

Mhan-Access: Producing knowledge using inclusive dynamics & making the explanatory models of disability, accessible in a ludic way.

Short summary

2025

Research conducted by :



Research supported by :



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Foreword

In this project, 17 persons from four different countries worked together during 26 months using an inclusive and participatory approach in order to create an educational game about the explanatory models of disability. They had different background: people with lived experience of impairment and disability, health and social care professionals involved in training personnel for work in care services, and human and social science researchers:

Advocacy Paris-Île de France: Marie-Claude Saint-Pé (France)

Anömalie: Quiterie Maucotel (Belgium)

ASA-HM: Viviane Guerdan, Pierre Weber, Anne-Sophie Kupper (Switzerland)

EHESP: Marie Cuenot (Arènes UMR 6051) ; Kerri-Anne Pierre ; William Sherlaw (France)

GRAVIR asbl: Baptiste Morin (Belgium)

HADéPaS – ETHICS EA7446 (UCLille): Agnès D’Arripe ; Cédric Routier (France)

Handi’chiens: Jessy Villepreux (France)

HELB-IP: Helyett Wardavoir (Belgium)

HelHa: Emilie Brasset (Belgium)

IFPEK: Bénédicte Dubois (France)

RIPPH: Jean-Yves Le Capitaine (France)

SSEO: Diana Chiriacescu (Romania)

Every person accepted to be observed by a researcher to better understand how the whole group managed to work using this approach. The project was coordinated by the EHESP. Although one person chose to leave the project after one year, and some difficulties were encountered in paying the people with disabilities, the whole group was globally very satisfied by this experience of inclusive collaboration and by the created game « the Challenges of Minach ».

This report provides a summary of the project and the results of observation and describes the game that has been built during this project.

Summary of the project

The Mhan-Access project had two main aims:

- 1) Make the explanatory models of disability (ICF and MDH-PPH) accessible in a ludic way;
- 2) Produce knowledge about how to create a game using an inclusive approach.

The project was designed and carried out by a transnational team (Belgium, France, Romania & Switzerland). People with lived experience of impairment and disability, health and social care professionals involved in training personnel for work in care services, and human and social science researchers were gathered together. The game which was created 'the Challenges of Minach' is an educational, cooperative, inclusive board and card game. It is based on lived situations experienced by people with disabilities, partners of the project, in the training, internships and work sectors. Such situations were translated in an imaginary fantasy world: namely that of Minach. The game calls upon players to help characters to meet challenges connected to the situations. To achieve this, each player gives their view on the decisions to take and choice of cards to employ.

You may choose different cards displayed "Around me", "My Capacities", "Kirali", and "Without End". The game aims to raise awareness of the multidimensional approach of disability, the positive or negative impact of the environment on the disability situation lived by a person, and to transform social representations of disability.

The game targets a wide adult public. It will be available free of charge in French.

The design process was observed by a researcher and this allowed dynamic adjustments to make in order to bring about greater inclusive game creation. The data collected concerning notably cooperation strategies, decision making, and emotional factors offer new knowledge on the dynamics of inclusive game creation.

Results pertaining to observation of the participative process

The Mhan-Access project is founded on participative methodology involving active collaboration between people having lived experience of disability, care and educational professionals, trainers and academic researchers. The project aims at designing an inclusive and collaborative game based around models of disability classification, namely the CF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, WHO, 2001) and MDH-PPH (Model of Human Development -Disability Creation Process, RIPPH, 2018) emerged from the observation that a person with special needs in the group did not understand when other members of the group spoke about such classifications. Hence the idea to codesign a game to render them accessible for all. The project aimed to involve all the stakeholders at all stages of the project. Knowledge production is conceived as a dynamic inclusive process.

The group took the decision to adopt a reflexive stance as regards to the participative and inclusive codesign of the game. All group meetings (ten sessions of two to three days) became the object of participatory observation with the aim in mind of "rendering the world under study visible from within" (Coulon, 2002, p.103) in order to understand the group dynamics, their world views, and the rationality of the individuals concerned. Hence the stance taken up by the person responsible for observing the group was that of a "participatory observer". This implied that the members of the group were well aware that they were under observation. Everyone was informed and understood the role of the observer and what were the objectives of

observing the group. Full and enlightened consent was sought from all the participants to guarantee the ethical nature of the procedure.

