

Inclusive Memory

Report of the inclusive path in Rome

Multisensory inclusive path – Sensory stories in Villa Torlonia

Title: Sensory Path at Villa Torlonia

Delivery

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Review

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Narrative report

1. Purpose

After the workshop developed within the pilot course and the multiplier events based on the senses realised at **Villa Torlonia**, and thanks to the feedback from the participants, it was decided to **exploit the Villa with its museums and its nature** to create a **sensory path open to all**.

Villa Torlonia is **one of Rome's historic villas**, a jewel of art: architecture, visual arts but also applied arts, it is a green place: a historic garden, a playground for children, a place of scented essences and sounds of nature. For the inclusive path was selected a daily life place: not only museums, but a senior centre, a scientific hub for children, a theatre, the headquarters of the National Academy of Sciences. A "condominium" of many lives, experiences and memories and a **synesthetic place** where you can see, touch, hear, smell.

A public park, the right place for inclusion.

The purpose of the path, named **"Sensory stories in Villa Torlonia"** is the wellbeing. **Wellbeing** resulting from immersion and the discovery of tree essences in the park and of the Villa's unique art jewels.

The path is designed for everyone, each one according to own abilities and level of involvement can experience it, alone or in company, guided by a voice via podcast, stopping and starting again according to their own pace and feeling.

The sensory path offers a unique experience that allows visitors to immerse themselves in the park's atmosphere through sound, touch, and scent, while also learning about the historical significance of the Villa and its surroundings.

2. Design of the sensory path

The idea for this inclusive sensory path came from Zètema's work with the *Inclusive Memory* workshops, which focus on creating accessible and engaging experiences for all visitors. This path is designed to **stimulate the senses in a way that offers a different kind of engagement** with the environment, **providing both a cultural and therapeutic experience**. The concept is rooted in the idea of **green therapy**, which is based on scientific studies showing that simply walking in green spaces can have significant **therapeutic effects**, helping to reduce stress and improve mental wellbeing.

The sensory path combines these therapeutic benefits with the opportunity to **learn** about the rich history and diverse plant life of Villa Torlonia. As visitors explore the park, they **engage with the natural world** through a multisensory approach, enhancing their connection to the environment and encouraging a **deeper understanding of the Villa's ecological and cultural significance**.

In this way, the sensory path at Villa Torlonia not only offers a deeper, more immersive exploration of the park but also fosters a sense of wellbeing, **promoting relaxation and reflection** as visitors walk

through the historical landscape. By **engaging all the senses** – through touch, sound, sight, and scent – participants can experience Villa Torlonia in a way that is inclusive, educational, and therapeutic.

During the testing of the IM pilot course, a workshop – based on multisensoriality – was developed by Zètema staff who deal with educational services and creative science.

Given the impact of the workshop and also the surprise of the participants in front of the discovery of so much more in the works of art and in what surrounds us not considering only the sight, with the scientific staff of Technotown (<https://www.technotown.it/> – a municipal public space of experimentation and scientific creativity that constantly dialogues with the Villa and its artistic heritage) it was decided to create a path through the park that can be done, even without sight, starting from a **tactile map connected to the podcasts via QR codes in relief**. The tactile map is in Italian, English and Braille.

After defined the idea and the technological tools, was identified and traced the path, starting from some plant essences and places of the Villa to which connect **an immersive storytelling**. As **starting point a tactile map** was conceived to launch the path and explain it; the Stories of the podcasts were written and the audio recorded in the Technotown recording studio, the texts and steps of the paths were refined, the specialised supplier for the creation of the map was identified, the authorisations for the installation were requested.

To be accessible to all, the path is marked by the counting of steps and also reports all the references to the type of terrain, to the elements that line the route to be accessible to the blind, giving indications on the direction to take and the path to follow. This kind of path is suitable also for elder people, children and families.

The sensory path in Villa Torlonia, created by Zètema, invites visitors to discover the park's rich natural and historical heritage in a deeply immersive way. By engaging all the senses – sight, sound, touch, and smell – the experience offers a profound connection to both the environment and the history of this extraordinary location.

Villa Torlonia is a historical park of 13.2 hectares located in Rome (https://www.museivillatorlonia.it/en/il_museo/villa_torlonia), rich in both natural beauty and cultural heritage including four museums Casino Nobile, Casino dei Principi, Serra Moresca, Casina delle Civette (<https://www.museivillatorlonia.it/en>), and even a 19th Century theatre, an example of the eclectic taste of the time with a mixture of various styles: classical in the central body, Northern European in the glass and cast iron greenhouse on the southern side, Gothic, Moorish, Greco-Roman and Renaissance in the decoration of the rooms of the lateral apartments.

3. The inclusive path – *Sensory Stories in Villa Torlonia*

The path is accessible by podcasts, the suitable tool to share a storytelling on the botanical essences of the villa, the many stories connected to them. A calm and gentle voice **invites to the discover of the essences, from a tactile, olfactory, hearing point of view**.

The tactile map is placed in a **strategic position**, close to the entrance of via Spallanzani (it does not overlap with another map of the Villa already present and conceived for different purposes of general orientation), near the entrance of Technotown the scientific hub for young people and the Limonaia restaurant, a point with a significant passage.

