



University of the  
West of England

## Health: The Design, Planning and Politics of How and Where We Live

- **Paper / Proposal Title:**

Disabling cities

- **Format:**

Presentation via Skype

- **Author(s) Name:**

Albertina Pretto

- **University or Company Affiliation:**

University of Trento (Italy)

- **Abstract (300 words):**

Cities are built by and for able-bodied people and are composed of a wide set of elements which make them partially accessible or inaccessible to disabled people (Hahn, 1986). Architectural barriers in a place or a building further impair disabled people because they limit the access to structures and services and, therefore, preclude a full participation to social life (Lettieri, 2013; Ferrucci, 2014). As a consequence, it is not possible to discuss about social progress until disabled people are constantly victims of marginalization caused by urban architecture and landscape (Priestley, 1998).

In order to identify few specific problems and possible solutions, I carried out a case study in a town in Northern Italy, involving numerous people with sensory and physical disabilities as participants. The findings indicate that cities in general, and the oldest ones in particular, have two types of problems. Firstly, historic centres and constructions

cannot be restored in order to become more accessible. Secondly, even if places and buildings are constructed and/or refurbished in accordance with accessibility standards and regulations, they are not actually accessible.

This inaccessibility increases the exclusion of disabled people from society by jeopardizing to a greater extent their health and well-being (Gleeson, 2001), since it imposes limitations and restrictions on them: from choosing what school to attend to the work place, from the use of sport facilities to the access to treatment and health services.

Moreover, the research study shows that not particularly expensive and complex measures and arrangements, which can be suggested by disabled people's organizations, would be adequate to tackle and solve these problems. It would be sufficient to consult such organizations before inefficiently investing public (or private) resources.

• **Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Albertina Pretto, PhD, is a researcher in the Department of Sociology and Social Research at the University of Trento (Italy), where she teaches Qualitative Methods and Research Lab. Her main interests lie in the development of qualitative research methods and in their application in different research areas, with special regard to the sociology of the health, the feeling of socio-territorial belonging and values. She is a member of the 'Supervisory Committee for the promotion of equal opportunities, workers' welfare and non-discrimination' of the University of Trento. The list of her publications is available at:

<http://webapps.unitn.it/Ugcvp/en/Web/ProdottiAutore/PER0000394>