**National Education: The Annual Field Trip
as an Instrument of National Education in Israel’s State Education System, 2008–2020**

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Introduction

. . . To educate the complete Hebrew, it is not enough for us to open the wellspring of the spirit of Israel to him. Rather, it is our task to bring him into direct contact with the nature of our land, blessed with sights to see. Be aware that love of homeland is acquired by experiencing the tribulations of wandering and moving about along the byways, and the more the individual travels, the more passion for the homeland will strike root in his soul. . . .[[1]](#footnote-1)

With thes words, the travel guides Pinhas Cohen and David Benvenisti chose to preface their guide to the Land of Israel, published in the late 1930s. In their view, one way to build a new society grounded in Zionist narratives and to nurture Jews’ connection with their land is to take them on field trips around the country. In fact, in the various education settings established in the country in the dawn of modern Jewish settlement in the 1880s, from preschools up to primary schools in towns and villages, through high schools, and up to the teachers’ seminar, the field trip became a conspicuous educational in the curriculum.[[2]](#footnote-2) The religious model of pilgrimage was consciously avoided in these trips, with the outings having no specific sanctified destination and no connection with any system of religious belief. Instead, they were dominated by thinking about nature and education in the manner of the Jewish Enlightenment, similar to European thought about tourist travel at this time, centering on modern scientific observation and also, to some extent, entertainment and attention to children’s need to head into the open air. As the Zionist project in Eretz Israel expanded and the existential struggles of the Yishuv (the organised pre-independence Jewish community) against the British and the Arab population multiplied, so did the landscape become charged with more and more national significance. The Yishuv leadership saw outings around the country and direct acquaintance with its landscapes as an important educational tool for promoting Zionist ideology, enhancing national consciousness, and promoting independent Jewish sovereignty in the country. By implication, beyond their pedagogical goals, these outings had an emphasis on the national aspect that combined proud national defiance in the sense of ‘We’re here despite it all!’[[3]](#footnote-3)

After statehood was attained, field trips continued to figure prominently in defining the way space fit into patterns of symbolic memory. Many perceived them as proof of ownership of the place, and the individual’s physical struggle with the hardships of the journey were seen as equivalent to the national struggle to gain control of the country.[[4]](#footnote-4) From the institutional standpoint, even in the first stages of the country’s education system, there was a need to anchor the guidelines and the way the country should be explored in rules and regulations that appeared and were occasionally updated in instructions from the Director General for Field Trips at the Ministry of Education.[[5]](#footnote-5) Over the years, the Director General’s instructions went out of their way to emphasise the nature of the field trip as a value-centric and meaningful activity associated with the values and goals of the national education system.[[6]](#footnote-6) In 2004, however, the Israel State Comptroller published a sharp critique of field trips in the education system, pointing to defects and vagueness about the guidelines and the conduct of the trips[[7]](#footnote-7) and stressing, *inter alia,* the opacity and the flawed attention to the pedagogical aspect of the trip.[[8]](#footnote-8) Pursuant to the report, the State Control Committee of the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) convened in order to formalise and fine-tune the rules and regulations pertaining to these outings.[[9]](#footnote-9) In 2008, in accordance with the committee’s conclusions and guidelines, the Ministry of Education published a ‘core program for field trips’ that was meant mainly to regulate the pedagogical contents of the organisation and administration of field trips in the education system.[[10]](#footnote-10) Among the principal goals, as stated at the beginning of the program, the purpose of the field trips is said to ‘acquaint [students] with and love of the homeland, and to cultivate a commitment to and responsibility for the Land of Israel, its landscape, nature, and human society, and the State of Israel’. Emphasis was given to attaining the national objectives of the field trip by ‘reinforcing national consciousness in connection with the history and legacy of the [Jewish] people in the Land of Israel’.[[11]](#footnote-11)

According to the nationalism scholar Hedva Ben-Israel, research that links education and nationalism should also examine the strategies by which national ideas were mobilised in order to instill national narratives among those participating in the field trips.[[12]](#footnote-12) Drawing on her approach, the purpose of the article that follows is to assess the way the annual high-school field trip in Israel’s State education system is used to inculcate national narratives that, according to Ministry of Education leadership, help to create national identity among the students. We conducted this inquiry by analysing a variety of sources: school field-trip programs,[[13]](#footnote-13) school correspondence and documents relating to annual field trips,[[14]](#footnote-14) and interviews with field trip coordinators in selected schools.[[15]](#footnote-15) These yielded a snapshot with which we could analyse the goals and culture of the schools’ field trips.

