art, defining it as an independent artistic phenomenon. Vishnyakova emphasizes that artworks created by artists with disabilities and developmental differences possess special aesthetic and social value worthy of recognition as a distinct category of contemporary art. Another scholar who investigated inclusivity Mustafina (2024) in her work argues that inclusive art serves two main purposes in today's discussions. First, it acts as a powerful tool for protecting disability rights — especially the rights to arts education and creative expression. Second, experts are developing new terms like "disability art" and "art brut" to better describe artworks made by people with disabilities (Mustafina 2024). She also argues that a special feature of inclusive art is the development of its own evaluation criteria, its own standards, which have nothing in common with classical traditional art. This point can be argued in the further part of the research since as it was stated above inclusivity promotes equality and for this reason making up special rules for participants of inclusive art can be viewed negatively.

In many cases inclusive art is considered as a therapeutic activity, which medicalizes the aesthetic human activity and art itself (Shemanov et al. 2013). The author highlights on the need of further research of disability are and of the questions of its' medicalization which is expressed in forms of numerous art-therapies centered at the disabled. According to Argyle and Bolton (2005), in the framework of any therapy in a medical context, a person feels like a patient, and while doing art, he feels like an artist.

The existing scholarship on inclusive art reveals several fundamental tensions that shape contemporary discourse in the Russian context. The reviewed literature highlights competing visions of inclusive art — as a distinct artistic category with its own aesthetic values, as a tool for social advocacy, and as a therapeutic practice. These differing perspectives raise important questions about cultural recognition, artistic autonomy, and the potential risks of both marginalization and medicalization.

This study is built upon these theoretical foundations while engaging with broader interdisciplinary perspectives on disability, art, and cultural inclusion. By examining both the conceptual frameworks and practical realities of inclusive art in Russia, the research aims to contribute to ongoing discussions about the complex interplay between artistic expression, identity, and accessibility in contemporary culture.

Methodology and Sampling

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of visually impaired individuals engaged in artistic activities within inclusive cultural settings. The methodology combines two primary data collection approaches: in-depth semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations. For the interview component, the study has recruited 19 participants selected through purposeful sampling according to three key criteria: they must be adults aged 18 or older, have partial or total visual impairment, and be actively involved in artistic or craft-based activities. Participants are recruited through contacts with specialized studios including the ceramic studio "Vizhu Rukami," the perfume-making studio "Pure Sense," and the origami studio operated by the All-Russian Society of the Blind ("VOS"). One interview of an expert on working with the visually disabled was taken in order to cover some sensitive features of communication with the blind, for instance, whether it was acceptable to talk about moments of sight loss during the interview.

The interview protocol was focused on participants' personal experiences in creative spaces, perceived barriers to inclusion, and adaptive strategies they

employ in the creative and cultural industry producing and perceiving arts and crafts. Interviews are conducted flexibly to accommodate participants' needs, using accessible formats such as telephone interviews with audio recordings with an average duration of 60 minutes each. Besides interview conduction, ethnographic observations are made at inclusive art and craft events such as ceramic workshops and festivals for blind artists. These observations document real-time creative processes, interactions within the communities, and the use of adaptive tools and techniques.

During interviews the participants were asked questions covering the topics which are necessary to understand their cultural and creative engagement. The topics were related with their personal information (age, city, work/hobbies, living situation), education and childhood (school type, hobbies, parental support, family finances), experience with vision impairment (onset, impact, emotions, adaptation challenges, social changes), inclusion and accessibility (preferred terms, audio description/tactile models, discrimination, focus on specific age groups), art and creativity (frequency, motivation, feelings, audience, influence of impairment, discrimination in art), cultural space accessibility (programs for disabled people, museum visits, barriers, desired changes), and closing thoughts.

To build contact and trust with the participants, so that they are ready to give the interview, in more than a half cases it was necessary to visit them personally at the arts and crafts classes in order to introduce myself in person and explain the context and objectives of the study. After having done so, the visually impaired artists were eager to share contacts and give an interview soon after.

The observational study was conducted over a four-month period from February to May, with data collected during regular arts and crafts sessions at two specialized studios: the ceramic workshop "Vizhu Rukami" and the origami studio operated by the All-Russian Society of the Blind. Unfortunately, access to the perfume-making studio "Pure Sense" could not be obtained due to the laboratory's strict policy restricting outside visitors, which limited the scope of observations in this particular creative discipline.