Participatory observation and analysis of group dynamics

Participatory observation carried out in the above manner allows the collection of data on non-verbal behaviour and secondary interactions. This is often ignored in formal reports but are highly revealing with respect to group dynamics. They are essential for good understanding of the stances, relations and roles within a group. Context also has a major impact on behaviour observed and implicit 'rules of the game' adopted. Certain behaviour may be deemed as being suitable or unsuitable according to the situation. The analysis put forward aims to reveal such communication rules at times, non-conscious, which guide and structure communication within the group. In other words what involved here, is to identify rituals of interaction and implicit codes of communication which progressively are constructed and become what may be termed as the 'communicational score' of the group.

Contrary to common practice, analytical feedback of the observation was given to the group at regular intervals throughout the whole project. Thus, nine feedback sessions pertaining to the ten two-or-three-day sessions observed were scheduled. At these sessions the researcher offered a report on the group dynamics enriched with theoretical insights enabling a better comprehension of the observations and favouring future improved interaction between members of the group together with enhanced inclusion and participation within the group.

It should be noted that particular attention was paid to examining the participation of all: Did specific communication rules favour or hamper inclusion? Facilitators and obstacles were analysed, notably with respect to links to the 'disability creation process' (Fougeyrollas, 2021) with particular emphasis on the importance of the environment within the dynamics of social participation. Group discussion on the feedback reports aimed to raise awareness and maintain a degree of vigilance with respect to the participatory process as well as identifying and resolving tensions within the group and allowed adjustments to practices, thus avoiding the exclusion of certain project members from certain areas of the project. This action-research philosophy allowed on-going questioning of each and everyone's practice and constant adjustments to the participatory process.

Data treatment and results analysis

Analysis of results were based on thematic content analysis (Bardin 1977/2007) of the reports of observations. These notes were coded by theme, with reference to interactionist frameworks, the Disability creation process and the notion of capacitating environments. (Vidal-Gomel et al., 2012). Themes were isolated and analysis covered, the evolving nature of contributions from different participants, meeting format and organisation, specific statements of rules, interactions, communication styles (use of complicated expressions, humour...) and references used in argumentation (financial, accessibility, budget, etc).

Particular attention was paid to meta-communication, that is to say, instances where relations between different participants were mentioned notably with respect to group objectives, the clarification of roles of everyone, proposals for how one should work together but also measures of recognition, encouragement or expression of misgivings and positive or negative feelings. At the end of the project, analysis of the whole set of project meetings, allowed the comparison of observed communicational rules with those explicitly laid down in a codesigned Charter elaborated by all the project members at the beginning of the project. The gap between the agreed principles laid down and actual practice was highlighted and shared with the group.

Main results

In order to guarantee the existence of a capacitating environment (Falzon, 2013), that is to say an environment which is not deleterious for the individual, which takes into account inter-individual differences and compensates impairments and allows the development by everyone of new skills and competencies, widen the possibilities of actions, and augment autonomy, the group adapted their practice and organisation.

These included:

- On-line meetings were split into regional groups allowing the gathering of many members on one site but still permitting the participation of other group members on-line. In other words, hybrid on-line video and on-site meetings were held,
- Travelling in pairs for on-site group meetings,
- Specific meetings between the project coordinator and people with disability partners,
- The co-design of a Charter to favour inclusiveness.

The Charter was elaborated through discussion with all the participants. It was then formalised by one of the participants. It had the aim of defining rules of group functioning and communication. The underlying idea of the Charter was to set up an environment in which everyone in the group felt at ease and could participate according to their needs and capacities.

Overall, the Charter was well respected, nevertheless, in spite of the good will of all the members of the group and wish for shared inclusion, certain rules proved difficult to apply. E.g., the use of clear and explicit communication, one of the founding principles of the Charter, was in tension with the use of technical language or references to specific domains or concepts not sufficiently made explicit. This may lead to the exclusion of certain members of the group who did not possess mastery of such codes. Equality expressly highlighted in the Charter became difficult to achieve due to the emergence of implicit hierarchies which tended to inhibit certain members of the group to give their point of view or proposing initiatives. Roles of facilitator, discussion leader or experts emerged and were tacitly accepted by the group. Even though these were not formalised, they influenced both discussion, turn taking and decision making.

The analysis of the meetings showed that how the Charter was applied varied with time. For example, the rule *'Everyone shall have time to express themselves at their own rhythm'* was well respected at the beginning of the project. But as the project progressed, individuals were prey to contradictory demands. Certain persons chose to self-censure themselves so not to have the feeling of dominating the discussion or slowing down the meeting. Lastly, certain rules were respected but also showed their limits. Thus, if the agenda of the meeting was sent in advance it rarely met objections, and certain participants did not read it before the meeting which tended to limit any real preparation and their effective participation.

