13th ALTER Conference: Transformations

University of Innsbruck

8-10 July 2025

Draft catalogue of abstracts

Per Type and Topic,
in alphabetical order by title.

Individual Sessions:

Topic 1

Policy and societal contexts for disability rights

"With Someone by Their Side": Critical Issues Regarding the Role of Support Teachers in the Italian School System

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Abstract

Since 1977, the figure of the support teacher has been present in all levels and types of education within the Italian school system. This institution aimed to overcome segregated classrooms and guarantee, for the first time, equal access to education for all students, regardless of motor, sensory, psychological, or cognitive vulnerabilities and limitations, consistent with the mainstreaming approach (Eurydice, 2004). The law emphasized two key aspects: the specialization of this role and the coordination among all teachers within the classroom to ensure effective support. Nearly fifty years later, a reflection on this professional figure is crucial due to the increasing diversification and certification of student needs and the evolving understanding of disability. Following the definition of disability outlined in the 2009 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the current approach in the Italian school system is formally based on the "social model of disability" (Oliver, 2004; Barnes, 2008), which incorporates principles of non-discrimination, equal opportunities, autonomy, and independence to achieve full social inclusion. This model acknowledges the agency of individuals with disabilities and the impact of social and environmental contexts and barriers that contribute to disability. Consequently, the role of the support teacher is reinterpreted through an inclusive and advocacy lens (Nieminen and Pesonen 2022; Frohn 2024), to create a learning environment that values diversity and meets the needs of all students, regardless of their abilities. From this perspective, the support teacher acts as a facilitator of inclusion for everyone, not just for the student with disabilities, through collaboration with curriculum teachers and co-teaching practices (Pesonen et al., 2021). This contribution critically examines the role of support teachers, focusing on institutional funding, the varied family demands for support related to diverse disabilities and vulnerabilities, teachers training, and student certification process, recently marked by increasing medicalization and resulting stigmatization compared to typically developing peers. This study uses secondary data from institutional sources (MIM, 2023; Istat, 2023). Organizational and structural aspects within the school system, on the one hand, and the training and experience of teachers, on the other, represent the main critical issues. The principal challenges include a quantitative shortage of qualified support teachers relative to demand, inadequate professional development opportunities, limited integration of digital technologies to facilitate inclusive pedagogy, an insufficient allocation of support hours per student, and discontinuity in teacher assignments across educational cycles. Furthermore, a negative perception persists: support teachers are frequently viewed by their colleagues as having lower status; similarly, parents often express concerns regarding their perceived inadequacy and inability

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to address students' diverse learning needs (Ianes, 2015). Consequently, support teachers appear to occupy a marginalized position, implicitly relegated to a secondary role by colleagues, thereby overlooking the critical nature of their work, which, more so than that of general education teachers, necessitates a focus on personalized learning. These combined factors underscore the need for regulatory reform, encompassing mandatory continuing professional development and enhanced specialized training.

Academic Education as a Way to Promote the Well-Being of People with Disabilities and Specific Learning Disorders

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Abstract

In the broader social context, individuals with disabilities must be recognized as capable of shaping their futures and contributing meaningfully to society. Education, particularly higher education, plays a critical role in this process by serving as a pathway to autonomy, empowerment, and active citizenship. Yet, achieving full inclusion in academic environments requires addressing persistent barriers that hinder equitable access and participation.

This research investigates the role of pedagogy in higher education, focusing on the current conditions of Italian universities and proposing strategies to foster a more accessible and inclusive academic environment. The research is driven by the increasing presence of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and aims to implement a systemic approach based on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework and the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). These models provide a foundation for designing spaces, tools, and teaching methodologies that meet diverse needs without waiting for individuals to request accommodations.

The research involves a multi-phase process conducted at the University of Pisa, starting with an extensive survey and needs assessment of students, faculty, and administrative staff, including those with disabilities, learning disabilities (LSD), or no specific conditions. The holistic and systematic perspective aims to identify the barriers faced by different stakeholders and develop flexible, inclusive, and personalized interventions. Particular attention is given to integrating the needs of both students and professors, emphasizing the creation of inclusive environments and practices that support accessibility in all aspects of academic life.

The findings will contribute to the formulation of university-wide guidelines for accessibility and inclusion, emphasizing the importance of vertical continuity with secondary schools to ensure a more informed transition and stable study pathways for students with disabilities or learning difficulties. The project also highlights the university's pivotal role in promoting inclusion, both as a driver of social change and as a hub of collaboration with organizations and institutions.

Ultimately, this research seeks to address the comprehensive well-being of students and staff by developing a sustainable and dynamic model of inclusion in higher education. By adopting flexible methodologies that adapt to the needs identified during the research process, the project aspires to create academic environments that embrace diversity at all levels and foster equitable access to education.

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Amplifying Student Voice in Inclusive Education: Insights from a Systematic Review

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Abstract

International frameworks on inclusive education emphasize the need for student participation in shaping their learning environments. However, despite policy advancements, a significant gap persists between these guidelines and real-world educational practices. Many schools still struggle to implement participatory inclusive approaches, which demonstrates the urgency of rethinking inclusive education beyond mere physical integration and addressing the structural barriers that hinder student participation. A key aspect is the need for frameworks that not only listen to students with disabilities but actively integrate their perspectives in educational practices. This aligns with the call for systemic transformation, as emphasized in critical disability studies and participatory research approaches.
This study investigates how Student Voice, as conceptualized by Cook-Sather (2006), can bridge this gap by ensuring that students with disabilities not only participate but also have their perspectives meaningfully incorporated into decision-making processes shaping their educational environments. To address this issue, we conducted a systematic review examining Student Voice practices involving students with disabilities across academic settings, from primary school to university, in both inclusive and special education contexts. Following the PRISMA framework, 47 studies were identified. Preliminary results indicate that most Student Voice initiatives rely on speech-centric methods. While alternative methods such as photo-elicitation and participatory visual research (Shaw, 2021) have been explored, they remain underutilized in formal education settings.

Many students with disabilities still lack meaningful opportunities for self-expression and agency in these processes because practices rely on traditional verbal communication methods, marginalizing students with complex communication needs and limiting their ability to contribute to discussions about their education (Lewis-Dagnell et al., 2023). The classic questions of ”nothing about us without us” and ”who speaks?” remain highly relevant, as students with disabilities continue to struggle for recognition as legitimate participants in educational decision-making.

Listening to non-verbal communication remains a significant challenge in Student Voice practices. Our first results highlight the need for decolonizing participatory frameworks, moving beyond dominant Western paradigms that privilege verbal interaction (Grace et al., 2024). Developing inclusive Student Voice methodologies that integrate multimodal communication is essential for ensuring participation for all.

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By presenting the preliminary findings of the systematic review, this study contributes to the discourse on inclusive education by offering evidence-based recommendations for more accessible and equitable participatory practices.

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Answering to Ableism: Students‘ Responses to (disabling) Expectations and Conditions at Universities

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Abstract

In Germany and Austria, about one-third of university students identify as experiencing disabilities in their studies, while the number of registered as claimants of support undergraduates remains much lower. Hence, disability allowances in higher education are only seldom granted. Many universities have started to improve campuses, curricula, and social activities, including diversity agendas pertaining to gender, age, and migration. However, universities rarely reach out to persons with disabilities. Despite the existing EU regulation based on the CRPD, ableist structures and attitudes remain dominant; thus, students face non-accessible environments when entering their studies.
For this contribution, I focus on students‘ narratives that focus on persevering within their degrees and graduating from their studies. Guiding questions were: What are the barriers considering communication on campus? How do students cope with the pressure? How is the constant need of proving their individual rights and needs affecting their lives at University? What ways do they find to use their own voice? How can one realize an ableist situation and be empowered to take action against it?

Form 2019-2023 data was gathered. I interviewed 18 persons regarding their paths of education including school experiences and their position at the Universities in the beginning of their studies. This forms the basis of this contribution. The students are enrolled in different university degrees at German-speaking universities. These institutions have very different inclusion offers. This paper interrogates students‘ experiences with the entry phase into academic education. It looks at the way they reflect on experiences of sensory and physical impairments as well as trauma. The empirical study gives insights into students’ school careers, identity formation, academic orientation, and ambitions within academic organizations.

I develop my analysis of the material in two steps. First, I draw on to focus on the obstacles in individual lives to describe barriers and make disabling situations visible to others.

Second, I aim to illuminate the experiences of students with disabilities when it comes to ableism in higher education. Drawing on my previous doctoral work on ‘Mechanisms of inclusion an exclusion, experienced by students with disabilities over the life course,’ I will show how students with disabilities face every-day tasks of university life and specific challenges that arise.

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By describing how students negotiate for compensation and disability allowances during and after entering university, as well as throughout the course of being enrolled, their student subject formation will be discussed. I argue that, depending on inclusion policies and services, different ways of disability disclosure manifest.

This holds especially true for those who, discover their difficulties later in life – hence later within the student life. They have to find answers to specific questions, before they do take action to ensure their human right to participation in higher education at the university. Necessary questions to negotiate, include: Do I have the right to claim a disability? How do I plan to handle a stigma around being a disabled person? Who is going to know about my disadvantages?

Autonomy as Institutional Practice: A Comparative Ethnography of Residential Care for People with Intellectual Disabilities in France

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Abstract

Over the past decades, disability policies have increasingly promoted autonomy and independent living as key objectives, in line with the UNCRPD. This shift has led to significant transformations in the organization of collective housing for people with intellectual disabilities, and in some cases, to their complete closure, fostering the emergence of more inclusive housing models (Mansell &Ericsson 2013).
In France, which ratified the UNCRPD in 2010, this new disability policy agenda has resulted in a growing number of inclusive housing facilities supported by personal assistance and other services. However, the number of specialized residential care facilities for people with disabilities has not significantly decreased (Henckes 2024). These institutions, criticized by the UNCRPD in 2022, now seek to reconcile their traditional care model with the imperative of promoting autonomy and inclusion for their residents. Autonomy-and more recently, self-determination-has thus become a central principle guiding professional assistance practices in disability services.

Goffman's *Asylums* (1961) demonstrated how 'total institutions' lead to the social inadaptation of their interned residents. Today's institutions that seek to distance themselves-at least in theory-from this model claim not only to consider their residents' autonomy but also to actively foster greater autonomy, preparing individuals for a greater inclusion or even an independent living afterwards.

My research focuses on non-medicalized residential care facilities for people with intellectual disabilities in France, a case of particular interest as a deinstitutionalization of intellectual disability has still been viewed as especially challenging for its potential tension between a horizon of autonomy and a specific character of this disability (Davy 2015).

Methods and data : This communication will be principally based on the analyses of the data collected for my thesis in sociology in 2022-2025. The methods used include ethnographic observations of assistance practices in several institutions and in-depth interviews with professionals working with people with intellectual disabilities.

Results : The aim of this communication is to demonstrate how residential care facilities are trying to adapt to a new disability policy focused on promotion of individual autonomy and

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how this new objective goes is transforming professional care practices. This study examines how autonomy, as understood by professionals, emerges as a negotiated outcome between institutional rules, assistance practices, and the agency of residents themselves.

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Balancing promotion and prevention of a disability: Down Syndrome, prenatal diagnosis and selective abortion in France.

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Abstract

This study looked at the role that Down Syndrome, as an iconic figure, has been playing in the scenario of medical interruptions of pregnancies. It applied Down Syndrome on a reasoning exercise to think how a society can deal - ethically and politically - with the challenge of 'preventing' a disability and 'promoting' it positively. France seems to equate in the same governance the offer of trissomy 21 fetal investigation and medical interruption of pregnancy along with the ideological afirmation of the interests of people with Down Syndrome. This investigation tryied to capture aspects of the dissent that might exists between these two basically antogonic public agendas. It expects to had brought some light to the question of how a screening policy, especifically target to a fetal anomaly, can coexists with the public valorization of the corresponding disability. Then, as a case-study, it focused the identitary activism promoted by french women who campaign in favor of a so-called 'Deuil Perinatal' – the process of grieving that follows abortion after the diagnosis of fetal anomaly. This activism reached in France particular features that made it meaninful for social analyses. The discussion that follows is the result of the discourse analysis carried out on testimonies of IMG secondary to T21 diagnosis, as well as on a television documentary named "Le Berceau Vide". Released on France 3 open channel it had intense media coverage and interviews with the film-makers, which also provided empiric material for linguistic and sociological interpretation.Thus, by presenting these discourses on mourning after selective abortion as a legacy of IMG in France, the results aimed to capture the subtle quality of some questions, so far silenced, like the feticides performed at late-term pregnancies procedures and its close relation to Down Syndrome.

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Being Blind & Belonging in Academia

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Abstract

Blind/partially blind people are underrepresented in postsecondary and lack equitable opportunities to develop a sense of belonging. This study shares narratives from 28 blind/partially blind students from across Turtle Island (what is colonially called North America) using Teng et al.'s (2020) Belonging in Academia Model (BAM) as a conceptual framework. All 28 focus group participants spoke to their experiences as undergraduate students, although some have played additional roles, some multiple: 17 graduate students/alumni, 8 non-academic staff, 7 instructors/adjunct faculty, 4 faculty, and 1 post-doctoral fellow. Thematically analyzed findings suggest blind/partially blind peoples' perspectives offer nuance to the BAM's conceptualization of how belonging develops through affiliation, familiarity, acceptance, interdependent relationships, and sense of equity. *Interdependence* was key to building *trusting connections* for blind/partially blind students, and thus it is suggested the dimension formerly called trusting connections within the BAM be renamed interdependent relationships. Attending to the underrepresented perspectives of blind/partially blind students, stakeholders can become more responsive to the experiences of people from equity-denied groups. Understanding facilitators and barriers to belonging is starting to transform higher education, making for culturally safer practices and more inclusive pedagogical practices. Only when we create a space where *everyone* can belong will higher education move toward being more just and equitable.

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Care Poverty Among Disabled People in a Familialist Welfare Regime: Exploring Multidimensional Support Needs and Carer Relationships

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Abstract

Background and Purpose: Unmet care needs among older adults have been a focus of gerontological research since the 1980s, with the concept of 'care poverty' gaining attention in recent years. While care poverty approaches – highlighting the user perspective and the societal context of the imbalance between needs and available support – have been applied to older adults (Kröger, 2022; Chou et al., 2024), their application to disabled people remains underexplored.

Unlike older adults, disabled people often have lifelong and more complex support needs, encompassing personal, practical, and socio-emotional dimensions to facilitate their inclusion in all aspects of social life (Chou et al., 2021). However, the interconnections between these multidimensional support needs and formal and informal provisions of assistance are poorly understood. Furthermore, the dynamics between disabled people, their family carers, and formal care workers remain unclear. Applying the care poverty framework as the research lens, this study explores disabled people's lived experiences of unmet and met support needs and examines how family care and social service use shape relationships between disabled people and their informal and formal carers.

Methods: In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 disabled people with physical or vision impairment in Taiwan in 2024-2025.

Findings: While there are social services for disabled people, such as home care, personal assistance and respite care, in Taiwan, they are insufficient to support the independence disabled people aspire to. Co-payments and out-of-pocket costs force many to reduce their use of social services, prioritizing basic needs over social participation. This often shifts the caregiving work to family carers, creating tensions in family relationships. Under-resourced systems lead disabled people to invest in maintaining relationships with care workers, who often adopt flexible roles driven by a desire to "do good." Moreover, technology plays a crucial role in supporting disabled people and their formal and informal carers, yet the high cost of assistive devices creates 'technology poverty', further limiting access to necessary resources and social participation.

Conclusions: This study calls for eliminating co-payment policies and ensuring sufficient social services, including home care, personal assistance and respite care, to meet the multidimensional support needs of disabled people. Policymakers should also ensure affordable

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access to assistive technologies to reduce care and technology poverty, improve relationships between disabled people, family carers and care workers, and enhance the overall quality of life and social inclusion for disabled people and their lifelong carers.

Keywords: care poverty, unmet support needs, disabled people, family carers, care workers, technology

Community Archives of Transformation and Disability Rights Activism in Contemporary Poland: a study of NGOs' social interventions in the educational policy and practice of neurodiversive students

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Abstract

Our proposal addresses the question how do changes in the politics, education and culture of societies affect the real lives of people with disabilities? Do they lead to social inclusion and justice, or do they rather reproduce and reinforce ableist imaginaries, creating new forms of inequality, stigma and exclusion? We would like to present a study aimed at analysing the documentary resources of a disability rights NGO in Poland. We treat the resources documenting some social interventions as a disability community archive (White 2024) - a record of the living history of disability and social activism taking place 'here and now' in the context of contemporary social, political and cultural changes in a post-socialist country. The research is positioned at the intersection of disability studies and education studies, and is based on a human rights model of disability (Degener 2016, Degener & de Castro 2022).
The aim of the research project is an in-depth analysis and critical interpretation of resources documenting the activities of the Community Intervention Team (CIT), a part of the Autism Team Foundation, which cooperates with other civil organisations of people with disabilities. The Autism Team is a non-governmental organisation co-created by social activists and volunteers - people on the autism spectrum, their families and professionals. The CIT has been active since 2010 and carries out an average of 40 to 90 interventions per month. Its main objective is to prevent violations of the rights of people with disabilities, especially those on the autism spectrum.

Research Questions: By analysing the resources documenting CIT activities, we aim to answer the fundamental question: what documentation currently exists in this disability community archive (White 2024) and what can we learn from it? Other questions we are asking are: What problems are reported and by whom? What actions are taken and how are reported difficulties addressed? What is the nature of students' experiences, knowledge of disability, awareness of the needs and rights of people with disabilities? How do changes in legislation, social and educational policies affect changes in the awareness and practice of those involved in education? Is political, social and cultural change accompanied by a new approach and a different way of thinking about education - a new, more equal and equitable

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educational imaginary?

The methodology of the research is grounded in qualitative social inquiry (Denzin, Lincoln 2017). The primary methods of data collection are desk research (Moore 2018) and in-depth interviews (Vaughn, Jacquez 2020) with individuals involved in social interventions. The community archive resources will be analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2021) and discourse analysis (van Dijk 2001, Wood & Kroger 2000).
Results: In the presentation we will focus mainly on the archival resources documenting the interventions related to the 2024 campaign 'Autism friendly school - A neurodiversity friendly school'. This campaign was implemented by the Autism Team in cooperation with the Commissioner for Human Rights and the Children's Ombudsman in Poland. We will discuss how the selected examples can provide answers to the research questions.

Community Participation of People with Intellectual Disabilities: Voices and Experiences

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Abstract

Background: In the latter part of the 20th century, the social model of disability redefined disability as a form of oppression resulting from societal barriers rather than individual limitations (Oliver, 2013). This paradigm shift, enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006), emphasizes the principles of inclusion and full societal participation. Social inclusion, conceptualized as a multidimensional process, encompasses community engagement and interpersonal relationships, which are contingent upon accessibility and opportunities for interaction within various community contexts. Simplican et al. (2015) identify three levels of participation: presence, encounter, and participation. This study seeks to investigate the community participation of individuals with intellectual disabilities, focusing on their personal narratives and experiences within social, consumer, and public spaces to elucidate their needs and challenges.
Methods/Data: Employing a qualitative research approach, this study aims to uncover the meanings and contextual impacts on the experiences of participants (Schenkel & Pérez, 2019). Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews and focus groups, supplemented by visual techniques such as place maps to facilitate expression despite potential communication barriers (Esteban et al., 2017). The study sample comprised 11 individuals with intellectual disabilities, aged 29 to 75. Interviews were conducted between October and December 2023, with the focus group convening in February 2024.

Results: The findings indicate that individuals with intellectual disabilities encounter substantial barriers in public, social, and consumer spaces, which adversely affect their autonomy and generate frustration. In public spaces, issues such as inadequate transportation, uncivil behaviours, and limited responsiveness to improvement requests were prominent. Participants reported a loss of autonomy due to their inability to make decisions regarding their activities or routes. In social and consumer spaces, they faced restrictions in venue selection, anxiety about new activities, familial overprotection, economic constraints, and environments poorly adapted for informational, physical, communicative, and movement accessibility. These barriers significantly curtailed their leisure options. However, support systems were identified as crucial in facilitating participation. Assistance with personal organization, initial accompaniment in transportation, support from friends and family, and professional assistance in specific tasks were highly valued, as they mitigated the impact of these barriers.

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Connecting class planning and Individual Educational Plans in primary school: Teachers' and parents' perspectives

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Abstract

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are widely used in Western countries, though under different names and functions. What they have in common is their role as formal plans for specialized support for students identified as having special educational needs (SEN) (Alves, 2018). Their implementation, however, comes with challenges and criticisms (Auer et al., 2023). On one hand, ensuring SEN students' participation in the general curriculum through IEPs risks normalization pressure and marginalization. On the other, eliminating IEPs carries the risk of flattening teaching for all and overlooking needs that may go unaddressed (Norwich, 2013). This dilemmatic nature of IEPs raises questions about their meaning for an inclusive school.

In Italy, as in many countries, legislation on inclusion is fragmented and lacks coherence. While the National Curriculum promotes differentiation as a fundamental principle for high-quality learning for all, inclusion policies emphasize individualization and personalization as individual right for students recognized as having SEN (Matucci, 2020). This dual framework – combining class-wide instructional planning based on the National Curriculum with IEP for students with SEN – results in a parallel planning system that challenges truly inclusive practices. From this perspective, the relationship between class planning – understood as planning for all in an inclusive school – and the IEP, which is meant to address the specific needs of individual students, is particularly interesting.

On this background, this paper aims to investigate how primary school teachers and parents of students with disabilities describe the connection between IEPs and classroom planning. To do that, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted in 17 Italian primary school classrooms (grades 2 to 5) in the provinces of Bolzano, Rome, and Turin, each including at least one student with an IEP. For each class, interviews were held with (1) a class teacher, (2) the support teacher, and (3) one parent of the child with IEP. Data were analyzed using Qualitative Content Analysis, a method for systematically organizing and interpreting relevant meanings by structuring them in a system of coding categories (Schreier, 2013). The analysis was carried out separately for the teachers' and the parents' interviews. The resulting category systems will be discussed during the conference presentation shedding light on the dilemmatic nature of IEPs outlined above. In particular, the discussion will focus on how teachers and parents, respectively, perceive – or not – the dilemma and how they articulate it.

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Deinstitutionalisation of support for people with disabilities in Poland: real or sham change?

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Abstract

Deinstitutionalisation (DI) is a key concept in disability support policy in Poland and has been present in public discourse for almost 50 years. Despite its dominant role in long-term care, DI is controversial in terms of its effectiveness and implementation (e.g.Kozma, Mansell & Beadle-Brown 2009; McCarron et al., 2019). This article assesses the DI implementation process in Poland from the perspective of neoinstitutionalism and institutional change, analysing the role of key actors and institutional logics.

The aim of this article is to assess the process of implementing deinstitutionalised solutions in the area of support for people with disabilities in Poland through the prism of neoinstitutionalism and institutional change that provided new insight into the DI process. In particular, the institutional field will be analysed, including the role of key actors in the field, as well as the institutional logics operating within it (Greenwood et al., 2008; Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Guler et al., 2002; Zucker, 1987; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). The process of institutionalchange within the DI is analysed using the concept of six steps of institutional change (Greenwood et al., 2002):

(1) Shock - that destabilises the existing institutional arrangement.
(2) Deinstitutionalisation - during which the institutional setup changes.
(3) Preinstitutionalisation - the creation of (proto)institutions.
(4) Theorisation - actors find justifications for possible solutions.
(5) Diffusion of new practices.
(6) Reinsitutionalisation - during which cognitive legitimisation of the new practice takes place.

The article is based on the qualitative research, conducted as part of the DI diagnosis project in 16 regions of Poland, included 44 case studies of organisations supporting people with disabilities (around 300 in-depth interviews).

Three types of these organisations were identified: hybrid, alternative and partial. Their emergence is stimulated by a combination of two factors: (1) institutional work, i.e., purposeful activity carried out (2) by institutional entrepreneurs-social innovators. The characterised institutional types that the qualitative research revealed are driven, in our view, primarily by a combination of two factors: (1) institutional work, i.e., purposeful activity carried out (2) by institutional entrepreneurs - social innovators. The institutional work of innovators is morphogenetic in that it leads to a gradual transformation of the organisational structure, which reciprocally models the actions of proto-institutional leaders and employees. Certainly, a circumstance that accelerates these processes is uncertainty about the systemic

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change. There is still no clear public policy message-a description of the new system. Thus, it is difficult to find manifestations of organisational isomorphism-the chaos of solutions and spontaneous search for new organisational patterns dominate. In this incoherent picture, however, there are some system enclaves that can serve as inspiration for systemic solutions. The transition process is hampered by the lack of a coherent vision for the new system in public policy towards disability in Poland, resulting in chaos and spontaneous exploration. However, in this ambiguous environment, organisational enclaves are emerging that can become models for systemic solutions. The future of DI requires a better understanding of these mechanisms and a more coherent public policy approach.

Digital Accessibility as a Human Right: A Paradigmatic Shift from Charitable Accommodation to Legal Imperative in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This paper examines the transformative journey of digital accessibility from its origins as a charitable initiative to its current status as a fundamental human right. The research analyzes the paradigmatic shift in how society conceptualizes and implements digital accessibility, particularly in the context of rapidly evolving digital technologies and increasing global connectivity. Through a comprehensive analysis of legislative frameworks, policy developments, and societal attitudes, this study demonstrates how digital accessibility has evolved from being perceived as a voluntary accommodation to becoming a legally mandated imperative (Goggin & Ellis, 2020). The research traces this evolution through three distinct phases: the charitable model (1990-2005), the compliance-driven approach (2006-2015), and the rights-based paradigm (2016-present). Drawing on extensive empirical evidence from both Global North and South contexts, the study illustrates how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) has fundamentally altered the global discourse on digital accessibility (Lawson & Beckett, 2021). The analysis reveals how technological advancements, particularly in artificial intelligence and machine learning, have simultaneously created new accessibility challenges while offering innovative solutions for digital inclusion (Zhang et al., 2023). The paper critically examines the role of landmark legal cases, such as Gil v. Winn-Dixie and NAD v. Netflix, in establishing digital accessibility as a civil right protected under various national and international laws (Blanck, 2022). Furthermore, it analyzes the impact of the European Accessibility Act of 2019 and the subsequent global ripple effect in promoting standardized accessibility requirements across digital platforms and services (European Commission, 2023). The Supreme Court of India has affirmed accessibility as a fundamental right, mandating public spaces and services be made accessible. This aligns with Article 21 of the Constitution and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (Narayan & Kumar, 2024). This research contributes to the existing literature by identifying key factors that have facilitated this paradigmatic shift, including disability rights activism, technological innovation, legal advocacy, and changing societal attitudes. The study employs a qualitative examination of policy documents. The findings reveal a significant correlation between strong legal frameworks and improved digital accessibility outcomes, challenging the traditional voluntary compliance model (Richardson & Martinez, 2024).
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Disability activism: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the career progress of disabled researchers

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Abstract

Researchers who are disabled, female, racially minoritised, or have caregiving responsibilities often face significant challenges with advancing their careers (Johnston & Sanscartier, 2019). These challenges were exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic where disabled researchers were disproportionately affected, especially when they were multiply impacted by race, gender, and caring responsibilities (Douglas et al., 2022). We therefore undertook a three-stranded mixed-method approach to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on disabled researchers, focusing on the intersections between disability, race, gender, and caregiving responsibilities within academia.

Our most important contributions to knowledge lie with an extensive list of recommendations for intersectional equitable practice (for individuals, institutions, and grant funders) and the organisation and curation of an exhibition. In this presentation, we will focus on the two qualitative strands (focus group and interviews) and the exhibition that led to our recommendations for practice.

In total, 25 participants took part in the qualitative strands of the research. The participants were all researchers in the United Kingdom and at various career stages. We conducted two focus groups: one with three early-to-mid career researchers and another with three researchers in late career and/or senior management positions. Additionally, two further participants were interviewed online, as they were keen to attend the focus groups but were unable. Seventeen participants were recruited from amongst the survey respondents to be interviewed on a one-to-one basis. Seven interview participants identified as early careers researchers, three participants identified as mid-career researchers, and two participants identified as late career researchers. To ensure consistency in the qualitative data analysis, the respective work strand leader and researcher involved with the data collection applied the process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). Through data assembly and reassembly in an iterative analytical process, three main themes were generated: (1) Research career and the experience of COVID-19, (2) COVID-19 and opportunities for career progression, and (3) COVID-19 and challenges to career progression.

Through the unique intersectional lens of this project, the research found that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant differences in privileges for researchers and that these discrepancies continue to influence career progress long after the COVID-19 pandemic reached its height. These persistent inequalities suggest that the devastation of the pandemic continues to be a concrete and harsh reality for some. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic having been a

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global event and therefore a collective experience, the intricacies, complexities, and nuances of specific circumstances meant that the experience was still very much individual, unique, and often separate.

The exhibition and the list of recommendations for practice help us to expose and address systemic challenges within higher education facing disable researchers who are multiply minoritised. Heeding the recommendations and resonating with the nuances of intersectional marginalisation are the first steps to translating the lessons of the pandemic into actionable pathways and creating an inclusive and equitable academic future for all.

Disability and Human Rights IN India: Looking through A Policy Prism

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Abstract

India got independence in 1947, and the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Though still in its infancy as a free Nation, India saw the intrinsic value imbibed in UDHR and became one of its founding members. It may not, then, be an exaggeration to suggest that the Indian Constitution, adopted in 1949, was greatly benefited from the covenant of Human Rights. Part III providing an elaborate list of fundamental rights granted to citizens is a testament to this impact.

Eventually, the State policy of independent India dealing with the issues of women, children, refugees, war victims, off late persons with disabilities, etc., came to incorporate the human rights perspective. All this has certainly been neatly packaged as a policy prescription, but the question remains as to what extent the State is sincere in implementing its own prescription, and as to what extent the concerned stakeholders are successful in formulating their agenda around the aspects of human rights.

Scaling down the broad spectrum to a specific socio-legal aspect, my paper would make an attempt to put to a critical scrutiny the disability law in India, examining both its content and operational direction from the vantage point of human rights. For this purpose, I would select, among other things, the major legislative enactments such as the Mental Health Act 1987, Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities Protection of rights and Full participation) Act 1995, the National Trust (for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities) Act 1999, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, and the Mental Healthcare Act 2017. These specific laws will be juxtaposed to the general laws such as the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act 2005,, the Right of free and compulsory Education Act 2009, The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013, etc.

The attempt of my paper would be twofold: 1) the examination of the major legislative enactments on the rights of persons with disabilities, with a close scrutiny as to how far they meet India's commitment to the doctrine of human rights; 2) the critical analysis of general laws on specific concerns such as child rights and gender rights, with an explication as to what extent they incorporate the issues of disability and the idea of human rights. I begin with an assumption, if not a strict hypothesis, that general laws on issues of child rights and gender rights invoke the doctrine of human rights with far more sophistication than the laws on disabilities do; but ironically enough, they avoid the segment off disability. Whereas,

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the laws on disability are prima facie loud on human rights butt the mechanisms of their implementation don't meet the requirements of actual commitment.

Bibliography

I don't have enough space to provide my full bibliography here, so will upload it as a supplementary document.

Do public attitudes support intellectual disability and autism rights and inclusion? – Lessons from a representative survey in Hungary

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Abstract

Purpose

This study explores social attitudes toward disabled people and their human rights, with a closer analysis of how social attitudes change toward specific groups of disabled people.

Design/methodology/approach

The survey was conducted on a probability sample of 1,000 respondents, representative of Hungary's adult population according to gender, age, level of education, and type of municipality of residence. Questions were asked about acceptance and approval of human rights separately about children and adults as well as men and women and by the type of disability.

Findings

Findings of our study seem promising, since the majority of respondents supported the full inclusion of people with sensory or mobility limitations, signalling a broad social consensus.The survey found high levels of acceptance towards people with sensory or mobility limitations, however, acceptance of autistic people and people with an intellectual disability was significantly lower, both for adults and children. Generally, attitudes were slightly more accepting of children than adults with the same disability. Respondents were less likely to approve certain rights of autistic people and people with an intellectual disability, including their right to vote, to marry, to raise children, to work in the open labour market, and to go to school with others. Some negative views expressed were in direct contradiction with the country's disability and human rights legislation. Those not affirming disabled people's right to marry or have children contradict both international human rights such as the CRPD and Hungarian constitution that prohibit discrimination based on disability . We found no significant relationships between attitudes towards different disabilities and main socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, or having children). However, logistic regression analysis identified several factors (religion, level of education or financial situation) that show a significant correlation with regard a few groups of disabled people.

Originality

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Findings underscore a strong hierarchy between disability groups where the least accepted groups are people with an intellectual disability and autistic people. Legal and policy progress need to be supported by the measurement of public attitudes and targeted interventions to counter stigma. The presentation will discuss implications for practice.

Easy-to-read and independent living of *disabled* people

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Although almost twenty years passed since the United Nations of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) has been enacted, people with intellectual impairment are still victims of ableist practices which want them ever dependent by others (Murphy, 1987). Consequently, the right to self-determinate (Charlton, 2000) which the UNCRPD refer to can be hardly exercised. Assuming Disability Studies' perspective, this paper discusses the importance of information accessibility for the independent living of people with intellectual impairment and people with other condition (i.e.: reading disorders or migrant backgrounds) who are still socially oppressed and disabled.

Easy-to-read seems to respond the right to receive accessible information and that of education (UN, 2006, articles 9, 24; Inclusion Europe, 2009) and, therefore, that of independent living but it is still scarcely used even in those countries where UNCRPD has been ratified. In Italy for example easy-to-read still constitutes an experimental phase, because of its rare use in everyday life and its few literature (Guerini, 2024) contrary on German situation (Baumert, 2016). This is the reason why we conducted between May and December 2023 exploratory research. The research involved a group of 114 future teachers and educators to investigate their opinions on any potential/critical aspects of using easy-to-read. Participants was firstly asked to translate some texts from Italian to easy-to-read Italian and then to fill out an *ad hoc* Questionnaire. From quantitative data analysis emerged:

- a scarce knowledge of easy-to read among participants (just 8.8%);
- the complexity of writing easy-to-read information (51.8%);
- the feasibility of the above-mentioned operation (48.2%);
- the utility of using easy-to-read in educational contexts (58.8%).

Qualitative data analysis returned four principal thematic cores:

- the simplification of more complex texts that easy-to-read guidelines allows;
- the necessity of using easy-to-read in the institutional contexts (i.e.: web sites);
- the risk for easy-to-read to become a tool of being used just with people with intellectual impairment;
- the importance of wide spreading easy-to-read in the educational contexts.

These and other aspects such as easy-to-read characteristics and what we actually are doing at our department to create inclusive learning environments (Guerini et al., 2024) will be presented during the Conference.

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Embodied policy engagement: accessibility and municipal policymaking

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Abstract

Background:
Disability advisory committees represent an important avenue of public participation that overcome some of the weaknesses of representative democracy by enabling governments and policy makers to respond to the development of a more differentiated, dynamic and plural polity. Historically, political citizenship was linked to the ableist and eugenic thinking that excluded disabled people and other marginalized groups from the processes of decision-making (Imrie, 2014). Political citizenship goes beyond the formal rights (i.e., right to vote) and calls for the removal of barriers that might prevent people with disabilities from exercising this right.

The engagement of people with disabilities in municipal advisory committees contributes knowledge in the form of "disability epistemology"(Nijs & Heylighen, 2015) that city officials often lack. Disability expertise is enacted knowledge specific to disabled people, acquired through life experience in non-normative bodyminds (Friedner & Osborne, 2013; Hartblay, 2020). Advisory committees advance expertise by experience.

Objective:

Informed by the fields of public engagement, urban planning, and critical disability studies, this paper will demonstrate how the committee members form the relationship between subjective bodily experiences and urban planning knowledge. Using the examples of the issues discussed at the meetings, this paper will demonstrate how a lived experience of disability informs the urban policies and brings perspectives that have not been previously considered by the urban planners.

Methodology:

This paper is based on the research study that explored the experiences of people serving on accessibility advisory committees in British Columbia, Canada. The primary means of data collection for this study are virtual individual interviews with 33 committee members and city staff and meeting observations.

Findings:

The reflective thematic analysis identified the following themes:

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1) Finding voice on the committee. The first theme discusses how committee members shape their communication style and their message in a policy environment.

2) Defining a lived experience. The second theme explores the meaning of lived experience in the context of policymaking and the interpretation Nothing About Us Without Us.

3) Translating embodied knowledge into policy. The third theme unpacks the process of connecting a lived experience to a policy change.

Conclusion:

The paper contributes further discussion on what we mean by lived experience and delves into embodied knowledge as a valuable component of the municipal policymaking. As well, the paper can support future discussions on bridging the gap between translating lived experiences into tangible policy recommendations.

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Empowering Students with Disabilities in Higher Education: Challenges and Best Practices

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Abstract

This contribution aims to draw attention to the inclusive potential of Higher Education (HE), emphasizing its role in providing specialized training while fostering essential life skills for active citizenship and employment, aligning with a quality-of-life approach (d'Alonzo, 2014). In Italy, school inclusion has been widely implemented through legislative measures such as Law 118/1971 and Law 517/1977, while Law 17/1999 specifically introduced interventions to ensure the participation of students with disabilities in HE.
According to national reports, 36.816 students with disabilities or Specific Learning Disorders were enrolled in Italian universities in the 2019-2020 academic year, representing 2,13% of the student population (ANVUR, 2022).

Following the bio-psycho-social approach of the ICF (WHO, 2001), universities should create contexts that allow the participation and inclusion of students with diverse features, ensuring accessibility and equity. As the number of students with disabilities in HE continues to rise (ANVUR, 2022), it is crucial not only to facilitate their access but also to enhance their sense of belonging within the academic community. Research highlights that disability-related services could facilitate this process (Moriña & Orozco, 2021), particularly when support is provided during the first year of study (Römhild & Hollederer, 2024).

