MEMORABLE

NATIONAL REPORT
BULGARIA

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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This report presents the findings of desk research and interviews conducted in Bulgaria within the Erasmus+ project Memorable (cooperation partnership in adult education, project number: 2024-1-BG01-KA220-ADU-000245828). More information is available at https://memorable-project.eu/.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Project context

The Memorable project is an Erasmus+ initiative that aims to promote a dementia-friendly society by training volunteers, (in)formal carers, artists and cultural stakeholders to make cultural institutions more accommodating for people with dementia. The project will develop educational materials to raise awareness and provide skills for creating dementia-friendly cultural spaces.

This report presents the findings of desk research and interviews conducted in Bulgaria as part of the **Memorable Project**. The research aimed to assess the landscape of dementia-friendly cultural practices, identify existing initiatives, and analyse the educational needs of people with dementia, their family members, cultural workers, volunteers, and other stakeholders.

Lessons learned from local and regional projects, as well as training efforts in the field, provided a valuable knowledge base. Additionally, the expertise of a diverse range of stakeholders—including people with dementia, their families, healthcare providers, staff from cultural institutions, trainers, and facilitators with experience in dementia-friendly practices—offered deeper insights into key issues surrounding cultural inclusion.

The research phase focused on four key objectives:

1. Facilitating the creation of comprehensive learning resources by identifying educational needs.
2. Enhancing understanding of the dementia-friendly cultural landscape and its supporting structures.
3. Promoting cross-border knowledge exchange by sharing existing practices and experiences.
4. Identifying effective practices that can serve as models for future initiatives.

The study examined local and regional initiatives that promote inclusive cultural engagement and identified exemplary dementia-friendly cultural practices tailored for people with dementia and their families. Practitioners, experts, and potential learners were actively involved throughout the process to ensure the subsequent development of learning modules would be both relevant and effective.

The findings, based on first-hand data and expert insights, provide a nuanced understanding of the learning needs, challenges, and best practices related to the cultural inclusion of people with dementia and their carers. These insights will contribute to the development of educational materials, including a **European Compendium**, aimed at raising awareness and supporting the expansion of dementia-friendly cultural practices.

1.2 Methodological approach

The research activities for the Memorable Project followed a structured methodological approach, combining desk research and stakeholder interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of dementia-friendly cultural practices. This approach ensured a thorough analysis of existing initiatives, educational needs, and best practices across partner countries.

The desk research phase involved a comprehensive literature review to gather and analyse existing knowledge, reports, and studies related to dementia-friendly cultural practices. The key focus areas included:

- **Public Discourse**: Examination of current discussions on dementia-friendly cultural engagement.
- **Access Challenges**: Identification of barriers faced by people with dementia and their caregivers when engaging with cultural institutions.
- **Best Practices**: Review of case studies showcasing successful dementia-friendly programmes.
- **Educational Needs**: Assessment of learning requirements for stakeholders, including caregivers and cultural institution staff.
- **Training Materials**: Analysis of existing educational resources on dementia awareness and cultural inclusion.
- **Policy Landscape**: Evaluation of national and regional policies supporting cultural participation for individuals with dementia.
- **Support Structures**: Overview of available services and frameworks for fostering dementia-friendly cultural spaces.
- **Recent Initiatives**: Identification of projects promoting inclusivity in the cultural sector.
- **Training Programmes**: Exploration of current training opportunities for volunteers, caregivers, and cultural workers on dementia-friendly practices.

Data was sourced from academic and policy databases, government reports, organisational publications, and relevant cultural sector materials to ensure a well-rounded analysis.

To complement the desk research, semi-structured and narrative **interviews were conducted** with key stakeholders, including:

- 4 people living with dementia
- 1 informal caregiver
- 5 experts and practitioners in cultural inclusion of people living with dementia

The experts and practitioners in the field of culture answered the questions through in-person interviews, which were conducted in the beginning of April 2025. The interviews were conducted with four female experts, all of whom have substantial experience working in museum and gallery institutions. Three of the interviewed experts are currently employed at the Bulgarian National Gallery (“Square 500”), one is an employee of the National Polytechnical

Museum in Sofia, Bulgaria and one is a music therapist. The interviewees held professional roles as curators as well as communications and public relations specialists, providing insights from both the content-focused and audience engagement perspectives. Their backgrounds reflect a deep engagement with the cultural sector, and their expertise contributed valuable perspectives on the intersections of culture, institutional practice, and public communication. As dementia-friendly cultural spaces are not yet common practice in the Bulgarian region, the interviewees had limited personal experiences with such specific programmes and practices. However, they were able to provide valuable insight into the needs of cultural experts regarding the needs cultural experts and staff of cultural institutions have in relation to working with and engaging people with dementia.

