

Accessible Fraternities for everyone!

The Accessibility of Fraternities for Students with Physical  
Challenges

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines which factors contribute to the accessibility of fraternities for students with a physical challenge. Students with a physical challenge find it more difficult to fully participate in social organizations such as fraternities. As a result, they miss out on opportunities in life. Social activities and a social network are important for all students, because this contributes to well-being and quality of life, leads to new friendships and it reduce stress. Students with a physical challenge can have difficulties with fully participating in fraternities. One of the main reasons of these difficulties is due to the accessibility of fraternities. The research has been performed qualitatively, based on the grounded theory. Information in this research was gathered by semi-structured interviews. Fifteen fraternities were interviewed about the factors that contribute to the accessibility of fraternities. The results of this study show that fraternities want to be inclusive and open to students with a physical challenge. It appears that managers of fraternities are ignorant about how they can help students with a physical challenge. The results also show that activities and premises are not always physically accessible for students with a challenge. Tools that can help make fraternities more accessible are: (a) training for managers; (b) a confidant; (c) a buddy system; and (d) financial support. Finally, it is concluded that it is desirable for managers of fraternities to be able to securely store data in a database about members with physical challenges. If fraternities know which physical challenges there are, active policies can be made to improve accessibility. It is recommended in this study to seek advice from the university regarding the handling of medical data in combination with the new privacy legislation.

Keywords: fraternities; accessibility; inclusion; students; physical challenges; diversity

## Introduction

Different studies show that involvement in social life might be challenging for students with a physical challenge who often encounter unwelcoming attitudes of exclusion or insensitivity. These identified barriers impede academic and social engagement. However, they are often largely ignored by college faculty, staff and peers (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Kef, 1997). Research also shows that many students with physical challenges have significant social skills challenges, either as a core trait of their disability or as a result of social isolation due to segregated environments or peer rejection (Maag & Katsiyannis, 2012). In addition, a study of Hanková (2017) shows that young people with a physical challenge more often feel lonely than their peers without a physical challenge. They have more difficulties with making and maintaining social contacts because of their own fear, but also because of prejudices and the attitude of society.

For the most students, participation in social activities and social organisations such as fraternities is a crucial part of their student time (Watson, Ayers, Zizzi, & Naoi, 2006). The literature shows that students with a physical challenge experience barriers when participating in social activities in student life. Low participation rates can result from several factors such as, lack of accessibility, negative attitudes, lack of social support from faculty or staff, social isolation and low financial capacity (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005; Foreman, Dempsey, Robinson, & Manning, 2001; Johnson, 2006 & McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Students with a physical challenge find it more difficult to fully participate in social organizations such as fraternities. As a result, they miss out on opportunities to build a social network. Support from the social network is important for all students, because this contributes to well-being and quality of life, leads to new friendships and it reduce stress (Kef, 1997; Valle, Bravo, & López, 2010). Because students with a physical challenge mention the accessibility of fraternities as one of the biggest factors for a lower participation rate, this research focuses on the factors that can contribute to the accessibility of fraternities (Valle, Bravo, & López, 2010).

### Students with a physical challenge

Recent research has shown that approximately 4.8% of students in the Netherlands have a physical challenge (CBS, 2016). In this research, the term ‘students with a physical challenge’ is equivalent to ‘students with a physical disability’. The population of students with a physical challenge is very diverse (Agarwal, 2013). In this paper, the term ‘physical challenge’ refers to the following groups: (a) people with a mobility impairment (upper or

lower limb loss or impairment, poor manual dexterity and damage to one or multiple organs of the body; (b) people who have a visual impairment; (c) people with hearing loss (partial or total inability to hear); and (d) chronic illness (sleep deficiency, chronic fatigue, chronic pain and epilepsy). Throughout this paper, the term 'students with a physical challenge' will be used to refer to all individuals in these four groups (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff, 2000).

### Diversity in fraternities

When talking about increasing diversity in the Netherlands, the term diversity often refers to culture, ethnicity and origin, or to the visible "discoloration" of Dutch society (Shadid, 2009; van Dijk, 2009). However, it is important to be aware of the fact that diversity includes much more than just these aspects. Other dimensions of diversity include gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status and disabilities. The term diversity therefore refers to the way in which individuals differ from each other (Brown, Snedeker, & Sykes, 1997). The various aspects of diversity therefore have one thing in common, namely that they form the basis for processes of social exclusion and discrimination (van Dijk, 2009).

