

## Art museums as a source of well-being for people with dementia: an experience in the Prado Museum

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Several studies have revealed the positive effects that cultural activities may have on people with dementia (PWD). The goal of this study was to describe the design, development and evaluation of a programme of artistic education activities for these people based on visits to the Prado Museum.

**Methods:** 12 people participated for two months in a program of artistic activities consisting of visits to the Prado. To determine the participants' response to the programme, information was gathered through participant observation.

**Results:** During the development of the program, the participant's reactions of interest, engagement and satisfaction, as well as a positive effect on mood and social relations, were observed.

**Conclusion:** The cognitive difficulties did not deter them from participating in the program, which had positive effects on the participants. It was concluded that the museum can be an important resource for the promotion of PWDs' well-being and social inclusion.

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## Background

It is estimated that 47 million people worldwide live with dementia and that this figure will reach 131 million by 2050 (Prince, Comas-Herrera, Knapp, Guerchet, & Karagiannidou, 2016). The prevalence of dementia in Spain is comparable to that of other European populations (Virués-Ortega et al., 2011). Approximately 600,000 people suffer from dementia in Spain (de Pedro-Cuesta et al., 2009). There are more than eight and a half million people over 65 in Spain, 18.8% of the total population (Abellán García, Ayala García, & Pujol Rodríguez, 2017). In view of this demographic structure, in the next few years, an increase in age-related neurodegenerative problems, such as dementia, is foreseeable.

Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights acknowledges that every person has the right to take part freely in the cultural life of the community and to enjoy the arts. In practice, however, dementia may imply a considerable decrease of people's cultural opportunities. The participation of persons with dementia in different leisure activities, such as painting or attending cultural events, is lower than that of their age group and gender

(Paillard-Borg, Wang, Winblad, & Fratiglioni, 2009). And this occurs despite the fact that diverse studies have revealed a positive relation between participation in this kind of activities and health and well-being throughout the ageing processes (Cohen, 2009; Cohen et al., 2007; Fisher & Specht, 1999). Art-based activities, whether visits to galleries and museums or artistic creation, can play an important role in the lives of these people for various reasons (Camic, Baker, & Tischler, 2016): because museums and art galleries are socially valued, but also because they provide intellectual stimulation and opportunities for social inclusion that change the way dementia is perceived. These components, taken together, create positive emotional and relational effects that can affect both the people with dementia (PWD) and their caregivers (Camic et al., 2016).

A recent review (Young, Camic, & Tischler, 2016) of the impact of community-based art and health interventions concluded that, despite certain methodological limitations, the studies suggest that art-based activities had a positive impact on cognitive processes, particularly on attention, memory stimulation, and improvement of communication. Participation in a programme of viewing art in a public gallery followed by a session of art-making can affect cognition, improving episodic memory, mood, and self-confidence and reduce isolation, as assessed by family caregivers (Eekelaar, Camic, & Springham, 2012). Contemporary art education programmes can provide several positive aspects to the experience of PWD, among them basically three: enjoyment, learning and a better self-image (Ullan et al., 2013). Taken conjointly, these three aspects are especially important with regard to the experience and well-being of these people.

In a study designed to address the most common methodological limitations of works on the effect of artistic activities in the quality of life of PWD (Sauer, Fopma-Loy, Kinney, & Lokon, 2016), the extent to which these people expressed behaviours of well-being and discomfort during a programme of visual arts activities was evaluated. The study concluded that this programme, designed to facilitate creative self-expression, gave the participants more opportunities to express behaviours of well-being such as social interest, engagement, and pleasure than the traditional programmes with which it was compared.

