

Engineering and Innovation Research Studentship 2023/2024



Project title:	Design for access and mobility in the public realm
Discipline	Design
Key words:	Inclusive design, accessibility, mobility, disability studies
Supervisory team:	Rachael Luck, Matthew Cook
URL for lead supervisor's OU profile	https://www.open.ac.uk/people/racl2 https://www.open.ac.uk/people/mc22226

Project Highlights:

- Aims to improve the accessibility of the public realm.
- Will involve ethnographic studies of life in public spaces to generate disability-inclusive accounts of the lived-experience of access and mobility.
- Will examine how to design from a disability perspective.

Overview:

Inspired by Whyte's observational studies of the social life of public spaces (1), the proposed project will study the movement of people and things in the public realm, with the aim to improve its accessibility. Public places are designed considering accessibility for all but now there are new inhabitants, such as robots and electric scooters that move in different ways from pedestrians, especially people with impaired mobility (4). This research will study life in public spaces from a disability perspective.



Figure 1. Inclusive design images that depict different human capabilities.

Methodology:

The project will involve ethnographic studies of social life in public spaces, observing and recording the movement and interactions of people and things. The research will generate disability-inclusive accounts of lived-experience of access and mobility. The project adopts a design from disability stance, which seeks to enable people with disabilities to lead in aspects that affect their everyday lives, including participation in design processes.

References & Further reading:

1. Whyte, H. The social life of small urban spaces https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEwo-_pQCz8
2. [Inclusive design and making in practice: Bringing bodily experience into closer contact with making](#)
Luck, Rachael
Design Studies, 2018, 54 (pp. 96-119)
3. [Access and mobility in Milton Keynes: an inclusive design history where urban planning ideals and design intent meet disability politics](#)
Luck, Rachael
Diseña, 2022, 21, Article 6
4. Valdez, M. Cook, M and Potter, S (2021) "Humans and robots coping with crisis – Starship, Covid-19 and urban robotics in an unpredictable world," 2021 IEEE International Conference on Systems, Man, and Cybernetics (SMC), pp. 2596-2601, doi: 10.1109/SMC52423.2021.9658581.

Further details:

This research would be ideally suited to someone with a passion to improve the accessibility of spaces, places, products and services, with a background in architecture, urban design, OT occupational therapy or disability studies. Approximately 12% of the Open University directly registered doctoral students have a disability and someone with a disability would be viewed positively for this research. The supervision team have experience in the design and planning of the public realm, as well as research projects on accessibility and inclusion that have been funded by ERC, ESRC, EPSRC and AHRC (2, 3). The student will need to travel to locations across the UK for data collection. To discuss the project please contact: Rachael.Luck@open.ac.uk.

Applications should include:

- A 1000 word cover letter outlining why the project is of interest to you and how your skills match those required
- an academic CV containing contact details of three academic references
- an Open University application form, downloadable from: <http://www.open.ac.uk/postgraduate/research-degrees/how-to-apply/mphil-and-phd-application-process>
- IELTS test scores where English is an additional language

Applications should be sent to

STEM-EI-PhD@open.ac.uk by 15.02.2023