

AperTO - Archivio Istituzionale Open Access dell'Università di Torino

**Disability and higher education: assessing students' capabilities in two Italian universities using structured focus group discussions**

**This is a pre print version of the following article:**

*Original Citation:*

*Availability:*

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1725321> since 2020-01-26T09:49:41Z

*Published version:*

DOI:10.1080/03075079.2019.1654448

*Terms of use:*

Open Access

Anyone can freely access the full text of works made available as "Open Access". Works made available under a Creative Commons license can be used according to the terms and conditions of said license. Use of all other works requires consent of the right holder (author or publisher) if not exempted from copyright protection by the applicable law.

(Article begins on next page)



**Disability and higher education: assessing students' capabilities in two Italian universities using structured focus group discussions**

Journal:	<i>Studies in Higher Education</i>
Manuscript ID	CSHE-2018-0554.R1
Manuscript Type:	Article
Keywords:	University, Disability, inclusion, capability approach, Student Participation

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

## Disability and higher education: assessing students' capabilities in two Italian universities using structured focus group discussions

In the last three decades, inclusive disability legislation has led to an increasing number of students with disabilities entering higher education. However, barriers to the full participation of students remain. This article presents evidence from studies conducted in two Italian universities. Drawing on the Capability Approach, the goal is to analyse the experiences of students with disabilities and to assess their capabilities in academic life. Participatory research methods were adopted using structured focus group discussion techniques. Fifty students with different type of disability participated in the study. Two major findings emerged from the qualitative and quantitative data collected, including: (a) the essential value, in the experience of the students, of being able to use educational spaces, move around outside of the campus and socialize; and (b) low levels of capabilities for students with visual disabilities compared to those with mobility issues, which means that academic inclusion is not for all.

Keywords: University, Disability, Capability Approach, Participation

### Introduction

Since the middle of the last century, recommendations from international organisations increasingly promoted the establishment of educational settings that are equal and open to diversity (UNESCO 1994). Regarding individuals with disabilities, the United Nations (UN)' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UN 2006) granted full enjoyment of human rights in all areas of society, including the right to academic inclusion and lifelong learning. This position was reaffirmed in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which emphasised the importance of ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for persons with disabilities by 2030 (UN 2015). Like other European countries, Italy sought to design and implement legislation that focuses on the inclusion of students with disabilities (SWDs) in higher

1  
2  
3 education (HE). Law n. 104/92 (*Framework law for assistance, social integration, and*  
4 *rights of persons with disabilities*) and Law n. 17/99 (*Integration and modification of the*  
5 *5 February 1992 framework law, n. 104*) define the legislative framework; in addition, in  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10 2009, Italy ratified the 2006 UN Convention. These intense reforms have encouraged  
11  
12 progressive growth in the number of SWDs at universities over the years. Data from the  
13  
14 Ministry of Education, University and Research reports that people with disabilities  
15  
16 attending post-secondary institutions numbered 26,091 in 2016/17 compared to 4,839 in  
17  
18 2000/01 (the first year in which data is available).  
19  
20

21  
22 Investment in lifelong learning is thought to significantly affect the quality of life  
23  
24 of persons with disabilities. A successful university experience is associated with an  
25  
26 increase in capabilities and achievements (Walker 2015) and far-reaching social and  
27  
28 economic benefits; for example, data identifies a positive link between HE attendance  
29  
30 and the employment rate (ANED 2018; CPS 2017). It follows that education is highly  
31  
32 relevant for individuals and society given its intrinsic, instrumental and positional roles  
33  
34 in promoting capabilities (Nussbaum 2006; Brighthouse and Unterhalter 2008; Authors  
35  
36 2014).  
37  
38  
39

40  
41 Although the protection of SWDs' right to education in the university has been  
42  
43 recognised in many countries and student support services are an important resource in  
44  
45 many universities (Fleming, Oertle and Plotner 2017), studies show that people with  
46  
47 disabilities still encounter barriers in academic contexts (Moriña 2017). The challenges  
48  
49 they face include architectural barriers, despite improvements in physical infrastructure  
50  
51 (Collins, Azmat, and Rentschler 2018; Moriña and Morgado 2018). Furthermore,  
52  
53 previous research highlights obstacles related to teaching, learning, and assessment,  
54  
55 especially when it comes to lectures and classes, coursework and exams (Fuller et al.  
56  
57 2004). Madriaga et al. (2010), who surveys both disabled and non-disabled students,  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 suggests the experience of SWD is greater in terms of the amount of time required for  
4 coursework, note taking and reading course material (amongst other things).  
5  
6 Interestingly, however, many of the challenges that characterise the academic experience  
7 of SWDs are also shared by those without impairments (e.g. all participants identified  
8 negative sentiments in their engagement with faculty members and teaching practices).  
9  
10 More recent studies show that lecturers do not always provide audio recordings of lessons  
11 or offer notes or slides prior to a lecture; nor are they always responsive to changing their  
12 teaching style or adapting curricula or modes of assessment (Moriña Díez, Gavira López,  
13 and Molina 2015; Strnadová, Hájková, and Květoňová 2015; Kendall 2016). Therefore,  
14 one form of barrier facing SWDs is the lack of awareness amongst faculty members of  
15 their different needs (Redpath et al. 2013; Collins, Azmat, and Rentschler 2018).  
16 Literature on faculty attitudes found that lecturers positively endorse inclusive  
17 instruction, but do not seem to implement corresponding strategies; in general, they lack  
18 confidence in their knowledge of Universal Design for Learning and disability policies  
19 (Lombardi, Vukovic, and Sala-Bars 2015; West, Novak, and Mueller 2016). In addition,  
20 SWDs seem experience social exclusion because of the negative attitudes of peers and  
21 teaching staff or due to avoidance reflecting uncertainty about how to respectfully  
22 approach them. Yet, little research has addressed this topic (e.g. Papasotiriou and Windle  
23 2012).

24  
25 These negative practices disadvantage SWDs. Their academic careers are  
26 characterised by relatively delay or failure to complete degree courses and inferior  
27 academic performance (Sachs and Schreuer 2011; Kilpatrick et al. 2017). In contrast, a  
28 study conducted by Richardson (2009) analysed disability as a predictor of academic  
29 success among students earning their first degree and found that “disablement per se does  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 not play a significant role in predicting whether an individual student obtains a good  
4 degree [*defined as a first-class or upper second-class honours degree*]" (134).  
5  
6

7 To our knowledge, few studies have investigated the experiences of SWDs in the  
8 Italian context while considering their perspective<sup>1</sup>. Unlike the literature on school  
9 education, Italian research focusing on HE is largely unrecognized at the international  
10 level.  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15

16 This paper has two aims. The first is to operationalize the Capability Approach  
17 (CA) through participatory methods, i.e. structured focus group discussions (SFGDs), in  
18 the HE context. The second is to assess the capabilities of SWDs by applying the SFGDs  
19 in two Italian university: Padua and Turin.  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24

25 The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, the relevance of the CA  
26 for understanding the experiences of SWDs in university settings is considered. The  
27 second and third sections present the research methodology and set out the research  
28 questions. And the fourth and fifth sections consider the data and analyse the results.  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37

### 38 **Theoretical framework and methodology: the Capability Approach and disability**

39 Most existing studies on inclusive practices in HE institutions have approached this topic  
40 using a social model of disability (e.g. Moriña Díez, Gavira López, and Molina 2015;  
41 Collins, Azmat, and Rentschler 2018). According to this perspective, society restricts  
42 participation in the economic and social spheres of people with disabilities (Oliver and  
43 Barnes 2010). This approach suggests that in the academic context, disadvantage and  
44 social exclusion experienced by SWDs are the results of attitudinal and environmental  
45 barriers.  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54

---

55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60 <sup>1</sup> One exception is CENSIS 2017, but this is only a quantitative study.