The informal caregiver interviewed for the purposes of the project is a female spouse of a person living with Alzheimer's disease for 7 years. She has extensive experience in caregiving, primarily managing the challenges associated with her husband's condition and his participation in cultural activities. Her background provides valuable insights into the practical difficulties faced by caregivers in accessing dementia-friendly cultural spaces, such as sensory sensitivities, mobility issues, lack of suitable programs and the need for tailored support systems. The caregiver's background informs about the actionable strategies that cultural institutions and policymakers can implement to improve the cultural engagement of individuals with dementia and ensures that the project's outcomes are grounded in practical and lived experiences.

The perspectives shared by four individuals living with dementia provided crucial insights into their experiences within cultural institutions. The interviewees - one woman, aged 68 and three men, aged 67, 79 and 83, all in the early to moderate stages of Alzheimer's disease - offered diverse personal experiences that enriched the research findings. They described various challenges and the lack of specialized programs in museums and galleries adapted to the needs of people with dementia. Their personal stories are essential for understanding the barriers they face and play a key role in shaping recommendations to enhance accessibility and inclusion in cultural spaces.

This combined methodology ensures a nuanced understanding of the landscape, challenges, and best practices in dementia-friendly cultural participation, providing a strong foundation for the development of educational resources and the broader objectives of the Memorable Project.

2. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH PHASE

2.1 The role of cultural spaces in enhancing well-being

Research shows that arts and culture interventions—such as museum and gallery visits, music and theatre activities, storytelling, and heritage-based programmes—can significantly enhance the emotional, mental, and social well-being of people with dementia and their informal caregivers (Delfa-Lobato et al., 2021; Letrondo et al., 2023). These interventions often lead to improved mood, increased self-esteem, reduced agitation, and greater cognitive engagement in people with dementia, particularly in areas like memory, attention, and verbal fluency. Carers also report reduced caregiver strain and improved well-being. Shared participation in these creative activities strengthens the relationship between the person with dementia and their carer by providing opportunities to connect outside of the usual caregiving dynamic.

Qualitative findings further highlight the value of social interaction and shared experiences in these interventions. Participants described benefits such as improved communication, enjoyment in doing something together, and the chance to socialise with others in similar situations. These emotionally meaningful experiences not only foster a sense of community and mutual support but also contribute to greater resilience and quality of life for both people with dementia and their carers (Mondro et al., 2020). Overall, arts and culture interventions offer a non-clinical, enriching approach that supports emotional connection, mental stimulation, and social inclusion.

Han et al. (2015) highlight cultural and artistic activities as key elements in maintaining continuity of self for people with dementia. Many individuals with early-stage dementia engaged in cultural activities such as attending church, participating in spiritual practices, and continuing involvement in local traditions, folk music, and life history-based activities. These practices helped maintain their cultural identity, connection to long-held beliefs, and sense of self-worth. Music in particular was emphasised as an enjoyable and low-demand activity, offering soothing and uplifting benefits for mood and concentration. Furthermore, cultural activities were found to foster a sense of community and belonging, especially when shared with others, and were considered valuable for maintaining social ties and emotional well-being.

Additionally, leisure activities such as music and gardening were not only enjoyable but served to support the mental and emotional health of people with dementia (Zhang et al., 2021; Sala et al., 2019). These activities were seen as less demanding, allowing individuals to engage without feeling overwhelmed, and were often part of a larger strategy to feel useful and connected to others. Participation in cultural activities, particularly those rooted in shared local or spiritual traditions, also provided opportunities for meaningful interactions, promoting a sense of belonging and reducing isolation.

Cultural participation has played a vital role in helping people with dementia maintain a sense of purpose and connection to society. Such social connectedness has been found to be beneficial for older adults' overall mental wellbeing, especially so in an older age group of 80-89 years old, who are more likely to experience loneliness or social isolation (Rivera-Torres e al., 2021). Engaging in familiar cultural and spiritual activities—such as attending church, participating in local traditions, listening to or making music, and reflecting on personal or community history—has enabled individuals to retain their sense of identity and continuity with their past. For example, people with dementia have found meaning and comfort in attending religious services,

playing roles within their spiritual communities, or continuing personal practices like prayer and Bible reading. Religious participation was associated with lower levels of emotional distress (Chen et al., 2007) as well as decreased loneliness and enhanced sense of purpose (Strange et al., 2023). These activities not only reinforce a sense of self but also provide connection to wider faith communities and cultural groups.

Additionally, participating in music-related activities like listening, singing, or dancing has allowed people with dementia to express themselves, improve their mood, and engage socially in ways that feel accessible and fulfilling. Cohen et al. (2006) find that older adults engaged in a group chorale activity report of better morale, less loneliness, as well as a trend toward increased overall activity. Group activities based on shared cultural experiences—such as singing traditional songs or reminiscing about local customs—have helped foster belonging and emotional closeness. Moreover, people with dementia have found purpose by contributing to shared tasks that align with their previous roles or values, such as conducting choirs, helping in the garden with family, or sharing their stories through participation in dementia-related research. These forms of cultural engagement support a continued sense of usefulness and social inclusion, even as dementia progresses.