When people talk about diversity, disability is often the big absentee. Not only because many challenges are not visible, but also because the term physical challenge is not self-evident in the list of concepts such as ethnicity and gender, certainly not in the Netherlands. Whereas ethnicity and gender are self-evident terms for both positive and negative discrimination, this is much less self-evident in the case of physical challenges (van Trigt, 2016). More diversity in a fraternity ensures that the differences between individuals are actively dealt with, whereby these differences are also used for positive purposes and everyone is given the opportunity to optimally develop his or her talents. Diversity leads to more room for students to develop themselves and to be themselves. Because differences between individuals can be used as a form of wealth, this can also lead to more creativity, different perspectives and improved study performance (Lauring & Selmer, 2010; van Dijk, 2009).

### Inclusion in fraternities

An inclusive society is a society in which everyone can participate and nobody is excluded. Every citizen must have the opportunity to develop equally, regardless of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, educational level, ethnicity or religion. People strive for general policy, but to ensure that everyone can actually participate, a separate approach and a focus on diversity are sometimes required (Lauring & Selmer, 2010). According to the study by van

Dijk (2009), it is important that information is given to managers of fraternities about awareness of the obstacles that students with a challenge encounter. The provision of information to managers must ensure that students with a challenge feel welcome. In addition, students must indicate themselves if they need extra support, facilities or adjustments. So that the fraternity can take this into account.

### Success factors of fraternities

Scientists have found that greater involvement in student life (e.g., social, residential and civic) leads to greater academic success (Gardner & Barnes, 2007). Other studies found that users of fraternities felt more at home on campus, had a greater ability to make friends and experienced an increase in quality of life, compared with nonusers. For the most students, participation in social life and student activities is a crucial part of their student time (Watson, Ayers, Zizzi, & Naoi, 2006). Tinto (1993) states that social activities, fraternities and campus-wide programs are ways to help alleviate feelings of isolation by allowing the opportunity to develop social attachments. Participating in fraternities therefore has various advantages for all students.

### Participation in fraternities

In 2001 the International Classification of Functioning (ICF) defined participation as 'someone's involvement in life situations.' Among students, greater participation has been associated with better physical and psychological health and greater overall life satisfaction. Participation is considered, so vital to human functioning and well-being (Johnson, 2006). In addition, other studies found that participation is considered a fundamental goal of rehabilitation and is increasingly recognized by researchers as being part of a comprehensive approach to health outcome assessment (Ginis, Evans, Mortenson & Noreau, 2016; Lippold & Burns, 2009). In this research, the focus is on the study of Bramston, Bruggerman & Pretty (2002). This study states that participation in leisure activities, for example fraternities, contributes to the development of students and their quality of life.

Students with a physical challenge are known to be at risk for participation in fewer activities. Risk factors for students with a physical challenge are less acceptance by their peers, fewer friendships, poor accessibility and less often part of a network (Bramston, Bruggerman & Pretty 2002). The findings of Doubt & McColl (2003) and Hemmingson & Borell (2001) declare that students with physical challenges have limited social contact

and thus, less experiences with peers, which can affect their opportunities for the future. Thus, students with a physical challenge can have difficulties with fully participating in social activities such as fraternities. One of the reasons of these difficulties is due to the practical accessibility of fraternities.

### Practical accessibility of fraternities

Students with a physical challenge do not want to be restricted and therefore just want to participate in society just like others. It is important that places and activities are (literally) accessible to this target group. For students, fraternities are the places where they can make new social contacts and make friends for life (Johnson, 2006). Although research shows that fraternities aim for an inclusive and diverse fraternity, this is not always realized in practice. The accessibility of fraternities is often a problem for students with a physical challenge. Here, the inaccessible locations of the fraternities are experienced as a barrier. The houses of fraternities are often old and are therefore not wheelchair accessible. This also applies to cafés and other areas where activities are organized (McCarthy, 2015). In addition, the research shows that students with physical challenges experience problems in participating in activities organized by fraternities. Students with a physical challenge are insufficiently helped or accepted by their peers. Because of this, participation in activities is not feasible. In addition to the practical barriers that students with physical challenges experience, there are some other factors that influence accessibility (Blake, 2016).

### Fraternities and factors that influence the accessibility

Traditionally, fraternities are an important component of student activities. Fraternities originated students' desire to discuss topics outside the nineteenth-century curriculums of colleges and universities. This led to the choice to live collectively and ultimately, to the founding of houses for the house group members and their activities. Today, many of these organizations have a (inter)national presence and approximately 60–70 percent of members live in houses owned by the fraternities (Blake, 2016). The fraternities promote its role in positive peer interactions and community involvement. Participants of fraternities are expected to assist and support each other and their communities not only during their time on campus, but throughout their lives. Overall, members of fraternities have higher graduation rates than students not involved in the fraternities (Stewart, 2001). However, a study in the USA shows that fraternities also involves drawbacks, especially from the perspective of diversity. First, ensuring inclusion and accommodation of disability in houses owned by fraternities involves additional challenges owing to the more murky nature of their role in the

provision of higher education and privately held properties (McCarthy, 2015). Also, if a fraternity determines to engage in disability discrimination and deliberately exclude disabled students, such behaviours might be difficult to detect in an already selective and mysterious process. Finally, the organizations are famous for engaging in harmful hazing and bullying activities. While the extent of these activities has been deliberately reduced over time at the same time as it was exaggerated in the popular imagination, students with physical challenges are at particular risk of experiencing negative effects of such practices.

