

MUGArtS - Cultural Ambassadors: Redefining Adult Education in Cultural Spaces

**How to make museums and art
galleries more engaging for people
aged 55+ not only as visitors but as
active participants in cultural life
- the situation in Bulgaria?**

Project No. 2025-1-LT01-KA220-ADU-000354739

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1. Introduction

How can museums and art galleries become more welcoming, interesting and engaging for people aged 55+, not only as visitors but also as active participants in cultural life? And what experiences, barriers and needs adults and seniors have when visiting cultural spaces?

These topics are in the focus of our project “Cultural Ambassadors: Redefining Adult Education in Cultural Spaces” (MUGArtS), (2025-1-LT01-KA220-ADU-000354739). The partners are: VSI EDUKACINIAI PROJEKTAI (EDUPRO), Creativity and Educational Studio “ARTIED” from Bulgaria, Bucovina Institute from Romania and MOSAIC from Greece.

The **project’s general objective** is to foster inclusion and civic engagement of seniors by empowering them as cultural ambassadors through non-formal educational activities in museums and art galleries. On the other hand, we want to increase the capacity of cultural institutions and cultural workers and educators on how to better engage these generations in interactive, experiential activities.

To better understand where to start from, our first step was to ask people aged 55+ themselves about **their experiences in museums or galleries, how often they visit them, what the reasons to do so are, how welcome and included they usually feel, what would encourage them to visit museums or galleries more often, as well as what barriers and challenges they face and what needs and support they would like to receive**. As the project aims to encourage seniors to become Cultural Ambassadors and to support other people their age to more actively engage with cultural life, we also asked them about what kind of participation would suit them best in a cultural activity and what training would be interesting and important for them.

The present report summarises only the opinions of the involved representatives of the target group and reflects their personal experiences on the topic, without pretending to be comprehensive or exhaustive. The survey was done through a common online questionnaire, implemented by Creativity and Educational Studio ARTIED in Bulgaria. We hope that the collected feedback and results will help us to initiate a discussion about how the cultural sector and cultural institutions in our country could become more inclusive and engaging for people aged 55+, as well as to better design and localise the MUGArtS Cultural Ambassadors Training Programme, so as to respond to the needs and expectations of seniors interested in culture and to the museum and gallery workers and educators.

2. Executive summary

The Bulgarian survey results show that the majority of respondents were already engaged with cultural activities, but their active visit to museums and galleries was mostly shaped by how welcomed they feel and how engaging and accessible cultural experiences are. Most respondents shared that they visit cultural spaces to enjoy arts, culture and cultural heritage, to learn something new and to have meaningful time outside home.

At the same time, most of them said that they would like to take a more active role and to become Cultural Ambassadors, as well as to share information about cultural events, to support other visitors and to invite other people their age to cultural events. Most of them admit that they would need some support to be more actively engaged and are open to participate in some training activities.

The most important conclusions from the survey

- Most respondents were aged 55–64 (64%) and live in big cities / urban areas (56%). However, people aged 75+, as well as those living in villages / rural areas also participated in the survey, so their experience and opinions are also reflected.
- Most of respondents visit museums and art galleries quite often – at least once per month (30.60%), 2-3 times per month or at least 1-2 times per year. However, people who never went to cultural places were also involved – 8.30%, so as to consider their opinions as well.
- The strongest motivators for visiting museums and galleries were to enjoy art, culture, or heritage (66.70%), followed by wish to learn something new (52.80%), while the least important reasons were to socialise / spend time with others and to connect culture with their own life experiences (each collecting 16.70%).
- Shared availability of more relevant themes or exhibitions (41.70%) and more social or group-based events (36.10%) were stated as the most encouraging reasons for visiting museums and galleries more often.
- As the most common barriers were stated: physical accessibility (between 25% and 66.70% depending on whether it is a general reason or a personal barrier) and lack of time/other responsibilities (25%, as a personal barrier).
- Respondents shared that the most preferred formats of engagement with a cultural activity are listening and observing (75%) and discussing artworks with others (50%).
- As training formats, respondents preferred demonstrations with examples (55.60%) and hands-on / practical activities (47.20%).
- Most of the respondents shared that they would prefer a mix of online and face-to-face trainings (38.90%), followed by mostly face-to-face experiences in a group (33.30%).

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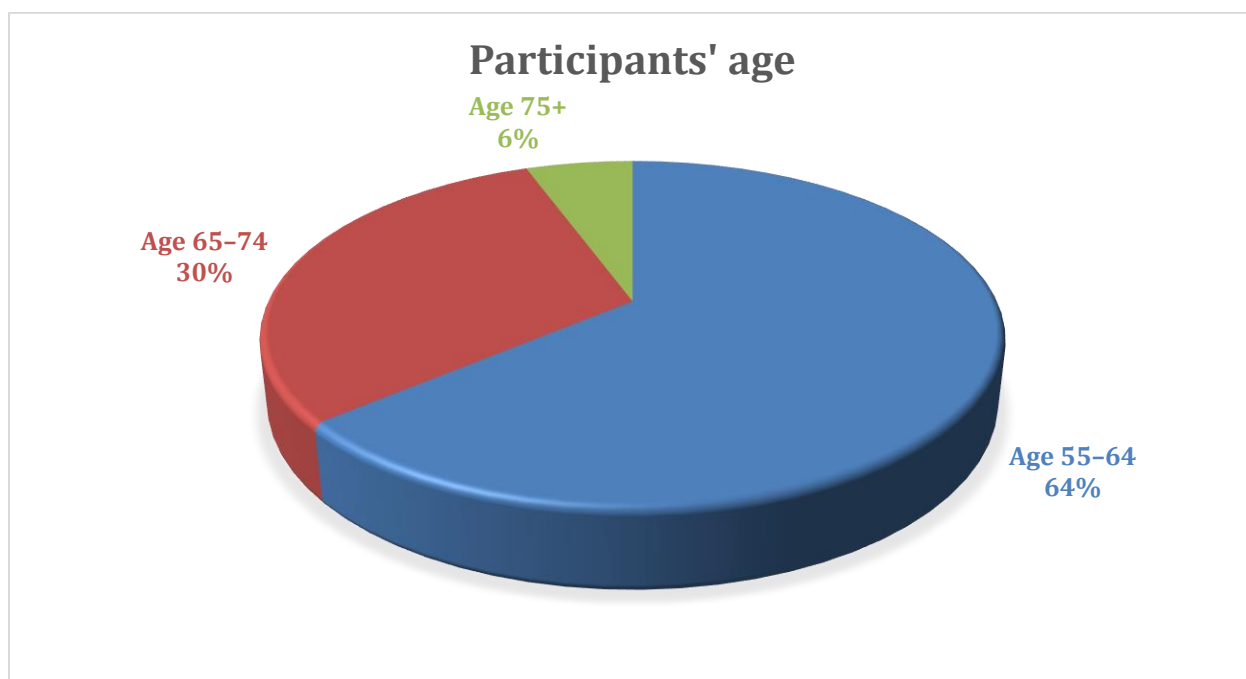
3. Participants' demographics

The survey was done through an online questionnaire, which was distributed via social media channels and face-to-face interviews with potential representatives of the target group. In such cases, a separate online form was completed for each participant.

