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Article

Disability, Access to Food and the UN CRPD: Navigating Discourses of Human Rights in the Netherlands

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Abstract

In 2016, the Netherlands ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), one of the last developed nations to do so. In this article, we explore how equal access to food provides a lens through which barriers to implementing a rights-based approach to disability equality can be examined in countries that are historically resistant to such discourses. Through a literature review, policy research, and interviews with disabled people, representatives of disabled people's organisations, Dutch legal scholars, food researchers, and foodbanks, we have explored barriers to equal food access in the Netherlands, and current approaches to overcoming social, economic and physical barriers. Our analysis indicates that implementation of the UN CRPD and other relevant international and EU policies continues to be limited in the Netherlands due to narrow interpretations, leading to policies and practices that do not foster equal access to resources and environments. Dutch understandings of disability equality are evolving, but encounter opposition from an entrenched system of separation and resistance to mandating change, including a reluctance to even collect data about inequality. From this basis, we identify knowledge gaps and make recommendations for steps the Netherlands could take to ensure equal access to food.

Keywords

accessibility; disability; economic rights; food; human rights; social rights

Issue

This article is part of the Issue "Disability Equality: In Theory and Practice", edited by Mark Priestley (University of Leeds, UK) and Lisa Waddington (Maastricht University, The Netherlands).

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1. Introduction

In 2016, the authors evaluated an annual campaign to improve disability access in the Netherlands, the *Week van de Toegankelijkheid* ('Accessibility Week'). The campaign was sponsored by Ieder(in), a network of Dutch disability groups. Every year the week has a theme, and in 2016 it was access to dining out and eating together. Our evaluation began with a literature review. We found ample literature related to the primary issue

of access to cafés and restaurants, ranging from reports written by Disabled Peoples' Organisations (DPOs, for example, Gehandicapt en Platform Venray, 2014) to the Dutch building code's accessibility rules for restaurants and other public spaces (Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, 2012). We conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with leaders and members of disability groups and disabled people, who helped us identify issues to explore further.

While Ieder(in)'s 2016 campaign concentrated on dining out, we had concerns that for many disabled peo-

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