



CULTURAL MEDIATION AND ACCESSIBILITY: PROMOTING INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS – A CASE STUDY OF THE INCLUSIVE MUSEUM PROJECTⁱ

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Abstract:

This paper explores the critical role of cultural mediation in fostering accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities within cultural institutions. Grounded in the framework of cultural studies and inclusion theory, the study presents a fictive case study of the 'Inclusive Museum Project,' a museum initiative designed to enhance cultural participation for individuals with physical, sensory, and cognitive impairments. The project emphasizes participatory design, adaptive technologies, and intersectoral collaboration between cultural professionals, disability organizations, and policymakers. Findings highlight the importance of universal design principles, staff training in accessibility, and community engagement as key pillars of sustainable inclusion. The paper argues that cultural institutions must transition from accessibility as compliance to accessibility as cultural value, reconfiguring mediation practices to reflect diversity, equity, and agency. Recommendations are provided for policymakers and cultural managers to strengthen inclusive mediation practices globally.

Keywords: cultural mediation, accessibility, inclusion, disability, museum studies, universal design

Résumé :

Cet article analyse le rôle de la médiation culturelle dans le renforcement de l'accessibilité et de l'inclusion des personnes en situation de handicap au sein des institutions culturelles. À travers une étude de cas fictive du « Inclusive Museum Project », l'étude

ⁱ MÉDIATION CULTURELLE ET ACCESSIBILITÉ : PROMOUVOIR L'INCLUSION DES PERSONNES HANDICAPÉES DANS LES INSTITUTIONS CULTURELLES – ÉTUDE DE CAS DU PROJET MUSÉE INCLUSIF

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met en évidence l'importance du design universel, de la co-création et de la formation professionnelle comme piliers d'une inclusion durable.

Mots-clés : médiation culturelle, accessibilité, inclusion, handicap, muséologie

1. Introduction

Access to culture is a fundamental human right enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). Yet, despite growing awareness, barriers persist in ensuring equitable participation of people with disabilities in cultural life. Cultural mediation—the process through which institutions interpret, contextualize, and communicate culture to diverse audiences—serves as a critical lever for inclusion. This paper investigates how cultural mediation practices can transform cultural institutions into inclusive spaces that reflect the diversity of their audiences. Through the fictive case study of the 'Inclusive Museum Project,' this research examines strategies that enhance accessibility, representation, and agency for persons with disabilities within museum contexts.

2. Literature Review

Scholarly literature on cultural accessibility has evolved from a focus on physical access to an emphasis on epistemic and participatory inclusion (Sandell, 2003; Hooper-Greenhill, 2013). Museums are increasingly recognized as social spaces of dialogue rather than repositories of objects (Simon, 2010). Cultural mediation extends beyond interpretation; it encompasses co-creation and mutual learning (Réseau Art et Handicap, 2018). According to Dewdney and Dibosa (2013), accessibility must be embedded in the institutional ethos rather than treated as an add-on. Recent research underscores that inclusive mediation not only benefits disabled visitors but also enriches the cultural experience for all (Kudlick, 2014).

3. Methodology

This qualitative study adopts a theoretical case study approach (Yin, 2018), constructing a fictive model based on best practices observed in leading international museums. Data are conceptual rather than empirical, drawing upon interdisciplinary sources in disability studies, museology, and cultural policy. The purpose is to demonstrate how inclusive mediation can be operationalized through design, programming, and governance frameworks.

4. The Inclusive Museum Project: A Fictive Case Study

The 'Inclusive Museum Project' is a hypothetical initiative implemented in a national museum context. Its primary goal is to eliminate attitudinal and environmental barriers to participation. The project includes three major components: (1) Universal Design Implementation, focusing on sensory-friendly spaces and tactile exhibits; (2) Digital Mediation Tools, including an accessible mobile application with sign-language video guides and audio descriptions; and (3) Co-curation Workshops, where people with disabilities collaborate with curators to shape exhibition narratives. The museum also established a permanent advisory board comprising individuals from disability organizations and accessibility experts. The project's evaluation, conducted after two years, showed significant improvements in visitor satisfaction, employee awareness, and overall inclusivity.

5. Discussion

The case study illustrates how cultural mediation can function as a transformative practice, fostering empowerment rather than paternalistic accessibility. Central to this transformation is the concept of co-creation, which positions persons with disabilities not as passive beneficiaries but as active cultural agents. Institutional commitment, resource allocation, and continuous staff education are prerequisites for sustainable inclusion. Furthermore, accessibility technologies must be integrated into curatorial and design processes from the outset rather than retrofitted. The fictive project underscores the ethical dimension of cultural work: inclusion is not merely a legal obligation but a manifestation of cultural democracy.

6. Conclusion

Inclusive cultural mediation redefines both accessibility and participation, aligning with global frameworks such as the UNCRPD and UNESCO's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through the lens of the Inclusive Museum Project, this paper demonstrates that meaningful access is achieved through institutional transformation, co-creation, and systemic change. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of inclusive mediation on audience diversity and institutional innovation. Ultimately, accessibility must be understood as a dynamic process of negotiation and collaboration—an ongoing cultural practice that embodies equality, creativity, and shared humanity.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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