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Knowledge Mobilization Strategy within a Municipality to Improve Accessibility of the Built Environment: A Research Protocol

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Abstract. Introduction: The increased number of people living with a disability and in urban areas makes it essential to create accessible and inclusive cities for all. Universal accessibility (UA) was recognized in 2006 by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Municipalities play a key role in the implementation of accessible environments but are facing challenges. Adapted and effective knowledge mobilization (KM) strategies are necessary to foster implementation practices of accessible environments. However, we don’t know much about the strategies used by municipalities, as well as their effectiveness, to mobilize knowledge in the implementation of UA measures. Objective: This project aims to support the municipality of Quebec, Canada, in best practices of KM to improve the implementation of UA measures. Methods and analysis: A case study based on a realist evaluation and a participatory approach will be used. (1) A scoping review was conducted to document strategies used by other municipalities. (2) Determinants of implementation will be documented by a questionnaire created from the CFIR. (3) Focus groups will be conducted to co-create KM interventions. The interventions will be implemented and monitored for 12 months. (4) The questionnaire will be retaken to assess the effects of the interventions. Results and discussion: findings of the scoping review outline importance of the involvement of all stakeholders, information sessions and interactive knowledge mobilization strategies to facilitate the implementation. Conclusion: KM strategies adapted to municipal context will actively facilitate the introduction of new evidence to change practices and behaviors regarding UA.

Keywords: universal accessibility; design for all; municipality; knowledge mobilization.

1 Introduction

Worldwide, 14.3% of the population live with a disability[1]. In Canada, this proportion rises to 20%[2, 3]. It is also estimated that by 2050, two-thirds of the world’s population will live in urban areas[4]. It is therefore essential to make cities accessible and inclusive for all people, including those with disabilities[1]. Actions improving the accessibility of environments are recognized to benefits from the entire population, not only
people living with disabilities[4-8]. Indeed, an accessible environment is an added value for all: the elderly with a loss of mobility, families with strollers, or tourists with their suitcases. The concept of universal accessibility refers to the character of an environment that provides equitable access to the infrastructure, the services, the transportation, the information, or the employment[9]. Universal accessibility allows all individuals to carry out their daily activities independently, in an equitable and inclusive approach[5, 9]. In 2006, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognized the legislative obligation to implement actions that increase universal accessibility of environments[1]. This convention marked a turning point in the approach to disability and played a pioneering role in the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, by emphasizing the basic human right to mobility and access to services and infrastructure for all[10, 11]. In Canada, the Canadian Accessibility Act aims to ensure the economic, social and civic participation of all persons in Canada, regardless of disability, and to enable them to fully exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a barrier-free country[12], promoting the development of universal accessibility measures.

Municipalities play a key role in the implementation of accessible environments[13, 14]. However, those organizations are facing different challenges when implementing better universal accessibility practices to reduce the risks of social exclusion and improve the participation of individuals living with disabilities[14, 15]. The implementation of practices improving the universal accessibility of built environments by municipalities is complex and presents several challenges[16] due to the singularity of the municipal structure (e.g. unstable relationships, uncertainty, unpredictable changes) [17, 18]. The identification of adapted and effective knowledge mobilization strategies is necessary to foster implementation practices of accessible environments. Implementation specialists suggest that implementation strategies be adapted to the specific context and designed to allow an effective actualization of the innovation[19-21]. Knowledge mobilization strategies enable for the development and implementation of a new process[22, 23] and bridge the gap between research innovation and practice. We currently know very little about the strategies used by municipalities, as well as their effectiveness, to mobilize knowledge to improve the implementation of universal accessibility measures. It is therefore important to explore the different determinants of implementation to better tailor strategies and facilitate knowledge mobilization and implementation of accessible environments[24].

2 Objectives

This project aims to support the municipality of Quebec, Canada in the implementation of best practices in knowledge mobilization to improve the implementation of universal accessibility principles. The specific objectives are to: (1) Synthesize evidence about the knowledge mobilization strategies used by municipal organizations to improve universal accessibility and their effectiveness, (2) To document the determinants of universal accessibility among municipal employees in Quebec City, (3) To co-create and implement a universal accessibility intervention, optimized specifically for each
municipality, (4) To evaluate the mechanisms and effects of the intervention on municipal employees with respect to the implementation of the universal accessibility measures developed.

3 Methods and Analysis

A case study based on the foundations of a realist evaluation and a participatory approach will be used to address all objectives. The project is presented in three distinct phases; 1) documentation (objectives 1 and 2); 2) implementation (objective 3); and 3) evaluation (objective 4).