A striking pattern emerged during the observation period: participants across both studios demonstrated remarkable self-sufficiency and autonomy in their creative processes. Despite the inherent challenges posed by visual impairments, which might logically necessitate additional guidance or assistance, the majority of artists worked with notable independence. They rarely sought clarification or help from instructors, instead relying on their developed skills and adaptive techniques to complete projects. This consistent behavior pattern suggests both a high level of acquired competency and a strong preference for self-directed creation among participants.

Discussion

This study has explored the complex dynamics of inclusive art practices in Russia, examining how artists with disabilities navigate creative production, cultural recognition, and societal perceptions. The findings reveal critical tensions between inclusive art's asserted autonomy as a distinct artistic category and its relationship to mainstream cultural frameworks, as well as between its therapeutic applications and purely creative dimensions.

The interview findings reveal perspectives on the role of parental support in shaping artistic paths, demonstrating that no singular narrative can fully capture this complex relationship. While some participants credited parental encouragement as instrumental to their creative development, others emphasized self-driven motivation that helped them to continue their education despite limited familial support. This divergence suggests that while parental engagement can be facilitative, it is not universally determinative of artistic trajectories, which contradicts the theory which supports high influence of parental involvement on a child's development in artistic terms (Hei Wan Mak & Daisy Fancourt 2021).

Crucially, these individual experiences cannot be set apart from socio-economic contexts. As evidenced in several cases, financial precarity often constrained parents' capacity to foster artistic growth, regardless of their attitude. This echoes what Zahrar and Gamal (2018) concluded about urban inclusive development. Just as he argues that true urban inclusivity requires removing economic barriers to access, our findings show how financial constraints often determine whether families can support artistic development, regardless of parental attitudes or a child's talent.

Another vital aspect of creative development is the socio-economic background of one's family which should be viewed through the lenses of Dai' theory of educational compensation of lower economic backgrounds (Dai et al. 2012). Their study demonstrated that while socio-economic status (SES) influences creative development, quality education can significantly mitigate these disparities by providing necessary artistic resources and training. This theoretical lens helps contextualize our participants' varied experiences. Several respondents who emphasized self-driven artistic success despite limited parental support often referenced crucial school-based opportunities — art classes, inspiring teachers, or extracurricular programs — that aligned precisely with Dai et al.'s (2012) findings about education's compensatory power. For instance, participants from lower-income backgrounds frequently described schools as their primary exposure to art materials and creative mentoring, echoing authors' conclusion that institutional educational support can overcome family resource limitations.

The analysis of participants' educational experiences reveals a complex landscape of teacher engagement with blind and partially sighted students, characterized by three distinct patterns: neglectful underestimation, balanced high expectations, and overprotective limitations. These findings demonstrate how educators' attitudes, whether dismissive, empowering, or excessively cautious, fundamentally shape students' academic trajectories, self-perception, and long-term artistic identities. This result supports the need of implementing the student-centered approach in any type of education mentioned by Beausaert et al. (2013), which can influence students' lifepaths significantly by prioritizing students' needs and specificities. Student-centered approach can also benefit to learn about diversity and giving equity to all the students, which are the main parts of inclusivity (Valdes 2004; Creary 2021).

The data particularly highlights the tension between two problematic extremes: the lowered expectations that constrained development, and the rigid adherence to conventional standards that may exclude alternative learning methods. Between these poles emerges the effective middle ground described by multiple participants, environments that combined reasonable accommodations with standards, fostering both independence and competence. Throughout their narratives it was evident that independence is thought to be the main driver of self-esteem and confidence, which also promoted equity. Independence in inclusive education sometimes meant lack of accessibility where kids had to adapt to reality. This is a debatable topic since such an approach lacks an important part of inclusivity, which is equity, since the students were not given equal necessities to fulfill the tasks at school. However, such a method bears traits of competency-based approach by Brandford et al (2000) because students were meant to apply their knowledge and skills to a given setting as well as they were considered able-bodied to fulfill the program, which, according to them, resulted in higher confidence and greater skills. This is an extremely vital point in disability discussion for the reason that it gives a meaningful insight on how to build up communication with the disabled group of people.

The participants' experiences of losing vision in adulthood demonstrate how Erving Goffman's theory of stigma (1963) operates in real life. Their stories show the profound social consequences when blindness becomes what Goffman called a "spoiled identity" — a trait that dominates how others see them. Goffman's concept of stigma as a "spoiled identity" manifests clearly in participants' accounts of sudden social exclusion and changed interpersonal dynamics. The irrational fears some encountered — being treated as contagious or dangerous — exemplify what Goffman termed the "abominations of the body" that provoke stigma anxiety. Many described being treated differently after losing their vision, with friends and even

partners pulling away due to discomfort or misconceptions. As Susman (1994) notes, disability often overshadows personal identity, and this pattern clearly emerged in the interviews. Participants frequently felt reduced to their visual impairment, with others focusing solely on their blindness rather than seeing them as whole individuals. This stigma created barriers in daily interactions, making it harder to form genuine connections.

