

Supporting Wellbeing at Museums - The ASBA project

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The modern museum plays a key role in society due to its mission involving education and health. It is a learning environment, and the cultural heritage can be considered a valuable resource to create fulfilling educational activities, including trans-disciplinary ones. Indeed, due to the nature of museum objects, which can express a multiplicity of meanings connected to different trans-disciplinary cognitive contents, the whole cultural heritage can become a useful tool for learning



Museums and wellbeing

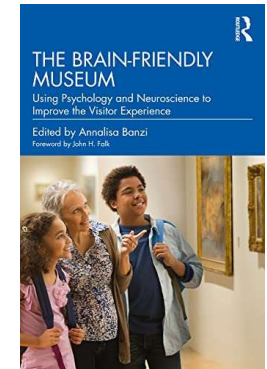
Numerous international experiences, such as those from Canada and England, where doctors recommend museum activities, show that going to museums can be beneficial for health promotion. As a result, the ASBA project was created based on a research protocol that was authorized by the Bicocca University's ethics committee in Milan, Italy. Anxiety, Stress, Brain-Friendly Museum Approach is what the abbreviation stands for. The goal is to evaluate a set of approaches (Mindfulness, Art Therapy, Visual Thinking Strategies, and Green Art) that museums might provide to enhance visitor wellbeing and value their holdings. Additionally, it tries to reach people who are unfamiliar with museums.

The ASBA project

Anxiety, Stress, Brain-friendly museum Approach

Banzi, A. (Ed.). (2022). The Brain-friendly Museum: Using Psychology and Neuroscience to Improve the Visitor Experience. Taylor & Francis.

Lucchiari C. et al (2023). Well-Being in the Museums: The ASBA Project Research Protocol https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4476434



The ASBA project is an interdisciplinary research framework implemented at the Modern Art Gallery (Milan, Italy) and the Museum of Natural History (Milan, Italy) starting from October 2022.

It involves researchers and professionals coming from different disciplines: art history, cognitive psychology, museum studies, neuroscience, artificial intelligence, education sciences, and clinical psychology

The ASBA objectives

- 1 Adapt and standardize within the museum context specific techniques designed to increase psychological well-being.
- 2 Analyze the feasibility and the effect of the above techniques on participants' perceived well-being.
- 3 Broaden museums' audiences by proposing activities that do not require any prior knowledge and that, by generating well-being, entice people to revise their possible negative judgment of the museum institution.
- 4 Push policymakers toward adopting a system where GPs can prescribe museum activities designed to produce wellness.
- 5 Encourage sponsors and policymakers to evaluate museums by also considering their ability to positively affect the quality of life of citizens.

The ASBA protocol

The ASBA project proposes more than one strategy to offer museums the opportunity to choose the method best suited to their needs: Mindfulness, Visual Thinking Strategies, Green Art, and Art Therapy.

We used the state anxiety level, measured by the State Anxiety Inventory , as main variable in a pre-post study as follows:

1. Participants are welcomed to a comfortable room inside the museum where pre-treatment state questionnaires (State anxiety scale) are filled out with the support of a researcher.
2. Treatment by a professional not directly involved in the study
3. At the end of the treatment, participants return to the compiling room where the post-treatment state questionnaires (State anxiety scale and qualitative data) are completed

Mindfulness

Mindfulness [Kabat-Zinn, 2018] is the ability to bring attention to the present moment in an intentional, nonjudgmental way. By focusing on the breath, attention can be focused on the body and mind in their momentary state, thus relieving both physical and emotional pain. It has been clinically proven to be an effective intervention in a wide range of disorders (chronic pain, anxiety disorders, depression, substance abuse, borderline personality disorder, etc.).

A tailored mindfulness practices for the environment of museums. With the use of mindfulness, visitors can create a new way to experience museums and their exhibits, encouraging introspection and objective observation. It was crucial to establish a strong link between mindfulness practice and museum life because the ASBA initiative aims to promote both museum activities and individual well-being. As a result, a museum curator participated actively in each mindfulness session's discussion of the participants' experiences and provided technical details about the items. According to several projects (such as Echarri & Urpi, 2018), mindfulness is successful in a museum setting while also respecting the cultural heritage and the goals of the institution.