However, the documented experiences coincide in that dementia itself is not an obstacle to participation in cultural activities such as visits to art galleries or museums (MacPherson, Bird, Anderson, Davis, & Blair, 2009; Zeisel, 2009). In 2006, the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) began a programme for people with Alzheimer's disease and their family caregivers (Rosenberg, 2009). Known as Meet Me at MoMA, it was initially proposed as a monthly programme for people in the early or mid stages of the disease. It basically consisted of guided tours and interactive discussions in the exhibition halls of the museum. The programme showed that art can be a rich and fulfilling experience for people with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers. In this line, other initiatives based on the use of museums and galleries as a resource to promote alternative care to PWD are documented. MacPherson et al. (2009) investigated the effect of a programme focused on discussing works of art in the National Gallery of Australia. The study aimed to verify whether the participants could significantly engage in an activity that, although normal for people without cognitive impairment, is of a higher intellectual and sensory level than usually offered to PWD. These authors concluded that art-based psychosocial programmes could maximize the residual capacities of these people. Eekelaar et al. (2012) changed the model of the MoMA, adding a component of artistic creation to the stage of viewing works of art. They also expanded the number of sessions to intensify the experience. Their

research sought to assess whether the structured activities to view art, followed by art-making activities in the context of a gallery, could have an impact on the verbal fluency and episodic memory. The results suggested that episodic memory might improve through aesthetic responses to the visual arts but the effects of the intervention on verbal fluency were more ambiguous. Camic, Tischler, and Pearman (2014) also incorporated elements of the programme Meet Me at MoMA and the experiences of MacPherson et al. (2009) and Eekelaar et al. (2012), developing a multi-session intervention carried out simultaneously in two galleries. From their study, it was concluded that participation in the programme fostered social inclusion, improved the caregivers' relations with the PWD, supported these people and stimulated cognitive processes of attention and concentration. Ullan et al. (2013) included sessions of virtual tours of museums in their programme of arts education for PWD, as a preliminary stage to performing artistic activities. These virtual tours aroused the interest and attention of the participants. Flatt et al. (2015) carried out a study in order to describe the subjective experience of older people with Alzheimer's disease and of their family caregivers when participating in an activity at a museum. They developed four focus groups involving PWD and family caregivers. The key issues identified were: cognitive stimulation, social connections, and self-esteem. The authors emphasised the potential role of art museums in the improvement of the quality of life of PWD.

Taking these issues into consideration, in this work, we proposed to design and evaluate a programme of artistic activities for PWD based on visits to the Prado Museum in order to determine whether this programme could be performed in a context of the normal operation of the museum and its effect on participants. The results are presented below.

## Method

### ***General description of the programme "We have a date with art"***

*We have a date with art* is a programme of artistic activities for PWD based on visits to the Prado Museum. It was designed by professors and researchers from the Complutense University of Madrid and the University of Salamanca (Spain). This programme includes guided visits to the Prado Museum and art-making workshops with activities related to the works seen in museum.

### ***Participants***

Twelve people, 3 men and 9 women, attending a centre specialized in neurocognitive disorders, participated in this programme. The technicians in charge of the centre selected the participants on the basis of their interest in artistic activities. The 12 participants were aged between 75 and 92 years (mean age 84.4 and  $SD = 5.5$ ). Concerning educational level, 6 had a primary education level, 3 had completed secondary education, and 3 had university studies. Their most recent scores in the Global Deterioration Scale were 3–4 ( $n = 7$ ) and 4–5 ( $n = 5$ ). Their latest scores in the 35-point version of the Spanish adaptation of the Mini-Mental State Examination, called the Mini-Cognoscitive Examination (MEC; Lobo et al., 1999), were between 10 and 33 ( $M = 23$ ,  $SD = 6.6$ ). In this version, values between 30 and 35 points are considered normal, and cognitive decline is suggested below 28 points.

In addition, 4 family caregivers – two children and two wives – , as well as 2 professional caregivers, 4 art educators (AEs) – two of them in training – and 2 researchers participated in the programme. The participants – or their legal representatives if the participants were disabled – signed a written informed consent to participate in the programme and the research associated with it. In this document, the goals of the research and the implications of participation are described, as well as guarantees of privacy for the participant, who also gave their consent for publication of the results of the investigation, provided that their anonymity was ensured. The research received the approval of the Committee of Bioethics of the Complutense University of Madrid and the University of Salamanca.