2.2 Current state of dementia-friendly cultural institutions in Bulgaria

Currently, cultural institutions such as museums and galleries do not offer regular, dementia-specific cultural activities. According to the experts interviewed, while some institutions have hosted occasional events aimed at individuals with physical or mental disabilities, none have been designed specifically for people living with dementia. The absence of tailored programming reflects a broader lack of institutional frameworks or strategies that address the specific needs of this audience. Interviewees, who work in roles related to curation and communications within cultural spaces, acknowledged the growing awareness of inclusivity but also pointed to limited resources, training, and guidance as barriers to developing sustainable and meaningful initiatives for people with dementia.

Instead, cultural engagement for individuals with dementia is more commonly facilitated in residential care settings or through the efforts of non-profit organisations such as the Alzheimer Bulgaria Association and the Compassion Alzheimer Foundation. These organisations occasionally organise cultural or art-based activities that aim to stimulate memory, enhance well-being, and foster social interaction. However, such programs are not offered on a regular basis and tend to rely heavily on external funding and volunteer involvement. This dependency on inconsistent resources makes it difficult to establish long-term or widespread access to cultural participation for people with dementia, leaving a significant gap in opportunities for engagement within the broader cultural landscape.

According to Eurostat data from 2024, only 7.7% of people in the age group 65-74 reported taking part in any kind of cultural or sports activity between one and three times over the past 12 months (cinema, live performances, cultural sites or sports events). This represents all participants in this age group without accounting for level of activity limitation/disability. This number drops even further for the age group 75-84 years, where only 4% of participants reported taking part in such activities 1-3 times in the past year and over 90% said to have participated in none at all. These are some of the lowest activity rates for these age groups in Europe and could potentially be traced back to the lack of established processes and cultural activities that are dementia-friendly and overall explicitly accessible to older individuals.

Table 1 Persons participating in cultural or sport activities by age and frequency

	Frequency of cultural activity in the past 12 months		
Age group	**None**	**1-3 times**	**At least four times**
65-74 years	89.3%	7.7%	3%
75-84 years	93.6%	4%	2.4%

Public discourse regarding people with dementia and providing support for their social inclusion has been increasing in recent years, exemplified through the growing interest in services such as support groups for people with dementia and for their caregivers. This observation has been made by the Alzheimer Bulgaria Association, who provide such services for people with dementia and their carers.

However, this discourse has not yet led to the development of national or regional policies supporting dementia-friendly cultural spaces. Currently there is also no official national strategy regarding the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of people with dementia in Bulgaria.

In addition to the lack of national and regional policies regarding dementia-friendly cultural spaces, there is also a clear lack of training and educational resources aimed at experts in the cultural sectors. This fact was also confirmed through our interviews with cultural stakeholders. All but one expert, who had already had experience working on the AIDA Erasmus+ project, reported that they had had no access to materials related to working with and engaging people with dementia. All experts remarked that this lack of resources caused them to feel unprepared and hesitant to actively participate in potential activities targeted specifically towards people with dementia. As the concept of dementia-friendly cultural spaces is a pioneering idea in Bulgaria, the interviewed professionals remarked that currently a helpful resource for them would be a training course or manual that highlights the most important aspects of working with people with dementia. Furthermore, a suggested idea was to establish a process for communication between cultural experts and people living with dementia or their families, to better understand their needs. On a larger scale, some of the interviewed professionals remarked that an opportunity to exchange experiences, knowledge, and advice with experts on an international level would be valuable in order to better understand the work and possible practical challenges that may arise.

As previously mentioned, the cultural participation for older individuals and the creation of dementia-friendly cultural spaces are new, even pioneering concepts in the Bulgarian region. While a handful of studies do address the preference of older individuals for activities with social interaction (Kaloyanova and Dimitrova, 2024), as well as spirituality among older Bulgarians (Coleman et al., 2011), none of the existing studies explore the aspect of cultural participation or its influence on elderly individuals' wellbeing and mental health.

2.3 Challenges of people living with dementia, informal caregivers and stakeholders in the cultural sector

As mentioned above, there are significant gaps in skills, knowledge, and professionalisation related to dementia-friendly cultural practices in Bulgaria. Currently, there are no available training programs or educational materials dedicated to equipping cultural professionals with the necessary understanding or tools to engage effectively with people living with dementia. This topic is not included in the standard training or professional development of cultural staff, leaving many institutions unprepared to accommodate the needs of this audience. As a result, professionals in the cultural sector often lack both the theoretical background and practical strategies to create inclusive and supportive environments for individuals with dementia.

