

Access to Culture as a Human Right

An Exploratory Study on the Accessibility of Cultural Leisure Activities for People with Intellectual Disabilities in Switzerland

About the authors

Annette Lichtenauer (annette.lichtenauer@fhnw.ch) is a researcher at the Institute for Integration and Participation at the School of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW). Her research and teaching focus on Easy Language, accessible communication, accessibility, and participation. She co-leads the Easy Language module in the Bachelor's programme in Social Work and the Easy Language module within the Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) programme *Accessible and Audience-Oriented Communication*. She has contributed to several research and development projects on Easy Language, accessible communication, and communicative participation. She is currently part of the research team of an Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) project investigating the role of images in Easy Language. She is the author and co-author of numerous publications in the fields of Easy Language, accessibility, and participation.

Gabriela Antener (gabriela.antener@fhnw.ch) is Senior Lecturer at the Institute for Integration and Participation at the School of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland FHNW. Her teaching and research focus on disability, participation and accessibility, accessible and audience-oriented communication, Easy Language, augmentative and alternative communication, and digital inclusion. She is co-head of the Certificate of Advanced Studies programme "Accessible and Audience-Oriented Communication" and has led and contributed to several research and development projects on accessible information, communicative participation, and digital inclusion. She is the author and co-author of numerous publications in these fields.

Abstract

This article presents findings from a small-scale exploratory study that replicated one aspect of the international WEL project (“From Written to Oral Texts in Easy Language: Easy Audios in Cultural Visits and Video Games”) in Switzerland. The study explored challenges and needs across the different stages of a cultural visit – planning, arrival, during the visit and after the visit – through two focus groups: one with people with intellectual disabilities (ID) and a support person, and one with experts in inclusive cultural work.

The findings show that while many participants with intellectual disabilities attend a wide range of cultural events, both through institutional group visit settings and independently, barriers persist at every stage of the visit. The challenges include insufficient or overly complex online information, unclear signage, inaccessible ticketing and payment systems, and limited adapted communication during events. Across both focus groups, Easy Language emerged as a key instrument for overcoming such comprehensibility barriers, yet its implementation in Swiss cultural institutions remains fragmented and largely confined to project-based initiatives.

The study concludes that cultural institutions in Switzerland are still inadequately prepared to guarantee equal access for people with intellectual disabilities. Embedding Easy Language systematically across all phases of cultural participation is not only an institutional improvement but also a necessary step toward fulfilling cultural participation as a human right.

Keywords: accessibility, cultural participation, people with intellectual disabilities, Easy Language, Switzerland, participation barriers

1 Introduction and Background

Equal participation in cultural life is a fundamental human right. Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) affirms the right of everyone “to freely participate in the cultural life of the community”. This right is further specified in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations, 2006), which explicitly confirms the

right of people with disabilities to access cultural leisure (Art. 30). Furthermore, Article 9 obliges States Parties to ensure accessibility not only in the physical environment but also in information and communication.

By ratifying the CRPD in 2014, Switzerland committed itself to ensuring accessibility across these domains and to promoting equal participation in cultural life. This includes ensuring accessible communication and information as key preconditions for meaningful inclusion.

1.1 The Situation of Cultural Participation and Accessibility in Switzerland

Due to Switzerland's federalist structure, a coherent national cultural policy has only been in place since 2012 (Pitton & Stocker Steinke, 2024, 208). In recent years, however, cultural policy initiatives in Switzerland have increasingly emphasised the need to open cultural institutions to all groups of the population.

A milestone for addressing the needs of people with disabilities was the establishment of *Kultur inklusiv* (Culture Inclusive) in 2016. Initially launched in German-speaking Switzerland and subsequently expanded to the French-speaking (2018) and Italian-speaking (2019) regions, it functions as a national competence centre supporting cultural institutions in developing accessible programmes and infrastructures. Since its establishment, over 90 projects have been supported (Pro Infirmis, n.d.; Parpan-Blaser et al., 2021, 593).

A further key step in this direction was provided by the Guidelines for the Promotion of Cultural Participation published by the National Cultural Dialogue in 2021 (Nationaler Kulturdialog, 2021) which explicitly aim to strengthen cultural participation for all population groups, including people with disabilities.

Many cultural institutions in Switzerland have undertaken efforts to respond to the needs of diverse user groups, initially focusing on removing structural barriers such as the installation of ramps. According to the most recent Swiss Museum Survey in 2023 nearly four out of ten museums were fully wheelchair accessible, although accessibility varied considerably by type of museum (ranging from 76 % in natural science museums to only 19 % in regional and local museums) (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2024). More recently,

some institutions have begun to consider sensory accessibility. For instance, the Natural History Museum of the University of Zurich provides specific services for visitors with visual and hearing impairments (Naturhistorisches Museum der Universität Zürich, n.d.). The same survey mentioned above further shows that almost half of all Swiss museums report providing some exhibition information in what is termed “plain language”. However, the report does not specify how and to what extent these provisions are implemented in practice, how far the language is actually easy to understand, or whether they meet the needs of people with intellectual disabilities (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2024).

1.2 Cultural participation for people with intellectual disabilities

Despite broader developments in accessibility, people with intellectual disabilities continue to face multiple barriers when accessing cultural institutions and leisure activities such as museums, theatres and other cultural events in Switzerland. These obstacles extend beyond physical access and include challenges related to communication and comprehensible information, which are essential for independent cultural participation. Even when structural barriers are removed, this alone does not guarantee meaningful participation in cultural events (Stocker Steinke, 2024), as cultural participation always also entails participation in content – a dimension that is often overlooked. The concept of the ‘accessibility chain’ (Darcy et al., 2011) underlines this point: accessibility must be ensured across all stages of a visit. Communication and information therefore play a central role in enabling access for all visitors. This applies particularly to people with intellectual disabilities, for whom unclear or overly complex information often constitutes a major hurdle when attending cultural events.

The use of Easy Language is therefore widely regarded as a key element in addressing these hurdles, as it helps make information more transparent and comprehensible. In Sweden, for example, Easy Language has from the very beginning been closely linked to cultural accessibility. As Bohmann (2024, 529) pointed out, the first initiatives explicitly emerged in the late 1960s in the context of a cultural policy programme called “*Culture for Everyone*” (*Kultur*

åt *alla*), which underscored that language accessibility was understood as a prerequisite for participation.

Previous research has examined communication in cultural institutions such as museums and other leisure settings. These studies show that communication in such contexts is often difficult to understand and can limit access to content for visitors (Kröger, 2020; Schum, 2024). In this context, Easy Language is discussed as an approach to making information more accessible.

In Switzerland, the above mentioned National Cultural Dialogue (2021) explicitly mentions Easy Language as one important element of accessible culture, underlining its central role in enabling access. In practice, some museums, theatres and other cultural events have begun to experiment with accessible formats, such as exhibitions in Easy Language, inclusive guided tours, or accessible online resources (for example, accessible websites or downloadable Easy Language brochures), as well as Easy Language information on their websites or in information sheets within the museums or other cultural events themselves. Nevertheless, its implementation in Swiss cultural institutions remains fragmentary and often limited to temporary or project-based activities rather than being embedded as a standard practice. (Pitton & Stocker Steinke, 2024; Smidt, 2024; Stocker Steinke & Staub, 2016)

This indicates that the specific needs of people with intellectual disabilities remain insufficiently addressed, particularly with regard to their participation in cultural institutions and leisure opportunities, where unclear or inaccessible information continues to pose major obstacles. International research confirms that such barriers are widespread across Europe, and that the needs of people with ID are still too often overlooked (British Council, 2021; Gratton, 2020; Leahy & Ferri, 2024; Mastrogioseppe et al., 2021). As in Switzerland, accessibility efforts in the countries examined in these studies tend to prioritise physical adjustments, such as wheelchair access or wheelchair-accessible toilets, while communicative accessibility receives comparatively little attention (British Council, 2021; Leahy & Ferri, 2022). This highlights the need for further investigation into how cultural institutions can more effectively meet the requirements of people with ID, particularly in terms of communication and information, which constitute a key dimension of accessibility for this group.