### **Data collection**

To determine the PWDs' response to the programme "We have a date with art", information was gathered during the programme sessions through *participant observation*. Two researchers with previous experience in artistic activities with PWD joined the group of AEs who had designed and developed the activities, and they took part in all of them, carrying out this participant observation. At the end of each session, these researchers completed a field journal about the session, discussing the most relevant aspects with each other and with the rest of the team. The record of these discussions was also incorporated into the field journal of the experience. At the end of the cycle of visits to the museum and the art workshops, a group assessment of the experience was carried out by the PWD who had been in the programme, as well as the AEs, and the professional and family caregivers who had participated in this experience. This final evaluation session was recorded on video for later analysis. A photographic record of the participants' artistic productions was also made. The contents of the field diaries of the experience were subjected to a thematic analysis to respond to the two main research questions: Could an experience like the one proposed in the program "We have a date with art" be carried out when the Museum is operating normally? and, especially, How would the participants with dementia react to the proposed activities included in the programme?

### **Results**

From the analysis of the aforementioned field journal, a series of differential stages in the programme can be described. The first stage focused on the design of the itineraries in the museum. The most significant aspect of this phase refers to the general considerations that were taken into account to develop these itineraries and their description. The second phase focused on the development of the visits. The most significant part of this phase was the reactions of the PWD to the experience of visiting the museum. The third stage refers to the proposed artistic activities based on the works viewed in the museum. The most significant aspect of this phase was the observations of the reactions of the PWD during these activities. The presentation of the results will follow the outline of these three phases.

### ***Phase 1: design of the itineraries in the museum***

The Prado Museum is considered one of the most important international art galleries. It is a primary cultural resource, located in the same city – Madrid – where the participants in the programme resided. The selection of works, between five or six, to be included on each visit to the museum was one of the first tasks of this phase. Given the immense patrimony exhibited in the Museum, we followed three general criteria to guide this selection: (1) to use primary works of cultural reference, by well known and popular authors; (2) to find a thematic or stylistic coherence among the works that made up the itinerary; and (3) to be aware of the physical accessibility of the itinerary for people with potential impaired mobility. It was estimated that the visit should last between 60 and 90 min. Following the model of the MoMA, the format we wished to follow for the visits consisted of a conversation with the participants focusing on the works that made up the itineraries, rather than a conference on art. These discussions would be initiated by the main AE and would continue, in small groups of three or four people, coordinated by support AEs. This system was meant to enhance the PWDs' participation, making it easier for them to express their opinions and points of view through personalized conversations. These talks about the works could be carried out during the normal operation of the museum, and to facilitate them, prior to the visit, a series of questions referring to each of the works of the itinerary were designed, which served to start the conversations about them, also following the model of the MoMA. Two itineraries were designed. The first focused on works by Velázquez, and the second on works by Goya. At the website [www.ucm.es/tenemoscitacnelarte/](http://www.ucm.es/tenemoscitacnelarte/), each of these itineraries and the questions proposed to initiate the talks about the paintings can be accessed.

### ***Phase 2: development of the itineraries in the Prado Museum***

#### ***Management of the visit: logistics***

The development of itineraries always began with the resolution of a number of practical aspects. One of the first was bringing the PWD to the museum. Two systems were used. One was to leave this up to the family caregivers who were in charge of bringing the PWD to one of the doors of the museum, which was defined as the meeting point. At this meeting point, the group of family caregivers, PWD and AEs was formed, and after being welcomed, the visit began. The second system used was to collectively manage the transportation from the day centre. In this case the assistance of the family caregivers was unnecessary because centre staff accompanied the PWD, although the family caregivers were given the opportunity to participate in the visit to the museum if they wished. After the group was formed at the meeting point at the entrance of the museum, a brief presentation of the experience was made, and aspects about the tickets or leaving objects in the lockers were resolved before the visit.

