

- ☼ **Name of the study:** Project to Provide Cognitive Accessibility at Museums and Recreation Sites
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Abstract

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Access to leisure and recreational activities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) is important and valuable. It contributes to bringing people with IDD closer to the cultural and leisure life of the broader community, improving their quality of life, and increasing their sense of equality. Moreover, access to leisure culture increases the presence of people with disabilities in the public sphere, and thus promotes a perceptual change among the general public. Recognition of this is expressed in a guarantee to the right to access all realms of life, granted by the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹ and in Israeli legislation and regulations.² With the enactment of the Equal Rights for People with Disabilities Act (Service Accessibility Adjustments, 2013)³, specifically regulations 60-61 regarding accessibility to museums and galleries, it is imperative to consider **how information can be displayed in museums so that all individuals can understand it, and how activities can be conducted so that all individuals can participate.**

A number of leading aid organizations for people with disabilities are partnering to achieve this goal: The National Insurance Funds, Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services, the Shalem Fund, and Akim Israel. Together, they have developed a special program to make recreational sites accessible. This program includes training for staff groups, development of tailor-made accessories according to the needs of each museum or recreational site, and accompanying evaluative research. This comprehensive plan is pioneering and unique in Israel (and possibly in the world).

In the first phase, the program was implemented at four sites of different orientations: the archaeological site at the City of David in Jerusalem, the Technoda Science and Technology

¹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

² <https://www.gov.il/he/Departments/legalInfo/crpd>

³ https://www.aisrael.org/_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/Regulations.pdf

Education Center in Hadera, the Hiriya Center for Environmental Education, and the Atlit Detainee Camp Museum. Another museum, the Bloomfield Science Museum in Jerusalem, where accessibility has not been improved, was used for comparative purposes.

The present study aims to assess the contribution of the activities for improving cognitive accessibility that took place in the museums involved in the project, in terms of the enjoyment, participation, and learning of people with IDD. A mixed-methods design was used, and we examined both quantitative and qualitative components. Groups of people with IDD from five different IDD residential places participated in the study. Four of the groups constituted the research group. Each of these groups visited one site before and after its accessibility program was launched. The fifth group was the control group. The control group made two visits to the Bloomfield Science Museum in Jerusalem, which has not improved its accessibility. The interval between first measurement (before) and second measurement (after) was between 18 and 24 months. The study participants were adults with moderate to high levels of IDD. Most (but not all) have independent mobility capability and no severe sensory disability such as blindness or deafness.

Several research tools were used in this study: (1) observations for measuring individual participation, (2) observations of groups, (3) interviews with museum guides and supporting staff, (4) a questionnaire assessing enjoyment and satisfaction, (5) a questionnaire assessing knowledge, consisting of five closed questions, with four possible responses to each, only one of which was correct. In addition, focus group with the supporting staff, conducted with the aim of increasing our insight into the overall perception of the museum visit

In an overall assessment of the sites that had improved their accessibility, the positive change in participants' knowledge before and after accessibility improvements was found to be large ($d = 0.70$) and significant ($P < .001$). However, although there was a positive change in knowledge at three of the four sites, participants' level of knowledge as a whole remains low. Satisfaction was found to be very high even before the sites' accessibility was improved. No confirmation was found that the improved accessibility contributed to an overall improvement in satisfaction, nor at any of the specific sites. That said, satisfaction was indeed already very high at the time of entry to the sites.

Analysis of the qualitative findings indicated a correlation between satisfaction and other components such as: length of tour (optimal duration is 60-90 minutes); group size (optimally a small group of 10-12 participants); degree of physical accessibility; number of transitions within the museum space (preferably few); instruction given within a closed space; support of the accompanying staff; use of name tags for participants; instruction that

is accessible and suited to the audience; demonstrations using accessories that are simple to operate and use; simplification of language; use of symbols; active and experiential learning; creating a fun visit experience.



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