



13th ALTER Conference: Transformations



University of Innsbruck
8 - 10 July 2025



Conference website and abstract submission: <https://alterconf2025.sciencesconf.org/>

ALTER, the European Society for Disability Research, is a scholarly network that promotes research on disability in the social sciences and humanities. It welcomes contributions from the scientific community across the globe.

The 2025 ALTER Conference theme of ‘Transformations’ is an invitation to analyse dynamics of change in disability rights and disability research. The underpinning question is whether changes in the social, cultural, economic, and political systems shaping the lives of persons with disabilities are reducing inequalities or lead to more pessimistic conclusions about increasing exclusion and precarity, including in the research arena.

The idea of ‘transformation’ applies to very different fields, including ideas, society, organisations, culture, technology, policy, and research. It encompasses utopian visions of intersectional disability justice that imagine new forms of space, time, and socio-political relations (Berne et al. 2018; Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018). The UNCRPD is undoubtedly an important impetus for major legal and policy changes. Broader developments in the societal, cultural, and political recognition of disability, neurodiversity, and mental health also deserve analysis.

Crucially, social change is not guaranteed. Exploring transformation relates to a question posed by last year’s ALTER conference: why are disability and ableism still real? The UNCRPD Committee has started to note declines in disability rights in its reviews of European countries, expressing concerns about inclusive education, accessibility, deinstitutionalization, participation, and empowerment. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed policy and societal ambivalence about disability equality (Mladenov and Brennan 2021) whilst welfare state cuts and the rise of rightwing extremism are directly threatening inclusion and minority rights (Disability Rights UK 2024).

Transformation therefore raises questions about the responsiveness of political structures, social services, and the public sphere to input from persons with disabilities and their organisations. Decision-making in the field of disability is often not democratic or transparent despite governments and service providers adopting agendas of rights, participation, and co-production. Classic questions of ‘nothing about us without us’ and ‘who speaks?’ continue to be salient. Democracy, diversity, and representation are also relevant issues inside the disability rights movement, for example, in the emergence of new issues, groups, spaces, and organisations.

The field of Disability Studies is itself experiencing transformation by growing as an academic discipline and branching into new areas, including Crip theory, Neurodiversity Studies, Deaf Studies, Black Disability Studies and Mad Studies. These developments potentially risk widening the distance of Disability Studies from its original connection to movements of persons with disabilities (Goodley et al. 2019). Disability Studies is also exposed to attacks on critical scholarship about gender, race, sexuality and diversity. It is therefore important to reflect on the conditions in which disability research can achieve social change. The topic of transformative knowledge includes the question of how archives can record and store lived experiences of disability and disability rights activism.

The conference, therefore, invites analysis of disability-related transformations, especially the degree to which change processes are democratic and inclusive. Which people, organisations and movements drive transformational knowledge and actions? What are the dynamics of knowledge production that underpin social change? How can models and concepts that are rooted in the perspectives of persons with disabilities lead to transformations in society, culture and policy?

Topics:

We are looking forward to an exciting interdisciplinary and international scientific conference. We welcome research-related presentations from academics, activists, professionals, and people with lived experience of disability from all geographic regions. Submissions from early career researchers are especially encouraged.

The ALTER conference attracts disability-related research in many fields, especially social policy, sociology, anthropology, inclusive education, law, political science, history, and cultural studies. This is not an exhaustive list, and contributions from other fields are warmly invited, which might include philosophy, psychology, architecture, urban studies, design, critical health and rehabilitation studies, and sport studies. The conference seeks research contributions addressing one or more of the following streams:

1. Policy and societal contexts for disability rights

This stream considers changes in policy, legal and societal frameworks shaping the lives of people with disabilities, especially the impact of changes on inclusion and disability rights. Potential areas that can be addressed include:

- everyday life, disability identities, disability policies, independent living, personal assistance, social services, inclusive education, poverty, living conditions, employment and labour market, social policy, public space, accessibility, mobility, UNCRPD implementation.

2. Activism and campaigning

This stream addresses how disability rights activism and campaigning can lead to transformation in social, cultural and policy fields. Transformations within disability activism are also important, including recognition of intersectional diversity and the emergence of new groups led by people with disabilities and other actors. Topics include:

- Online activism; crip and queer movements; intersectionality and diversity within disability activism; disability rights organisations; transnational networking; self-advocacy and mutual support; engagement with policy actors; protest and campaigning; alliances, allyship and solidarity.

3. Culture, history, and disability archives

This stream welcomes contributions about changing understandings and experiences of disability in historical and cultural contexts, especially challenges to dominant ideas of disability. These analyses could relate to:

- history, literature, art, design, culture, religious objects, media, social media, medical humanities, everyday life, establishment and development of disability archives.

4. Disability knowledge and disability research

This stream reflects on processes of creating conceptual and empirical knowledge about disability, including transformations within Disability Studies and related disciplines. The contributions may cover:

- theory-building; conceptual developments; ethical questions; methodological innovations; interdisciplinary approaches to disability; the role of disability in epistemologies of the body, mind, and world; Disability, Crip, Mad, Deaf and Neurodiversity Studies.

5. Disability Futures

This stream contemplates how understandings and experiences of disability will evolve in the future, for example, in light of transformations in technology, social welfare, and ethics. It critically discusses new and emerging topics around disability, which might cover:

- utopian ideas; disability justice; reproductive justice and genetic selection; international solidarity; end-of-life and assisted suicide; rise of the 'rehabilitation industry'; technological developments; artificial intelligence; precarity of democracy and economy.