Building on this perspective, the present article reports findings from a small-scale exploratory study based on two qualitative focus group discussions. These guided group interviews explored the experiences, challenges, and needs of persons with ID in accessing cultural leisure activities in Switzerland. The study replicates one aspect of the currently ongoing WEL project, “From written to oral texts in Easy Language: Easy audios in cultural visits and video games” (WEL project, n.d.), coordinated by Mangiron and Matamala, and applies it to the Swiss context. The focus, as outlined, is restricted to the accessibility of cultural institutions for people with intellectual disabilities. Particular attention is given to Easy Language Audio Guides, which emerged as a question from the WEL project but also from the focus group participants’ accounts. Easy Audio is still a relatively under-researched concept, currently being examined more systematically in the WEL project (WEL project, n.d.; Machuca Ayuso & Matamala, 2025). In this article, however, Easy Audio Guides appear only as a secondary theme rather than a primary focus. Against this background, the present exploratory study addresses the following research question: To what extent are cultural venues in Switzerland prepared to meet the needs of people with intellectual disabilities, and what barriers and challenges arise across the different stage of a cultural visit (planning, arrival, the visit itself, and after the visit)? Within this framework, particular attention is given to the role of Easy Language in facilitating participation. In addition, the study seeks to gain initial insights into the potential and practical use of Easy Audio Guides as a complementary format.

The article is structured as follows: Section 1 provides the theoretical and contextual background. Section 2 presents the methodology, including the focus group design and data analysis. Section 3 reports the findings, followed by a discussion in Section 4. Section 5 concludes the article.

2 Method and Sample

This study employed a qualitative exploratory research design using focus group discussions as the primary method of data collection. This approach was chosen to capture perspectives on cultural accessibility from different

stakeholder groups, particularly persons with intellectual disabilities and experts in inclusive cultural contexts. The focus was on exploring these perspectives in their own right rather than conducting a systematic comparison between groups, with the aim of identifying key themes across the data.

Given its small-scale and exploratory nature, the study does not aim to produce generalisable findings but to generate initial insights into relevant challenges and needs.

2.1 Data

Data were collected through two separate qualitative focus group discussions, a well-established method in qualitative social research (Schulz et al., 2012), guided by a semi-structured interview guide. The group format enabled participants to discuss their experiences and perspectives collectively and to respond to each other's contribution, thereby generating interaction-based insights.

One focus group included people with intellectual disabilities and one support person, who accompanied some participants from the support context in which she worked. The second focus group included experts working in the field of inclusive culture, including professionals active in cultural leisure institutions.

The support person (a social worker) was present to facilitate communication and to support the participants she accompanied in expressing their perspectives, where needed. In addition, she occasionally contributed contextual insights from social work practice, particularly regarding the planning and organisation of cultural visits. These contributions enriched the discussion but were not treated as a separate analytical perspective. The presence of a support person reflects common practice in research involving people with ID and aimed to support meaningful participation without directing the discussion.

This approach is consistent with the WEL project framework, on which the study is based. As a partial replication of the WEL project, the study draws on the same research framework and interview guide, which were adapted with minor adjustments. The interview guide focused on the challenges and needs of people with intellectual disabilities when attending cultural leisure events

and was structured according to different phases of the visit – from planning and arrival to the visit itself and the departure.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. According to national regulations, formal ethical approval was not required, as the study addressed a non-sensitive topic and did not involve sensitive personal data or any form of intervention. Nevertheless, particular care was taken due to the involvement of persons with ID. The study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Information and consent materials were provided in Easy Language for participants with ID. At the beginning of each focus group discussion, participants were informed again about the project, and consent forms were reviewed with participants with ID to ensure understanding. Accessible communication was ensured throughout the research process. Only limited and strictly necessary personal data were collected. All data were handled confidentially and anonymised. Participants were included based on self-identification as persons with intellectual disabilities; no diagnostic or medical information was collected.

In this article, quotations are marked with the letter A for participants with intellectual disabilities and B for experts, followed by the corresponding transcript line number. All quotations were translated into English.

Both focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed. An initial version was generated using the locally running programme noScribe (Dröge, 2024); in a second step, the audio recordings were revisited to verify and refine passages, as the automatically generated transcripts were not always accurate or comprehensible. One challenge concerned the focus group with participants with ID, where some contributions were occasionally difficult to understand, for instance when spoken very quietly or for other reasons affecting clarity. A further challenge was that the discussions were conducted in Swiss German, which made automatic transcription more demanding.

In both focus groups, rich discussions emerged, providing a detailed empirical basis for the analysis. The data were analysed using qualitative content analysis following Mayring's approach (Mayring, 2015), focusing on recurring themes and patterns across the different stages of a cultural visit.

2.2 Participants

Focus Group 1:

People with intellectual disabilities and a support person

This sample consisted of seven participants. Six were adults with intellectual disabilities, two women and four men. One participant was a social worker employed in a residential facility where two of the six participants lived and one worked. She acted as a support person, supporting communication and facilitating contributions from the participants she knew, with only occasional contextual input.

Participants were recruited through personal networks, contacts established in previous inclusion projects, and professionals in the field with whom the research team was in contact. Some participants had experience as reviewers for Easy Language texts. Among the six participants with ID, three lived in institutional settings (including two in a preparatory programme for independent living), two lived with their partners, and one lived with his brother. They came from different regions of the German-speaking part of Switzerland and lived in both urban and rural areas. All participants were employed either in facilities for people with disabilities or in other sheltered workplaces. Their ages ranged from 23 to 57 years.

The focus group was conducted on-site at the University of Applied Sciences in Olten and lasted approximately 75 minutes. The location was easily accessible by public transport, and an accompanying person was organised to guide participants from the railway station to the venue. Recruiting participants required considerable effort due to accessibility barriers. Contact was established mainly by telephone, and additional time was needed to arrange participation and travel. To facilitate communication, the discussion was structured using topic cards as a visual aid supporting participants in following the sequence of themes and contributing their views more easily. In addition, the focus group discussion was moderated in Easy Language to ensure that all participants could follow and actively contribute. Participants reported that the discussion was clear and understandable. Participants received vouchers as compensation for their time and travel expenses.

Focus Group 2: Experts from the cultural sector

This focus group consisted of six women working in various roles within the cultural sector, all of whom engage with issues of accessibility in cultural and leisure provision for people with disabilities. All participants had expertise at the intersection of culture, inclusion, and accessible communication; most also had additional qualifications in Easy Language and/or were active in the field of disability rights and equality.