Likewise, the research paper of Maag & Katsiyannis (2012) point out that students with physical challenges are part of the risk group threatened by bullying. Specifically, they are confronted with negative comments against their person, with spitefulness, humiliation or with not being part of the group. Although fraternities indicate that they are committed to an inclusive and accessible organization, several studies show that this is not always the reality in practice (Downs & Williams, 1999; McCarthy, 2015).

### Research question

Less studies have been published on the accessibility of fraternities for students with a physical challenge. This can be a problem because students with a physical challenge may not be able to participate in fraternities due to inaccessibility. Because less research has been done into the factors that contribute to accessible fraternities, it is difficult to give expectations. From the literature study it is expected that accessible premises, accessible activities and help from fellow students can contribute to more accessible fraternities. To get more clarity about this, this research is started. The research question is: **What factors contribute to the accessibility of fraternities for students with psychical challenges?**

## Research method

### Research design

This research is carried out in the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands. The research has been performed qualitatively, based on the grounded theory. In this study, qualitative methods offer the opportunity for respondents to describe the different factors that contribute to the accessibility of fraternities in their own words and to do so largely on their own conditions. Respondents may express views, give words to their experiences and describe situations. The information gained is not limited to preconceived questions and therefore can provide detailed and rich data (Boeije, 2009). The goal of the grounded theory is to gain knowledge about the socially-shared meaning that forms the reality and the behaviors of the participants being studied (Glaser, 1978). The research is carried out for the organization SOLGU (Stedelijk Overleg Lichamelijk Gehandicapten Utrecht). SOLGU is an organization that is committed to policies for people with a physical challenge in Utrecht.

### Sample and participants

In this study, a total of fifteen interviews were conducted. The population of fraternities in Utrecht consists of 49 fraternities in total. A total of approximately fifteen managers of fraternities should be enough to procure the necessary qualitative data. The managers of the fraternities were interviewed about the factors that contribute to the accessibility of fraternities. In this study, the researcher has used theoretical sampling, designed to generate theory which is grounded in the data, rather than established in advance of the fieldwork. Theoretical sampling is based on the grounded theory. Theoretical sampling is a process of data collection from the managers of fraternities for generating theory. The researcher has collected, codes, and has analyzed the data and has decided which data to collect next in order to develop the theory as it emerges (Glaser, 1978). For the participants, this research is subject to the condition that they are eighteen years of age or older. Participants participated in this research on a voluntary basis.

### Ethical requirements

This research considers the ethical requirements that are set for scientific research (Boeije, 2009). For example, permission is requested from the Ethics Committee prior to the investigation for the execution of this study. An application has been made here: for the managers of the fraternities. After this application was approved by the ethics committee, the interviews started. Prior to the interview, the participants received an information letter via



email or phone containing important information about the objective, method and content of this study. The participants then gave permission to participate in the study by completing and signing the informed consent form. This clearly describes the purpose, the agreements and the procedure of this research. The data of the participants are carefully handled. The collected data was first transcribed and then anonymized in Atlas.ti 8 (software for qualitative data analysis). Here the data is treated confidentially. Finally, this research takes into account the fact that the researcher has a visual impairment. The researcher has appointed her visual impairment prior to each interview, so that there was clarity for the participants.

### Reliability & validity

Within this research it is important that the researcher is accountable for what happens in the research. Within the research, it is accurately described what the research entails and how and why this research is carried out. Accountability within this research is important, because in this way other researchers can assess whether the results are reliable and these researchers can also repeat the research if required (Boeije, 2009). The internal validity says something about the quality of the research design (Boeije, 2009). To increase the internal validity in this study, a fixed interview schedule with topics is used in a fixed order. In addition, the semi-structured interviews were conducted under the same conditions. The external validity relates to the question whether the results of this research can be generalized outside this specific research context (Boeije, 2009). In order to increase the external validity in this study, enough participants were interviewed. Within this study, saturation arises when data is collected from fifteen managers of fraternities.

The concept of accessibility in this research means that a product or service is usable for everyone. "Product" has a broad meaning here and includes buildings, transport facilities and utensils. In this study, this means that students with a physical challenge must be able to be a member of fraternities without obstacles (McCarthy, 2015).