In addition to the lack of training, there are broader structural barriers in current practices that hinder the development of dementia-friendly cultural spaces. One notable gap is the absence of an official symbol or label that designates an institution as dementia-friendly, which could otherwise signal a welcoming and prepared environment for visitors with cognitive impairments. Without such identifiers or standardised guidelines, cultural institutions are left without clear benchmarks for accessibility and inclusivity in this context. This lack of awareness, resources, and institutional support collectively contributes to the exclusion of people with dementia from regular cultural participation.

The cultural professionals interviewed highlighted the lack of resources and training as a major barrier to developing and implementing dementia-friendly cultural programmes. Although they have experience working with people with various disabilities, they noted that dementia presents unique challenges that require specific knowledge and skills. This gap in understanding, particularly around communication techniques and the progression of cognitive decline, makes it difficult for them to confidently engage with this audience. Despite these challenges, the stakeholders expressed a strong willingness and motivation to learn. They see training not just as a necessity, but as an opportunity to expand the reach and inclusivity of their work. Some professionals mentioned that they had already had positive experiences with dementia-friendly cultural activities, such as concerts or interactive museum exhibits, where participants with dementia had positive and engaging experiences. However, they emphasised that these initiatives were few and cultural institutions ought to develop a consistent framework for such programs.

Additionally, the interviewed caregiver shared their frustration with the limited opportunities for their loved ones to access cultural institutions. This sentiment was echoed by others who reported facing various logistical obstacles, such as inadequate transportation or the absence of trained staff who could help people with dementia engage meaningfully with exhibits. Caregivers stressed that having a designated space within museums or galleries where people with dementia can safely and comfortably enjoy the cultural experience would greatly alleviate these challenges.

Caregivers play a crucial role in facilitating access to cultural events. As reflected in the interviews, many people with dementia depend on caregivers to navigate the practicalities of attending cultural activities. One person living with dementia noted that the absence of company can make visits to cultural spaces less enjoyable: “I don’t like going alone; it makes me feel more isolated." This highlights the importance of social support when attending cultural activities. An important point raised by the caregiver was the need for collaboration between caregiver organisations and cultural institutions. The caregiver noted that while cultural institutions could do more to accommodate people with dementia, caregiver organisations

could play a significant role in facilitating access to these spaces: "Caregiver organisations should work closely with cultural institutions to ensure that people with dementia and their caregivers are not only welcomed but actively supported in attending events."

Moreover, interviewees highlighted that gaining the right knowledge and tools would enable cultural professionals to enhance connections with people living with dementia. One interviewee noted: “In music, you can truly live the moment with the person. Music is an experience that brings people with dementia back to the present.” This belief was supported by several cultural professionals who recognised that incorporating sensory elements into cultural programmes could provide a more inclusive experience.

The testimonials reveal a strong commitment from cultural professionals to make culture more inclusive, provided they receive the proper training and institutional support.

In conclusion, the challenges faced by people with dementia and their caregivers in accessing cultural institutions are multifaceted. While there is a strong desire within cultural organisations to provide inclusive and supportive environments for people with dementia, systemic barriers such as a lack of training, resources and structural support remain significant obstacles. By providing targeted professional development and implementing clear standards for dementia-friendly spaces, cultural institutions could not only increase accessibility but also enrich the lives of people with dementia. This would create a more inclusive society where cultural experiences are accessible to all, regardless of cognitive impairments.

2.4 Examples of best practices in dementia-friendly cultural spaces

At least 6 best practice examples from each partner countries (or countries beyond).

Please use the template in Appendix 4 of the Research and work plan of WP2 for each example.

2.4.1 AIDA project (Alzheimer patients Interaction through Digital and Arts); Italy, Greece, Ireland, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Denmark

Type of activity: Both a training program and a cultural activity

Relevance to dementia-friendly cultural participation: Highly relevant, as it fosters inclusive engagement by training cultural professionals and adapting activities specifically for individuals with dementia in public cultural spaces.

Primary objectives and goals of the practice: Maintaining the cognitive skills of people with dementia and improving their overall quality of life by facilitating meaningful participation in cultural activities.

How does the practice create inclusive opportunities for people with dementia?
The practice promotes inclusion by designing activities that cater to the specific needs of people with dementia, providing extensive training to cultural staff on how to communicate and engage with them, and ensuring that venues are physically accessible and welcoming for elderly participants.

Who implements the practice?
Alzheimer Bulgaria Association in collaboration with museum staff, particularly during the pilot phase held at the National Polytechnical Museum in Sofia.

Structure of the initiative, including its content, duration, location, and frequency: The initiative was structured around the AIDA methodology, which includes learning scenarios, activity sheets, and a practical toolkit for professionals. A total of fifteen different activity scenarios were developed and tested in cultural institutions across the project's partner countries. The pilot phase took place in 2023, with activities conducted in museums and galleries.