The survey was done in April 2026, and the total number of collected questionnaires was 36.

Age group

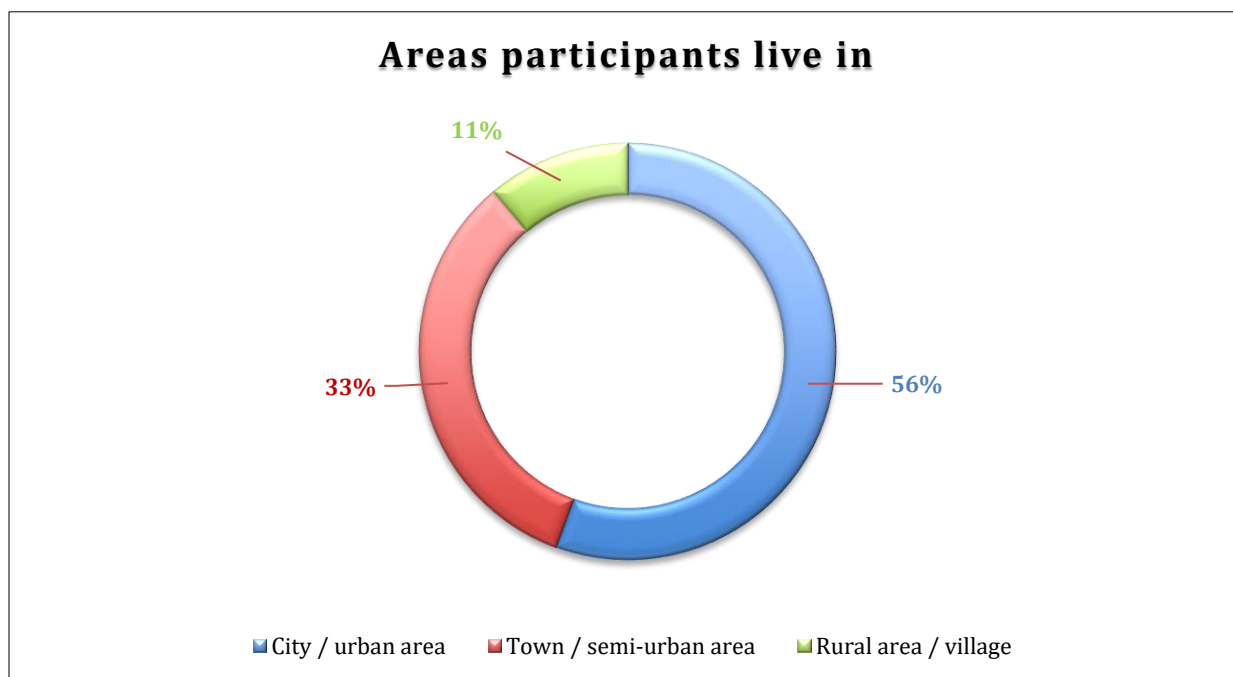
The respondents were concentrated on the age group 55–64 (64 %), followed by the age group 65–74 (30 %). The oldest group was most modestly presented, but still 2 people (6 %) responded to the questionnaire. This suggests that the Bulgarian responses mainly reflect the perspectives of younger seniors.



Areas where participants live in

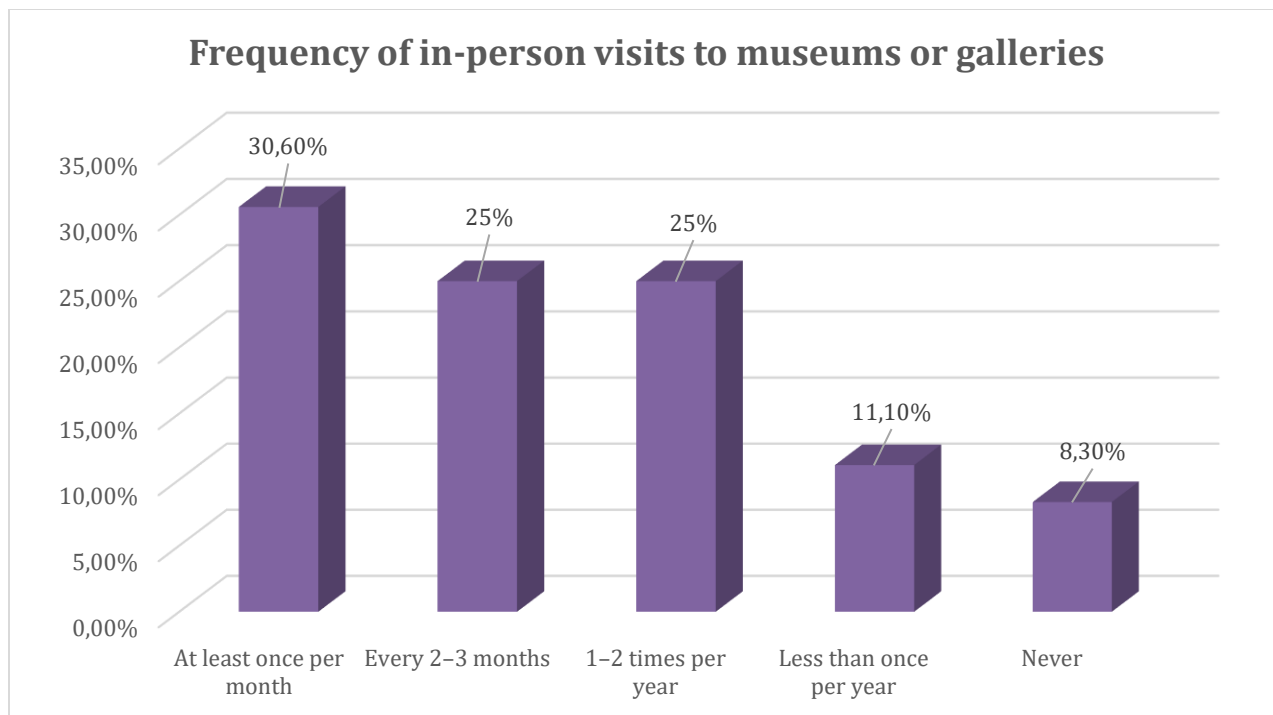
Almost half of the respondents marked city / urban area (56 %). The second biggest cohort was from a town / semi-urban area (33 %). Still 4 people / 11 % marked that they live in a village / rural area, which is also valuable for the survey. It could be summarised that the findings mostly reflect seniors who live in cities and towns and already have relatively better access to cultural venues.