### Procedure

The data from this research was collected through semi-structured interviews. The duration of the interviews was between fifty minutes and one and a half hours. Fifteen interviews were conducted within this study. Recruitment in this research was done by distributing an E-mail containing a recruitment text and an invitation for the research. In addition, the E-mail contains an extensive information letter containing all relevant information about this research. The researcher looked up the email addresses of the managers of the fraternities on

the websites of the fraternities. Because a number of fraternities had not responded to the first email, the fraternities were then called. In addition, it has happened that fraternities were not available. A repeat email was sent to these respondents. Approaching fraternities by telephone and sending a repeat email proved to be an effective way to approach fraternities. The interviews were conducted by means of topics that are important for the research. A topic list is used to ensure that respondents addressed the main themes of the study: (a) diversity in fraternities; (b) inclusion in fraternities; (c) participation in fraternities; (d) (practical) accessibility of fraternities and (e) policies for and experiences with students with a physical challenge. The topic list can be found in appendix I.

After the data collection, the data is analysed in Atlas.ti 8 (software for qualitative data analysis). The results and findings are reported in a research paper. This paper is shared with all the relevant stakeholders and organisations.

### Data analysis

The data is collected by conducting interviews in Dutch. The interviews have been recorded and literally transcribed. Data analysis followed the open, axial and selective coding procedure described by Boeije (2009), which is based on grounded theory. All data has been input into a database, so that the findings could be described systematically and analysis could be carried out. Atlas.ti 8 is used for data management and analysis. Coding was started with the sensitizing concepts. These are the predefined topics that are used in the interviews. These topics provided direction to relevant characteristics, but in such a way that an open view was not prevented. In addition to the predefined codes, new codes have also been created during coding. These new codes were based on the data. This is the so-called by-catch (Boeije, 2009).

## Results

### Analysis

In the results section the research question of this research is answered. The research question is answered through sub topics. The research question is as follows: **What factors contribute to the accessibility of fraternities for students with physical challenges?**

To answer the research question, a total of fifteen fraternities were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in Dutch. For this research, there is a topic list with all the codes that are used in this research. The topic list can be found in appendix I. Various codes were selected in Atlas.ti 8 in this study. Different codes have been compared for analysis. First, the researcher looked at the codes (a) concept of diversity and (b) diversity & students with a physical challenge in order to gain insight into the extent to which respondents consider physical challenges when they talk about diversity in fraternities. Subsequently, the codes (a) inclusion in fraternities (b) tools to make the fraternity inclusive (c) barriers to achieving inclusion were compared with each other. This is to analyse how inclusive the fraternities are, what the obstacles are according to respondents and what is needed according to respondents to make fraternities more inclusive. Subsequently, it was analysed to what extent students with a challenge can actually participate in the activities, whether physical challenges are already taken into account in advance, whether there are obstacles within the activities and what tools or solutions are offered so that everyone can participate in activities. The following codes were compared: (a) ask for physical challenges on the registration form (b) barriers during activities (c) tools / success factors during activities and (d) participating as a student with a challenge within the entire fraternity. Furthermore, an analysis was made of how respondents think about the (physical) accessibility of the fraternity, what obstacles there are, how these can possibly be solved and what is required for this. The following codes were compared: (a) (physical) accessibility of own premises (b) accessibility barriers (c) possibilities / solutions for (physical) accessibility problems and (d) tools to make fraternities more accessible.

### Characteristics of the fraternities

Fraternities in Utrecht are all different from each other and each has their own vision, goals and interests. The fraternities can be divided into categories, based on the type of fraternity. In this research there are three different types of fraternities namely: social fraternities, sports fraternities and cultural fraternities. This research examines which factors can contribute to the accessibility of fraternities for students with a physical challenge. It is important here to

take different types of fraternities into account, because students with a physical challenge also have different interests. So, it is important that they can go to all types of fraternities. In this research, four social fraternities, ten sports fraternities and one culture fraternity were interviewed.

### Diversity in fraternities

The results of this research show that fraternities have different thoughts about the meaning of the concept of diversity within a fraternity. The majority of fraternities see physical challenges as one of the forms of diversity and consider it important to pay attention to this target group. Nine out of fifteen respondents state that they see a physical challenge as a part of diversity within the fraternity. While six fraternities do not mention students with physical challenges when the interviewer asked about the concept of diversity within the fraternity. One of the nine respondents hereby explain that students with a physical challenge in fraternities must also be mentioned when they talk about a good reflection of society.