The participants worked across different institutional settings – publicly funded organisations, government authorities, and private enterprises. They were recruited through professional networks, contacts established through prior work in the field of Easy Language, and targeted invitations to experts with relevant experience in accessibility and cultural participation. To ensure anonymity, professional backgrounds are described in a generalised form without reference to specific institutions or identifiable projects. Participants included professionals working in museums (e.g. in public engagement, education, accessibility, or inclusion), representing a range of museum types such as art, technology, and archaeology. The group also included experts from consultancy and public sector organisations, such as cantonal authorities. Several participants had experience in developing and implementing accessible formats, including Easy Language exhibition texts, guided tours, and audio-based formats. Some had been involved in national accessibility initiatives (e.g. “Kultur inklusiv”), while others had experience designing and contributing to accessibility strategies for large-scale cultural and public events, including major international events in Switzerland, such as the UEFA Women’s Euro 2025 and the Eurovision Song Contest 2025.

The expert focus group was conducted online and lasted approximately 75 minutes. While online discussions may differ from in-person settings in terms of interaction dynamics, most of the participants were already familiar with each other and experienced in collaborating in digital formats, which likely supported a focused exchange. Expert participants did not receive financial compensation.

3 Results

The following section presents the findings from the two focus group discussions. In each subsection, findings are presented first for participants with intellectual disabilities (focus group 1), followed by expert perspectives (focus group 2). Section 3.1 describes the types of cultural events attended and with whom they are visited, while Section 3.2 examines how participants learn about cultural events. Section 3.3 then focuses on barriers across the different phases of a cultural visit, structured into planning, arrival, the visit itself, and the post-visit phase. Section 3.4 presents initial insights into Easy Audio Guides.

3.1 What kinds of venues are visited and with whom

The participants with intellectual disabilities reported attending a wide range of cultural and leisure activities. These included visits to museums, theatres, cinemas, concerts, popular music festivals, operas, open-air events, historical sites, as well as guided city tours in Switzerland and abroad. The museums mentioned covered not only art museums but also natural history, transport, and technical museums. Many participants reported that they often attend events together with the institutions in which they live or work. Professionals were described as playing an important role in facilitating such group visits. Within the discussion, the support person referred to her own role in organising and accompanying cultural visits, which prompted further discussion among participants with ID. Participants also referred to situations in which visits were jointly planned with staff members from the institutions in which they live.

At the same time, it became clear that independent visits to cultural events also play an important role. Most participants regularly attend events on their own, with a partner, or with friends. One example is a young participant who reported frequent independent visits to a natural history museum as well as to other museums. Only one participant stated that she almost exclusively attends events as part of organised group offers arranged and accompanied by staff members of her residential group or institution.

Experts in the second focus group emphasised the predominance of institutionally organised group visits. They observed that cultural visits by people with ID are often initiated and accompanied by professionals who organise collective group visits as part of their work. This point was illustrated by the statement of a museum professional:

So far, we have mainly had groups coming to the museum, because it is usually organised by the head of the residential group – but we have had very few individual visitors. (B392)

This observation was further reflected in experts' accounts that many people with ID may hesitate to attend cultural events independently due to uncertainty or difficulties in orienting themselves.

Experts also noted that cultural institutions often implicitly assume that people with ID will attend events accompanied rather than independently. They raised the question of how people with ID could be enabled to attend cultural events more independently, alongside institutionally organised group visits. They underlined the importance of a low-threshold and welcoming environment as a precondition for participation. At the same time, they observed that many people with ID rarely consider visiting museums on their own, not only due to practical barriers but also because of psychological thresholds. As one expert explained:

People do not even think about it [...]. Going as a group is one thing, but going independently and saying, 'I will go to a museum'? I think this is not yet part of the awareness of the target group for Easy Language. This threshold, which is already well known in relation to museums more generally, means that they simply never think about going to a museum on their own. (B415).

This statement illustrates that attending cultural events may not even be considered a possible activity for people with ID.

3.2 Access to information on cultural events: How people with intellectual disabilities learn about cultural events

The participants with intellectual disabilities described various ways of accessing information about cultural events. While recommendations from staff and social contacts remained important, they also reported actively searching for information independently, particularly through digital channels. Parents, friends, and colleagues often shared information, while staff occasionally supported the process by sending links to specific offers. At the same time, several participants reported regularly searching online, often using Google or consulting the websites of familiar venues. One participant explained:

I often go on Google to look. If you know what the event is and the month, you can find it quite easily. (A480)

The extent to which online searches have become a habitual part of information-seeking for some participants is illustrated by the example of one participant who, during a trip to another city with his residential group, used Google to find cultural events and museums of interest:

I go on Google and look for museums. For example, when we were in [city], I checked which museums there were and which ones interested me. And I went there. (A589)

This example illustrates how digital tools can support independent planning of cultural activities. Social media was also important, especially for younger participants. One participant explained how following museums on Facebook and Instagram helped them stay informed:

I usually hear about it through social media like Facebook and Instagram. I follow some museums, like the Dinosaur Museum or the Tram Museum. That way I know when they have a new exhibition or when the old tram runs again, and then I go and take part. And I actually get a lot of information through social media. (A462)

Despite these examples of active information seeking, not all participants relied on digital channels to the same extent. For some, staff members and notice boards in their residential institutions remained the main source of information. Younger participants tended to engage more intensively with social media, whereas older participants relied primarily on Google searches.

The experts in the second focus group emphasised that people with ID often only learn about cultural offers through institutional channels, for example when staff members draw attention to events or organise collective visits. From their perspective, access to information remains largely mediated by institutions, raising the question of how more independent forms of access could be supported. Experts also noted that even when they inform residential and support institutions about cultural events, the information does not always reach the individuals concerned, as it may be lost within institutional communication processes. They further highlighted a gap between the provision of accessible offers by cultural institutions and their actual uptake. While cultural institutions may develop accessible formats or targeted information, these do not necessarily reach or engage people with ID.

Taken together, the findings show that while some participants with ID relied primarily on staff and institutional sources, others actively used digital tools such as Google and social media to search for information. Access to and use of digital media varied between participants with ID and appeared to depend on individual resources and competencies. However, the study did not systematically assess participants' access to digital devices or their level of digital competence. Digital channels nevertheless emerged as an increasingly important source for independent information seeking, particularly among younger participants.

3.3 Accessibility and challenges in attending cultural events

Participants with intellectual disabilities reported facing considerable barriers when attending cultural events in Switzerland. Difficulties occurred across multiple stages of the visit – in advance of the event, upon arrival, and during the visit itself. They also described a range of strategies they had developed

to cope with these obstacles, indicating that attending cultural events often involves careful preparation and planning.

Experts in the second focus group similarly observed that people with ID in Switzerland continue to face considerable barriers when attending cultural events and also referred to the different stages of the visit. Across both focus groups, it was noted that not all events were equally difficult to access. Some were described as presenting fewer barriers, particularly when they were explicitly designed with accessibility in mind. Such offers were seen as especially helpful and enjoyable, as they enabled active participation and reduced dependence on support staff.

3.3.1 Barriers prior to attending cultural events

A range of barriers emerges already prior to attending cultural events. These relate in particular to the availability and accessibility of information, ticket purchase, and financial aspects.