If the Charter, co-designed by the group before being formalised by two members of the group constitutes an important set of principles, experience has shown how fragile the participatory process may be. Despite the best intentions, constraints and tensions may emerge and certain group members risk being left behind. On-going vigilance and adjustments are essential to maintain inclusion. As was deplored by certain members of the group, the Charter could have been adopted by the group with greater enthusiasm. Even if the feedback sessions given after observation reminded members of certain rules expressed in the Charter, the group never explicitly and collectively chose to discuss and revisit the Charter. One member of the group ended up almost totally leaving the project before its end. If personal reasons, related to a new and developing professional role, had some influence on the decision to leave the project as well as a feeling of being submerged, the manner of working in the group was also pin-pointed. Solutions for improving group functioning were explored by the group. These included digital

shared workspaces to avoid an accumulation of emails, and recapping regularly with concrete examples or using even shorter sentences.

Several implicit rules were constructed and adjusted from meeting to meeting to form 'a communicational score'. This allowed participants to adjust their way of communicating in order to work together more harmoniously. These rules, at times explicitly stated in the Charter, at other times remaining implicit guided, participation and inclusion within the Mhan-Access project. Although at times they were in harmony with the Charter, they may also differ from the Charter.

It should be noted that even the way the project has been designed may induce some differences within positions and roles, especially between people with disabilities partners of the project and the other members of the group. For some of them, limiting their role may indeed be tantamount to reproducing stigmatization of the project members with disabilities. Distinguishing them from other project members, as the researcher in charge of the observation chose initially to do, proved to be too restrictive since identities may be manifold and other persons, not identified as living with disabilities may also be considered as being in a disability situation. Moreover, does it make sense to consider them as being in the same category, since the three official partners of the project with disabilities had very diverse difficulties? Importantly the partners with disabilities were included in the group since they possessed « rare experiential knowledge" (Gardien, 2024). As such, they were the only members of the project who were interviewed to elicit narratives on their training and educational experiences. This involved sharing personal intimate realities that at times proved to be painful. One person, notably, who encountered disability situations expressed the feeling of being used as a guinea pig. This brought about two different reactions from the group. In an attempt to re-establish some degree of equality between targeted and non-targeted categories, one researcher envisaged sharing some details of her own training itinerary. Whilst another one suggested since the aim was to research lived experience of the people concerned it would be also important to highlight the value of experiential knowledge of the persons concerned by disability, the targeted category. Such debates led the members of the group to question other variables or categorizations that could impact participation, e.g. gender has then been included in the analysis, in relation to the concept of mansplaining. This has offered the opportunity to raise awareness and to pay attention to such dimensions throughout the meetings.

Although offering remuneration and expenses may be an incentive when participating in a project, it was far from being the only source of motivation in our project. The members of group shared common values such as inclusion and, the importance of the role of the environment in producing situations of participation or disability as conceptualised in contemporary models of disability classification namely the ICF and the MDH-PPH. All project members shared the goal that the project should have societal impact and at the minimum raise awareness of living in disability situations. This may partially explain the degree of tension felt in the group between the necessity of finishing the deliverables on time and the wish that everyone should be able to contribute equally to the project. All the group members were in agreement about the necessity for everyone to participate. However, they did not necessarily conceive or evaluate participation in a similar way. If certain members believed that everyone should give their views in discussions to guarantee inclusiveness and so not to lose important nuances, for others obligation to systematically participate in discussion could be quite distressing. Another implicit controversial rule concerned the systematic participation of all at every stage of the project. Certain members of the project believed it was possible to conceive participation as being multi-form depending on the competencies and the possibilities of each person; while others viewed the fact that some people did not participate at all stages of the

project in a negative light. In connection with this the regrouping of participants in subgroups by region when hybrid meetings were held combining on-site gatherings in Rennes, Brussels, and Geneva with on-line video participation had an influence on such views. A feeling of belongingness tended to develop in each group which shared refreshment breaks and meals. The 'Brussels' group was made up of several people possessing a good degree of mastery of games and their different mechanisms. This led to the group rapidly taking up a special role as regards to formulating prototype rules for the game- in-the making even though this had not been requested or expected by the other sub-groups. Although a feeling of belongingness can have a beneficial effect on the dynamics of a sub-group and help certain members to find their place in the project it can also have negative impact on cohesiveness of the whole project group.

