

PROJECT OUTLINE

ARGO: A Journey through the Museums of Volos city for People Living with Dementia and Their Caregivers

Project outline for the ICOM COMMS Award application

Alexandra Tranta | Archaeologist PhD – Museologist PhD



Museum participation as a shared cultural and social experience.

Project at a glance

Location Volos, central Greece	Submitted period One sustained cycle, launched in October 2025
Project lead Conceived, designed, coordinated, facilitated and evaluated by Alexandra Tranta	Academic context Second doctoral research, Democritus University of Thrace
Academic supervision Nadia Macha-Bizoumi, Associate Professor	Support network Museum and dementia-care professionals, facilitators, collaborators and volunteers

Project profile: 4 museums · 6 sessions · 11 original activities · 4 focus groups · 10 participants · 20 professional caregivers · 4 facilitators

1. The problem

People living with dementia and their caregivers remain underrepresented in cultural participation. Even where museums offer dedicated programmes, participation can be occasional, narrowly centred on reminiscence, or framed primarily through cognitive loss and therapeutic benefit rather than through cultural rights, agency and belonging.

ARGO began from a different question: what happens when the museum is approached not as a place that tests memory, but as a place where people can still learn, interpret, create, relate to others and make meaning in the present?

A second challenge was structural. In a regional Greek city, dementia-inclusive practice was not embedded across different museums. The project therefore sought to move beyond the isolated one-off activity and create a sustained route through varied museum environments, allowing continuity, familiarity and repeated cultural participation to become part of the method itself.

Core challenge: to move from occasional access to sustained cultural participation – and from a deficit-based view of dementia to participation, agency, meaning and belonging.



Creative, sensory engagement through museum collections as reason for art making.



A shared museum encounter within an archaeological collection.

Why a city-wide museum journey?

Different museums invite different forms of attention. By moving between collections and environments, the project can vary the sensory, intellectual and creative prompts while preserving a familiar programme structure. The city itself becomes part of the inclusive museum experience.

2. The solution: ARGO

ARGO was conceived as a journey through the museums of Volos. The submitted cycle, launched in October 2025, brings participants into different museum settings and collection types rather than keeping the experience within a single institution. The change of place is deliberate: each museum offers a new set of objects, stories, sensory prompts and ways of participating, while the recurring structure of the programme provides continuity.

Each encounter is built around museum objects and collections, supported by discussion, sensory exploration, creative making and social interaction. Caregivers participate alongside people living with dementia, not merely as accompanying persons. Activities invite interpretation and expression without turning factual recall into a test of competence.

3. How ARGO works

Person-centred

Abilities, preferences and agency rather than deficit.

Present-focused

Meaningful experience in the here and now, not memory testing.

Creative and social

Making, conversation and shared activity offer multiple routes to participation.

Object-based

Objects as prompts for observation, association and interpretation.

Sustained

Repeated encounters build familiarity, confidence and continuity.

Evaluated with participants

Observation and participant feedback, including direct voice where possible.



Facilitated object-based discussion in a museum setting.



Participant-made clay forms: creative response as interpretation.

4. LIFECASES ETC.: from project practice to a transferable framework

ARGO is informed by LIFECASES ETC., a synthetic model developed through the wider doctoral research. The framework brings together the principles required to design, facilitate and evaluate dementia-inclusive museum experiences across different settings. Rather than offering a fixed activity recipe, it supports museums in adapting content and methods while retaining continuity, inclusion, active participation, person-centred facilitation and reflective evaluation¹.



Why this matters: the project does not only deliver activities; it tests a way of working that can be adapted by other museums and cultural organisations.

5. Leadership, collaboration and academic context

ARGO is my research project. I conceived its overall concept and methodology and held responsibility for programme design, coordination, facilitation and evaluation. Its implementation was strengthened by the expertise and practical contribution of museum professionals, dementia-care specialists, facilitators, collaborators and volunteers across the city.