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Frequency of in-person visits to museums and art galleries

The findings show that the biggest share of respondents (30.60%) visit cultural spaces very often. The other two cohorts were of those who visit museums and art galleries rather often – every 2-3 months or 1-2 times per year – 25% for each category. 11.10% of respondents marked “Less than once per year”, which means that they go rather rarely to cultural venues. The last category “Never” was selected by 8.30%, which means that although these people never go to museums and art galleries, they might have interest in doing so.



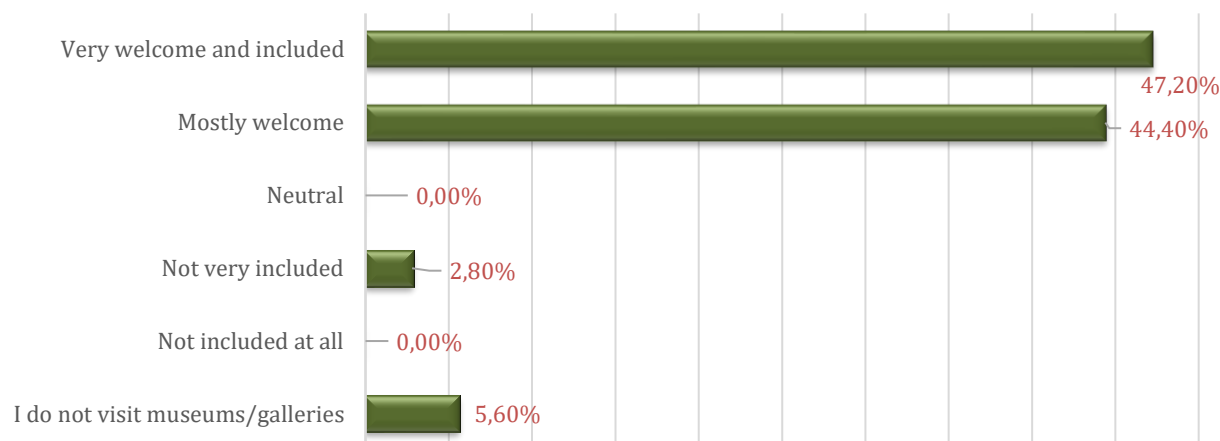
4. Quantitative results from the survey

Seniors' experience in museums and galleries

Most of the respondents were positive about how welcome and included they feel in museums and galleries – respectively 47.20% marked very included, and 44.40% - mostly welcome, which signifies that they find what they expect at cultural spaces. One respondent (2.80%) admitted that they did not feel very included, and 5.60% said that they do not visit cultural spaces.

Therefore, when asked about **how welcome and included they usually feel when visiting a museum or an art gallery**, the obtained results were:

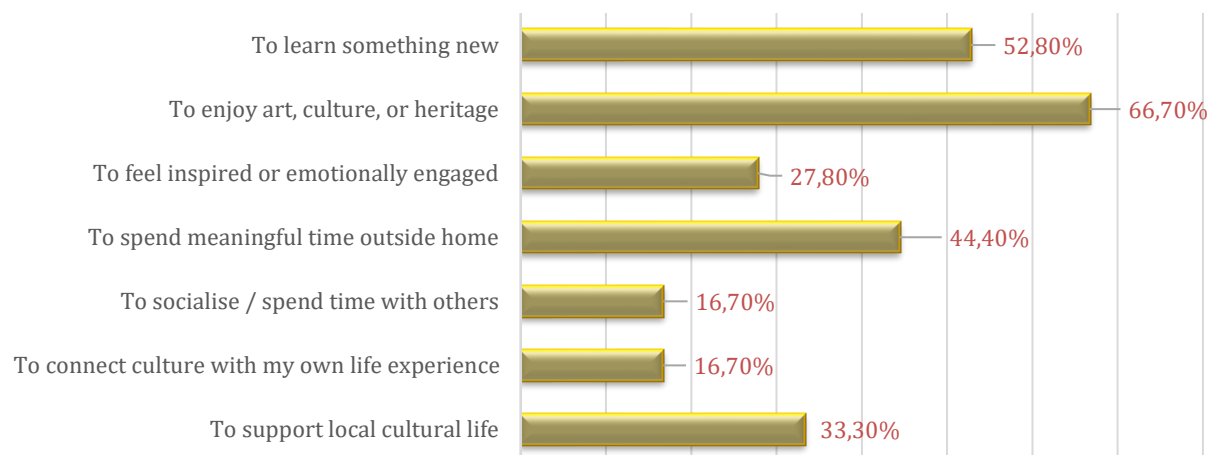
When you visit a museum or gallery, how welcome and included do you usually feel?



When asked about the **main reasons for visiting museums or galleries**, the strongest reason was to enjoy art, culture, or heritage (66.70%), followed by learning something new (52.80%). Other very strong motivators were to spend meaningful time outside home (44.40%) and to support local cultural life (33.30%). The opportunity to feel inspired or emotionally engaged was marked by 27.80%. As the lowest motivators were selected “To socialise / spend time with others” and “To connect culture with my own life experience” - 16.70% for each category.

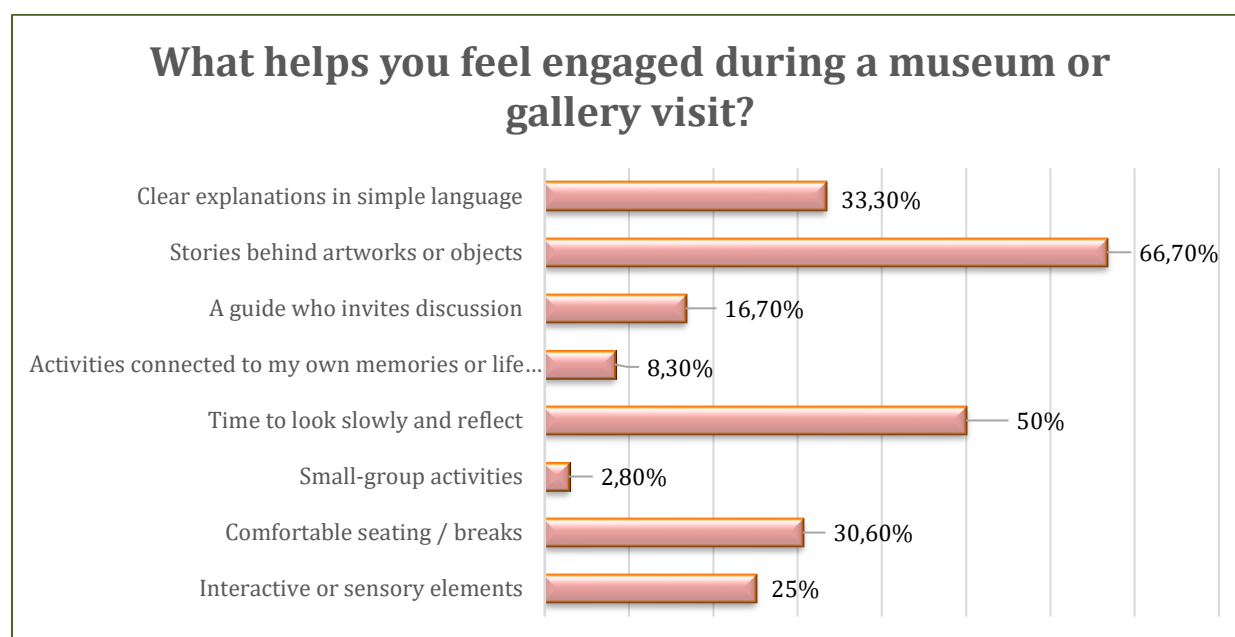
Note: Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.