As is well known, the positions and roles in research project intervention are never set in stone. The project induces changes. Lived collaboration coupled to analysis and reflective awareness has allowed the group to structure itself and offer both professional and personal development perspectives. Individual positioning taken up in the group becomes established over time depending on room to manoeuvre, granted or won. The disability situations of two partners together with how their role and place in the project evolved seen through different angles raises the question of accessibility and universality within a capacitating environment. In a group championing equality, there is a tendency to treat everyone in the same way without paying special attention to any specific needs that certain people may have. This was not the overriding value underlying the actions of the group, which from the very beginning of the project had enquired into the needs of everyone, and had strived to take these into account. The group ideally wished to be inclusive. It wished to create a friendly environment where everyone, irrespective of whether they had specific needs or not, felt welcome and valued and where every person had the same possibilities to follow fully discussions. The group's vital goal was to transform the environment and view this as a necessity for people living in disability situations and a comfort for all in his or her diversity according to the principles of universal accessibility. The values of the group are in harmony with the idea that people who have specific needs will enable the transformation of collective experience, thus enriching the world in which we live through permitting people to see the world in a different manner leading to collective innovation / forming a vector of collective innovation. Despite this ideal, the reality of the project and especially the necessity to produce deliverables within an allotted time led the group to adopt a stance more reminiscent of equity at least with respect to the person having special needs linked notably to their intellectual disability. Equity consists in recognizing that there are differences between individuals and to adapt the environment in order to compensate for such differences. To allow them to participate and find a place in the project the group adopted a differential treatment of this person.

If the group also encouraged free expression and the resolution of disagreements through group discussion, the will to include and to debate was often counterbalanced by implicitly resolving tensions in the group through the seeking of harmony rather than taking on board a diversity of opinions. Conflict or divergences of opinion were handled via implicit rites which could take the form of humour, minimalization, avoidance or a rapid search of consensus. When disagreement occurred different viewpoints were heard, but there was no one present who took a final decision to resolve the matter. This proved problematic for several members of the group. The researcher observing the group, following a conversation with a member of the group, suggested that the group should use a method known as process of decision by consent. This involves several steps which were never completely implemented, notably due to the tension between effectiveness and participation. Nevertheless, it undoubtedly had some influence on how decisions were reached since the leader of the group attempted to obtain consent with

respect to certain matters that need to be resolved. It should be noted that how the 'facilitator' or leader of the group in a project of this type chooses to pursue his or her role is very much an issue. He or she must seek the right stance which favours facilitation without dominance, a balance between consensus seeking and assuming the role of leader making decisions since it seems clear that there is manifest discomfort when no one makes decisions to resolve matters. Lastly the sharing of information is seen as key to co-design.

Another point which took on considerable importance within our project was emotions and their management. Emotions are essential and can be considered as being vectors for mobilising people and also help the understanding of certain realities, nevertheless they can also be painful, and their management may need support and counsel. During the groupwork on the literature review, the work of Trépanier-Jobin (2016) was referred to justify the choice towards an 'expressive game' which offered individuals the possibility to take on roles designed to raise awareness of people with difficulties, and ethical dilemmas encountered by the main characters in the game. Rather than reducing the emotional work carried out by the women and men players, such work was expected or even sought after. Nevertheless, within the project considerable emotional tensions emerged in connection with lived experience and distancing of such experience by project members with disabilities or during trials of the game. Heron (2024) cited in the literature review has put forward a number of different approaches to resolve this issue and some project members had an on-line discussion with him to discuss this. One strategy consists of creating a fantasy universe for the game to distance from the harsh realities of living with a disability. Another was to use a joker card to avoid broaching possibly painful realities or offer players the possibility of missing their turn in the case of too intense emotions. A strategy combining both options was adopted. Firstly, a fantasy universe was designed: the world of 'Minach' in which pupils from the Academy of Owls encounter different characters with difficulties living the world of Minach. The aim of the Academy of Owls is to help them carry out their challenges. In the game leaflet there are 'trigger warnings' in relation to the fact that the game may induce emotions and anyone has the possibility to leave the game and to return later, if they wish. Although elements to introduce distancing were envisaged at the start of the project, the fact that certain situations in the game could provoke strong emotional reactions in people with disabilities, led to the whole group becoming aware of this and taking totally on board the necessity for adaptations.

If the highlighting of experiential knowledge could at times be viewed as assigning an identity, or people were upset when their own life story was used, it is worth stressing that people with disability in our group reacted more strongly than other members of the group whenever the group of players put forward solutions which aimed to modify the individual capacities of characters pursuing their challenge rather than modifying the environment. Everyone agreed that it was problematic if each type of solution was equivalent within the game. Hence, game mechanisms were introduced to give greater value to decisions aiming to change the environment.