Participants with intellectual disabilities reported that essential information needed to prepare for a visit was often missing, difficult to obtain, or presented in complex forms. Websites were frequently perceived as providing either too little or too much information, making it difficult to identify relevant details. As one participant noted:

Sometimes there are two or three pages you find on Google. Then you have to search. Sometimes it is also complicated. Then you really have to search and plan well in order to find it. (A929)

Practical information such as the availability of toilets, food and drink facilities, accepted payment methods, wheelchair accessibility, or the presence of contact persons was rarely communicated in advance. When such information was available, it was presented in complex language or through symbols that were difficult to understand, particularly regarding payment options before or at the venue. From the perspective of participants with ID, such information is essential for preparation, and its absence made it difficult to plan a visit independently. As one participant with ID summarised:

What I noticed is, that when you go to a museum, the information never says whether you can pay with Twint [mobile payment system] or a card. Then you go there and see that it doesn't work without it. (A1037)

Language barriers further compounded these difficulties. Participants described the increasing use of English names for venues, exhibitions, or programmes as confusing and a major obstacle to accessing cultural events. This was particularly challenging when familiar institutions or events suddenly adopted new English titles, which many found difficult to pronounce or recognise. The following quotation from a participant with ID illustrates this issue:

Before, it had a simple name, and suddenly they had an English name. [...] For me, that is difficult. Also for others. For many people who do not speak English, it is really very difficult, also to pronounce it. Because I cannot speak English, I cannot speak a foreign language. (A500)

Ticketing procedures emerged as another critical obstacle. The predominance of digital-only systems and cashless payments excluded participants who lacked access to these tools. Several participants reported that they sometimes do not have the technical resources or the required means of payment, such as credit cards or the payment system Twint (a mobile payment app widely used in Switzerland), making the purchase of tickets difficult or impossible. As a participant remarked:

What I noticed is that at theatre performances, they only want you to pay with a credit card. That is annoying. I also have bank cards, but I do not have the card they want. They want the one with Twint. I find it annoying when you want to go to the theatre. (A991)

The entire process of paying and booking tickets online was perceived as a substantial hurdle. Participants with ID described the requirement to enter large amounts of personal information as overly complex and difficult to manage. In such cases, they relied on others for support or had to purchase

tickets directly at the venue. Such experiences highlight how digitalised procedures can systematically restrict independent access.

Finally, participants with ID pointed to financial barriers. High ticket prices, combined with the mostly limited financial resources of people with intellectual disabilities, often prevented participation. Participants reported that they were frequently unaware of available discounts or reduced-price tickets. Information about such concessions was often missing or difficult to access, which further limited their opportunity to make use of more affordable options.

Experts in the second focus group described similar challenges and repeatedly emphasised the importance of clear and accessible information prior to the visit. In particular, they highlighted the need for guidance on how to reach the venue, for example through visual explanations such as photos or short videos on the website, showing the route from public transport stops. As one expert noted:

Many museums offer an online preview where you can have a look and see: what is it like there? What does it look like? (B627)

This quotation reflects experts' view that such information would greatly facilitate access and support participation. Experts also pointed to practical constraints that may limit participation even when information is available. They noted that interest in cultural activities does not necessarily lead to attendance, as participation may be hindered by factors such as limited transport options, unsuitable timing, or financial costs.

In addition, experts suggested that ticketing procedures are often designed without considering that people with intellectual disabilities may book tickets independently, and that their needs are therefore not sufficiently taken into account.

Experts also referred to concrete examples of approaches that may facilitate attendance at cultural events. They described participative projects in which cultural institutions collaborate with people with intellectual disabilities, where personal contact, familiar persons, or the possibility to arrange support in advance – including the option of being met or accompanied if needed – helped

to lower barriers and made it easier to plan visits. In particular, knowing who to approach or expecting a supportive reception was described as increasing the likelihood of independent attendance.

3.3.2 Arrival at the cultural venue

Arrival at cultural venues introduced a further set of barriers beyond those encountered during the planning stage. Orientation and access to essential information at the venue emerged as key challenges across the data. Participants with intellectual disabilities repeatedly emphasised the lack of clear and accessible signage. They reported that directions to venues were often unclear, and signage at the entrance was insufficient. As one participant noted:

It would also be good if the directions were clearer. It would also be better if there were more information at the bus stop already. (A374)

Similar difficulties were described once inside the venue, where signs for toilets, cloakrooms, or catering facilities were often hard to find or understand. Participants with ID stressed the importance of clear and understandable information:

It would be good to have an information board where everything is written down. Where exactly is the toilet? Where is the entrance? What is in the museum? What is forbidden? Are you allowed to be loud? Can you use your phone? General things like that. (A1136) I think it is a pity that it is almost never labelled where the men's or women's toilets are. [...] Signs should be put up so that everyone knows where to go for the toilet or where you can get a drink. (A1140)

The need for clear signage and accessible information becomes even more important, as participants with ID described feeling reluctant to approach staff for assistance. This hesitation illustrates that the absence of accessible signage not only creates practical difficulties but also reinforces barriers, as people with ID may avoid seeking assistance even when they need it.

Orientation difficulties were perceived as particularly stressful in situations with large crowds. Congestion at the entrance or in waiting areas was repeatedly described as uncomfortable. To cope with these situations, some participants with ID adopted strategies such as arriving early:

We always make sure to arrive 20 minutes early. (A362)

Experts in the second focus group confirmed these challenges and emphasised that signage and clear wayfinding systems (“signaletics”) are central for orientation in cultural venues. They noted that the presence of a reception desk or clearly identifiable staff can facilitate navigation and foster a sense of trust and security. As one expert remarked:

For many people, just getting into the building is stressful. They are confronted with unclear entrances, too many signs, and no one who explains things simply. (B501)

They further suggested providing orientation materials in advance, enabling people with intellectual disabilities to prepare more effectively before arriving at the venue.

Taken together, the findings show that barriers at the point of arrival extend beyond physical accessibility and are closely linked to orientation and communication. Both focus groups emphasised that clearer signage and the presence of trained staff could substantially improve accessibility and reduce stress during the initial phase of a cultural visit.

3.3.3 During the visit

A variety of barriers emerged during cultural events. Central challenges during the visit concerned the comprehensibility of information, both in written formats (e.g. museum wall labels or leaflets) and in oral formats such as guided tours. In addition, digital-only payment systems at the venue emerged as a further barrier.

Participants with intellectual disabilities reported that information was often difficult to understand or missing altogether. While some content was

perceived as accessible, terminology was often described as too complex and explanations as overly technical. Information was perceived as easier to follow when participants were already familiar with the subject matter, even when unfamiliar terms were used. One participant illustrated this when evaluating an audio guide tour at Lindt & Sprüngli:

I understood it well. If it is about chocolate, I can imagine it. (A725)

Written information in museums was frequently described as difficult to understand, even when clearly structured. Participants with ID noted that certain words remained inaccessible, limiting engagement with exhibitions:

For example, they had the exhibition with the Triceratops for two years. And it is nice that they wrote it down step by step, so you can also read it step by step and understand it. But there are words that are not so easy to understand. Especially for people with a disability, it is even harder to understand. (A675)

Missing information was also perceived as a barrier. Without clear explanations, participants with ID felt excluded from understanding the content of the exhibition. As one participant with ID put it:

I was in the museum. It was just difficult to understand. Nobody told me what it was about. I saw colours. I did not know what it was about. (A294)

Oral information in guided tours (e.g. museums or city tours) was described as particularly demanding. Long explanations often exceeded participants' ability to concentrate, while background noise and complex terminology further reduced comprehension, making the experience tiring and diminishing enjoyment. One participant summarised:

There are things where you don't understand what they mean. They are difficult. Not only for us. Maybe also for other people who have difficulties to understand. There are things they say where they also use foreign

words. [...] Because it is difficult to understand, and you don't really get it. Then it is not enjoyable. Sometimes it also goes on too long. [...] Sometimes they talk for almost 10 minutes. You cannot keep all that in your head. (A614 ff.)