What are your main reasons for visiting museums or galleries?



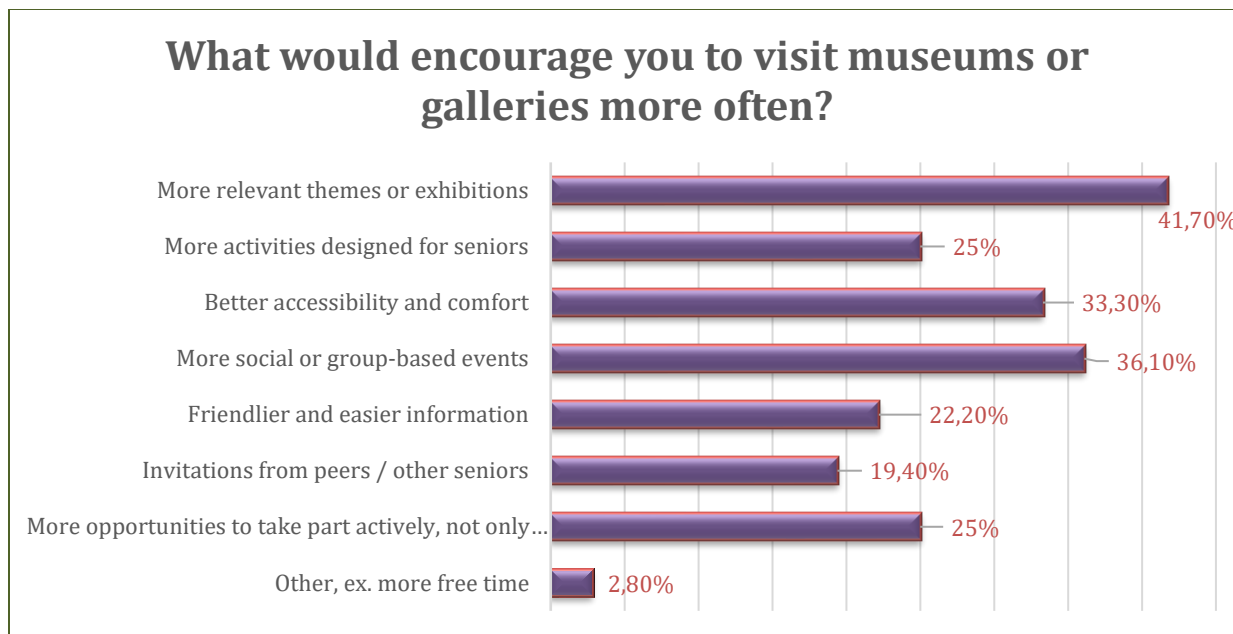
Regarding **engagement factors during a museum or gallery visit**, “Stories behind artworks or objects” and “Time to look slowly and to reflect on exhibits” were selected as the strongest ones - 66.70% and 50% respectively. “Clear explanations in simple language” and “Comfortable seating / breaks” were also marked as very important for engagement - 33.30% and 30.60% respectively, followed by “Interactive or sensory elements” - 25%. The engagement role of the guide who invites discussions was marked by 16.70%. The least engaging aspects were respectively “Small-group activities” (2.80%) and “Activities connected to my own memories or life experience” (8.30%).

Note: Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.



Regarding what would **encourage people 55+ and seniors to visit museums or galleries more often**, as the most encouraging factors were marked: “More relevant themes or exhibitions” (41.70%), “More social or group-based events” (36.10%) and “Better accessibility and comfort” (33.30%). As a second layer of encouragement were marked factors such as “More activities designed for seniors” and “More opportunities to take part actively, not only observe” – selected by 25% each; and “Friendlier and easier information” (22.20%). The least encouraging factor was “Invitations from peers / other seniors”, but it was still marked by 19.4%, which makes it also important to be considered. One person (or 2.80%) marked lack of sufficient free time as a factor too.

Note: Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.

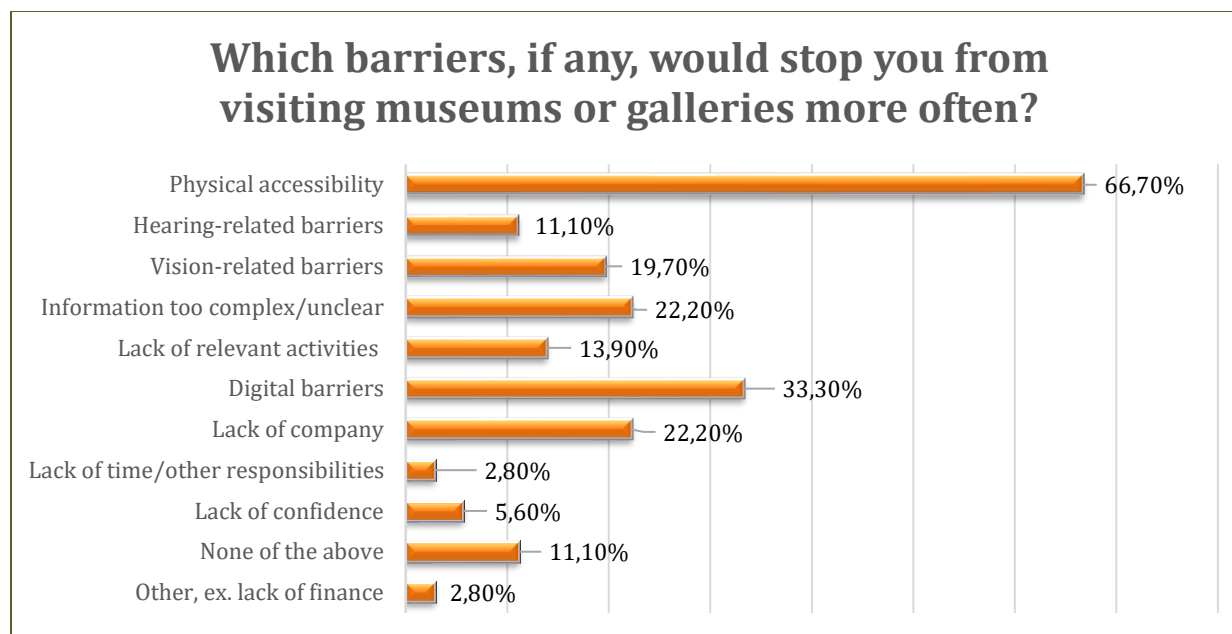


Barriers and support needs when visiting cultural spaces identified by people 55+