This presentation draws on the experience and best practices of the Service for Inclusion of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Italy). Its approach is multidimensional, including orientation before and during the enrolment process, facilitation of communication between students and faculty members to secure suitable accommodations for lectures and assessment activities, and initiatives that foster an inclusive culture inside the university. A key component of the service is the pedagogical guidance provided by expert tutors in Special Education. These tutors assist students in developing autonomy in academic and campus life, recognizing personal and environmental facilitators and barriers. Acknowledging that students with similar disabilities may have diverse learning styles and needs (Collins et al., 2019), tutors hold regular meetings with them to facilitate self-reflection and identify appropriate strategies for their academic progress. The primary goal of the pedagogical guidance is to empower students in a self-determination process by supporting them in understanding their personal strengths and challenges, and in taking an active role in the educational journey. These actions, along with collaboration with faculty members, can promote a transformation in the academic community's perspective on disability and inclusion.

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Enabling and experiencing transitions: Contrasts in the perspectives of young people with disabilities and social workers

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Abstract

While inclusion policies are facing increasing pushback, there is a heightened focus on improving school-to-work transitions for young people with disabilities. However, what constitutes ”improvement” and for whom remains contentious. This presentation explores how the rise of ”transition management” is reshaping professional practices and relationships within multi-professional teams. Drawing on empirical data from the ongoing comparative (Luxembourg & Switzerland), multimethod *PATH_CH-Lux* project, which examines the school-to-work transitions of young people with disabilities, we aim to deepen the understanding of how multi-professional teams, including social workers, career guidance services, and specialized educational support staff (amongst other actors) collaborate to facilitate the successful integration of these young people into the labour market. We also explore how young people with disabilities experience their school-to-work transitions.
Luxembourg has made progress in developing legal frameworks aimed at fostering a high-skilled, multicultural workforce. However, challenges persist in reconciling universal educational policies with the specific needs of students with disabilities The school-to-work transition remains a critical stage where systemic barriers hinder the successful school-to-work transition of young people with disabilities. Luxembourg's inclusive education system relies on targeted support measures for students with special (educational) needs, relying on career guidance services and specialized teams to assist these students in navigating the educational realm and the transition process. Social workers play a vital role in supporting young people as they move from education to employment and into adulthood.

The qualitative study uses a triangulation approach, combining a longitudinal panel study of 30 young people with disabilities transitioning from education to the labor market in Luxembourg, and expert interviews with social workers and other key actors intervening in the transition-process. Innovative methods, including photo elicitation, capture more nuanced insights into the transitions. This triangulated approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges, dynamics, and systemic constraints, while also highlighting enabling factors for more successful transitions.

Preliminary findings reveal that many young people with disabilities form strong emotional bonds with social workers, viewing them as trusted mentors rather than authority figures, particularly for those coming from emotionally deprived backgrounds. While fostering trust, these connections challenge social workers, who must balance the competing demands of students, parents, and institutional constraints such as credentialism. This adds

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barriers, as many young people complete vocational training without receiving formal diplomas, limiting access to employment. Social workers navigate these gaps, advocating for the recognition of these youths' competencies within rigid frameworks that prioritize formal qualifications. Their triple role-direct support, gatekeeping, and advocacy-creates complex multi-professional dynamics that influence the social construction of disability and labour market outcomes.

In our presentation, we explore the challenges of reconciling persistent barriers with the need for transformative change through policy reforms that genuinely advance inclusion and ensure equal participation and subjective well-being. We tackle the complex dynamics within multi-professional teams and how they navigate systemic barriers to facilitate transitions. Finally, we contrast the perspectives of social workers and young people with disabilities to highlight areas of alignment and tension in their transition experiences.

Factors shaping social and health service user involvement in Poland. The perspective of persons with disabilities and in mental health crises.

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Abstract

The idea of involving citizens in shaping social and health services is not new. Many authors have stated the lack of citizens' input in these sectors development. Different theoretical frameworks on the user perspective exist as well, but they are often broad and difficult to clearly connect with the presented topic.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the factors influencing the involvement of service users in health and social services in Poland, particularly from the perspective of individual people with disabilities and with mental health issues.

The findings presented here are part of a project funded by the European Union's HORIZON 2020 programme, called RESPONSIVE. The empirical data used in this paper is based on qualitative research conducted in Poland, including 20 in-depth interviews, 2 focus groups with service users, and 2 observational studies provided between September 2023 and February 2024.

This article discusses the challenges and potential related to service user involvement in the Polish social and health care system, as perceived by people with disabilities and people facing mental health issues. According to the collected data, three major factors are pointed as supportive to their engagement: 1) multidimensional accessibility of services, 2) the need for basic information about available services, and 3) changes in the relationship between service users and service providers. While the empirical results are mixed, the overall picture of service user involvement is not very optimistic. Interviews reveal significant limitations to the participation of users in Poland's social and health services, resulting in relatively low engagement. Furthermore, for the groups analysed (people with disabilities or those experiencing mental health crises), the challenges in implementing effective service user involvement are more pronounced. The key barriers include: limited service accessibility, lack of information about health or social services, and the low agency of service users. Additionally, the power imbalance between service users and service providers hinders meaningful participation in decision-making processes on services' change.

The evolution of support systems for people with disabilities and those experiencing mental health crises does not follow the direction for greater sensitivity to the voice of citizens. It continues to overlook the importance of active listening and direct communication with service users to better address their needs and adapt services accordingly. Most often used consultations remain limited and typically occur within political circles, which are often less accessible to the voices of those who use the services.

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From Hidden Struggles to Center Stage: 25 Years of Shifting the Fibromyalgia Narrative

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Abstract

Background and research problematic

Fibromyalgia is a common condition characterized by chronic, widespread pain, often accompanied by severe fatigue, sleep disturbances, cognitive issues, and symptoms like those of irritable bowel syndrome. It can significantly impair professional, social, and familial functioning (Giorgi et al., 2022). Affecting 2% to 4% of the population, it is twice as common in women (Marques et al., 2017; WHO, 2015). Its cause remains unclear, and diagnosis relies solely on clinical criteria, with no biological markers (Sarzi-Puttini et al., 2021). Treatment requires a holistic approach (Joyce et al., 2018). Medical ambiguity affects doctor-patient communication, societal perceptions, and patient rights.

The current research tracks the changes in the "visibility" of the disease in Israel over 25 years, largely due to the efforts of patients to bring their illness to the forefront and gain recognition, despite the medical ambiguity. The research shows how, over time, the medical establishment and societal institutions have come to recognize the limitations of scientific knowledge and the need for flexibility in defining the disease in order to provide equal rights and assistance to patients, enabling them to function and improve their quality of life (Finkelstein, 2013, 2014 (Hebrew)).

Methods

We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews in three stages:

- 2000 – 2004: 24 patients (mostly women) with fibromyalgia.
- 2014 – 2015: seven various stakeholders, including policymakers and medical staff members.
- 2018 – 2019: seven patients (mostly women) with fibromyalgia and one physician who were interviewed in stage 1.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically.

Additionally, stage 1 included observations at seven fibromyalgia patient conferences. Between 2020 and 2025, we also conducted a content analysis of global and local documents,

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including legislation and policy.

Results

In the first stage of the study, the participants spoke extensively about their physical condition and its profound impact on their daily functioning. They described an identity crisis marked by feelings of shame, guilt, and concealment of their physical state. With anger, they highlighted the dismissive attitude of physicians and their struggle to gain medical approval to secure social recognition and rights. The second part of the study analysis shows that the government policies in Israel, which are often rigid and objective, are not appropriate for chronic diseases without a known cause and make it harder for patients to continue functioning adequately with their condition. However, some countries have found ways to address the needs of patients using dynamic, flexible models, some of which might be appropriate for Israel and other countries. In the third stage of the study, patients no longer hoped for a "scientific breakthrough" and have loosened their reliance on the medical establishment, choosing often choosing alternative ways to seek help. The internet and social media help them stay informed, connect with other women, and overcome early isolation. They are "returning to life" by adopting flexible routines suited to their condition. With support from medical and political allies, they have worked to change the discourse around their illness and, after a long struggle, gained state recognition and rights.

From individual accommodations to structural modifications: the transformative potential of disability rights law

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Abstract

A principled distinction can be drawn between two kinds of legal mandates aiming to facilitate disabled people's full and equal social participation. I call them "individual accommodations" and "structural modifications". Individual accommodations are tailored changes to customary practices or to the built environment that cater only to individuals with disabilities while keeping the policy or built environment unchanged for everyone else. By contrast, structural modifications are overarching alterations that are available for all, disabled or not, and render individual accommodations redundant.
The law in many countries reflects a preference for individual accommodations. In the US, for example, the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), either explicitly set or are understood as requiring individual accommodations as the high road to ensuring disabled people's social participation, while structural modifications are seen as an extra measure to be discretionally pursued, beyond the letter of the law.

Disability legal scholars and philosophers have recently pointed to the shortcomings of relying primarily on individual accommodations in achieving disability justice. Thus, scholars rightly claimed that individual accommodations are difficult to realize due to legal hurdles and social stigma,(1) that the need to seek accommodations one person at a time exacerbates socio-economic differences,(2) and that even when granted, individual accommodations exacerbate the problem of not having a sense of belonging in one's world and space.(3) Based on the insight that individual accommodations are just but insufficient, there is a renewed call for adopting comprehensive changes-along the lines of what I call structural modifications-in achieving disability justice goals.

Joining this general sentiment, this article argues that structural modifications are sometimes preferable because they improve social activities for all. It begins by analyzing the preference for individual accommodations as reflected in disability law, and shows that it rests on a commonsense assumption that disability access provisions undermine other constitutive features of public places and social activities and so individual accommodations are significantly less burdensome than structural modifications. Relatedly, when individualized accommodations lack justification structural modifications are assumed to lack justification too. This article will then show that contra to the commonsense assumption, at times individual accommodations lack justification because they undermine the constitutive features of some social activity, whereas structural modifications are better suited to not only to provide disability access but also to uphold social practices' constitutive features and improve social

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*Speaker

practices for all. Thus, this article will demonstrate how a critical disability perspective carries transformative and revolutionary potential for social practices, extending beyond its service to disabled people.

(1) Katie Eyer, *Claiming Disability*, 10a1 Bost. Univ. L. Rev. 547–618 (2021).

(2) Ruth Colker, The Americans With Disabilities Act's Unreasonable Focus On The Individual, 170 University of Pennsylvania Law Review 1813, 1819 (2022)(arguing that the individual accommodations provisions tend to benefit those disabled people already better off).

(3) Corinne Lajoie, *The Problems of Access: A Crip Rejoinder via the Phenomenology of Spatial Belonging*, 8 J. Am. Philos. Assoc. 318–337 (2022).

Identity in Suspension: Between Culture, Disability, and Education. The Voice of Students with Migration Experiences and Their Families

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Abstract

This study explores the intersection between interculture and disability, focusing on the experiences of students and their families with migration backgrounds in order to gain a deeper understanding of the difficulties, obstacles, as well as the resources and elements that can promote and facilitate processes of school inclusion through the narration of lived experiences and stories from the protagonists. We are surrounded by a landscape governed by incessant migration flows that destabilize the geopolitical and anthropological coordinates of our social systems (Lombardi & Lucattini, 2024; Bini, 2020). In this regard, educational institutions are increasingly called to broaden their horizons, modify their disciplinary boundaries, and adopt intersectional approaches between interculture, special education, and inclusive education from a universal perspective (Bolognesi & Dainese, 2020). Among the most influential voices in Special Pedagogy, including those from Disability Studies (Goodley et al., 2019), many reflections have contributed, from different perspectives, to the global debate on disability and migration experiences. The study aims to analyze how students with disabilities from other cultures and their families experience and interpret the school context, navigating challenges and new existential redesigns. The research adopts a qualitative approach, using interviews to gather and analyze the personal stories of participants (Berne, 2004; Gaspari, 2024), whether told by the students themselves or their families. These are stories that, when listened to, allow individuals to step out of invisibility and the circuits of a denied identity and from ”non-places” (Auge, 1999) of culture. The analysis of these stories allows us to understand how cultural values influence the perception of disability and adaptation strategies in educational contexts. Moreover, the research explores the role of storytelling as a tool for mediation between different cultural identities and the specific needs related to disability, promoting reflection on inclusive practices and the importance of an intercultural approach to school inclusion (Canevaro, 2020). We expect that storytelling will not only offer an important key to interpreting disability experiences in multicultural contexts, but will also represent a fundamental resource to foster existential re-composition and a greater understanding of the inclusive perspective.

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*Speaker

Inclusion and transformation at the Teaching-Learning-Laboratory for Inclusive Education at the University of Innsbruck

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Abstract

The teaching-Learning-Laboratory for Inclusive Education at the University of Innsbruck has been developing didactic teaching-learning materials as well as innovative teaching concepts for implementing inclusive teaching in secondary schools (Hoffmann & Sonntag, 2024). The focus is on working on and with learning boxes, which enable cooperative learning on a common subject using flashcards, differentiated tasks, learning structure grids and detailed information for teachers (Feuser, 2019). The learning boxes are based on the differentiation matrix by Sasse and Schulzeck (2021) and take place as part of courses within teacher training. They emphasizes interdisciplinary topics as independent learning units. The material is collaboratively tested, evaluated, and continuously refined by students, teachers, and their pupils in various learning settings under academic supervision.

The Teaching-Learning Lab therefore starts at the point of transformational processes in the implementation of inclusive education. In addition to the questions outlined above, the focus is increasingly on aspects of education and sustainability, increasing attention is being given to aspects of education for sustainable development, digitalization, and democracy (BMBWF, 2023).

From a scientific perspective, the work in the teaching-learning lab is guided by the following questions: What is the prior knowledge of students concerning inclusive education and didactics? How do learners and teachers construct the common object of learning in the classroom? Under which conditions does constructive cooperation in the sense of joint learning take place?

These questions have been addressed empirically as part of a proseminar since 2021/2022 and examined in the context of qualitative data collection (focus groups). The dataset has been analyzed using qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2022). The results point to several key aspects: Many students, socialized in an educational system geared towards segregation. The access to learning on the common object seems diffuse, but they generally position themselves in a rather broad understanding of inclusion. The statements move between possible change on the one hand and utopia in the concrete implementation on the other. They identify clear systemic prerequisites and challenges. Current (educational) policy developments indicate that this area of tension must be productively addressed in teacher training in order to be able to continue working on the implementation of the UN CRPD.

At the conference, the concept of learning boxes and their transformative relevance will first be presented. Further, the ongoing research project and its findings will be discussed together with the participants.

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*Speaker

Intersectional Transformations: Socio-legal Analysis of Disability Human Rights Discourses

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[1]Magda(lena) Szarota – Lancaster Universiy, Great Britain – United Kingdom

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between the British social model of disability, the human rights framework codified in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and disability activism. While the first two are often considered complementary, this research explores whether and how these frameworks diverge conceptually, and what this divergence might mean for disability activism and theory.

The analysis is grounded in a socio-legal examination of the CRPD and interrelated academic theorizing, combined with a critical discourse analysis of knowledge production emerging from cutting-edge disability organizations led by and for women with disabilities. Since Poland's ratification of the CRPD in 2012, these organizations have been active within disability human rights circles in Poland and the broader UN regime.

Drawing on activist discourses, this analysis identifies a shift in focus: from societal exclusion, as framed by the social model, to state accountability, as emphasized by the human rights approach. This paper raises and addresses several key questions: Does this shift represent a meaningful "advancement," or does it complicate the theoretical coherence of disability advocacy? What role does the authoritative yet "softly" enforceable nature of the CRPD play in shaping the claims of disabled women advocates? Does the CRPD enrich the social model, or does it challenge its foundations? How might these shifts reshape the strategies of disability activism?

By addressing these questions, this paper provides original theoretical and methodological contributions by centering disabled women's theorizing and advocacy practices, while inviting a deeper interrogation of the CRPD's significance for policymaking, disability activism, and academic theorizing.

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*Speaker

Maltreatment among children with disabilities: A social perspective

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Abstract

Background: Child maltreatment can be either intentional or unintentional and is typically categorized into five primary subtypes: physical abuse, emotional maltreatment, neglect, sexual abuse, and exposure to family violence (Clemens et al., 2018). These actions lead to actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity and occur within a context of responsibility, trust, or power (World Health Organization, 2020). The increased risk of maltreatment (abuse and neglect) among children with disabilities is a substantial issue (Miller & Brown, 2014; Stalker et al., 2010; Stalker & McArthur, 2012), yet there remains a significant gap in knowledge on this important subject. According to Flynn (2020), the perspective of Critical Disability Studies (CDS) is essential for understanding the heightened risk of neglect and abuse faced by children with disabilities. While the Medical Model views disability through the lenses of individualization, psychologization, and medicalization, CDS emphasizes broader social, cultural, economic, and political processes. Applying a CDS framework to the elevated risk of maltreatment among disabled children necessitates research into the cultural and social determinants that may contribute to this vulnerability.
aims: To review the risk of maltreatment among children and adolescents with disabilities in Israel, and examine the characteristics associated with this risk.

Methods: Data Analysis of the National Program for Children and Youth at Risk in Israel, encompassing information on 125,764 children (including 31,350 children with disabilities). The data includes variables, such as demographic variables, disability type, maltreatment type, perpetrator type, family characteristics, and environmental and social aspects (such as educational settings and opportunities for skill acquisition)

Results: Children with disabilities are at higher risk of maltreatment, especially Children with multiple disabilities, learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities and mental disabilities. Factors identified as increasing risk among children with disabilities: economic distress, unmarried parents, parental disability, belonging to Arab population, unemployed parent, special education school or class, social difficulties of the child. It was also found that girls and ultra-Orthodox children are at increased risk when it comes to sexual abuse.

Conclusions: This study proposes a framework for conceptualizing the risk of child maltreatment, drawing from CDS. It elucidates how the elevated vulnerability to maltreatment

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among individuals with disabilities is shaped by societal structures. The researchers argue that disability itself does not constitute a risk factor for abuse and neglect. Instead, they posit that it is the contextual contemporary living conditions and societal structures-such as economic status, minority group, family structure (such as unmarried parents, parental disability) and social perceptions -that create the risk.

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Path-Breaking and Compromise: The Establishment of Workplace Personal Assistance Services in Japan

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Abstract

Background and Research Problematic

In 2020, Japan launched the Special Program for Employment Support for Persons with Severe Disabilities in Collaboration with the Employment Policies (the "Employment Support System" or ESS). For the first time, individuals requiring personal assistance services (PAS) gained access to publicly funded support during working hours, a provision previously unavailable.

This initiative integrates employment and welfare policies. Employment policy, managed by the Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities and Job Seekers (JEED), is funded through an employment levy system paid by companies failing to meet disability employment quotas. Traditionally, this funding promoted the employment of individuals with disabilities. Conversely, welfare policy, funded by taxes, has historically excluded support for personal economic activities. With the growing focus on promoting equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities, this new initiative was established.

However, implementation at the municipal level has been inefficient. By 2024, only 226 individuals across 102 municipalities had benefited, accounting for less than 2% of the PAS users, and fewer than 6% of municipalities had implemented the policy.

This study seeks to analyze the establishment and implementation of workplace personal assistance services (WPAS), a topic that remains underexplored, by addressing two questions through the framework of Path Breaking Theory:

1. How did the policy shift from excluding economic activities to promoting employment participation for people with disabilities?
2. Why has this path-breaking policy seen limited implementation four years after its introduction?

Method and Data

This study employs the theoretical framework of Path Breaking to conduct a case study of WPAS in Japan. The analysis is based on a textual analysis of administrative documents, reports from non-profit organizations, and media coverage spanning 2015 to 2025.

The analysis focuses on identifying the existing path of PAS policy, critical junctures that

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facilitated change, mechanisms of policy formation, and challenges in implementation.

Results

Japanese welfare policy has historically acted as a safety net, limiting support for people with disabilities to sheltered employment and disability pensions. Breaking this entrenched path can be attributed to two critical factors. The first is the growing recognition of independent living and supported employment as key concepts among people with disabilities, practitioners, and researchers. The second, and more direct factor, is the election of severely disabled individuals to the National Diet, who have consistently advocated for expanding support systems.

This study highlights a compromise in the transformation of the PAS policy. Rather than fully expanding the scope of PAS, the ESS project introduced a dual-funding mechanism: care-related PAS during work hours is funded by taxes, while work-related PAS is supported by JEED.

Although this compromise facilitated the policy's passage by reducing resistance, it has introduced significant implementation challenges due to the complexity of administrative procedures and the need for close collaboration between the two managing organizations.

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Patterns of disability and homelessness in Hungary

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Abstract

Background
In Central-Eastern Europe, the collapse of communist regimes has had a significant influence on the lives of people with disabilities. In Hungary, new institutions were put in place, legislation brought in line with international standards, and EU support was used for development. Despite the progress achieved, fundamental challenges remain, including the lack of sufficient guarantees to exercise basic rights, a scarcity of inclusive educational and employment opportunities, low levels of accessibility, misalignment of user needs and social service supply, restricted legal decision-making capacity for many, and a lack of affordable housing (UN 2020, Kozma, Petri and Bernát 2020, Petri, Turnpenny and Bernát 2023).

In the same period, a growing proportion of the country's population has been affected by housing poverty. Due to privatization, the share of social housing in the total housing stock dropped drastically, the system of needs-based housing support was dismantled and the number of evictions increased (Habitat for Humanity, 2020; Györi 2020; Teller et al. 2023). Homeless services were first created in the 1990s and the have gradually came to serve clients facing various disadvantages. People with Roma background, experiences of early school leaving, foster care, (segregated) special needs education, poor physical and mental health are overrepresented among homeless clients (Györi, 2017; Györi, 2021; Szabó, 2014; Bényei et al., 2018; Rákosy & Szeitl, 2018; Gyöngyösi et al., 2021).

Methods

This research addresses the intersection of disability and homelessness in Hungary over the past three decades, since the establishment of homeless services in the country. It relies on secondary analysis of survey data from the annual internal cross-sectional surveys of the Hungarian homeless service sector ("3 February" survey), from the years 2017-2023 using descriptive statistical methods, completed with a series of qualitative interviews with homeless experts by experience (n=12) analyzed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Results:
Persons with disabilities have been overrepresented among homeless people over the last few years, and they face multiple problems, which is consistent with accounts of the declining trends of overall physical and mental health in the Hungarian homeless population. A rather surprising and alarming finding is that a high number of homeless clients reported to have attended special education in childhood, and those with such education history are more likely to identify as Roma, and to have been been raised in foster care.

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*Speaker

Peer work as a building block for the democratisation of social services: perspectives from experts with lived experience

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been increasing discussion about the need to implement and strengthen peer work in the social and health sector. In Austria and the German-speaking countries, a number of pilot projects have been carried out and partly evaluated under the heading of 'peer involvement'. In the user surveys, the peer formats were predominantly evaluated positively. However, this was generally based on a narrow understanding of peer work, which was not itself scrutinised. There is a lack of research that examines the perspective (ideas, criticism, wishes) of experts with lived experience on peer work. In this presentation I would like to report on the research project RESPONSIVE (Horizon Europe), in which users of social services were asked about their experiences of participation and co-determination in social services. The evaluation of a part of the study, consisting of 25 individual interviews and three workshops with a total of 26 participants, showed that the experts interviewed have comprehensive ideas about peer work, which are linked to demands for the democratisation of social and medical services. The interviewees saw peer work as a building block for the democratisation of social services and the social sector and identified three dimensions of democratisation through peer work: peer work was seen as having the potential to improve access to social services, to contribute to the democratisation of knowledge and to reduce power imbalances through peer ownership. While social services, and especially mental health services, were following the approach of peer involvement - i.e. the partial integration of peers into existing structures - many users called for peer work formats that could lead to substantial changes in social services.

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*Speaker

Political (mis)alignments of Inclusive Education Policy Discourses: A Comparative Approach to Schools and Society

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Abstract

Despite sweeping acceptance of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, national and international assessments report difficulties with implementing inclusive policies, complicating the notion of a paradigm shift (Hussar et al., 2020; Maaz et al., 2020). Political scientists, historians, and sociologists use models to explain changes; however, few studies trace patterns of discourse in education policies. Furthermore, Article 24 in UN CRPD underscores the need for a cross-national comparative approach (Köpfer, Powell, & Zahnd, 2021; Pateisky, 2021).

This project offers a comparative study of Germany and the United States and investigates inclusive education policies. Drawing on Foucault's (2010) discourse theory of genealogical studies and Schmidt's (2008) concepts of discursive institutionalism, this project uses a discursive, comparative, and historical framework to analyze inclusive education policies from 1949 to 2009. Germany and the U.S. were chosen because of converging and diverging educational histories vis-a-vis political structures and educational histories after World War II. The findings demonstrate that: 1) inclusive education policy discourses in Germany and the United States consist of cognitive justifications and normative legitimations, 2) the dominance of an inclusive education policy depends on the expression and coherence of both the ideational and interactional dimensions of discourse, and 3) the consistent alignment of both dimensions led to the dominance of inclusive education discourse in the United States, whereas the misalignment of these dimensions in Germany produced a weakened, recessive, discourse.

(Mis)alignment of inclusive education policy discourses with polities and politics across all three branches of government determines the implementation of inclusion in schools and societies. This project's findings demonstrate that discourse, understood as practices, influences the dominant or recessive hold of inclusive policies. International education policy discourses reveal a history of discontinuities, mechanisms of fragility and power at play in inclusive practices, and the extent to which discourse shapes, determines, and affects educational and societal change. By examining inclusive educational policy discourse, this work aims to inform implementation efforts and contribute to ongoing efforts that link policy and practice toward more inclusive and just education.

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Reflections on the implementation of a human rights-based perspective on sport participation of people with disabilities

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Abstract

Background
The regular implementation of sport as a form of physical activity has manifold positive effects on all aspects of health and well-being and is irrespective of age, gender, origin or a potential disability. Moreover, the participation in sport and physical activity is a human right and anchored in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations, 2006). In Article 30, the right for people with disabilities to participate in sport as leisure activity is clearly stated. Based on the CRPD and sport opportunities, five characteristics for sport participation on a human rights-based perspective have been identified (Aichele, 2012): 1) availability of opportunities for the different target groups, i.e., there must be opportunities for everyone; 2) accessibility to the opportunities, e.g., a person in a wheelchair must be able to get to the sport facilities; 3) acceptability, i.e., the legal framework as well as the social setting should meet the needs of the target group; 4) adaptability, i.e., facilities and services can and should change over time; and 5) cultural appropriateness, i.e., consideration of the cultural conditions of the target group and the region. Research on these aspects has given some indications as to how they should be implemented (Kiuppis, 2016) and highlighted general problem areas such as a focus on a few forms of disability, one-sided understanding of sport, and unawareness of barriers and deficits in the educational process related to the needs of people with disabilities (Hölter, 2013).

Methods

Therefore, the aim of the presentation is to give a critical reflection on sport participation based on a human rights perspective according to the five characteristics of sport participation (Aichele, 2012). Besides general literature and current studies related to those characteristics, own research projects will be presented, e.g., in terms of exclusive, inclusive and unified sport opportunities (Kreinbucher-Bekerle et al., 2024) or the participation of people with disabilities as volunteers in sport events (Jobst & Kreinbucher-Bekerle, in review).

Results
The results indicate that further critical considerations of sport and physical activity programs for the target group of people with disabilities is necessary. Especially due to the fact that most of the literature on sport participation lacks the inclusion of people with different (dis-)abilities and thus, their voices are ignored. Different research approaches, for example,

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focus-group interviews or a feedback tool resembling the sports-related version of the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2011), would be required to deepen our understanding on the topic and to ensure equal rights for people with disabilities in the field of sport and physical activity.

Resettlement in Germany and Canada – An intersectional view of disability experiences in transnational biographies

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Abstract

The PhD research project combines comparative policy research with forced migration studies and disability studies, while remaining true to the application focus of social work studies.
The intersection of forced migration and disability is a key area that is still somehow neglected in (European and German-language) disability studies. The UN CRPD addresses this intersection, but only peripherally scrutinises the politically induced causes of the living conditions of disabled and chronically ill people in the Global South. Resettlement as an instrument of migration management is aimed at those people who are categorised as particularly vulnerable by the UNHCR and national policies and who are living in certain asylum countries. The global distribution of power, as evidenced by the prevalence of wars, occupations, and economic sanctions, has been demonstrated to be a contributing factor not only to displacement, but to the onset and exacerbation of disabilities and health conditions. When people with disabilities from the Global South are admitted to countries of the Global North via resettlement, they are confronted with further and different discourses, prejudices, legal and social structures, barriers, but also resources and agency - even during the selection process for resettlement.

This research project explores the intersection of forced migration and disability within transnational biographies. It is based on 14 semi-structured interviews with resettled refugees in Germany and Canada. All participants have either self-reported a disability or chronic health condition, or have indicated that a close family member has experienced such a condition, be it physical, psychological or mental. The results I am going to present question pre-conceptions of vulnerability and agency in relation to forced migration and disability. They point to inconsistencies in international and national humanitarian regimes. I am employing an intersectional multi-level analysis in combination with grounded theory, examining barriers and agency in the transnational context of the interview narrative. The paper also shares structural differences between Germany and Canada as host countries and their impact on the barriers and resources encountered at the intersection of forced migration and disability. The presentation is concluded with a series of recommendations for the transformation of the system of integration and inclusion of refugees with chronic health conditions and disabilities, drawing on the insights from the interviews.

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Rights, Supports, and Life Projects for the Exercise of Personal and Social Freedoms of Persons with Disabilities: The Italian Path to Self-Determination

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Abstract

The Italian journey toward self-determination and non-discrimination for persons with disabilities has been shaped by recent laws, supports, and strategies for social inclusion. It has redefined the distributed roles of educational, training, and socio-health agencies dedicated to this population, aligning with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Italy has progressively incorporated the Convention's principles, emphasizing the importance of reasonable accommodations, multidimensional assessments, and individualized life projects.
The concept of disability has been expanded and shielded from stereotypes, recognizing that limitations to social participation arise from the interaction between impairments (physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory) and various barriers. The adoption of the bio-psycho-social approach, in line with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF), highlights the role of context and the need for targeted interventions that go beyond the individual condition.

The "life project" represents a paradigm shift in policies aimed at designing and ensuring future accessibility for persons with disabilities. In Italy, this rights-based horizon is conceptualized as an individualized, personalized, and participatory plan that seeks to achieve the objectives of the person with disabilities, improve their quality of life, and promote their inclusion across different domains. Rooted in the person's desires, expectations, and preferences, the life project identifies, within a unified existential vision, the necessary supports to enhance quality of life, develop potential, select living environments, and participate on equal terms. As stated in Legislative Decree No. 6 of May 14, 2024, letter n), "The life project of the person with disabilities, starting from their desires, expectations, and preferences, identifies, in a unitary existential perspective, the supports necessary to improve their quality of life, develop their potential, choose living contexts, and participate under conditions of equal opportunities."

The person with disabilities plays an integral role in shaping their life project, contributing actively to its definition in line with the principle of self-determination on the basis of equality in the exercise of their rights. The clear definition of individual objectives and operational and monitoring plans-established through "multidimensional assessment"-addresses various aspects such as learning, social and emotional well-being, education and employment, housing and social habitats, as well as care, assistance, and reasonable accommodations. These measures aim to ensure the best possible quality of life and foster participation across all life

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domains (Article 26).

The inclusive paradigm of the Italian school system, implemented for over 40 years, reflects a social model of disability that seeks to remove barriers impeding the full realization of individuals. This is achieved through tailored, flexible, and differentiated approaches that create accessible learning processes oriented toward future opportunities.
The current and future challenge lies in ensuring that self-determination becomes an effective and tangible reality throughout all phases of the life project. This involves fostering awareness of alternatives and the capacity for informed choice. Moreover, guaranteeing the continuity of supports and constant monitoring of the life project is essential to improving quality of life and ensuring full non-discrimination.

Supported Employment in France: A Recent Publicly Funded Scheme for the Professional Inclusion of People with Mental Health Disabilities – A Multidisciplinary Evaluative Study on Its Implementation and Impact

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Abstract

Supported Employment (*Emploi Accompagné*) is a **recent policy initiative in France**, introduced by the **2016 Labour Law** and publicly funded aimed at facilitating the **integration of people with disabilities** into the open labour market. This scheme provides **individualized, long-term support** delivered by **Supported Employment counsellors** who act as intermediaries between job seekers, employers, and healthcare and social service professionals. It represents a **significant transformation in public employment and health policies**, shifting towards a **social model of disability** and incorporating the principles of the **recovery paradigm in mental health**.

This paper presents a **multidisciplinary evaluative study** drawing from **social sciences, public health, employment policies and medico-social practices** to analyse the **implementation of the Supported Employment scheme in France for people with mental health disabilities**. Conducted as part of a doctoral research project, the study examines **27 medico-social structures across 25 French departments**. A **mixed-methods approach** was used combining **fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, longitudinal tracking of beneficiaries and standardized assessment tools** enabling comparisons with international Supported Employment programs. The research aims to evaluate the **effectiveness of the scheme in fostering access to and retention in employment** while also assessing its role in **supporting beneficiaries' recovery process**.

The findings demonstrate **significant effectiveness** of the scheme both in terms of **sustainable job retention** and **improvements in the subjective quality of life of beneficiaries**. The study also highlights **key challenges in its implementation**, particularly regarding **coordination between psychiatric services and medico-social structures** and **raising awareness among employers about the need for inclusive workplace adaptations**.

By shedding light on the **transformations introduced by Supported Employment in the field of work integration and mental health policies**, this research critically examines whether the scheme can **reduce structural inequalities in labour market access for people with mental health disabilities**. It also provides perspectives on how to **strengthen its integration within public policies** and ensure its sustainability as an inclusive employment intervention.

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*Speaker

The attitude of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing towards Russian Sign Language interpreters

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Abstract

Many changes have taken place in recent years in the field of sign language interpretation in Post Soviet countries. These include the emergence of a professional standard for interpretations, recognition of the status of sign language, and the development of requirements for interpreter training, among others. All of these factors contribute to a shift in the paradigm of perception of Russian Sign Language (RSL) interpreters, particularly among their key audience-Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals (DHoH).

Building upon previous works on evolving interpreter-community relationships (Cokely, 2005), including those within the Russian context (Bazoev, 2022), this research investigates the sociocultural dynamics shaping perceptions of RSL interpreters within the Deaf community in Russia. The study was conducted by the team of Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing and hearing researchers from the project "Researching the Deaf Community" of the GES-2 House of Culture using a mixed-methods approach, which included qualitative interviews with members of the Deaf community and a quantitative survey of DHoH individuals.

According to the results of the study, different models of perception of RSL interpreters coexist in Russia today. These models reflect diverse expectations concerning interpreter competence, ethics, the role of personal relationships, and related terminological uncertainty. The Soviet term "surdoperevodchik" ("surdointerpreter") and the contemporary term "sign language interpreter" are both used by DHoH individuals but are understood and defined semantically in different ways. The former term is more often associated with the perception of the interpreter as a helper, emphasizing emotional support and problem-solving assistance without focusing on formal qualifications. In contrast, the latter term is linked to the perception of the interpreter as a professional, prioritizing high proficiency in RSL, ethical conduct, and cultural understanding.

As a result, the accelerating professionalization of RSL interpretation leads, on one hand, to an improvement in the quality of interpretation, while on the other hand, it may create gaps between the traditional expectations of DHoH clients and the evolving requirements for the work of a interpreter. And the position of a good interpreter in the eyes of the DHoH audience today is ambivalent and requires a balance between informal inclusion in the Deaf community and formal qualification requirements.

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*Speaker

The implementation of the EU Disability Strategy 2021-2030: achievements and perspectives for disability rights in Europe

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Abstract

Background: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is ratified by the EU and all its 27 Member States, and the implementation is in progress, albeit at different pace. The EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (the Strategy) is the policy framework of the European Commission for the implementation of the UNCRPD. The Strategy includes an ambitious set of actions and flagship initiatives until 2024 in various domains, linked to the UNCRPD. Six of the seven flagship initiatives have already been implemented, and the remaining one is expected to be published by early 2025. Most of the other policy actions included in the Strategy are also completed by 2024. Despite significant efforts to implement the UNCRPD across the EU, persistent gaps remain between persons with and without disabilities, for example when it comes to poverty, access to jobs, inclusive education, housing, or healthcare services.

The problem: Recent multiple crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy crisis due to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, coupled with rising inflation, affect persons with disabilities and their families disproportionately (Birtha et al., 2023). As the European Commission is expected to propose new initiatives for the remaining time of the Strategy until 2030, the objective of the paper is to give an overview on the implementation of the Strategy, on its achievements so far and to discuss the main bottlenecks that hinder the full participation of persons with disabilities in European societies. It is important to understand, based on available quantitative and qualitative evidence, the complex reasons behind equality gaps. For instance, EU data shows a persistent disability employment gap, despite several Member States implemented various policies in recent years to improve the labour market participation of persons with disabilities, along with EU actions in the area (e.g. Disability Employment Package, impact of EU funds etc.). There are other structural barriers that should be addressed in the Member States, such as the lack of inclusive education, starting from early childhood, that lead to early school leaving and lower educational attainments, as shown by EU data. Taking a holistic approach is key to identify future actions and to put forward ideas for the implementation of the Strategy in the coming years.

Methods: This paper is building on data collected for the purposes of the European Disability Expertise (EDE) European Semester task (at the request of the European Commission) and a briefing requested by the European Parliament in 2024, through extensive desk research and analysis of the most recent EU SILC data.

