

## ***“That says, for me, you are a second-class citizen”*: A concept analysis of accessibility**

### **Introduction**

Accessibility as a concept has a lot of different meanings and applications, which can make it a slightly difficult concept to define. Much of the focus is on its use to describe how things are designed for the largest number of people to make use of products, services, and spaces. This paper developed out of a relationship between academics working in disability and accessibility, and a social change initiative in Aotearoa/New Zealand that seeks to make Aotearoa the most accessible country in the world. We sought to create a definition of accessibility that would support the development of a measure of accessibility related to people’s experiences.

### **Summary of the research**

We attempted to help further understand the concept of accessibility by using literature searches and focus groups (and some interviews) with key members of disability communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand. We used these sources to develop a framework that gives some insights into how people might experience accessibility and how these insights might be used to measure the experience of access for disabled people in Aotearoa/New Zealand. We used a form of concept analysis supported by reflexive thematic analysis to tell a story of the data. We also tested out the framework by using a survey about accessibility and a conference on disability to get feedback from other members of disability communities.

### **Main findings**

We identified 1) some of the existing definitions of accessibility, 2) the reasons for it being a necessary and important concept, and 3) discussed some of the boundaries with other concepts. We argued that the key intersecting attributes of accessibility are: *attainability*: someone being able to effectively attain something they want or need; *intersectionality*: the intersections between people, their environments, and their social position shape people’s experiences of access; *conditionality*: access is conditional on a wide variety of systems, structures, and people; and *relationality*: all people rely on others in one way or another, especially those disabled by societal and attitudinal barriers, it is relationships with others that much of the difference between access and lack of access. Further, we constructed some interpretative themes that extended our understanding of the concept: (1) physical access does not always guarantee full participation, (2) the need to prioritise choice supporting infrastructure, (3) opportunities for participating socially, economically, and politically require equitable societal arrangements, (4) elements of the social and built environment come together to make access possible, (5) the everyday and mundane should be possible for everyone, (6) the future of access is precarious. Following our thematic analysis, we discussed some areas that need further thought and development, including the intersections of our work with conceptual knowledge in disability studies and the ways that intersectionality and all of society representation can be further researched.

## **Summary of main implications**

This paper is informing the development of a measure of accessibility that is designed to challenge current focus on physical access and minimum requirements in building standards. Instead, the measure developed will focus on the subjective experiences of access and how various groups, especially disabled people are marginalised even when physical design considerations are being attended to. This has the potential to shift our orientation from treating access as a secondary concern to one that is understood as essential to all facets of life.

## **Find out more**

All authors worked out of the Centre for Person Centred Research, at AUT in Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand. You can read more about our work and projects we are working on at <https://cpcr.aut.ac.nz/>

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