Physical accessibility of museums and galleries was marked as the biggest barrier for more frequent visits (66.70%), followed by Digital barriers (33.30%). The second layer of barriers were “Information too complex/unclear” and “Lack of company” - 22.20% each, as well as “Vision-related barriers” - 19.70%. “Lack of relevant activities” was marked by 13.90% and “Hearing-related barriers” – by 11.10%. Few respondents selected options “Lack of confidence” (5.60%) and “Lack of time/other responsibilities” and Other, such as lack of finance - 2.80% each. 11.10% marked “None of the above”, showing that there are some barriers, but the respondents might not be aware of them or might not reflect about them.

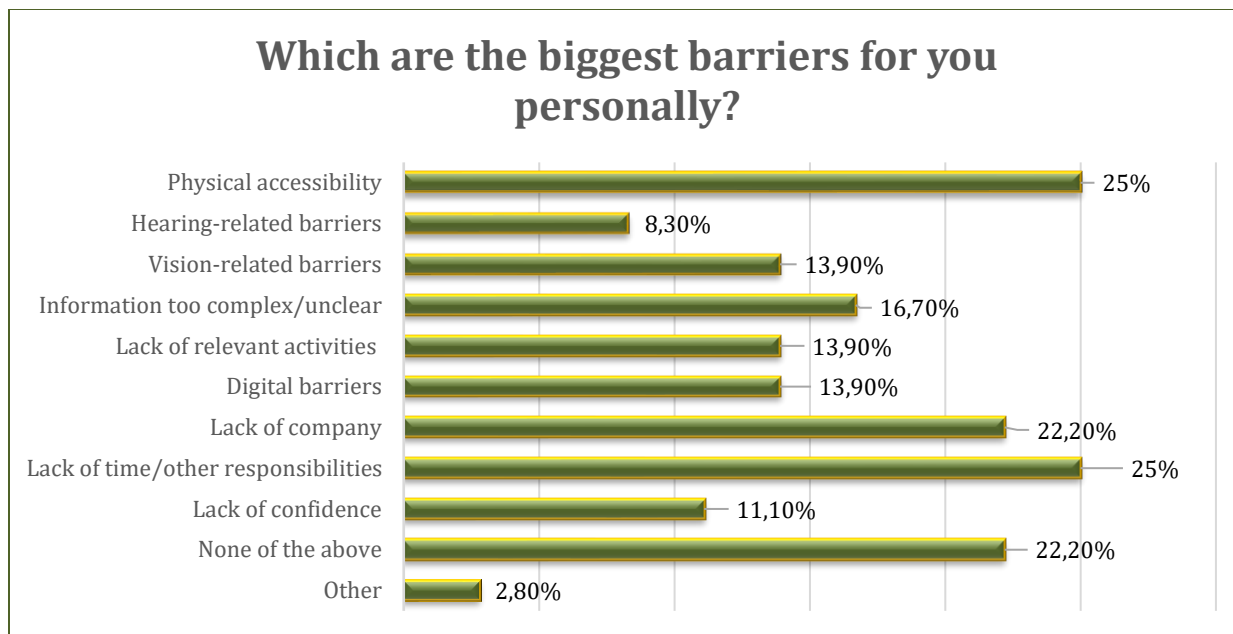
Therefore, when asked about **any barriers which would stop seniors from visiting museums or galleries more often**, the obtained results were:

Note: Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.



When asked about their **personal barriers** which prevent them from regularly visiting cultural spaces, most frequent ones were “Physical accessibility” and “Lack of time / other responsibilities” – 25% each, followed by “Lack of company” and “None of the above” - 22.20%. The next layer of personal barriers is “Information too complex / unclear” (16.70%) and “Vision-related barriers”, “Lack of relevant activities” and “Digital barriers” - 13.90% each. Few respondents also selected “Lack of confidence” (11.10%) and “Hearing-related barriers” (8.30%). Uncomfortable location of cultural spaces was also marked by one respondent - 2.80%, under the “Other” category. Here, the respondent made the following clarification: “*Some museums / galleries are far away, for example the Botanical Garden of the Bulgarian Academy of Science, The National History museum (located in Sofia outskirts), Muzejko is also difficult to access, etc.*”

Note: Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.



This way, when comparing the results from the last two questions, **physical accessibility** was marked as the major common barrier for frequent visits, followed by **lack of company**. Biggest deviations could be seen regarding **digital barriers**, which were selected among the most frequent common challenges. However, when it comes to personal reasons, **lack of time and other responsibilities** were selected among major ones which prevent 55+ people from visiting museums and galleries.

Training topics and formats identified by 55+ people related to cultural visits

The most desired topics were “Storytelling: connecting artworks, objects, and personal memories” (58.30%), followed by “Understanding artworks through discussion and reflection” and “Making museums and galleries more inclusive and accessible for seniors” - 47.20%. Relatively lower interest, but still sufficient to consider received “Sensory-based or experiential cultural activities” (33.30%) and “Encouraging and supporting other seniors to participate” and “How to lead or support small-group cultural activities” - 30.60% each.

Therefore, when asked about **the topics which they would like the training to include**, the obtained results were:

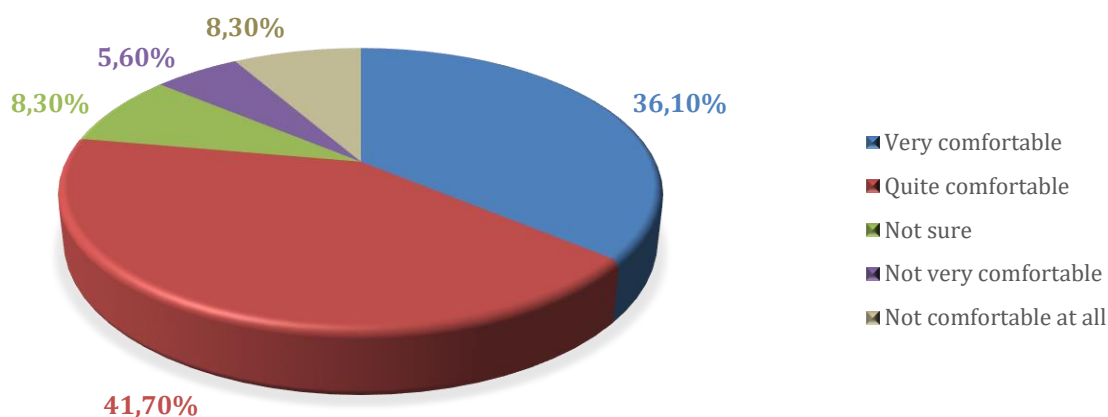
Note: Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.