Specific methods used: AIDA methodology: includes learning scenarios, activity sheets, and a practitioner toolkit; Facilitator training on dementia engagement and communication; Mood evaluation scale used before and after sessions

Key stakeholders involved: Erasmus+ (funding body); Cultural institutions (implementation venues)

Financial or non-financial contributions and specify whether participation is free or requires payment: Erasmus+ provided the financial support for the project, and participation in the cultural activities was free of charge for all individuals with dementia and their caregivers.

Required skills, resources, or infrastructure: Trained facilitators and museum staff**;** Dementia-accessible cultural venues**;** Toolkit and activity materials

Outcomes of the initiative: The initiative showed measurable improvements in participants' mood, as documented by evaluations conducted before and after each session. Anecdotally, both participants and their caregivers reported positive experiences and a sense of inclusion, indicating that the sessions had a meaningful impact on well-being.

Feedback from participants or carers: Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Caregivers and participants expressed appreciation for the activities, noting improvements in mood and enjoyment during the sessions.

Long-term benefits or lessons learned: One of the key lessons learned is that cultural institutions, when properly supported and trained, can effectively contribute to the well-being and inclusion of people with dementia. The project demonstrated that such activities are not only feasible but also beneficial and valued by the target group.

Is the practice ongoing or completed? The practice was completed in 2023, as it was implemented within the fixed timeframe of the AIDA project.

Potential for replication or scaling: There is strong potential for replication and scaling of the practice. The existing activity scenarios and toolkit can be adopted by other museums and galleries, both within Bulgaria and internationally, to create similar inclusive programs.

Unique or noteworthy aspects of the example that set it apart: AIDA was the first project of its kind in the Bulgarian region, integrating a structured methodology with practical cultural sessions.

Sources or references for further information, if available: https://artzheimer.eu/

2.4.2 Virtual tours of cultural and historical sites, Bulgaria

Type: cultural activity incorporating elements of art therapy, museum reminiscence, and cultural tourism.

Relevance to dementia-friendly cultural participation: highly, as it created tailored cultural experiences that considered the cognitive, emotional, and physical needs of individuals with dementia, thereby promoting inclusion and access to cultural heritage.

Primary objectives and goals of the practice: The main goal of the project was to provide meaningful and inclusive cultural experiences for people with dementia. By combining art therapy, reminiscence activities, and guided tours of cultural sites, the initiative aimed to stimulate memory, foster emotional connection, and enhance the well-being of participants.

How does the practice create inclusive opportunities for people with dementia?

The practice ensured inclusion by adapting activities to meet the varying cognitive abilities of participants and by offering both in-person and virtual experiences. Sessions encouraged self-expression and interpretation, reinforcing participants' dignity and individual perspectives.

Who implements the practice? The initiative was implemented by the Compassion Alzheimer Bulgaria Foundation in collaboration with dementia care homes in Razgrad and Kazanlak, as well as the Day Center for people with dementia in Varna.

Structure of the initiative, including its content, duration, location, and frequency:

The initiative took place in 2023 and involved 20 sessions. These included guided visits to historical and cultural sites, art therapy sessions, and museum-based reminiscence activities. Participants were residents of care facilities and day centers located in Razgrad, Kazanlak, and Varna. Virtual tours were also offered as an alternative for those unable to travel.

Specific methods used: art therapy, reminiscence techniques in museums, guided cultural tours, and the use of virtual platforms to enable participation.

Key stakeholders involved: "For Our Parents" Fund of the BeCause Foundation (funding body); Local care institutions contributed by facilitating participant engagement and handling logistical arrangements.

Financial or non-financial contributions and specify whether participation is free or requires payment: The initiative was fully funded by the BeCause Foundation, and participation was completely free of charge for all individuals involved.

Outcomes of the initiative: More than 60 participants took part in the program. Outcomes included observable improvements in emotional well-being, increased engagement, and a more meaningful daily routine for elderly individuals.

Unique or noteworthy aspects of the example that set it apart:

The integration of cultural tourism, virtual tours, and therapeutic art practices makes this initiative particularly innovative. Its holistic approach to dementia care through culture sets a powerful example of how inclusive practices can be embedded into mainstream cultural programming.

Sources or references for further information, if available:

Compassion Alzheimer website

2.4.3 Creative Reminiscence Therapy ('Forget Me Not' project); Bulgaria, France, United Kingdom, Spain, Greece, Denmark

Type: a digital reminiscence platform, training program, and inclusive cultural tool designed to support people living with dementia and their carers.

Relevance to dementia-friendly cultural participation: highly relevant, as it enables individuals with dementia to engage with their personal and cultural memories through digital tools. By making reminiscence accessible and interactive, it enhances social inclusion and fosters meaningful cultural engagement for people with cognitive impairments.

