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# Emancipation Through Activism: an Action-Research on the Right to Access for Disabled People

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## Résumé

The study is based on the assumptions that emancipation of disabled people is connected to access, both because barriers can hinder emancipation, and because the emancipatory process entails learning about one's rights, including the right to access, and taking action to protect them.

We present the participatory phase of a larger research aimed at exploring factors hindering the implementation of access law. The more general research consisted in a case-study focused on a municipal regulation about access to places open to the public, enacted in 2021 in the Italian city of Bologna. The study included interviews to stakeholders involved in the implementation process (like shopkeepers and municipal officials), field observations, analysis of data and documents and a collaborative action-research, put in place by a group of activists with physical disabilities.

For this presentation we focus on the latter phase, in which a group of volunteers with and without disabilities co-designed the study and were involved in the fieldwork together with the researcher, who has a disability too. The action-research had two goals: 1. providing information to the shopkeepers about the new regulation, which requires them to make their establishments more accessible by a deadline; 2. gathering (and sharing) data about access to establishments in Bologna. Volunteers went door-to-door to every open-to-the-public place in the assigned streets, talking to the shopkeepers about the regulation and taking measurements of the potential barriers found in the establishments. Interactions between the shopkeepers and the volunteers were observed. Some events were later organised to disseminate the results, and volunteers were involved in focus groups and meetings to collect feedbacks and improve the method. In the end, 175 places open to the public were mapped and the results published in an online custom Google Map. The project raised interest in local media and politics, playing a role in the implementation of the regulation.

We particularly focus on some methodological issues emerged, showing opportunities and risks of a method in which research and grassroots activism are intertwined, and the researchers-activists with disabilities enter into a direct confrontation with potentially ableist interlocutors.

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