#### ***Reactions observed in the PWD during the visits to the museum***

The visits were planned as a series of conversations in front of each of the works, in principle, following the aforementioned guideline of questions. The idea was to promote these conversations about the works between the AEs and the participants. In this way, throughout the visits, the following observations of the PWDs' reactions are underscored:

**The attention and interest with which the PWD followed the visit.** One of the first aspects observed was the participants' interest in and commitment to the activity. The possibility of visiting the museum was very well received, both by the PWD and their family caregivers, some of whom mentioned the change that the activity (visiting the Museum) involved instead of the daily routines of the family member who was in charge (Table 1, Quote 1). During the visits, the PWD remained attentive to the explanations they received, listening or asking relevant questions about the works or authors (Table 1, Quote 2). They viewed the works carefully, and there were no reactions of lack of attention or disconnection from the activity that, contrariwise, was followed with interest by the participants.

**The development of the conversations about the works.** The development of the conversations about the works did not pose any particular difficulty. After examining the pictures, the participants gave their opinion, stating whether or not they liked them, what impressed them, what they thought about the characters, the landscape, etc. Their observations and comments were consistent, and the discussions between the participants and the AEs were fluid and made sense. Obviously, some people were more expressive than others and they participated more, but the system of organization, in very small groups of three or four people where there was always a support AE, allowed maintaining a very personal relationship with each participant, listening to their point of view and, when it seemed appropriate, commenting to the group about some people's especially significant observations. These conversations revolved around the works, but the works also frequently aroused the recall of anecdotes, either biographical or otherwise, which were incorporated into the conversation coherently (Table 1, Quotes 3, 4 and 7). One of the support AEs referred to these visits as "walking around the museum on someone's arm", reflecting the cordial and relaxed climate of the experience and the close relations that the visit to the museum allowed them to establish with the participating PWD.

**Expressed satisfaction with the activity.** The participants showed a relaxed and satisfactory mood while performing the activity. Some expressed satisfaction with the visit to the museum spontaneously (Table 1, Quotes 5 and 6) or else they answered affirmatively when asked if they had liked the visit to the museum and viewing the works. When they were

**Table 1.** Quotes from participants in the Prado Museum's visits.

1	"My mother was a very active person before she got sick. These visits motivate her a lot because they represent a change from what she normally does at home, which is to spend the day watching TV" (Son of a participant who accompanied his mother on the visits to the Museum and to the workshops)
2	"You can see who was partying and who was working" (in front of Goya's work "The harvest"). (C, PWD)
3	"In my village, there was a forge where I would go when I was little and I watched them working on plow blades and shoeing horses" (looking at Velazquez's work "Vulcan's forge"). (F, PWD)
4	"When I was a little girl, I enjoyed the festive atmosphere when they slaughtered the pig, but I had to cover my ears because I couldn't stand the cries of the animals when they killed them" (looking at Goya's work "The snow storm"). (B, PWD)
5	"We had a good time". (M, PWD)
6	"We have to repeat these visits more often". (M, PWD)
7	"How cold they must be!" (About Goya's work "The snow storm"). (M, PWD)
8	"When we went to live in Madrid, some Sundays we went with the children to the Museum". (D, PWD)
9	"I liked the harvest, when the grapes were collected and there were a lot of people in the village". (A, PWD)
10	"My father had a resin factory, and when the children of the village had a cold, their mothers would send them to the factory so they would cure it by breathing in the smell of the resin" (Looking at Velazquez's work "The spinners"). (F, PWD)
11	Looking in her purse for the entrance ticket "I think I've been in a Museum recently". (P, PWD)

accompanied by family caregivers, some pairs extended the visit individually, after the group experience had ended.