Even when guided tours were explicitly organised for people with intellectual disabilities and it was stressed beforehand that accessible language was required, the way it was delivered in practice often remained inconsistent. Within the discussion, the support person (who accompanied the participants) referred to her own experience, noting that museum staff were often unsure what “accessible language” meant in practice, which prompted further reflections among the participants with ID. At the same time, however, participants also reported positive experiences, for example being able to follow an audio guide during a city tour, indicating that the accessibility of oral information varied across contexts.

Finally, participants with ID discussed barriers related to practical aspects during the visit. A particular challenge concerned payment methods at the venue itself, which were sometimes restricted to credit card or the mobile payment system Twint, reflecting similar accessibility issues as identified before the visit. For people with intellectual disabilities, who may not have access to these payment methods or who face difficulties in using them, this created significant barriers to basic needs such as buying refreshments or using toilets. They reported that under such conditions, they were sometimes unable to purchase food and, in some cases, even unable to use WC facilities.

That is often the case. At a concert you could only buy food with Twint. Without Twint you could not even get a drink. (A992)
And there everyone just has the Twint card. And if someone does not have one, do you want something to eat or drink? That is not my problem. [...]
Why don't they make one or two counters extra for people like us? (A987)

Experts in the second focus group similarly emphasised challenges related to the comprehensibility of information and communication during cultural visits. They highlighted that information and communication at the venue are often

too complex and insufficiently adapted to visitors' needs, particularly regarding orientation and understanding. As one expert noted, accessible participation requires clear and simple communication, especially for orientation within the venue.

Regarding formats of information, experts reported that different approaches may be effective depending on the type of cultural setting. In particular, visual formats such as photos or symbols were described as helpful for conveying how to engage with exhibits or activities, particularly in more technical contexts, while Easy Language was seen as important for providing information.

Experts also described the use of multiple access formats, for example through apps that allow users to choose between Easy Language texts, audio, or visual formats. However, such solutions may create additional barriers, as they often require prior knowledge, technical skills, or assistance (e.g. requesting access at the reception). In contrast, Easy Language materials in printed form were described as more immediately accessible, as they do not require any technical interaction. They also highlighted the role of cultural mediation as an important interface between cultural institutions and visitors with intellectual disabilities. In addition, they pointed out that producing and testing accessible formats, including Easy Language materials, requires considerable time and financial resources, particularly when involving review groups.

In this context, they referred to examples such as tandem-guided tours specifically designed for people with intellectual disabilities, in which people with intellectual disabilities are trained to guide others with similar needs through exhibitions. These formats were described as enabling a more dialogical engagement, although implementation was described as resource-intensive.

Taken together, these accounts highlight barriers related to information, communication, and payment during cultural visits, which may undermine independent participation and limit access to basic services.

3.3.4 After the visit

Compared to the planning, arrival, and on-site phases of cultural participation, the period after cultural events was mentioned less frequently in the focus

group discussions. A recurring issue concerned the return journey. Participants with intellectual disabilities emphasised the importance of reliable information about the timing of events, especially their end times, in order to organise transport home. While starting times were usually provided, end times were often missing, creating uncertainty and stress. As one participant explained:

It is always written when it starts, but almost never when it ends. Then you don't know: will I still catch the train or the bus? (A564)

Participants with ID also referred to feedback after cultural events. Some reported positive experiences with questionnaires, including digital formats such as QR codes, indicating that such tools can in principle be used to express their impressions. However, this aspect was mentioned only briefly within the discussions.

In contrast, experts in the second focus group discussed the provision of feedback after cultural events in more detail. They underlined that conventional feedback instruments, such as written questionnaires or digital surveys, are often not accessible for people with intellectual disabilities. Written forms were described as difficult to complete, while digital formats may introduce additional technical barriers.

Experts further indicated that feedback collected through direct questioning – whether written or oral – may not always reflect actual difficulties experienced during the visit. They observed that participants with intellectual disabilities sometimes tend to report that everything was fine, even when challenges occurred. In contrast, difficulties became more visible when observing visitors during the activity itself.

Accordingly, experts emphasised more practice-based and situational approaches to gathering feedback. These included accompanying visitors during exhibitions or guided tours, asking questions in context, and observing reactions during the visit. Such approaches were described as providing more immediate and experience-based insights into barriers and support needs. As one expert explained:

What really works well is simply to join the guided tours and then either ask questions or just observe – I find that even through observation alone you can already notice a great deal. (B1318)

Experts also mentioned alternative formats for collecting feedback, such as more accessible and playful tools (e.g. touchscreen symbols or rating icons), which may lower barriers compared to written questionnaires. Furthermore, experts referred to more structured forms of feedback, such as working with test groups of people with intellectual disabilities who regularly engage with exhibitions. One expert described working with a test group from a residential institution whose members regularly reviewed exhibitions at her museum. Such forms of collaboration were described as enabling a more continuous and practice-oriented integration of the perspectives of people with intellectual disabilities into exhibition development and evaluation.

3.4 First insight into Easy Audio Guides

As outlined in the introduction, Easy Audio remains a little-explored area. In the present study, Easy Audio was not a primary focus, yet it emerged as a recurring theme in the group discussions and offered initial insights into the criteria that oral information – and Easy Audio Guides in particular – need to meet in order to be helpful for people with intellectual disabilities.

Participants with intellectual disabilities reported a range of experiences with Audio Guides in different contexts, mostly referring to practical encounters with standard Audio Guides and occasionally with Easy Audio Guides. Their accounts reflected divergent perspectives: while some described positive experiences, others highlighted barriers that affected usability regardless of the format.

A central theme concerned speed and user control. Participants with ID repeatedly noted that Audio Guides often moved too fast, with no option to pause or adjust the speed. One participant described her experience as follows:

They also had such devices there. But you really had to be quick to actually catch the right points. You really had to check whether it was

actually the one they were talking about. But it just kept running [...]. If you were a bit slower, the device was maybe already finished while you were still at the beginning. (A750)

Another issue concerned technical usability. Participants with ID reported difficulties in handling devices and headphones, as well as challenges related to the listening situation itself. They also noted that background noise from other visitors and occasional interruptions in playback further hindered comprehension.

Experts in the second focus group reflected on Audio Guides both from a user perspective and from their professional experience in developing Easy Audio formats. They confirmed several of the challenges described by participants with ID and provided further insights into design and implementation requirements. Experts reported that user testing had shown both overly fast and overly slow narration to hinder comprehension. They emphasised adjustable speed and section-by-section playback are essential features for making Audio Guides more accessible (for more information on speed-topic refer to: Pujadas-Farreras, 2025).

They also described the devices themselves as potential barriers, stressing the need for intuitive design and accessible instructions, as otherwise lengthy explanations were often required before use.

With regard to content and language, experts emphasised that information should remain short and concise to avoid exceeding attention spans. They also noted that open-ended prompts may help sustain engagement. In addition, the choice of language was described as a point of tension: while people with ID often prefer local dialects, cultural institutions must balance this preference with the needs of other visitor groups, highlighting the complexity of linguistic accessibility.

The examples from experts' own professional practice point to an important consideration: Easy Audio Guides should not merely be simplified versions of standard texts. One expert reflected on her experience in developing Easy Audio Guides in a museum context: Existing material was reduced and reshaped to resemble guided tours, focusing on selected aspects rather than detailed technical explanations. Future productions, however, were seen to

require stronger involvement of the target group to ensure that the content genuinely reflects their needs.

