

**The Samarkand Half Marathon, cultural accessibility and 'going digital' during COVID-19**  
**Tuesday 24 November 2020, 1.00 – 2.30pm (GMT)**  
**Alsu Akhmetzyanova, Head of Education at the Arts and Culture Development Foundation**  
**(Uzbekistan, ITP Fellow 2019).**

## **Attendees**

### **UK**

Ronan Brindley, Manchester Art Gallery  
Zeina Klink-Hoppe, Middle East, British Museum  
Andrea Martin, The Collection: Art and Archaeology in Lincolnshire

### **ITP Fellows**

Nagwa Abdelzaher Mohamed Bakr, Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (Egypt, ITP Fellow 2019)  
Rasha Ali Attia Abd El-Mageid, Alexandria National Museum (Egypt, ITP Fellow 2011)  
Asuman Alpagut, Museum of Anatolian Civilizations (Turkey, ITP Fellow 2019)  
Khadijeh Zohreh Baseri, Golestan Palace (Iran, ITP Fellow 2007)  
Ketevan Chitashvili, Money Museum of the National Bank of Georgia (Georgia, ITP Fellow 2019)  
Beimote Ngozi Etim, Currency Museum, Central Bank of Nigeria (Nigeria, ITP Fellow 2017)  
Gertrude Aba Eyifa-Dzidzienyo, University of Ghana (Ghana, ITP Fellow 2009)  
Khine Mon Kyaw, National Museum, Yangon (Myanmar, ITP Fellow 2019)  
Lydia Nafula, National Museums of Kenya (Kenya, ITP Fellow 2008)  
Balqees Abdul-Hakeem Nakhla, Birzeit University Museum (Palestine, ITP Fellow 2019)  
Shreen Mohamed Amin Taher, Egyptian Museum, Cairo (Egypt, ITP Fellow 2016)  
Aprille Tijam, Ayala Museum (Philippines, ITP Fellow 2018)  
Chantal Umuhoza, Institute of National Museums of Rwanda (INMR) (Rwanda, ITP Fellow 2018)  
Fatih Yucel, Sabanci University (Turkey, ITP Fellow 2014)

## **Introduction**

The Samarkand Half Marathon is an annual charity event the main aim of which is to draw public attention to the problem of accessibility and inclusiveness of cultural and art institutions, as well as promoting a healthy lifestyle and developing sports tourism in Uzbekistan.



The event consists of educational and cultural programs as well as the race itself. The funds raised at the event go to the creation of accessibility, thus, last year Arts and Culture Development Foundation (ACDF) was able to purchase the special equipment needed for audio description for some of the theatres of Uzbekistan in order to create the opportunity for vision-impaired people to "watch" plays.

## Content and potential learning outcomes

Alsu's session looked at the ways ACDF have created a digital way of working during the COVID-19 pandemic and how this will impact on the future. She focused on a project which went digital – the Samarkand Half Marathon 2020 on the theme of autism.



The session aimed to share experiences, challenges and outcomes of the project to inform participants and support them in creating, shaping and delivering their own digital output in the culture and heritage sector.

<https://acdf.uz/en>

<https://samarkandhalfmarathon.uz/>

## Q&A and discussion

*What was your biggest challenge for going digital?*

The website itself was not a big challenge – with enough resources creating an online platform can be achieved at any time. Finding partners to support a project was not a huge challenge either. The biggest challenge was communicating with communities and parents of children with autism. This is because at the time during the pandemic parents were reluctant to go outside. Children with disability were considered high risk.

*How did you deal with people who do not have access to the internet?*

Many parents who wanted to participate in the project did not have strong internet connections, if at all. What we would do is download the sessions along with subtitles and send to parents on a USB stick. We still wanted to share this knowledge with as many people as possible.

*How did you create your tactile exhibition models?*

We used concrete to make the tactile models. The etiquette of tactile models is that there should not be too many details in the model so that the visually impaired user can understand the overall image.

*Are there any plans to work with local parents and communities directly? Courses for teachers and parents, for example?*

We aim to engage with specialists who can work with these children and their families. There was not the opportunity to do so before. We are doing our best to engage with government to create change.

*What do you think are the obstacles for getting government involved?*

One problem is the mentality around disability. People try to hide disability. Before solving an issue, we have to accept it. There are a lot of things to work on in education.

We have worked with the ministry of pre-school education in Uzbekistan. We aim to collaborate with the ministry in the future to engage more teachers and specialists.

*What is next for Uzbekistan in this kind of work?*

I hope more institutions and organisations will start working more with people with disabilities.

Hopefully more museums will launch projects to work with children with autism and disabilities. I

hope in the future society will improve to better address the challenges children with disability have.

*How do you measure the impact of the project? Do you receive feedback?*

We remain in contact with the communities we work with and receive feedback from them. We are active on social media and receive a lot of feedback there. The comments online are not always positive, but the fact people are talking about our work shows we are raising awareness.