The emotional toll was significant. Beyond practical challenges, participants struggled with the psychological weight of societal rejection and lowered expectations. Some internalized these attitudes, feeling shame about tasks they could no longer perform which also goes along with Goffman's theory of stigma (1963). Yet those who adapted most successfully often did so by finding supportive communities that looked beyond their disability to value their capabilities and personality.

These experiences align with Susman's (1994) and Goffman's (1963) notions that stigma limits authentic interaction and that gaining trauma exposes a person to overwhelming feelings. When society fixates on disability, it creates artificial barriers to communication and connection. The participants' stories show how crucial it is to move beyond stereotypes and engage with visually impaired adults as individuals first combined with their desire for autonomy. Therefore, one significant conclusion out of consideration of the factors which influence creativity, it might be stated that acknowledgement of diversity is thought to be the main driver of development since it can eliminate any borders which children might face during early steps of basic and creative education.

Concerning the issue of the objectives in arts and crafts, analysis of motivations of visually impaired people has shown that the disabled engage in arts for various reasons, not solely as for therapeutic reasons.

1. Economic necessity

Older participants shared that they developed artistic skills as a means of financial survival, while younger artists outlined the need for monetization of their artistic activity, otherwise they are not interested in continuation.

2. Socialization

Many informants supported the idea of socialisation which art permits to get. Sense of belonging and community is a crucial factor which maintains the disabled active in their artistic activity.

3. Professional identity

Several informants said that what they do is a mere desire to create and show their skills in a professional area.

4. Therapy

Another significant reason for engaging in art is a purpose of "saving" during hard times and improving current conditions.

5. Rejection of Patronizing Attitudes
Artists resist having their work reduced to "therapy" or "inspiration."

The analysis of the reasons for the visually impaired people shows the variety of factors which push people to pursue artistic pathway, battling the common opinion of the disabled pursuing healing purposes and creating art under a medicalized approach. By revealing the reasons of the participants to engage into arts and crafts, it becomes clear that the question of the medicalized approach mentioned by Shemanov et al. (2013), Argyle and Bolton (2005) gets clearer in a way that the participants themselves tell about the accomplishment of many other purposes apart from art-therapy.

Analysis of goals of art production of the visually impaired people can help to better understand the complex relationship between disability, creativity, and cultural participation. Below are the most typical goals which the artists pursue in their art path:

1. Spiritual and personal growth
Disabled artists pursue this goal as a result of self-expression through art and genuine devotion to it.

2. Sharing emotions
By creating artworks people want to share a certain emotion with spectators.

3. Tactile and sensory exploration
Respondents pursue the goal of innovating non-visual aesthetics that challenge sighted norms as well as focusing on texture, rhythm, and touch as artistic language, which is important for blind people.

4. Independence and defiance
Rejecting pity or low expectations and Using art to assert capability and resist marginalization.

5. Professional recognition

6. Validation as artists, reserving techniques and contributing to cultural heritage Therefore, it can be concluded that visually impaired artists pursue various goals of art, which can be compared to goals of healthy artists. Moreover, there is a lack desire to express emotions connected with their trauma, so that the notion of "disability art", which is about a desire to make artworks with the intention of delivering sentiments of traumatized period is not relevant, which contradicts the notions of a desire of people with the disabilities to create their own "traumatized" art (Suvorova 2022; Mustafina 2024; Argyle, Bolton 2005).

In the analysis part there have been outlined various barriers faced by the visually disabled when perceiving and performing arts and crafts. Therefore, list of barriers encountered by the visually impaired people in creative and cultural industry can be outlined:

1. Societal bias and devaluation of art

Audiences and buyers often judge artwork differently upon learning the artist is blind, dismissing its artistic merit due to ingrained stereotypes or fear of disability

2. Institutional and educational gatekeeping

Institutions (e.g., music schools) reject necessary adaptations (like braille notation) without proper consideration. Blind artists face overt exclusion from professional organizations, where their membership is questioned based on disability rather than skill. It also covers the lack of desire of specific inclusive organizations to resolve the problems with which visually impaired people come to them.