Primary objectives and goals of the practice: The main objectives of the *Forget Me Not* project are to further develop the digital platform, improve accessibility for users with impairments, expand language options, and integrate interactive features such as cognitive assessment tools and sharing functionalities. Additionally, it seeks to build digital literacy among carers and professionals through targeted training and resources.

How does the practice create inclusive opportunities for people with dementia? The initiative promotes inclusion by using reminiscence therapy techniques in a digital format that allows individuals with dementia to share their stories and experiences. It incorporates multilingual support, accessible design, and digital tools that adapt to the user's cognitive level, making the platform usable for a broad range of abilities. It also supports carers and professionals with training to create dementia-friendly cultural content and environments.

Who implements the practice? The project is led by a European consortium that includes The Union Départementale des Associations Familiales of Charente (France), edUcation (United Kingdom), the University of Zaragoza (Spain), NGO FRODIZO (Greece), OJB «Shalom» (Bulgaria), and SOSU Østjylland (Denmark).

Specific methods used: reminiscence therapy, memory box creation, digital storytelling, training workshops, and cognitive assessments.

Key stakeholders involved: European Union (funding body), implementation by a partnership of educational, non-profit, and care-oriented organisations across several European countries.

Financial or non-financial contributions and specify whether participation is free or requires payment: The project is EU-funded, and all access and participation are free of charge for users and carers.

Required skills, resources, or infrastructure: digital infrastructure, accessible platform design, and training for carers in digital skills and reminiscence methods. It also involves cognitive assessment tools and guidance on workshop facilitation.

Outcomes of the initiative: The initiative significantly improved the digital and caregiving skills of professionals and enhanced the quality of care for people with dementia. It increased social interaction, cultural inclusion, and quality of life for participants. The platform was praised for being easy to use and accessible, contributing to strengthened community engagement and greater awareness of dementia care needs.

Long-term benefits or lessons learned: The project fostered intercultural collaboration, strengthened digital inclusion in dementia care, and highlighted the value of accessible,

multilingual tools. It empowered carers and professionals, while emphasising the enduring role of reminiscence in improving the lives of people with dementia.

Is the practice ongoing or completed? The *Forget Me Not* project is ongoing and continues to evolve, with a focus on adaptation across various cultural and linguistic contexts.

Potential for replication or scaling: The project is highly adaptable and scalable across different countries and care settings, given its multilingual structure, digital nature, and flexible training components.

2.4.4 The MoMA Alzheimer's Project: Making Art Accessible To People with Dementia website, USA

Type: a training program designed to expand the Museum of Modern Art's education programs for individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, as well as their carers.

Relevance to dementia-friendly cultural participation: This initiative significantly contributed to dementia-friendly cultural participation by developing resources and training that make art more accessible to individuals with Alzheimer's and other dementias. It promoted inclusion within museum settings and encouraged engagement with modern art through specially designed programs.

Primary objectives and goals of the practice: The project aimed to identify best practices for designing and implementing art gallery tours and related activities for people with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. It also sought to provide training and resources for other museums and care organisations to replicate similar programs in their communities. Additionally, the project advocated for wider awareness about the benefits of accessible arts for individuals with dementia and their care partners.

Who implements the practice? The initiative was implemented by MoMA's Department of Learning and Engagement in collaboration with the MetLife Foundation.

Structure of the initiative, including its content, duration, location, and frequency: The project ran from 2007 to 2014. It included on-site gallery tours, training workshops, web-based seminars, educational videos, printed guides, and presentations at professional conferences.

Specific methods used: guided gallery tours based on MoMA's unique teaching methodology, educator training sessions, workshops, video resources, a published guide, and collaboration with academic researchers to study program outcomes.

Key stakeholders involved (e.g. sponsors, local communities, or governmental agencies) and their role in supporting the initiative: The MetLife Foundation provided financial support for the project. MoMA also partnered with organisations such as the New York University School of Medicine, which conducted formal research on the program's effects.

Financial or non-financial contributions and specify whether participation is free or requires payment: Participation in the program was free of charge for individuals living with dementia and their carers.

Outcomes of the initiative, both measurable (e.g. participation rates, user satisfaction) and anecdotal (e.g. improved well-being or cultural inclusion): The program served over 10,000 individuals with disabilities, including those with Alzheimer's disease. Research conducted in collaboration with NYU School of Medicine indicated improvements in participants' quality of life, mood, and engagement. Feedback included testimonials and evidence of increased emotional well-being and meaningful connection to art.

Long-term benefits or lessons learned: The initiative emphasised the value of museum-based art engagement for people with dementia and helped shape international best practices in the field. It left behind a rich collection of training materials and educational resources still used by institutions today.

Is the practice ongoing or completed? The project officially concluded in 2014, but its materials, training guides, and methodologies continue to be used and adapted by museums and care organisations worldwide.

Potential for replication or scaling: The project was specifically designed to be replicable, with resources provided to help museums, care homes, and community organisations implement similar programs in diverse settings.