***Effect on communication and social relationships.*** The design of the visits allowed a very personalized communication between participants and the AEs. As mentioned, the visits were organized in small groups of participants and support AEs. The participants formed the groups spontaneously, without previously having specified their composition. This composition was flexible because, during the visit, the participants sometimes changed their group without any problems. An exchange of views, comments on the works, and even personal anecdotes could be observed in these small groups (Table 1, Quote 8). Anecdotes were especially significant with some works, for example with those of Goya, which gathered agricultural tasks (*The Grape Harvest, Winter, etc.*) (Table 1, Quote 9), and with the works of Velázquez (*Vulcan's Forge and The Spinners*) (Table 1, Quotes 3 and 10). A spirit of companionship and mutual help among the participating PWD could also be observed, for example, when going in the elevators of the museum or when there were crowds in front of the best known works.

***Art as a performance context unconditioned by dementia.*** The design and organisation of the visit to the Prado Museum was made taking into account the above-mentioned aspects, basically regarding the duration and physical accessibility of the itinerary. Aside from these issues, it was not observed that the participants' diagnosis of dementia affected their reactions to the works, or led them to perform behaviours different from those of other groups of visitors of similar ages but without any problems of cognitive impairment during the visit. It could be that, during the artistic workshops that took place in the weeks following the visits to the museum, these people did not remember, or remembered only vaguely, having visited the Prado Museum (Table 1, Quote 11); but during the visit itself, their memory or cognitive impairment problems did not seem to affect their involvement and their response to the activity. Whereas mobility or sensory limitations (especially auditory and visual) could condition the development of the activity, their cognitive problems seemed entirely unrelated to the experience in the museum. This aspect was commented on by the AEs, and also by the family caregivers. Sharing the exhibition halls with the public required some restrictions, but it also provided positive elements for the PWD, who enjoyed watching as other groups of visitors, especially children and adolescents, listened to their educators' explanations while viewing the paintings. Sharing the museum with the general public was an inclusion experience for the PWD participants, who were treated like the rest of visitors to the museum.

### ***Phase 3: artistic education activities drawn from the works viewed in the museum***

The third phase of the programme consisted of the development of a series of artistic activities, taking as a reference the works seen in the museum. These activities – performed on a weekly basis – were carried out in the participating PWDs' day-centres. They worked for six weeks in different workshops that focused on the works of Velázquez and Goya. Each session lasted one hour and a half and they all began with a welcome phase, in which the AE in charge presented the session. Then each participant received a high quality reproduction in colour of the work of the session (in DIN-A4 or DIN-A3), in order to be able to see its

details. Participants were encouraged to recognize the image and to comment and share any memories about it. The AE encouraged dialogue based on observations and questions similar to those performed during the visit to the museum. After this first dialogue, focused on a global overview of the work, the AE proposed moving on to a detailed observation. For this purpose, it was useful to use frames of  $4 \times 3$  cm that were distributed to each participant. With these frames, by focusing on the faces of the characters or on objects, details of the work could be located.

After this phase of discussion of the work, the phase of personal creation began, with different artistic techniques. A different technique was used in each session. The techniques used were: Collage (session 1), Calligraphy and collage (session 2), Drawing in chiaroscuro (session 3), Silhouettes in watercolour (session 4), Collaborative collage (session 5), and Watercolour pencils (session 6). The website [www.ucm.es/tenemoscitaconelarte/](http://www.ucm.es/tenemoscitaconelarte/) describes these activities, including the work of reference of each session and the technique used, the proposed activity and the materials necessary for its development. All sessions ended with a common discussion and a leave-taking.

### ***Reactions observed in the participants during the artistic activities***

Of the participant observation made during the performance of the artistic activities, we underline the following aspects.

***Attention and concentration on the task.*** After the main AE had described the task to be carried out, participants in the workshop engaged in it, without observing any special difficulties to do so in general. Although the works around which each workshop revolved had been viewed in the Prado Museum, the participants did not always remember this visit or, if they did, the memories could be somewhat confused (Table 2, Quotes 1 and 2). However, the participants hardly expressed any problems to focus on the proposed task. In some, concentration on the task could be so intense that it made observers think of the experiences of flow described by Csikszentmihalyi (1996), moments in which the person is so involved in an activity, almost in a meditative state, that they do not notice the passing of time.