3. Tokenistic or fake inclusion

This category includes such barriers inequality in assessing artworks where works either are not assessed adequately in or not given any feedback for the reason that the assessors a-priori do not want to consider artworks of the blind as independent art but rather they consider them as results of art-therapy.

4. Physical and financial struggle

Many participants notice that due to their physical condition they cannot dedicate much time for doing arts, as well as for the reason of having severe jobs or other responsibilities, which hinder full participation in art activities.

5. Inadequate implementation of inclusive programs

Last huge barrier refers to institutional inability to implement adequate programs for the disabled. It can be expressed in wrong choices of tools of communication or target audience and a lack of dialogue with the disabled. Organizers of inclusive programs usually fulfill their responsibilities just to show their, at first glance, good intentions, while being totally fake.

These barriers show that the lack of main principles of inclusivity hinders full inclusion of the visually impaired to the genuine art process. Equity, mentioned by Creary (2021), importance of recognition of diversity (Kreitz 2008), and significant role of accessibility (Shahaud 2024) are neglected in the cultural settings, which leads to complicated and unfair distribution of possibilities in the art sphere.

Outsider art proposed by Suvorova (2022) and other scholars who referred to terms such as "art brut" and "disability art" (Mustafina 2024) are not relevant to the informants' way of artistic expression since nobody wanted to make their art stand out from the dominant culture. The notion of creating a new branch of disability art becomes irrelevant according to the informants' view.

Tokenistic attitude in assessing the works of disabled individuals goes along with the theory of Heinich (1997) who concluded that audiences might prescribe certain value to the art creations of the blind just because of their trauma.

Without addressing these issues, the art world will continue to marginalize blind artists, denying them the recognition and opportunities they deserve. True inclusion requires dismantling biases, enforcing accessibility, and ensuring blind artists are treated as professionals, not just as subjects of pity or tokenism.

As for the questions of inclusivity, views on it of the participants challenge the notion of importance of accessibility since they state that accessibility goes along with independence. For people who want independence and autonomy, accessibility which is expressed in higher attention in different cultural spaces is inappropriate and is perceived as helplessness. Another vital point is the need for normalization of disability. This can be considered as giving equity to all the participants of art processes in a form of equal treatment. This is the problematic issue in today's inclusive creative and cultural sphere as the disabled artists are often viewed as "not normal" or their art becomes special to the spectators. This notion aligns with what Finkelstein (1987) wrote about the division of the artists into the two worlds — one of the able-bodied artists, often referred as leading dominant culture, and the other which focuses on disabilities. Both the results of Finkelstein's and this study support the fact that usually organisators of inclusive events align with the able-bodied norms, which hinder inclusion and sometimes make the participants of such events feel suppressed as if it was not created for them. Therefore, the ableism proposed by Hayhoe (2017) confirms its existence in the creative and cultural industry, which must be eliminated. Competency-based approach (Bransford, Brown, Cocking 2000) should be introduced here in order to change the attitude of all the participants of inclusive creative and cultural industry which can help truly include the disabled into art production and perception.

The question of favouring a certain age group under inclusivity programs plays a significant role in understanding how inclusive art programs function nowadays. According to the informants, there is an inclination to develop more rehabilitation and artistic companies for the children. Undoubtedly,

this tendency is generally positive, however, it makes the elderly people and adults be left out from any artistic process. Doubled unsystematic approach of institution in terms of implementing inclusive programs and general assumption to develop kids, adults experience huge problems in receiving help, possibilities for self-expression, and equality.

As for the specificities with which visually impaired people have to deal with when engaging with art, they could be described as following: a museum becomes a place of social interaction thanks to which the disabled can share experiences and exchange ideas. Another aspect which is important for the visually disabled when going to a cultural place is preparation in advance for materials presented in exhibitions or other places of cultural leisure. This helps the disabled to better understand the materials presented and get a deeper understanding of the topic. Moreover, some participants describe visiting museums as a vital step in understanding the piece of an art for the reason that by touching and seeing what other masterpieces are placed next to the certain object, one can infer the context of the certain period of time, which is a really interesting implication even for the healthy people.

Talking about availability of museums, several problems have been outlined, which prevent museums from giving truly inclusive experiences.

1. Visual-centricity. Although museums are made to be accessed visually, talking about visual-centricity of them could be inappropriate. However, participants notice that in many museums there are not enough tactile art objects presented there. This is also constrained by economic reasons since the tactile copies are extremely expensive that prevents museums from ordering them.
2. Staff's unpreparedness. In spite of many inclusive programs which have been set, informants point to the fact of staff's incompetence in realization of these programs which were put from their authorities. Unpreparedness is expressed in impolite communication, generalized approaches to leading excursions and lack of guidance.