Start of the Sensory Stories at Villa Torlonia

The sensory path begins with a tactile map located at the entrance of *Technotown – Villino Medievale*. This map, available in Italian, Braille, and English, serves as a guide to the sensory path, offering visitors the opportunity to experience a variety of plant species through touch, sound, and smell.

By scanning QR codes along the route, participants can unlock captivating sensory stories, which include sounds, scents, and historical anecdotes that bring Villa Torlonia to life in a new and engaging way. These stories are delivered through podcasts developed by Zètema, allowing visitors to listen to narrations that enhance their experience as they walk through the park.

Immersion in nature for mental wellbeing

The path/storytelling by the podcasts begins by emphasising the benefits of immersing oneself in nature.

This experience is not only an antidote to stress and the chaotic pace of modern life but also a way to reconnect with the deep, ancestral impact that nature has on our health. The sensory path enables visitors to engage with Villa Torlonia in an unusual way, focusing on tactile sensations and evocative sounds that create a full-bodied experience of the park.

Exploration of the park's flora and history

The path is designed to introduce visitors to the park's rich flora, beginning with an exploration of the extraordinary plant species that inhabit the villa. As you walk through the park, you'll encounter a variety of trees, each with their own sensory characteristics. For instance, as you approach the *Medieval Villino (a medieval-shape building)*, you are encouraged to notice the change in the air and sounds, indicating the proximity to one of the park's entrances and the blend of nature with the city's background noises.

The first stop focuses on a series of *lime trees* (*Tilia cordata*), each offering a unique tactile and olfactory experience. Visitors are invited to touch the rough bark of the trees, feel the texture of the leaves, and, during the right season, immerse themselves in the sweet scent of lime flowers that create a serene atmosphere. The lime tree is historically significant, symbolising welcome, eternal love, and femininity, and it has deep roots in Greek mythology as well.

As you walk further, you'll encounter the *laurel* (*Laurus nobilis*), a plant known for its aromatic leaves. The laurel is also linked to ancient mythology, particularly the myth of Apollo and Daphne, symbolising unrequited love and victory. The journey pauses with a reflection on the mythological significance of the laurel, accompanied by evocative music, further deepening the sensory connection.

The bamboo grove and cedar of Lebanon

One of the key moments in the journey is the *bamboo grove*, where visitors are invited to listen to the soft, hypnotic sounds of the bamboo swaying in the wind, creating a serene and calming experience. Bamboo, a symbol of resilience and flexibility, connects visitors to the rich cultural symbolism found in Asian traditions, where it represents moral integrity, strength, and loyalty.

The journey culminates with a visit to the majestic *Cedar of Lebanon*, a tree symbolizing strength, longevity, and sacredness. The cedar, which can grow up to 60 meters tall, invites visitors to reflect on its history and significance while experiencing the calming scent of its bark. The cedar is not only

a symbol in the Bible but also an emblem of Lebanon, making this stop a powerful conclusion to the sensory experience.

Interactivity and reflection

Throughout the journey, participants are encouraged to interact with their environment - touching tree trunks, smelling leaves, and listening to the sounds of nature and of the cultural venues within the Villa (as the theatre). This sensory engagement is designed to deepen the connection between the visitors and the landscape, surrounding world, providing moments of reflection and mindfulness. Each step of the path offers new sensory discoveries, helping participants to slow down, focus, and engage more deeply with the natural world.

Connection to the history of Villa Torlonia

In addition to the sensory experience of nature, the journey also provides historical context about the villa itself. Visitors are introduced to the *Villino medievale*, which served as the residence of Prince Giulio Borghese and later became the headquarters of the International Institute for Cinematography and Education. Other buildings, like the *Casino Nobile* and the *Casino dei Principi*, are also part of the narrative, offering a glimpse into the rich history and architectural heritage of Villa Torlonia. The route encourages visitors to reflect on the cultural significance of the villa while deepening their appreciation for both the natural and historical aspects of the park.

End of the journey and return to Technotown

At the end of the sensory journey, visitors can stop at the Cedar of Lebanon or can choose to be guided back to *Technotown*, the creative science hub of Rome, where they can continue exploring themes of creativity, science, and technology. The path returns to Technotown, offering a seamless transition from the natural world of Villa Torlonia to a space that fosters innovation and imagination.

From the QR codes on the tactile map one can access **other podcasts** that tell **the story of the Villa** and the **sounds of the Villa at night**, which for now are only the sounds of winter night, but which will be integrated with the sounds of the Villa in the other seasons.

To **listen to the Sensory Stories**, open the links below connected to QR code 1 and QR code 2 of the tactile map respectively:

<https://www.technotown.it/racconti-sensoriali-di-villa-torlonia/>

<https://www.technotown.it/racconto-sonoro/>



4. Follow up

This sensory path – if positively evaluated by the different users – could be the first of many other sensory and inclusive paths in the historic villas of the City and has the potential to be replicated and customized in other contexts.

After a testing period, it will be inaugurated and promoted, having to pay attention to the actual practicability and needing feedback from the different users as blind visitors, people with autism spectrum disorders, elderly people, young people, families, citizens and visitors.