3.1 Phase 1. Documentation

Objective 1. A scoping review was conducted following the steps of Arskey and O’Malley and the PRISMA guidelines. The search strategy included two concepts: (1) Universal accessibility (e.g., Universal* design, Universal* access*, design for all, accessible design, facility design) and (2) Local governments (e.g., Local govern*, City, Cities, municipal*, county, towns). Searches were completed in August 2021 and limited to 2006-2021 (begin of the application of the UN-CRPD) and to French or English articles. The data was extracted independently by two authors and was classified in an excel table by implementation, dissemination, integration, or capacity-building strategies. Barriers and facilitators identified in studies were also extracted. Raw data of the studies were reported as author, year, area of study and objective (what was implemented). Analysis was conducted according to the combined used of the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) and the Theoretical Domain Framework (TDF) [1-4], allowed to identify determinants, facilitators, and barriers to the implementation of universal accessibility measures by municipalities.

Objective 2. Initial determinants facilitating and hindering universal accessibility implementation will be documented by a questionnaire created from the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) [4]. The questionnaire is created in collaboration with the City's steering committee (two researchers, a PhD Candidate, a city representative of universal accessibility committee and two city managers). It is also validated by a committee of experts made up of 4 researchers specialized in accessibility and implementation fields as well as one research professional specialized in universal accessibility. To build the questionnaire, the various CFIR constructs were mapped to existing tools in a five-step process: (1) Looking at references used by Damshroder and al., (2) Overview of existing systematic review on tools based on CFIR, (3) Documenting constructs in PubMed, (4) Checking out JBI implementation science table of contents, and (5) Transforming questions from the CFIR qualitative tool into quantitative questions. Based on these 5 steps, questions were proposed for each construct and was validated by the expert committee as well as City's steering committee. The questionnaire will be distributed to municipal employees. Descriptive analysis will classify the determinants identified as barriers or facilitators to implementation. Further
3.2 Phase 2. Implementation

**Objective 3.** Two focus groups with managers of Quebec City will be conducted. The first one will be to identify an initial theory of change, based on the determinants identified as barriers and the literature documented in the scoping review. This theory will take the form of a context-mechanism-effects (C-M-E) association. The second focus group will be to co-create the knowledge mobilization interventions by identifying its final format with the city managers (e.g., Workshops, videos, awareness campaign, sensitivity training, etc.). The constructed interventions will then be implemented in the cities and monitored for 12 months.

3.3 Phase 3. Evaluation

**Objective 4.** The initial questionnaire will be retaken by municipal employees representing all job types to assess the effects of the interventions on the implementation determinants of universal accessibility measures. Same analysis as objective 2 will be conducted to compare the results. In addition, ten interviews will be led with municipal employees, to understand the efficiency of the intervention and what worked, for whom, and under what circumstances.

4 Results

4.1 Objective 1

1328 articles were identified through the search process and 236 duplicates were removed. The remaining 1132 articles were screened based on titles and abstracts according to the inclusion criteria. 1059 articles were excluded, and 73 articles were subjected to a full-text review of their eligibility according to the inclusion criteria. Of these articles, 66 were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. The references of the remain 6 articles were included in the final review [14, 25-29]. Findings from the scoping review outline the importance of involvement of all stakeholders as an implementation process strategy [25, 27-29]. It also put forward the importance of publications and reports to foster knowledge as dissemination strategy [14, 25, 29]. Integration strategies listed by studies are implication of expert in landscape and accessibility to increase skills [14, 26, 28], interactive and diversify knowledge mobilization strategies (video, photovoice, journal)[14, 28] and representation of people with disabilities into the process[25, 28]. Few studies talked about capacity-building strategy, but the two most recent studies talked about the importance of new knowledge assessment[14, 28]. Involvement of all stakeholders was identified as a facilitator by 5 studies over 6 [14,
as the lack of awareness by municipal actors was identified as a barrier by half of the studies [25, 27, 29].

4.2 Objectives 2-3-4

The second objective will allow to identify facilitators and barriers perceived by municipal employees of Quebec City. These results, joined with the results of the scoping review, will act as a basic premise to guide the co-creation of knowledge mobilization interventions and tools with the city (objective 3). These interventions will answer an existing need and will be adapted to the reality of municipal organizations. The fourth and last objective will allow to evaluate the impact of these new knowledge mobilization interventions on the determinants of implementation among municipal employees.

5 Discussion

The implementation of knowledge mobilization interventions adapted to the specific needs of the municipalities of Quebec City is an innovation. Indeed, literature about knowledge mobilization strategies is increasing in the health field. However, it seems that in urban planning and universal accessibility, we have little information on the strategies used to promote change in practices, nor how effective these strategies are. Thus, this project will allow us to propose innovative solutions in a context that is still poorly documented, to improve knowledge and skills related to the implementation of universal accessibility practices and inspire other municipalities. The intervention will facilitate the operationalization of the practices by municipal employees, which could contribute to the creation of accessible environments and promote the social participation of people with disabilities.

6 Conclusion

The implementation of universal accessibility measures requires effective strategies that are adapted to the municipal organizational context. Knowledge mobilization will actively facilitate the introduction of new evidence to change practices and behaviors, and to determine which methods work best in which context. This research project will also identify what mechanisms for change are effective in a given context to achieve the desired results in terms of application of universal accessibility measures by municipalities.

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