Results: The paper presents recommendations from recently published studies on how to move forward with the implementation of the Strategy. This includes the proposal of new

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*Speaker

flagship initiatives but also highlights the importance of the swift implementation of existing legislation and policies across the Member States (e.g. European Accessibility Act). Disability mainstreaming is an important way to uphold the rights outlined in the UNCRPD across policies and programmes (e.g. the upcoming European Affordable Housing Plan).

The Outbound Orientation Project for univerity students with Special Educational Needs: developing and testing a Highly Accessible MOOC

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Abstract

This paper takes as its starting point a research work presented at the Conferences of the Italian Society of Special Pedagogy held in 2024 in Ortigia and Rome. The aim here is to present the Work Orientation Project for university students with disabilities, Specific Learning Disorders (DSA) and Special Educational Needs (BES), which included an implementation phase of a highly accessible Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) launched at the Department of Education Sciences at the University of Roma Tre. The training course consisted of three thematic modules, related to storytelling for orientation, curriculum vitae writing and the Office package, designed according to the principles of Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2024), therefore, able to meet the vocational orientation needs of university students with BES.

In the ex-ante phase, the project involved a number of university students with Special Educational Needs to survey their initial skills and expectations towards employment. In the ex-post phase, the effectiveness of the career guidance course in terms of improving the participants' professional skills and awareness of job opportunities was evaluated.

The collected results give an account of the validity of the training experience, highlighting its impact both on the students' technical skills and on the increase in their perception of employability and self-efficacy. The results of the project are intended to fit in with and extend the investigations conducted by the international scientific community (Liu et al., 2024), promoting effective innovative perspectives for the labour market orientation of students with disabilities, DSA and BES; to suggest further areas of development to strengthen university and work inclusion policies; and to strengthen

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*Speaker

the dialogue with local stakeholders. INDICATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The right to information – An effective tool for access to social protection for people with disabilities?

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Abstract

Access to information and social protection remains a significant challenge for people with disabilities (PWDs) worldwide, particularly in lower- and middle-income countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal. Both countries struggle to address the needs of individuals with physical disabilities at birth or through accidents and war. Additionally, intersecting factors such as gender, caste, and ethnic discrimination further marginalise PWDs, increasing poverty and social exclusion.
This paper employs an intersectional approach to explore the potential of the Right to Information (RTI) Acts in Sri Lanka and Nepal in improving access to essential information on social protection schemes for PWDs. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data collected from interviews and RTI requests submitted by PWDs and NGO representatives between 2021 and 2022, the study identifies key barriers to information access and disability benefits. Furthermore, it examines the impact of Sri Lanka's recent political transition on access to information and support, using preliminary findings gathered in spring 2025.

The current data shed light on systemic obstacles in both countries, including the absence of proactive disclosure of public information, limited transparency in resource allocation and government services, widespread corruption, and weak accountability mechanisms. Additionally, many government officials lack awareness of disability rights and receive insufficient training in providing necessary accommodations. However, some positive developments have emerged: RTI submissions have clarified the procedural framework for disability benefit applications, selection criteria, and processing timelines, contributing to greater transparency.

Against this backdrop, the paper concludes by discussing the potential applicability of RTI legislation in enhancing access to information and social protection for PWDs in the European context.

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The struggle for independent living - deinstitutionalisation of services for people with intellectual disabilities in Poland. Transformations of ideas, deconstructions of strategies and activist actions

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Abstract

The development of a deinstitutionalisation strategy is one of the priority objectives of Polish social policy. Demands for accelerated action and the creation of a meaningful plan to enable people with disabilities to live independently in the local community are now part of the mainstream struggle of activists and their allies in Poland, making deinstitutionalisation a disability rights movement. It is therefore important to reflect on how deinstitutionalisation has been conceptualised in Polish policy in recent years, and how it is understood by the disability community?
In 2018, in Geneva, the UN Committee, while adopting a report on the implementation of the UN CRPD in Poland, issued recommendations for Poland, taking into account the voices of Polish activists who presented the actual state of implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities at the session. One of the resounding problems highlighted is that in Poland many persons with disabilities live in institutions due to a lack of alternatives, and an active and independent life without assistance is impossible. In view of this situation, the UN Committee recommended that Polish social policy should develop and adopt an action plan for deinstitutionalisation. Unfortunately, after six years of discussions on deinstitutionalisation, both at the level of legislation and in the disability communities, the Polish strategy is still in limbo. The Supreme Audit Office report shows that the number of people with intellectual disabilities in 24-hour institutions - social welfare homes - increased by 8% in 2024. The report also shows gross violations of the basic human rights of residents of social welfare homes (Supreme Audit Office Report, 2024).

The aim of this presentation is to show how the deinstitutionalisation of services for people with intellectual disabilities is understood, conceptualised and practiced in contemporary Poland, where disability policy is re-embedded in the paradigm of equality, inclusion, diversity and recognition of rights.

The problem presented will be analysed at three levels, focusing on the following issues: transformation of ideas, deconstruction of strategies, activist actions. In a theoretical context referring to Degener's (2016) human rights model of disability, Goffman's (2023) concept of the total institution or Foucault's (1987) perspective of institutional oppression.

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*Speaker

The issues highlighted are the result of a research project. Using critical discourse analysis, the main aims of the project were to:

- to analyse the ways in which deinstitutionalisation has been constructed in the field of social policy and legislation,

-to capture the current shape of the constructed strategy and the meanings given to deinstitutionalisation

-to highlight the work of NGOs and activists in developing local solutions to support independent and autonomous living, often in opposition to mainstream social policy.

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Time, Disability, and Work: Rethinking Inclusivity Through Crip Temporalities

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Abstract

Workplace culture often reinforces standardized schedules and position productivity as the primary measure of success. These norms are typically designed around an idealized, able-bodied worker, creating significant barriers for individuals with disabilities. While much existing research has focused on discriminatory practices and the challenges of workplace accommodations (e.g., Foster, 2007; Østerud, 2023), the role of time in shaping these exclusions remains underexplored. Narratives of inclusion often centre on offering disabled workers more time-through extended hours or flexible schedules-rather than questioning whether the very structures of time themselves are exclusionary. This framing shifts responsibility onto individuals, framing disability as a personal issue to be overcome, rather than addressing the systemic barriers embedded in workplace time regimes (Jammaers et al., 2016).
Drawing on 19 semi-structured interviews with disabled individuals in the Czech Republic, this study examines the intricate relationship between time, disability, and work. By employing the theoretical frameworks of chrononormativity (Freeman, 2010) and crip time (Kafer, 2013), it investigates the tension between normative work schedules and the embodied realities of disabled workers. It also examines the adaptive strategies disabled workers employ to navigate these temporal constraints, while highlighting how alternative temporalities centred around care and well-being could challenge prevailing workplace culture. By centring time as a crucial factor in workplace inclusion, this research highlights the transformative potential of crip time. Thus, rather than advocating for temporal flexibility alone, this study calls for a rethinking of workplace time regimes. Ultimately, it contends that inclusivity cannot be achieved through mere individual accommodations or extended time, but requires a broader transformation of temporal expectations-one that recognises diverse temporal needs and values diverse ways of being, working, and caring. It argues that to achieve inclusivity, workplaces must challenge chrononormativity and recognise care as an integral part of labour.

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Tools of transformation: Personalized Didactic Plans as a way of perpetrating deficit-thinking

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Abstract

Italy ratified CRPD in 2006, integrating art. 24 on Education which maintains non-discrimination and equal opportunity as principles for inclusive educational environments at all levels of instruction.

Despite formal commitment, defining inclusion uniformly remains challenging (D'Alessio & Watkins 2009; D'Alessio 2011; Göransson & Nilholm 2014), as it shall consider multiple axes intersecting disability (Besič 2020; Slee, Corcan & Marnie 2021). At the national level, the issuing of Ministerial Directive concerning intervention tools for pupils with special educational needs and operative guidelines (MIUR 2012, 2013), introduced the concept of SEN (UNESCO 1998), specifically targeting pupils with migratory background. Assessment is carried out by school personnel on multiple reasons, yielding SEN as a non-normative and general label (Dyson & Gallannaugh 2008).

The aim of this proposal is to present how inclusive education is hindered when a priori targeting students with migratory backgrounds as SEN learners happens. Through ethnographic semi-structured interviews (Wolcott 1999) with school personnel in lower middle-schools situated in the peripheries of Turin, Northern Italy. These were selected based on the high density of pupils with migratory backgrounds. The interview-based data gathering assessed the criteria for individuating SEN status, and the actual application of Personalized Didactic Plans (PDPs), a seemingly adaptable and temporary tool for inclusion of disadvantaged students. However, the research shows how 1) temporary disadvantages are rather perpetuated within PDPs usage, thus stabilizing a condition of temporary difficulty; 2) the shift in inclusive education from a comprehensive discourse for all learners, to the possibility of inclusion being based on permanent deficits predicated on the learners. The transformation happens by creating barriers to inclusive education for disadvantaged students, the latter raging from social control of immigration areas to school-specific practices, such as the structure and usage of PDPs.

As DisCrit (Connor, Ferri & Annamma 2016) proposed, teaching practices can generate disablement, despite inclusive purposes (Migliarini 2018). Disability Studies in Education (Gabel 2005) are beneficial to the Italian system, as a reflection on how school inclusion is eschewed by coopting Special Education discourse (Skrtic 1991), already riddled with a medical approach to learning disabilities, through deficit-thinking (Valencia 1997) towards migrant students.

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*Speaker

Transforming ideas of accessibility: the role of helping interactions in the era of powered assistive devices

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Abstract

In recent years, assistive devices for people with mobility impairments, such as powered wheelchairs, have significantly advanced, leading to evolving expectations for independence among people with disabilities. However, the culture among non-disabled people have not kept pace with these changes. This paper investigates how accessibility of public buildings is perceived by individuals with mobility impairments and shopkeepers. In particular, it focuses on the acceptability of helping interactions as a means to overcome architectural barriers.
The study took place in an Italian city. It was carried out by a disabled researcher and activist, and included a participatory action research involving other disabled and non-disabled volunteers. The shopkeepers' perspective was explored through 16 interviews and field observations about other 60 shopkeepers. The voices of 65 people with mobility impairments were collected through an online mixed-methods questionnaire. Qualitative data were analysed using a thematic coding process (Flick, 2014).

Findings revealed two contrasting perspectives. Shopkeepers often assume that solving accessibility problems by providing help (for instance, lifting a wheelchair up a step) is both feasible and acceptable. In many cases, the need for ramps is denied or downplayed, with the belief that help alone is sufficient. Conversely, for disabled people, needing assistance to enter a public building is unjust. They describe the negative feelings triggered by being forced into a lower level of independence than what they normally experience, highlighting the psycho-emotional consequences of ableism (Reeve, 2008; Thomas, 2004). Moreover, they point out that help is ineffective in overcoming barriers when the person uses a power wheelchair, as it cannot be easily lifted.

These findings highlight how both transformations in assistive technology and evolving expectations of autonomy challenge traditional ideas of disabled people as passive recipients of help. Firstly, the specific needs of powered wheelchair users remain mostly unknown to non-disabled people, whose understanding of disability has not evolved in line with technology advancements. Secondly, the study confirms that portraying disabled people as recipients of help and 'deserving poors' (Katz, 2013) constitutes an ordinary discourse (Titchkosky, 2011), unproblematized and deeply ingrained in societal norms. However, the help provided, to use Nadler's framework (2020), seems dependency-oriented instead of autonomy-oriented.

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*Speaker

Moreover, the shopkeepers' perspective seems misaligned also with the UNCRPD and accessibility laws in general, which emphasize the value of autonomous access, equality, and non-discrimination. As the proper implementation of laws and policies also depends on how the knowledge and beliefs of the actors involved (Michie, 2005), these findings call for policies and educational strategies that address the cultural gap in mainstream attitudes toward disability.

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Understanding the potential of assistive technology to support independence and wellbeing: A qualitative study

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Abstract

Background: Assistive technology (AT) includes adaptive or non-digital equipment, digital technology, electronic equipment and innovative digital infrastructure and is being prioritised as a cost-effective way of supporting independence, health and wellbeing amongst people living with disability and those living with long-term conditions. However, the potential of AT is yet to be realised in practice. Understanding the service provision involving AT from providers and recipients' perspectives and how we can enhance the accessibility of AT to address a considerable unmet need is vital.
Methodology: A qualitative methodology informed by participatory approaches was used. We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews (October 2023-September 2024) to understand AT service provision and its impact. Using purposive sampling, diverse perspectives were sought from people with long term conditions, informal carers of people with long term conditions, health and social care professionals and other AT professionals on what works well, what are the challenges and how AT service provision could be improved. We also conducted a photovoice activity among a small number of interviewees to gain additional insight into their experiences of AT.

Analysis: Interviews were transcribed verbatim and used to develop prompts for the photovoice activity. We used thematic analysis and the photos and the discussion of the photos with the participants were used to support the analysis. The WHO strategic action framework to improve access to assistive technology comprising the "four Ps" (With 'People' who need AT in the centre, 'Policy' defines the space in which 'Products' 'Personnel', 'Provision' operates) was used to organise and understand the study findings.

Results: 42 participants (13 people with long term conditions, 10 carers (4 of each participant type took part in the photovoice activity) and 19 professionals were interviewed. (1) 'People' with long term conditions (and their carers) highlighted the negative impact of the health conditions and how AT was helpful but also aspects that were unhelpful. Their journey to accessing AT was convoluted and not streamlined which led to frustration; (2) 'Policy': policymakers to consider the burden of costs associated with healthcare and the benefits of a focus on prevention through AT; (3) 'Products': simple accessible information, with consideration of people for whom English is not their first language, on the range of AT

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[*] Speaker

available is needed; (4) ‘Personnel’: the lack of trained personnel to carry out assessments to ensure an individual receives AT that is appropriate and timely leads to delays resulting in situations where AT may be inappropriate for use. (5) ‘Provision’: A streamlined process for individuals (people and personnel) through collaborative working in areas of referral, assessment, and AT supply, and involving health and social care teams is needed to improve the accessibility of AT.

Conclusion: The study sheds light on the current service provision of AT, the challenges, and how service provision might be improved. The findings could help stimulate the development of better opportunities for people to access appropriate, acceptable and timely AT.

When the family encounters disability: from the communication of the diagnosis to the transformative educational support

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Abstract

This contribution aims to explore the gap between the communication of a disability diagnosis and the isolation experienced by many families, examining the benefits that educational support could have on all the actors involved.
The birth of a child represents a crucial event, which inevitably entails a process of change in personal and couple identity. In the course of pregnancy, parents begin to develop an image of the child and of their being mother and father. However, it can happen that, in the pre-natal, peri-natal, or post-natal phase, a medical professional communicates the diagnosis of a disability. This situation, without effective educational support, could be a "point of no return" (Arosio, 2007), in which the family experiences a sense of vulnerability. Regarding the above, the author Healey (1996) identified several stages of adaptation that a family experiences while accepting the communication of disability. Furthermore, to ensure effective dialogue, it is essential to adopt clear and appropriate language; identify a defined setting, and adopt relational modes characterized by openness and empathy.

Through an exploratory survey, a total of 99 responses from parents belonging to Italian Family Associations. This qualitative analysis aims to investigate how health professionals communicate the diagnosis and the subsequent educational support in the family dynamics of coping with their son or daughter's disability. A semi-structured format combined with closed and open-ended questions was administered to the research sample using the Google Forms platform. For this work, participants were guaranteed complete anonymity of their answers, respecting privacy and ethical standards.

The data collected suggest the positive value of identifying an educational figure, such as the Pedagogist, capable of working from the outset in synergy with the medical staff so that he or she can accompany the family in the process of elaborating the diagnosis and, subsequently, of structuring for their son or daughter with disabilities an authentic, personalized and quality life project (Healey, 1996; Canevaro, 2004).

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"Nothing about you without you", except for ... . Professional and organisational constraints to participation in Austria's disability services.

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Abstract

Austria's disability services have, at least in some federal states, developed a supposedly broad infrastructure for the participation of people using them. Following the ratification of the UNCRPD in 2008, new participation acts, organisational guidelines, formal bodies, user representative structures and evaluation or complaint mechanisms have been introduced or widened. Yet, many disability rights organisations in Austria report that power and decision-making have not shifted towards persons with disabilities. This paper addresses the organisational and professional barriers to impactful participation in Austria by analysing interviews with staff in disability services from different organisational levels (frontline workers, mid-level managers and directors) conducted in autumn 2024 (n=15).

In most cases, a lack of co-decision in areas that determine the everyday life of persons with disabilities became apparent. The results show that persons who use disability services do often not have a say in the construction of rules, support structures, evaluation mechanisms, participation formats and communication channels. Importantly, information and transparency about the possible levels, areas and outcomes of participation are often missing.

Further obstacles are rooted in the risks of professionalising and formalising co-constructive elements. Informants mentioned how informal possibilities to exchange about needs, conflicts and possible solutions were unintentionally undermined by highly structured participation mechanisms. Also, most formats seem to assume specific norms of personal competencies which impede participation by a diverse range of persons with disabilities.

The paper will finish with examples and ideas from the interviews about how to overcome such constraints and make participation in disability services more impactful.

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*Speaker

Social Participation of People with ME/CFS

Ute Kahle*[1]

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Abstract

Under the motto *research-based learning and practice meets theory*, the practice research project on the social participation of people with ME/CFS was launched under the leadership of the chairwoman of *Fatigatio e. V.*, Dr. Lieseltraud Lange Riechmann, and Prof. Dr. Ute Kahle, together with 42 students of Social Work at the SRH University Campus Dresden.
The research focuses on the social participation of those affected in school, work, and private life, as well as mobility, medical care, participation opportunities in education and studies, social law issues, and the tasks of self-help organizations. The project addresses a completely unexplored research area and represents a new field of action and engagement for Social Work students, as there are currently approximately 500,000 affected individuals who urgently need social work and educational support to achieve independent living and participation in society.
Social and societal participation relate to *"the relationship between the individual and societal conditions"* (Bartelheimer et al. 2020, 43). Current findings in participation research show that people with disabilities, elderly individuals, those with higher care and support needs, or those with mental illnesses experience discrimination. Independent living and participation in the community, as codified in Article 17 of the human rights-based UN CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), can only be realized if a professional support system is established (*TEILHABE DIGITAL 2023*).

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*Speaker

Individual Sessions:

Topic 2
Activism and campaigning

"Listening to My Voice" The Experiences of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Women in Accessing Onsite and Digital Health Care Services in Israel

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Abstract

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The 2025 ALTER conference theme of 'Transformations' can be linked to my research, since one of my research aims as a registered nurse, is achieving the utopian vision of equal accessibility to onsite and digital health care services for deaf and hard-of-hearing women.

My research focused on the accessibility of digital and in-person health services for deaf and hard-of-hearing women and their unique experiences both as women and as women who are deaf and hard-of-hearing. The study also examined the strategies of these women and their ways of dealing with hearing challenges and with the circles of oppression around them.

One important conclusion from my thesis which relates to one of the conference's questions, is the importance of continuing activism including academic activism. "Please, I hope your research will not stay in the libraries," was a comment made to me by one of the participants who is deaf, and also a therapist herself. She wanted me to be an activist as well and reported that sometimes the lack of access to proper medical treatment due to her hearing loss was harmful to her health and harmed her female autonomy. Academic activism is an essential concept and space that underpins social change.

The qualitative research method used was conducted from a feminist perspective of an open and flexile approach to reach the unknown (Herzog, 2012). Listening to the different voices can help us reach inclusive knowledge, as "the personal is political" and in the spirit of "nothing about us without us" (Oliver, 1983).

As a researcher, who is a registered nurse, and has a deaf family member, I chose to study deaf and hard-of-hearing women in situations that combine three fields of knowledge: medical services, hearing disability and unique female perspective.

Intersectionality theory serves as an important tool in this multidisciplinary study and provides a link to the topic of the conference 'Transformations'.

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Looking at European countries, the UNCRPD committee has noted a decline in disability rights including accessibility. My research, particularly during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, showed that women reported a decline in accessibility to medical services due to the compulsory wearing of a mask. Deaf and hard-of-hearing women were not able to lip read, and this was harmful to their health.

An optimistic conclusion was that the positive approach of medical staff, despite the necessity of following rules such as the use of masks during COVID-19, can contribute to better accessibility. Women reported that different accessibility trainings for the medical staff promote better understanding, a reduction in stigma and a better experience for them.

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Disability activist strategies for transformation: findings from a six-country EU study

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Abstract

The UNCRPD has prompted major discursive, legislative and policy changes in disability rights across European countries. Terms such as participation, 'independent living' and 'self-determination' are no longer activist slogans and increasingly feature in strategies from governments, ministries and providers of disability services. Yet, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities regularly notes deficiencies in the participation of persons with disabilities in public policy processes as well as limited progress and even reverses in deinstitutionalisation, inclusive education and the provision of personal assistance.
Against this backdrop, this paper analyses the messages, strategies and experiences of disability and mental health activists in six EU countries in achieving transformations in the provision of disability services and support. It seeks to advance multi-country research in Disability Studies by synthesising data from Austria, Denmark, France, Poland, Portugal and Romania, looking for common patterns as well as single illustrative cases. Data comes from 73 interviews with disability and mental health activists conducted in 2024 as part of an EU research project on increasing responsiveness to expertise-through-lived-experience in social policy and social services.

The findings show the range of activist practices used to try to achieve change, both when cooperating with authorities/disability services and when directly challenging policy decisions and the non-implementation of the UNCRPD. However, there is a clear inequality between the material and infrastructural resources for campaigning available to activists with lived experience compared to those of professional groups and providers of classical disability services. This unequal distribution of resources limits the weight of expertise-by-experience within media, policy and public actions for change within disability and mental health services.
Overall, the paper argues that fundamental questions of voice, self-advocacy and decision-making remain key for disability activism. However, the focus of activist campaigns is shifting to highlight the poor understanding and implementation of these key goals.

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[*] Speaker

Disability rights under democratic backsliding – Perspectives from Central and Eastern European disability rights movements

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Abstract

Around the world, social movements of disabled people have been pursuing social, political and cultural transformations to challenge, and ultimately end disablement. Since the 1990s, human rights laws have brought about a tide of policy changes, influencing both national, and international laws. Today, disabled people's organisations and other organisations speaking for disability rights are tasked to build on the legal framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, disability rights organisations face challenges in eroding democracies. Populist governments often employ strategies to curb the operation of organisations critical towards their policies. My study explored how disability movements advocate for human rights in changing and eroding democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. Data was collected in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Serbia. First, I will present disability movements in the four countries, with data about their mobilisation resources and positions in policy-making. Second, a closer analysis will explore the situation in Hungary, a 'poster child' of illiberalism. Results confirm that the space for disability rights movements is shrinking in eroding democracies. Opportunities to influence and monitor public policy-making have been diminishing where de-democratisation is stronger. Due to fear of repercussions, some disability movement actors employ self-censorship when talking publicly. Legal obligations to consult with the disability movement, existing human rights laws, and statutory human rights bodies seem less and less effective amid eroding democratic structures. De-democratisation affects disability movement organisations diversely, making it difficult for movement actors to form coalitions internally or externally with other social or political movements. National disability movements can, and often become fractured.

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*Speaker

France's social history and the infamous "40 years" French delay on autism

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Abstract

Despite the country's pride taken in its status of "country of human rights", France was pointed out several times for the 40 years of delay on Autism the country accused. The country was even several times accused by European institutions or even the UN of violating autistic people's rights. The (proved) popularity of psychoanalytic theories in France (see BATES Richard, " Autisme et psychanalyse, Histoire d'un échec français ", The Conversation) and of the ABA method was often pointed out as the origin of this delay- however, limiting to just the question of medical research on autism would be reductive. Indeed, the growing importance of the "social" and "human right" models of disability makes autism being increasingly understood as a social condition. Hence, Peter Crosbie, autistic living in France, dwelled in 2018 into the French political culture and linked it to the overall question of minorities in France and the country's rejection of any kind of identity politics - he drew a parallel between France's development (or lack thereof) of gender and disability studies. He cites Asari: The French republican model has traditionally been regarded as the ideal of inclusiveness. However, in practice, this amounts to confronting minorities with highly assimilationist demands in terms of language and cultural mores and refuses public recognition of cultural diversity.
The presentation would still rely on the medical definition of Autism provided by the ICD-11, as it is the definition allowing people to be diagnosed.

The analysis will link the question of autistic rights to the history of social progress regarding minority rights and of social transformation in France, and therefore analyze to what extent understanding this social history, of course disability rights but also women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights and the question of poverty in the country may help to understand French - by dedicating a part of the presentation to an intersectional approach.

My presentation will present several analyses conducted by autistic (often LGBT) and allistic people involved in the disability rights movement, as it will rely on semi-structured interviews, (including some I conducted in the frame of my Master Thesis in Political Science in May and June 2023) - and on press analysis.

Indicative sources and bibliography:

Brigitte Chamak et al. The Autism diagnostic experiences of French parents.. Autism, 2011

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L'Union européenne : une puissance normative pour les droits des femmes autistes ?, Institut du Genre en Géopolitique.

La Convention relative aux droits des personnes handicapées, ou la Convention invisible ? Institut du Genre en Géopolitique.

Peter Crosbie, Autism in France: Why we're 40 years behind", The Autism Advantage, 2018

Sophie Robert, Le mur ou la psychanalyse à l'épreuve de l'autisme, Océan Invisible Production, 2011

On disability:

PETIT Thibault, Handicap à vendre, Les Arènes, 2022

PIOT Alain, Femmes, laïcité, égalité, handicap, Editions L'HARMATTAN, 2019

PIOT Maudy, Violences du genre, violences du handicap, Editions L'HARMATTAN, 2015

Narrative Empathy, Intersectionality, Human Vulnerability and Interdependence in Claudia Marseille's But You Look So Normal (2024)

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Abstract

Life narratives like memoirs manage to bridge the chasm between research fields, such as Deaf Studies and Disability Studies, and the quotidian existence of Deaf people and people with disabilities. Such texts are testament to the heterogeneity existing within the disability and Deaf communities. Reading and studying such self-referential works can aid in documenting and preserving these first-person accounts. Couser (”Signifying Selves” 202) as well as Smith and Watson (219) maintain that such texts can be construed as a means to uplift and better the lot of these communities. These literary works not only raise awareness from the perspective of the very people concerned, thus arguably epitomizing the activist spirit of ”nothing about us without us” (see Couser, ”Disability” 603–605); they can also engage and sway the readership emotionally-by eliciting empathy, for instance. Following Keen's (”Life Writing”; ”Strategic Empathizing”), Anderst's and particularly Baena's (”No Pity”; ”The Epistemology”) lines of argumentation, who have focused on empathy in (non-)fiction, my paper will put Claudia Marseille's 2024 memoir *But You Look So Normal: Lost and Found in a Hearing World* under the microscope. This primary text chronicles Marseille's life story as a person born with severe hearing loss. My paper will examine in what ways the chosen memoir potentially creates narrative empathy. It will also investigate how the text represents the identity of the narrativized version of Claudia Marseille and how it portrays her interactions with and embeddedness in the socio-cultural context. Following directly in Baena's footsteps (”No Pity”), who focuses on disability memoirs while applying Keen's approach to ”narrative empathy,” I will employ Keen's ”strategic empathizing” to scrutinize Marseille's memoir. This approach will be linked to notions taken from Smith and Watson's ”tool kit ... for reading life narratives” (235–251), including ”identity,” ”knowledge” and ”trauma.” Structure-wise, my paper will commence by introducing pertinent ideas from Deaf Studies, Disability Studies, Life Writing Studies and Narratology. After laying the theoretical and methodological foundations, the primary text will be analyzed. Overall, I aim to show that *But You Look So Normal* uses Keen's ”techniques of bounded, ambassadorial, and broadcast narrative empathy” to emotionally influence the audience and to potentially spread valuable information on the experience of hearing loss. I will further illustrate that these empathizing strategies are inextricably interwoven with the depiction of the highly intersectional identity of its narrativized author, whose self-representation sheds light on discrimination, unique insights that arise from a life with severe hearing loss, (familial) trauma, human vulnerability and interdependence.

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*Speaker

Polish struggle for personal assistance for people with disabilities in the perspective of a narrative policy framework

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Abstract

Activists in Poland have been advocating for personal assistance since the 1990s, but significant progress began only after Poland ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2012. This ratification heightened public pressure on policymakers to address the issue. However, it took an additional decade for the topic of a Polish Act on personal assistance to gain political traction. This journey involved various initiatives, including project-based trials of assistance, local government funding applications, and the collaborative development of Personal Assistance Standards by governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Street protests also played a crucial role in pushing for legislative action, culminating in two competing draft acts: one from the Office of the President (2023) and another from the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy (2024). The focus of recent activist efforts from 2023 to 2024 has been particularly intense. The analysis examines narratives surrounding the implementation of personal assistance legislation and the ensuing conflict between the two proposed acts. Four key events are analyzed: 1) the presidential draft creation process, 2) a May 2023 street protest dubbed the "funeral of personal assistance," 3) the government's legislative development process, and 4) a December 2024 protest aimed at urging publication of the government's draft.

The analysis employs a narrative policy framework to explore how various political actors-activists and policymakers-craft narratives around personal assistance. It seeks to identify who creates these narratives, their purposes, and their messages. The first stage involved identifying key participants in these events and their narratives. The second stage focused on gathering textual and visual materials that reflect public discourse, including press articles, public consultation documents for both acts, and social media content from various stakeholders.

The third stage involved analyzing these materials through open coding to uncover dominant narratives related to personal assistance. These narratives often reflect societal values and perspectives on personal assistance's function and implementation. Notably, activists have articulated existential narratives emphasizing slogans like "personal assistance or death" and "live but not just survive." The narrative of "unfulfilled promise" is also prominent among activists. However, there is a lack of unity within the advocacy community, with some parents of individuals with disabilities promoting the idea that "the parent is the best assistant."

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*Speaker

Additionally, skepticism about the feasibility of personal assistance is reflected in narratives that express doubt about its implementation.

On the policymaking side, a ”narrative of deferral” has emerged, highlighting a cautious approach to implementing personal assistance and sometimes denying its necessity altogether. This discourse underscores a broader struggle between activists advocating for systemic personal assistance and policymakers who may prioritize gradual reform over immediate action. In summary, this period of activism represents a critical juncture in Poland’s pursuit of personal assistance legislation. The interplay between grassroots advocacy and governmental response continues to shape the narrative landscape surrounding this essential issue for people with disabilities in Poland.

Post-May 68 disabled people protest movements in France and its afterlives

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Abstract

Main topic: In the political and intellectual context of the post-May 68 era, some of the most culturally priviledged young people with physical disabilities mobilized to express their anger and subvert the dominant image of disabled people promoted by charities, media and the state. This collectives are the Mouvement de Défense des Handicapés (MDH) and the Comitéde Lutte des Handicapés (CLH), who are conducting a double battle: against the annual street collections organized by major associations to finance their activities, and for the repeal of the "Loi d'orientation en faveur des personnes Handicapées", passed on June 30, 1975. This law regulates their administration, their rights, the forms of assistance granted to them, and their recognition and orientation by administrative commissions.
This paper will look at the genesis of these mobilizations, particularly in the student movement of the 1960s, and discuss their role in the metamorphosis of the disability category inherited by French public policy today. The mobilization of the MDH and CLH took place in the name of all disabled people, at a time when a law was being passed to regulate their administrative treatment, thus contributing to the process of unifying this category. We could speak of a "paradoxical contribution" of these movements, which mobilize in the name of the very category promoted by the law they are contesting. By demonstrating, forging alliances and disseminating their analyses, they bring this category into the public arena, giving it flesh and attaching new representations to it. In so doing, they open up a space for renewed uses of the category of disability, as well as the representations, practices and rights attached to it.

Methods: This contribution presents a part of the results of a dissertation in historical sociology on the process of unifying the category of disability in twentieth-century France(Bas, 2021). It analyzes this process on the basis of a cross-cutting history of mobilizations by disabled people, public policies and the sciences that take this population as their object. This question is explored on the basis of interviews, public and private archives, films and autobiographies, as well as analyses of the press and parliamentary debates.

Indicative bibliography:

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The awareness of one's human rights as a facilitator for successful school-to-work transitions

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Abstract

A majority of nation-states have ratified the UNCRPD, committing to promote the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. However, reports from the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities consistently indicate that the rights to inclusion in education and employment are often applied inconsistently and insufficiently. In this context, the findings of in-depth and comparative research on transitions between education and work can be helpful in delimitating and explaining this lack. The PATH_CH-LUX project, which examines the school-to-work transitions of young people with disabilities in Luxembourg and Switzerland, provides valuable insights in this respect (Powell et al., 2024). The research incorporates the perspectives and experiences of young people during this transition, using a qualitative lens to analyze the interactions among various welfare state institutions, their actors, and subjects.
Incorporating the perspectives of education and welfare policy recipients enables an empirical analysis of these policies' effects on citizens' self-perceptions, agency, and subject formation. Drawing from Althusser's reflections on the subjectivizing effect of state institutions, Studies in Subjectivation (Bosancic et al., 2022) emphasize the importance of how service users interpret social expectations and are engaged in co-production: During the transition from school to work, young people with disabilities pass through various institutions, and the expectations placed on them are correspondingly diverse and sometimes contradictory. How do they advocate for their rights and needs to ensure inclusion and participation, and how do transition systems respond?

In our presentation, we aim to precisely capture the emergence of awareness of one's rights through the concept of subjectivation as a "subject of rights" (Traue & Pfahl, 2022). By integrating the concept of awareness context (Glaser & Strauss, 1965) into the concept of subjectivation, we highlight the significance of being aware of one's legal, economic and political situation in developing a self-perception as a rights-bearing subject. The concept of awareness offers a relational understanding of subjectivity and recognizing the essential emergence of the situation.

The database contains 30 biographical interviews we conducted in Luxembourg with young people with disabilities transitioning from school to work. We approach these data with hermeneutic methods adapted to questions of subjectivation in disability studies. The findings reveal varying levels of awareness regarding their legal rights and demonstrate the impact on labor market inclusion. While some young individuals successfully assert their claims to

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participate in regular employment or pursue higher education, others are trapped in mutual deceptions created by the illusion of inclusion perpetuated through workshop employment.

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Justin Powell, Andeas Hadjar, Robin Samuel, Boris Traue, Carmen Zurbriggen (2025): Comparing Pathways into the Labor Market of Young People with Disabilities in Switzerland and Luxembourg. Journal für Sozialpolitikforschung, 9 (2). doi.org/10.18753/2297-8224-5884

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‘I discovered I was ADHD and my life changed’. Identification, self-determination and self-representation of ADHD adults in Italy

Barbara Centrone*[1], Carmine Ferrara[2], Alice Scavarda[3], and Luigi Gariglio[3]

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Abstract

Social networks have given people the opportunity to authentically self-narrate and get in touch with stories of people talking about themselves, doing outreach and activism on neurodivergence issues (Betts et al., 2023). This phenomenon is leading more people to question their own ways of being in the world (Rosqvist et al., 2020; Centrone, 2024), sometimes deciding to embark on diagnostic journeys to find answers.

The extant literature on the subject, which to date has focused primarily on autistic persons, demonstrates that this newfound self-awareness leads some individuals to utilise identity-first language and to appropriate a label often associated with medical discourse, such as ADHD or ASD. Rodriguez et al., 2024). In certain instances, this awareness has prompted individuals to engage in reinterpretations of various elements and occurrences in their lives, contextualising them within the framework of their newly recognised identity components.

In order to investigate the experiences of adults who identify as ADHD persons, we initiated a research project by first conducting a collaborative autoethnography (Gariglio & Luvera, 2023) between Barbara and Carmine, authors of this paper, researchers, activists and persons who discovered they were ADHD in adulthood.

Then, we decided to conduct participatory research, which is still ongoing, with adults who self-identify as ADHD - independent of a formal diagnosis. The call to participate was disseminated via the social media pages of ’Cose Molto ADHD” (”Things that are so ADHD’”) a project created by Barbara Centrone that constitutes the first Italian project of dissemination, activism and community building on ADHD in adulthood.

The present study employs unstructured interviews to investigate the genesis of ’ADHD awareness’, with a focus on the process’s development and the meanings attributed to it by individuals. The investigation also encompasses its effects on relationships and interactions.

The adoption of the crip theory (McRuer, 2006; Centrone, in press) and the neurodiversity paradigm (Rosqvist et al, 2020) to interpret social interactions and intersectional discrimination is also being employed in order to investigate the community dimension returned by

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*Speaker

social networks, the identity and political use of the ADHD label and the intersections with other identity axes (Marocchini, 2024). The employment of creative methods (Giorgi et al., 2021) facilitates the adherence to the criteria of universal accessibility delineated in the most recent update of Universal Design for Learning. The people involved in the study reported on and represented their lived experiences of neurodivergence in a neurotypical normed society, using a variety of media including texts, collages, images, artefacts, songs and poems (Den Houting, 2019; Szubielska, 2023). Researchers and participants are reflecting on research methodologies and tools to disrupt the power hierarchies between researchers and partecipants. The objective for the imminent future is to establish an itinerant art installation, ideally within Italian public universities, which will enable the public to appreciate the artistic creations and narratives of the participants, to stimulate a transdisciplinary discourse on the ableism intrinsic to institutions, discourses, and representations, and to propose strategies to enact a radical transformation.