1  
2  
3 Drawing on this perspective, we use an approach that usefully complements the  
4 social model to explore disability in HE. In doing so, we build on the CA developed by  
5 Amartya Sen (1992, 1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2000) in an effort to explore the voices  
6 and aspirations of SWDs (Hart, 2013).  
7  
8  
9  
10

11  
12 Our model stresses the achievable functionings (or potential capabilities) that  
13 people have reason to value. The capability approach supports an agency-oriented view  
14 that emphasizes the relevance of people's ability to live the life they value (Sen 1999) and  
15 to influence their own lives as well as those of others (Sen 1992). Within the CA, the  
16 SWD capability set (achievable functionings or opportunities to function) is determined  
17 by individual conversion factors (including age, gender and type and level of impairment)  
18 and their interaction with the social and environmental conversion factors linked to  
19 education systems and the specific institution and context (Terzi 2005). The CA considers  
20 how individual factors such as wheelchair use interact with the design of the environment  
21 the person lives in and the person's valuable ends (Terzi 2011). In other words, disability  
22 is a deprivation of capabilities resulting "from the interaction of an individual's (a)  
23 personal characteristics (e.g. age, impairment) and (b) basket of available goods (assets,  
24 income) and (c) environment (social, economic, political, cultural)" (Mitra 2006, 237).  
25 Consequently, the CA focuses on disability as one variable of human diversity and  
26 highlights its impact on people within institutional and social settings (Reindal 2009).  
27 This new perspective can enrich the social model and its recent integration with the right  
28 based approach found in the 2006 UN Convention (Author 2011; Trani et al. 2011).  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49

50  
51 In (higher) education, disentangling the CA process enables us to identify which  
52 factors – given individual, social and environmental conversion factors and their  
53 interactions with institutions, resources and services – reduce the opportunities of people  
54 with disabilities to exercise valuable beings and doings. For these reasons, this research  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 focuses on the nature of impairments and their impact on academic experiences, in line  
4  
5 with the findings of other studies that recognise “it is, perhaps, erroneous to talk of  
6  
7 disabled students as though they were a single population” (Fuller, 2004, 315). The CA  
8  
9 can give university students – with their values, skills, and aspirations – a central role in  
10  
11 the process of analysing education systems, because it is centred on the students  
12  
13 themselves and their capabilities.  
14  
15

16  
17 From a broader perspective, the CA is able to embrace the complexity of various  
18  
19 phenomena related to HE (McLean and Walker 2012; Boni and Gasper 2012; East,  
20  
21 Stokes, and Walker 2014). For example, it promotes new criteria (such as agency, well-  
22  
23 being, participation, empowerment, equity, diversity, and inclusion), based on key values  
24  
25 of human development, for assessing university activities and better orienting a university  
26  
27 towards social justice (Boni and Gasper 2012). Moreover, unlike the human capital  
28  
29 perspective – which sees education as just an instrument for increasing economic growth  
30  
31 (Sen 1999) – the CA and human development perspective views HE as a public good that  
32  
33 promotes flourishing lives (Boni and Walker 2013). In the CA, the inclusion of people  
34  
35 with disabilities in universities is crucial, because it enables the development of  
36  
37 capabilities to fulfil SWDs aspirations and promote agency and tools that are fundamental  
38  
39 for active citizenship (Halvorsen et al. 2018). In this way, universities can become  
40  
41 concrete “conversion factors” in the students’ life projects (Author 2012).  
42  
43  
44  
45

46  
47 A range of participatory methods can be used to make the CA operational (Author  
48  
49 2019); in this paper, we examine the opinions of SWDs through SFGDs. This method has  
50  
51 been selected for its flexibility and is considered in the following section.  
52  
53

### 54 55 **Methodological approach: the structured focus group discussion**

56  
57 The Structured Focus Group Discussion, introduced by Author (2014) within  
58  
59 Opportunity-Gap (O-GAP) Analysis, has been used by several authors to operationalise  
60



1  
2  
3 the CA in different areas, such as quality of life assessment, disability and rehabilitation,  
4  
5 health barriers assessment and project evaluation (see, for example, Author 2018).  
6  
7

8 This particular participatory method is flexible and enables a general and direct  
9  
10 evaluation of individual functionings (outcomes) and capabilities (achievable  
11  
12 functionings) within a system such as education, collecting data and information on the  
13  
14 capability or real opportunity levels of SWDs as well as capturing obstacles and  
15  
16 identifying enabling factors. At the same time, this method provides researchers,  
17  
18 participants and policy-makers with useful information for planning and evaluating the  
19  
20 impact of certain policies, initiatives or acts, and for indicating the factors and services  
21  
22 that facilitate or inhibit final outcomes within the education system.  
23  
24  
25

26 The method itself combines the classical setting of a focus group with a matrix  
27  
28 scoring system (Catley et al., 2008), but is "structured" through a series of steps involving  
29  
30 a sequence of actions and questions that are largely fixed and therefore replicable in a  
31  
32 clear and defined way, which permits comparability (Author 2018). The 'fixed' structure  
33  
34 of focus groups does not diminish the ability to adapt the elements of analysis (e.g.  
35  
36 educational sub-dimensions), the context, the typology of intervention, the characteristics  
37  
38 of SWDs and the factors and services that promote disabled students' learning and  
39  
40 university life.  
41  
42  
43

44 The structured discussion takes place in a dialogical, collaborative and explorative way  
45  
46 with the aim of creating a "community of inquiry" (Author 2012) in which participants,  
47  
48 questioning their own convictions, help to create new knowledge and awareness of their  
49  
50 reality. Moreover, participants in such discussions have a propensity for taking  
51  
52 responsibility with respect to their positions (Author 2017).  
53  
54  
55

56 For any operationalisation of the capability approach, it is necessary to select the  
57  
58 relevant dimensions of well-being to be utilised in the analysis (Author 2011). This can  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 be done using different methods (Author 2019, table 1). Therefore, prior to any SFGD, it  
4 is important to carefully select dimensions after a thorough desk-analysis of the context,  
5 literature and data collected through questionnaires, in-depth interviews or standard focus  
6 groups with key informants. The alternative is to give participants (in this case, the  
7 SWDs) the opportunity to directly select the most relevant dimensions for analysis via  
8 focus group discussions.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the process, each element and dimension of the  
9 matrix must be clearly defined and shared to ensure validity and reliability for all those  
10 who took part in the various SFGDs.  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20

21 At the beginning of each exercise SFGD, each relevant dimension relating to  
22 education is captured and confirmed through a participatory ranking exercise with the  
23 students.  
24  
25  
26  
27

28 The selection of participants is based on the heterogeneity and representativeness  
29 of SWDs. This is essential for the internal validity of the tool and external validity of the  
30 results. Moreover, the heterogeneity of participant reduces the number of SFGDs needed  
31 (Author 2014).  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36

37 The information and data to fulfil the SFGD matrixes are collected via  
38 participatory focus group discussions in which SWDs were asked to express their own  
39 view and share their opinions regarding their academic lives. The final scores reflect the  
40 outcome of the debate in the focus discussions with SWDs: a dialogical mean value.  
41 Although the SFGD is a participatory and qualitative tool, it is possible to quantify and  
42 systematise the results of the discussion by devising a scoring method consisting of a  
43 sequence of structured questions that can be displayed in a Matrix (Author 2014). This  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54

---

55  
56  
57 <sup>2</sup> Each dimension can be clarified further through the identification of sub-dimensions and the  
58 addition of related elements according to the criteria and the target established by the  
59 researchers, while still ensuring the researchers' ability to synthesise the methodology  
60 (maximum 10-12 dimensions) with the aim of allowing effective and in-depth debates.