RESTA MONSONICA INDIANA
TO NEL PARCO NAZIONALE NAGARHOLE (INDIA)



Art Therapy

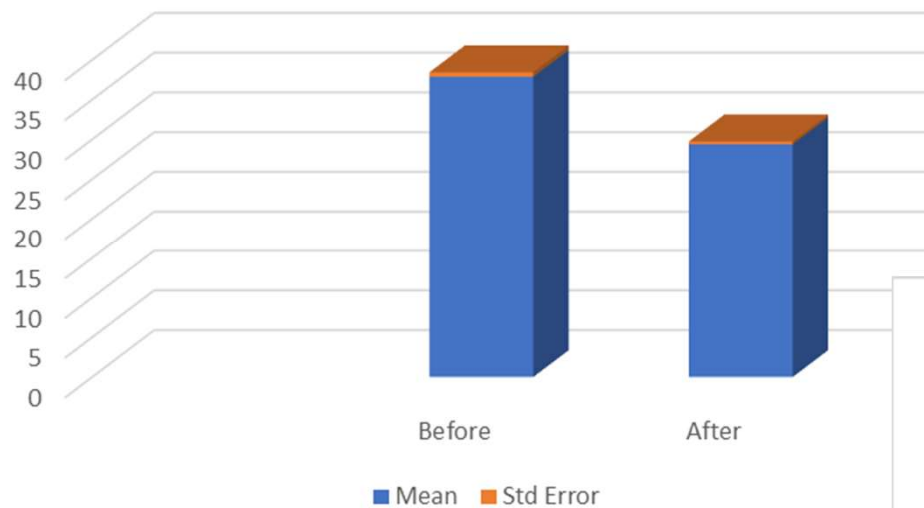
Art therapy is based on the use of artistic activities (e.g., painting) for therapeutic purposes. The process of making art is a healing experience; it provides an opportunity to express oneself when verbal communication is difficult. It can lead to personal realization, revision, and transformation of one's emotional experiences. It is not a diagnostic tool but a means of dealing with emotional issues that can be confusing and distressing [Abbing et al., 2018; Gilroy, 2006].

Visual thinking strategies

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) [Yenawine, 2013] constitute a learning method that originated in the 1980s and is based on group discussion, led by a facilitator, in front of a museum object. It was developed in the United States by a cognitive psychologist, Abigail Housen, and the former educational director of the New York Museum of Modern Art, Philip Yenawine. The VTS method reduces anxiety, improves self-esteem, and develops problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and social skills. It can be adapted to the construction of meaning for any museum object. This method therefore also suitable for science museums [Ferrara et al., 2022]

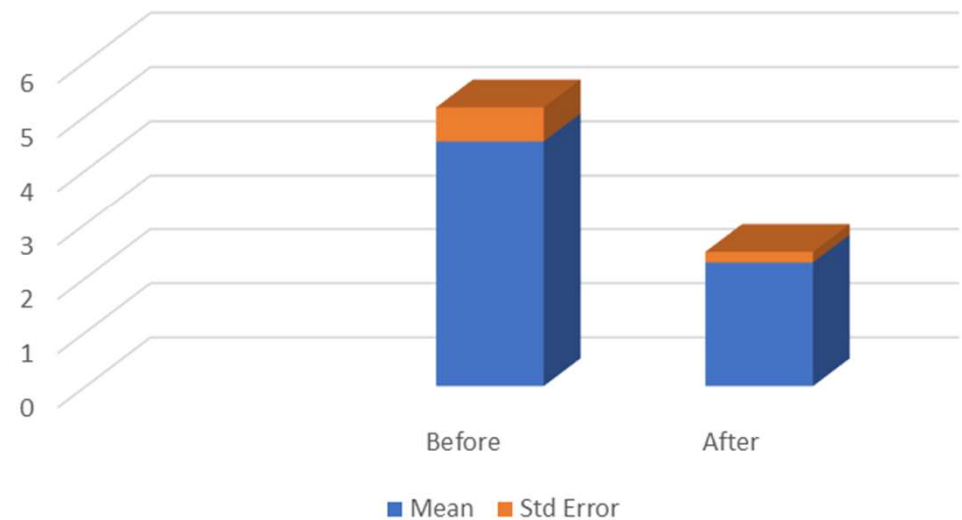
Preliminary Results (Mindfulness)