Individual Sessions:

Topic 3
Culture, history and archives

”From each according to his ability, to each according to his performance”1 - On the problematization of ‘dis/ability’ in contemporary history using the example of the GDR

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Abstract

Throughout the 20th century in Germany, work was seen as the most important factor for the ”integration”1 of people with disabilities into society. Social policy was strongly oriented towards this field and if success had to be measured by contemporary parameters, then by the criterion of integration into work. This was not only the case in West German society, but also in the GDR. The latter is even regarded as a distinct labour society, albeit not a meritocracy.2 An inclusive and nuanced historical analysis of the working conditions of people with disabilities can reveal new perspectives and, in particular, question the framing of the GDR in terms of performance orientation. What significance did work and performance have in the GDR society and what effects did this have on disabled people?
The analysis will be based in Foucault’s concept of problematisation, which Anne Waldschmidt has originally applied for disability history.3 Society often sees disability as a ”social problem” that needs to be solved. With the help of this concept, I will examine the functioning of this ”social problem” and the social negotiation processes in relation to dis_ability and performance in society. In addition, Critical Ability Studies4 can be made fruitful for disability history. I want to show that performance and the ability to work played a significant role in the GDR that should not be underestimated and had concrete effects on the lives and wages of people with disabilities.

During the Cold War, the SED leadership hailed the ”right to work” as an achievement of the socialist system.5 But still, as I will show, people with disabilites were associated with a medically justified reduction in performance. The upheavals in disability policy also seem to have been more related to an international rehabilitation discourse and the prevalent concepts of disability and less to the change of power from Ulbricht to Honecker, which dominates the usual periodisation of the GDR.

1Elsbeth Bösl, ‘Integration Durch Arbeit? Westdeutsche Behindertenpolitik Unter Dem Primat Der Erwerbsarbeit 1949-1974’, Traverse. Zeitschrift Für Geschichte, 13.3 (2006), 113–24.

2Martin Kohli, ‘Die DDR Als Arbeitsgesellschaft? Arbeit, Lebenslauf Und Soziale Differenzierung’, in Sozialgeschichte Der DDR, ed. by Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, and Hartmut Zwahr (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), pp. 31–61.

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3Anne Waldschmidt, ‘Soziales Problem Oder Kulturelle Differenz?: Zur Geschichte von ”Behinderung” Aus Der Sicht Der ”Disability Studies”’, Traverse, 3 (2006), 31–46.

4Mackert, Nina, ‘Critical Ability History. Für eine Zeitgeschichte der Fähigkeitsnormen’, Zeithistorische Forschungen // Themenheft Disability History”, 19.2 (2022), 341–54 .

5Leinweber, Ralf R.: Das Recht auf Arbeit im Sozialismus: die Herausbildung einer Politik des Rechts auf Arbeit in der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1961, Marburg 1983.

(Com)memorating as/in new forms of (historical and transcultural) knowledge of disability

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[2]Kazimierz Wielki University – Poland

Abstract

We situate our presentation in the field of changing understandings and experiences of disability in historical and cultural contexts, especially challenges to dominant notions of disability, with particular reference to a plot of the establishment and development of disability archives. In the field of theoretical analyses and discussions, conducted through qualitative content analysis of selected cultural texts - we look at the construction of knowledge about disability in relation to postcolonial and neo-colonial entanglements and further the theoretical-pragmatic dimension of historical, social and educational policies towards people with disabilities. We derive the categories that guide the reflection on the (re)construction of disability knowledge from the proposals of R. Bishop (2007), who refers to the crisis of traditional research approaches on issues of initiation, crisis of utility, empowerment, representation, crisis of responsibility, exposing the theme of infantilising the validity of the experiences and voice of people with disabilities, or even condemning them to non-remembrance. 'Reflection on memory - on its emergence, production, distribution, politics, forms and role - should be (...) long and constant in postcolonial studies.'(Kolodziejczyk,2013). Although memory incorporated into history becomes part of historical discourse, there are communities that do not seem to gain historical status in (historical) research, their history and memory appear '(....)incomplete and imperfect (insufficiently modern, non-modern, non-literate, insufficiently rational), they remain on the margins of history as a subordinate past'.(Chakrabarty,2011). In the presentation we will focus on the recovery/restoration of memory for excluded groups in social and historical space. In Poland, the starting point was the efforts which led to the adoption by the Polish Parliament in 2024 of a law establishing 22 September as the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Extermination of Persons with Mental Disorders in occupied Poland during the Second World War, in memory of 20,000 murdered Polish citizens. The establishment of the Day of Remembrance in the Polish calendar of anniversaries initiates further efforts in trying to establish an international day of remembrance for murdered persons with disabilities in the human rights calendar of Amnesty International and the United Nations. 'The global practice of remembrance should become (...) a dialogical arena in which dynamic transcultural connections of local memories would take place in a multi-voiced and multi-directional process of recovering the losses experienced in the traumas of history. It is thus possible to imagine the globalisation of memory as the very process of recovery that simultaneously produces new forms of historical and (trans)cultural knowledge.' (Kolodziejczyk, 2013).
Ref.

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(Re)negotiating access – Learning-disabled artists' perceptions of access to visual artworks

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Abstract

Access is often treated as an afterthought in the arts, considered only after the completion of an artwork or curatorial process. This marginalizes the needs and lived experiences of disabled communities. Crip curation, by contrast, integrates access to arts as a foundational aspect of both creative and curatorial practices (Bunch et al., 2022), prioritizing knowledge centering disabled individuals' experiences (Johnson and McRuer 2014).This approach should be built on a thorough exploration of access preferences of various people with and without disabilities when addressing inequalities in creative and curational practices.
Despite its promise, limited research has explored how learning-disabled individuals who are artists themselves conceptualize their access preferences in visual arts. This gap reflects a broader societal marginalization of voices of people with learning disabilities. This study addresses this gap by investigating the conceptual understandings of access among 11 learning-disabled artists at an art centre. Seeking to understand these participants' specific meaning-making perspectives (so important to implement crip curation), we adopted a qualitative research design: a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) of interviews and fieldnotes.

Our analysis revealed a first theme: access experiences of these artists were often shaped by prior experiences in normative art spaces. Accessibility in such spaces was typically framed as integration into able-bodied structures, rather than transforming these structures to meet diverse needs. This theme fits into a larger social context where accommodations typically focus on a narrow subset of disabilities, often prioritizing visual impairment and a "passive" role for the disabled community.

While this first theme conforms to prevailing social norms, a second theme envision a different route for access: While traditional access measures are often designed for independent, individual use, our analysis shows that participants prefer a more collective approach, embracing interdependence. Participants expressed a desire for art spaces that prioritize interpersonal engagement, encourage interaction, and foster community-building. They understood an art space as being a safe environment where personal connections can be made with artists or others who share similar experiences.

By centering the meaning-making of learning-disabled artists, this study shows their nuanced positionings within traditional notions of access, while also contributing to an evolving discourse on accessibility in the arts.

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Angelic or Sinful – Depictions of Down Syndrome and Other Disabilities in the Middle Ages

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Abstract

In the socialization of any community, value selection serves as a powerful determinant of behavior. In the Middle Ages, the interplay between health, religiosity, disability, economic factors, and societal structures was far more intricate than it is today. Christian sensibilities reinterpreted the ancient Greek concept of kalokagathia, linking visible beauty to virtue through religious devotion (Berzsenyi 2024).
Our research employs disability history and content analysis methodologies to explore representations of disability in medieval iconography. Positioned at the intersection of philosophy, religious, cultural, and social history, the study examines the cultural legacy and transformative effects of these representations. It also considers the enduring impact of medieval depictions on contemporary perceptions of disability.

Medieval thought, deeply rooted in faith, offered a stark dichotomy between the divine and the worldly, as interpreted through the teachings of the Church. The divine was equated with true and pure beauty, while the material world inevitably bore the marks of sin (Huizinga 1990). Within scholastic philosophy, Christianity articulated beauty as a fundamental value, interconnected with goodness, truth, existence, and, ultimately, God (Eco 2007). These transcendental qualities-goodness, truth, beauty, eternity, existence, and sanctity-were thought to exist fully and immutably only in God. Their reflections, however, appeared in earthly forms: artistic beauty as an embodiment of sanctity, goodness in a life devoted to God, and truth in rulers' divinely sanctioned authority. These qualities, while distinct from the divine, mirrored and validated it in the earthly realm, with their absence seen as evidence of sin.

Visual representations of disabled individuals were prevalent in medieval art, particularly in religious works, as ecclesiastical art dominated the period. Many depictions included individuals with Down syndrome, often portrayed as cheerful and kind, with angelic facial features (Murken 1971). In contrast, intellectual disabilities were sometimes associated with depictions of evil, where facial features implied malevolence (Graus 1981).

The cultural influence of disabled individuals in the Middle Ages was significant. Despite disabilities being perceived as divine punishment for sin, societal integration was instinctive and practical, avoiding the exclusion or annihilation of disabled persons. Within the medieval worldview, sin was an intrinsic part of earthly life, and individuals with disabilities often served as living reminders of the necessity to adhere to penitential practices and moral obligations (Egen 2020; Metzler 2013).

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[*] Speaker

The lived reality of medieval life diverged significantly from the Church's idealized conception of humanity, yet ideology permeated all aspects of existence. The nuanced representations of disability in medieval thought and art reveal a complex relationship between theology, aesthetics, and societal attitudes, offering valuable insights into a historical understanding of disability and its cultural shaping force.

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Autism in the Archives: the view from national, regional, and local archive research in the UK

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Abstract

This paper will outline our current project based across university and academic holdings in London, and regional and local archives, both written and film/sound in Hampshire. We explore how the history of autism from the 1960s onwards in the UK has produced particular narratives, condensed and adduced with great frequency but which archival research can illuminate, complicate, and counter. In particular, we will discuss the work of John and Lorna Wing and the archival collections of their work at the Wellcome Institute in London. This work was crucial to producing dominant understandings of autism which were then made operational through clinical work, and its translation through charities, in particular the National Autistic Society of the UK, in to government policy in the areas of health, education, and law. The role of the NAS, itself founded by Lorna Wing, has been key and remains so, at official policy level, and as a designated source of information and expertise for professionals and families in this area. We will explore through the visual history of this organisation, again part of the Wellcome archive holdings, how concerning and problematic understandings were officialised over the period of the 1980s and 1990s in the UK – the key period for the cultural translation by the Wings and Uta Frith of the work of Hans Asperger. Finally, we will examine how using local and regional level archives can help trace out the embedding of certain practices which impacted the lives and self-understandings of autistic people in the late 20th century. We look at how partnerships with Disabled People's Organisations, at local and regional level, can operate practically and meaningfully, to foster the inclusion of different kinds of materials alongside these official, top-down kinds of documentation, including holdings at the National Archives in London. We argue that only through partnerships with these kinds of local and regional archives which work through substantive issues of access, both 'functional and attitudinal' (Brilmyer, 2020), can these harmful histories be recontextualised and 'taken back'. Finally, we will explore how such partnerships can be managed to ensure truly 'emancipatory research methodologies' (Stone and Priestley, 1996) which centre the expertise of disabled people in their own histories, and what recontextualizing these histories can mean for present lives.

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Cultural Representations of Dis/Ability in Picturebooks: empowering neurodiverse voices through the children's literature

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Abstract

The proposed presentation aims to show how dis/ability is represented in contemporary cultural texts such as picture books. In our presentation we define children's literature, in the words of Hadaway and McKenna (2007), as that which addresses the issue of neurodiversity and seeks to embrace the diverse ways in which the human brain, mind and body function as expressions of natural human difference. This new and significant field of children's literature production is aligned with current knowledge and discourses that seek to empower and include neuroatypical people and neurodiverse cultures in mainstream society (Johnson & Olson, 2021).
The theoretical framework of our discussion is based on an interdisciplinary approach constructed at the intersection of critical cultural studies, critical disability studies (Ellis, Garland-Thomson, Kent & Robertson, 2019) and neurodiversity studies (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Chown & Stenning 2020), as well as child studies (Murris 2016).

Research Aim: This theoretical lens will be used to examine the evolving cultural representations of neurodiversity, particularly in the context of autism, based on an analysis of two seminal picture books published in Poland in the last two decades: Kosmita (Alien) (2008) by R. Jedrzejewska-Wróbel & J. Jung and Guzikożerca na tropie slów (Button Eater in Search of Words) (2024) by Olga Ptak & D. Czerniak-Chojnacka. The selected picture books illustrate different approaches to the portrayal of children on the autism spectrum, and their analysis will be contextualised against an overview of picture books on neurodiversity published worldwide. The study will demonstrate the evolving dynamics of change in children's literature as an educational project shaped by the advancing knowledge of neurodiversity culture and its social perception in global and Polish contexts.

The methodology of critical content analysis (Jonson, Mathis & Short 2019) will be used to analyse the verbal and visual strategies employed in the picturebooks that serve to reinforce differentiation, stereotyping and the phenomenon of ableism, while their alternative represents a transgression of the boundaries of the dominant rules of ableist culture, thereby empowering neurotaypical people as subjects with their own voice within cultural texts. Furthermore, we will explore the role and significance of such picture books for educational and

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multicultural advancement in the ongoing cultural transition associated with the neurodiversity turn.

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Culture of Living: A Study of Women with Visual Disabilities in India

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Abstract

According to Census 2011, India has around 2,68,14,994 people with disabilities, accounting for approximately 2.1% of the total population. Of them, 1,18,24,355 are women with disabilities, constituting 44% of the total disabled population. Going by the definition of disability provided in Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection Of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 which was the applicable law at that time, people belonging to 7 categories of disabilities were counted during that census. Blindness is one among those 7 categories, and people identified with this disability are estimated to constitute nearly half of the total disabled population. Within the category of blindness, women constitute more than half of the total population.

The existing research on disability in India focuses predominantly on the themes of rights and state policy (O'Dowd, Mannan, & McVeigh, 2014; Mehrotra, 2011); rehabilitation (Kumar, Roy, & Kar, 2012; Halder, 2008); special education (Kalyanpur, 2008; Das & Shah, 2014); disability movements and academics (Ghai, 2002; Chander, 2016;, 2013; Mehrotra, 2020); and health practices to a certain extent (South India Disability Evidence Study Group et al., 2014; Sharma & Sivakami, 2019; Pal et al., 2000). Given the recent focus on quick research goals, fast publication targets and overemphasis on statistics, qualitative research on cultural lives of people no longer finds any attraction. But the fact is that the nuances of human life are beyond statistics and hard data. It is in this context that the proposed study becomes critical.

The educational status of children with disabilities in general, and that of children with visual disabilities in particular, is estimated to be dismally low in India. Based on a household survey conducted using validated screening tools, a group of researchers have conclusively established that "children with disabilities are less likely to start school and more likely to drop out of school earlier and before completing their high school education than non-disabled children ..." (Bakhshi, Babulal, & Trani, 2017). Their research argues that the gap is much wider for girl children with disabilities, among others. The pertinent question which no existing research in India has addressed so far is, how successful are educated women with disabilities, and particularly those with visual disabilities? How fulfilling are there lives? What roles do their families, communities and society at large play in their equal participation? What coping mechanisms do women with visual disabilities adapt to adjust their day-to-day lives with mainstream social norms? Given an opportunity, my paper proposes to interrogate some of these questions using the cultural studies framework.

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Empowering Voices through the Representation of dis/ability in children's books

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Abstract

The CRPD (2006) provides the foundation for inclusion for people with lived experience of disability. One general principle is the "respect for difference" and the "acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity". It thereby calls for the recognition of people with disability not as objects of pity or charity but as valuable members of society (Degener & Witzmann, 2023). It is within this context that representation in various forms, such as literature, becomes a crucial aspect of societal change (Maskos, 2015).

For this change, we need to focus on two key aspects: the visibility of disability and the possibility for individuals to identify with this representation. Visibility is vital because it ensures that the experiences of disabilities are acknowledged within broader society. Representation then plays a crucial role in how the understanding of diversity and difference is developed (Eggers, 2011). It is not enough for people with disability to merely see themselves represented; the representation must also allow for identification, fostering a sense of belonging and affirming their identity (Verband binationaler Familien und Partnerschaften, 2013).

This paper focuses on the representation of disability in children's literature, which serves as a tool in shaping young people's perceptions of difference and the understanding of the world around them. However, the representation of disability in children's literature has often been stereotyped or invisible altogether (Renggli, 2006). This lack of nuanced portrayal can contribute to the marginalization of disabled children, both in terms of their self-perception and acceptance by peers (Schilcher, 2011).

The analysis will take place in a bachelor seminar, providing an opportunity to critically explore the implications of disability representation in literature. By collaborating in this context, we seek to engage students in a dialogue that not only critiques existing portrayals but also explores how alternative and more inclusive depictions might be created. The seminar approach will allow students to dissect aspects of disability in literature, examining this representation contributes to shaping perceptions of disability in young audiences. During the seminar, we will analyze children's books that feature characters with disabilities, paying close attention to how these characters are presented and how their disability is portrayed. By engaging in group discussions, we will explore how different theoretical frameworks, such as disability studies and critical pedagogy, can inform our understanding of these representations.

With this approach, we aim to reconstruct the ways in which dis/ability is constructed in children's literature. Through this exploration, we anticipate identifying patterns ranging

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from stereotypical depictions to more nuanced and empowering portrayals. We also aim to consider the implications of these representations for children's social development, particularly their capacity for empathy and their understanding of diversity. Furthermore, we expect to uncover the ways in which dis/ability representation in children's literature can either reinforce or challenge societal norms about disability. By reflecting on these findings, we hope to contribute to the broader conversation about the role of literature in shaping social attitudes towards dis/ability and encourage the development of more inclusive and empowering representations of disability.

Francesco and Chiara of Assisi: a new approach to physical diversity

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Abstract

Background/ research problematic
In the 12th and 13th centuries, people with physical disabilities were excluded from society and often lived in isolation. One condition in particular was treated in an emblematic way: leprosy. A leper, characterised by visible marks on the skin, moved from one place to another with a bell around his neck: his arrival was announced to the population. There were also special places called "leprosariums" where people with the disease lived together (Montesano, 2021). This segregation had many basic motivations: fear of contagion, disgust at the plagues around the skin, conviction of the sin of the leper (Schianchi, 2018). It's interesting to note the absence of a direct relationship between the leper and other people. The relationship is denied from the start. The physical differences have a "shock" effect on the observers, distancing those involved. This still happens today with people with complex disabilities, who are unfortunately often excluded from everyday social life. In the specific context of the 12th and 13th centuries, the experience of Francesco and Chiara of Assisi is revolutionary.

Method/data

In order to carry out the analysis, I worked on the Franciscan sources (2011), searching for Latin words related to the universe of leprosy, sickness, disease and infirmity. In his Testament, Francesco begins his narrative with the encounter with a leper. This moment coincides with the definitive conversion of Francesco (Corsini, Guillemant, 2024). Francesco admits his difficulty in relating to lepers, the feeling of disgust he felt when he saw them, but he goes beyond appearances and embraces and kisses a person with leprosy (Le Mèhautè, 2021). The "impactful exteriority" (Ghezzani, 2025) is overcome and a new way of approaching the other is shown. Chiara, too, shows a special attention to people with a condition that has a significant physical impact. For example, she wrote in the Rule that attention should be given to sisters with infirmities or serious illnesses.

Results
These aspects underline a relationship based on closeness and respect for the other, very distant from the usual treatment reserved in these cases. We can find many references of this kind in the texts written directly by Chiara and Francesco, but there are also many references in the biographies written by other authors, such as Tommaso di Celano or Bonaventura di Bagnoregio. In the Franciscan Rules there is an explicit invitation to serve the suffering brother as oneself, and the presence of this precept in an official document underlines its importance.

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The sources show in the Franciscan experience a new way of approaching physical illness. At a time when disability didn't exist in its present institutional form, at a time when deformity was interpreted as a divine punishment, Francesco and Chiara showed an alternative way of relating to "difference", proposing an approach to care based on mutual recognition and respect (Paoletti, 2022). Perhaps an ancestor of an ethic of care

From Form to Norm: The Politics of ”Diversity” in Higher Education

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Abstract

In my presentation I will talk about the current situation for academics with disabilities in the Austrian academic field. I will focus on the judicial situation, the inclusion of people with disability in the university system, with a focus on the situation at the Academy of Fine Arts (my host university until February 2025 and why it's ending with that date). Besides a description of my own situation, the talk will focus on the Academy as a heritage-listed building, its limited accessibility and problematic adaptivity due to its legal regimentation of original material protection.
As an art historian, I am aware of the implications of monument protection: it means refraining from altering or deconstructing an important historical building in its fundamental structure. Built by the architect Theophil Hansen in 1876, the Academy of Fine Arts has been a university (instead of ”Hochschule”) since 1998. Part of the Ringstrasse architectural layout, which includes many key buildings, it is located in the first district of Vienna. The building retains an overwhelming atmosphere of the Historicism era from its founding period. After its prominent restoration in 2020-22, the ceiling frescoes by Anselm Feuerbach appear vibrant and well-preserved, the renewed floors shine, and the overall historic ambiance of the building is unquestioned. This important structure is protected under heritage preservation laws (Denkmalpflegeregelung, Schutz des Altbestandes).

If you belong to the so-called ”norm”, meaning an average human being, you can see, hear, smell, move, feel, walk. .. You enter the building through the main entrance, climb about 10 steps, open the door, and follow signs to locations such as the museum, exhibition spaces, or lecture halls. However, this experience changes dramatically if you are a person with a disability.

In this talk, I will present a demonstrative performance by Philipp Muerling, the first and only student at the Academy to use a wheelchair. His performance, which highlights the challenges of ”accessibility” and ”dis/ability” in the context of ascending stairs, is striking, intense, and thought-provoking.

Building on this institutional critique, I will focus on the broader issue of ”inclusion” within the academic system. In this context, in or exclusionary practices are often reframed as corporate strategies that prioritize diversity as a modern PR tool or asset for institutional benefits, rather than addressing systemic inequalities. As a result, diversity is not treated as a means to achieve social justice, but rather as a way to generate value within the academic sphere, often aligning with economic or managerial goals.

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In essence, my presentation focuses on how diversity is co-opted by institutions for economic purposes, particularly in higher education, while ignoring deeper questions of justice and systemic inequality. In short, diversity narratives often obscure power dynamics, while simultaneously reinforcing and maintaining them. The generally, as neutral defined term "diversity", thus refers to the selective inclusion of individuals that are still labeled as "different". The question is: Are those that speak about inclusion really holding a "neutral" position from which the ones other-ed are seen as "diverse"?

Museum Practice and Disability - Going beyond Accessibility

Jennie Carvill Schellenbacher*[1]

[1]Wien Museum – Austria

Abstract

Inclusion in museums is at a pivotal juncture in Austria. Historically, many institutions have struggled to meet basic accessibility standards, let alone embrace comprehensive inclusion. This paper investigates how museums can evolve to foster genuinely inclusive environments, exploring what accessibility and representation could and should look like in practice. Drawing on the extensive redevelopment of the Wien Museum (Vienna's City History Museum) as a case study, this research provides insights into the current state of Austrian museums, the systemic barriers they face, and the potential pathways forward.
The Wien Museum, a publicly funded institution housing over one million objects on behalf of the City of Vienna, reopened in December 2023 after a five-year transformation. For the first time, the museum integrated the role of an inclusion officer into its redevelopment process, shaping its architecture, permanent exhibitions, and public programming as well as its approach to working with experts and communities. This paper critically examines the challenges of embedding inclusive practices in a traditionally hierarchical institutional framework and explores how the museum negotiates questions of authority, co-production, and the democratization of public history.

More than a year after reopening, this analysis reflects on the tangible impacts of these inclusion efforts, identifies emerging challenges, and considers how they mirror broader trends in the Austrian museum landscape. How can museums transform themselves to meaningfully serve diverse publics, and what does this transformation reveal about evolving attitudes toward accessibility, representation, and disability rights within cultural institutions?

By addressing these questions, the paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on transformation, aligning with the conference's focus on the dynamics of change in policy, culture, and institutional practice. It invites broader reflections on the intersections of disability, accessibility, and cultural heritage, offering valuable insights for both academics and practitioners.

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*Speaker

Other Bodies: The Animalization of Disability in Cinematic Narratives

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Abstract

One of the most innovative areas of Disability Studies is Freak Studies, which highlight the connections between disability and cultural spectacularisation. Research classics such as those of Rosemarie Garland Thomson and Robert Bogdan have historically reconstructed the phenomenon of sideshows, in which the animalisation of humans was a central element. Traces of this tradition can be found in the history of cinema, in works such as Tod Browning's 'Freaks', David Lynch's 'Elephant Man' and Marco Ferreri's 'The Ape Woman', as well as in the portrayal of Saartjie Baartman in Abdellatif Kechiche's film 'Black Venus'. In this context, the fusion of dysmorphia and animality reveals a collective imaginary in which threatening otherness is exorcised through the construction of the abilist ideal.

Sunaura Taylor's work, "Beasts of burden" (2021), fits into this perspective, taking up the theme of the relationship between animality and disability in her paintings, transvaluating their meanings. By representing her own body next to animal figures in similar postures, the author applies a theoretical strategy that is inscribed in the crip and queer tradition, transforming the stigma into an element of identity claim. The link between animality and disability is made explicit by the author herself: "Throughout my life I have been compared to various animals. I have been told that I walk like a monkey, that I eat like a dog, that my hands resemble the claws of a lobster and, in general, that I look like a chicken or a penguin' (p. 169).

In this paper, an attempt will be made to address the issue of the "animalisation" of people with disabilities. Starting from the reflections put forward by Freak studies, we therefore want to investigate the intersection between ableism and speciesism by observing how disability/bestiality has been represented in art, with particular emphasis on cinema and the films mentioned above. An analysis of cinema will therefore be carried out, trying to reflect on how much this medium has represented a certain idea of disability already present in society and how much it has contributed to creating it, constructing it and making it part of the common imagination.

The article will be structured as follows: a first paragraph will be devoted to a review of the literature on disability studies with a focus on Freak studies. This will be followed by a second paragraph devoted to the methodology of analysis and the criteria for choosing the films to be analysed. Then, in the third paragraph, we will move on to the analysis of the selected films, investigating the concept of disability that emerges in the various films and bringing it into dialogue with the authors who deal with freak studies. A fourth paragraph will finally be devoted to discussion and conclusions.

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*Speaker

Religious Interpretations of Disability: Representations of Disability in the Sacred Texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

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Abstract

My research explores the concept of disability as represented in the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions-Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Since the term ”disability” did not exist in its contemporary sense within these texts, my study required careful contextualization and alignment of relevant concepts. Central questions include: How do the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an address disability and disabled individuals? Furthermore, how do early religious commentaries interpret physical and mental imperfections, and how have these interpretations influenced theological teachings and societal attitudes over time?
When I began this work in 2013, no comparative analysis existed in international scholarship that systematically examined disability teachings across these three religions. The literature gap was only partially addressed in 2016 with the publication of *Disability and World Religions: An Introduction* (Schumm & Stoltzfus, 2016). My research sought to fill this void by investigating the historical dimensions of disability in these traditions and identifying points where discrimination, exclusion, or stigmatization emerged-or might have emerged.

This study employs content analysis within a multidisciplinary framework, integrating insights from religious studies, philosophy, theology, cultural history, anthropology, and the history of education. The findings reveal that the sacred texts themselves do not promote discrimination or exclusion. Instead, they consistently emphasize inclusion, compassion, and support.

Christianity, for example, associated imperfection with sin only after St. Augustine's theological contributions in early medieval Europe (Ebach, 2002). In Judaism, disability-based discrimination has never been a central theme in its theology or philosophy (Sachs, 2000). While the highest priestly duties in the Jerusalem Temple required physical and mental integrity, these requirements were rooted in sacred and practical considerations rather than discriminatory intent. The exclusionary practices of the Qumran Essenes cannot be regarded as representative of broader Jewish traditions. Islamic theology and philosophy, meanwhile, have refrained from linking disability to sin, interpreting physical impairments as natural variations in human embodiment (Sohn, 2004). Across all three traditions, sacred texts treat illness and disability as intertwined, emphasizing their enduring significance within divine revelation, where earthly temporalities hold less relevance (Berzsenyi, 2020).

Understanding the cultural roots of fear, prejudice, and exclusion surrounding disability

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is vital for contemporary societies. These historical legacies continue to influence modern perceptions and practices, and addressing them is essential for fostering inclusive social frameworks. This research contributes to ongoing discussions on equity and justice by demonstrating the enduring relevance of sacred texts in shaping cultural attitudes toward disability and inclusion.

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Social and community psychiatry divorced: the psychiatric reformers' professional politics after the end of state socialism in Bulgaria

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Abstract

Prior to 1989 social psychiatry was the officially pushed forward psychiatric agenda. It was promoted by the psychiatric community – not as something marginal and auxiliary, but as a major historic achievement, as the authentic socialist psychiatric project that best demonstrated the power and humanism of socialist society. What is more, it was meant to be the ‘showcase’ of socialist psychiatry, a testimony to its ‘great successes’. This social psychiatric tendency was typical not only for the socialist bloc but was part of the global wave of social psychiatry that unfolded after the Second World War. Undoubtedly, we may consider it not successful, especially in terms of emancipatory stakes and patient- and rights-centered demands, but this does not negate the presence of other typical social-psychiatric characteristics.
After 1989, a reformist phase started in psychiatry in Bulgaria, with one of its main goals being the establishment of a community psychiatry – an undertaking that was presented as catching up with the achievements of Western psychiatry after decades of isolation and backwardness. Community psychiatry usually is closely related to or is conceived as a strand within social psychiatry, and it is common for these two designations even to figure together in one phrase. It is indicative of the professional politics after 1989 that this was never the case in Bulgaria: community psychiatry was framed as a completely new undertaking, fundamentally different from everything that have ever existed in the psychiatric system.

Thus, drawing on the complete issues of the main journals of the psychiatric community in Bulgaria under socialism, *Nevrologiya, psihiatriya i nevrohirurgiya* (Neurology, Psychiatry and Neurosurgery, 1963–1989) and *Byuletin na NINPN* (Bulletin of the Scientific Institute of Neurology, Psychiatry and Neurosurgery (SINPN), 1958–1984), scientific publications of eminent members of the Bulgarian psychiatric elite as well as various programmatic documents, reports, and archives, the presentation outlines how, after the end of socialism, psychiatric reformers reframed socialist social psychiatry as a purely medicalised and clinically-focused endeavour in order to pave their own way to the new resources that were flowing towards postsocialist countries. The narrative of a total rupture that was staged after 1989 was an important move in some respects - it stressed for the first time patients' rights, for example, but at the same time allowed for the deployment of private practices and the neoliberalisation of care - a sustainable trait of the local deinstitutionalization processes. It could be said that the complete erasure of the previous aspirations of the psychiatric professionals and the complete silencing of the already existing critiques of deinstitutionalization and community psychiatry (as Andrew Scull's for example, or Peter Sedgwick's) went too far. This move

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made it difficult to strive towards establishing a balanced care model that stresses the need of both community-and hospital-based care (Thornicroft and Tansella 2013).

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Sounds of Becoming: Two hundred years of teaching music to the blind in Hungary

Maria Magdolna Flamich*[1]

[1]Eötvös Loránd University of Science – Hungary

Abstract

The topic:
The history of blind people's education: past and present aspects for future perspectives

Background

Blind people's education in Hungary started two hundred years ago, in 1825, the year when Louis Braille introduced his writing system.

Although the very few aristocrats who supported the idea of educating the blind knew nothing of Braille's groundbreaking invention, they knew that music should be prioritized amongst the first set of school subjects to be taught. Their supportive attitude could be explained by two main reasons. First: the humanistic paradigm of enlightment, and second: the urgent need for active workers, These circumstances and the novel, creative innovations of industrialization initiated immediate steps to be taken. As blind people in general were believed gifted musicians because gods compensated them for the loss of sight, teaching music served all these purposes: blind people were taken out of their shelters or of often poor families (the humanistic aspect), and they could earn a living by making music (the economic aspect).

This bicentenary is an excellent chance to sum up what has been done in order to consider what to do to promote blind people's sense of belonging.

Aims:

The author's aim is to introduce the 200-year practices of blind persons' music education in Hungary. She also aims to initiate thinking over what the role of music education has been playing in belonging since 1825.

She aims to highlight current tendencies, and how much they influence blind people's self-esteem. Her aims are to initiate re-considering the present role of special schools, moreover, to promote understanding the significance of belonging through blind people's lived experiences.

Method:

In order to achieve the aims, the author applies a historic overview and semi-structured

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interviews. She interviews blind musicians, music teachers. As she leads the choir of the School of the Blind in Budapest, she talks to the choir members to investigate how music influences and/or determines their self-esteem.

Results:
As the author overviews the changes of blind students' music education in the past 200 years and pays attention to current tendencies through the choir members' narratives, not only does she highlight what it means to become responsIble subjects from pitiable objects, but also initiates steps towards inclusive (music) teacher training.

Transformations – the shared space of disability studies and postcolonial studies

Sina Isabel Freund*[1]

[1]Universität Koblenz – Germany

Abstract

Postcolonial studies and disability studies ask similar questions regarding power and injustices. Both fields discuss particularity (in postcolonial studies also/especially locality) and universality critically. Sometimes they directly overlap, sometimes a concept is used in disability studies as well as postcolonial studies, sometimes there are approaches where it could be useful to deploy it in the other field, but they have not yet been transferred. Looking at the academic discourse, this paper examines the shared space of disability studies and postcolonial studies and how it changes. Following the ways of thoughts and concepts, it relates paradigm shifts to one another. How does knowledge production work in the interchange and what perspectives are possible in the shared space, which would not be thinkable outside of it? Where are studies of the intersection of racism and ableism situated in the academic discourse? What are the discursive conditions of possibility for such research? Which images, knowledges and presumptions are implemented in disability studies/postcolonial studies that go against those of the other field? How do they transform when disability studies and postcolonial studies meet? Using discourse analysis and theoretical exploration, this paper looks at the transformation of the *in-between* as well as the movements of theories. How does the discourse stabilize itself and/or how does the discourse welcome transformations?
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"They really looked, looked and looked:" contemporary dance, disability and the circulation of emotions

Apelmo Elisabet*[1]

[1]Malmö University – Sweden

Abstract

Over the past decade, several inclusive dance projects, in which professional dancers with and without disabilities collaborate, have been started in Sweden. The article explores disabled and able-bodied dancers' and leaders' experiences of and strategies for managing gazes and emotions – in encounters with the audience and other surrounding people – from a phenomenological perspective. Eleven qualitative interviews were conducted. The interviewees meet gazes filled with benevolence, surprise, pity and fascination. The emotions stick to the disabled dancers' bodies, distance them from their own bodies and arouse uneasiness that needs to be handled. However, disabled dancers and disabled persons in the audience may also meet in the gaze of recognition. The companies' internal gazes are important, too. When disabled dancers are only physically integrated or when differences are hidden, the potential for change gets lost. If choreographers and audiences succeed in looking beyond the body itself, an empathetic identification may take place. Another strategy is to completely break with voyeurism by blocking all gazes. The companies show new ways of interacting, thus expanding the possibilities for both able and disabled bodies.

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Der Turmalin ist dunkel, und was da erzählt wird, ist sehr dunkel.” Physical and Psychological Disability as a Motif in Adalbert Stifter’s Work

Lisa Maria Hofer*[1]

[1]research associate – Austria

Abstract

Adalbert Stifter’s *Turmalin*, part of his collection *Bunte Steine* (*Colorful Stones*), is described within the text itself as ”dark.” This darkness merits examination, particularly since *Bunte Steine* was intended as a reading collection for children and young adults, with the preface suggesting its purpose as moral and educational. Stifter narrates the story chronologically, though he avoids specifying the exact historical timeframe. However, the setting is clear: the city of Vienna, making it the only story in the collection set in an urban environment. The backstory reveals the family life of a rentier and his wife, who falls in love with an actor named Dall. Described as beautiful, the wife one day confesses her affair and abruptly leaves her husband without explanation. The rentier, suspecting Dall knows something, desperately seeks answers, but the wife remains missing. Eventually, the rentier also disappears with their young daughter.

Years later, the narrative resumes with a shift to a female narrator, who recounts her encounter with a girl whose father has died. This girl, exhibiting both physical and likely psychological differences from societal norms, becomes the focus. This narrative approach, particularly the shift in perspective, is unusual for Stifter.

Disability is used as an analytical concept. Anne Waldschmidt’s cultural model of disability provides a useful framework, proposing that disability is understood differently across historical periods and societies. In other words, concepts of normality are socially constructed, evolving with advancements in fields like medicine and psychology. In *Turmalin*, Stifter presents the nameless girl as deviating from expected child development and imbues her character with stereotypes of developmental delays prevalent in the 19th century.

To explore these stereotypes, it is necessary to first examine how disability was perceived in the 19th century, the discourses surrounding it, and Stifter’s exposure to these ideas in his role as an educational administrator. Following this, the question arises of how disability is analyzed in literary studies, specifically how such motifs are identified and interpreted. Finally, the depiction of disability in *Turmalin* will be closely analyzed, leading to a summary of key insights.

Disability does not exist independently of its historical context. The 19th century is often regarded as the ”century of science,” marked by a pursuit of norms across various domains. One example in the Habsburg Monarchy was the development of a standardized education system, in which Stifter was actively involved. But what does the perception of disability

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[*] Speaker

have to do with this educational system?