1  
2  
3 facilitated concretising the methodological procedure to be followed in each focus group  
4  
5 session, allowing for comparison.  
6

7  
8 The matrix in Table 1 assembles the collective answers from debates among the  
9  
10 participants of focus group discussions (Acocella 2012) and reduces ambiguities and  
11  
12 distortions often attributed to traditional focus groups. The rows of the matrix correspond  
13  
14 to the dimensions of analysis or outcomes previously identified, i.e. the functioning or  
15  
16 dimensions of well-being. The columns refer to different (ideal) typologies of students  
17  
18 and/or policies, target groups or services and initiatives.  
19

20  
21 These profiles are *ideal types* and are distinguished according to individual characteristics  
22  
23 and identities (individual conversion factors such as disability) that influence the results  
24  
25 of actions taken in terms of opportunities and final outcomes. The use of ideal type  
26  
27 functions to obtain a partial abstraction from the participants of SFGDs helps avoid self-  
28  
29 referential responses based exclusively on personal experiences – i.e. the ‘quasi-impartial  
30  
31 spectator argument’ (Sen 2006; Author 2014).  
32  
33

34  
35 Each cell of the matrix thus represents the level of capability for the corresponding  
36  
37 ideal type of student (column) and for each sub dimension of inclusiveness in the  
38  
39 university courses (row).  
40

41  
42 Scores are awarded on a scale from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 10 (where  
43  
44 1 is ‘Not at all important’ and 10 is ‘Very important’). These scales were previously tested  
45  
46 (along with other possible scales) among students with similar characteristics to ensure  
47  
48 the scale producing the most consistent results and detailed evidence was adopted (Author  
49  
50 2012). During the SFGDs the scoring system was explained to participants and subjected  
51  
52 to open debate and scrutiny. The final specification of the score in each matrix cell (i.e.  
53  
54 the assessment for each question included in the matrix) is based on collective discussion  
55  
56 and group answers by students (rather than on individual answers as in a standard  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 individual questionnaire). This gave students the opportunity to debate openly through a  
4 public enquiry, open-up to different points of views, and reflect on the results and  
5 different types of disability.  
6  
7  
8

9  
10 The matrix structure adds value to the method in terms of comparing the results  
11 across different focus group discussions, as it ensures the same sequence of questions.  
12  
13

14 [insert table 1]  
15  
16

17  
18 The application of this method to our research was based on the active  
19 involvement of informed SWDs, who were called upon to collectively discuss and  
20 analyse specific contexts, services and situations – particularly with reference to  
21 functionings and capabilities relevant for higher education and University accessibility.  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27

### 28 **Research context and aims**

29  
30 The research was carried out in two Italian universities, Padua and Turin, which  
31 have a long tradition of providing services and accommodations to SWDs (Author 2017).  
32  
33

34  
35 The Universities of Padua and Turin have similar characteristics: they are both  
36 regarded as large institutions in terms of the number of students by the Italian the Ministry  
37 for Education, University and Research. During the 2014/2015 academic year, the  
38 reference period for the present study, 586 SWDs were enrolled in Turin and 501 were  
39 enrolled in Padua. In both cases, the proportion of SWDs in the two institutions was 0.9%,  
40 which is roughly the same as in other post-secondary Italian institutions.  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47

48  
49 The specific research aims were to (1) identify relevant capabilities for SWDs in  
50 HE; (2) assess the level of opportunity to function in each of these dimensions; and (3)  
51 analyse the role of different factors, resources and barriers that affect opportunities to  
52 realise personal and educational aspirations at university.  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59

### 60 **Data Collection and analysis**

1  
2  
3 The SFGD method was adapted to the research context and followed eight specific  
4 steps (Figure 1):  
5  
6

7 [insert figure 1]  
8  
9

10  
11 Step 1. Researchers conducted a CA oriented literature review to identify dimensions that  
12 describe the well-being of SWDs in the university context (Nussbaum 2000; WHO 2001;  
13 Walker 2006; Spreafico 2013). The eight dimensions identified were:  
14  
15

- 16 (1) Teaching and learning
  - 17 (2) Mobility inside and outside the campus
  - 18 (3) Interpersonal relationships (during academic activities and leisure time)
  - 19 (4) Counselling and career development
  - 20 (5) Access to information
  - 21 (6) Respect
  - 22 (7) Health (also mental and spiritual)
  - 23 (8) Empowerment (to be an empowered and active agent)
- 24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37

38 Step 2. The SFGD participants were identified through theoretical sampling. A  
39 heterogeneous group was selected in terms of gender, type of disability, department of  
40 study and year of study at the university.  
41  
42  
43  
44

45 A total of 38 SWDs from the University of Turin participated. A further 12  
46 students from the University of Padua took part in the SFGD. In both cases, only students  
47 assisted by disabilities services were recruited, as, it was not possible to contact  
48 individuals who did not seek the assistance of support services despite having declared a  
49 disability at the time of enrolment.  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55

56 The participants from Turin consisted of 21 women and 17 men; 12 had mobility  
57 problems, 11 had mental-behavioural disabilities, 9 had visual disabilities and 6 had  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 hearing disabilities. The participants from Padua included 6 men and 6 women; 4 had  
4 mobility problems, 2 had visual disabilities, 2 had hearing disabilities, 2 had down  
5 syndrome and 2 had multiple disabilities. In terms of field of study, SWDs in our sample  
6 were enrolled in the humanities (50% Turin, 60% Padua), social sciences (37% Turin,  
7 30% Padua) and natural sciences (13% Turin, 10% Padua). Students with learning  
8 disabilities were not included in the study.  
9

10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17 Step 3. In both Universities, three levels of SFGDs were conducted. All of these  
18 SFGDs were audio-recorded. During the first, researchers asked SWDs to describe their  
19 daily routine at the university and to map out their activities. A list was constructed to  
20 gather these activities under specific themes representing the central dimensions of well-  
21 being.  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27

28  
29 Step 4 and step 5. The second level focused on ranking dimensions (step 4) and  
30 opportunity assessment (step 5). In step 4, students ordered the dimensions from the most  
31 to the less relevant to express how valuable each dimension was perceived. Meanwhile,  
32 in step 5, the groups of students with the same impairment assessed their opportunity  
33 level for each dimension by using a scale from 1 (not important) to 10 (very important).  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39

40  
41 Step 6. The third and final level of SFGDs focused on evaluating the impact of  
42 Disability Services, academic staff and interactions with peers on the ability of SWDs' to  
43 participation in HE. SWDs responded to the following question with respect to their  
44 interaction with Disability Services, academics and peers: How do they support the  
45 opportunity level of a student with a disability? (depending on the type of disability; Table  
46 2). This makes it is possible to analyse their respective contributions – whether positive,  
47 negative or non-existent – to the well-being of SWDs.  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55

56 [insert table 2]  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Step 7. The data collected in steps 4 to 6 are analysed. Numerical scores make it  
4 possible to quantify the analysis and are useful for comparability synthetic outcomes of  
5 two universities.  
6  
7  
8

9  
10 Step 8. Investigating narratives from which the scores are derived is core to the  
11 analysis; it produced qualitative explanations of the processes behind the expansion and  
12 contraction of participants' capabilities and opened up space for dialogue between SWDs.  
13  
14 It was vital and instructive to collect detailed information on the mechanisms that support  
15 capabilities which involved taking extensive notes and comparing any differences of  
16 opinion amongst students.  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22

23  
24 In this study, quantitative scores in opportunity levels have been used directly,  
25 without any statistical tests, to compare different disability groups in both universities.  
26  
27

28 Transcribed focus group discussions were imported into the qualitative analysis  
29 program N-Vivo 10, and were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34

## 35 **Results**

36  
37 The first set of results relate to the co-construction of a situated and contextualised  
38 list of dimensions of well-being for SWDs (Table 3).  
39  
40

41  
42 [insert table 3]  
43

44 Several differences emerge if the lists compiled from scientific literature are compared  
45 with the lists generated by SWDs:  
46  
47  
48

- 49 (1) the dimensions increase from 8 to 9;
- 50 (2) SWDs did not indicate that empowerment is an important dimension nor did they  
51 mention health;
- 52 (3) SWDs flag the importance of a new dimension: 'the usability of spaces' (spaces  
53 with adequate furniture and technologies) for moving around and working;  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

- 1  
2  
3 (4) SWDs separated the teaching (didactic) dimension from the learning dimension;  
4  
5 (5) SWDs reformulated the dimension of interior and exterior mobility to include two  
6  
7 different concepts: “accessibility” to indicate movement within the university and  
8  
9 “mobility” to show mobility outside the university.  
10  
11

12 The analysis of student responses also reveals the importance of new dimensions  
13 for success in the academic life. For many participants ‘usability’ is a priority for  
14 example. One noted:  
15  
16

17 All libraries should have a location accessible with speech synthesis, even to scan. Why do we have  
18 to go to Disability Service? In other libraries there are computers, but we cannot use them because  
19 they don’t have the right programs (student with visual impairment, Turin)<sup>3</sup>  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24

25 In addition, mobility generally was seen as a significant and necessary condition  
26 for participation within the university:  
27  
28

29 I meet more hostility with the buses than inside the University. In addition to talking about inclusion  
30 in the university, it is necessary to consider the difficulties to get there (student with mobility  
31 impairment, Turin)  
32  
33  
34

35 An interesting result also emerged in the ranking of the dimensions. Students regarded  
36 the most important dimension as teaching, while the second most important dimension  
37 depended on the nature of their disability. For students with mobility impairments, it was  
38 accessibility, while those with visual impairments indicated mobility, those with hearing  
39 impairments indicated learning and those with cognitive/mental impairments (other  
40 disabilities in Padua) indicated access to information.  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48

49 Meanwhile, levels of opportunity varied according to university attended and type  
50 of disability. The radar graphs presented in Figures 2 and 3 represent the opportunity level  
51 assessed by the students with the same impairment attending the same university for each  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57

58  
59 <sup>3</sup> The quotes employed in this article have been selected to illustrate the analysis and do not  
60 constitute a complete evidence base.