***Observed satisfaction with the process and the results.*** A recurring observation was the satisfaction of the participants with this type of task. They seemed to enjoy the task and especially the results obtained with collage techniques. Sometimes, they were critical about

**Table 2.** Quotes from participants in the artistic activities.

1	"It seems to me that we have seen this picture". (F, PWD)
2	"I don't remember it, but I love it". (M, PWD)
3	"It's really good!" (P, PWD)
4	"We're artists". (D, PWD)
5	"Yours is very nice, you did it very well". (M, PWD)
6	"This one of yours is wonderful, I am always going to be here". (M, PWD)
7	"How nice that you have come. We have to go on doing this". (A, PWD)
8	"I am from a village in Guadalajara but I have lived for a long time in Madrid". (D, PWD)
9	"I was born in Madrid, in Hortaleza Street". (F, PWD)
10	"I studied teaching but I did not practice it because I married a wealthy farmer". (P, PWD)
11	"It looks really good, I didn't think I could do this". (F, PWD)
12	"I'm going to hang this (referring to the work) in the living room so that everyone can see it". (D, PWD)
13	"I didn't remember that I had done this, but it's very good". (P, PWD)
14	"The best thing are the teachers we have had". (M, PWD)
15	"They have treated us very well and have taught us a lot". (J, PWD)

the results of their work. In these cases, the intervention of the AE was very relevant, in the sense of reorienting the interpretation of the results, highlighting the more positive aspects (composition, colour, etc.) or making suggestions to improve them, always avoiding negative appraisals of the works. When the AE returned the works done in previous sessions to the participants, they were examined with great interest. Sometimes they did not remember having made them, but upon seeing their signature on them, they expressed satisfaction and pride (Table 2, Quotes 3 and 4). This experience of reviewing the creations of earlier workshops was very important, they encouraged each other, showing their creations to each other and commenting on them (Table 2, Quote 5). Somehow, this experience of enjoyment influenced the participants' expectations at the beginning of each session (Table 2, Quotes 6 and 7). They often did not exactly remember the goal of the workshop or the dynamics followed and, in some cases, they did not recognize the AE, but even so, especially as the sessions of the programme advanced, we observed a more positive disposition in them and some expectations derived from their experience during the previous sessions, although they did not remember their participation in them accurately. Beyond the momentary enjoyment of the experience, the participants' positive expectations about the sessions were noteworthy because they frequently asked the AEs to continue the following week, and they welcomed them with enthusiasm and affection (Table 2, Quote 6).

***Stimulation of social exchanges.*** It was observed that, although they were usually individual, the tasks of the programme easily promoted social exchanges focused on autobiographical recall (where they were from, youth experiences, etc.) or other aspects (Table 2, Quotes 8, 9 and 10). We also observed a supportive attitude toward their companions, helping them, for example with the materials, but also reinforcing them when the completed works were presented to the group, making positive comments about the outcomes. Some more introverted participants made no comments, but we observed that they listened with pleasure to the other participants' interventions, smiling at them. The role of the AE's support in this regard was very relevant. They talked with the PWD about how to resolve the task, the outcomes or other issues that arose spontaneously. These conversations seemed to please the participants very much. They would often ask the AEs for their opinion or point of view about their works. In order to make this dynamic possible, it was necessary to maintain a careful ratio between PWD and AEs. When developing the programme, the proportion maintained was 4/1, with slight variations between sessions. Having fine arts volunteer students as support AEs during the workshops and visits to the Prado Museum facilitated the development of activities in the above-mentioned format, in which the personal relationships between AEs and PWD were considered very important.

***Humour and mood.*** A very common observation was the humour with which the participants' situations were treated. There were frequent interventions that gave rise to humorous comments that made most of the group laugh. These funny comments contributed to the relaxed atmosphere of the workshop and were appreciated by the participants and teachers. In general, the PWDs' mood was positive, lively during the development of the activity, with notable differences among them in terms the expressiveness of their emotions or points of view. We sometimes observed that, at the beginning of the session, some participants showed some discouragement but, with very few exceptions, they gradually joined the work dynamics, and their mood at the end of the session was more positive than

at the beginning. Except for two punctual situations, the participants' mood was calm, quiet and predominantly cheerful.