6. Open stream

For contributions that do not seem to fit well in one of the above streams. The conference organisers will then assign accepted papers to a panel.

Languages of the conference

The conference language is English. Closed captioning, audio loop, Sign Language interpretation and potentially other support with communication can be provided on request – please provide details in the comment box when submitting your abstract.

Format

In-person attendance. Hybrid participation is unfortunately not technically possible.

Types of contribution

The conference welcomes four types of contribution:

- *Individual submission*: a research intervention on a focused topic. The conference organisers will group individual presentations into thematic panels.
- *Joint session/symposium*: three to four individual presentations addressing an overarching research topic, followed by audience questions and discussion. Joint sessions can include presentations by people with lived experience of disability, artists, activists or professionals.
- *Workshop/open space/collaboration space*: this is a new format for the ALTER conference to request a time slot for one of four specific goals: (i) run a workshop on research, teaching or practical skills relevant to disability activism or disability research (ii) unite colleagues interested in a specific research topic (iii) hold a meeting of an existing network (iv) present a major disability research project. These sessions must be open to all interested conference participants and interactive in format to allow exchange, discussion, and connection. These sessions will take place in 1-2 dedicated slots during the conference, separate from the panels with research presentations and symposia.
- *Book presentation*: for books on disability issues published since 2021. Presentations of approximately 10 minutes will be grouped into a larger session.

Submission

Proposals must be submitted no later than **31 January 2025** on the ALTER conference website. To submit, it is required to create an account on the Sciencesconf platform if you do not already have one: <https://alterconf2025.sciencesconf.org/>

Proposals must be written in English according to the following guidelines:

- *Individual submission*: an abstract of maximum 500 words that explains the presentation title, background/research problematic, methods/data and results (depending on the practices of the discipline) and an indicative bibliography. Please indicate the conference stream most relevant to the paper or session.
- *Joint session/symposium*: a session proposal of maximum 500 words that clearly explains the aim of the session and what innovative knowledge will be presented. The session proposal should include the names and institutional affiliations of all presenters, and the titles of their papers. In the symposium submission, please also upload a file with 300-word abstracts for each of the 3-4 papers to be presented in the session, following the same guideline as proposals for *individual submissions*. **One symposium application for all papers is sufficient – individual speakers do not need to submit separate abstracts.**
- *Workshop/open space/Collaboration space*: a 500-word proposal that explains the aim of the event, i.e.: (i) running a workshop on skills for disability-related research or practice, (ii) bringing colleagues together on a specific research topic, (iii) meeting of an existing network or group, (iv) presenting a major research project. Please include the event title, aim(s), explanation of its interactive format, names/institutions of the proposed moderators, expected audience and initial list of participants (if known).
- *Book presentation*: a 300-word summary of the book, 200-word biography, information on any reviews that have been published and a link to the publisher's website.

Key dates

1 December 2024	Abstract submission opens
31 January 2025	Submission deadline for abstracts
15 March 2025	Decisions by the Scientific Committee
15 May 2025	Conference registration for presenters
8-10 July 2025	Conference in Innsbruck

Confirmed keynote presentations at the ALTER conference

- **Katerina Kolarova, Charles University (Prague).**

Katerina Kolarova's work engages intersections of disability, crip, queer and critical race theories. The research for the book *Rehabilitative Postsocialism* was awarded the Tobin Siebers Prize for Disability Studies in the Humanities.

Forthcoming book (2025): *Rehabilitative Postsocialism: Disability, Sex, and Race in Eastern Europe*, University of Michigan Press, <https://press.umich.edu/Books/R/Rehabilitative-Postsocialism2>.

- **C-TV (If I Tell You I Like You...) by Cordula Thym and Eva Egermann (Vienna)**

C-TV is an award-winning film that uses satire to critique ableist and heteronormative dynamics in society. It depicts a fictional television station and its interviews with people with disabilities about their daily lives and their artistic and political work. Directors Egermann and Thym portray a world in which participation, inclusion, agency, and visibility are realized far more strongly than in our current world. Their film is playful, humorous, and experimental.

The film C-TV is recognised as cutting-edge radical critique and excellent cinema, having been awarded the Diagonale Prize for Innovative Cinema in 2023 and the Golden Medusa for the queerest aesthetic work in 2023.

ALTER is pleased to screen the film and host a Q&A session with its directors.

- Film (with English subtitles): C-TV, 2023, Austria, 30 minutes.
- Discussion with directors:
 - Eva Egermann, <https://www.sixpackfilm.com/en/catalogue/filmmaker/7305/>
 - Cordula Thym, <https://www.sixpackfilm.com/de/catalogue/filmmaker/3672/>

References

Disability Rights UK (2024) Disability Rights UK Stands Against Far-Right, Racist Violence: Full Statement, 6 August 2024, <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/disability-rights-uk-stands-against-far-right-racist-violence-full-statement>.

Berne, P., Levins Morales, A., Langstaff, D. and Sins Invalid (2018) Ten principles of disability justice. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 46:1/2, 227-230.

Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. (2018) *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*. Arsenal Pulp.

Goodley, D., Lawthom, R., Liddiard, K. and Runswick-Cole, K. (2019) Provocations for Critical Disability Studies. *Disability & Society*, 34:6, 972-997.

Mladenov, T. and Brennan, C. (2021) The global COVID-19 Disability Rights Monitor: implementation, findings, disability studies response. *Disability and Society*, 36:8, 1356-1361.