1  
2  
3 dimension. The results point to “dialogical mean values” of the opportunity levels  
4 expressed during step 5. The area delineated by the dotted lines shows the levels of  
5 opportunity in the various dimensions or capability set available to SWDs in academic  
6 contexts.  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12

13 [insert figure 2]  
14

15 The data reveals that the University of Turin (Figure 2) provides opportunities to further  
16 participation for students with some types of disabilities, while for other disabilities  
17 (especially for students with visual impairment), it has not yet fully succeeded in  
18 implementing strategies that enable their participation. Teaching, learning and respect are  
19 generally evaluated positively by all SWDs, others like guidance and mobility did not  
20 always receive positive scores.  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28

29 In line with the quantitative data, most of the participants discussed positive  
30 experiences with their lecturers (in the learning dimension). Faculty members seem  
31 willing to offer alternative methods of assessment, especially if the students advise them  
32 of their difficulties:  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37

38 I need extra time. It is difficult to find the right solution in these things, but I spoke with my lecturer  
39 and everything went smoothly (student with mental-behavioural disability, Turin)  
40  
41

42 During lessons (the teaching dimension), the support of a personal tutor came up  
43 repeatedly in the SFGDs:  
44  
45

46 The teachers are helpful. They ask if there is a need for any adaptations, for example regarding the  
47 use of videos with subtitles, but then it is difficult for them to consider them. For me, to get to class  
48 without the tutor had become a waste of time (student with hearing impairment, Turin)  
49  
50  
51

52 Typically, participants reported an atmosphere of tolerance and respect:

53 If we consider the absence of discrimination and marginalization, the judgment in the dimension of  
54 respect is very good (student with mobility impairment, Turin)  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 On the other hand, some participants expressed concerns about travelling in the  
4 city. A student described specific difficulties with mobility:  
5

6  
7 Around the university there is no tactile paving even to pay it, not even at the stops near the  
8 University, perhaps only in one. Yet at the stop where all the buses arrive, there is nothing (student  
9 with visual impairment, Turin)  
10  
11  
12

13 For the University of Padua (Figure 3), the data refers exclusively to mobility and  
14 visual impairment. Differences are observed in the students' dimensions of well-being,  
15 especially regarding respect and socialisation. Students with mobility impairments  
16 perceived the University as more respectful than students with visual impairments. The  
17 "dialogical value" of the opportunity levels expressed by the first group is 8 while for the  
18 second group it is 5.  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

26  
27 In high school I was isolated and bullied. Now I feel positively about university inclusion. I have  
28 found new friends who meet in class (student with mobility impairment, Padua)  
29  
30

31 Teaching and learning dimensions also received positive evaluations. The  
32 University of Padova organizes a General Course for an Inclusive University open to  
33 teachers and administrative staff every year.  
34  
35  
36  
37

38 I went to speak with the professor. I explained my problems, and we agreed upon an oral exam  
39 (student with mobility impairment, Padua)  
40  
41

42 Furthermore, Disability Service offers a peer tutoring service to assist the students  
43 throughout the learning process. This support is seen as a necessary condition for coping  
44 with lessons:  
45  
46  
47

48 The tutor helps me in classroom; he takes notes and we study together (student with mobility  
49 impairment, Padua)  
50  
51

52 SWDs remain critical of the mobility situation. For example, a student reported:  
53  
54 The mobility service doesn't exist in my town. Even taking the train is complicated. Very often my  
55 grandparents bring me to the university (student with visual impairment, Padua)  
56  
57  
58

59 [insert figure 3]  
60

1  
2  
3 The available data makes it possible to compare the two universities in terms of the levels  
4  
5 of opportunity indicated by students with mobility problems (Figure 4) and visual  
6  
7 disabilities (Figure 5).  
8

9  
10 [insert figure 4]

11  
12 [insert figure 5]

13  
14 Both universities reveal the capacity to remove obstacles to students' participation. If we  
15  
16 look at this process from the perspective of students with mobility impairments, we find  
17  
18 the same opportunities for participation in both contexts, with a fairly positive evaluation  
19  
20 of nearly all dimensions of well-being. If we look at it from the perspective of students  
21  
22 with visual disabilities, the opportunities vary according to academic context. The  
23  
24 University of Turin seems to be more sensitive to diversity and relationships: socialisation  
25  
26 and respect (dialogical mean for both dimensions=7). In contrast, Padua is better placed  
27  
28 to facilitate dimensions like teaching, learning and accessibility (dialogical mean for each  
29  
30 dimension=7).  
31  
32  
33

34  
35 Despite the efforts in offering different type of provisions, for the students with  
36  
37 visual disabilities some dimensions remain problematic, especially with respect to their  
38  
39 aspirations to move and study independently. The participants again emphasize, for  
40  
41 example, the difficulties derived from little or no signposting in Braille, as well as the  
42  
43 lack of tactile-plantar paths within the university (the accessibility dimension):  
44  
45

46  
47 I would give a very low rating; if you are blind, everything is inaccessible here. There is no indication  
48  
49 in Braille; therefore, you must necessarily request the accompanying service (student with visual  
50  
51 impairment, Turin)

52  
53 Students also pointed to the lack of specific teaching adaptations:

54  
55 The teachers have always been available; of course, they should better explain graphs and formulas,  
56  
57 otherwise a personal tutor is necessary (student with visual impairment, Turin)

58  
59 Other participants added that developing a sense of belonging is more challenging:  
60

1  
2  
3 No lack of respect, but it is as if we were living in two completely separate worlds (student with  
4 visual impairment, Padua).  
5  
6  
7

## 8 **Discussion**

9  
10 Personal experiences allow students to reformulate their participation in HE articulated  
11 in nine dimensions. The list generated by the students emphasises the importance of  
12 interior and exterior mobility (“accessibility” within the university and “mobility” outside  
13 the university), adds a new dimension to lists advocated in the literature (the “usability”  
14 of spaces), and confirms that socialisation and respect are among the most important  
15 dimensions for students.  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23

24 For SWDs, accessibility by itself is not enough. Just because a space is architecturally  
25 accessible does not mean that it is usable: having a suitable space, one that is large enough  
26 and equipped with the technology necessary for studying is vital for ensuring that SWDs  
27 can participate in university life.  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32

33 If we then examine the ranking of the importance attached to dimensions and the  
34 levels of opportunity, we see that these differ in both universities depending on the nature  
35 of the disability and the dimensions considered. The situation is very different if we  
36 analyse the levels of opportunity for students with mobility disabilities in the two  
37 universities and compare them to levels of opportunity for students with visual  
38 disabilities.  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46

47 If socialisation is excluded, the levels of opportunity for students with mobility  
48 impairments are roughly the same in the two universities, as opposed to the levels of  
49 opportunity indicated by students with visual disabilities, who hold very different  
50 perceptions. This difference may reflect the efforts that the two universities have made in  
51 facilitating the participation of students with mobility impairments, a disability for which,  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 thanks to the involvement of associations campaigning for people with disabilities  
4  
5 (Shakespeare 2014), there has been a more inclusive attitude towards for some time.  
6

7  
8 However, for students with visual disabilities, participation appears to depend  
9  
10 heavily on the context in which they study and live. For a student with a visual disability,  
11  
12 choosing to study in Padua or Turin results in different capabilities to function in virtually  
13  
14 all dimensions; this means that uneven practices continue to occur between academic  
15  
16 staff, departments and institutions (Tinklin and Hall 1999; Holloway 2001).  
17