***Reinforcement of feelings of capacity.*** On several occasions, participants' observations were recorded, referring to the surprise they felt at being able to make the art works (Table 2, Quote 11). They also frequently mentioned the idea of presenting the work at home so that their children or other family members would see it (Table 2, Quote 12). In these cases, their feeling of satisfaction for the achievements was evident.

***The artist folders.*** Since the beginning of the programme, each participant had a drawing folder, suitable for DIN A3 paper. Each folder was identified with the name of the person to whom it belonged, and the reproductions on paper of the works of Velázquez and Goya on which they had worked in that session. Also, their own personal creations, always signed and dated, were kept in these folders. At the beginning and end of each session, we presented the folders to the participants so that they could review their content, and we observed that this review was a very significant experience. This stimulated their recall of the works of the Prado Museum (the title of the painting, the name of the painter, etc.), but, above all, seeing their own creations signed with their name was pleasantly surprising and often gave rise to comments reflecting the positive experience of re-encountering the outcome of their work and the satisfaction of having been able to create those works (Table 2, Quote 13). Even the more introverted participants seemed to enjoy these reviews, examining their works attentively, sometimes repeatedly, and frequently smiling as they did so.

***The central role of the AE.*** The AEs played a key role in the development of the sessions. They not only explained the tasks to be done, the procedures, etc. but also reinforced participants individually, often serving as a connection between each participant and the rest of the group by drawing their attention to certain aspects, creations or considerations. Their interventions and replies to the questions posed to them, highly valued by the participants, helped to define the general atmosphere of the session (Table 2, Quote 14). Their considerate and respectful treatment of the PWD, without any over-simplifications or infantilism, promoted a welcoming and relaxed climate (Table 2, Quote 15). They commented that they carried out these workshops with the same approach as with other groups, and that the cognitive difficulties of the participants did not essentially condition either the approach or the results.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The goal of this work was to describe the design, development and evaluation of a programme of artistic activities for PWD based on visits to the Prado Museum called "We have a date with art". We have detailed the basic aspects that the AE team took into account to design the itineraries that made up the visits to the Prado Museum. We also described two itineraries in the museum, how these visits were performed and the participating PWDs' observed reactions during the visits. Drawing on each itinerary, a series of art workshops were also designed to be carried out by the PWD who had visited or would visit the museum, and we described the reactions observed in the PWD who performed these art-making activities.

Results highlight, first, the limited role played by the cognitive difficulties of the participants in this experience. The programme was designed as an experience of cultural participation and learning, and it offered the possibility of visiting the Prado Museum, walking through its exhibition halls, focusing on a number of selected works, participating in conversations about them and later performing art-making activities based on the visits. The visits were carried out without any difficulties that might make this group of people's reactions different from the reactions that could be expected from a group of adults without a clinical diagnosis of dementia. As pointed out by Ullan et al. (2013), it is common to underestimate the skills of PWD, emphasizing their deficits and, consequently, assigning them tasks with a low level of intellectual stimulation or sense of achievement (Malone & Camp, 2007; Perrin, 1997). PWD frequently face the double stigma of ageing and dementia (Benbow & Reynolds, 2000; Katsuno, 2005). The decrease of the negative stigma that affects PWD is proposed as a priority goal in the coping with dementia at a global level (Batsch & Mittelman, 2012), and art programmes offer an opportunity for PWD and their caregivers to reconnect with their communities, with the added benefit of showing the PWDs' ability to continue participating in these activities when the disease progresses. In our view, it is therefore important to highlight that, regardless of the clinical condition of dementia, the type of activities of cultural participation and inclusion that took place in our experience can be a resource for PWD that would allow them to develop a meaningful life, promoting their cultural participation in the community and, in this regard, ensuring the development of their rights.