It should be noted that many terms used in historical contexts would today be considered discriminatory and stereotypical. These terms are highlighted here for their historical relevance but are not intended to perpetuate prejudice.
Lisa Maria Hofer studied German and History at the University of Salzburg, worked on third-party funded projects in museums, was a research associate at the JKU, and is now a lecturer at the University of Erfurt as well as a research associate at the Learning and Memorial Site Castle Hartheim and the DFG Network on Deaf History

Individual Sessions:

Topic 4

Disability knowledge and disability research

A Neurodivergent child's journey: a researcher-mother's perspective

Martina Visentin*[1,2]

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[2]Università degli Studi di Padova = University of Padua – Italy

Abstract

Building on Ehrenberg's approach, this autoethnography explores my dual experience as both a mother and a researcher, navigating the complexities of raising a neurodivergent child within the Italian socio-cultural context. Situated within the broader sociological discourse on disability and neurodiversity, this study employs an autoethnographic methodology, integrating personal narrative with sociological analysis. The data collection method primarily follows a "back-and-forth" technique, which involves a continuous interplay between personal experience and cultural analysis, introspection and external observation, as well as personal data and external sources. This study specifically addresses the following key themes: 1. the social construction of neurodiversity in Italy: the challenge of integrating an invisible disability. Like many other countries, Italy is undergoing a gradual shift in its understanding of neurodiversity, moving away from a strictly medical model toward a more social and inclusive perspective. However, traditional conceptions often persist, contributing to societal stigma, restricted access to adequate resources, and a lack of widespread acceptance of neurodivergent individuals. This study examines how these societal attitudes manifest in everyday school experiences, highlighting the challenges of navigating an educational system that is not always adequately equipped to support neurodiversity. Particular attention is given to the critical role of support teachers within Italy's educational welfare system. 2. The Researcher's privileged position: from precarity to stability as an academic and mother of a neurodivergent child. The dual role of the researcher-as both a mother and an academic-provides a unique lens through which to analyse the challenges of raising a neurodivergent child while making the deliberate decision to embrace a 'slow academia' approach. This section focuses on the evolution of my role from researcher to advocate, exploring how my academic background informs both my parenting and my engagement in activism. The discussion will examine how this positioning enables a critical interrogation of existing structures and facilitates advocacy for systemic change. 3. Coping strategies: navigating the Italian special needs educational welfare system. This section presents concrete examples of the everyday challenges encountered within the Italian special needs education system and the individual and private strategies employed to navigate these difficulties. Being aware of my privileged position, what appears to be emerging is a kind of eternal return of the identical: individual solutions to structural problems. It is important to acknowledge that autoethnography is inherently subjective; thus, the researcher's experiences may not be representative of all families raising neurodivergent children. However, by sharing this personal narrative, the study aims to foster dialogue, empathy, and social change. This autoethnography seeks

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to: i) provide a nuanced and empathetic understanding of the lived experiences of families raising neurodivergent children in Italy; ii) contribute to the ongoing discourse on neurodiversity and inclusion from the perspective of parents; iii) raise awareness of the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals and their families, advocating for more inclusive policies and practices.

A systematic review of barriers and supports to the participation of co-researchers with intellectual disabilities in inclusive research

Katarzyna Ćwirynkało*[1], Agnieszka Żyta[1], Agnieszka Wołowicz[2], and Monika Parchomiuk[3]

[1]Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie – Poland
[2]Uniwersytet Warszawski – Poland
[3]Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie – Poland

Abstract

Objective: This systematic review aimed to evaluate the barriers and supports to the participation of co-researchers with intellectual disabilities in inclusive research, highlighting factors that influence their meaningful involvement.
Introduction: Inclusive research emphasizes the active participation of individuals with ID as co-researchers, yet challenges persist in achieving equitable engagement. This review builds on existing knowledge by systematically synthesizing evidence on the facilitators and obstacles to their participation.

Inclusion Criteria: Studies were included if they focused on inclusive research (OR participatory research OR emancipatory research) involving people with intellectual disabilities (OR learning disabilities), reported some methodological aspects connected with inclusive research, and were published in peer-reviewed journals. Exclusions included studies not involving people with intellectual disabilities or lacking empirical data.

Methods: Key databases (Web of Science, PsycArticles, Academic Search Ultimate, ERIC, PubMed, and Scopus) and several journals (Disability and Society, American Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Inclusion, Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Journal of Policy & Practice in Intellectual Disabilities, British Journal of Learning Disabilities) were searched in October and November 2024, in English. Studies were selected through a systematic screening process, followed by critical appraisal and data extraction. A thematic synthesis approach was used to analyze findings, and confidence in the evidence was assessed. Deviations included the inclusion of gray literature to capture diverse perspectives.

Results: Out of 2,835 articles, thirty qualitative studies were included, with sample sizes ranging from 1 to 66 participants. Key barriers included lack of funding, training, communication limitations, and power imbalances, while supports included tailored communication, mentorship, and inclusive research designs. The overall quality of studies was moderate, with some risk of bias due to limited methodological rigor.

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Conclusions: This review underscores the importance of addressing systemic and interpersonal barriers while leveraging supports to enhance the participation of co-researchers with intellectual disabilities. Recommendations include developing training programs, fostering equitable partnerships, and implementing policy frameworks to promote inclusive research practices. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of inclusive research participation.

Advancing Disability Knowledge and Research through Access Curriculum

Marion Quirici*[1]

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Abstract

For educators committed to expanding access to higher education and growing the field of critical disability studies, how do we weather the storm of political "transformations" like we are seeing in the United States? Progress toward disability justice has always been slow, but as an assistant professor of Disability Studies and Global Anglophone Literature with an interest in access pedagogy, I was encouraged in April of 2024 when the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division revised Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to require state and local governments to make their websites and mobile applications accessible for people with disabilities by meeting the technical standards of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). With colleagues, I created a new course called Writing for Accessibility, which trains future professionals to develop the accessibility skills to meet these standards, and the theoretical grounding in disability studies to understand why they are needed. As I began teaching the course nine months later, in January of 2025, the new Trump administration leveled an executive order for "the termination of all discriminatory programs, including illegal DEI and 'diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility' (DEIA) mandates, policies (etc.)" Knowing that equity and access are still in fact the opposite of discrimination, despite what any president tries to tell us, I still have to serve my students. The recent DOJ ruling had given my accessibility course a sense of exigency, but it was never the reason for what we were doing. We forge ahead, building collective access in the faith that no executive order can rob disabled people of their inalienable rights.

This presentation considers how, in an unstable world, we can continue to advance disability knowledge and research by building curriculum in accessibility skill building, exemplified by my Writing for Accessibility course piloted in Spring 2025. The course provides access training for students pursuing a variety of careers, guides them through the creation of a professional portfolio, and motivates them to advance the social equity of disability communities online. I reflect on the creation and piloting of the course, describe its reception by the first cohort of students to enroll, explore its potential value to other student populations, and imagine the downstream effects of such curricular innovations to the broader disability communities these students will serve. The first cohort of students includes aspiring professional writers, educators, instructional designers, technical communicators, a non-profit manager, and an aspiring law student. I will share my progress toward establishing the course in my university's curriculum, granting credit toward these and related degrees, such as graphic design, marketing, and media and entertainment. Finally, I relate the creation of this course to a larger project of creating a cross-disciplinary minor in the health humanities.

Indicative Bibliography:

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Margaret Price, *Mad at School*

Jay Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric*

Jay Dolmage, *Academic Ableism*

Aimi Hamraie, *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability*
Sarah Horton and Whitney Quesenbery, *A Web for Everyone*

Affecting Transformation

Judith Tröndle*[1]

[1]Université du Luxembourg – Luxembourg

Abstract

Transformative processes are shaped and enacted at the societal and legal levels, as well as by, through and (in-) between individual subjects. Subjects engage with and act upon transformative change. The 'trans-formation' of subjects however turns the perspective to the question of how societal, cultural and legal continuities and changes contribute to historically specific ways of becoming an intelligible subject. Studies in subjectivation have demonstrated how subjects become shaped by discoursive power relations, structural dimensions, as well as individual and collective practices. Although sometimes with a strong connotation on formative aspects, while the 'trans'-formative part of subjectivation tends to be neglected. Furthermore, the formation and transformation of subjects is also a matter of affectivity (see also Traue & Pfahl 2022). It is through affectivity that (the possibilty of) change becomes palpable. But the question remains: what does transformation feel like? Is it envisioned as a state of liberation or respite? Or, perhaps, it is more akin to the gentle emergence of a steadfast conviction? However, feelings of transformation can also be accompanied by tremendous fear or anger. Current political events illustrate that transformation is not inherently associated with an enhancement of rights and possibilities for all individuals. But, transformation becomes felt by individual subjects in relation. The proposed contribution will explore disabling affects becoming felt and enacted in processes of subjectivation, which are both formative and transformative. Disabling affects are understood as being evoked by ableist cultural norms and attributions, but also as evoking an embodied activity with no predefined direction. From this perspective, affectivity in transformation is not a passive experience. It is rather an affective (body-)movement, an engagement in opening up towards change and formation that involves the whole, embodied subject. Potential transformative effects of disabling affect are illustrated by an empirical example of an in-depth interview study on couples parenting a child with disabilities (Tröndle, 2022). The study elaborates on cultural attributions along gendered and ableist attributions and affective repertoires that reinforce inequalities in partnership. The study suggests that couples become subjected as 'special parents', which is challenging to refute, and this includes affective aspects as well as gendered inequalities in care. Disabling affects are delegated to, and experienced by, the female partner. The couple positions the mother as the one who 'suffers,' which is part of a well-known affective repertoire that ableism suggests to feel. The following argument will be put forward: the capacity to affect as an embodied activity holds the potential of feeling 'trans-formation' as subjectivation. This renders the object amenable to being addressed and potentially mobilises intentionality and capacity.

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*Speaker

Autoethnography: inclusive methodological practices for neurodivergent researchers doing neurodivergence research.

Alexa Macdermot*[1]

[1]University College Dublin [Dublin] – Ireland

Abstract

I am a neurodivergent PhD student who will use autoethnography as part of my methodological practice when researching the lived experiences of neurodivergent women in Ireland. I propose that I speak about the epistemology of autoethnography in neurodivergence research, and the inclusion of neurodivergent researchers in the Academy, as part of stream 4: disability knowledge and disability research. Your conference brief highlighted the importance of 'nothing about us without us', as well as last year's conference question of why ableism is still prevalent, and I believe autoethnography addresses these issues.

Ettore (2016) writes that autoethnography "creates transitional, intermediate spaces, inhabiting the crossroads or borderlands of embodied emotions;..(it) is an active demonstration of the 'personal is political'; (and) is feminist critical writing which is performative, that is committed to the future of women and...helps to raise oppositional consciousness by exposing precarity" (p. 4). It describes the cultural dynamics that an individual confronts, and provides a useful context for creating a positive neurodivergent researcher persona. It also creates research that follows the disability mantra of 'nothing about us, without us'. While reflexivity has not been seen as consistently ethical even in qualitative research, it is useful as a way of understanding the nature and practice of ethics in research (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). By 'writing the self' the researcher reveals the political and personal layered experiences and power distributions in unequal human relationships (Ettore, 2016). The 'I' of autoethnography firmly places the researcher within a cultural landscape that is as inescapable as it is revealing of context and positionality (Ettore, 2016). The placing of the researcher within an emotional life is radical and feminist; it includes the human nature of the researcher that strengthens findings and creates new pathways for disability research to move forward. For my research, I am using autoethnography to unravel my personal, cultural, and contextual experiences as a white autistic mid-life woman living in Ireland, for how I reframed my identity following an autism assessment months before my fortieth birthday, and what use this can be for my epistemological approach into analysing neurodivergent women in Ireland.

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Beyond 'social versus medical' models of disability: towards a transformative model of non-disabling healthcare

Steve Graby*[1] and Inga Reichelt*[2]

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Abstract

The social model of disability is often regarded as the 'big idea' of the British Disabled People's Movement (DPM) (Beckett & Campbell 2015), and has become a dominant paradigm in both the academic sphere of Disability Studies and the practice of Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs), particularly within the UK, but has also had significant influence in other national contexts.
When the phrase 'social model of disability' was coined by Oliver (1983), it was defined in opposition to the 'individual model', argued to be the pre-existing dominant set of assumptions about disabled people. Despite this, the term 'medical model' has gained much greater currency and familiarity, in the practice and rhetoric of the DPM and its organisations in the UK and internationally, as the social model's assumed opposite.

We argue that this terminology has contributed to a reluctance on the part of the DPM to engage with the sphere of medicine, relegating it to an irredeemable domain of paternalistic oppressors. This has been accompanied by an 'anti-cure' politics that, by focusing on acceptance and affirmation of impairment and the body constructed as 'naturally' occurring (linked with the social model argument that it is society, rather than individuals, that must be changed or 'fixed'), may feed bio-essentialist ontologies and contribute to oppressions such as transphobia (see Slater & Liddiard 2018).

This rhetorical position also has the potential to alienate disabled people who do desire medical amelioration of their conditions, while also supporting the DPM's transformative aims regarding the built and social environment, from the movement. It also leaves unanswered the question of what form, if any, medicine and healthcare more broadly could take in an equitable and non-disabling society.

In contrast, other movements adjacent to the DPM, including the trans health movement and the mental health system survivors' movement, have advanced critiques of medicine that suggest its practice could be transformed in accordance with the social model and with the principles of individual and collective self-determination that underpin the DPM's concept of 'independent living'. Drawing on the insights of these movements, we argue that the DPM needs to shift its relationship with healthcare from non-engagement to seeking its radical transformation, and from a politics of affirmation of bodies-as-they-are to one of bodily self-determination.

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*Speaker

sciencesconf.org:alterconf2025:611626

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Care, loss of touch, and intellectual disability

Jenny Frogner*[1] and Halvor Hanisch[2]

[1]Norwegian University of Science and Technology [Trondheim] – Norway
[2]VID Specialized University – Norway

Abstract

Many persons with intellectual disabilities have rights to and receive a wide range of care services in the Norwegian welfare state. This paper, based on nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in various everyday contexts, explores how such services are provided. While adequate services often require knowledge of interests and preferences of the person receiving care, our analysis indicates that the welfare state is often "out of touch": knowledge of who these persons *are* often gets lost in the context of the state's professional care provision.
Rather than interpreting this as a lack of recognition, we interpret it as a *loss of touch*. Hence, we explore how the workings of various care relations can struggle to acknowledge or incorporate knowledge of each person in their singularity. We also explore how dispersed moral responsibility, often in professional work characterized by coincidence and short-term relations, can engender such a loss. Finally, we explore the role of institutional or systemic complexities in the Norwegian context.
Noting that this exploration resonates with anthropologist Lisa Stevenson's concept of "anonymous care", we theorize a notion of palimpsestic care. This neologism describes the processes through which knowledge of persons with intellectual disabilities is "overwritten", often with detrimental effects. Since these processes are reminiscent of the practice of palimpsest, where once important texts are considered less relevant, "obsolete", or "out of place" and then overwritten by other texts, we also emphasize how a loss of touch can be connected to contextual changes or instabilities.

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*Speaker

Co-opting and exporting the neurodiversity paradigm: when the U.S. neoliberal alt-right meets French popular discourse and emergent disability politics

Juliette Tocino-Smith*[1]

[1]NeuroConvergences – NeuroConvergences – France

Abstract

This paper critically analyzes how tech billionaire Elon Musk's controversial gesture at the 2025 U.S. presidential inauguration-widely interpreted as a Nazi salute-was trivialized and swiftly reframed by French alt-right media and its supporters as "an awkward man's love expression through a clumsy gesture" (Europe 1, 21 Jan. 2025). Echoing alt-right responses in the U.S., such framings draw from pre-established tactics that weaponize Musk's self-diagnosed Asperger's syndrome to deflect criticism of his transgressive behaviors and ties to reactionary politics.
Musk's case offers a rich framework to analyze 1. how the libertarian techno-elite reinforces ableist inequities by valorizing figures who simultaneously claim minority status and embody neoliberal ideals (Musk is frequently portrayed as an "alpha nerd" with exceptional productive and intellectual abilities); 2. how these actors co-opt and cherry-pick disability discourse to evade accountability, desensitize audiences to ethical violations, and legitimize extremist behavior; and 3. the transnational ripple effects of cultural-materialist supremacy on nascent neurodiversity and social disability frameworks globally.

France's unique sociopolitical landscape and historical underpinnings provide a crucial analytical lens. Despite WHO recognition of social disability models, French institutions and popular discourse remain entrenched in medicalized frameworks that pathologize neurodivergence and exhibit longstanding resistance to Anglo-American social justice movements. When coupled with techno-supremacy and the growing influence of internationally connected far-right actors (Bardella, Hanouna, Zemmour), this epistemic vacuum paradoxically creates fertile ground for localized alt-right co-optation of neurodiversity narratives for image management and strategic gain.

Where nationalist rhetoric and institutional resistance to change masquerade as cultural preservation, this study uncovers how Musk's seemingly benign gesture reveals broader forces at play-specifically, deepening political, corporate, and tech alliances that undermine minority epistemic formation, rights advancements, and systemic change through corporate lobbying, algorithmic monopolies, and hyperstitial truth-making (CCRU, 1999), thereby blurring lines between reality and manufactured fictions.

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Following an exploration of entrenched and emergent discourses on disability and neurodiversity in France, alongside their sociocultural and historical trajectories, this study employs a multimodal critical discourse analysis of French media responses and social media data collected between 20–30 January 2025. Case studies examine actors (news outlets, online platforms, pop-cultural figures) that echoed U.S. far-right tropes post-inauguration, depoliticizing the gesture with statements such as ”Asperger’s syndrome can provoke uncontrolled gestures when intense emotions arise” (TF1, 26 Jan. 2025). Nonpartisan French media (Blast, Le Média) and online community reactions (X, Reddit, LinkedIn) to the incident further contextualize the extent to which transnational alt-right narratives intersect with France’s evolving disability and neurodiversity paradigms through the debates the gesture ignited.

Findings reveal that algorithmic supremacy and uncritical engagement with neurodiversity narratives-particularly those divorced from intersectional critique-risk inadvertently emboldening right-wing extremism and entrenching systemic inequities by undermining rights-based disability and neurodiversity movements. Key recommendations include: enacting intersectional French legislation grounded in social disability and neurodiversity rights frameworks; launching national campaigns and multi-agency initiatives to combat neurodivergence stereotypes via participatory engagement; supporting grassroots neurodiversity advocacy independent of tech-funded organizations; and implementing robust content moderation and transparency mandates to counter algorithmic disinformation amplification.

Concepts, Contents, Realities: What a course on inclusion teaches us about us

Maria Rita Hoffmann*[1]

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Abstract

Topic:

The English-speaking world offers countless discourses on human diversity. This paper highlights one of these aspects: disability-related narratives, and places them onto a relatively young academic pillar: cultural disability studies. The author relates the experiences she has recently gained at a course on inclusion for trainee teachers of English as a foreign language in Budapest, Hungary.

Aim:

The author aims to give an example of how disabled persons' narratives could support inclusive teacher training in general, and English language teacher training in particular.

The author also aims to initiate considering cultural disability studies as an element of teacher education.

Background: these days people often refer to Inclusion as a tendency to follow, a paradigm to accept, yet it is a misinterpreted practice. The concept of inclusion challenges most professionals, including educators. In most cases, teachers expect to be told what to call and how to "treat" disabled students. Inclusion, however, does not mean a series of guidelines and instructions to people with various characteristic features. Inclusion is about understanding different ways of thinking, getting to know several forms of perceiving the world, and learning the nature of diverse abilities. Inclusion is inside us, grows in our mind through culture and results in acquiring a sense of belonging. The English-speaking culture excels in being inclusive, so English language teacher training could benefit from that aspect of the English-speaking culture .

Method: the author describes a course she has recently held, titled: English for Inclusion at the Department of English Applied Linguistics at the School of English and American Studies of ELTE. The course attracted several students.The author speaks about the course, underlines its aims, structure, the types of materials, activities and students' feedback.

Results: on the basis of students' feedback and experiences, the author encourages dialogue to understand that guidelines and instructions can often times be ableist definitions, and as such they are impersonally deepening the gaps between people with various dis/abilities and

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the mainstream world. P

Future perspectives:

The described course and students' reflections can prove thought-provoking to start training inclusive (language) teachers.

Disability culture meets health professions culture: Are health professions culturally safe for students and clinicians with disabilities?

Laura Yvonne Bulk*[1], Yael Mayer , and Tal Jarus

[1]University of British Columbia [Canada] – Canada

Abstract

The term Cultural Safety is grounded within the critical theory and emancipatory research, and it refers to the feeling of a person receiving services in the health system, that their identity, values, and culture is accepted and respected (Ramsden & Spoonley, 1993). The term originates from discussions in the literature related to racialized, and particularly indigenous, practitioners and clients, although the term cultural safety may refer to various equity-denied groups. We adopt the term cultural safety to discuss how people with disabilities feel when providing and receiving care in the health system. Within this theoretical work, the pillars of cultural safety will be examined through the perspective of critical disability studies.

Studies show that the cultures within health education and practice distinguish between the service provider as the "healthy, strong and capable" person, and the service user, as the "ill, weak and incapable," and do not always allow unique and diverse perspectives within health professions. In contrast, disability culture stresses celebrating diversity, recognizing the unique contribution of people with disabilities to the community, and embracing varying perspectives. These contradictions manifest in disabled students' and clinicians' experiences of stigma, negative attitudes, and the need to legitimize their belonging and citizenship within the health professions. We propose to explore how the health culture and disability culture may interact and how cultural safety for people with disabilities in health professions can be promoted.

Ramsden, I., & Spoonley, P. (1993). The cultural safety debate in nursing education in Aotearoa. The New Zealand Annual Review of Education, 3.

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*Speaker

Distance Learning for Learners with Disabilities in Kenya

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Abstract

The presentation will report on a study on distance learning for learners with disabilities in Kenya, focusing specifically on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the learning. It is noteworthy that the situation was a consequence of the pandemic. Specific focus is laid on the application of digital technology to facilitate learning at the time. Significant lessons were learned from the experience, with practical possible transfer of knowledge from the experience that is applicable to the contemporary period. The study compared the experiences of learners with and without disabilities, their parents and educators. Results showed that social distancing and other Covid19 restrictions made learners with disabilities more socially distanced and disadvantaged. There was significantly less learning occurring among them, they were more stressed, and their families were in more financial distress compared to their counterparts without disabilities. The study recommends measures that different stakeholders (parents, communities, non-state actors, governments, and especially the Ministry of Education) should put in place measures to avert further physical and psychological trauma on the learners with disabilities currently and in the future.

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*Speaker

Ethical challenges of doing research inclusively with young people with various disabilities in Tyrol

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[2]Heidelberg University – Germany

Abstract

Research with young people with disabilities requires alternative ethical approaches, as standard institutional ethics procedures are often unfeasible and critical ethical processes are frequently overlooked (Kaufmann et al., 2021). Furthermore, ethics procedures and involved challenges are rarely disclosed in existing studies with (young) people with disabilities. Hence, this paper seeks contributing to a discussion and transparency in research ethics when conducting inclusive research with young people with disabilities. It does so by drawing on the perspectives of an ethics of care (Maio, 2018), co-production approaches (Strnadová et al., 2022) and critical disabilities studies (Goodley, 2018).
It builds upon the experiences our team currently gains in the context of two research projects: Firstly, the project "Youth with Disabilities' Organisation, Representation and Participation in Europe, Austria and Tyrol", which explores the (non-)existent opportunities or spaces for political and social participation for young people with (cognitive) disabilities. There, we are closely collaborating with the Youth Council of the Tyrolean Monitoring Committee of the UN-CRPD using participatory observations during their monthly meetings. Secondly, it draws on the FWF-funded project "Enabling Spaces", which investigates how young people with disabilities perceive and negotiate everyday experiences of inclusion/exclusion in Tyrol. The project employs a flexible mixed-methods approach with co-productive elements including innovative mobile methods such as mobile eye-tracking.

It shares experiences of conducting research with the participants of both studies, focusing on their desires, challenges, and limited opportunities for participation and independence. It elaborates on key considerations, practices and learnings from the planning stage to the implementation of our research. As part of this, we reflect upon the informed consent procedure, discussions regarding adjustments to the research design and other decision-making processes within the research practice. In doing so, we want to highlight some of the differences from conventional research practices and their methodologies, especially in regard to their flexibility, adaptivity and accessibility.

We conclude that while integrating meaningful (elements of) co-production is of great importance when doing research with marginalised groups, researchers need to be aware of structural and temporal limitations, such as inadequate support systems, social and physical barriers as well as time constraints, which can fundamentally challenge its applicability. Researchers must be aware that socio-political and institutional discourses and structures, in which both researchers and participants are often situated, potentially can pressure young

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people with disabilities to conform to conventional and at times discriminatory discourses around disabilities, which should, of course, be avoided.

We therefore advocate for a stronger consideration of critically-reflected inclusive research practices, which are guided and informed by an ethics of care and procedural ethics. There is a need to carefully assess when, where and how the integration of co-production can contribute to meaningful research both for participants and researchers.

Inclusion Through Plants

Ruzzante Giorgia*[1] and Weyland Beate[1]

[1]Libera Università di Bolzano – Italy

Abstract

This paper presents the inclusive research of the Bloom Lab research project, a collaboration between the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and the Il Cortile Cooperative in Salsomaggiore Terme (PR). The research aims to enhance both indoor and outdoor spaces of the cooperative's various services, including school and extracurricular programs, while also fostering a relationship with the plant world, both outdoors and through indoor plants (Weyland, 2022).

One of the most significant services managed by the cooperative is school inclusion, carried out by educators within schools, from early childhood education to upper secondary education. The experimentation presented in this paper explores the inclusive potential of the plant world through the creation of a simplified version of the logbook titled Feeling the Plants (Weyland et al., 2024), developed using AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication). This tool serves as a mediator in the relationship with plants, enhancing students' and educators' awareness and contributing to the construction of a personal "green biography" (Buonanno & Weyland, 2024). Additionally, it fosters a reconnection with nature through a more active engagement with the plant world.

Furthermore, the study investigates the educational use of plants (Weyland & Boaretto, 2022) and the interaction between plants and students with disabilities.

Methods

In an initial online meeting, the research team presents the project and discusses key aspects for effectively simplifying the logbook. The new tool is then created and tested with educators and students in a school setting. Research data will be collected via a Padlet board, where educators will upload photos with captions documenting the experimentation and plant interactions, along with best practice sheets. Additionally, interviews will be conducted with the educators involved in the study.

At the end of the research, an in-person feedback session will assess the usability of the tool through a monitoring grid and an analysis of qualitative and quantitative data obtained from questionnaires, the Padlet board, and best practice sheets.

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Mirror of Perception: An Analysis of Worker Attitudes Toward Service Users with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Community-Based Living Services in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

The attitudes of social service workers are pivotal in shaping the quality of support provided to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), directly impacting their well-being and social inclusion. This paper presents findings from a study funded by the Czech Science Foundation (GAČR, project no. 20-08327Y), analyzing the attitudes of workers in community-based living services toward individuals with IDD in the Czech Republic.
The study used the Community Living Attitude Scale (CLAS) to assess worker attitudes, combining quantitative data with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. The analysis explored correlations between workers' attitudes and demographic variables, identifying patterns in their perceptions of service users.

Results, reveal demographic differences between direct support workers and management staff. The study focuses on four CLAS categories: Empowerment, Exclusion, Protection, and Similarity. Findings show that while employees generally support community-based services, significant differences appear, especially at higher organizational levels. Direct support workers exhibited less inclusive attitudes, scoring higher in Protection and Exclusion, indicating a stronger tendency to safeguard individuals with disabilities. Managers, in contrast, scored higher in Empowerment and Similarity, reflecting a greater belief in the autonomy and inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

The study also compares Czech findings with a 1999 U.S. study (Henry et al.), showing that Czech workers held more positive attitudes toward inclusion but perceived a greater distinction between individuals with IDD and the general population.
These findings have implications for policy and practice, suggesting that targeted educational programs and interventions can foster positive attitudes among workers, ultimately improving the quality of support and social inclusion for individuals with IDD.

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*Speaker

Network meeting of Netzwerk Disability Studies and Disability Studies Austria (DiStA)

Laura Nadine Hochsteiner*[1], Bertold Peter Scharf*[2], Karin Elinor Sauer*[3], Volker Schönwiese*[4], and Angela Wegscheider*[5]

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[2]Hochschule Bremen – Germany
[3]Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg – Germany
[4]Universität Innsbruck – Austria
[5]Johannes Kepler Universität Linz – Austria

Abstract

Within the proposed collaboration space, we aim to hold a meeting between the existing networks DiStA (Disability Studies Austria, research on disability, Austria) and Netzwerk Disability Studies (network for Disability Studies in German-speaking countries). With this meeting, we aim to bring together people interested in working within the field of Disability Studies in the context of Austria and other German-speaking countries.
Since 2009, DiStA has functioned as both a working group and a cooperation platform for people researching and working in the spirit of Disability Studies. The members of DiStA come from a variety of disciplines. During the first DiStA networking meetings, the participants decided against establishing any criteria based on social identity for membership. As such, DiStA intends to neither include nor exclude anyone per se.

Netzwerk Disability Studies was founded in 2018 and is an informal association of people who are active in the fields of science, art, culture and/or disability policy and who identify with the principles of Disability Studies. The network is open to people with and without disabilities. It encourages people to actively question difference and privilege and to reflect on their own (lack of) experience of disability and personal reference - in the knowledge that these are not always directly visible.

The aim of DiStA and Netzwerk Disability Studies is to popularize and further develop a multi-dimensional, social and cultural model of disability in Austria and in other German-speaking countries. DiStA has set out to establish Disability Studies in research as well as in higher and further education in Austria. This also has an impact on Disability Studies in other German-speaking countries.

DiStA and Netzwerk Disability Studies especially encourage and call for research undertaken from an intertheoretical and inter-/transdisciplinary perspective. Such transdisciplinarity requires the development and promotion of methodologies that permit to include non-academic and academic epistemologies in equal measure and to conduct participatory research.
The collaboration space is open to students, early-stage and advanced researchers from Austria, Germany, Switzerland and abroad. The meeting will start with an overview of the aims,

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structures and working modes of both DiStA and Netzwerk Disability Studies. A short political analysis will be added to this overview as well as a short report about the activities of both groups. We would like to collect ideas for future activities in the German speaking countries. What is more, we aim to discuss the situation of teaching in higher education and the situation of researching and research funding in Austria and other German-speaking countries with the participants. Suggestions for further research and issues regarding current/future challenges pertaining to research, funding and teaching will be explored together. The collaboration space will provide plenty of opportunities for discussion and exchange. The meeting, as part of the ALTER conference, will be held in German and is open to anyone interested in Disability Studies and research on disability with reference to Austria and other German-speaking countries.

Reimagining Crip: Extending the Notions of Resistance and Identity

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Abstract

Inclusive research methods involving collaboration with people who have been labelled as "mentally impaired" are being "cripped". Recognition that a research partners' experiences and abilities can serve not only as a source for enriching the discipline's knowledge but also as a basis for "research orientation" (Quinn 2024, 3078) provides the foundation for research methods' radicalisation. These include methods known as emancipatory, participant-led, or collaborative (Atkinson 1997) or the ones that explicitly mark themselves as "cripped" (Dronkert 2023). Currently, the dialogue between the theory-practices of inclusive research and the discipline known as "crip theory" (McRuer 2006) is burgeoning within the field of disability anthropology. However, the (theoretical) elaboration of one of the crip theories' key concerns, namely the possibilities for subversion and resistance against institutionalized structural ableism, has so far been only modest (Quinn 2024).

The main aim of this presentation is to begin to fill in this gap in both inclusive research methodology and crip theory. Through the method of extensive re-reading of the literature on (inclusive) research projects done together with the people labelled as "mentally impaired," we aim to answer the following main question. When and how can the cripping of the research methods through inclusive, collaborative research projects enable crip resistance practices, including practices of description and theoretical rethinking, and possibly open avenues for identification with crip identities? We will also try to conceptualize the mutual relationships between the methodological, practice-oriented, and identity-based perspectives on crip through exploring the following sub-questions. Firstly, how can the "cripped" (inclusive) methodologies become a form of resistance through formulating counter-discourses (Foucault 1995)? Secondly, what kinds of resistance of the people labelled as "mentally impaired" can be discerned in the literature on inclusive research – whether in the form of counter-discourses or tactic bricolages (Synek – Hradcová – Carboch 2022)? And finally, through accounting for the potential relational and coalitional disabled/crip identities that emerge within the research literature, we intend to rethink the very notion of "crip identity."

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Spatiotemporal Emotionality: How Does a Person with Autism Experience Time-Space?

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Abstract

Although the study of autistic experience has grown in recent years, the vast majority of interest remains focused on childhood experiences, particularly within the fields of medical sciences. The experiences of autistic adults are disproportionately less explored. In this paper, I address the topic of emotionality, one of the most studied aspects of autistic experience, through the case of an autistic adult. Since this is my own experience, I chose the method of autoethnography. Over the course of two years, I kept a diary where I recorded situations that intensely influenced my emotionality. I developed the concept of "mobility time flow," which allows insight into the process of emotion creation through an inseparable aspect of everyday life: traversing through time-space. This concept envisions an ideal imagined path through time-space. Emotional creation is then dependent on deviations between my real movement and this ideal imagined path. Using three specific situations (walking through the city centre, traveling on a train, and crossing the road at a pedestrian crossing), I demonstrated how these deviations take shape and how they function. The aim of this paper is to understand how autistic emotionality is created, influenced, and subsequently shaped by unavoidable situations that are everyday and essential to life. This research connects the geography of mental health with crip temporality, which provides the framework for exploring emotions. The paper contributes to the topic of invisible disabilities, not only within disability studies but also within social geography. At the same time, it enriches these fields with the unique and non-transferable experience of an adult woman with autism, who has faced spatial and temporal challenges throughout her life. This topic not only enhances social geography and disability studies with the perspective of crip temporalities and research into emotionality but may also support other areas of research involving people with autism.
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The communication assistant as change agent in the school

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[2]Catholic University of Sacred Heart of Milan – Italy
[3]Università degli studi della Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli" = University of the Study of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli – Italy

Abstract

The communication assistant, envisaged by Italian Law no. 104/1992, is part of the school world with the aim of encouraging and mediating communication and facilitating autonomy for students with sensory disabilities. Despite the fact that this figure is still often confused with other operators due to unclear and ill-defined regulations in relation to peculiarities, training and competences, in Italian schools he/she plays a fundamental role, not only in the relationship with the student with disabilities, facilitating their inclusion, but also in that with the teaching team, the family and the services, as an 'agent of the network'.

This contribution is the result of a recent exploratory survey, aimed at analysing peculiarities of this operator in some Italian regions. From the qualitative analysis of 120 questionnaires addressed to communication assistants for pupils with hearing disabilities in service in educational institutions on the national territory, professional profiles emerge that present many points of contact between regions, but also many differences, the result of heterogeneous territorial policies and management in relation to classification, training and ways of understanding and performing the role. The survey also reports on the training needs expressed by these professionals and some indications and suggestions for improving the service offered.

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The development of recommendations for participatory technology development projects with people with disabilities

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Abstract

The number of participatory research projects has been slowly increasing for years (Munde & Tillmann, 2022). However, there are very different research designs and opportunities for participation in these research projects. In addition, the term "participation" is vague (Heiden, 2014; Ukowitz, 2021). At the same time, accessibility does not play a role in current participation formats and methods (Bittenbinder, Pinatti de Carvalho, Krapp, Müller & Wulf, 2021; Düber, Rohrmann & Windisch, 2018). Accordingly, people with disabilities have so far only been addressed as a target group, if at all, in the case of disability-specific questions, and usually not at the beginning or in the course of the research process, i.e. during the development of the question and solution, but only during testing (Rogalla & Reichelt, 2019). As a result, , (supposed) solutions are developed that do not meet the actual needs and the fundamental causes of problems are not even considered.
For this reason, the INPART project (Inclusive Participation through Integrated Research) aims to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of participatory technology development projects with people with disabilities. For this investigation, research and technology development projects from the period 2013-2023 that address issues of social participation in the context of digital technology development will first be identified. It is of central importance to include projects that explicitly address the specific needs of people with disabilities, including aspects such as inclusion and accessibility. However, projects do not have to exclusively target people with disabilities, as people with disabilities are also an integral part of a diverse society. The projects are then evaluated according to inclusion and participation criteria.

This is an ongoing project. It is therefore not yet possible to present final results, but the current state of knowledge and the methods and evaluation matrix used will be presented and discussed.

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The Dynamics of Caregiving and the Relational Construction of Personhood in Spinal Cord Injury, Bengaluru, India

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Abstract

In 2017, the World Health Organization launched Rehabilitation 2030, emphasizing the urgent need for inclusive and high-quality rehabilitation services globally. This study examines the rehabilitation experience following spinal cord injury (SCI) at the Bengaluru Rehabilitation Center (BRC) in Bangalore, India, highlighting the complex role of caregiving in shaping personhood. Using an ethnographic approach-including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and multimodal methods such as art workshops-this research explores the intersection of caregiving, personhood, and relational labor, where care is not only provided but reciprocally negotiated between caregivers, and care recipients.
In SCI care, caregiving is stratified by gender and class, with lower-income patients relying on unpaid female kin, while wealthier individuals access professional caregivers. However, care is not unidirectional: SCI residents often engage in forms of non-physical caregiving that remain invisible in dominant care frameworks. For example, caregivers and care recipients manage each other's emotions, with SCI residents regulating their moods to ease the emotional burden on family members. Rather than a linear progression toward independence, rehabilitation emerges as a relational process where dependency, autonomy, and social participation are constantly renegotiated.

Peer mentors at BRC complicate traditional caregiving hierarchies. As individuals with lived experience of SCI, they blur the line between care provider and care recipient, offering guidance and support that challenges the conventional dependency model. This highlights the role of relational personhood, where identity is constructed through networks of care rather than through individual agency.

Furthermore, caregiving in SCI rehabilitation is not just about sustaining life but also about navigating social visibility and stigma. When children care for their mothe discreetly to avoid social scrutiny, illustrate how caregiving is embedded in moral and cultural expectations. At the same time, men with SCI sturggle with their ideas of masculinity and self sufficiency in a new physical reality. Similarly, families often make strategic decisions about investing in rehabilitation for male versus female patients, revealing how gendered norms shape access to care.
This research situates SCI rehabilitation within broader disability rights transformations, questioning whether current rehabilitation frameworks truly support inclusive models of care or reinforce existing inequalities. I argue that caregiving must be understood as a central,

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[*] Speaker

rather than peripheral, aspect of the disability experience-not simply as a function of rehabilitation, but as a core site of remaking of personhood, and social belonging. By reframing caregiving as a transformative and relational practice, this study calls for a reexamination of rehabilitation models that move beyond biomedical assumptions and instead center care,and interdependence, within the disability experience.