We reduced the material and placed more focus on what we would say if we were giving a guided tour. And now the museum is planning to develop an Easy Language audio guide for the remaining works. At this stage, we are considering approaching it differently from the very beginning, detaching ourselves completely from the original texts and instead going through the works together with the target group to see what information matters to them and what captures their interest. (B1537)

Experts also noted that Easy Audio Guides should not be seen as substitutes for other formats but as complementary tools. They stressed the value of offering multiple channels of communication, thereby increasing accessibility for different groups of visitors. They further underlined that developing Easy Audio Guides is highly challenging, requiring substantial resources in terms of time, funding, and professional expertise:

I really only did it once in that context, because it was very resource intensive. It cost an enormous amount if you wanted to do it professionally with a narrator, which was what the museum demanded at the time. So there were already quite a few hurdles, starting with the device itself. (B1520)

Looking ahead, the discussion also touched on future technological developments. One expert highlighted AI-based Audio Guides in Easy Language, recently piloted at a regional art museum in Switzerland, as a promising approach. According to her account, the system already allowed for interactive features such as asking the guide to slow down or repeat information. While still at an early stage, she noted that such innovations could potentially reduce current barriers for example related to speed and user control. She remarked:

With interaction, you could tell this avatar: please speak more slowly. I didn't understand it, can you explain it to me again. (B1693)

Taken together, these findings point to a range of requirements related to user control, usability, and the design of content and language in Easy Audio Guides.

4 Discussion

The present study provides insights into the accessibility of cultural leisure activities for people with intellectual disabilities in Switzerland. By drawing on perspectives from two focus groups – one with people with intellectual disabilities and one with experts in inclusive cultural practice – it identifies barriers to accessing cultural events across the different stages of a cultural visit.

Access to cultural events is shaped to a large extent by information and communication processes. Across all stages of a cultural visit, barriers emerge particularly where information is missing, overly complex, or not accessible, thereby restricting independent access. In this context, Easy Language emerges as a key instrument for reducing communicative barriers and enabling more independent access to cultural offers.

4.1 Pre-visit barriers as participation bottlenecks

Access to cultural events is largely determined before the visit takes place. Barriers at the planning stage function as a bottleneck that can restrict or even prevent participation altogether. Rather than occurring only at the venue itself, exclusion processes begin at the level of accessing and understanding information and organising attendance.

A central issue concerns the availability and accessibility of information. Barriers do not simply arise from a lack of information, but from a mismatch between the information provided by cultural institutions and the specific needs of people with intellectual disabilities. When relevant information is difficult to find, overly complex, or presented in inaccessible formats, this creates uncertainty, complicates independent planning and increases reliance on others for organising participation. Access to cultural events is therefore closely linked to the availability of accessible and understandable information in advance.

Relevant information includes both general event information and practical on-site conditions, such as toilets, seating, food and drink options, or accepted payment methods, which constitute basic preconditions for participation. If such information is missing or not accessible in advance, attending cultural events becomes unpredictable and may be avoided. Poorly structured or overly dense websites, particularly those using complex language, unclear symbols, or unfamiliar terminology (e.g., English-language terms), further limit accessibility.

The findings indicate that increasing digitalisation introduces new barriers in the pre-visit phase, affecting both access to ticketing and payment systems and communication and support. While digital tools can expand access to information, they simultaneously introduce new forms of exclusion. Digital ticketing systems, cashless payment methods, and online booking procedures increasingly require access to specific technologies and the ability to navigate complex digital environments. As a result, access to cultural events becomes dependent on digital competencies and resources that are unevenly distributed.

This aligns with international research showing that digitalisation in the cultural sector often overlooks the needs of people with disabilities, thereby reinforcing rather than reducing exclusion (British Council, 2021; Leahy & Ferri, 2022). A large majority of European cultural venues still lack fully accessible websites or inclusive booking systems, limiting access for many potential visitors (British Council, 2021; Leahy & Ferri, 2022). Current developments in Switzerland further illustrate this trend: the shift towards cashless-only payment systems in cultural institutions, for example at a major art museum in Zurich (Tages-Anzeiger, 2025) exemplifies how efficiency-driven practices can unintentionally exclude those who depend on alternative payment methods or personal assistance.

Increasing digitalisation reduces opportunities for direct personal contact. In many cultural institutions, communication and support have shifted from personal interaction to websites, email, or automated chatbots. Access to information is often available only online, while telephone contact has been reduced. Such systems presuppose that visitors can formulate precise written requests and navigate complex digital structures. For people with ID, this represents a significant barrier. They are typically among the last group to be

considered when digital services are designed, making information hard to find and excluding those who rely on human support.

Taken together, these findings indicate that barriers in the pre-visit phase play a decisive role in determining whether participation occurs at all. Without appropriate conditions in place, many potential visitors are effectively excluded before reaching a cultural venue. This points to a broader issue that extends beyond “technical” adjustments, highlighting how informational and communicative accessibility are closely linked to questions of cultural rights and function as structural preconditions of participation rather than optional additions.

4.2 Orientation and trust as an essential prerequisite for cultural participation

Difficulties with orientation are one of the most persistent challenges to cultural participation for people with intellectual disabilities. The findings indicate that these difficulties fundamentally shape whether participation is possible. Orientation thus emerges as a prerequisite for participation rather than a secondary aspect of the visitor experience.

These challenges become particularly relevant at the point of arrival and while moving through the venue. Essential information is often unclear, inconsistent, or difficult to understand, and insufficient signage (e.g. for basic facilities) can lead to uncertainty and increased dependence on others. This indicates that orientation is closely tied to how information is communicated and structured within the space.

Building on this, the findings point to a dynamic in which unclear environments not only hinder orientation but also affect trust and confidence. Where spaces are difficult to interpret, visitors may experience uncertainty about how to act. The findings further indicate that, for people with ID, asking for help cannot be taken for granted and may already involve hesitation. Unclear environments can reinforce this hesitation, reducing confidence in acting independently and limiting access to support. In this context, the visibility and recognisability of staff are central, as they indicate who can be approached for support. Where it remains unclear who can be approached for

assistance, access to support becomes effectively restricted. This may also point to the existence of psychological thresholds that go beyond practical barriers. Cultural visits may not be perceived as a self-evident or accessible option, which can further limit independent participation. Orientation thus emerges not only as a cognitive task but also as a social and emotional condition of participation. This aligns with Gratton (2020), who identifies, based on empirical findings on access to cultural activities for people with ID, what he terms “emotional access”, including feeling safe and welcome in cultural environments.

Situational factors such as crowding at entrances or ticket counters further intensify these dynamics. The findings suggest that such environments can create stress and confusion, particularly for people with intellectual disabilities, leading them to adapt their behaviour, for example by arriving earlier. While these strategies may reduce stress, they indicate that responsibility for managing barriers is shifted onto visitors rather than addressed structurally. This points to a broader imbalance in how accessibility is currently addressed.

Drawing on the expert perspectives, the findings indicate that cultural institutions tend to prioritise structural accessibility – such as ramps, lifts, or wheelchair spaces – while paying less systematic attention to cognitive and communicative accessibility. Orientation, signage, and crowd management remain underdeveloped, despite their influence on whether people with intellectual disabilities feel confident, welcome, and able to participate independently. This pattern resonates with international research showing that accessibility in cultural institutions is often reduced to structural adjustments, while cognitive and communicative aspects remain overlooked (British Council, 2021; Leahy & Ferri, 2022).

