

The 16th research conference of the Nordic Network on Disability Research, Reykjavík, May 2023

# Co-Designing with People with Learning Disabilities: an architectural perspective

---

**Menatalla Kasem**

The Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University, United Kingdom

Architecture Department, Faculty of Engineering, Zagazig University, Egypt

“promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities”

---

Article 1, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities  
(CRPD) 2006

To enable persons with disabilities to **live independently and participate fully** in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to **ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis** with others, to .....

a) **Buildings**, roads, transportation and other **indoor and outdoor facilities**, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces;.....

---

Article 9, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities  
(CRPD) 2006

Are buildings accessible for all  
people?

# Research problem

Lack of Self-Advocacy



```
graph TD; A[Lack of Self-Advocacy] --> B[Building Standards and Regulations]; B --> C[Architects' Attitude Towards Learning Disability]; C --> D[Lack of Architectural Guidelines for People with Learning Disability];
```

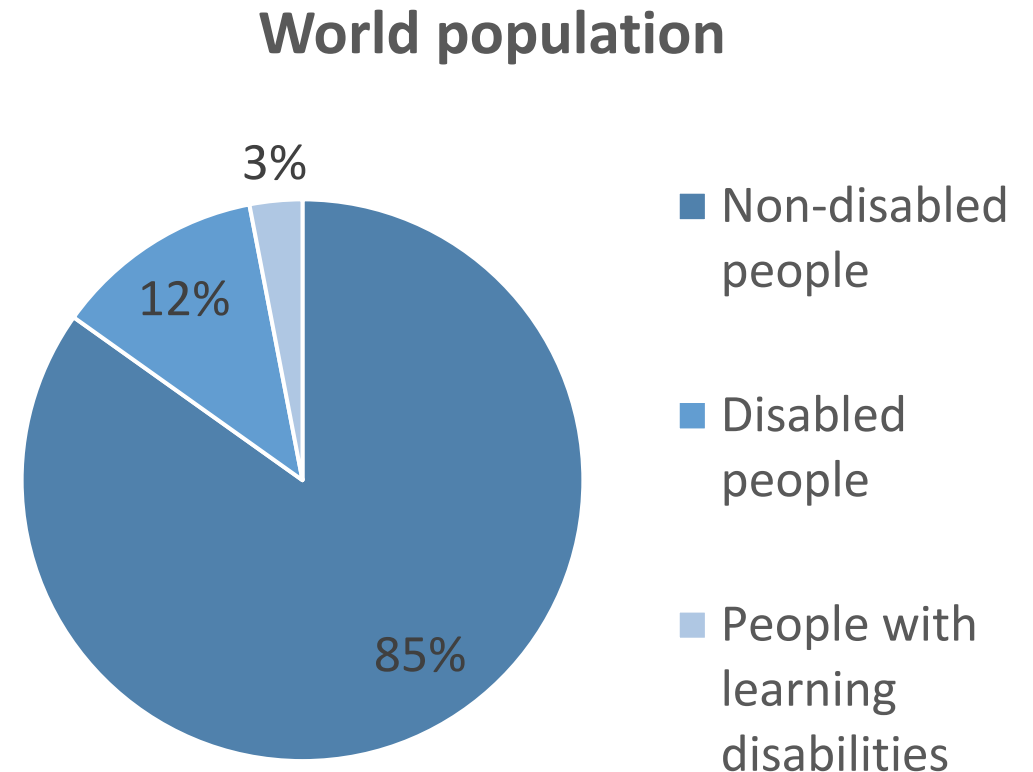
Building Standards and Regulations

Architects' Attitude Towards Learning Disability

Lack of Architectural Guidelines for People with Learning Disability

# What is learning disability?

- Usually not visible.
- Someone with learning disability might find a difficulty:
  - Understanding complicated information.
  - Learning some skills.
  - Looking after themselves.
  - Everyday activities.