*“When you say diversity, I think of many different things. Diversity is a very broad topic like a man-woman relationship but also sexual orientation, ethnicity and things like that. And I think that it is indeed people with challenges. Yes, they are part of diversity. If you would like to have a good reflection of society in your fraternity, then the people with challenges are certainly part of it.”* (Respondent 2: sports fraternity)

Although fraternities generally indicate that students with a psychical challenge are welcome, the results of this research show that several fraternities indicate that they currently have few members with a physical challenge. Of the fifteen respondents interviewed, eight fraternities indicate that they have less than five or no students with a physical challenge. The other seven respondents indicate that they have more than five students with a physical challenge in their fraternity. Furthermore, it is striking that nine fraternities indicate that they have difficulty with international students. The working language and the website are often still in Dutch in fraternities.

The eight respondents give various reasons why, according to them, few or no students with a physical challenge are members of the fraternity. Respondent 1 describes:

*"We don't have many members with challenges. I don't know exactly why. It is not that we do not allow them or that they are not welcome."* (Respondent 1: social fraternity)

In addition, respondent 14 a sports fraternity states that they may have fewer students with a physical challenge because, according to the fraternity, it is difficult for a student with a challenge to fully participate in their activities, because the activities within this fraternity are very physical. Which means that members have to move a lot, whereby the use of all your body parts is important. Finally, it is striking in this study that twelve respondents indicate that they have no members with visible challenges in hearing, seeing and / or in mobility.

#### Factors that contribute to an inclusive fraternity

This research shows that the managers of eight fraternities are not always aware of the members they have with a physical challenge within their fraternity. This is because this is not requested within these fraternities at the start of the introduction time. While the research also shows that at the start of the introduction time, seven out of fifteen respondents explicitly ask students if they are injured or have a physical challenge. Respondents indicate that they ask this so that they can take sufficient account of challenges or injuries during the activities. And because they can make their fraternity more inclusive for everyone. Respondent 2 gives as an example:

*"We always ask members if they have injuries or challenges when registering. Because we think it is very important to know which problems our members have. What they possibly suffer from us and how we can take that into account."*  
(Respondent 2: sports fraternity)

Furthermore, all fraternities indicate that they want to help the members with a physical challenge as well as possible and they will make the fraternity more inclusive. Five fraternities indicate that it is helpful if students with a physical challenge clearly state what their physical challenge entails and what the fraternity should take into account. This is because fraternities do not always know how to support the students with a physical challenge.

*“Yes, and we will see how we can help these students. And It is desirable if students let us know what they need and what they can and also what is difficult for them. They have much more experience with this than we have.”* (Respondent 5: sports fraternity)

### Tools that contribute to an inclusive fraternity

The interviews of this study show that there are various tools that can contribute to inclusive and accessible fraternities. One of the tools mentioned by four of the fifteen respondents that can contribute to inclusive and accessible fraternities is to follow a training on the theme of students with a physical challenge. This training is intended for the management of the fraternity, and aims to make managers more aware of the different challenges and at the same time gain knowledge about how to deal with students with a physical challenge.

*“Hmmm yes, I think some kind of training might be appropriate. And maybe we can include it in our application procedures that when we hire people we ask if they can handle it or already have experiences with this topic.”* (Respondent 3: sports fraternity)

*“Yes. I find it difficult because I think that it is a very extensive, expanded world, in which of course you have many different challenges and you cannot describe them all quickly in a small file. So, I think, yes, I think you could possibly discuss it more and learn more about challenges. Because we don't actually do that right now. But we can do that in the future. And yes, a training on awareness of challenges could help with that learning process, I think. For example, we also had training on alcohol consumption and the consequences of drinking too much alcohol at a young age. We found this very useful as a board, because we now know better what alcohol can have for harmful consequences. So, such awareness training is also very useful for physical challenges, I think.”* (Respondent 15: social fraternity)

There are also other tools mentioned in this study that can contribute to an accessible and inclusive fraternity. Three fraternities indicate that they have appointed confidants within their fraternity. Members can turn to these confidants with sensitive questions or if they want to talk about something.

*“Yes, and I think we have a high regard for the fact that it is very often spoken to members that we have confidants who can be contacted at all times. When members want to talk with someone about their story or specific questions or feelings about these things.”* (Respondent 6: sports fraternity)

Another respondent indicates that they use a buddy system as a tool for some activities. This respondent describes the buddy system as a way to help and support students with a physical challenge where needed. This respondent tells about the positive experience they have gained with the buddy system:

*“For example, you agree that such a student will receive two buddies that help the student with a physical challenge during an activity where necessary. These two buddies remain close to the student during the activity so that they can possibly help. I think that you can use it to solve problems that students with a challenge have. We use the buddy system last year. We had a member who was not feeling well because of her chronic illness and wanted some extra support. And then I became her buddy and I stood during the activity next to her. I stood next to her to check if everything went well.”* (Respondent 2: sports fraternity)