The Frankfurt School's Critical Theory, Michel Foucault's Theory of Power, and Cyborg Feminism: New Impulses for an Analytical Framework

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Abstract

The presentation introduces the findings of my PhD thesis in sociology in relation to the development of a potential new epistemological framework and explores the question of how the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory, Foucault's notions of power, and Donna Haraway's cyborg feminism can enhance the British social model of disability in the context of postmodern critique.
Originally, disabled activists developed the concept of the social model of disability in the 1970s and 1980s to highlight the disabling conditions of the current social organisation of society that would exclude disabled people from participation and isolate them. Although the social model was a decisive impulse for the disability movement, it has faced several criticisms by postmodern scholars and disabled activists. The main points of criticism were the accusation of overall simplifying explanatory approaches, the promotion of a unifying identity that would ignore the existing diversity and differences among disabled people, and the biologisation of lived experiences expressed through the body and the fostering of solely medical interpretations of impairment through the distinction between impairment and disability. Furthermore, disabled feminists criticised gaps in the social model suggesting that it centred the perspectives and experiences of white and mainly physically disabled men and obfuscated gender-specific discrimination.

In the light of this critique, I want to reconcile these different perspectives for an analysis of disability and gender through the integration of Critical Theory and an epistemologically specific and nonidentitarian cyborg feminism. The Frankfurt School's critical social theory shares the Marxist underpinnings of the social model of disability as it was formulated initially but is specifically interested in how the entanglement of the domination of nature, instrumental reason, and economisation has led to a new totality. Disability as a social category reveals societal contradictions through its nonconformity to capitalist performance requirements. It, therefore, constitutes a nonidentity that questions the universal ideal of always being healthy and productive in a society that is focused on efficiency. In addition, Foucault's dissection of power relations and social practices offers relevant insights into medical settings and the pathologisation of disability, which has already been highly significant for research in disability studies. Like Foucault and Critical Theory, Donna Haraway shared a rejection of binary and identitarian thinking, but her approach was explicitly based on socialist feminism and a critique of situated knowledges. Instead, she argues for a partial and feminist epistemology that acknowledges particular perspectives and embodiments of the subject and allows analysing individual experiences as well as multifaceted mechanisms

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of inequality and oppression.

The presented approaches have in common that they reject rigid identity categories and question the dominance of standardised norms. Based on these approaches I want to argue for an epistemological framework that takes into account the diversity and intersectional dimensions of disability and gender but also acknowledges the groundbreaking approach of the social model rooted in materialist thinking. I aim to discuss the merits of the theoretical approaches and what they can add to disability research and analysis.

The Right to Research: Amplifying Voices, Caring for Stories

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Abstract

In many countries around the world, people identified as disabled remain ”orphans” of many of the socio-economic networks forming our communities, and are capitalised upon by the more powerful and vocal actors (Synek and Hradcová 2023). Disadvantaged by various disability labels and inadequate support, they are often excluded from research, or are included in ways that do not acknowledge their standpoints and views on policies. Can this situation be changed through the direct involvement of the disabled people in research and in policy making? Which relocations of the socio-economic networks' ”obligatory passage points” (Callon 1984) are necessary so that their voice might be heard and taken seriously? Can the right to research (Reed and Schenck 2023) be postulated as a fundamental right and can it be implemented in accordance with the relevant laws and ethical rules?

In our presentation, we will try to tentatively answer these questions on the basis of insights gained through a number of past and recent collaborative research projects done together with the people identified as ”mentally impaired” (www.zivotnipribehy.com). In the Czech Republic, where we conduct our research, the human rights lawyers agree that even the most extensive formulation of the legal rights restriction cannot encroach on the right of citizens to take part in research and to bear witness to his/her unique life experience. However, in a country where many of the disabled peoples' lives are deeply affected by the long history of institutionalisation and widespread ableism, realisation of the right to research is often difficult, as many legal guardians, research institutions and service providers consider controlling and/or curtailing disabled peoples' participation in research activities as their obligation and a necessary tool for the protection of the people in their care. And as in many cases collaboration in research does not hinge only on the legal right to participate but also on an appropriate support and sufficiently flexible knowledge infrastructure (Dronkert 2023), conducting a collaborative research with the people identified as ”mentally impaired” also brings number of questions concerning adequacy of the various enactments of the right to research and, more generally, of the human rights model of disability.

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Transformation in research regarding inclusive schools: How to approach the problem of producing, reproducing and deconstructing categories in qualitative studies from the view of doctoral students – an explorative study

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Abstract

Research about inclusive education often deals with the question of how specific practices of inclusion and exclusion interact. The aim of analyzing these interactions by focusing on a particular question in the field of inclusive education is to gain more differentiated knowledge about inclusion. This newly generated knowledge may lead us, in the best case, to ideas of how to reduce inequality and discrimination, both of which are strongly linked to the question of existing and created differentiations and categorizations, e.g. students with and without special needs or students with and without disabilities. But what if we recognize that our research about inclusive education tends to reproduce differentiations and categorizations in a way that they become reinforced during our research process? Following this idea, my presentation puts forwards the thesis, that we need a transformation in research that deals in particular with questions of various kinds of inequalities through vulnerabilities and includes categories such as dis/ability. Inclusive education researchers use difference-sensitive language and terminology, but nevertheless we are confronted with the problem of dealing with differentiations and categorizations in our research. Research about inclusive education that is centered around the question of diversity, runs the risk of emphasizing differences and reproducing categories that construct subjects as different from others (Demmer/Heinrich 2018). This can lead to a perspective that reinforces the categories that produce exclusion. In my presentation I first explore the need for reflexive research in the field of inclusive education with a focus on research about inclusive schools and take a 'meta-perspective' of the research process itself. Secondly I give an overview of my current study in which I analyze interviews with PhD students who conduct research in the field of inclusive schools. I also plan to examine other practices that culminate in a PhD such as discussions in colloquiums and conversations with their mentors. The interviews should be interpreted by the Grounded Theory (Glaser/Strauss 1967) to generate new kinds of approaches for doing reflexive qualitative research about inclusive education. I further investigate how PhD students address the dilemma of the reproduction or deconstruction of differentiations and categorizations, which are represented in their research (Budde/Hummrich 2015). The (preliminary) results of my interviews will be discussed and will lead us to the question if and how reflexive research about inclusive schools may be possible (Messerschmidt 2016).

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Transformations Within Disability Studies and Beyond: Empirical Results from Intersectional Ableism Research

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Abstract

Background

Research on *dis/ability* is constantly transforming and branching into new areas, such as Deaf Studies (Rombach and Kellermann, 2022) or Mad Studies (Lüthi, 2022; Morgan, 2021). In Disability Studies, there is also a growing body of literature employing intersectional perspectives, such as (Trans) Feminist Disability Studies (Garland-Thomson, 2005; Timmons, 2020) or Postcolonial Disability Studies (Chataika and Goodley, 2024). Such perspectives focus on specific identity intersections. Generally, intersectional frameworks are also applicable in research on ableism (see Afeworki Abay, 2022; Timmons, McGinnity and Carroll, 2024). When defining ableism, various authors (e.g., Goodley, 2014) recount Campbell (2009) as a foundational text. Here, ableism is defined as "(a) network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular king of self and body (...) that is projected as (...) essentially and fully human" (Campbell, 2009, p. 5).

However, two aspects remain unclear in definitions of ableism: firstly, it seems reasonable to posit that the dynamics described by Campbell (2009) differ depending on the specific impairment and experiences of *dis/ability.* Secondly, the interplay between *dis/ability* and further categories of difference deserves more attention (Goethals, De Schauwer and Van Hove, 2015; Pieper, 2022). Accordingly, the concept of ableism calls for further theorization (Waldschmidt and Schillmeier, 2022). Therefore, this empirical contribution critically and intersectionally engages with the concept of ableism, considering the heterogeneity of *dis/ability* as a category of difference (Evans, 2020; Waldschmidt, 2019) by focusing on two research questions: (1) When characterizing *dis/ability* as a heterogeneous and intersectional category of difference, what constitutes the phenomenon of ableism?, and (2) how does ableism relate intersectionally to other power structures?

Methods and Data

As ableism is linked to discrimination *and* privilege (Black and Stone, 2005; Evans, 2020), both disability and ability need to be taken into account (Karim, 2022). Accordingly, both inter-categorical diversity in *dis/ability* as well as intra-categorical intersections and the co-construction of categories of differences are considered in this empirical study. Without focusing on specific identity formations, an open, multi-sited, and field-controlled recruitment process is applied in a constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology framework (Charmaz, 2008, 2014). Narrative interviews (Schütze, 1983) are used to gain access to experiences of

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individuals identifying as disabled and non-disabled. Participants are informed that the research focus lies on discrimination and privilege but are asked openly to tell their life stories. First empirical results will be presented alongside general remarks on the transformative potential of intersectional ableism research for both the living conditions of disabled individuals and Disability Studies. Only by including the perspectives of intersectionally positioned individuals with and without disabilities into theory building is it possible to, firstly, develop an understanding of ableism that is appropriate to lived realities and, secondly, attain social change towards less discrimination and more disability rights in societies.

Transforming ableist methodologies in research with visually disabled people

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Abstract

Mobile methods are becoming increasingly popular in disability research, as they have the potential to uncover hidden and unconscious relations with the environment (Kusenbach, 2013), including their ableist underpinnings. However, their methodological pitfalls have been rarely addressed, leaving not only practical, but also epistemological challenges unresolved.

This paper critically examines the use of go-along interviews with visually disabled people. While the research design was selected to challenge and critically question the normative and ableist presuppositions not only of urban space but also of human geography entrenched in visuality, the research method itself proved to carry ableist premises. Despite their promise to enhance understanding of lived experiences, go-along interviews often embody an ableist "corporeal standard," (Campbell, 2009) privileging normative conceptions of walking and spatial navigation. Thus, while intended to question inequalities, they can enhance them as the research produces and reinforces the situations it studies (cf. Law, 2004).

The sighted research team encountered numerous methodological dilemmas stemming from the asymmetrical access to visual information and the heightened need for planning and foresight among visually disabled participants. These issues underscore the risks of uncritically applying methods designed for able-bodied individuals in disability research. To address these challenges, we developed a flexible, iterative research framework emphasizing pre-study sit-down interviews, mutual understanding, situated processual ethics (Rice et al., 2018), and role negotiation to ensure participants' autonomy and safety. The research highlights the importance of grounding methodologies in participants' lived realities rather than forcing them into preexisting methodological paradigms. By reimagining go-along interviews as "laboratories" (cf. Latour, 1999, 2004) for producing knowledge, we can critically confront ableist methodologies as well as anti-methodologies as presented by post-qualitative inquiry (see St. Pierre, 2019).

The paper offers practical insights for conducting ethical research while reflecting on how disability research can drive knowledge production that transforms both the given discipline (human geography, in our case) and the topic (visual disability, in our case) through their mutual interaction. By emphasizing not only political, social, and public responsiveness but also methodological responsiveness, the study aims to foster epistemic justice.

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Transforming Autism Narratives through Affirmative Interventions

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Abstract

Transforming Autism Narratives through Affirmative Interventions explores a shift in how autism is understood, moving from deficit-based narratives to strength-based, affirmative approaches. This presentation highlights the development and evaluation of an online course aimed at fostering positive self-perception and awareness of strengths among autistic adults. The findings underscore the potential of affirmative interventions to empower individuals, and challenge societal stereotypes.

Background

Autism has traditionally been conceptualized through the medical model, framing it as a deficit. However, alternative perspectives have emerged, emphasizing strengths and unique abilities associated with autism. These perspectives, initially voiced by the autistic community, have gained recognition among researchers and professionals. This shift aligns with the affirmative model, which highlights positive experiences and identities of individuals with disabilities.

Focusing on strengths offers a constructive narrative, enabling autistic individuals to counter stereotypes, build positive self-identities, and reduce stigma. It also contributes to understanding autism as part of human diversity, promoting inclusion and recognizing the value of neurodivergence. Research supports the benefits of strength-based interventions in enhancing well-being. These insights are particularly relevant for autistic adults, who often experience high rates of mental and physical health problems, lower quality of life, and limited social integration.

This study aimed to: (1) develop an online course focused on identifying and raising awareness of strengths among autistic adults, and (2) evaluate the course's impact on participants. This paper presents preliminary findings regarding participants' satisfaction and experiences with the course.

Methods

Fourteen autistic adults (seven women and seven men, aged 19–34) participated in the *Good Word* online course. The course comprised eight study units and a summarization unit. Each unit included an introductory video, questionnaires, and tasks to identify and internalize strengths. Upon completing the course, participants completed a satisfaction questionnaire with five closed-ended and three open-ended questions, adapted from prior research.

Results

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The qualitative analysis highlights the course's positive impact on participants, fostering a more positive self-perspective by emphasizing their strengths. Participants reported a shift from focusing on limitations to recognizing and valuing their unique abilities. The course's structured format, incorporating questionnaires and feedback, was identified as supporting this positive self-reflection. Participants highlighted the emphasis on strengths as a meaningful departure from the deficit-oriented narratives.

The quantitative analysis highlights positive feedback on the course's online format and participants' sense of ease. While interest in the topic and likelihood to recommend the course were rated slightly lower, these areas indicate opportunities for improvement. Qualitative feedback suggests adding clearer instructions, more examples, and diverse tasks, to enhance engagement and content depth.

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Transforming the Discourse on Ableism in Occupational Therapy: A Twenty-Year Critical Reflection

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Abstract

Background & Research Problematic:

Our presentation explores how disability research can help drive social change, drawing on our study of ableism in Occupational Therapy (OT) through the perspectives of disabled OT leaders.

OT is a healthcare practice that aims to empower individuals to engage in meaningful activities despite challenges. While committed to providing collaborative, client-centered care, the profession remains shaped by ableist structures that influence practice, education, and professional identity.

Over the past two decades, research on ableism in OT has grown, highlighting the lived experiences of disabled students and clinicians. While this has drawn attention to the field's ableist history, some scholars argue OT has yet to fully critique its core ableist values, integrate disability scholarship, or acknowledge its role in marginalizing disabled people (Hammel, 2023). Our study examines how discussions on ableism in OT have evolved over the past twenty years, examining the barriers and facilitators that have shaped shifts, and drawing from successes to inform recommendations for change.

Methods & Data:
This qualitative study, itself conducted by a disabled OTs (a student and researchers/educators), employs a critical interpretive approach to analyze the perspectives of key disabled OT leaders. Participants will be selected based on: (1) lived experience of disability, (2) professional experience as OT clinicians, and (3) recognized leadership in advocating against ableism in OT or healthcare. Data collection will focus on participants' experiences of ableism throughout their careers, their perceptions of shifts in discourse and practice, and their insights into the factors that have facilitated or hindered these transformations. Thematic analysis will be used to identify key trends, pivot points, and ongoing challenges in the evolving discourse on ableism in OT.

Results & Discussion:
With data collection underway, we anticipate sharing substantial findings by the time of the conference. Our study will offer critical reflections and recommendations to advance conversations on ableism in OT, contributing to social change, holding the profession accountable,

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and moving toward disability justice.

Relevance to Conference Theme & Stream:
This research aligns with the ALTER 2025 conference theme of ‘transformation’ by critically examining how discourses on ableism in OT have evolved and how centering disabled voices can drive meaningful change. Our study envisions a future in which disabled individuals can truly thrive in all aspects of practice, education, and services. Occupational therapy (OT) remains a field where disabled perspectives are often marginalized, limiting the profession’s ability to fully support and empower the communities it serves. By critically reflecting on past shifts and progress within OT, we can identify key successes and use them as a foundation for meaningful change. This presentation specifically contributes to the ”Disability Knowledge and Disability Research” stream by analyzing the production and evolution of knowledge on ableism in OT.

Transforming Writing – Accessibility, Inclusion, and Participation in Writing Studies

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Abstract

Dijana Simić & Interdisciplinary Research Collective "Making Writing (More) Accessible"

(Julia Ganterer, Lisa Pfahl, Stefanie Preiml, Erika Unterpertinger)

While accessibility, inclusion, and participation are often considered in the teaching of (academic) writing, in German-language writing studies, they still have little prevalence as research topics (e.g. Widhalm et al. 2023, Miglar 2024). In US-based writing studies, however, the correlations between disability, mental health, and writing have been explored more profoundly in the last few years (e.g. Brueggemann & Lewiecki-Wilson 2008, Price 2011, Mills & Sanchez 2023).

Writing strategies like freewriting and clustering have traditionally been used in higher education to prepare students for writing academic texts. These strategies aim at reducing insecurity and overcoming writer's block. They are supposed to have a transformative effect on writers. However, writing instructions often fail to recognize the ableist assumptions, structures, and barriers on which they are based and which they perpetuate. Therefore, it's indispensable to design writing didactics in a more inclusive manner.

In order to achieve a sustainable transformation of writing in higher education, interdisciplinary collaboration between the fields of writing studies, disability studies, and inclusive education is needed. Our presentation, therefore, brings together different strands of academic and non-academic knowledge production, dealing with accessibility, inclusion, and participation in writing. We compile 1) the state of research in writing studies and writing didactics, 2) writings by authors with disabilities, and 3) practices of writing groups in various settings (e.g. formal and nonformal education, social work, self-organization).

Carried by the principle "Leave no one behind!" represented in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we reach out to people with disabilities as experts in their writings. By choosing this approach, we will not only evaluate the sustainability and inclusivity of writing didactics as an academic discipline but also explore how writing can become a means of transformative self-expression and socio-political analysis in the multi-faceted writings of German-language disabled authors (reaching from life writings to handbooks and novels – e.g. Buschmann & L'Audace 2023, Miles-Paul 2023, Gersdorf & Sturm 2024) as well as practices of concrete writing groups in the German-speaking area.
This contribution from writing studies aims at mapping the current state of the art in inclusive writing.

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*Speaker

Vibrant crip materialisms: Environmental futures, sensitivity, and the knowledge in chronically ill and neurodivergent relations

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Abstract

New materialist philosophies regularly contend with the role of the "non-sentient" and the "unalive" in a wider network of human, nonhuman, more-than-human relations. Thinkers such as Bruno Latour (1987), and Deleuze and Guattari (1980) have contemplated the vibrancy of the object, and the power that it holds within social, cultural, philosophical, and political networks. In her book Vibrant Matter, Jane Bennett (2009) encourages us toward knowing objects in this way, primarily to benefit our relationship to our environments-she argues that perhaps, if we recognised the vibrancy of a "thing", we would be less inclined to waste it, harm it, or exploit it. However, within all of these framings, disability is not discussed, nor is the fact that these ways-of-knowing are often innate to disabled experience and their accompanying cripistemologies. For neurodivergent people, an object can challenge the senses and energise, exhaust, trigger, or comfort in a manner beyond what neurotypical experience can comprehend. With chronic illnesses, we find ourselves at the whim of weather, light, volume or scents, amongst a myriad of other "things". Yet these experiences are often dismissed as trivial sensitivity. Within this paper, I argue that crip sensitivity is a way-of-being that brings new knowledge to otherwise non-disabled dominated spaces, whether that expertise is scholarly, activist, political, or creative. While I cannot speak to all disabled experience, some sensitivities and disabled ways-of-being can allow us to recognise the importance, interconnectedness and personhood in the "non-sentient" and "unalive". In part, it is this knowledge that can fuel environmental activism and scholarship. Through navigating these ways-of-knowing, this paper responds to the call of Johnson and McRuer (2024) for 'Cripistemologies Now (More than Ever!)', and situates cripistemology in Sunaura Taylor's (2024) exploration of disabled ecologies. I build upon Johnson and McRuer's term 'crip materialism' to extend their critique of the socio-political systems that fuel environmental harm, while highlighting that disabled people have been sidelined in the envisioning and creation of futures that seek to prevent it. From here, I argue that the parallels between Jane Bennett's vibrant matter and experiences of crip sensitivity demonstrate how cripistemology can aid in the creation of futures that aspire to prevent further environmental harm and allow for new modes of flourishing. In doing so, I follow the reflections of Eli Clare (2023) whose work brings attention to disabled relationships to the more-than-human and slams against the marginalisation and eradication of disabled ways-of-being.

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*Speaker

What if publishing was just the beginning of research? Feedback on an approach to disseminating results to disabled participants.

François Bouharmont*[1] and Justine Dehon*[1]

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Abstract

The study "Répercussions de la crise sanitaire sur le secteur du handicap" (Repercussions of the health crisis on the disability sector) published in 2023 by the Handicap & Santé service (ASBL ARAPH) highlighted the experiences of around a hundred people in the disability sector. When it was published, the department aimed to make the report accessible to the 75 people with disabilities who took part. In doing so, the department pursued several objectives:
- To move away from an approach where disabled individuals' voices are merely used as testimonies-sometimes intimate ones-without giving them the right to know how their words have been used and what impact they have had

- Involve people with disabilities in all stages of research, including after publication;

- Make study results understandable and accessible to people with disabilities;

- Discuss the results of the study with them as a starting point for further work.

To give a concrete expression to this approach, Handicap & Santé has created a tool in the form of a 7-minute video in " Facile à Lire et à Comprendre " (oral and visual). The video tool was co-created with an intellectually disabled person trained in " Facile à Lire et à Comprendre " (easy to read and understand). This person collaborated on an initial FALC synthesis of the report, and then on the visualization of this synthesis.

This type of production carried out in collaboration with a person affected by intellectual disability, implies other ways of working and requires mutual adaptation on the part of the parties involved. We propose to explore how this process can be a lever for methodological innovation within social science research and contribute to strengthening the self-determination of the people concerned.

On the occasion of the 13th Alter: Transformations conference, our service offers to present this feedback methodology to participants, present and distribute the video tool, discuss the experience of co-constructing the tool with a disabled person, and share feedback from target audiences on the approach and relevance of the tool.

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”Technological Embodiment” Revisited: Theorizing Human Interactions with Life-Sustaining, Assistive, and Casual Technologies

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Abstract

Drawing on Cyborg (Haraway, 1991; Inman, 2004) and Posthumanist (Hayles, 1999; Mara & Hawk, 2010) scholarship, Lisa Meloncon's (2013) ”Toward a Theory of Technological Embodiment,” in search of technical communication's ”complex user” (who may or may not be disabled) describes an array of examples of ”technological embodiment,” roughly definable as any bodily interaction with technology. Under this umbrella, she lumps together the everyday, casual use of an alarm clock, radio, TV, and laptop, prosthetics, pacemakers, and insulin pumps, self-help books and canes, as well as a ”dispersal of the self” in online gaming and virtual conferencing and, of course, fictional cyborgs.

The presentation I am proposing under conference stream 4, ”Disability knowledge and disability research,” seeks to debate and revise Meloncon's approach from a disability studies framework, suggesting that the lived experience of a person dependent on a technology to sustain their life or using a technology because it enables them to meaningfully participate in normative society, and that of a person occasionally and/or casually interacting with an appliance, do not exist on the same plain of ”technological embodiment.” To make this argument, I draw on medical knowledge and disability, accessibility, and usability studies to offer a methodical categorization of human interactions with technologies including life-sustaining, assistive and adaptive, rehabilitative, pharmacological, casual, and virtually immersive. Each category features examples of kinds of human-technology interactions and the kinds of physical and/or accessibility needs or general occasions that elicit them. I remain fully aware, however, that experiences may very well transgress these artificial categories, and provide examples of such transgressions, too. Through this descriptive process, I make more visible how some forms of ”technological embodiment” are more pervasive or all encompassing than others, and how choice, necessity, access, and enablement play into this phenomenon. Yet, the point of this categorization is not to delineate *degrees* of technology use, but rather to illustrate that there are different *kinds* of embodied interactions humans have with various technologies, with the ultimate caveat that all these experiences always have to be recognized as individual and subjective.

With this theoretical contribution, I hope to both challenge and re-open the conversation surrounding ”technological embodiment” in the medical humanities, not without arguing, however, that such a theoretical categorization should not be abused to categorize actual, living human beings, and that those living with and using life-sustaining and/or assistive and adaptive technologies should be at the forefront of revising and adding to the theoretical framework I outline here.

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*Speaker

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Individual Sessions:

Topic 5
Disability Futures

Accommodating Men with AS or Enforcing Patriarchy? The Ethics of Dating and Relationships After the #MeToo Movement

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Abstract

The #MeToo movement has reshaped feminist discourses and highlighted the need for gender equality, prompting new perspectives in disability studies. This presentation examines psychological advice given to heterosexual couples involving neurotypical women and men with Asperger syndrome (AS). While disability and neurodiversity studies advocate for nurturing environments for men with AS, the advice often places undue burdens on women, raising ethical concerns about reinforcing patriarchal norms.
Psychological resources emphasize that men with AS may struggle with emotional expression, empathy, and prioritizing their partners' needs. They often experience sensory overload and limited tolerance for social interactions. Consequently, neurotypical women are advised to adjust their expectations and lifestyles to accommodate their partners, accepting behaviors like emotional unavailability, dishonesty, and the prioritization of their partner's interests. Women are also expected to shoulder disproportionate household responsibilities, such as preparing fresh meals and maintaining spotless homes, while tolerating abrupt disengagements during sensory overloads.

Feminist scholars critique this advice for perpetuating unequal power dynamics. By urging women to deprioritize their own needs, these narratives reinforce patriarchal structures, transforming relationships into caregiver-care recipient dynamics rather than equal partnerships. While loyalty and straightforwardness are highlighted as positive traits of men with AS, the expectation that women sacrifice their well-being for these qualities raises significant ethical concerns. In a world where women's rights are increasingly under threat, such advice disempowers women and normalizes inequitable treatment.

Moreover, this approach inadvertently disempowers men with AS by minimizing their agency in fostering healthy relationships. By granting them carte blanche to prioritize their needs, these narratives risk entrenching patriarchal behaviors, counteracting the goals of inclusivity and accommodation. Even AI-generated advice, trained on existing literature, reproduces these gendered expectations, underscoring the need for critical, feminist approaches to relationship guidance.

In conclusion, while the intent to accommodate men with AS is rooted in empathy, the current advice often reinforces patriarchal norms and disempowers women. Moving forward, it is essential to develop equitable frameworks that prioritize mutual respect, shared responsibility, and the empowerment of both partners. Relationships should be built on equality,

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not one-sided accommodation, ensuring that neither partner's needs are sacrificed for the sake of the other.

Between local heritage and inclusive futures: Transformations in disability rights and accessibility in small Polish towns

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Abstract

Despite the growing international emphasis on disability rights and the impetus provided by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, small and medium-sized European towns-home to approximately 56% of Europe's urban population-remain underexplored in disability research. While larger cities often lead in implementing accessible frameworks, smaller towns face unique challenges due to limited resources, historical urban structures, and deeply rooted local identities. This study aims to develop practical recommendations for local governments on how to ensure accessibility while respecting and leveraging local architectural heritage and identity. It addresses key questions: What do small municipalities need to create accessibility that goes beyond standard solutions like steel ramps or handrails and instead aligns with local aesthetics and identity? How does the historical development of these towns shape their contemporary accessibility landscape?

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach that combines Disability Studies, architecture, and urban planning, the research focuses on two central questions: How can local architectural heritage and identity inspire the design of accessible spaces in small towns? What are the needs of small municipalities in creating accessibility that is functional and culturally harmonious?

The analysis is based on qualitative and quantitative data, including spatial audits, document reviews, and detailed assessments of individual public and private buildings. The study evaluates the current state of accessibility in small Polish towns, identifying both physical barriers and social challenges. Examples include the integration of ramps into historic buildings, the use of traditional materials in accessible pathways, and the redesign of public spaces to reflect local aesthetics while adhering to universal design principles. The research also examines how the historical development of these towns influences contemporary opportunities and constraints in accessibility.

Preliminary findings indicate that small municipalities require both financial support and education on accessibility to effectively implement solutions that are not only functional but also consistent with local heritage. The study highlights the importance of balancing heritage preservation with innovation, ensuring that accessibility interventions respect and enhance the unique character of small towns. Additionally, the research underscores the need for awareness-raising education among local communities, authorities, and designers to make accessibility an integral part of planning and space management processes.

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The author, a disability accessibility trainer collaborating with the local public administration of several dozen small Polish towns, emphasizes that small towns can become laboratories for innovative, inclusive design. Success depends on a deep understanding of local realities and the involvement of all stakeholders-from persons with disabilities to local decision-makers-in co-creating solutions. The study offers practical recommendations that can serve as a starting point for small municipalities in their pursuit of creating accessible, yet culturally authentic spaces.

By focusing on the role of local identity in shaping accessible environments, this research provides new perspectives on how transformations in disability rights discourse and practice can unfold beyond large urban centers. It argues that the quest for inclusive futures must embrace the diversity of local contexts, using architectural heritage as a resource for creating spaces that are both accessible and culturally meaningful.

Blessing in disguise? – the role of digitalisation in the lives of entrepreneurs with disabilities

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Abstract

Work in modern society is undergoing continuous digital transformation and research shows that while new types of jobs emerge, existing jobs and required employee skills are changing significantly (Balliester & Elsheikhi, 2018; Dunn, 2020). The impact of these changes on the life activities and the work of people with disabilities has so far been poorly explored (OECD, 2022).
Our research focuses on how digital transformation affects entrepreneurs with disabilities. Since they occupy a special place in the community of people with disabilities through their self-realization and the many benefits and resources (personal assistance, relational capital, freedom) arising from their business, digitalization may mean not only difficulties but also greater flexibility and autonomy to them (Pichault & McKeown, 2019).

We used qualitative methodology (Cooper and Emory, 1995) and snowball sampling (Silverman, 2008). In 2024 we conducted semi-structured interviews with 19 entrepreneurs with disabilities. Disabilities included physical disability, visual impairment, hearing loss, neurodiversity (autism, ADHD), and speech impediment (stuttering). The businesses involved were computer technology, construction, consultancy, clothing, car trading, foreign language services, event management and accounting services. The analysis was carried out by double coding, which increased the intersubjective validity of the research (Kvale, 2007). The work was facilitated by NVivo12 software.

The results revealed four distinct strategies or types of businesses concerning digitalisation: 1) For some entrepreneurs, especially for those with neurodiversity, it was digitalisation, telework or platform work that in fact made participation in the labour market possible. They make good use of flexible working hours, home office, and the lack of distractions like noises or colleagues. 2) Some entrepreneurs have maximised the benefits of the digital economy (earning income, empowerment, overcoming social barriers) and not only applied digital tools, but also made them the main profile of their businesses, exploiting their progressive and barrier-free features (provision of ICT services, distribution of digital tools, innovation). 3) Other entrepreneurs, although working in more traditional working conditions, have benefited from digitalisation in their business through e.g. online learning, organisation and marketing of services, etc. 4) Some entrepreneurs, due to the nature of their businesses or personal reticence, did not want to innovate, but rather highlighted the negative, controlling and limiting nature of digital transformation, which is fundamentally difficult and requires significant resources to overcome.

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Overall, entrepreneurs accept the digital imperative, see digital solutions as opportunities to bridge the so-called digital disability gap (Dobransky & Hargittai, 2016), at the same time believe that digital equality for people with disabilities (accessibility, ICT skills education, technical-social norms, infrastructure) have yet to be achieved (Yu et al., 2019).

Digital talking heads on home-based speech therapy for youngsters: the future through their siblings' eyes

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[4]GRHAPES – Institut national supérieur de formation et de recherche pour l'éducation inclusive (INSEI) – France

Abstract

Our proposal follows last year's presentation about the AVI-Corse project (2022-2025) in which we described its methodology and challenges faced. The general objective of this participatory project is the use evaluation of the Dynalips automatic lip synchronization technology for digital talking heads in the context of situations related to speech-therapy care. To date, 45 children and their families have been met, including 15 deaf children, 15 children with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDD) and 15 children without difficulty (control group). The main issue of this research is to understand whether the avatars' articulatory quality, intelligibility, and comprehensibility is satisfactory so that they can be included so that they can be used as part of a continuum of home care. This project is hosted by the UNESCO Chair for Disability, Education and Digital (HEN) of the National Higher Institute for Training and Research in Inclusive Education (INSEI), linked by agreement to the ARS of Corsica, initiator and funder.
This year, we want to focus on the siblings of young participants with language difficulties. In the experimental field, siblings are directly involved, because they are often called upon to help with learning: speech therapy exercises, homework, sporting or family leisure activities, etc., in a context where access to care is problematic. In fact, the mountainous terrain of Haute-Corse and Corse-du-Sud means that families have to mobilise a lot of human and financial resources, travelling long distances and having hectic days.

From a methodological point of view, the AVI-Corse project is organised around two complementary research strands. This proposal concerns the second part, which presents several prototypes of avatars in possible speech therapy situations at home. Five short videos, each lasting less than a minute, were shown to 9 children from different families. These were 4 siblings of deaf children (2 girls and 2 boys with an average age of 10 years 4 months) and 5 siblings of children with NDD (4 girls and 1 boy with an average age of 13 years). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with them using questionnaires (Likert scale) and interview grids to gather their opinions on the effectiveness of avatars in their family dynamics, from their point of view as older brother or sister. The study is based on an

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analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected.

In addition to children's interest in avatars, our paper outlines the criteria they consider important for successful implementation at home, as a complement to in-office speech therapy.
In the field of health education, the voice of these young caregivers is often overlooked. Our aim here is to explore their active roles and take into account their visions of the future, informed by their experiences.

Education for all: managing Intellectual disability and autism in emergency situations

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Abstract

Emergencies, whether caused by natural disasters, human actions, or unforeseen events, pose unique challenges for individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorders. These scenarios often disrupt established routines, causing heightened anxiety and behavioral challenges. The unpredictability of emergencies, combined with the rigid behavioral and cognitive frameworks typical of individuals with such conditions, underscores the urgent need for tailored strategies and inclusive education to ensure their safety and well-being.

This paper explores the critical role of education and training in preparing individuals with disabilities, their families, and emergency responders to effectively navigate crisis situations. Drawing on a multidisciplinary approach, it emphasizes the importance of fostering adaptive skills, emotional coping mechanisms, and behavioral flexibility. These components are essential for enabling individuals with disabilities to respond effectively to emergencies, mitigating the risk of crisis escalation. Key insights are derived from the Erasmus+ project *"I Learn and Get Beyond My Limits" (LEBEL)*, a collaborative initiative involving partners from Italy, Turkey, Belgium, and North Macedonia. This project developed innovative tools, including a visual dictionary and training modules, to enhance the communication and self-reliance of individuals with disabilities during emergencies. The project also emphasized the critical role of family members as first responders.

Furthermore, this paper underscores the necessity of training emergency professionals to recognize and address the specific needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities and ASD. This includes understanding sensory sensitivities, behavioral responses, and communication barriers that may arise in crisis scenarios. The integration of inclusive protocols, designed to accommodate diverse needs, is presented as a foundational step in building a resilient and equitable emergency response system.

The discussion also extends to the broader societal implications, advocating for a shift toward systemic inclusivity. This involves fostering collaboration among stakeholders, including educators, healthcare providers, policymakers, and community organizations, to create sustainable frameworks that prioritize the safety and dignity of individuals with disabilities.

In conclusion, this paper highlights the transformative potential of inclusive education and tailored emergency strategies. By equipping individuals with disabilities, their families, and professionals with the tools to navigate crises, we can foster a society that values diversity, promotes resilience, and ensures that no one is left behind during emergencies. This

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*Speaker

approach not only addresses immediate challenges but also contributes to a cultural shift toward greater inclusion and equity.

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Working out a Politics of Employment from a Care Sitpoint: Learnings from Self-Administered Disability Networks

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Abstract

In this dissertation project, I deeply engage with self-administered disability spaces and their ways of organising their – mostly unpaid – labour. Based upon the comprehension that such spaces represent essential sites of reproductive value generation, I consider research on disability networks as a learning opportunity for those actors in the employment complex who struggle to appropriately accommodate the needs of, and integrate the resources held by, non-normatively embodied workers. With much of labour research on disability being restricted to subjects with a legally recognised disability or an institutionally recognised need for rehabilitation, as well as to forms of work categorised as wage labour, findings represent only limited kinds of disabled realities. This is where a broader conceptualisation both of disability and of labour becomes inevitable, making self-administered disability spaces a relevant subject of research. I make sense of these spaces as sites of prefigurative politics (Sörensen 2023), that is, sites where alternative ways of relating to one another are being envisioned and materialised.

I explore how the central role of care – both for one another and about more just social relations – in the work of disability networks has implications for the ways in which their labour is structured. Given its refusal to externalise reproduction from labour, disability knowledge, or 'crip wisdom' (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018), challenges conventional employment relations. I am interested both in the purposively formed, or ecologically forming, dynamics of disability network labour, as well as in the diverse resources and needs that are integrated in such contexts. This kind of knowledge, a manifestation of desired future relations in the here and now (Raekstad and Gradin 2019), carries much transformative potential in relation to current employment politics. This project explores these potentials through the questions: What can we learn from self-administered disability networks about more accessible configurations of labour? How can a disabled sitpoint contribute to the forging of a care oriented politics of employment?" With sitpoint (Garland-Thompson 2005), I refer to the situated knowledge arising from the experience of becoming disabled, an ecologically arising location of mismatch between subject and environment (Garland-Thompson 2011).

Seeking to understand how labour relations work (differently) within disabled spaces, I plan on conducting preliminary fieldwork in different types of disability networks, e. g. online fora, self-help groups, advocacy groups. I am interested in observing and/or taking part both in current activities of the group, as well as meeting with interested members for focus groups to learn about the work(ings) of their respective network. Besides that, I plan on conducting narrative interviews, adjusting the degree of guidance to the interviewees' individual needs. Insights will be contextualised with the field observations I continuously

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gather alongside the interviewing process. Following advanced participative standards (e. g. von Unger 2012), I consider co-analysing the anonymised interview data with interested participants in interpretation workshops – for example, with those who collaborated in the focus groups of the preliminary phase.