Which topics would you most like the training to include?



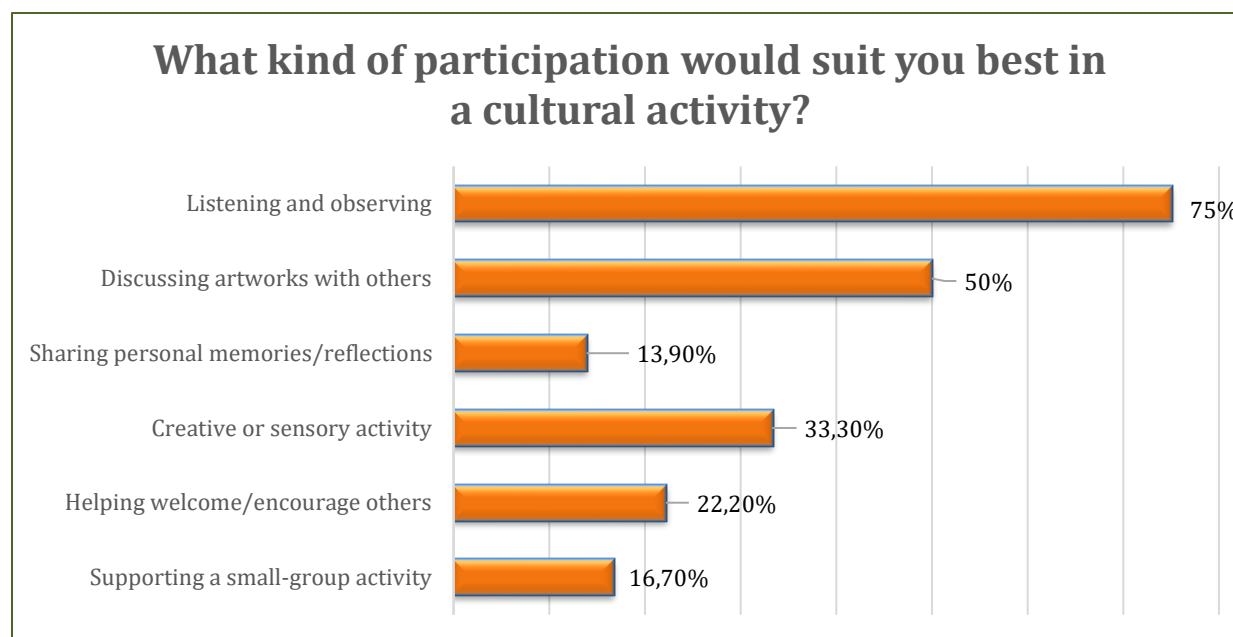
Regarding **sharing their own memories, opinions, or life experience during a cultural activity**, generally respondents stated that they would feel comfortable doing this - 36.10% marked option “Very comfortable”, and 41.70% - “Quite comfortable”. The other respondents were in the neutral spectrum - respectively 8.30% as not sure, and 13,90% in total as not feeling comfortable to make personal sharings.

How comfortable would you feel sharing your own memories, opinions, or life experience during a cultural activity?



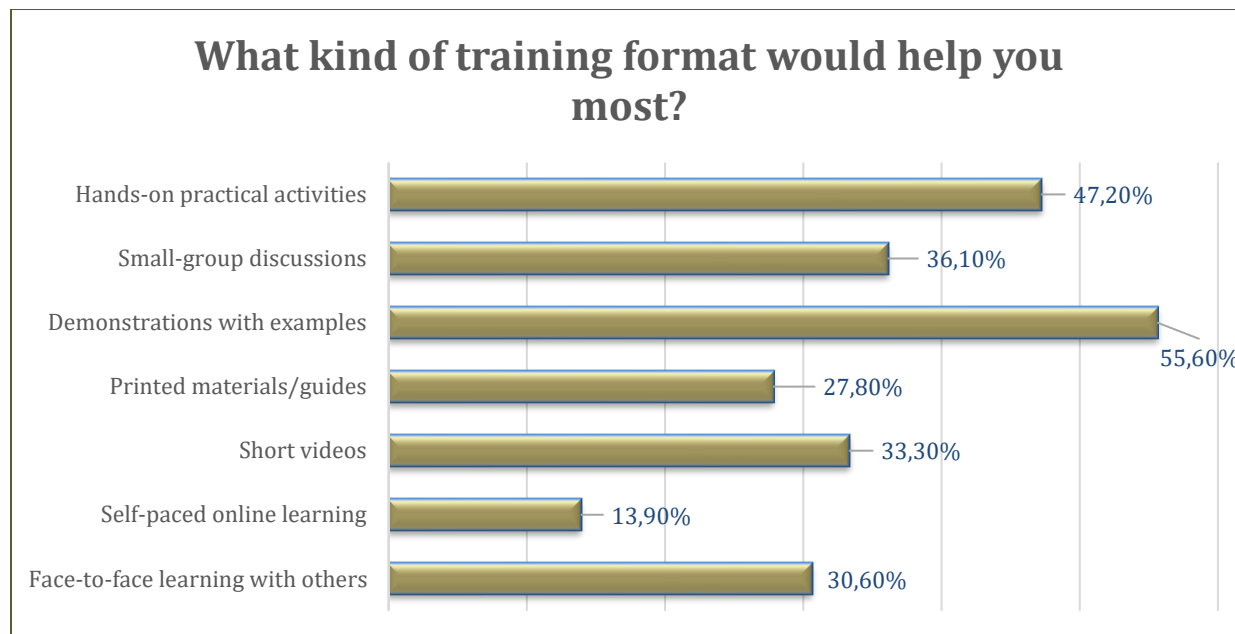
When asked about **the most preferred participation mode**, 75% of respondents marked “Listening and observing”, followed by “Discussing artworks with others” (50%). The second layer of preferences collected participation in creative or sensory activity (33.30%) and helping welcome/encourage others (22.20%). The least preferred options were “Supporting a small-group activity” (16.70%) and “Sharing personal memories/reflections” (13.90%).

Note: Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.

