Personal Reflection on barriers and accessibility

2023/06/15 -> phase: survey and barriers checklist

I discovered, while producing the checklist to list all the barriers, that such documents is not already existent; I expected a complete list of possible barriers, divided by area and disability, to be easily available to quickly and simply evaluate public buildings in the eye of accessibility. Contrary to what I thought such document doesn’t exist and papers on the topic of accessibility are often vague and not exhaustive in listing more or less recurrent barriers.

What I also found out is that, even if a building seems to be well structured and present most accessibility features, the real experience of the user is not really considered: even if an accessible options are present, sometimes they happen to be in a different position w.r.t the ones used as main solution, meaning that the disabled person needs to separate himself from the group of other student to be able to access some services. Finding the accessible alternative is sometimes difficult and non-intuitive, even if all accessibility requirements are met, for example because the alternative is not in the same place/very close to the traditional option (es: available bathroom, but at a different location).

Is a building considered accessible for disabled people if their objective needs are satisfied, but still they are treated differently, because a building is designed for “traditional” users and disabled ones separately, instead of looking for solutions that satisfy everyone at the same time. I think the separated solutions to be demeaning and force people to distinguish between disabled and not disabled because the most obvious and used path is not always shared.

Another issue I learned about is the difficulty to easily retrieve information that is not related to the most popular option. Accessible solutions and alternatives are non-intuitive and even less obvious. Finding a suitable entrance, finding the toilet figuring out the purpose of a room without additional information with respect to the one accessible on the place. If you’re blind and enter a room, how can you know in which room you are and if it matches what you’re looking for If you didn’t look it up in advance? How can you find the disabled toilet if you’re visually impaired and cannot see it when walking by? How can you choose goods on shelfs if you’re visually impaired, cannot thouch them and don’t want to ask for help? Even if people are not bothered by answering simple questions to help, the act enforces a feeling of dependability and lack of autonomy; basic information should be accessible to everyone without requiring external help or previous preparation. Exploring an environment to find what is needed is not costless for everyone and it can be way more time confusing in case of a disability.