Overall, orientation remains insufficiently recognised as a central condition of participation and is still largely embedded within a predominantly physical understanding of accessibility. This suggests that enabling cultural participation is closely linked to more holistic understandings of accessibility that incorporate orientation and trust as core dimensions, including clear and comprehensible communication through approaches such as Easy Language.

4.3 Easy Language as a key dimension of cultural participation

Building on the findings and the arguments developed in the previous sections, Easy Language emerges as a key dimension of cultural participation and a central instrument for reducing communication barriers and enhancing comprehensibility (see Girard-Groeber & Lichtenauer, 2024; Bredel & Maaß, 2016), thereby enabling access to cultural events.

This is reflected in the data, where Easy Language appears as an important resource across different forms of communication in cultural settings. Where available, it facilitates comprehensible engagement and supports more independent participation, particularly in relation to websites, accessible brochures, exhibition texts, museum wall labels, signage, and, less frequently, audio-based offers. At the level of cultural events, the lack of Easy Language can limit both orientation within the venue and meaningful engagement with the content of the cultural event.

In practice, Easy Language has been introduced in selected museum projects in Switzerland, for example through simplified exhibition texts, accessible brochures, or audio-based formats (Smidt, 2024). However, these approaches are typically implemented as individual projects rather than as a standard element of institutional communication (Pitton & Stocker Steinke, 2024). This indicates a broader structural issue, as communicative accessibility continues to be overlooked in cultural institutions, a pattern also identified in European research, despite its central role in enabling cultural participation (Leahy & Ferri, 2022).

However, Easy Language cannot be understood as a universal solution. Its effectiveness depends on the specific context, and Easy Language alone is not sufficient in all situations. Visual or multimodal formats – such as photo-based instructions – may be more appropriate. This also aligns with Schum (2024), who emphasises that inclusive cultural participation cannot be achieved through Easy Language alone, but requires strategies that are developed systematically and collaboratively involving both cultural institutions and their audiences.

There is also a tendency to treat the introduction of Easy Language as a sufficient measure in itself. This risks overlooking that accessibility cannot be achieved through a single approach and that different visitors require different forms of support. This highlights the importance of multi-channel approaches combining Easy Language with complementary forms of accessible communication, including visual, audio-based, or interpersonal support.

Easy Language can therefore be considered as a structural condition of participation rather than a supplementary service. Its systematic integration into written and oral communication – including websites, museum wall labels, brochures, and audio formats – is central to inclusive cultural practice. Strengthening these dimensions not only improves institutional practice but also contributes to the realisation of access to culture as a human right (United Nations, 1948; United Nations, 2006).

4.4 Implications for inclusive cultural practice and policy

Improving accessibility in cultural institutions requires a more systematic focus on the conditions under which people with intellectual disabilities can access and engage with cultural offers. For cultural institutions, this implies that accessibility should not be treated as an additional feature, but as a core component of cultural provision. A key element is the systematic integration of Easy Language across different communicative formats, including digital platforms, on-site information, exhibition texts, guided tours and audio formats. Easy Language alone is not sufficient and needs to be complemented by other accessible communication formats, such as visual or interpersonal support.

Participation also depends on whether people can orient themselves, understand the environment, and act independently within it. This includes providing alternative modes of access, such as non-digital options, as well as ensuring clear orientation through signage, pictograms, and Easy Language instructions and the availability of visible and approachable support. In addition, staff play a central role in enabling participation and need to be prepared to communicate in accessible and supportive ways.

For policymakers and funding bodies, these considerations underline the importance of linking public support to explicit and verifiable accessibility criteria. The 2021 Guidelines of the National Cultural Dialogue already provide a framework (Nationaler Kulturdialog, 2021), but their implementation remains uneven. Strengthening incentives and monitoring mechanisms may support a shift from pilot initiatives towards accessibility as standard practice. This includes requiring publicly funded institutions to provide accessible information, to offer non-digital access options, and to involve people with intellectual disabilities in the design and evaluation of cultural offers.

Ultimately, the systematic integration of Easy Language and inclusive communication into cultural practice is not only a matter of service improvement but also a legal obligation under the CRPD (United Nations, 2006). Embedding Easy Language and accessible communication as standard elements of cultural provision is central to realising cultural participation as a human right. Addressing these dimensions can enable cultural institutions to move beyond compliance and foster more meaningful cultural participation for people with ID, while also benefiting a broader range of visitors.

The findings point to a shift towards more self-directed forms of participation, which remain insufficiently supported under current conditions. This highlights the need to further strengthen communicative and structural accessibility in order to enable more independent forms of cultural participation.

4.5 Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the exploratory design was based on two focus groups with a relatively small number of participants. While the discussions generated substantial and nuanced insights, the results cannot be generalised to all people with intellectual disabilities in Switzerland. Second, the study was restricted to the German-speaking part of the country, and experiences in other linguistic regions may differ, particularly in terms of accessible information and institutional practices. Third, recruitment relied on personal and professional networks linked to previous inclusion projects, which may have influenced the sample by favouring participants already familiar with accessibility issues.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a valuable starting point for further research. Participation of people with intellectual disabilities in cultural life in Switzerland has so far mainly been addressed through practice-oriented projects but has not yet been systematically examined in sustained empirical research. Future work should therefore involve larger and more diverse samples and include comparative analyses across Switzerland and internationally. Mixed-methods approaches that combine focus groups, surveys, and systematic accessibility audits (e.g. websites, ticketing systems, signage) would allow for a more comprehensive understanding. Particular attention should also be given to the design and evaluation of Easy Language audio guides, including evaluations of comprehension, speech rate, and user experience. Research comparing institutions with and without inclusion labels, such as *Kultur inklusiv* (Pro Infrms, n.d.), could shed light on the effectiveness of policy instruments.

Equally important are participatory approaches that actively involve people with intellectual disabilities in the research process. Their direct involvement would not only broaden the evidence base but also ensure that future studies on cultural leisure participation reflect lived experiences more accurately.

Finally, future research should also explore overlaps with other groups who face similar barriers, such as older adults, migrants, or people with limited digital literacy. Investigating these intersections may help identify inclusive solutions that benefit a wider audience while still addressing the specific needs of people with intellectual disabilities.

5 Conclusion

This study examined the accessibility of cultural leisure activities for people with intellectual disabilities in Switzerland, revealing persistent barriers in access and participation. While participation often still takes place within organised group settings, the findings also point to a shift towards more self-directed forms of engagement. However, these developments remain insufficiently supported, as barriers persist across all stages of the visit and are particularly pronounced in individually organised visits.

Efforts to improve accessibility are visible, yet they often remain fragmented and limited to isolated measures rather than being part of a systematic approach. Notably, several initiatives and committed actors have developed valuable and innovative practices. However, these efforts remain largely project-based and have not yet been translated into systematic practice.

This reflects a broader structural issue: accessibility is still frequently understood in a narrow sense, focusing on individual adjustments instead of addressing the full complexity of participation. As a result, measures tend to respond to specific problems rather than creating conditions that enable participation in a consistent and sustainable way across all stages of a cultural visit.

Within this context, Easy Language emerges as a key instrument for enabling access to cultural participation. It plays a crucial role in making information understandable and in supporting orientation and engagement. However, the findings also underline that Easy Language alone is not sufficient. Its potential unfolds only when it is embedded within a broader, multi-layered approach that combines different communicative formats, structural conditions, and forms of support.