These are the main obstacles encountered in museums which hinder fruitful experience of engagement with museums.

Finally, informants have shared their ideas on how to improve experiences in museums and below the discussion of sensible recommendations can be encountered. The study participants proposed several key improvements to enhance museum accessibility for blind and visually impaired visitors, moving beyond basic accommodations to fundamentally rethink engagement strategies. Their suggestions emphasize multi-sensory interpretation methods, like one artist's innovative approach where performers recreate paintings

through movement that others can touch, translating visual art into tactile and kinetic experiences. Physical access emerged as a critical concern, with participants advocating for more opportunities to touch exhibits while acknowledging conservation needs — suggesting solutions like designated handling sessions or high-quality tactile reproductions.

Several technically-informed design recommendations were offered, such as using yellow tactile guidance systems which remain visible longest for those with degenerative eye conditions. Participants sharply critiqued poorly implemented accessibility features like Braille signs placed at knee level, noting such thoughtless execution renders them useless. The artists emphasized that true inclusion requires maintaining high cultural standards rather than "dumbing down" content, with one ceramist criticizing oversimplified inclusive routes that treat blind visitors as children despite their typically high education levels.

A recurring theme highlighted the importance of staff training and ongoing dialogue, with one participant noting that even perfect physical accessibility fails if staff fear interacting with blind visitors or don't know how to guide them. The suggestions collectively point to a need for museums to develop accessibility through continuous collaboration with blind communities rather than one-time fixes, creating spaces where multi-sensory engagement and equal cultural participation become seamlessly integrated rather than exceptional accommodations.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal a fundamental disconnect between the theoretical frameworks of accessibility and their practical implementation in cultural institutions. While many organizations have begun adopting inclusive policies and physical adaptations, these measures frequently remain superficial, prioritizing compliance over genuine engagement. A recurring theme in participants' accounts is the paradox of having technically accessible spaces undermined by human factors: untrained staff, lingering prejudices, and bureaucratic problems that treat inclusion as a formality rather than an ongoing commitment.

The study has answered the research questions regarding the pathways of experience of the visually impaired people in the cultural and creative industry, describing it as a multilateral artistic journey. Participants of the study highlighted the independence which is lacking in modern programs of inclusive art and craft-based activities, which is an important part for accessibility and equity, which are the key components of the inclusivity.

Moreover, normalization of disability is expressed as a key component of inclusivity, thus questioning the notion of creating such branches of art as "disability art" or "art brut" (Mustafina 2024; Suvorova 2022).

As for the second research question regarding the barriers which hinder full inclusion of the visually impaired people into creative production, the main barriers have been outlined. They are connected with societal bias and devaluation of art, institutional and educational gatekeeping, tokenistic or fake inclusion, physical and financial struggle, inadequate implementation of inclusive programs. These barriers create obstacles in creative production of the visually disabled people.

This study makes it clear that there is a need to rethink inclusion as a collaborative process — the one where disabled creators lead the conversation in designing programs, where staff in various cultural spaces receive proper ongoing training, and where the artificial divide between "regular" and "disability" art disappears. True inclusion means challenging outdated attitudes everywhere, starting from physical spaces ending with the way the society thinks about art itself. Having this implemented, cultural spaces can become places where visually impaired artists and visitors aren't just included as an afterthought, but where they help shape what creativity looks like for everyone.

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THE EXPERIENCE OF PEOPLE WITH EYESIGHT DISABILITIES IN INCLUSIVE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRY: BARRIERS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS

Abstract. Despite the growing global attention to inclusion in the cultural and creative fields, visually impaired people in Russia still face systemic exclusion that goes beyond physical accessibility barriers. While Russian literature on inclusion in the arts establishes foundational principles of inclusion, it largely takes a medicalized, rehabilitation-oriented approach and views disabled art as a subordinate field of artistic creativity to the dominant culture. This study aims to represent the lived experiences of visually impaired people, focusing on how they interpret and engage with inclusive creative practices within a broader social and cultural framework. It aims to identify key barriers — behavioral, social and institutional — that participants themselves identify as preventing their full inclusion in cultural experiences. By exploring the experiences of participants in inclusive cultural and creative production, the study aims to contribute to the development of more meaningful and participant-oriented strategies for inclusion in cultural and creative spaces.

Keywords: inclusion, culture, visually impaired people, creative industries

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