"Shaping Inclusive Dental Care Futures: A Digital Innovation for Accessibility and Anxiety Reduction"

Liron Benisti*[1]

[1]Shalva - The Israel Association for Care and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities – Israel

Abstract

This paper presents "Shani," an innovative digital learning platform developed through a groundbreaking collaboration between Israel's leading disability organizations and government bodies, including Shalva, Shalem Foundation, Beit Issie Shapiro, the Health Council, and the Ministry of Welfare and Social Security. This free, multilingual platform (Hebrew, Arabic, and English) represents a significant step toward reimagining accessible dental care for individuals with disabilities.

The platform addresses a crucial challenge in disability healthcare: dental anxiety and treatment accessibility. By providing interactive preparation tools, simplified language options, and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), "Shani" aims to reduce anxiety associated with dental visits. This preparation is expected to significantly decrease the need for complex treatments and general anesthesia, marking a shift from reactive intervention to proactive preparation and support.

While primarily designed for individuals with disabilities, the platform's universal design principles make it valuable for broader populations, including children and individuals with dental anxiety. This inclusive approach exemplifies how disability-centered innovations can benefit society at large, suggesting a future where healthcare accessibility tools are designed with maximum inclusivity in mind.

The initiative demonstrates how technological solutions, when developed through multi-stakeholder collaboration, can address healthcare barriers while promoting patient autonomy and dignity. It offers a model for future healthcare innovations that prioritize accessibility, emotional well-being, and inclusive design.

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*Speaker

Transforming Early Intervention: A Knowledge-Building Framework Through the Lens of the Shalva 'Me and My Mommy' Program

Liron Benisti*[1]

[1]Shalva - The Israel Association for Care and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities – Israel

Abstract

This paper examines the epistemological foundations and methodological innovations of the Shalva "Me and My Mommy" early intervention program, offering critical insights into disability knowledge construction and family-centered disability research. Through an interdisciplinary approach combining developmental psychology, occupational therapy, and disability studies, we analyze how this pioneering Israeli program challenges traditional interventionist paradigms while building new theoretical frameworks for understanding early childhood disability.

The study explores how the program's unique methodology integrates three key epistemological innovations: first, the reconceptualization of early intervention through a family-centered framework based on the ICF-YC (WHO, 2007); second, the development of an interdisciplinary knowledge-building approach that positions parents as equal partners in the therapeutic process; and third, the creation of a comprehensive training model that transforms localized practical knowledge into transferable disability expertise.

Our analysis demonstrates how this model contributes to broader theoretical developments in Disability Studies by emphasizing the role of familial knowledge in understanding childhood disability, challenging traditional expert-centered approaches, and developing new methodological frameworks for disability research. The findings suggest that this integrative approach not only enhances therapeutic outcomes but also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of disability in early childhood development.

This research carries significant implications for both disability theory and practice, suggesting new directions for conceptualizing disability knowledge creation in early intervention settings while advancing methodological innovations in disability research.

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*Speaker

Societal Attitudes Towards Parents with Blindness or Visual Impairment

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Abstract

Background

Article 23 of the UNCRPD states the right of individuals with disabilities to found a family and underlines the importance of providing them access to all necessary information so that they could make free and responsible parental decisions. Parents with blindness or visual impairment (BVI) all over the World face frequent discrimination in pregnancy and child birth related health settings (Frederick, 2015), and society questions their ability to provide proper care for their children (Molden, 2014, Rosenblum et al., 2009).

Method

In 2023 and 2024 two different qualitative research projects investigated the child rearing experience of Hungarian fathers and those of Hungarian mothers with BVI). Both projects applied semi-structured interviews for data collection, and asked parents with BVI about different aspects of their parental experience. In this presentation, we introduce and summarize parents' accounts of how society relates to them as parents.

Results

Both some fathers and some mothers said their family were worried to hear the news of them becoming parents. Similar accounts were shared concerning medical staff, who doubted that parents would be able to look after their babies. On one occasion, the blind mother was suggested an abortion by her gynaecologist upon detection of the pregnancy. Communication and colaboration proved to be smooth with kindergarten and school teachers, but many parents have had the impression of being outsiders, "UFOS" in the eyes of other parents due to their visual impairment.

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*Speaker

Individual Sessions:

Topic 6

Open Stream

A tool for empowerment or reinforcement of existing power dynamics? - Peer approaches in sexuality education for and by people with learning difficulties in Germany

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Abstract

Peer approaches in sexuality education for and by people with learning difficulties remain significantly under researched in the German and English-speaking spheres. However, they present a means to actively include people with learning difficulties into the development and delivery of sexuality education according to the leitmotif of the Independent Living Movement "Nothing About Us, Without Us". This paper expands research and literature on sexuality education and people with learning difficulties not only to the German country context but also to the field of peer approaches as it makes recommendations for implementation respectively drawing attention to pitfalls and structural problems. Existing evidence of peer counselling and people with learning difficulties has focused on its effectiveness respectively its outcomes: peer counselling is effective and meaningful also for people with learning difficulties, but they are underrepresented within peer counselling and less likely to be reached if they live and/or work in segregated institutions like residential care homes and sheltered workshops. Current evaluations have failed to investigate the underlying causal mechanisms and their interplay with different contexts. A realist logic of reviewing the landscape of implementation, evaluation reports, and literature on peer approaches for and by people with learning difficulties in Germany was applied to understand "what works for whom under which circumstances and why (not)". Five sets of problems were identified: (1) underrepresentation of peer counsellors and counselees with learning difficulties, (2) presumed abilities, (3) shared lived experience, (4) topics of counselling, and (5) power and dependency relationships. The findings stress that contrary to the original idea of the Independent Living Movement, peer counselling for and by people with learning difficulties has been increasingly appropriated and instrumentalized by segregated institutions, both in its content and structure. This calls for a reassessment of how peer counselling is implemented and whether it truly empowers people with learning difficulties or perpetuates existing power dynamics. Understanding the complex interplay of context, mechanisms and outcomes in the implementation of peer counselling for and by people with learning difficulties is essential for developing more inclusive, effective, and enabling peer counselling practices. It highlights the need for ongoing advocacy for deinstitutionalisation, tailored support, and critical evaluation of persisting institutional influences.

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*Speaker

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Ableviolent absolution. An autotheoretical exploration

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Abstract

The importance of ableism plays a decisive role in disability studies. However, this notion seems to imply a feeling of order or predictability that not always resonates with the experiences of people with disabilities. In this autotheory, which begins with the disruptive experience of interpersonal violence in public space, I will therefore develop an additional notion which increases the emphasis on unpredictable, unstable or violent aspects: the ableviolent.

In part, this choice is motivated by a tendency in the existing research on violence against people with disabilities. There is a tendency to give interpersonal violence low analytical priority: Often, such violence is positioned as an output of larger social and cultural processes, mediated by a complex set of cultural and/or institutional systems. Although unintentionally, this tendency seems to position violence in the aftermath of processes which could have been analyzed in a very similar way without giving any particular importance to the issue of violence. Hence, one purpose of this work is to develop the notion of the ableviolent in order to increase the interpretative importance of violence against people with disabilities,

However, the purpose of this particular paper is not to develop a general notion of the ableviolent. Instead, I aim to highlight a particular but often overlooked aspect of this kind of violence: The process wherein people with disabilities experience, "process" or "receive" experiences of violence – experiences which in itself suggest that a person with disabilities is unwelcome – are "translated" or "renarrated" in ways that suggest that a person with disabilities becomes welcome after all. To develop this notion, the paper also activates the broader conceptual history of absolution, since such absolution belongs not only to the aftematch of violence, but also to the aftermath of the plethora of ableist/disabling/disablist/ableviolent processes.

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*Speaker

Access Nature

Felix Fussenegger*[1] and Katta Spiel[2]

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[2]Human Computer Interaction - TU Wien – Austria

Abstract

Recent research has paid more and more attention towards the intersection of accessibility, technology and environmental justice, which indicates a growing recognition of the challenges people with mobility disabilities (PMD) face in accessing natural environments. The topic becomes even more important with the wide-spread acknowledgement of the positive effects of physical activity in natural environments (PANE) on mental and physical health for everyone. However, PMD are often excluded from PANE due to a lack of accessibility measures. Factors influencing access to nature are not just established at the interplay of impairment and the physical environment but are often social and policy related and manifested in intra- and interpersonal aspects. Derakhshan et al 2024(1) categorized the resulting barriers into different levels based on a social ecological model to be able to effectively address them. In reference to this categorization, we augment this analysis with a technological perspective allowing us to better understand the potential to address accessibility factors at the different levels of interaction. We analyze each technology in terms of its potential to facilitate access, the possible risks involved and its overall availability. All of this is compared to human assistance and its socializing factor. Our aim is to present a catalogue of different options of assistive technologies addressing a wide range of interaction challenges for PMDs in nature. Our analysis functions both as a design guide for technical interventions as well as for interested PMDs to choose the desired assistance to engage in PANE.

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*Speaker

Challenges and opportunities in tracing vocational training graduates with disabilities: insights from Nairobi County, Kenya

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[2]Action Research for Co-Development – Italy
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[4]TVETA – Kenya

Abstract

Abstract

Background

Inclusive education and equitable labor market access for persons with disabilities (PwDs) remain key challenges in many low- and middle-income countries. As stated by art.24 and art.27 of the UNCRPD, access to technical and vocational education and training is crucial for a full realization the right both to work and to education. Despite Kenya's leadership in disability mainstreaming through its policy frameworks and legislation, significant barriers persist, particularly in the transition from education to work for youth with disabilities. Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) play a pivotal role in equipping marginalized youth, including PwDs, with practical skills. However, there is limited evidence on the school-to-work transition outcomes for this group, making tracer studies essential for understanding their trajectories and informing policy. Our study aimed to bridge this knowledge gap by conducting a tracer study of VTC graduates in Nairobi County, with an emphasis on the experiences of PwDs.

Methods and data

Building on a rights-based perspective, the study implemented a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative data from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). A sample of 100 VTC graduates from eight public institutions in Nairobi was surveyed, with 5% of respondents identifying themselves as PwDs. Additional qualitative insights were gathered through FGDs with 42 graduates and KIIs with stakeholders, including VTC administrators, representatives from the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA) and OPD. Efforts to reach graduates with disabilities included leveraging institutional records, targeted outreach, and partnerships with local disability advocacy organizations.

Due to a low response rate from employers, secondary data from the 2018 Kenya Enterprise

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Survey by the World Bank was analyzed to complement the primary data. This provided broader contextual insights into the labor market conditions for VTC graduates.

Results

Our findings reveal that while Kenya's VTCs have made progress in reducing stigma and promoting inclusivity, PwDs face unique challenges in their transition to employment. Barriers include inadequate resources for accommodating disabilities, limited career counseling tailored to PwDs, and a lack of employer readiness to provide reasonable accommodation in the workplace. Notably, our data collection process highlighted structural challenges in reaching graduates with disabilities, including insufficient institutional tracking mechanisms and outdated contact records. These difficulties underscore the need for robust, ongoing tracer systems rather than one-off studies, particularly for marginalized groups.

The study also identified critical gaps in the alignment of VTC curricula with labor market demands, limited pathways for career progression, and insufficient financial support for low-income students in general. However, the research affirmed the potential of tracer systems to serve as tools for institutional learning and policy improvement when implemented systematically.

Inequality in seemingly equal integration: the permanent liminality of people with disabilities

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Abstract

When people face disability, their primary concern is definitely the "disability", while ignoring other characteristics and embodied experiences of disabled people. Therefore, while listening to the feedback of others, disabled people are also reflecting on their own embarrassing situation: What is the position of disability in society? This article hopes to use the method of autoethnography to further present the permanent liminal position of "disability" in society.

Key Words
Disability Autoethnography Liminality Permanent Liminality Novice/Neophytes Communitas

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Sex Education for People with Intellectual Disabilities in Portugal: mapping the resources of Non-Governmental Organizations for Disabled People

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Abstract

The sexuality of people with intellectual disabilities (ID) develops in the same ways as that of people without disabilities (Deffew et al., 2021; Wit et al., 2022). However, it is often not seen as a natural form of expression and pleasure when it relates to people with ID. Some demeaning perspectives about people with intellectual disabilities and their sexuality lead to exclusionary situations in sex education (Carvalho & Silva, 2018). Over-sexualization, desexualization, and infantilization contribute to family and institutional hypervigilance, which often makes privacy and intimacy impossible and discourages sexual expression (Maia & Ribeiro, 2010; Bahner, 2020; Garcia-Santesmases et al., 2024).
As several studies (Michielsen & Brochmidt, 2021; Maia et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2011) identify, families, teachers, and healthcare professionals often feel unprepared to discuss sexuality with people with ID. Moreover, people with ID report that their sex education has been normative and non-inclusive (Coutler et al., 2023). Other studies demonstrate that programs of sex education adapted to the pedagogical needs of people with ID promote access to knowledge, self-definition, and identity development, thus supporting the sexual emancipation of people with ID (Charitou et al., 2021; Brilhante et al., 2021; Bahner, 2020; Andreassen et al., 2024). Plus, when these programs involve both professionals and families, they contribute to raising awareness and the recognition of the sexuality of people with ID (Schaafsma et al., 2013; Bahner, 2020). Furthermore, the expanding awareness of people with ID sexual rights promotes more positive attitudes towards their sexuality (Medici & Bonato, 2015; McCann et al., 2019; Andreassen et al., 2024).

Given that informal and non-formal educational contexts are essential for developing and educating people with ID (Silvestre, 2013), this PHD research aims to map the sex education resources available in Portugal to this specific group of people provided by public entities or non-governmental organizations. We conducted the study in three phases: (1) in the first phase, the organizations' websites were mapped to identify educational materials, projects, or relevant programs related to sex education for people with ID. (2) in the second phase, the mapping process extended to the Library of the National Institute of Rehabilitation of Portugal (INR) to collect other possible sex education resources made available. The analysis conducted on these materials aimed to understand the availability of resources related to sex education for people with ID. (3) In the third phase, a questionnaire was administered to

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non-governmental organizations to identify programs, educational practices, and their perceptions about people with ID sex education.

Thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns and gaps in the available resources by public and non-governmental organizations. Statistical analysis is carried out to map materials and activities related to sex education.
The analysis reveals that non-governmental organizations rarely publish educational resources or actions/activities related to the sexuality of people with ID on their websites. Plus, most resources made available by public authorities regarding the sexuality of people with ID are international, mainly in English, and were developed between 1980 and 2010.

Special Needs Education and Professional Practises: A Study of Selected Institutes in India

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Abstract

Special needs education is the systematic arrangement aimed at providing education for the disabled in the least restrictive environment. It involves accommodation of individual differences, adoption of individualized educational plan, universal design and usage of appropriate material/equipment based on the educational needs of the disabled. In India, Rehabilitation council of India (RCI) is the statutory body, which formulates training policies for special educators and sets code of conduct. However, there have been long-standing issues in matters of planning and functioning of RCI ever since its inception. There have been several studies and policy papers discussing these issues. But there are hardly any studies evaluating the outcome of the actual programs, standards, and regulations executed by RCI in teacher training.

It is in the above context that my paper proposes to present findings of an evaluative exercise undertaken in this regard. The attempt would be to explain special needs educational practises in India, by examining the teacher training strategies, availability of supportive systems in their workplace, challenges, and professional competencies from practitioners' perspectives. The findings will be drawn from a larger fieldwork on inclusive and special schools in Andhra Pradesh- one of the major states in southern India-conducted during 2023-24. The primary objective is to examine the efficacy of teacher training programs run by RCI and the impact it has on the professionalization of special education in India in general and in the selected state in particular.

As the special education is fast changing across the world, my study has a potential to offer useful suggestions for special education policy makers, training professionals, parents, and special educators themselves. My hope is to be able to provoke a discussion on the gap between principles and practises of special education and inclusive curriculum.

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The definition of the sense of school belonging for students who attend a device called "Localized Unit for Inclusive Education" (Ulis-primary school).

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Abstract

I conduct a study to define the sense of school belonging for the students who attend a device called "Localized Unit for Inclusive Education" (Ulis-primary school).
My qualitative study is semi-longitudinal using an ethnographic method. According to Julie Delalande et Claire Simon (2006), this is a comprehensive approach that identifies constants from one research field to another. My observations were participatory, and took place during recess, meal, and learning in classrooms. To make my semi-structured interviews accessible, easier to understand, I studied the work of Alison Clark (2005) who defines the Mosaic approach, including various visual activities around drawings, photographies, games, or guided tours. One hundred and twenty-five children (including twenty-five ones with cognitive function disorders) and twenty-two adults (including three special education teachers and three teaching assistants) were interviewed. I crossed their points of view in my research.

The French Law has been stipulating compulsory school attendance since 1882-83. On the basis of this compulsory schooling, it is necessary to study, on the first hand, how the absence and presence of students benefiting from shared schooling in Ulis device are considered, and on the second hand, how it affects the sense of school belonging for these students.

I will summon two spans to address the variability of the sense of school belonging of students attending the Ulis device. The first one is the "liminal span" defined by Claire de Saint-Martin (2014) which ranges from a maximum liminal situation when the student follows the majority of their schooling with the special education teacher, to a minimum liminal situation when schooling takes place mainly in a regular setting.

And the second span concerns "the recognition" defined by Axel Honneth (2004), which ranges from minimal visibility to maximum visibility of students attending the Ulis device when they follow their teaching in the "regular" classroom.

From these two spans, I will try to define the sense of school belonging considering the amount of school time spent in the "regular" classroom.

I decided to define five profiles of students, each of them has a different expression of school belonging. I will present these five portraits. This presentation will help me to define what is at stake in the definition of the school belonging for these students.
Diane Bedoin and Martine Janner-Raimondi (2017) point out the difficulty to: "find a place

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or make a place for oneself within a group when the child, because of his or her disability, is only occasionally present in the classroom" (p.74)

Joint sessions:

Boosting self-determined participation in work: The transdisciplinary approach of the project ”Working the Way I Want”

Abstract

In Germany, transition rates to the general labour market for people with disabilities (pwd) who are employed in sheltered workshops are very low (cf. Engels et al. 2024; Jochmaring 2019; Richter 2019). Against the backdrop of the rapid rise of AI-supported solutions in recent years, a transdisciplinary consortium of practitioners, social designers, social and rehabilitation scientists and computer scientists has come together in the project ”Working the Way I Want” (AWIEW), funded by the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The project aims at opening up new avenues for self-determined participation in work by the participatory development of a needs assessment tool, containing both a technological solution and new practices. With this approach, the consortium aims to support a transformation of the system of integration assistance in Germany towards more self-determination and better opportunities for participation in work for pwd.

Social designers from the Münster School of Design (FH Münster) apply a participatory design approach with pwd employed in facilities of the Franz-Sales-Haus (FSH) as co-designers to develop a requirements profile for the tool. Not only are exemplary wishes and needs of the co-designers collected, but the dispositions of the co-designers with regard to the general labour market and obstacles to be taken into account (from reservations to open information needs) are also highlighted. The focus is also on the extent to which wishes are expressed and what implications this has for the development of the needs assessment tool.

The implementation of the participatively developed requirements in a technological solution is being carried out by a team from Fraunhofer FIT, application centre SYMILA.

In order to support successful trialling in the FSH facilities, to identify further requirements from the practice of the integration assistance and to support the applicability of the tool for other organisations, the context is also examined. In collaboration with FSH, social scientists and rehabilitation researchers from the Social Research Center (TU Dortmund University) are researching the framework conditions for transitions to the primary labour market. One approach pursued for this purpose was embedded research (McGinity & Salokangas 2014; Vindrola-Padros et al. 2016) in facilities of a welfare organisation (incl. workshops).

In the proposed session, all partners introduce and discuss their research and development results in individual presentations. They show how their activities are condensed into a transdisciplinary and participatory development process:

1. Jill Backs, Joline Düring & Adiaha Ita (Franz Sales Haus): *Status quo: vocational orientation and its challenges*

2. Diana Cürlis, Mara Vöcking, Nora Karl, Carolin Schreiber (FH Münster): *Insights into the participatory design processes: Co-designing the Needs Assessment Tool*

3. Harald Mathis, Dennis Hemker, Stefan Kreutter, Jad Maalouly, Carina Goretzky (Fraunhofer FIT, application centre SYMILA): *Technological development of the Needs Assessment Tool: Exploring the role of AI*

4. Felix Fankhänel, Daniel Krüger, Bastian Pelka, Lisa Preissner, Ann Christin Schulz (TU Dortmund University): *Embedding the Needs Assessment Tool in integration assistance: What needs to be considered?*

Abstract paper presentation |Joint session „Boosting self-determined participation in work: The transdisciplinary approach of the project Working the Way I Want“|13th ALTER Conference: Transformations |Topic 5: Disability Futures

Status quo: vocational orientation and its challenges

Jill Backs, Joline Düring & Adiaha Ita (Franz Sales Haus)

People with disabilities (pwd) face multiple challenges on their way to the general labour market in Germany. The presentation analyses and illustrates the slow progress in the labour market integration of pwd, despite legal frameworks and support measures. Although considered necessary by some the sheltered workshop system is not without its controversies. Critics argue that it creates a segregated system, excluding pwd from the general labour market (York, et al., 2024).

The presentation focuses on relevant instruments and influencing factors. Structural barriers, social prejudices and dependence on the support of caseworkers play a key role. Lack of information and support from the social environment hampers the vocational orientation of pwd (Schulz et al., 2024).

In order to illustrate significant barriers that pwd face on their way into the labour market and to gain a detailed insight into their life, the project’s co-designers report on their experiences during their career orientation process.

Overall, transitions to the general labour market remain a challenge for pwd, despite several support offers. In view of the barriers listed above, developing new approaches to support pwd is crucial and helps them deal independently with their wishes, goals and needs in regards to the general labour market – a major goal of AWIEW’s needs assessment tool and a contribution to providing impetus for the transformation of the practice of integration assistance.

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Abstract paper presentation |Joint session „Boosting self-determined participation in work: The transdisciplinary approach of the project Working the Way I Want“|13th ALTER Conference: Transformations |Topic 5: Disability Futures

Insights into the participatory design processes: Co-designing the Needs Assessment Tool

Diana Cürlis, Mara Vöcking, Nora Karl, Carolin Schreiber (FH Münster, Münster School of Design)

This contribution focuses on transformation of findings from the participatory design processes (Sanders & Stappers 2008) with people with disabilities (pwd) into a requirements profile and a process model for the Needs Assessment Tool.

In an explorative participatory-design phase, the team from Münster University of Applied Sciences conducted 36 workshops over 10 months with 9 co-designers with disabilities in total . In order to work resource-oriented on the topic of vocational orientation, various design methods and make tools (Brandt et al. 2012) were tailored to the individual needs of the co-designers. The workshops were documented with 79 field protocols and analyzed using a qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker 2022).

The presentation shows how the results are transformed into a process model for the tool.

Derived from the results of the participatory design processes, the model contains information that is useful in two ways:

Firstly, it provides user journeys and concepts to support the data scientists at Fraunhofer FIT. To maintain the level of participation, prototypes are tested in participatory design workshops.

Secondly, the process model includes concepts aimed at institutional contexts and social practices. Here, the results of the co-design workshops provide the micro-level perspective to complement the social scientists' work, which focuses on the meso-level of the system of integration support. This will also provide impetus for the transformation of integration assistance in Germany.

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Abstract paper presentation |Joint session „Boosting self-determined participation in work: The transdisciplinary approach of the project Working the Way I Want“|13th ALTER Conference: Transformations |Topic 5: Disability Futures

Embedding the tool in integration assistance: What needs to be considered?

Felix Fankhänel, Daniel Krüger, Bastian Pelka, Lisa Preissner, Ann Christin Schulz (TU Dortmund University)

The presentation provides insights into research results on German sheltered workshops and other facilities of Germany's system of integration assistance. In 2024, researchers from TU Dortmund University had the opportunity to observe the practice of integration assistance in a hitherto almost non-existent depth in an embedded research approach (Lewis & Russell 2011; Vindrola-Padros et al. 2016). For this research, 5 researchers each spent a full working week (25 days overall) observing and participating in 8 facilities, from the vocational training area, the entry procedure of workshops and external workplaces to pre-vocational training measures and a special school. This made it possible to gain deep insights in several contexts that people with disabilities (pwd) go through in the German system of integration assistance. The result is new knowledge about the framework conditions that determine the success of self-determined participation in the general labour market. By making drivers and barriers visible, the results contribute to the identification of pathways for the transformation of integration assistance in Germany. Furthermore, the comprehensive picture of framework conditions will contribute to the design of the currently developed needs assessment tool as a combination of technology and practices. The realization of this tool for the promotion of self-determined participation in work by pwd will provide a central impetus for the transformation of integration assistance in Germany.

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Joint session "Europe's disability archives: past and present transformation"

Organised by: Tom Campbell (University of Leeds), Lisa Pfahl (University of Innsbruck), Luke Beesley (University of Manchester)

Archives are essential for both disabled people`s movements (DPMs) and disability studies. For movements, the past is a strategic resource; and its preservation allows contemporary activists to learn from previous struggles. For academics, historical objects, documents, media texts, and pictures of disabled people give insights into living realities, social relations, and institutions which would be otherwise unavailable.

Unfortunately, most government- and university-owned archives do not preserve records produced by, or concerned with the lives of, disabled people- or limit themselves to records about disabled people created by medical or charitable professionals. In the face of this 'symbolic annihilation' (Caswell: 2016); disabled activists around Europe have gradually collected and curated their own archive projects over the last three decades, and experimented with novel forms of access and governance to better relate archival practice to disabled people outside academia. This process began in the 1990s, with Colin Barnes' digital disability archive (hosted by the University of Leeds) of open-access articles and speeches from the British DPM; and Volker Schönwiese's preservation of research texts, life stories, and video testimonials of disabled Austrian activists at the University of Innsbruck (Pfahl & Urthaler: forthcoming). More recently, these have been joined by large social movement archives run by Disabled People's Organisations in Great Britain (The Disabled People's Archive, Manchester), the Netherlands (The Kreukelcollectief Archive and Cultural Centre, Leiden), and Germany (The Disability Movement Archive, Marburg).

This joint session brings together academics and activists involved in running disabled people-led archives for the first international discussion of the significance of, and challenges facing, archives 'of', 'by', and 'for' disabled activists (Clarke, Graby & Beesley: forthcoming). It will be staged as a panel discussion between disabled archivists/archive practitioners from different national contexts, and will address:

- The collections held by these archives, and the political and academic research opportunities arising from them;
- The application of accessibility standards designed by DPMs around Europe to digital and physical collections of documents, audio-visual recordings, and artefacts;
- The role of movement-led disability archives in democratizing heritage institutions and academic research;
- Generative conversations, and tensions, between academic uses of archives to uncover lived experiences of disablement (Brilmyer: 2022), and activists' insistence that archives be collectively owned by movements and subject to their projects of transformation (Beesley & Clarke: 2023).

The contributions below show how these archives contribute to a historical understanding of how disability has been shaped in Europe, and the struggles of disabled people to advance their visions of social change in different national contexts.

Our panel aims to lay the groundwork for greater international co-operation between disabled people-led archives. Through this initial, public, conversation we hope to encourage the sharing of ideas, material, skills, and access innovations between (current and future) archivists and users of such collections. Through such grassroots, international connections, we seek to unify and develop strategies to remove barriers to archival research, and ensure long-term public access to the social history of disability across the continent.

This panel will be chaired by Dr Tom Campbell (University of Leeds).

Presenters' Abstracts:

Josefine Wagner (Université de Luxembourg; josefine.wagner@uni.lu)

'How to Save an Archive: A Practical Guide to Preserving Disability History'

In this contribution an Austrian disability history archive, BIDOK (Disability, Inclusion, Documentation) takes the stage. BIDOK is currently involved in updating and reinventing itself to be fit for the digital future and resilient in the fight for truth and facts of underrepresented cultures and modes of living and existing. The purpose of this talk is twofold: On the one hand, I want to give insights into the process of saving the archive, including interviews with the founders and the team that forms the intellectual and organizational backbone of BIDOK. By documenting the painstaking activities of BIDOK`s members to save the archive through, for example, personally contacting authors of hundreds of publications to update permissions and contracts, I want to show how BIDOK has evolved from a private collection started in 1997 to a public and independent archive of our times, fueled and carried by the many. These efforts also show that the work of saving and archiving is relational, political, and quiet. On the other hand, I want to show what it means in times of crisis to persevere. Book banning, book burning, book censoring forms the international backdrop to an effort of a small collective of Austrian disability rights activists to claim space in the landscape of past and present archives to minoritized cultures. This effort is not unprecedented, may it be the Ringelblum Archive in the Warsaw Ghetto, the Libri Prohibiti of samizdat publishers from Communist Czechoslovakia or, more recent, Alice Wong's Disability Visibility Project, bearing witness and maintaining the evidence to a culture and a people under threat is an effort worth illuminating and lifting into our collective conscience.

Ella Clarke & Luke Beesley (Disabled People's Archive, Great Britain – Archive@gmcdp.com)

'Archiving the Disabled People's Movement: Knowledge Production and Emancipatory Struggle'

The Disabled People's Archive (DPA) is a joint venture between the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People (GMCDP) and Archives+, formerly the Greater Manchester County Records Office, based at Manchester Central Library. It is, to the best of its staff teams' knowledge, the largest collection of material produced by disabled activists anywhere in Europe.

The underlying principle of the DPA's work is that the archive of a social movement is not a dead resource for research; but the living record of knowledge production. It records competing analyses, formed through struggle, of the social world which disabled activists sought to change – complete with the strategic and tactical innovations such analyses entail. The archive, then, is a resource to be learned from, rather than about, and its success depends on its availability to all disabled people engaged in emancipatory struggle. This requires its material to be accessible, and for disabled people to collectively set the DPA's priorities and control its practice.

Our presentation outlines our model of democratic control – the divisions of labour and decision making processes used to ensure that disabled activists have full control over the DPA's strategic development, conditions of access, and overall policy orientation within the partnership between a Disabled People's Organisation and a public sector archive; It further explains our approach to universal design, and the challenges of access adaptations in what is still an exclusionary heritage environment.

Eline Pollaert (Kreukelcollectief Archive and Cultural Centre)

'Building a Dutch disability archive : from dreaming to doing'

Anti-ableism activism is one of the most invisible forms of Dutch activism, struggling to achieve the recognition granted to feminist and anti-racist movements. The fact that the Netherlands has a vibrant disability activism history since the 1970s (and even before) remains largely unknown and unacknowledged. The newly founded Kreukelcollectief Archive and Cultural Centre aims to change that.

The eight founding members of the Kreukelcollectief first gathered online in 2020. All of us engaged with disability activism directly or indirectly through academic work, art, and/or community organising. Every member had been curating disability history collections on their own: legacies of departed friends and comrades, oral history interviews, public history websites, personal writing, and photography. The Dutch word "kreukel", meaning "crinkle" or "crease" and acting as a linguistic nod to the reclaimed English "cripple" and German "krüppel" slurs, is a perfect common denominator for the somewhat haphazard, disjointed, and intersecting forms of collecting we had engaged in before that first meeting.

Then one of us died. Jan Troost (1958-2023) had been a disability activist for over 50 years. He moved between and beyond local and national politics, theatre and action groups, and protests and occupations. The personal archive and foundation he left us reflected his multifaceted work and life. We were unable to find an archive or heritage institution willing to take in Jan’s archive in its full complexity. Refusing to break up the intertwined strands of not just Jan’s work, but that of all Dutch disability organisers, we started dreaming of a place of our own. A place that could be a living archive, not just *housing* Dutch disability history, but also *sharing* and *building* it with current and future disability organisers and allies.

Our dream of a disabled activist-led archive, housing permanent and temporary exhibitions, welcoming disabled and nondisabled visitors, and showcasing the abundance of disabled lives and resistance has recently become a reality. The Kreukelcollectief is still in the early stages of starting a historical and cultural centre dedicated to the past, present, and future of Dutch disability movements. In other words: this is the perfect time to engage in conversations with (international) disability communities to share experiences, ambitions, and lessons learned.

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Illusion of Inclusion: Underserved Learners with Disabilities in Canada's Mainstream Classrooms

Allyson Eamer (Ontario Tech University)

The Salamanca Statement which emerged from UNESCO'S 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education, included a call for nations to ensure that individuals with special education needs could attend regular classrooms in regular schools with inclusive orientations (UNESCO, 1994). Thirty years on, concerns remain about how to operationalize and fund the level of support required to teach children with disabilities in the same classrooms as their peers.

Article 24 of the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) indicates that signatory countries agree that persons with disabilities are entitled to inclusive education systems that allow for the development of their personality, talents, mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential.

In Canada, parents of children with disabilities are assured that the school is committed to inclusivity, and that self-contained classes are unlikely to ensure a child meets their potential. While the pedagogical philosophy aligns with the Salamanca Statement and UNCRPD, parents are rightly concerned about what inclusion looks like in practice. Educational assistants shared across multiple classrooms results in diapers left unchanged, lunches left uneaten, and children left unsupervised in padded 'isolation' rooms. The recent death of an Ontario child who'd been left alone in a sensory room, brought Canada-wide attention to the gaps in support available to children with disabilities in regular classrooms (Applewaithe, 2024). The gaps are even greater for children with intersecting differences of race/culture and disability. Canadian research has shown that both immigrant and indigenous parents have described feeling excluded from - and alienated by- discussions pertaining to assessment and services for their child. This paper considers how the current reality in Canadian public schools, particularly for those students minoritized due to both race and disability, relates to the goals expressed in the Salamanca Statement and in Article 24 of the UNCRPD.

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School education for children with disabilities in Jewish religious communities in France: An intersectional analysis

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In recent years, increasing attention has been given to the intersection of disability and religion. Religion shapes the meanings ascribed to disability and influences stigma, exclusion, resilience, support, hope, and coping strategies. In particular, the interplay between disability and religion profoundly impacts the education of children with disabilities. However, the intersection of disability and religious minority status in educational contexts remains underexplored.

This study addresses this gap by examining the case of children with disabilities in Jewish religious communities in France. It analyzes the discourses and practices surrounding disability within this minority religious group. We conducted 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with staff from Jewish educational and welfare organizations, Jewish individuals with disabilities, and their families. This paper focuses on the interviews that discussed school education and explores how religious and cultural identities, beliefs, values, and norms shape the integration, participation, and treatment of children with disabilities in both formal and informal educational settings.

The study elaborates on the dual minority status of these children—as individuals with disabilities in an ableist society and as members of a religious minority in a secular state. Specifically, it sheds light on the strategies and practices employed by Jewish schools, educators, and parents to provide culturally and religiously appropriate education in a secular context, where state-funded services are expected to remain religion-neutral.

We explore how stakeholders navigate tensions between secular policies and religious values, focusing on boundary work within organizations and its effects on community members. Additionally, we analyze how these dynamics manifest in diverse educational frameworks, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and their implications for equality, autonomy, social integration, and socialization. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex intersections between disability, religion, and education, offering insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by religious minority communities in secular states.

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Education and professional Development of the Peer Mental Health Workforce in California

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Peer support workers—individuals with lived experience of mental health challenges including psychiatric disabilities—play a crucial role in behavioral health by providing empathy, support, coaching, and advocacy. Their work has been shown to reduce symptoms, increase empowerment, improve engagement in care, and decrease reliance on acute services. As healthcare systems rapidly expand peer roles across community outreach, crisis response, and hospital settings, new questions have emerged about how to effectively train and support this workforce.

Despite growing demand for peer workers, research indicates that they often lack the educational and professional development opportunities available to their clinical counterparts. This paper explores the challenges and opportunities associated with peer workforce continuing education, focusing on the tension between preserving the peer identity while offering opportunities to acquire clinical skills and responsibilities. Peer work is traditionally defined by non-clinical tasks, including outreach, service navigation, emotional support, and health education. A key aspect of their effectiveness is their ability to share lived experiences to foster trust, hope, and mutual growth.

However, pressures to expand peer roles have led to concerns about "peer drift," where peers take on clinical tasks—such as assisting with medications or participating in involuntary treatment—potentially shifting their identity toward that of clinical colleagues. Our research with peers in mental health crisis response suggests that, under the right conditions, developing clinical skills can strengthen rather than diminish peer identity. In organizational settings that value and integrate the unique contributions of peers, continuing education and professional development can enhance their role as models of recovery while maintaining the core principles of peer support. This paper highlights strategies for creating career pathways that sustain peer identity while expanding opportunities for growth within behavioral health systems.

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Implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Inclusive Schools in Innsbruck

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Abstract

This research investigates the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) within inclusive schools in Innsbruck, Austria. UDL is an inclusive educational framework that enhances instructional practices by offering flexible teaching methods, thereby enabling all students to engage and learn effectively (CAST, 2012). Within the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, UDL is recognized as Tier 1 instruction and is effective for all learners in inclusive classrooms including students with disabilities (Rose & Gravel, 2020).

The primary aim of this study is to assess the extent and manner in which UDL is implemented in local inclusive schools. The specific research questions guiding this investigation are:

- Are schools implementing UDL as a strategy for Tier 1 instruction?
- Which aspects of UDL-multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression-are being utilized?
- What key limitations hinder the effective implementation of UDL?

The rationale for this research stems from a significant gap in the literature regarding UDL implementation in Austria. A review of academic databases reveals a scarcity of studies addressing this topic, particularly in the context of inclusive schools. Additionally, students at the University of Innsbruck are exploring UDL as an inclusive framework in their MA and BA courses, highlighting the need for empirical insights that bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Methodologically, this study employs a quantitative approach, utilizing validated UDL Guidelines Checklists (in German) to collect data from teachers and administrators regarding their understanding of UDL and the strategies employed in their classrooms. The target population includes teachers from primary and secondary inclusive schools, particularly those instructing students with official diagnoses. A minimum of 50 participants from local inclusive schools in Innsbruck and surrounding areas will be surveyed over a 2–3-week period, with data analyzed using SPSS.