Conclusion


The reflexive approach employed within this project has allowed on-going evolution of practice. Reflexive analysis of group practices and feedback from participants underpinned practice. The drawing up of the Charter, regular feedback based on observation and openness to proposals from the group were important levers for strengthening the participation of all. Reflection on how environments may be capacitating suggests it will be necessary not only to take into account material or intellectual accessibility but also to recognize differences, the clarity of communicational exchanges, roles within the project, and the development of competencies of every member involved. What is at stake is clear: how can one create and above all maintain

over time a way of working where every member can express him or herself, learn and fully contribute to a project, whatever their particularities be?

This project has allowed us to have increasing awareness of what are the necessary conditions for inclusive and capacitating participation. Recognizing different forms of knowledge and skills, ongoing adaptation of the environment, paying attention to power dynamics and emotions are important elements. This work also highlights the importance of an adaptive temporality (allocating time to take into account different needs), an ongoing active Charter which was frequently referred to notably through reflexive accompaniment throughout the process.

The recommendations stemming from the analysis and discussion with the group have highlighted the necessity to rethink the modalities of coordination, the clarification of roles, diversify ways of participating and to move towards adopting a model of universal accessibility. This project has led to the production of a game for raising awareness international models of disability, namely the ICF and the MDH-PPH. Co-designed and anchored in lived experience, it represents a good example of participative action-research. Undoubtedly, its approach may be perfected, but it bears witness to how social transformation can emerge from a meeting between academic, professional knowledge and particular life experiences, within an environment thought through to enable all to make a full contribution.

Description of the game: 'The Challenges of Minach'

Name	The Challenges of Minach / Les défis de Minach
Logo	
Content	<p>This game deals with the different causes of « disability », as social participation restriction, and based on the systemic approach of disability. It enhances the impact of the environments on the situations lived by the persons (theoretical models of the ICF (WHO, 2001, 2025) and the Disability Creation Process (RIPPH, 1998, 2018).</p> <p>The proposed situations deal with training, internships and work. They take place in an imaginary context, the world of Minach.</p> <p>The players – who become part of the 'Academy of Owls' - will help some characters to meet their challenges. By exchanging their views, by cooperating, the players will have the opportunity to use different types of card games – e.g. « Around me » or « My capacities » and then learn how to better reduce the disability situations. Each type of card games has a cost in « light pearls ».</p> <p>You can play with 2 to 8 players, adults / young adults, following an inclusive approach.</p>
Objectives	<p>Making accessible and ludic the explanatory models of disability (ICF and DCP),</p> <p>Making understandable the multidimensional aspect of the explanatory factors of disability,</p> <p>Raising awareness of the impact of environments on the situations lived by the persons,</p> <p>Modifying social representations of disability.</p> <p>This game has been constructed in an accessible way to help easy understanding of these notions by a broad public.</p>
Format of the game	<p>Cooperative analogical game, in easy-to-handle and easy-to-read French format.</p> <p>Several copies have been printed out and all the PDF accessible files will be available online, for free, to be printed by the public.</p> <p>One game contains the following material:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -2 rules booklets in easy-to-read (1 & 2); -2 rules booklets in not easy-to-read (1 & 2); - some materials to help the players (point sheets to count the turns and the challenges, a table for counting votes, a reminder about the game steps, and an overview of the cards in the game.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 game board (9 sheets of A4 paper)

	-142 card games (A6 format, for two-sided printing)
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10 Characters



20 Challenges



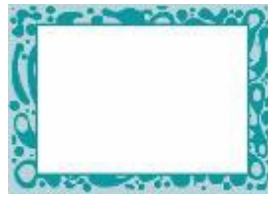
20 Without End



12 Kirali



26 My capacities



1 Owl




52 Around me



1 Silver rod



Targeted public	Persons with disabilities, their relatives, trainers, students, learners, associations, professionals of the disability fields, policy makers, civil society, ...
Technical providers	Translation into easy-to-read French: ASA-HM. Graphic design: Chloé Nico. Printed by EHESP, UCL. Editing phase of the video production introducing the game: EHESP-CaPp.
Language	French
Dissemination	Video to promote this game (in French, with French subtitles and French Sign Language) : On vous présente le jeu : Les défis de Minach The game and the rules are available for free on the FIRAH Resource Center site: https://www.firah.org/fr/mhan-access.html  This game is available under a Creative Commons licence CC-BY-NC-ND.
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