Respondent 2 also describes the added value of a buddy system:

*“That depends on the situation and the challenge, I think. But at least it is someone who supports you were necessary. And I think that for a day or an activity that can agree that you can ask within the member group: who wants to keep an extra eye on*

*this person, or make sure it just feels safe for that person. I think a lot of people are open to do that." (Respondent 2: sports fraternity)*

Furthermore, the results show that all fraternities consider it helpful that when a student with a physical challenge registers and this student needs (expensive) adjustments that a grant can be claimed. Fraternities want to invest in students with physical challenges, but because relatively few students with a physical challenge often register, the adjustments are seen as a costly investment. That is why fraternities would like to receive financial support for tools or adjustments for physical accessibility. Fraternities think differently about the providers of this subsidy. This depends, among different things, on what kind of adjustment must be made. Nine fraternities appoint the university as an organization that they would approach if financial support is needed, three other fraternities appoint the sports council. There are also three respondents who indicate that they would be entitled to the municipality, but this is more about adjustments that are related to making a building or location accessible.

Finally, four respondents in this research state that they would like to register which members have a physical challenge within the fraternity, so that the board can take this sufficiently into account. The results show that this data cannot be stored at this time due to privacy legislation. As a result, managers are not always aware of the challenges that members have within the fraternity. Respondent 10 describes what the problem is:

*"It is a bit tricky because we make sure we know and pay attention, but that all happens unofficially. On the one hand, we think it is very important that everyone can participate if they want to participate. But on the other hand, if, for example, you put in a document that he has a brain injury, then that is medical data and with the new privacy law it is almost impossible to save this data correctly. So that is tricky because, in fact, you can only really implement policy and draw up written agreements if you can store the data responsibly." (Respondent 10: cultural fraternity)*

### Barriers for the inclusion of fraternities

The interviews state that eight fraternities indicate that they are ignorant of what it is like to have a physical challenge and what possibilities there are. one of the respondents states that



there are various factors depending on the challenge that influence the participation of students with a physical challenge in the activities within the fraternity. The ignorance and lack of knowledge of the fraternities with the different physical challenges creates a barrier for students with a physical challenge. The respondent describes this ignorance in the quote below:

*“And I think if you suffer more from deafness or blindness, yes ... I don't really know if there is a problem to participate in our fraternity. I know that our trainers are not specialized in this. In principle, they have followed a regular training for trainer. And not for a specific cluster. But I can say that on the one hand a trainer gives a lot of verbal explanation during an activity. But it is also sometimes important that you see a movement, I think. So, and sometimes it's important to hear well. So, I think that are all factors that you have to take into account.”* (Respondent 3: sports fraternity)

Although all fifteen fraternities state that students with a physical challenge are in principle welcome and they will create an inclusive fraternity, the research also shows that several fraternities pay less attention to motivating this target group to become a member. Six fraternities indicate that they have not previously consciously paid attention to the fact that students with a physical challenge would also like to participate in a fraternity. One of the respondents gives the reason that within the fraternity no attention is paid to motivating students with a physical challenge to become a member because it is not yet in the consciousness of the fraternity itself.

*“So, I think we are not really geared to that as a fraternity and that is why we are, yes I don't know. It is not that we are not actively looking for that, but it is just something that is not very much in our consciousness of the fraternity.”*  
(Respondent 2: sports fraternity)

Respondent 15 states that when recruiting new members, no specific attention is paid to students with a challenge because the fraternity already attracts more than enough members each year, so they do not have to actively look for new members.

Finally, respondent 9 indicated that because of their sport activities, they select members on level and gender. So, it is determined how good you are in sports, whether or not you have a challenge. On the other hand, the results also show that there are three respondents who explicitly state that they are consciously engaged in actively approaching students with a physical challenge. And thus, contribute from the start to the accessibility of fraternities.

### Barriers for participation in activities in fraternities

One of the barriers that emerges very clearly in this study and is mentioned by six of the fifteen respondents is the physical accessibility of activities. Various fraternities indicate that students with a physical challenge cannot fully participate in all activities. The fraternities mainly see problems when it comes to students with challenges in the arms or legs. The main reason given is that adapted material is needed for these students, and this is often not available at the fraternities.