Following a review carried out by Smiraglia (2016) of more than one hundred programmes of museums aimed at older people, with or without problems of cognitive impairment, the author concluded that the results most commonly found related to participation in these programmes were an increase of socialization and an improvement in mood. The needs of older persons with dementia are multiple and complex. It is striking that most of the unmet needs of these people when they live in residential environments (Hancock, Woods, Challis, & Orrell, 2006) have to do with the need for stimulating daily activities and with social needs, company, communication, etc. Both aspects – the involvement in stimulating activities and the establishment and development of social relations – along with an effect on self-esteem, have been noted as important elements of the subjective experience of early PWD when they are involved in art activities in museums (Flatt et al., 2015). The results obtained in the evaluation of the programme "We have a date with art" indicate that these aspects (stimulating and social activities) were also important elements in the experience presented in this work. The development of the programme provided the opportunity to engage in exciting activities – both visits to the Prado Museum and the art activities – different from the habitual ones that the participants used to carry out, and, for this reason, valued by them and their caregivers alike. In addition, as noted, the development of these activities promoted processes of social interaction. Sharing community space in the museum with the public in general was no doubt an experience of social inclusion, and working in the art-making sessions with artistic techniques that encouraged creativity and personal interpretation of the task they faced led to a rewarding experience, valued by all those involved in it, PWD, but also caregivers and AEs. It is worth highlighting the importance of the social relations between the AEs and the PWD in our results. Largely, this aspect can be considered essential for the satisfactory development of the experience, by ensuring a warm and welcoming climate in the different sessions that were part of the programme. Art, from this point of

view, may constitute an interesting “mediator” of these social relations. The works of art that were part of the programme allowed all the participants to focus on aspects unrelated to their health conditions and their cognitive difficulties. In an earlier work (Ullan et al., 2013) it was found that the possibility of developing artistic activities could provide positive aspects to the experience of PWD, among which, we highlight mainly three: enjoyment, learning and a better self-image. This new experience reinforces this line of research, adding a dimension of social inclusion derived from sharing the museum spaces and cultural resources without the fact of having a diagnosis of dementia being an obstacle.

Our work has a number of limitations which show the need for further research on the role of art in the promotion of the well-being of PWD. Firstly, there was no control group of people who, with similar conditions of age, etc., did not have the clinical condition of dementia. The impression of the AEs and researchers who participated in this project is that the results would not have been very different, supporting the idea that dementia, in the phases in which it was studied in our work, does not reveal any very significant differences that would prevent greater social participation of the affected persons. However, it would be necessary in the future to introduce this comparison, developing this kind of artistic activities in parallel groups of people with and without a diagnosis of dementia and comparing the results. On another hand, we only evaluated the effects of the programme “We have a date with art” during the participation in it. It is necessary to assess potential long-term effects, that is, to carry out longitudinal studies in which the art-based programmes are more extended in time and also the follow-up of the participants in them.

Despite the above limitations, we believe the results are worth being taken into account. A growing body of evidence shows that museums can provide benefits for individual and community health and well-being as public spaces for discussion and learning and that they can help people make sense of their world and their place in it (Dodd & Jones, 2014). Participation in cultural activities linked to museums can provide positive social experiences (Chatterjee & Camic, 2015), new opportunities for learning, experiences of calmness that reduce anxiety, increase positive emotions, increase self-esteem, a sense of identity and inspiration, reduce social isolation, providing a positive distraction from the clinical environment and an increase in communication among families, caregivers and health professionals (Chatterjee & Noble, 2016). As a result, museums play an increasingly more important role as partners in public health programmes (Camic & Chatterjee, 2013). The results obtained in our study coincide with these perspectives by highlighting the important role that museums, in this case the Prado Museum, can play in the promotion of the well-being and inclusion of a group of people who are especially vulnerable and whose diagnosis of dementia should not imply either a decrease in the practice of their right to cultural participation or their social exclusion derived from the stigma associated with dementia.

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