At a broader level, there remains a persistent gap in awareness. People with ID are still insufficiently recognised as potential and legitimate participants in cultural life – not only within cultural institutions, but also at the level of policy and society more broadly. This lack of recognition contributes to the continued marginalisation of their needs in the design of cultural offers. Strengthening awareness is therefore a key prerequisite for change.

In this context, people with ID need to be involved more systematically in the development of cultural offers. Participatory and co-creative approaches can contribute to identifying relevant barriers, developing more appropriate formats, and questioning existing assumptions about who cultural institutions are designed for. Cultural mediation can play a central role as an interface in this process, linking institutions with diverse audiences and supporting more inclusive forms of engagement.

However, the implementation of such approaches is closely linked to structural conditions, including the availability of financial and human resources. Developing accessible formats, providing inclusive communication,

and involving target groups require time, expertise, and funding. In times of increasing financial constraints, including in the cultural sector, there is a risk that accessibility remains underprioritised, particularly for groups that are already marginalised in other areas of society.

Against this background, strengthening accessibility in cultural participation should not be understood solely as a question of improving services, but as part of a broader commitment to human rights. Ensuring access to culture contributes to the realisation of cultural participation as a human right and, more broadly, to more inclusive and equitable societies.

Bibliography

- BOHMAN, U. (2021). Easy Language in Sweden. In: C. Lindholm & U. Vanhatalo (eds.), *Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe*. Frank & Timme, 527–566.
- British Council (2021). *Time to act: How lack of knowledge in the cultural sector creates barriers for disabled artists and audiences* [Final report]. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/time_to_act_full_report.pdf
- BREDEL, U., & MAAB, C. (2016). *Leichte Sprache: Theoretische Grundlagen* (Duden Band 4). Dudenverlag.
- Bundesamt für Statistik (2024). 15 Millionen Eintritte in Schweizer Museen im Jahr 2023. In: *Bundesamt für Statistik*. Retrieved September 5, 2025, from <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/kultur-medien-informationsgesellschaft-sport/kultur/museen.assetdetail.33306443.html>
- DRÖGE, K. (2024). *noScribe. AI-powered Audio Transcription (Version 0.6.2.)* [Computer software]. <https://github.com/kaixxx/noScribe>
- GIRARD-GROEBER, S., & LICHTENAUER, A. (2024). Was ist Leichte Sprache? In: G. Antener, A. Parpan-Blaser, S. Girard-Groeber, & A. Lichtenauer (eds.), *Leichte Sprache: Grundlagen, Diskussion und Praxisfelder*. Kohlhammer, 21–34.
- GRATTON, N. (2020). People with learning disabilities and access to mainstream arts and culture: A participatory action research approach. In: *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 48 (2), 106–114. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bld.12303>

- KRÖGER, J. (2020). Communication barriers and cultural participation: A visit to a wildlife park as a multicodeable accessible text. In: S. Hansen-Schirra & C. Maaß (eds.), *Easy Language Research: Text and User Perspectives*. Frankfurt & Timme, 179–193.
- LEAHY, A., & FERRI, D. (2022). The right to participate in cultural life of persons with disabilities in Europe: Where is the paradigm shift? In: *Alter*, 16 (4), 5–29. <https://doi.org/10.4000/alterjdr.1430>
- LEAHY, A., & FERRI, D. (2023). Barriers to cultural participation by people with disabilities in Europe: A study across 28 countries. In: *Disability & Society*, 39 (10), 2465–2487. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2023.2222898>
- MACHUCA AYUSO, M. J., & MATAMALA, A. (2025). Easy audios: From readability to listenability. In: *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, 8 (1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v8i1.2025.345>
- MASTROGIUSEPPE, M., SPAN, S., & BORTOLOTTI, E. (2021). Improving accessibility to cultural heritage for people with intellectual disabilities: A tool for observing the obstacles and facilitators for the access to knowledge. In: *Alter*, 15 (2), 113–123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alter.2020.06.016>
- MAYRING, P. (2015). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: Grundlagen und Techniken* (12th ed.). Beltz.
- Nationaler Kulturdialog (2021). *Förderung kultureller Teilhabe: Ein Leitfaden für Förderstellen*. Bundesamt für Kultur.
- Naturhistorisches Museum der Universität Zürich. (n.d.). *Barrierefreiheit*. Retrieved September 20, 2025, from <https://www.nmz.uzh.ch/de/besucherinformation/barrierefreiheit.html>
- PARPAN-BLASER, A., GIRARD-GROEBER, S., ANTENER, G., ARN, C., BAUMANN, R., CAPLAZI, A., CARRER, L., DIACQUENOD, V., LICHTENAUER, A., & STERCHI, A. (2021). Easy Language in Switzerland. In: C. Lindholm & U. Vanhatalo (eds.), *Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe*. Frankfurt & Timme, 573–622.
- PITTON, P., & STOCKER STEINKE, S. (2024). Leichte Sprache in der Kultur. In: G. Antener, A. Parpan-Blaser, S. Girard-Groebler, & A. Lichtenauer (eds.), *Leichte Sprache: Grundlagen, Diskussionen und Praxisfelder*. Kohlhammer, 208–215.
- Pro Infirmis (n.d.). *Fachstelle Kultur Inklusiv*. Retrieved September 15, 2025, from <https://www.kulturinklusiv.ch/fachstelle/fachstelle-kultur-inklusiv.html>

- PUJADAS-FARRERAS, M. (2025). Speech rate perception in audios in Easy Language amongst individuals with intellectual disabilities. In: *Cadernos de Tradução*, 45 (special issue 2), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-7968.2025.e106792>
- SCHULZ, M., MACK, B., & RENN, O. (2012). Fokusgruppen in der empirischen Sozialwissenschaft: Von der Konzeption bis zur Auswertung. Springer VS.
- SCHUM, S. (2024). Museum texts – On breaking down linguistic barriers in museums and art exhibitions. In: C. Maaß & I. Rink (eds.), *Handbook of Accessible Communication*. Frank & Timme, 577–591. https://doi.org/10.57088/978-3-7329-8775-7_30
- SMIDT, S. (2024). Leichte Sprache im Museum. In: G. Antener, A. Parpan-Blaser, S. Girard-Groeber, & A. Lichtenauer (eds.), *Leichte Sprache: Grundlagen, Diskussionen und Praxisfelder*. Kohlhammer, 221–228.
- STOCKER STEINKE, S., & STAUB, S. (2016). *Barrierefreie Museen: Hinweise und Anregungen*. Verband der Museen der Schweiz.
- STOCKER STEINKE, S. (2025, January 12). *Barrierefreiheit und Zugänglichkeit – eine Einordnung*. Inkluseum. <https://www.inkluseum.ch/post/barrierefreiheit-und-zug%C3%A4nglichkeit-eine-einordnung>
- Tages-Anzeiger (2025, September 24). *Kunsthhaus Zürich wird cashless: Überwachungsgesellschaft sagt einer, der nur bar zahlt*. Tages Anzeiger. <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/kein-bargeld-im-kunsthhaus-zuerich-tech-foerderer-uebt-kritik-130573715144>
- United Nations (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- United Nations (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)* (A/RES/61/106). Department of Economics and Social Affairs. Social Inclusion. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>
- WEL project (2023–2026). WEL (From written to oral texts in Easy Language: Easy audios in cultural visits and video games). <https://webs.uab.cat/wel/en/>