Unique or noteworthy aspects of the example that set it apart: This initiative was one of the first large-scale efforts by a major museum to combine dementia care with arts education. Its thorough documentation, research-backed outcomes, and emphasis on scalability make it a pioneering model in the field of inclusive cultural engagement.

2.4.5 Azure - Exploring greater inclusion of people with dementia in museums and galleries, Ireland

Type: cultural activity and training program

Relevance to dementia-friendly cultural participation: highly relevant because it improves access for people with dementia to galleries and museums in Ireland and enhances their experience in these institutions.

Primary objectives and goals of the practice: Providing people with dementia and their care partners with the opportunity to enjoy shared experiences in cultural spaces, to create meaningful and inclusive interactions in museums and galleries, and to build capacity within cultural institutions through staff training. It also aims to contribute to a broader societal shift that views dementia through a social and community lens.

How does the practice create inclusive opportunities for people with dementia? Azure creates inclusive opportunities by facilitating specially designed tours led by trained museum and gallery staff. These tours are sensitive to the needs of people with dementia and provide a shared space where participants can connect with others and engage with artworks and cultural artifacts in a relaxed, respectful environment.

Who implements the practice? The practice is implemented by a consortium of organisations: Age & Opportunity, the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), the Butler Gallery, and the Alzheimer Society of Ireland.

Structure of the initiative, including its content, duration, location, and frequency: The structure of Azure includes both the direct delivery of gallery and museum tours and a broader training component. In 2012, a Steering Group was formed to introduce Azure tours nationwide. Inspired by the 'Meet Me at MoMA' model, the group also oversees training courses and network days, which support museums and galleries in implementing Azure tours. To date, over 35 institutions across Ireland have trained staff to run these programs.

Specific methods used: Specific methods used in the Azure project include facilitated gallery and museum tours, staff training, and collaborative planning.

Key stakeholders involved (e.g. sponsors, local communities, or governmental agencies) and their role in supporting the initiative: Key stakeholders include Age & Opportunity, which focuses on inclusion of hard-to-reach groups; IMMA, which expanded its programming for older people through Azure; the Butler Gallery, contributing to Kilkenny's Age Friendly County programme; and the Alzheimer Society of Ireland, whose involvement supports visibility and inclusion for people with dementia and their caregivers.

Required skills, resources, or infrastructure (e.g. trained staff, accessible venues, digital tools): Required resources include trained museum/gallery staff and accessible cultural venues.

Long-term benefits or lessons learned: A key long-term benefit of Azure is its contribution to a new community-based model of dementia care that focuses on abilities, possibilities, and social inclusion. It illustrates how cultural participation can be normalised and made accessible to people with dementia.

Is the practice ongoing or completed? The Azure practice is ongoing. It continues to train staff and support institutions in Ireland to adopt inclusive programming.

Potential for replication or scaling: Azure has high potential for replication. Its low-resource, adaptable model can be scaled in other countries with similar cultural infrastructure. It aligns well with broader dementia-friendly strategies and community engagement goals.

2.4.6 Project Theatre on dementia and depression, Germany

Type: a cultural activity, specifically a theatrical performance, that also serves as a tool for community dialogue and awareness-raising.

Relevance to dementia-friendly cultural participation: It directly addresses the stigma, misunderstanding, and emotional impact of dementia (and depression) among older adults. By presenting these issues through theatre, the project creates space for empathy, dialogue, and societal inclusion of those affected.

Primary objectives and goals of the practice: The main objective of the project is to encourage open conversations about dementia and depression among older adults, making these often taboo or difficult subjects more accessible to the general public and professionals alike. It aims to raise awareness, foster understanding, and reduce stigma by emotionally engaging the audience.

Who implements the practice (e.g. cultural institutions, non-profits, or volunteer groups)? The project was implemented through a cross-border collaboration involving theatre producers and various institutions such as nursing homes, residential care facilities, training programs for care workers, and patient associations like the Alzheimer Association (DE).

Structure of the initiative, including its content, duration, location, and frequency: The initiative ran from June 2014 to March 30, 2015, and involved 62 theatre performances across Dutch Limburg, Germany, Eastern Belgium, and Belgian Limburg. The performances were directed at both the general public and professional groups. Each performance was followed by an audience discussion, allowing interaction and reflection.

Specific methods used: The project used theatrical storytelling to portray the complex emotions and social dynamics surrounding dementia and depression. A key method was the audience-led follow-up discussion after each performance, which encouraged emotional engagement and peer exchange.

Key stakeholders involved (e.g. sponsors, local communities, or governmental agencies) and their role in supporting the initiative: The project was funded by Interreg IV-A EMR People to People, a cross-border European funding program. Key stakeholders included nursing homes, care institutions, professional training providers, and patient associations.

Financial or non-financial contributions and specify whether participation is free or requires payment: The project was made possible through financial support from Interreg IV-A EMR People to People.