To choose the schools, we thecalled Be-mabat rahav (From a Broad Perspective) database. The information in this database is based on an educational-information system developed by the Director of Digital Communication and Information Systems at the Ministry of Education.[[16]](#footnote-16) We used the database to choose recognised schools in the State (Jewish) sector in five Ministry of Education districts: North, Haifa, Center, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem.[[17]](#footnote-17) The State junior and senior high schools we sampled in this article are representative of the various districts in the State Jewish sector in accordance with population size.[[18]](#footnote-18)

To analyze the data, we selected several important six-year (7–12) schools that have had large enrollments (at least 1,000) over several years in order to harvest data that may provide information about the centrality and meaningful role of the school as a leading and formative institution in the community.[[19]](#footnote-19) Another source that we used to assess the educational atmosphere in the schools studied is the Shkifut be-hinukh (Transparency in education) database.[[20]](#footnote-20) This Ministry of Education database, operative since 2015, contains budgetary and quantitative data about the schools that we examined.

The article is divided into three main parts. In Part 1, we present the theoretical basis of the discussion and mention several studies that address the interaction of education and nationalism, collective memory, and school field trips. Part 2 presents the historical and scholarly background and deals with school field trips in Israel in years preceding the period investigated. Part 3 discusses the findings of the study on annual field trips in the State education system in 2008–2020 along two main paths. The first is a qualitative analysis of four areas of activity that we found dominant in annual field trips during the investigation period: instilling knowledge of the country’s geography, using the Bible, holding ceremonies in the course of the outing, and creating a challenging field trip experience. The second is a quantitative analysis of two dimensions that we found salient: the nature of overnighting in the open and the conspicuous pedagogical content of the field trips.

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1. Notes

. Cohen and Benvenisti, 1938, preface, no page noted. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . Rinot, ‘Ha-hinukh be-Eretz Yisrael,’ 621. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. .Tadmor-Shimoni, *Shi’ur moledet,* 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . The guidelines promulgated in these instructions express the educational and administrative principles of the Ministry of Education and the ways in which they are to be implemented. See Ministry of Education, Circulars of the Director General. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. . Ministry of Education, Instructions of the Director General, ‘Tiyulim u-fe’iluyot.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. . Israel State Comptroller, Report 55b for 2004, 645–654. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. . Ibid., p. 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. . State Control Committee, November 16, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. . Ministry of Education, *Tokhnit ha-liba.* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. . Ibid., Preface, no page number. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. . Ben-Israel, *Be-shem ha-uma,* 74–75. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. . All recognised schools (those carrying the Ministry of Education emblem) must submit an annual field trip plan, constructed jointly by the entire school faculty under the principal’s direction. See Ministry of Education, *Hora’ot mankal misrad ha-hinukh* ‘Tiyulim’. Section 3.1.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. . To carry out the study, we approached the schools that we surveyed and asked them to share correspondence and documents that might be helpful in understanding how the trips were planned and carried out. The documents that we gathered were contingent on the schools’ responsiveness and ability to assent to our requests; they differ in content and range among schools examined. Examples of such documents are security authorizations that the schools issued before each outing, specifying the hikes that the school will be taking; circulars to parents and students in advance of the trip; minutes of staff meetings before and after the annual field trip; and correspondence with service providers and hospitality venues. These sources helped us to gain insights into the planning aspects of the field trips and the extent of the schools’ commitment and investment in making the annual field trip happen. See *Hora’ot mankal misrad ha-hinukh*, ‘Tiyulim u-fe’iluyot’, Section 3.3.2 (April 2, 2019), <https://apps.education.gov.il/Mankal/Horaa.aspx?siduri=244> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. . In accordance with instructions from the Director General for Field Trips, principals must appoint a member of teaching faculty as the coordinator of field trips. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. . Ministry of Education, Development Administration, ‘Mipui ve-tekhnun’. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. . The system also provides statistical information about schools in other sectors such as Bedouin, Arab, Haredi (‘ultra-Orthodox’), and Non-Recognised. In this article, we do not refer to these schools on the assumption that their field trips are different in their nature and goals. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. . We focused on junior and senior high schools because annual field trips at these levels are at least two days long if not longer. In primary schools, there is a tendency to limit field trips to a single day. The Ministry of Education core program (*Tokhnit ha-liba*) for field trips requires overnight trips only from seventh grade up. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. . For example, in accordance with data published in 2018, if we wished to search for the largest schools in the districts in terms of enrollment, the system indicates that in the Central District, the Dror Education Campus school has seventy-nine classes and nearly 2,500 students; in Tel Aviv District, the Kefar Hayarok School has seventy-one classes and more than 2,300 students; and in Haifa District, Amal Hadera School has eighty-seven classes and more than 2,000 students, and so on. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. . Ministry of Education, Shkifut be-hinukh. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)