Change in state Anxiety level

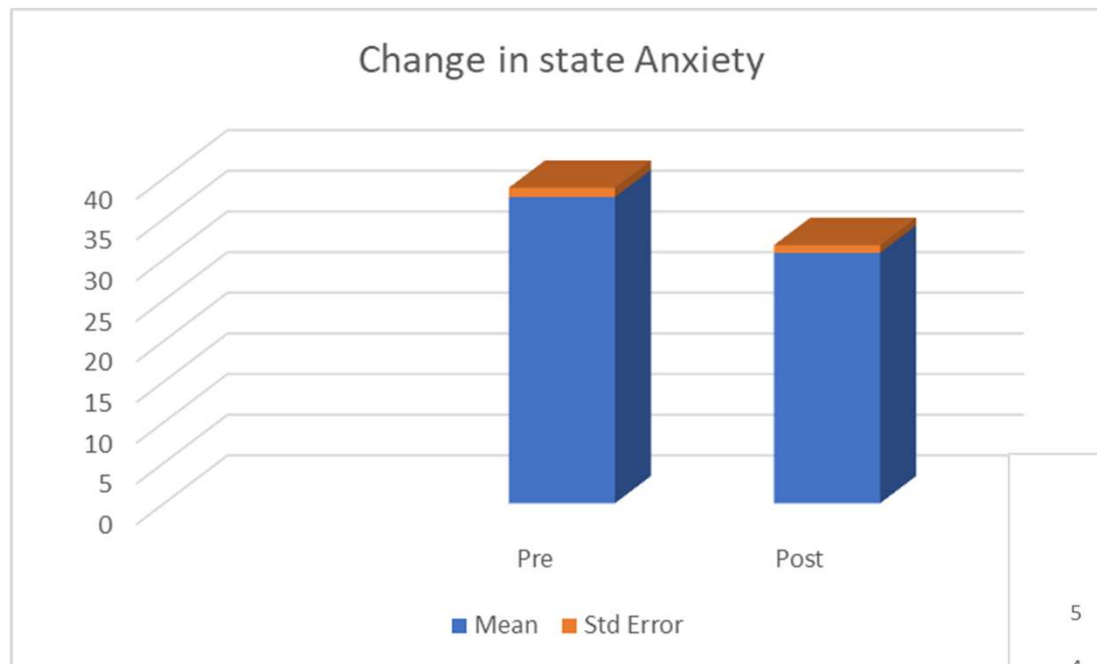


$P < .001$

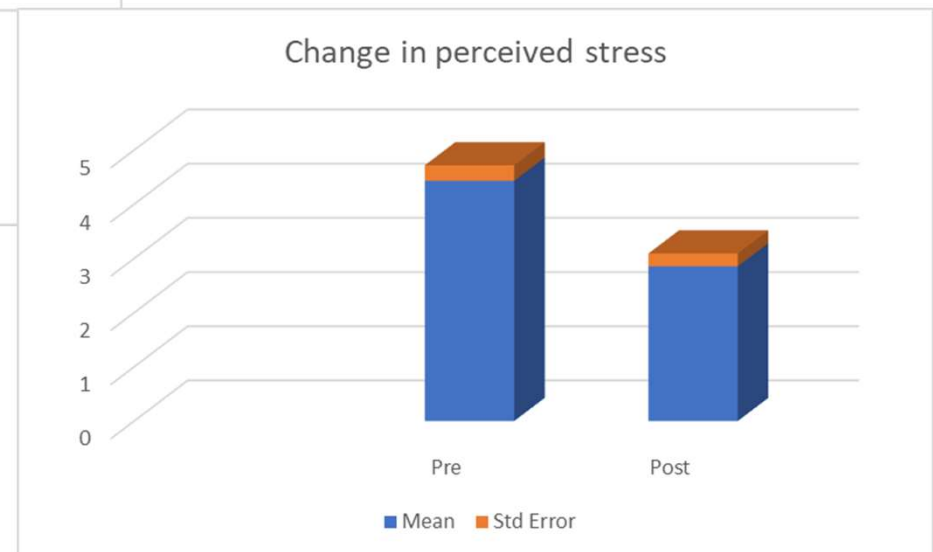
Perceived stress



Preliminary Results II (Art Therapy)



$P < .001$



Next steps

- Run Visual Thinking strategies sessions
- Analyze qualitative data
- Extend research to students
- Focused research on museums personnels
- Run the same paradigm to other type of museums (e.g. contemporary art)

Acknowledgments



This research was funded by the Department of Philosophy “Piero Martinetti” of the University of Milan under the Project “Departments of Excellence 2023-2027” awarded by the Ministry of University and Research (MUR)

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d'Arte Moderna
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