Required skills, resources, or infrastructure (e.g. trained staff, accessible venues, digital tools): The practice required trained actors, facilitators for discussions, and accessible performance venues that could accommodate older adults and individuals with dementia.

Long-term benefits or lessons learned: A key takeaway from the project is that theatre can be an effective medium for addressing sensitive topics like dementia and depression, making abstract issues more tangible and sparking meaningful conversations. It also highlights the importance of follow-up dialogue in deepening understanding and emotional engagement.

Is the practice ongoing or completed? The project was completed in March 2015.

2.5 Recommendations

The Memorable project strives to create meaningful and interactive experiences that encourage self-expression and personal growth for people with Alzheimer's disease, their caregivers and the cultural professionals who support them. The project aims to provide a greater recognition of the benefits that participation in arts and creativity can have for positive health, wellbeing and active ageing. Based on the comprehensive desk research and interviews with key stakeholders (individuals living with dementia, caregivers, cultural professionals), the findings have significant implications for both public health, the arts and creativity sector, especially with low participation in arts and creativity by people living with dementia. This set of recommendations and insights outlines practical strategies for enhancing accessibility, inclusivity and awareness within cultural space and is to be considered in any future roll out of the programme:

For cultural experts

Dementia awareness training for cultural professionals

Cultural institutions and organisations ought to establish and provide training programs for caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia to promote psychosocial support through cultural engagement. Research shows that cultural venues and experts have identified a shared need for support in developing inclusive methods, improving communication strategies and adopting better models for engaging individuals with dementia. By integrating various cultural and artistic activities, these programs can offer individuals with dementia enriching interactions that enhance their cognitive, emotional and social well-being.

Inclusive and supportive environment through communication techniques

Stakeholders in cultural spaces should be aware that effectively engaging individuals with Alzheimer's disease requires specific communication and facilitation strategies. To effectively engage individuals with Alzheimer's disease in cultural spaces, it is crucial to communicate directly with them, even if they are non-verbal, and to use simple language, emphasising key words. Patience is essential, allowing time for responses and understanding that repetition may be necessary. It is important to try to interpret what is being said and support participants at their own level of functioning, offering room for a wide range of responses. These strategies should be integrated into practice through targeted training and ongoing awareness, ensuring that cultural spaces remain inclusive and supportive environments for individuals with Alzheimer's disease.

Dementia-friendly design standards in cultural spaces

Cultural institutions should ensure the availability of a quiet and low-stimulation space where individuals feeling anxious, overwhelmed or confused can rest. This can be achieved by organising visits outside of the cultural institution's busiest work hours. Sensory overstimulation may increase distraction, agitation, and confusion (Brawley, 1997). Therefore, a balance of sensory stimulation should be found, where noise is not excessive, but also not absent (Dewing, 2009). These findings have also been affirmed in practice within activities carried out by the Alzheimer Bulgaria Association, such as the AIDA project mentioned above.

Clear, accessible signage is essential in helping individuals with dementia navigate cultural spaces confidently and independently. Institutions should assess and adapt signage such as clear signs in bold face with good contrast between text and background. Signage should be placed at eye level, be well-lit and clearly mark important locations such as toilets, exit and key decision points within the venue.

Staff should be trained to understand the importance of how to use the physical environment to support visitors with dementia. Implementing these standards ensure improving the accessibility for people with dementia, supporting independence, reducing anxiety and promoting engagement.

Partnerships between caregiver organisations and cultural institutions

To create truly inclusive cultural spaces for people with dementia, caregiver organisations should actively collaborate with cultural institutions to co-design and support dementia-inclusive programmes. By working together organisations and venues can improve accessibility,

reduce social isolation and enhance caregiving experience. Cultural programming and artistic activities can help caregivers better understand the perspective of the person with dementia and to provide new and engaging ways for caregivers and people with dementia to interact.

For organisations providing support for people with dementia and their families

Transportation and mobility support for accessing cultural spaces

Institutions need to consider transportation and mobility to make cultural spaces more accessible to people with dementia and their caregivers. Many people are exposed to obstacles that simply reach the location of events where they can participate. To address this, caregiver organisations, working in partnership with local authorities and cultural institutions, can offer or coordinate transport services and collaborate with local transport providers to improve dementia-awareness among drivers and to advocate for better accessibility on public transit.

Public awareness through campaigns and visibility

Dementia is the biggest health and social care issue of our time. Cultural institutions and caregiver organisations should prioritise public outreach as part of their awareness campaigns to ensure that the benefits of dementia-inclusive cultural programming are widely recognised. Through public awareness campaigns, we can ensure that people with dementia receive the comprehensive care and support they need to improve their quality of life. These campaigns should focus on educating the public, healthcare providers and policymakers about the needs of individuals with dementia, while also advocating for more accessible and inclusive services.

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