*“It's just that, unfortunately, we don't have the facilities in advance to allow everyone to join our fraternity.”* (Respondent 5: sports fraternity)

In addition, two respondents state that some activities with certain challenges are unfortunately not feasible. Respondent 2 describes:

*“We have a member who suddenly got epilepsy last year. Unfortunately, we as a board have had to decide that this member can no longer participate in all activities because, for example, it can be very dangerous on the water if this member has an attack. This was decided in consultation with this member.”* (Respondent 2: sports fraternity)

### Success factors of participation

Although this research shows that there are sometimes barriers to participating in activities, but fraternities also identify success factors that contribute to accessibility. This research shows that all managers of the fifteen fraternities are willing to think about solutions when a student with a physical challenge cannot fully participate in an activity. In addition, tools are

used at some fraternities, so that students with a physical challenge can fully participate. One of the respondents gives as an example that there is a student who can participate excellently in the activities within the fraternity with his prothesis. This student does not experience any obstacles with this tool. The results also show that some fraternities have made adjustments to activities so that students with a physical challenge can participate. These adjustments are in most cases small, easy to implement and very effective for the student with a physical challenge. The example given by respondent 4 about a member with a hearing problem shows this:

*"Because our hearing-impaired board member is on the wrong side of the constitution, which means she doesn't hear anything. So, with the general meeting we always have other places than normal. Otherwise she just won't hear the entire meeting. And we simply say that to everyone, because otherwise everyone thinks that we are sitting on the wrong place. But our board member is very open about it. And everyone does not find it a problem. And most important our board member can still participate."*

(Respondent 4: sports fraternity)

### Positive factors of (physical) accessibility

In the interviews it is striking that six fraternities would like to contribute ideas about the physical accessibility of their premises, but find it difficult to actually make it more accessible. The other nine fraternities do not have an own premise.

*"So, we think about it, but it's hard to find a suitable solution for physical accessibility."* (Respondent 8: social fraternity)

In addition, all fraternities state that students with a physical challenge are more than welcome. And fraternities are open to new members with a physical challenge.

*"Yes, well, if you hear students, send them to us!"* (Respondent 1: social fraternity)

*“Well, what is especially important to say, everyone can become a member. And we work with a disputing culture. And there are many different disputes that are also very different in terms of character cosiness. So, I think there is a place for everyone. And if there isn't, it can always be created again.”* (Respondent 13: social fraternity)

### Barriers to (physical) accessibility

The results of this study show that many premises of fraternities are not yet physically accessible at this time. Of the fifteen fraternities interviewed, six fraternities have their own premises. According to the results of this study, only one of these six premises is fully physically accessible. The main reason for the inaccessibility is mainly that the fraternities are located in a monumental (old) building where many stairs are present. Furthermore, this study shows that six of the fifteen other fraternities do not have their own premises but consider the sports complex as their main location. The sports complex is generally considered physically accessible by these six fraternities, although there is also a doubt about this. Respondent 2 doubts whether you as a student with a challenge can really go anywhere with your wheelchair within and around the sports complex.

What four respondents also mention in this research is that they have never had the need to make their premises more physically accessible, because they have no members with physical challenges. As a result, fraternities may see less of the need to make their premises more accessible in the short term, because it is simply not necessary at the moment. Fraternities, on the other hand, wonder if the students with a physical challenge may not be there because the fraternity is currently not accessible.

*“And also, because I think it was not really discussed because it was not necessary. So, then there is not yet the urgency. So, we don't think about it at the moment. Because it hasn't happened yet. But you can of course also wonder if there are no members who are in a wheelchair because we are not accessible to people in a wheelchair. Whether that is because of that. Or simply because nobody in a wheelchair has ever wanted to become a member here.”* (Respondent 1: social fraternity)

## Discussion

### Findings

The main research question of this research is: **What factors contribute to the accessibility of fraternities for students with physical challenges?**

The results of this research show that the majority of fraternities by the concept of diversity explicitly the target group of students with a physical challenge name. From this, it can be concluded that students with a physical challenge are not forgotten when talking about creating a diverse fraternity. Furthermore, this study shows that eight fraternities have fewer than 5 or no members with a physical challenge at the moment. In addition, it is concluded that there are even fewer members with visible challenges (blind, deaf or a mobility challenge). Only three of the fifteen fraternities have members with visible challenges.

According to fraternities, members with a physical challenge are always welcome, but the results of this study also show that members with a physical challenge are not always able to find the fraternities. Another conclusion that emerges from this research is that the majority of the board members of the fraternities are not always aware of members who have a challenge. All fraternities, on the other hand, are willing to help students with physical challenges and they all want to strive for inclusive fraternities. To realize this, it is important for fraternities that students with a physical challenge indicate what they need from the board. Furthermore, fraternities have mentioned various tools that can contribute to the accessibility of fraternities. The mentioned tools are: (a) training for managers of the fraternities to create more awareness and to support students with a physical challenge, (b) a confidant in the fraternity and (c) a buddy system whereby a member without a physical challenge is linked to a member with a physical challenge. The fraternities also mention that financial support could be a tool to allow students with a physical challenge to fully participate in the fraternities. It is concluded that financial support is especially desirable for the realization of (physical) adjustments in the fraternities or the purchase of resources. Depending on what is needed for a student, various organizations are named to provide this financial support, namely: Utrecht University, the sports council or the municipality of Utrecht. Finally, it is concluded that it is desirable if there is a way to store data about students with a challenge in a secure and confidential way. This research shows that this is currently not possible due to privacy legislation. This results in the problem that managers of fraternities not being allowed to

record which physical challenges students have, with the consequence that managers are often ignorant of the students who have a challenge.