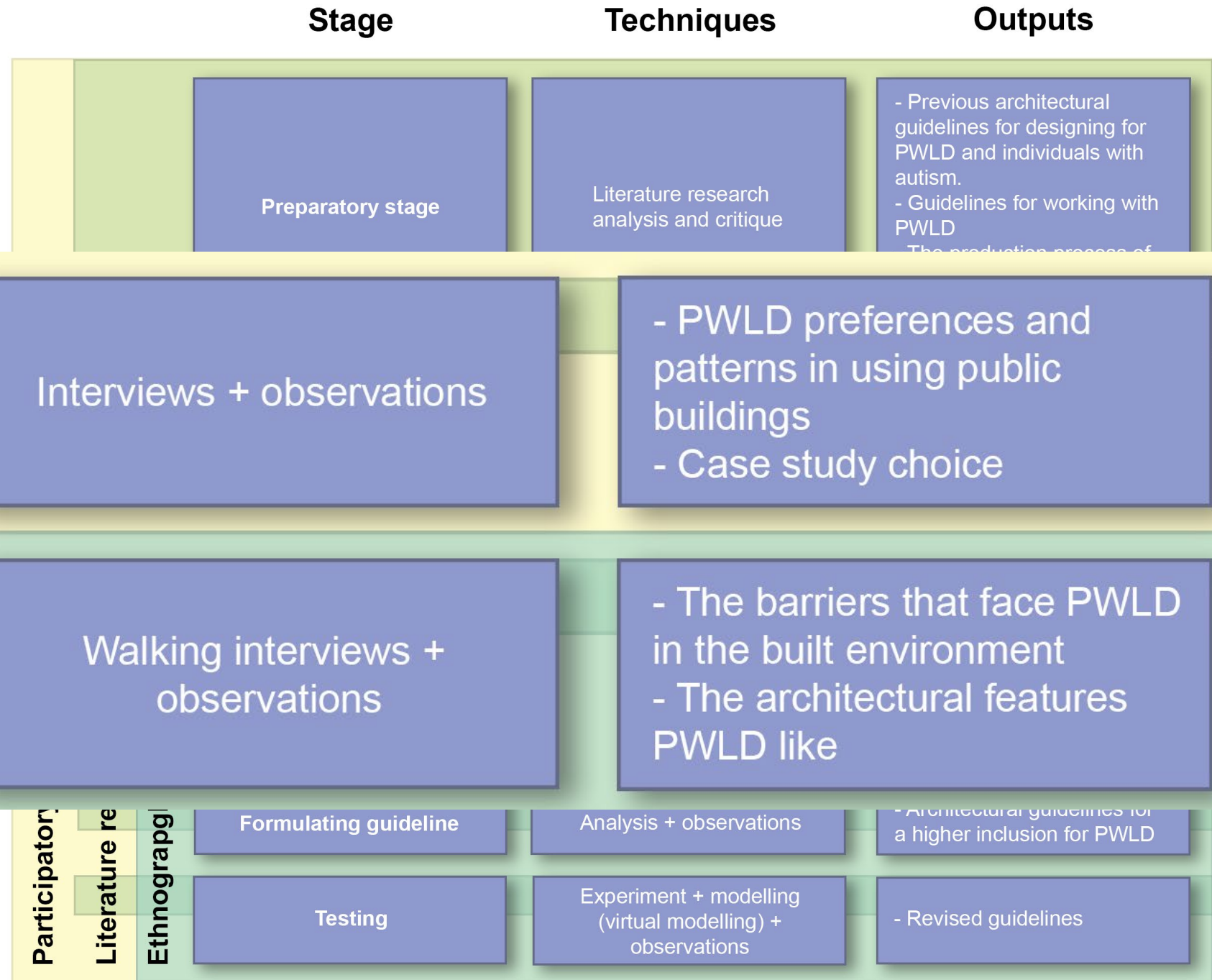


Research aim

To fully include people with learning disability in creating accessible architectural guidelines

How can this be achieved?

# Methodology



Participatory

Literature re

Ethnographi



# Co-Design with People with Learning Disability

- Considering that people with learning disability are among society's most vulnerable citizens.
- Special approaches and techniques must be considered when dealing with them.
- In order to enable them to generate information and share knowledge on their own terms.

# Phase 1

---

Exploratory phase

# Enabling techniques

## **Field observations**

- Collaboration with self-advocacy organization.

## **Interviews**

- Employing a co-researcher with a learning disability.
- Use of different communication tools (e.g. cue cards).
- All participant facing material are in easy read format.
- Use open questions.
- Face-to-face and verbal admission.
- Building rapport.
- Familiar locations.

# Key finding of phase 1

70% of the sample had positive comments on commercial buildings



# Lessons learned from phase 1

## **Accessibility notes for participants**

- Easy-read is not necessarily accessible
- Cue cards are a great prompt
- ‘What is your learning disability?’, is a stressful question

## **Accessibility notes for the co-researcher**

- Following up with the interview questions from a paper is hard.
- Holding the recording device is inconvenient.

# Phase 2



Primary phase

# Enabling techniques

## Workplace + field observations

- Employing a co-researcher with a learning disability.
- Working in a self-advocacy organization for people with learning disability.

## Walking interviews

- Employing a co-researcher with a learning disability.
- Use of different communication tools (e.g. cue cards).
- All participant facing material are in easy read format.
- Use open questions.
- Face-to-face and verbal admission.
- Building rapport.
- Familiar locations.
- Activities/ games.
- Follow the participant lead.
- The centre was visited before the interview to locate, seats, escape space and toilets in case needed.

# Key findings of phase 2



Familiarity is critical for people with learning disability.



Shopping centres are entertainment facilities for people with learning disability.



People with learning disability are accessibility experts.



People with learning disability want to be heard.



# Lessons Learned from phase 2

- Visuals over verbal
- Verbal over written
- Make it personal
- Be Interactive
- Be Patient

# The added-value of the co-researcher

- Conversation facilitator
- Accessibility officer/ advisor
- Recruiter
- Allow a bigger observation space
- Tackle prejudice



# Conclusion

---

- People with learning disability need to be included in research about people with learning disability.
- In order to do that, we need to bridge the communication gap between research and the learning disability community.
- Co-researcher/facilitator from the learning disability community is one way to bridge that gap.
- People with learning disability have a great hidden potential that needs to be explored.

# Thank You

Questions

- Menatalla Kasem  
[Kasemmg@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Kasemmg@cardiff.ac.uk)

LinkedIn



CU profile