18  
19 Nevertheless, one aspect experienced in both universities concerns the fact that  
20  
21 the mobility dimension – or rather, the obstacles that SWDs encounter in travelling to and  
22  
23 from university (while subject to some variation) – is among the most critical factors that  
24  
25 hampers participation. More emphasis needs to be placed on tailored services that  
26  
27 facilitate personal mobility if equal participation in broader aspects of university life is to  
28  
29 be ensured for SWDs. Furthermore, specific issues arise for students with visual  
30  
31 disabilities. The lack of tactile paving at bus stops and train stations and the lack of  
32  
33 academic information in Braille greatly reduce mobility opportunities and create  
34  
35 dependence, which undermines personal autonomy and other goals. Previous studies tend  
36  
37 to focus on the architectural barriers within institutions (e.g. Holloway 2001; Redpath et  
38  
39 al. 2013). Just recently, research has investigated the problems SWDs face in trying to  
40  
41 reach academic institutions (Moriña and Morgado 2018), but the specific problem of  
42  
43 visual barriers (outside and within the campus) remains poorly documented within the  
44  
45 literature (Lourens and Swartz 2016).  
46  
47  
48  
49

50  
51 The results of the study indicate positive assessments in terms of learning  
52  
53 opportunities. Participants reported that their universities were supportive and provided  
54  
55 accommodation to meet their needs during exams, in accordance with existing legislation.  
56  
57

58 In terms of the teaching dimension, the most important form of support for  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 students are the tutor provided by Disability Services. The high quantitative score  
4 assigned by SWDs in this dimension reflects the tutor support. Students cannot choose  
5 whether to use the tutor's support; it is considered essential also because lecturers do not  
6 seem to be committed to implementing inclusive practice of teaching. These results  
7 describe a little knowledge by lecturers towards providing curricular adaptations similar  
8 to those documented in other HE systems (Moriña Díez, Gavira López, and Molina 2015;  
9 Kendall 2018), confirming that teaching remains an area of particular concern.

10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19 Finally, the fact that the participants did not point to the empowerment dimension  
20 or emphasises the importance of physical, mental and spiritual well-being can be  
21 interpreted in one of two ways. The first explanation is that they do not value their  
22 university experience in terms of well-being or empowerment. In fact, SWDs may not  
23 think that their university's is responsible for supporting these functionings. Teaching is  
24 the relevant priority, as the rankings suggest. As Soorenian (2014) points out, access to a  
25 university degree is fundamental for being able to compete in the employment market.  
26 However, when it comes to the empowerment dimension specifically, it is also possible  
27 that adapting to academic contexts has reduced the ability of students to perceive  
28 university well-being as connected to the fulfilment of their own agency. In fact, studies  
29 suggest that university policy-makers have only marginally involved people with  
30 disabilities in the creation of the services and institutional policies implemented on their  
31 behalf (Luna 2009; Beauchamp-Pryor 2013). The fact that the voices of SWDs have  
32 rarely been considered by universities may have affected their aspirations for authentic  
33 and meaningful participation in the academic world.

## 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 **Conclusion**

56  
57 This study has identified several spaces in which gaps emerge between the lived  
58 experiences of students and what they value in HE. First, issues such as socialisation,  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 mobility outside of the university and the usability of spaces (traditionally poorly  
4 studied), must be better addressed by Disability Services in HE to guarantee equal  
5 capabilities and well-being for all students – especially for those with visual impairments.  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10 Second, while academic staff seems to make reasonable adjustments for exams, the  
11 teaching experience is above all supported by the tutor support. Training all lecturers in  
12 disability awareness and the adaptation of their teaching styles to the needs of SWDs is  
13 likely to be essential for implementing a universal learning design. Finally, to empower  
14 SWDs on the campus, universities should seek feedback from students and encourage  
15 them to participate in such initiatives (it is worth recalling that only 12 students from the  
16 University of Padua agreed to take part in this research). As Sen (2009: 17) has remarked,  
17 “the focus of the CA is not just on what a person actually ends up of doing, but also on  
18 what she is capable of doing, whether or not she chooses to make use of that opportunity”.

19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31 In this respect, the SFGD method is relevant for making the CA operational, as it  
32 opens up spaces in which SWDs can exercise their agency by creating a “community of  
33 inquiry” (Author 2019). The SFGD method engages students in all phases of the research  
34 and encourages them to adopt the positions of quasi-impartial spectators to reduce the  
35 risk of relying solely on personal experiences that might tarnish insights. The SFGD helps  
36 reduce the ambiguities and distortions attributed to traditional focus groups (Acocella  
37 2012; Author 2014). The comparability of results across different focus group discussions  
38 is a key advantage of this matrix structure, which ensures the same sequence of questions.  
39 Moreover, SFGDs aid detailed and in-depth analysis of opportunities and barriers,  
40 evaluating the capabilities and functionings with quantitative scores and qualitative  
41 narratives. It follows that the use of SFGDs could be useful, as this study shows, for  
42 obtaining reliable information and data as well as contributing to the empowerment of  
43 SWDs.  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6 **Declaration of interest statement**  
7

8 The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research,  
9 authorship and/or publication of this article.  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

For Peer Review Only



## References

- Acocella, I. 2012. "The focus groups in social research: advantages and disadvantages." *Quality & Quantity* 46 (4): 1125–1136.
- ANED. 2018. "European comparative data on Europe 2020 & People with disabilities." <https://www.disability-europe.net/theme/statistical-indicators>
- Beauchamp-Pryor, K. 2013. *Disabled students in Welsh higher education: A framework for equality and inclusion*. Sense Publishers: Rotterdam.
- Boni, A., and D. Gasper. 2012. "Rethinking the quality of universities: How can human development thinking contribute?." *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 13 (3): 451-470.
- Boni, A., and M. Walker. 2013. "Introduction. Human development, capabilities and universities of the twenty-first century." In *Universities and Human Development: A New Imaginary for the University of the XXI Century*, edited by Alejandra Boni and Melanie Walker, 1–10. London: Routledge.
- Braun, V., and V. Clarke. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2): 77–101.
- Brighouse, H., and E. Unterhalter. 2008. "Primary Goods versus Capabilities: Considering the Debate in Relation to Equalities of Education". In *Capabilities – Handlungsbefähigung und Verwirklichungschancen in der Erziehungswissenschaft*, edited by H.-U. Otto and H. Zegler, 69–84. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag.
- Catley, A., J. Burns, D. Abebe, and O. Suji. 2008. *Participatory Impact Assessment: A Guide for Practitioners*, Somerville: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University.
- CENSIS. 2017. *Accompagnare le università verso una più ampia integrazione degli studenti con disabilità e dsa*. Roma: CENSIS.

- 1  
2  
3 Collins, A., F. Azmat, and R. Rentschler. 2018. "Bringing everyone on the same  
4  
5 journey': revisiting inclusion in higher education." *Studies in Higher Education*: 1–13.  
6  
7  
8 CPS (Current Population Survey) 2017. "Persons with a disability: labor force  
9  
10 characteristics." <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>  
11  
12  
13 East, L., R. Stokes, and M. Walker. 2014. "Universities, the public good and professional  
14  
15 education in the UK." *Studies in Higher Education* 39 (9): 1617–1633.  
16  
17  
18 Fleming, A. R., Oertle, K. M., and A. J. Plotner. 2017. "Student Voices:  
19  
20 Recommendations for Improving Postsecondary Experiences of Students with  
21  
22 Disabilities." *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 30(4): 309–326.  
23  
24  
25 Fuller, M., M. Healey, A. Bradley, and T. Hall. 2004. "Barriers to learning: a systematic  
26  
27 study of the experience of disabled students in one university." *Studies in Higher*  
28  
29 *Education* 29 (3): 303–318.  
30  
31  
32 Hart, C S. 2013. *Aspirations, Education and Social Justice Applying Sen and Bourdieu*.  
33  
34 London: Bloomsbury.  
35  
36  
37 Holloway, S. 2001. "The experience of higher education from the perspective of disabled  
38  
39 students." *Disability & Society* 16 (4): 597–615.  
40  
41  
42 Kendall, L. 2018. "Supporting students with disabilities within a UK university: Lecturer  
43  
44 perspectives." *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 55(6): 694–703.  
45  
46  
47 Kilpatrick, S., Johns, S., Barnes, R., Fischer, S., McLennan, D., and K. Magnussen. 2017.  
48  
49 "Exploring the retention and success of students with disability in Australian higher  
50  
51 education." *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(7): 747–762.  
52  
53  
54 Lombardi, A., Vukovic, B., and I. Sala-Bars. 2015. "International Comparisons of  
55  
56 Inclusive Instruction among College Faculty in Spain, Canada, and the United States."  
57  
58 *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability* 28(4): 447–460.  
59  
60