The project forms part of my second doctoral research at Democritus University of Thrace. The doctoral research was conducted under the academic supervision of Nadia Macha-Bizoumi. This academic framework provided critical reflection and scholarly guidance, while responsibility for the conception and delivery of ARGO remained mine.



ARGO moves across different collections and museum environments in the city.



Direct participant input forms part of the evaluation process.

¹ Tranta, A. (2026). The museum as a space of learning, inclusion and wellbeing for underrepresented and vulnerable social groups: design, implementation and evaluation of programmes for people living with dementia and their caregivers. National Archive of PhD Theses (EADD): <https://www.didaktorika.gr/eadd/handle/10442/62444>

6. Results

Evaluation of the submitted cycle is qualitative and embedded in the museum experience. It considers not only what participants remember, but how they engage cognitively, emotionally and socially during and after the encounters. Across the cycle, the most consistent outcomes include:

- sustained attention and active engagement with objects, spaces and creative tasks;
- positive affect, enjoyment and willingness to participate;
- spontaneous association, interpretation and meaning making without dependence on factual recall;
- social interaction, mutual support and shared experience between participants and caregivers;
- growing familiarity and confidence within museum environments through repeated participation;
- stronger cross-sector links between museum practice and dementia-care expertise in the city.

7. Significance

ARGO demonstrates that dementia-inclusive museum practice can move beyond occasional access towards sustained cultural participation. Its contribution lies not in treating the museum as a clinical setting, but in recognising people living with dementia as cultural participants: people who can observe, learn, create, interpret, relate and contribute.

The city-wide journey also shows the value of working across different kinds of museums. Archaeological, industrial-heritage, social-history and other collections can each become resources for participation when facilitation is flexible, person-centred and attentive to the present.

From access to belonging: ARGO proposes the museum as a relational cultural space in which people living with dementia and their caregivers can participate on equal terms, build familiarity and make meaning together.

The submitted cycle at a glance

ARGO submitted cycle	Session 1 Shaping Myself (AAMV) 23 Oct 2025	Session 2 A Beautiful Butterfly (EMV) 27 Nov 2025	Session 3 Flowers and Feathers (LCGW) 19 Feb 2026	Session 4 Pomegranate Seeds (AAMV) 20 Feb 2026	Session 5 (caregivers only) Seeds of Care (AAV) 19 Mar 2026	Session 6 White Boats (KMFC) 20 Mar 2026
Participants	7 (W)	8 (W)	8 (2M+6W)	9 (3M+6W)	—	7 (3M+4W)
Caregivers	6	5	4	5	10 (3M+7W)	8
Facilitators	5	5	3	3	1 (+3 psych.)	3

Venues: AAMV – Athanassakeion Archaeological Museum of Volos; EMV – Entomological Museum of Volos; LCGW – Lyceum Club of Greek Women of Volos; AAV – Alzheimer Association of Volos; KMFC – Kitsos Makris Folk Art Centre.

What they said about the project:

Participants

“[...] our mind wakes up”; “I saw things I had never seen before”; “I’d like to come again”; “[it was] a wonderful morning”; “Even at this age I came — after all these years in Volos, I had never been here. Like a child being taken somewhere. It lifted my spirits”; “surprise”; “we felt free”; “I felt like a butterfly”; “with this group, I’ll go anywhere.”

Caregivers

“I saw liveliness and curiosity, as if a switch had been turned on; there was flow.”

“I saw an undiminished interest on their faces.”

“They referred back to the previous session. It was not something new or completely disconnected; it was as if the experience had continuity in their minds.”

“It activated me emotionally.”

“Overall, the programme was highly original. It offered many different stimuli, all exceptionally engaging.”

Facilitators

“We benefited too; it was a very honest relationship, equally reciprocal for all of us. It is one of the few programmes that changes me both as a person and as a facilitator.”

“I felt satisfaction. I enjoyed myself too, although I did not expect to.”