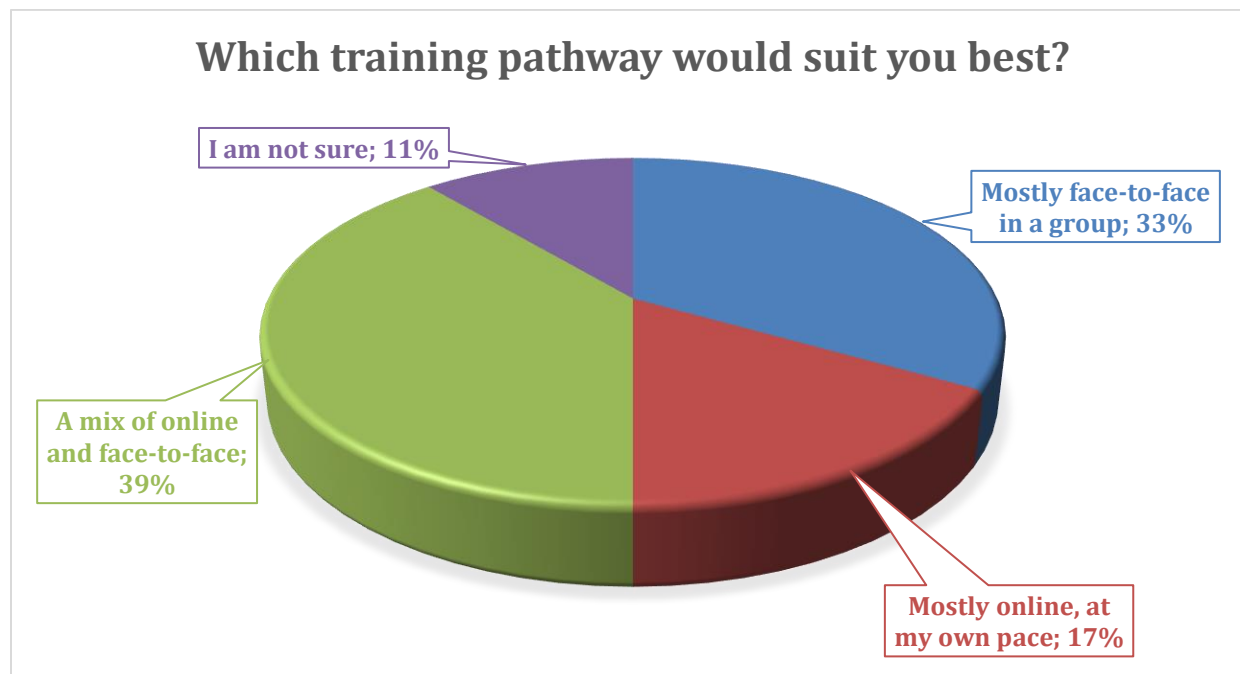


Regarding **training formats**, the most preferred ones were “Demonstrations with examples” - 55.60%, followed by “Hands-on practical activities” - 47.20%. The second layer of preferences collected “Small-group discussions” - 36.10%, “Short videos” - 33.30%, “Face-to-face learning with others” - 30.60% and “Printed materials/guides” - 27.80%. The least wanted format was “Self-paced online learning” - 13.90%.

Note: Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.



When asked about **training pathways**, “A mix of online and face-to-face” was selected as the most preferred one - 39%, shortly followed by “Mostly face-to-face in a group” - 33%. At the second level comes “Mostly online, at my own pace” - 17%. 4 respondents, or 11% were not sure.



5. Cultural Ambassador's role and involvement

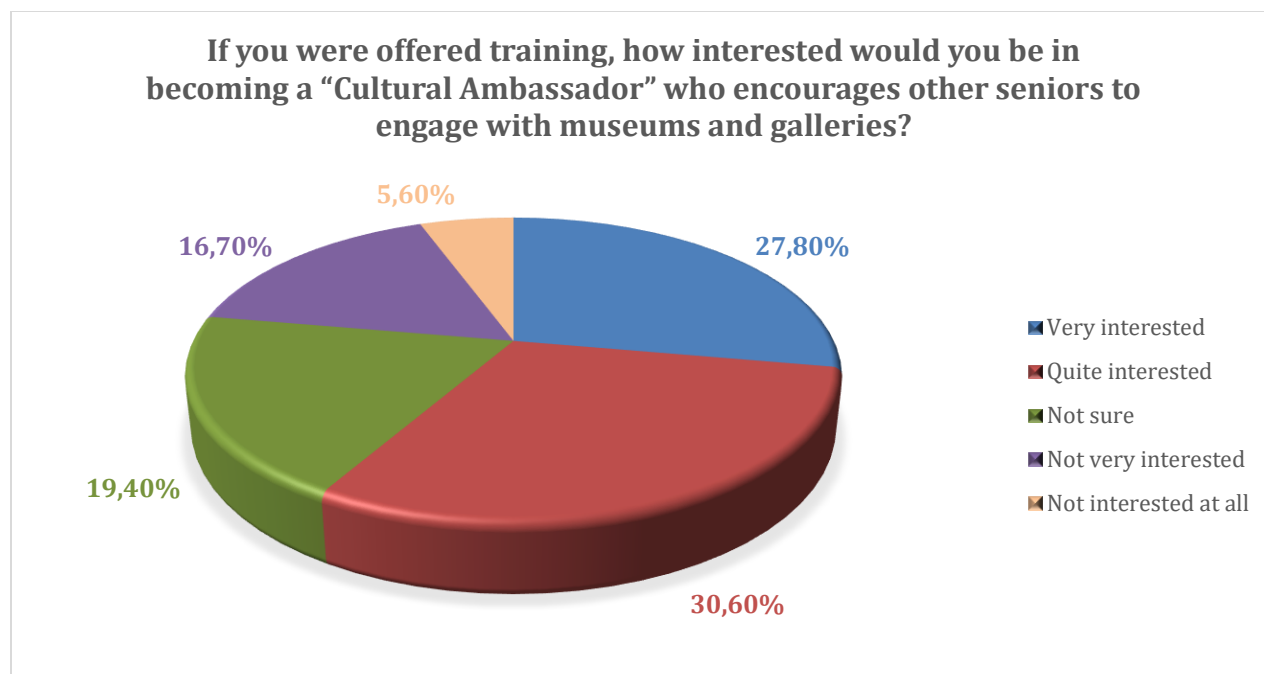
With MUGArtS project, a **Cultural Ambassador** is a person, preferably aged 55+, but other generations are also welcome, who is interested in art and culture and like to take the lead and to inspire and support other people at their age to interact more actively with cultural heritage, to visit museums and art galleries and to engage with exhibited artworks and artefacts. The idea is not to substitute for cultural workers and educators but to help cultural institutions to be more inclusive to senior generations and to offer more interesting and engaging activities for them, by being supported by cultural enthusiasts in the field.

