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# The experiences of societal participation of people with disabilities: An interview-study among people with disabilities in Finland

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## Abstract

Participation in different areas of life, such as the labour market or leisure activities, is important for everyone. The experiences of societal participation for people with disabilities may however be influenced by different kinds of barriers limiting the participation, as well as enabling factors, which enhance participation. Therefore societal participation is a cornerstone for disability policies in Finland, as well as internationally. The aim of this study is to shed light on how people with disabilities in Finland experience their own societal participation and to examine what kind of barriers and facilitators they highlight. The study consists of 13 individual qualitative interviews among working-age people with different kinds of disabilities. The general aim is divided into the following research questions; what kind of meaning do people with disabilities themselves give to societal participation, and how do they experience their own participation in society? What kind of facilitators do they identify for their societal participation and what do they consider as possible challenges or barriers? And finally, what do they see as to be needed in order to favour participation of people with disabilities, both regarding themselves and people with disabilities in general? The findings show that the persons interviewed see societal participation primarily in terms of a right to equality i.e. to be able to do the same things as everyone else. Most of them also consider themselves as quite involved in society, and also see a positive trend concerning the societal participation of people with disabilities in general. Different kinds of disability services, assistive technology and legislation were some of the facilitators highlighted, while for example inaccessibility and negative attitudes were seen as barriers to societal participation. Many of the persons interviewed called for increased accessibility and improvement in attitudes in society, as well as more flexibility and individual solutions concerning disability services.

**Keywords:** societal participation, people with disabilities, barriers, facilitators, interview, study

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