Expected outcomes include insights into teachers' and schools' perceptions of UDL in inclusive classrooms, identification of the UDL components in use, and challenges faced by educators. The findings also provide actionable recommendations for enhancing UDL implementation, ultimately supporting all students in their learning journeys.

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*Speaker

The Educational Challenge of ADHD: Perceptions, Beliefs, and Perspectives of a Sample of Teachers

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Abstract

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), as defined in the DSM-V (APA, 2013), is a developmental disorder characterised by inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity, which can significantly affect students' educational experiences, making appropriate management by teachers essential (Mura, Bullegas, Tatulli & Zurru, 2022). European and Italian legislation has promoted the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), providing targeted pedagogical-didactic guidelines. In Italy, the Ministry of Education included ADHD as a condition falling within the SEN category through the Directive of December 27, 2012. It allows students with ADHD to benefit from a Personalized Educational Plan (PEP), which includes the use of specific educational strategies, compensatory tools, and dispensatory measures. Despite the favourable regulatory framework, the actual implementation of the prescribed measures is often inconsistent, and some issues remain concerning the management of problematic behaviours, teacher training, awareness of the disorder's characteristics, and the early identification of students' needs (Fiorucci, 2016; Wilson, Green, Toye & Ballantyne, 2024). These factors can negatively influence the educational path of students with ADHD, leading to discomfort, learning difficulties, and, in more complex cases, the risk of school exclusion or dropout. In Italy, research on ADHD in the school context remains limited, with a lack of studies exploring teachers' perceptions and training needs regarding this disorder (Frigerio, Montali, Marzocchi, 2014; Amatori, 2020). This paper, therefore, aims to explore the beliefs, perceptions, training needs, and proposed interventions of in-service and pre-service teachers (Teacher Training Course - TFA) concerning the management of students with ADHD. To this end, ad-hoc questionnaire was administered to a sample of teachers from various educational levels, both in training and in service, to analyze their knowledge of the disorder, perceptions, classroom strategies, and potential training needs. Data collection was carried out via Google Forms, and the analysis of the results highlighted differences in perceptions between experienced teachers and those in training, as well as a widespread demand for more effective teaching tools and methodologies. The study's implications suggest the need for specific training programs and concrete support to enhance the inclusion and academic success of students with ADHD.

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*Speaker

sciencesconf.org:alterconf2025:611388

Alter 13° 2025
Symposium Proposal Abstract

Symposium Title
Practices, actions and representations of disability/diversity in the current global political-economic scenario. A multi-perspective and intersectional analysis from Disability Studies to Universal Design for Learning

First Presentation

Title: *Visual Impairment and Accessible University Context: An Intersectional Look under UDL perspective*

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Keywords: Universal Design; Visual Impairment; Learning Environments; Accessibility

Abstract: In Italy, the 8% of university students with disabilities has a visual impairment: according to the ANVUR Report (2022), this percentage regards approximately 3,000 students, to be added to students with a visual impairment that do not involve a disability. This paper focuses on this core group of people to examine, through their voice, the choices and initiatives they can contribute to developing inclusive and accessible learning contexts in the university environment, such as: information and awareness on the topic of visual impairment; accessibility of textbooks and study material; acquisition of assistive technologies; attention to spaces and their usability.

One the one hand, through a trasversal analysis of the aforementioned factors, which concretely delineate the complex reality of *accessibility*, and through a more critical gaze among students, the aim is to reveal the factors which still do nourish the existence of barriers. On the other hand, the hope is to promote through educational programs the right of everybody to self-determination, to a full participation to society, and to a more general state of well-being.

The research will lead to a identify both what has already been done and – according to universal planning (CAST, 2024) of inclusive university context – to examine methods and guidelines enriched by aspects not yet evaluated. To this end, it's important to pay attention to all the functions, needs, possible micro-exclusions phenomena or, simply, to the critical issues not yet considered but adequate for the well-being of university life and the full realization of the life projects of all students.

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Second Presentation

Title: *Technofascism and the Fates of Inclusion*

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Keywords: Inclusion; Diversity; Technofascism; GAFA; Intersectionality.

Abstract: The "coronation" of the 47th president of the United States has sanctioned the welding between real and digital political power, between the White House and Silicon Valley. Indeed, it is no coincidence that, sitting in the front row at Inauguration Day, were the platform plutocrats, who had already paid homage to Trump and his Agenda by putting an end to fact-checking initiatives and disrupting programmes on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (Sherman, 11 January 2025). In the new government, therefore, GAFA would seem to have assumed the function of the core of the counter-reform, of sentinels of the global techno-fascist system. Indeed, if Trump, among his first executive orders, feels legitimized to sign one with the emblematic title "Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism And Restoring Biological Truth To The Federal Government" (White House, 20 January 2025), with which he intends to restore an alleged biological reality of sex, or announcing the deportation of millions of migrants (SkyTg24, 21 January 2024), the Lords of the Platforms, possessing an infinite amount of data, have the tools to know, to "predict", who among the users does not agree with this perspective or has entered the country "illegally" (Zona & De Castro, 2020). The GAFA, being able to rely on powerful cultural machines, such as their algorithms and Artificial Intelligence applications, are able to condition people's behaviour and homologate their thoughts, establishing who/what can be seen and who/what cannot, but also to reaffirm a dominant identity prototype, penalising any dissimilar corporeity.

In a scenario made even more complex by the numerous conflicts at a global level, the aim of this contribution is to offer a political reading of these phenomena and the risks they represent in terms of the inclusion of all and to reason about the role that minorities and intersectional activists will play in the near future.

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Third Presentation

Title: *To include, or not to include, that is the policy*

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Keywords: Inclusion Policies; Disability; Migratory Background; Intersectionality

Abstract: Starting from European policies on SEN (Special Educational Needs), this paper explores the implementation of the Italian ones with the aim of recognizing mechanisms of segregation. In these policies, it is possible to identify examples that highlight how the meaning of inclusion is still not fully understood. We refer to the "SENitization" of students with disabilities and/or students with migratory backgrounds (Bocci, 2016; Migliarini, D'Alessio & Bocci, 2018; Migliarini & Elder, 2024), to the separation of newly arrived migrant children from mainstream education (Bunar & Juvonen, 2022), and to the separation of children with impairments from those without. Through the lens of Disability Critical Race Theory, which intends disability and race as intersectionally linked (Annama et al., 2018), the authors of the paper analyze and discuss the effects of Italian SEN polices on educational practices.

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Fourth presentation

Title: *Towards Crip Studies: convergences for a new intersectional field of study*

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Keywords: Crip Studies; Disability Studies; Intersectionality; Cultural Representations

Abstract

The racist, ableist, classist, homophobic, transphobic drift that characterizes recent times has led, in the perspective of Disability Studies, to the development of approaches that examine the oppressions experienced by disabled bodies embodying other socially marginalized identities (i.a. Race and DS). However, the analytical tools at hand are fragmented and not always able to capture the complexity that characterizes intersectional discrimination, with focuses on identity issues that overlook systemic socio-political-cultural structures.

Because of this limitation we propose the adoption of Crip Theory (McRuer, 2006) for the creation of a new interdisciplinary field: the Crip Studies (Centrone, 2025). Such an integrated and intersectional perspective allows for the development of analytical tools and transformative practices capable of investigating the dynamics of oppression beyond existing disciplinary fragmentations.

For example, *Queer Studies* provide a critique of the normative categories of gender and sexuality, which is essential for interrogating the processes of sexual identity construction (Rich, 2003); *Man and Masculinity Studies* highlight links to patriarchal power dynamics (Gardiner, 2002); *Fat and Freak Studies* adopt tools to analyze the processes of stigmatization and monstrification of nonconforming bodies (LeBesco, 2015; Bocci & Valtellina 2024;). The *neurodiversity paradigm* offers a de-pathologizing view of neurological differences (Walker & Raymake, 2021), studies on monogamy and other relational forms interrogate capitalist social norms on affective-sexual relations, while *Postcolonial Studies* investigate the concept of otherness by deconstructing the hegemonic white Western gaze (Grech, 2017). Finally, a central role is played by media analysis to unravel the devices involved in cultural representations (Domenici, 2018).

All these influences converge in an anti-capitalist framework that critiques the logics of exploitation and profit: the emerging Crip Studies, in fact, do not limit themselves to a theoretical study of the phenomena of oppression but propose political, artistic, and academic- institutional interventions capable of deconstructing hierarchies between bodies and building a society based on equity and social justice.

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Public policies and interventions for persons with disabilities. Issues and challenges in the age of digital accessibility

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Abstract

Ensuring access to digital information and communication tools, i.e. web accessibility, has been a priority of the EU disability policy agenda for the last two decades. The recast European Electronic Communications Code, which sets an EU-level legal framework to coordinate national legislation on electronic communications networks and services, includes measures to ensure equal access and choice of electronic communication services. Further, the amended Audiovisual Media Services Directive requires Member States to ensure the accessibility of audiovisual media services. The Web Accessibility Directive (WAD) establishes mandatory accessibility requirements for websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies. The WAD is now complemented by the European Accessibility Act (EAA), which regulates the accessibility of key products and services in the internal market, such as computers, smartphones, tablets, TV sets, banking ATMs and services, payment terminals, e-books and e-readers, e-commerce websites, mobile applications and ticketing machines. Moreover, web accessibility and digital equality have also been mainstreamed in various EU policy initiatives adopted to boost Europe's digital transformation of the economy and society. The Digital Services Act, which sets out responsibilities and a system of accountability and transparency for providers of intermediary services, requires the drawing up of codes of conduct at the Union level 'to promote full and effective, equal participation, by improving access to online services that, through their initial design or subsequent adaptation, address the particular needs of persons with disabilities' and 'pursue the objective of ensuring that those services are accessible'. The Regulation on Artificial Intelligence (the AI Act) also tackles the prevention and mitigation of the adverse outcomes of AI systems on fundamental rights, including the rights of persons with disabilities. Against this background, this panel will focus on the transformative role of the EAA in the European society, in light of the approaching deadlines for its transposition. The EAA came into force in 2019, but Member States had until 2022 to adopt and publish the laws, regulations and administrative provisions to comply with it at the national level. After this deadline, the Member States shall apply these measures by 28 June 2025 and, between 2025 and 2030, they will have to remove inaccessible products from the market. Our purpose is to reflect on the changes underway and to examine whether the measures envisaged by the EU legislator can prove

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*Speaker

to be real instruments for reaffirming the centrality of the person and for achieving equality and equal social dignity, which are essential foundations of modern democracies. Speakers: Eva Krolla, Maynooth University (Ireland), *The Transformative Potential of the EAA: Enhancing Digital Accessibility of Cultural Goods and Services?*; Roberta Esposito, University of Pavia (Italy), *Opening Digital Doors, Breaking Barriers, Caring for Minds: The EAA and the Right to Mental Health;* Silvia Favalli, University of Milan (Italy), *Promoting financial inclusion for persons with disabilities in digital finance: a European perspective;* Beatrice Rabai, University of Sassari (Italy),*SMEs and access to digital tools. Barriers and facilitators in the inclusion of persons with disabilities, between European obligations and PNRR's opportunities.*

ALTER Conference: Transformations
University of Innsbruck
8-10 July 2025

TITLE OF THE PANEL: Public policies and interventions for persons with disabilities. Issues and challenges in the age of digital accessibility

SPEAKER: Beatrice Rabai, Assistant Professor, University of Sassari (Italy)

TITLE: SMEs and access to digital tools. Barriers and facilitators in the inclusion of persons with disabilities, between European obligations and PNRR's opportunities.

Both government decision makers and private actors can play a significant role in the process of inclusion of people with disabilities. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), which offers support for the adoption of new technologies, innovative problem-solving methods and best environmental practices, is an essential tool for small and medium-sized businesses in Italy. PNRR initiatives are particularly important as they aim to modernize our country, stimulate economic growth and strengthen industrial might, while providing individuals with the ability to fully participate in society using the opportunities offered by emerging technology. However, a truly contemporary and up-to-date society must not limit itself to using cutting-edge equipment, but must also ensure that everyone has access to it. This is made possible by a regulatory system that promotes inclusion and innovation. In order to ensure that new technologies are truly accessible to all, within a framework of equality and equal social dignity, this contribution will focus on how EU (particularly EEA) legal and political initiatives on digital accessibility influence the Italian legal system and private actors, in particular SMEs. The effects that these measures will have on eliminating the problems of the so-called digital divide and on promoting an inclusive culture for the good of the entire community will also be examined.

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ALTER Conference: Transformations
University of Innsbruck
8-10 July 2025

TITLE OF THE PANEL: Public policies and interventions for persons with disabilities. Issues and challenges in the age of digital accessibility

SPEAKER: Silvia Favalli, Research Fellow, University of Milan (Italy)

TITLE: *Promoting financial inclusion for persons with disabilities in digital finance: a European perspective*

Increased internet speed and easier mobile access are giving rise to rapid growth in the use of digital financial services. As they reduce costs and facilitate access to financial products and services, they are expected to contribute to inclusive growth and financial inclusion of vulnerable groups of financial users, such as persons with disabilities. However, they also generate new challenges in the protection of the rights of the same users. As recent studies demonstrate, there are a range of barriers that persons with disabilities face in digital finance, including the inaccessibility of the digital financial services provided.

At the EU level, web accessibility and digital equality have been mainstreamed in the EU policy initiatives adopted to boost Europe's digital transformation of the economy and society. In particular, the European Accessibility Act (EAA), which aims at eliminating and preventing barriers to the free movement of products and services arising from divergent accessibility requirements in the Member States, also applies to consumer banking services and related services, such as identification methods, electronic signature and payment services, since they are necessary for concluding consumer banking transactions. Against this background, this paper, which is informed by doctrinal legal methodology, will analyse the transformative role of the European Accessibility Act in digital finance for users with disabilities.

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ALTER Conference:Transformations
University of Innsbruck
8-10 July 2025

TITLE OF THE PANEL: Public policies and interventions for persons with disabilities. Issues and challenges in the age of digital accessibility

SPEAKER: Roberta Esposito, PhD Student, University of Pavia (Italy)

TITLE: *Opening Digital Doors, Breaking Barriers, Caring for Minds: The EAA and the Right to Mental Health*

Vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, are at a higher risk of developing mental health conditions. Social exclusion and limited access to critical products and services make daily life harder, contributing to feelings of isolation, anxiety, or sadness. In a digitally driven society, digital literacy and inclusion are essential for promoting mental health and preventing mental health conditions among persons with disabilities. These factors enable persons with disabilities to navigate their environments more easily, reducing the stress associated with daily discrimination. In this context, given that the right to mental health is widely echoed worldwide yet remains unfulfilled, this contribution aims to analyse the role of the European Accessibility Act (EEA) in shaping both the social and environmental determinants of health as a means of realising the right to mental health for persons with disabilities.

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ALTER Conference: Transformations
University of Innsbruck
8-10 July 2025

TITLE OF THE PANEL: Public policies and interventions for persons with disabilities. Issues and challenges in the age of digital accessibility

SPEAKER: Eva Krolla, Research Assistant, Maynooth University (Ireland)

The Transformative Potential of the EAA: Enhancing Digital Accessibility of Cultural Goods and Services?

This presentation aims to explore the extent to which current European Union (EU) legislation promotes accessibility of cultural goods and services for persons with disabilities. In this connection, the intervention first reflects on the EU competences as regards market integration (Art. 114 TFEU) and regulation of culture on the basis of Article 167 TFEU and beyond as well as the relevant obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to contextualise EU accessibility legislation. It then focuses primarily on the European Accessibility Act (EAA) and how it affects the digital accessibility of cultural goods and services covered by the EAA. The contribution further investigates the interaction and complementarity of the EAA and the Web Accessibility Act (WAD) to better discern the state of play of digital accessibility of cultural goods and services and the transformative role of the EAA in this respect. Provisions relating to accessibility features for persons with visual impairments, and in particular relating to Braille, will be examined as a case study.

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Both government decision makers and private actors can play a significant role in the process of inclusion of people with disabilities. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), which offers support for the adoption of new technologies, innovative problem-solving methods and best environmental practices, is an essential tool for small and medium-sized businesses in Italy. PNRR initiatives are particularly important as they aim to modernize our country, stimulate economic growth and strengthen industrial might, while providing individuals with the ability to fully participate in society using the opportunities offered by emerging technology. However, a truly contemporary and up-to-date society must not limit itself to using cutting-edge equipment, but must also ensure that everyone has access to it. This is made possible by a regulatory system that promotes inclusion and innovation. In order to ensure that new technologies are truly accessible to all, within a framework of equality and equal social dignity, this contribution will focus on how EU (particularly EEA) legal and political initiatives on digital accessibility influence the Italian legal system and private actors, in particular SMEs. The effects that these measures will have on eliminating the problems of the so-called digital divide and on promoting an inclusive culture for the good of the entire community will also be examined.

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Transforming Transitions: The Need for Empowerment of Young Adults with IDD on Their Path to Adulthood

Šárka Káňová*[1], Jan Šiška*[1,2], Simona Miščuková*[1], and Lenka Pejšová Mouleová*[1,2]

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Abstract

This symposium brings together three interconnected papers that explore the critical phase of transition from adolescence to adulthood for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). While all young people experience challenges during this period, those with IDD face a distinct set of barriers that complicate their transition. These challenges stem from both individual needs and systemic, societal, and structural barriers that limit their opportunities and hinder successful integration into adulthood.
A key issue for young adults with IDD during this transition is the lack of empowerment. Historically, individuals with IDD have been seen as passive recipients of care, with others-such as family members, educators, and service providers-making decisions on their behalf. This lack of agency contributes to feelings of powerlessness, which can have lasting effects on their ability to engage with society, pursue careers, and live independently. Empowerment must be a central aspect of the transition process. Young adults with IDD should be active participants in shaping their futures, with opportunities for self-advocacy, involvement in planning, and systems that prioritize their voices and choices. Empowerment is not just about providing support, but about enabling young adults to be independent decision-makers navigating adulthood with confidence and autonomy.

In addition to the need for empowerment, young adults with IDD face significant structural barriers. These barriers often stem from societal perceptions that underestimate their abilities to participate in mainstream education, work, and community life. For example, many young adults are placed in separate, less challenging educational environments, limiting their ability to develop important skills. Protective approaches often result in young adults being placed in environments with younger peers, reinforcing infantilization and hindering their ability to take on adult roles. These barriers restrict access to education and employment and contribute to isolation and exclusion.

The symposium will also address the need for inclusive planning and systemic change to facilitate a successful transition. Person-centered planning, inclusive policies, and active participation in decision-making have been shown to improve outcomes for young adults with IDD. These approaches help create pathways that align with their unique needs and aspirations, supported by resources that foster independence, social inclusion, and community

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*Speaker

integration. The importance of collaboration among families, educators, service providers, and policymakers will also be emphasized, ensuring that young adults with IDD are provided with the tools, support, and opportunities needed to thrive.

By examining the lived experiences of young adults with IDD and the structural challenges they face, this symposium advocates for a future where empowerment is not just an ideal, but a reality. The goal is to create a world where young adults with IDD are seen, heard, and respected as they take their place in society, with the support they need to navigate the transition to adulthood.

Paper 1: "Let Me Speak: Anna's Path to Adulthood and the Call for Inclusion"

Simona Miščuková, Šárka Káňová

I’m Anna, and I’m 20 years old. I’ve always loved cooking, so I studied culinary arts in high school. But when I finished school, I felt lost. No one helped me understand what comes next—how to live on my own, find a job, or make my own decisions. At school, we focused on exams and theory, not much practical life skills. My teachers, although I liked them, were more concerned with grades than with preparing me for adulthood.

After graduating in June 2023, I started a part-time job at a mall, arranged by my father. I wasn’t happy. The hours were short, and I wanted a full-time job, but no one was helping me find that. My parents wanted to help but didn’t know how. There was no one to guide them. Sometimes they made decisions for me without asking what I wanted, and I didn’t feel like I had a say in my future.

During my last year of school and after graduation, I joined art workshops at the university. These workshops, for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, were held with students without disabilities. We all shared our dreams and ideas for the future, and it felt empowering. It helped me realize I’m not just a student—I’m a young woman with a voice, and my ideas matter.

Now, at 20, I can do many things on my own, like shopping or traveling, but I still rely on my parents a lot. I sometimes feel lonely because most of my friends were from school. I dreamed of a full-time job and starting a family, but it felt far away. Then, after another year in my part-time job, I got a full-time job offer and an indefinite contract in 2024.

My story shows how important it is for young adults like me to be part of decisions that affect our future. People with IDD need to be heard and included in shaping our lives.

Paper 2:

Who's Future is it Anyway? Young Adults with IDD and the Struggle for a Future That Includes Them

Jan Šiška, Šárka Káňová

The transition from school to adulthood is a critical phase for all young people, but for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), it is marked by unique challenges. These challenges, including barriers to independence, employment, and social integration, are often made worse by systemic obstacles, inadequate support, and exclusion from decision-making processes. Research highlights the need for person-centered planning (Agran, 2018), community integration (Chun et al., 2023), and comprehensive transition strategies (Bear et al., 2020). In the Czech Republic, young adults' voices are often marginalized, emphasizing the need for inclusive research.

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, gathering qualitative data from focus groups, interviews, and case studies to explore the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of young adults with IDD during their transition to adulthood. The aim was to capture the voices of young adults themselves, as well as their families.

Findings revealed that both young adults with IDD and their families face overlapping challenges, including navigating complex bureaucratic systems, balancing independence with the need for support, and limited social opportunities. Parents expressed concerns about employment and housing, while young adults emphasized the importance of self-determination and social inclusion. The study highlights a disconnect between the aspirations of young adults with IDD and the support systems designed to assist them.

The research underscores the importance of a participatory approach to transition planning, which actively includes young adults and their families. It calls for enhanced transition planning, cross-sector collaboration, and inclusive policies that promote independence and meaningful community participation. By amplifying the voices of individuals with IDD, the study offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and service providers. These findings advocate for a future that includes young adults with IDD, ensuring that their aspirations and needs are central to transition planning.

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Paper 3:

Lenka Pejšová Mouleová

Title:

Navigating the Transition: The Challenges of Emerging Adults with IDD Moving from Primary to Secondary Education in the Czech System

The right to education is a fundamental human right, enshrined in both international and national documents. However, it appears that the Czech education system fails to fully implement, advocate for, or enforce this right for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The transition of students with IDD from compulsory education in the Czech Republic remains an underexplored area, with a lack of attention to holistic approaches in supporting this transition.

This research investigates the educational options available to students with IDD completing compulsory education, taking into account their age and personal preferences. The study explores how this situation is perceived by the students themselves, their families, school directors, teachers, and the regional authorities responsible for ensuring the right to education. A mixed-methods approach was used to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, with thematic analysis of focus groups involving students, principals, teachers, and regional authorities.

Preliminary results suggest that many students with IDD remain in primary education beyond the age when they should be preparing for the transition to adulthood, whether independent living, partnerships, or i.e. employment. There appears to be a prevalent assumption that young people with IDD are unable to make decisions about their lives and do not qualify for age-appropriate education. Families of these students face persistent barriers, and their children receive insufficient dignified support, with little emphasis on preserving their individuality. The lack of enlightened leadership and educators skilled in positive behavior support strategies contributes to this situation. Consequently, these students are often tolerated in primary schools without being actively involved in decisions regarding their future.

The findings highlight the urgent need for accessible and quality secondary education for young people with IDD, where they can actively participate in choosing their educational paths. Timely and informed support for families is crucial, as informed families play a key role in empowering young people with IDD to take charge of their futures.

Redefining living: adult with disability, residential centers, and family involvement

Silvia Maggiolini*[1,2] and Elena Zanfroni*[2]

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Abstract

In recent years, the culture of rights and the development of inclusive practices that foster the active participation of people with disabilities within community contexts have experienced significant growth. This evolution is partly driven by demographic shifts observed at both national and international levels. The progressive aging of the population, coupled with an increase in life expectancy, poses substantial challenges for individuals with disabilities and their families. These demographic trends highlight the need to address not only the recognition of inclusion and participation rights but also the implementation of effective organizational and managerial practices.
On the basis of these considerations, the Centro Studi e Ricerche per la Disabilità e la Marginalità- Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Italy)- in order to face the request of some educational services, in Northern Italy, carried out a research project aimed to investigate, identify and define the main aspects - pedagogical, architectural, organizational and managerial - of a scientifically grounded, innovative and sustainable design of daytime services for disabled adults. Through a structured methodological framework, the survey identified and defined important elements for the design of these services. The emerging aspects highlight many points of interest on the pedagogical, managerial and structural level that can guide debates and actions in this field and open up further research areas.

The role of the family experiencing the disability of one of its members has gained increasing recognition. Understanding functions, needs and possible contributions that the family can offer means going beyond a care perspective, highlighting instead its qualities and skills, sometimes not immediately visible and that require to be enhanced. The families of adults with disabilities attending day care centers in the analyzed area, were also involved in the research project through the administration of a questionnaire. The aim was to offer them opportunities to intervene and share their needs, expectations and requirements. A total of 20 people were reached.

This research emphasizes the necessity of adopting a participatory approach that engages stakeholders, including families, professionals, and community members, in co-designing and co-managing services. It also highlights the importance of leveraging community resources and fostering intersectoral collaborations to create sustainable systems capable of adapting to evolving social demands. Ultimately, the study underscores the critical role of inclusive, innovative practices in enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families, while contributing to a broader cultural shift toward equity and participation for

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*Speaker

all.

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Open Spaces / Workshop:

History of the Disability Rights Movement in Austria

Petra Flieger*[1], Natalie Mair[2], Volker Schönwiese*[2], and Angela Wegscheider*[3]

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Abstract

The workshop is based on an ongoing research project on the history of the Disability Rights Movement in Austria which started in 2015 and was awarded with the Public Disability History Award in 2022. At the beginning, in-depth interviews with 14 Austrian activists of the Independent Living (IL) Movement were carried out. The interviews provided an entry point into reconstructing the milestones of the Independent IL history since the 1970s and were complemented by research in public and private archives. In the course of the project, historical material dating back to the 1920s and 1930s became increasingly important. This led to research the life and political activities of Siegfried Braun, an early pioneer of the Disability Rights Movement.
With the material a free online archive was established which includes:

a) A comprehensive introductory text which is available in German as well as in English.

b) A timeline from 1920 to 2014 that features more than 100 important events of the Disability Rights Movement in Austria. Documents give background information and context.

c) Interviews that were videotaped with 14 participants. Video sequences are organized according to content categories as well as according to the chronological timeline.

d) Digitized full collection of the journal LOS (”Onwards”) which was a sounding board for the IL Movement from 1983 to 1992. The journal reported on current activities of the movement and published special issues on specific topics.

e) Information regarding further research on the Disability Rights Movement in German-speaking countries, that offers extended literature lists and research projects. This research database also includes the digitized full collection of the journal ”The Cripple”, published between 1927-1938, including each original text in full length.

To spread the word about the project a total of twelve public presentations took place all over Austria between 2017 and 2022. Regional activists were always invited to attend these presentations and participate in discussions afterwards.

In 2020, a special issue of the quarterly ”Stimme der Minderheiten” (”Voice of minorities”) was published which featured articles that all reflect on the 100-year-history of the Disability Rights Movement in Austria. In 2021, a publication in Disability & Society focused on

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*Speaker

Siegried Braun: "Don't forget about self-help' the fight for disability rights in Austria in the 1920s and 1930s". In 2024, a collection of nine articles which had been translated from German into English was published. The translations were done in a two-year cooperation with the Institute for Translations at the University of Innsbruck.

The workshop will start with an overview of the project activities and outcomes, including the online archive. A short political analysis will be added to this overview as well as a short report about the translation project and difficulties related to translations. Suggestions for further research and, finally, issues regarding difficulties in doing Disability History research in Austria will be discussed. The workshop will provide plenty of opportunities for discussion and exchange among participants.

Nazi ‘Euthanasia’ in Literature and Film: Transformations in the Media Representation of Disability

Proposal for a workshop/collaboration space, stream three (“culture, history, and disability archives”) at the 13th ALTER Conference: “Transformations” (Innsbruck, 8–10th July 2025)

Johannes Görbert (Fribourg, Switzerland): johannes.goerbert@unifr.ch
Urte Helduser (Oldenburg, Germany): urte.helduser@uni-oldenburg.de

While the post-war literary and artistic engagement with Nazi history has been extensive, the systematic murder of disabled people during the Nazi era has remained relatively peripheral in cultural memory. Nevertheless, several German-language literary texts and films have addressed the Nazi ‘euthanasia’ programme, with a notable increase in media and artistic engagement since the turn of the millennium (cf. Knittel, The Historical Uncanny, 2015). The T4 programme and subsequent ‘wild euthanasia’ have become subjects of contemporary novels, feature films, and theatrical productions, as evidenced in works such as Ulrike Draesner’s *Sieben Sprünge vom Rand der Welt* (2014), Anne Weber’s *Ahnen* (2015), Olga Martynova’s *Der Engelherd* (2016), Uwe Timm’s *Ikarien* (2017), Barbara Zoeke’s *Die Stunde der Spezialisten* (2017) or the widely performed puppet play *F. Zawrel – Erbbiologisch und sozial minderwertig* by Nikolaus Habjan (2012).

A historical perspective on the period from 1945 to the present reveals significant transformations in this memory discourse. The confrontation with the continuing effects of Nazi extermination policies in an ableist post-war society was instrumental in the emergence of the (West) German disability rights movement since the 1980s. The delayed processing of the “destruction of life unworthy of life” can be attributed primarily to the engagement of disability rights activists like Ernst Klee (‘Euthanasie’ im NS-Staat, 1983). This movement gave rise to pioneering works such as Didi Dankquart's documentary film *Der Pannwitz-Blick* (1991), which juxtaposes perspectives on disability from Nazi propaganda, ‘euthanasia’ advocates, and philosopher Peter Singer, with interviews with disabled activists.

The workshop will analyze how contemporary artistic works navigate the complex relationship between historical documentation and disability representation through various strategies, from documentary approaches using medical records and photographs to biographical narratives and fictional accounts. Special attention will be paid to the shift toward individual victim narratives, also in recent filmic works such as *Nebel im August* (2016) and *Werk ohne Autor* (2018).

Our 90-minute interactive session will examine exemplary works through close inspection of selected text passages/film scenes, facilitating comparative discussion of continuities, transformations, and ruptures in disability representation within Nazi ‘euthanasia’ narratives. The workshop aims to bridge approaches from Literary Disability Studies and Medical Humanities, considering how these perspectives can illuminate our understanding of historical trauma and contemporary disability rights discourse. This investigation is particularly pertinent given current bioethical debates ranging from prenatal diagnostics to assisted dying legislation and considering concerning recent political developments that threaten disability rights and inclusion.

The session will be structured to encourage active participation and scholarly exchange, welcoming contributions from researchers, activists, and practitioners in the field. As an initial exploration toward a larger collaborative research project on the cultural afterlife of Nazi ‘euthanasia’, we particularly welcome participants interested in future research cooperation. By combining close textual analysis with selective digital methodologies, we hope to generate new insights into the relationships between historical memory, disability representation in its transformations over time, and contemporary political and cultural discourse.

Format: 90-minute interactive workshop
Expected participants: 15–20
Technical requirements: digital projection capabilities for text/film analysis

Participative research, film-making and transformations : Screening and discussion on the film "INEXCLUSIO. A history, images, faces."

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Abstract

Since 1956, French-speaking Swiss television (RTS) has broadcast images of disability in numerous religious, medical and sports programmes, in society magazines and in the TVnews, all of which are available in the archives of this French-language television channel. Do these television images enables spectators to get to know people with disabilities better, or to better understand disabling situations, or rather to discover the history of society's relationship with disabilities and differences? In 2022, a team of sociologists began a research collaboration with five Swiss associations involved in defending the rights of disabled people and monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, UN, 2006). During the screening of these archives, self-representatives from the associations speak out about this collective history, recounting their journey towards activism for a more inclusive society. The participative research process led to the production of a documentary film in which the development of the collaboration between researchers, activists and journalists is shown, as well as results of the work carried out together. The proposal for the AlterConference2025 is to organize a screening and discussion of this documentary film titled *INEXCLUSIO. A history, images, faces.* (Marcellini, 73 min, november 2023), to discuss the results of this participative research, in terms of the various transformation issues involved. The debates on transformations in research methods, research strategies and activist strategies, the uses of images in social science research, and ultimately the power of images to bring transformation to society, will be explored.
The film is in french, with french audiodescription file, and french, or english or german subtitles.

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[*] Speaker

Photovoice Reimagined: principles and scope of photovoice research

Nicole Brown*[1]

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Abstract

Photovoice is a particular approach to research that emerged in the 1990s in response to wider developments within qualitative research. Researchers more formally recognised the power they held in the relationship to their participants and began to feel uncomfortable about the researcher-researched hierarchy. As a result, trends moved towards participatory and creative approaches to minimise these hierarchies, to reduce the power differentials between participants and researchers, and to equalise the responsibility amongst the stakeholders within the research (e.g. Wang and Burris, 1994, 1997). In addition, smartphones, tablets, or action cameras have eased availability of and accessibility to relatively cheap and simple means for recording through photography. Where once detailed knowledge of the photographic process may have been required to enable individuals to capture meaningful information and data, editing apps and software further facilitate the development of photography. As a result, research projects employing photographs became more prominent (e.g. Blinn and Harrist, 1991; Schwartz, 1989; Niessen, 1991).

A quick search on Google Scholar for the key terms "photovoice" and "photo elicitation" demonstrates just how significant that change has been. Articles relating to "photo elicitation" nearly octupled between the 1990s and the 2010s, whereas articles relating to "photovoice" multiplied by 120. The popularity of research studies using photography as an approach to gathering data is undisputable. However, the terminologies and conceptualisations are not always entirely clear.

Whilst photovoice and photo elicitation initially were two quite distinct approaches to research in the social sciences, the boundaries are more blurred nowadays. In part, this is due to researchers designing projects to suit their specific target communities and target participants, and so adjusting elements of a research method. In part, this is also due to developments that rendered photovoice and photo elicitation a kind of diary method with communities that would otherwise be difficult to reach. The social distancing rules that were put in place during the COVID19 pandemic exacerbated this trend of using photographs as a form of remote data collection. As the approaches along with the terminology have varied over time, many visual methods or forms of visual inquiry have also been used to describe what others define as "photovoice" or "photo elicitation". To untangle this web, I have reframed photovoice and photo elicitation as Photovoice as a framework and Photovoice as a method (Brown, 2024).

For this interactive workshop I propose to offer an introductory session on how Photovoice may be used as a framework and as a method. I will begin by outlining the main principles of photovoice in its original intention and sketching out how photovoice research has developed

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*Speaker

since. For the workshop activities, I will have images available that will enable attendees to experiment with aspects of photovoice research from data collection to analysis through to dissemination. Throughout the session, I will highlight ethical, methodological, and practical opportunities and challenges when using photovoice as a framework or as a method.

Call for papers: 13th ALTER Conference: Transformations
University of Innsbruck

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Towards an ethical framework for co-construction of knowledge in Deaf and Disability studies.

NOTE: the presenters we can either briefly present the research and insist on a few main issues in order to create a space for exchange around the question of ethical issues in research and knowledge co-construction practices (axis (ii) gathering colleagues interested in a specific research topic) or 2) present our research in more depth ((iv) presenting a major disability research project).

The Canada Research Chair on Cultural Citizenship of Deaf People and Cultural Equity Practices (CRC) aims to promote the full social and cultural participation of Deaf people.

Recently, our project on the ethics in research on and for deaf people was led. Indeed, the literature review showed a lack of knowledge on Deaf and disability studies. For example, research with Deaf people has largely been conducted by hearing people (McKee and al., 2013; O'Brien and al., 2013) and raises many ethical issues in Deaf research (Harris and al., 2013; Benedict and Sass-Lehrer, 2007; Singleton and al., 2014). Several authors suggest possible solutions to counter this trend. Hence, Singleton (2014, 2015, 2017) argue for a collaborative and respectful approach to research involving Deaf communities and the need for a community-based research model with the active participation of Deaf people and communities as well as sign language experts with appropriate linguistic guidelines.

The CRC lead a research project to address the following question: What are the main ethical issues in research with Deaf people and what research practices respect Deaf culture, Deaf communities and their participation in the different stages of research?

Based on the theoretical framework of Deaf Studies (Bauman et Murray, 2014) and the epistemology of situated knowledge (Haraway, 2009), we conducted five group interviews with eleven respondents from eight different countries and with different profiles, including professors, researchers and graduate students.

The interviews were conducted in ASL, LSF and IS on the Zoom platform in 2023 and 2024. The data analysis identified several ethical and social issues in research with Deaf people, such as the experience of audism, non-recognition of sign language, and as interpreting issues, also funding barriers in a predominantly hearing academic environment. Challenges in Deaf and Disability Studies were also identified, and some solutions were suggested in the interviews to move towards co-construction of knowledge.

The main outcome of this research is to propose specific guidelines on research involving deaf people to the policies of Canadian research funding institutions, which are currently missing (Government of Canada, 2022) based on the example of guidelines for research involving Indigenous peoples such as TCPS 2 (2022) - Chapter 9: Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada.

The 2025 ALTER conference will give to the team an opportunity to share the results of our project and to think about different ways to develop ethical frameworks to co-construct knowledge with Deaf people, and more largely with Disabled people : which methodologies using to avoid appropriation of intellectual and cultural assets within the various researches conducted by non-concerned persons in a cross-field study in the spirit of "nothing without us about us."

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