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Experiencing movement through access: public transport in Johannesburg

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Masters Research Report

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0Research Title:

Experiencing movement through access: Public transport in Johannesburg.

Abstract

The main research question for this research report is: How does accessibility to, and/or the experience of, public transport in Johannesburg shape the identity of a person with a disability? This thesis aims to understand the experiences of people with disabilities in terms of how public transport in Johannesburg accommodates their disabilities and aims to look at a number of questions around the shaping of the identities of people with disabilities when using public transport in the City of Johannesburg.

This research is based on an auto-ethnographic account of my own experiences, along with five participants who took part in semi-structured interviews. I found, through this research, that accessibility is far more than just ramps and lifts. The public transport sector in the city is a space that gives people different experiences that shape who they are as people – it hence raises questions around social understandings of personhood. Furthermore, it shapes certain strategies of navigating the city: in order to have some sense of independence some people with disabilities either endure the challenges that they come across in spaces like taxis and taxi ranks

or some resort to using alternative routes while others use other modes of public transport available in the city.

The central argument of this research is: since most everyday public transport like minibus taxis and buses are not fully accessible for people with disabilities, this makes them question their identities and depend on others. The implications of this is that when people with disabilities use public transport they enter that space with a knowledge that it's not fully accessible to accommodate their individual disabilities and they would have to adapt themselves in whatever ways they can, and they also have to develop a certain understanding of how they are perceived by the public; as a result, how they interact with the space, and the types of interactions they have, shapes their identities.