- 1  
2  
3 Lourens, H., and L. Swartz. 2016. "Experiences of visually impaired students in higher  
4 education: bodily perspectives on inclusive education." *Disability & society*, 31(2):  
5 240-251.  
6  
7  
8  
9
- 10 Luna, C. 2009. "But How Can Those Students Make It Here?: Examining the Institutional  
11 Discourse about What It Means to Be 'LD' at an Ivy League University." *International*  
12 *Journal of Inclusive Education* 13(2): 157– 178.  
13  
14  
15  
16
- 17 Madriaga, M., K. Hanson, C. Heaton, H. Kay, S. Newitt, and A. Walker. 2010.  
18 "Confronting similar challenges? Disabled and non-disabled students' learning and  
19 assessment experiences." *Studies in Higher Education* 35(6): 647–658.  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24
- 25 McLean, M., and M. Walker. 2012. "The possibilities for university-based public-good  
26 professional education: a case-study from South Africa based on the 'capability  
27 approach'." *Studies in Higher Education* 37 (5): 585–601.  
28  
29  
30  
31
- 32 Mitra, S. 2006. "The capability approach and disability." *Journal of Disability Policy*  
33 *Studies* 16: 236–247.  
34  
35  
36
- 37 Moriña, A. 2017. "Inclusive education in higher education: challenges and opportunities."  
38 *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 32 (1): 3–17.  
39  
40  
41
- 42 Moriña, A., R. Gavira López and V.M. Molina. 2015. "Students with disabilities in higher  
43 education: a biographical-narrative approach to the role of lecturers." *Higher*  
44 *Education Research & Development* 34 (1): 147–159. doi:  
45 10.1080/07294360.2014.934329  
46  
47  
48  
49
- 50 Moriña, A., and B. Morgado. 2018. "University surroundings and infrastructures that are  
51 accessible and inclusive for all: listening to students with disabilities. " *Journal of*  
52 *Further and Higher Education* 42 (1): 13–23.  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

- 1  
2  
3 Nussbaum, M. 2000. *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*.  
4  
5 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
6  
7  
8 Nussbaum, M. 2006. "Education and Democratic Citizenship: Capabilities and Quality  
9  
10 Education." *Journal of Human Development* 7 (3): 385–398.  
11  
12  
13 Oliver, M., and C. Barnes. 2010. "Disability Studies, Disabled People and the Struggle  
14  
15 for Inclusion." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 31 (5): 547–560.  
16  
17 doi:10.1080/01425692.2010.500088.  
18  
19  
20 Papatirio, M., and J. Windle. 2012. "The social experience of physically disabled  
21  
22 Australian university students." *Disability & Society* 27 (7): 935–947.  
23  
24  
25 Redpath, J., P. Kearney, P. Nicholl, M. Mulvenna, J. Wallace, and S. Martin. 2013. "A  
26  
27 qualitative study of the lived experiences of disabled post-transition students in higher  
28  
29 education institutions in Northern Ireland." *Studies in Higher Education* 38 (9): 1334-  
30  
31 1350.  
32  
33  
34 Reindal, S. M. 2009. "Disability, capability, and special education: towards a  
35  
36 capability-based theory." *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 24 (2):155–  
37  
38 168. doi: 10.1080/08856250902793610  
39  
40  
41 Richardson, J. T. E. 2009. "The academic attainment of students with disabilities in UK  
42  
43 higher education." *Studies in Higher Education* 34 (2): 123–137.  
44  
45  
46 Sachs, D., and N. Schreuer. 2011. "Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Higher  
47  
48 Education: Performance and participation in student's experiences." *Disability Studies*  
49  
50 *Quarterly* 31 (2).  
51  
52  
53 Sen, A. 1992. *Inequality Re-examined*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.  
54  
55  
56 Sen, A. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.  
57  
58  
59  
60

- 1  
2  
3 Sen, A. 2006. "What do we want from a theory of justice?." *The Journal of Philosophy*  
4  
5 103 (5): 215–238.  
6  
7  
8 Sen, A. 2009. *The Idea of Justice*. London: Allen Lane.  
9  
10  
11 Shakespeare, T. 2014. *Disability rights and wrong revisited*. London: Routledge.  
12  
13 Soorenian, A. 2014. "How inclusive are the pedagogical practices in British Universities?  
14  
15 " *Italian Journal of Disability Studies* 2 (2): 13–47.  
16  
17  
18 Spreafico, A.M.C. 2013. "Liberal arts education and the formation of valuable  
19  
20 capabilities. " In *Human Development and Capabilities. Re-imagining the university*  
21  
22 *of the twenty-first century*, edited by Alejandra Boni and Melanie Walker, 129–144.  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28 Strnadová, I., V. Hájková, and L. Květoňová. 2015. "Voices of university students with  
29  
30 disabilities: inclusive education on the tertiary level—a reality or a distant dream?."  
31  
32 *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 19 (10): 1080–1095.  
33  
34  
35 Terzi, L. 2005. "A capability perspective on impairment, disability and special needs.  
36  
37 Towards social justice in education." *Theory and Research in Education* 3: 197–223.  
38  
39  
40 Terzi, L. 2011. "Vagaries of the natural lottery? Human diversity, disability, and justice:  
41  
42 A capability perspective." In *Disability and disadvantage*, edited by Kimberley  
43  
44 Brownlee and Adam Cureton, 86–111. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
45  
46  
47 Tinklin, T., and J. Hall. 1999. "Getting round obstacles: disabled students' experiences in  
48  
49 higher education in Scotland." *Studies in Higher Education* 24 (2): 183–194.  
50  
51  
52 UN. 2006. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.  
53  
54  
55 UN. 2015. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.  
56  
57  
58 Unesco. 1994. *The Salamanca Statement and framework for action on special needs*  
59  
60 *education*. Paris: Unesco publishing.

1  
2  
3 Walker, M. 2006. *Higher education pedagogies: A capabilities approach*. Maidenhead:  
4  
5 SRHE/Open University Press & McGraw-Hill.  
6  
7

8 Walker, M. 2015. "Advancing student well-being and agency: outline of a 'capabilities-  
9  
10 friendly' approach". *South African Journal of Higher Education* 29(5): 279–296.  
11  
12

13 West, E. A., Novak, D., and C. Mueller. 2016. "Inclusive Instructional Practices Used  
14  
15 and Their Perceived Importance by Instructors." *Journal of Postsecondary Education*  
16  
17 *and Disability* 29(4): 363–374.  
18  
19

20 WHO. 2001. *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*.  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

**Figures**

Figure 1 Research phases

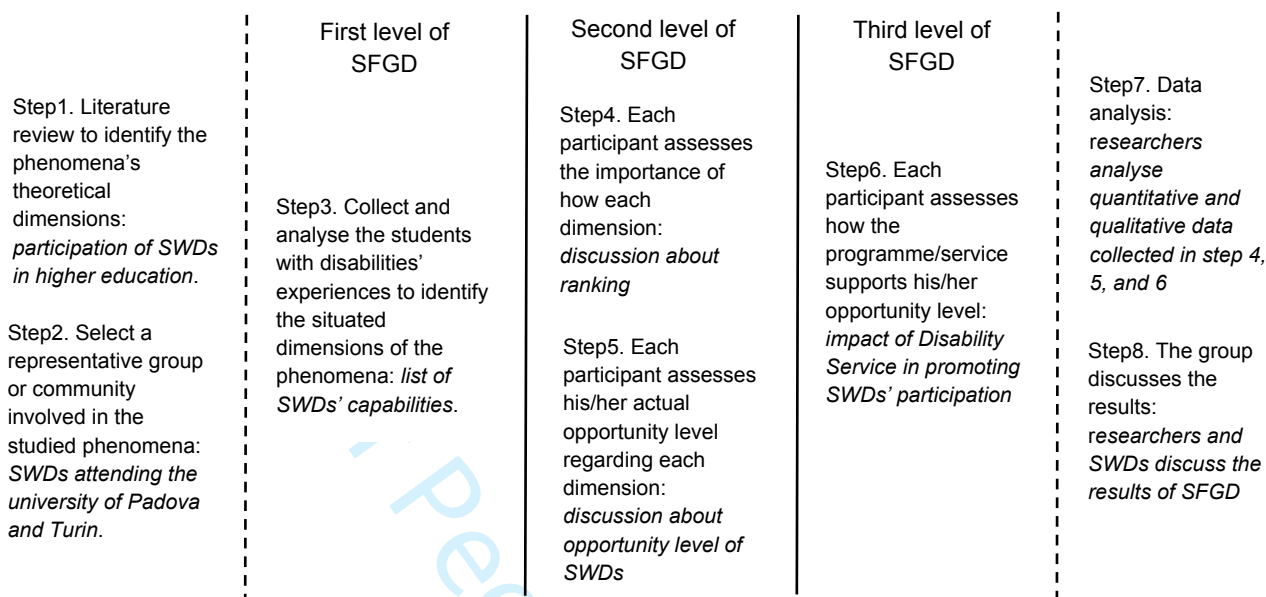


Figure 2 Levels of opportunity for students with disabilities at the University of Turin (N=38)

