

Développement Humain, Handicap et Changement Social Human Development, Disability, and Social Change



Editorial The Accessible City

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Volume 19, Number 3, December 2011

Milieus urbains, politiques municipales et personnes ayant des incapacités
Urban Communities, Municipal Policies and People with Disabilities

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086809ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1086809ar>

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Publisher(s)

Réseau International sur le Processus de Production du Handicap

ISSN

1499-5549 (print)

2562-6574 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Gaucher, C. (2011). Editorial: The Accessible City. *Développement Humain, Handicap et Changement Social / Human Development, Disability, and Social Change*, 19(3), 5–6. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1086809ar>

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Editorial

The Accessible City

Since the 1970's the city has changed from an object of fascination to a field of study structured, at least in the francophone world, around reflecting on urban space, its development and its meaning for the people who live there. Very particular place of misery – ghettoization, street gangs or even general indifference with regards to others suffering – the city is also full of hope for those who are interested in issues surrounding handicap. The city became an object of attention, especially in Western countries, that monopolizes virtually all efforts to implement measures of inclusion for people with disabilities. This issue of *Human Development, handicap and social change* is part of this effort and examines the issue of accessibility and effectiveness of policies developed in recent years to make urban spaces habitable for people with disabilities thus guaranteeing their social participation.

For some background, we'll say from the get go that today's cities appear to be as much places for political innovations as spaces for social struggles. The questioning of the Welfare State and the adoption of new governing practices have resulted in the redefining of relations maintained between public, parastatal, private and community actors, institutions and municipal territory. In fact, the development of intersectoral partnerships, the negotiation of service agreements, the elaboration of collaborative projects and the establishment of coalitions contribute, firstly, to rebuilding the roles and responsibilities of the actors that cohabit urban space and, secondly, the process of politicization of certain populations that had, hitherto, been excluded from local citizen participation. Such changes in city governing are not without consequences for people with disabilities and the organisations that represent them.

The thematic issue « Urban Communities, Municipal Policies and People with Disabilities » is

comprised of texts that can be grouped into two major issues. The first refers to the arrival of new actors in the planning, organization and delivery of municipal services that can influence the quality of access and availability of management measures for people with disabilities, including frail and elderly persons. Dubé and Torrès' text illustrates how accessibility in public areas is crucial to the latter. Decisions with regards to tourism, territory management, transportation, leisure activities, snow removal, etc., made by these new actors can lead to the creation of new environmental barriers to social participation or contribute to their reduction. These decisions must be informed and in line with the needs of people living with disabilities. Rocque, Langevin, Chalghoumi and Ghorayeb's article proposes defining the notion of universal accessibility, whereas Sims, Marshall, Summerskill, Case, Gyi and Davis offers ways to determine the level of accessibility of products, services and municipal environments. Broome, Worrall, Fleming, Boldy propose ways of improving public transportation from an assessment of the specific needs of the elderly people, so that the multiplicity of actors involved in municipal services have a rigorous reference point to develop these services. Ultimately, many municipal services are essential to the basic conditions for the realization of current activities and social roles of people with disabilities.

The second issue addressed by this issue on the city refers to the fact that people with disabilities are now fully integrated into decisions made by these new actors of urbanization. Their involvement in governing mechanisms of newly established municipal territory suggests a better fit for the management and treatment of issues related to social participation. This involvement however is dependent on conditions of possibility which may vary depending on the type of disability, as Mathers, Thwaites, Simkins and Mallett's article pertaining to the

participation of people with learning disabilities outlines. According to the preferred approaches, people with disabilities and their representatives may, or may not, collaborate in defining the issues and proposing solutions adapted to their reality.

We hope that this special issue will challenge policy makers and people with disabilities so as they see in the city a space of potential rather than barriers to social participation of persons with disabilities. Participation which involves the development of universal accessibility measures and special arrangements, but also the inclusion of key stakeholders in decisions that involve them. The accessible city must be more than a target; it must become a right for people with disabilities.

Charles Gaucher
Editor in chief