To be more effective, we encourage all interested Cultural Ambassadors to-be to enroll our **MUGArtS Training Programme**, to go through the 4 modules, to improve their knowledge and skills on how to be more efficient in storytelling, small group facilitation, art appreciation, creative reminiscence, etc. and to validate their competences with the issued certificates.

The Training Programme is openly accessible for self-paced online learning. Contact us for more information about how to access the learning materials at www.arti-ed.com or artied.events@gmail.com.

To be more effective when designing and developing the MUGArtS Training Programme and its modules and learning materials, first we turned to potential cultural ambassadors and other people aged 55+ who are interested in culture, arts and historical heritage and asked them how they see their role, what will be interesting for them to do in a museum, gallery or other cultural organisation and what support they would need to take on such a role.

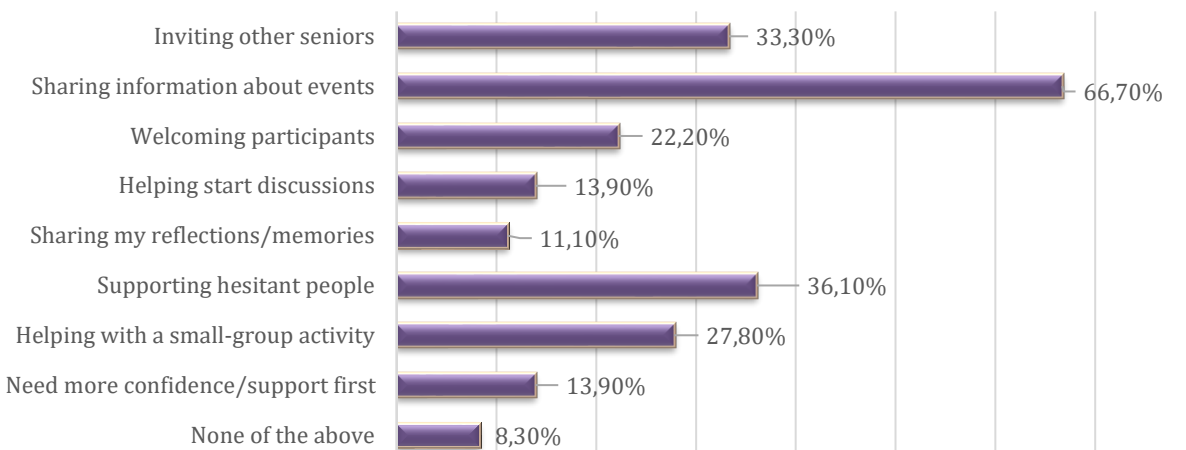
The majority of respondents indicated that they were **interested in becoming cultural ambassadors** – respectively 27.80% were very interested and 30.60% were quite interested. A relatively small number of them were not interested - 22,30% in total, while the other 19.40% were not sure.



When asked about **what role(s) as a Cultural Ambassador they would feel more comfortable to implement**, the biggest share of respondents selected “Sharing information about events” (66.70%), followed by “Supporting hesitant people” (36.10%) and “Inviting other seniors” (33.30%). The second layer was seen “Helping with a small-group activity” (27.80%) and “Welcoming participants” (22.20%). Few respondents also marked “Helping start discussions” and that they “Need more confidence/support first” – for 13.90% each statement. 8.3% (or 3 people) marked “None of the above”, which means that they might not be interested in becoming Cultural Ambassadors.

Note: Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.

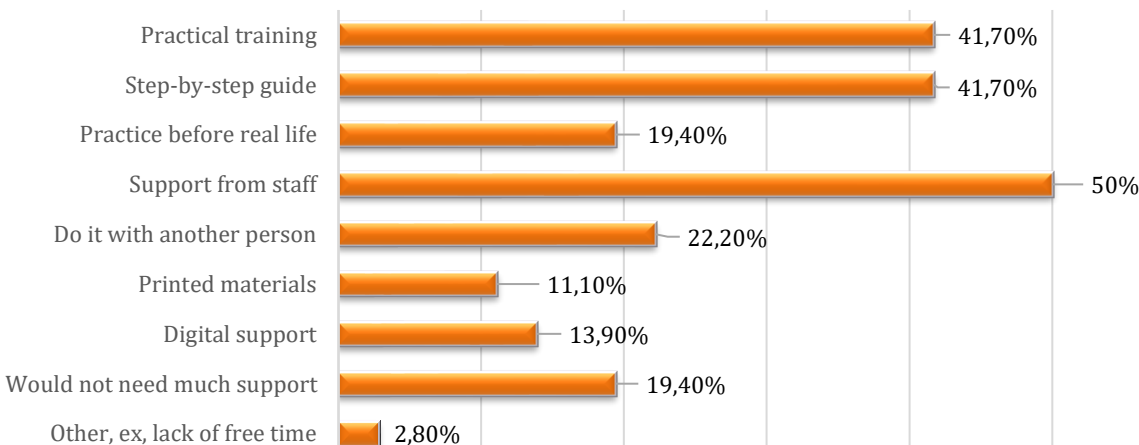
What would you feel comfortable doing as a Cultural Ambassador?



Regarding the **types of support people aged 55+ would need to take Cultural Ambassador's role**, the most requested ones were "Support from staff" (50%), followed by "Practical training" and "Step-by-step guide" - 41.70% each. The second layer was to "Do it with another person" - 22.20% and "Practice before real life" - 19.40%. Another 19.40% selected "Without need for much support". Few people also marked "Digital support" - 13.90% and "Printed materials" - 11.10%. One person (or 2.80%) said that they do not have time to take such a role.

Note: Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer to this question.

What support would you need in order to take on Cultural Ambassador's role?



6. Additional comments

When invited to share any other ideas, suggestions, concerns, etc, which respondents would like museums, galleries, or the MUGArS project to understand about seniors' participation in cultural activities, some of them said:

- ✚ More advertising and information about cultural events, for example – to create a special website and to share it with us via email to follow it. Thank you!
- ✚ Museums and galleries to create places for rest during the visits.
- ✚ Small settlements are disadvantaged in terms of cultural events. There is a lack of visiting exhibitions in places where there are community cultural centers, which could contribute to a richer cultural life.
- ✚ People 65+ need organized visits - with transportation from their neighborhood, village... to the gallery and then back. People aged 55+ can volunteer/help with such an organization. Elderly artists can talk about their work and events from their lives. Quizzes on knowledge in the field of art can be organized.
- ✚ I think more attention should be paid to people who have hearing problems. Personally, I don't attend such events, precisely because of this.
- ✚ It would be good to involve elderly people at the planning stage of the activities, in order to immediately identify the problems that would arise during the implementation and possible obstacles to their active participation.
- ✚ More interesting events and activities.

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