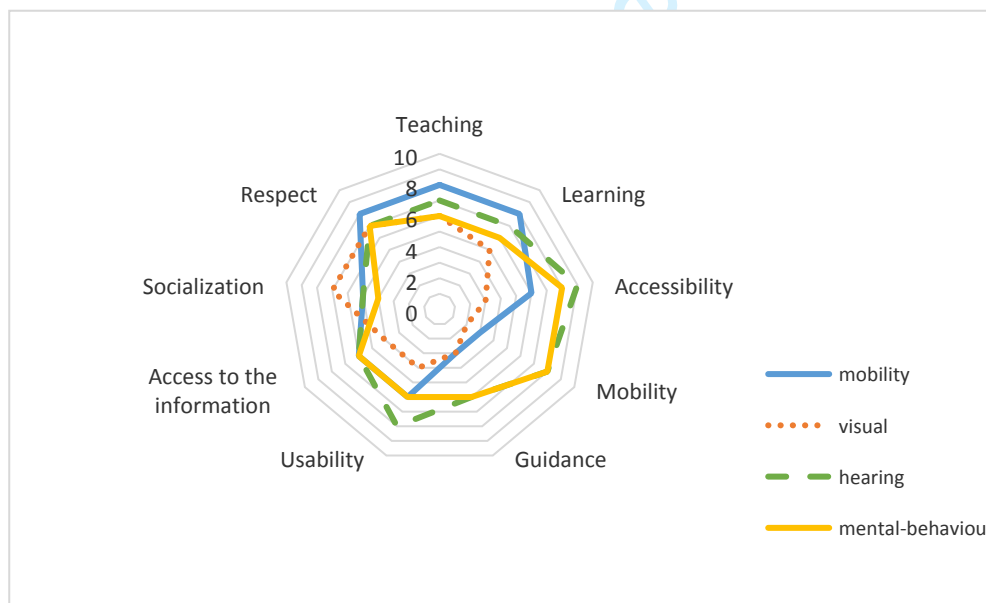


Figure 3 Levels of opportunity for students with disabilities at the University of Padua (N=12)

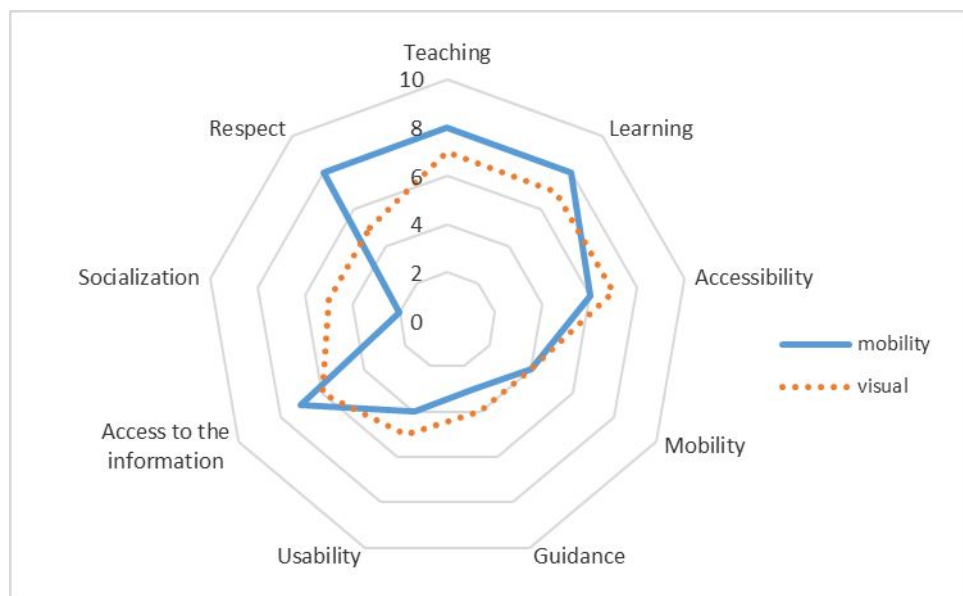


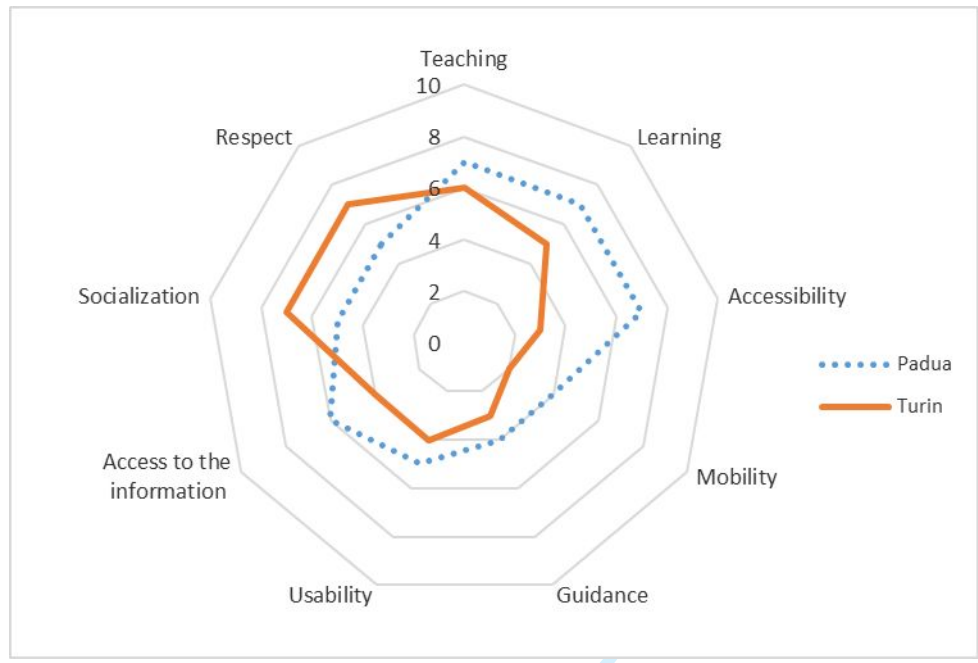
Figure 4 Levels of opportunity for students with mobility disabilities, comparison between the two universities





1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Figure 5 Levels of opportunity for students with visual disabilities, comparison between the two universities



Review Only

Figure 2 Levels of opportunity for students with disabilities at the University of Turin (N=38)

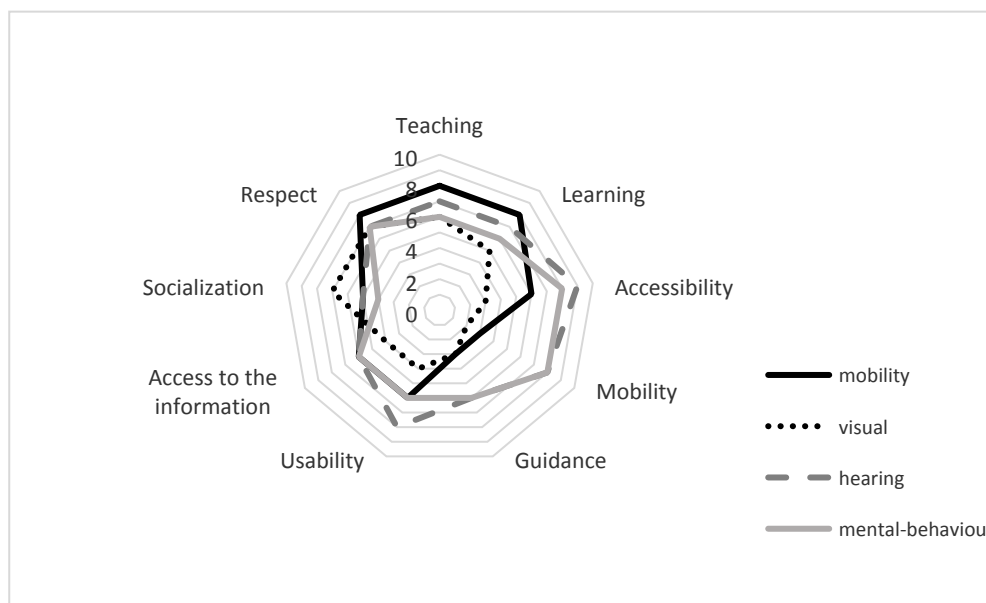


Figure 3 Levels of opportunity for students with disabilities at the University of Padua (N=12)

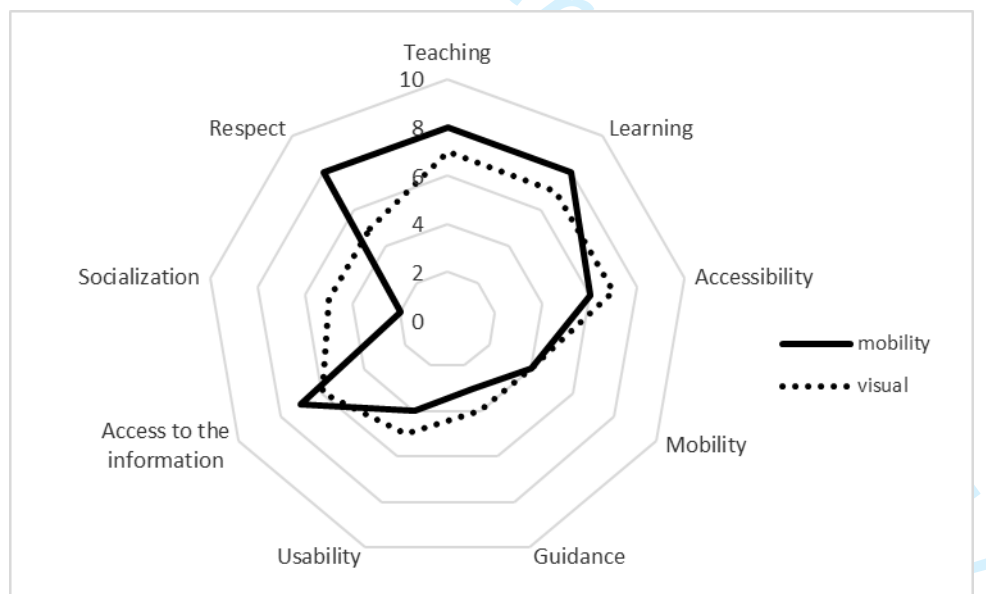


Figure 4 Levels of opportunity for students with mobility disabilities, comparison between the two universities

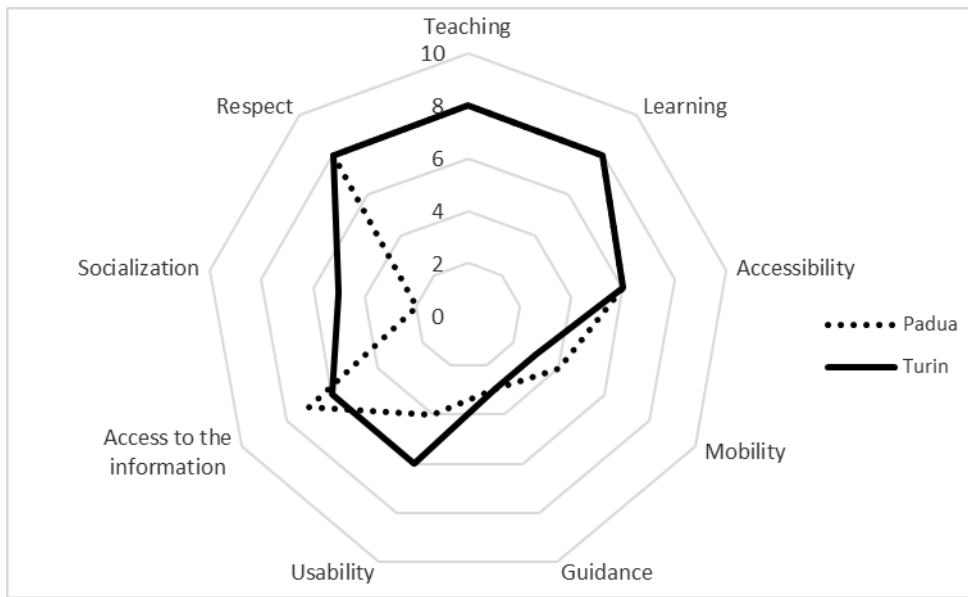


Figure 5 Levels of opportunity for students with visual disabilities, comparison between the two universities

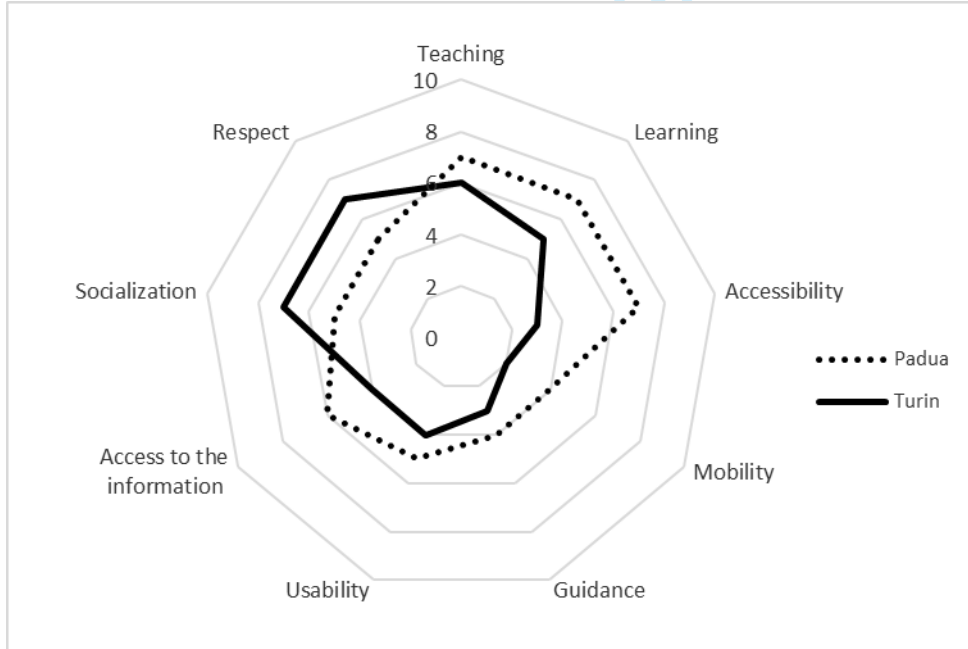


Table 1 Simplified SFGD Matrix

Ranking	Opportunity level (today)	Assessment in terms of opportunity level
How important is each dimension?	Which is the student opportunity level today?	How does the program/service support the student opportunity level?
<b>Dimensions</b>		

Table 2 SFGD Matrix designed with the students with disabilities

Dimensions	Ranking	Opportunity level according to disabilities		Assessment in terms of opportunity level		
		Mobility	Visual	Tutor/ Disability Service	Faculty Staff	Peers
Teaching						
Learning						
Accessibility						
Mobility						
Guidance						
Usability						
Access to the information						
Socialization						
Respect						

Table 3 Comparison

Scientific literature list	SWD list
Teaching and learning	Teaching
Interior and exterior mobility	Learning
Interpersonal relationships and leisure time	Accessibility
Counselling and career development	Mobility
Access to information	Guidance
Respect	Usability
Well-being	Access to the information
Empowerment	Socialization
	Respect