This study further concludes that six fraternities do not take concrete initiatives to let students with a physical challenge participate in the fraternities. This is seen as a barrier. Reasons that fraternities give for not taking the initiative are: (a) that it does not fit into the consciousness of the fraternity; (b) that the fraternities already have too many registrations and (c) that members are selected by level or gender regardless of whether or not you have a physical challenge. One of the conclusions from this study is also that some fraternities indicate that activities are regularly physically inaccessible or difficult to access. Fraternities mainly see problems when it comes to students with challenges in the arms or legs. What is striking in this study is that the sports fraternities indicate this problem. It is concluded that these fraternities do not have the necessary tools to allow students with a physical challenge to fully participate in the activities. On the other hand, the other fraternities indicate that they have found solutions to allow students with physical challenges to fully participate. It is concluded that a small adjustment such as a prosthesis is often sufficient to allow a student with a physical challenge to fully participate in the fraternity.

The results of this study also show that fraternities are very open. Students with a physical challenge are more than welcome. In addition, the six fraternities that have their own premises are prepared to think about the physical accessibility of their premises and where possible they want to make adjustments if necessary. It has been established in this study that of the six fraternities with their own premises, only one is fully physically accessible. What is also striking in this research is that fraternities doubt whether the sports centre is fully accessible. From this, it can be concluded that accessibility is not yet self-evident for fraternities. It is also concluded that fraternities will only see physical inaccessibility as a barrier if they actually have members with physical challenges. In conclusion, fraternities finally ask whether they do not have members with a physical challenge because they are physically inaccessible or because these students really do not want to become a member.

#### [Discussion of findings with the literature](#)

According to van Trigt, Kool & Schippers (2016), the concept of diversity does not always include people with a physical challenge. The term disability is often the big absentee. Not only because many disabilities are not visible, but also because the term disability is not self-evident in the list of concepts such as ethnicity and gender, certainly not in the Netherlands

(van Trigt, Kool & Schippers, 2016). The researcher does not find this finding in the results of this study. The most fraternities specifically identify physical challenges when questioning the meaning of the concept of diversity within the fraternity. A possible alternative explanation for the fact that the term disability is specifically mentioned in this research is because the research focuses on students with a physical challenge. As a result, managers may already be more aware of this target group than when the research was not focused on physical challenges and the same question was asked.

The research by Foreman, Dempsey, Robinson & Manning, (2001) describes that students with a physical challenge have the risk of not being able to fully participate in activities within the fraternities because they are less accepted by other students. However, the results of this study have shown that this is not the case within the fraternities in Utrecht. According to the board members of the fraternities, students with a physical challenge are generally well included in the member group and are accepted just like others for who they are. In addition, all fraternities indicate that they are open to help these students where necessary. A possible explanation for this difference could be that the literature study by Foreman, Dempsey, Robinson & Manning, (2001) is already relatively old. In recent years, there has been a relatively large amount of attention in the Netherlands for students with a physical challenge, which means that there may now (in 2019) be more awareness and policies for this target group.

The studies of McCarthy (2015) and Bramston, Bruggerman & Pretty (2002) states that accessibility or fraternities is often a problem for students with a physical challenge. Here, the inaccessible locations of the fraternities are experienced as a barrier. The houses of the fraternities are often old and are therefore not wheelchair accessible. This also applies to cafes and other areas where activities are organized. In the results of this study, the accessibility of buildings, premises, locations and cafés is also mentioned as a barrier to accessibility. The premises of the fraternities are often old and monumental, which means that there are often many stairs, steps and narrow corridors. However, the results of this study show that managers of fraternities would like to think about how they can make their own premises more accessible. The fraternities want to contribute to accessible fraternities. Only from the results of this study does it appear that the managers are ignorant of what students with a physical challenge actually need to be able to fully participate in fraternities. Fraternities also like to hear from students with a physical challenge what they need to fully participate in the fraternity. This finding that emerged from the interviews is not mentioned in

the literature. A possible explanation for this could be that little research has been done into students with a physical challenge in relation to fraternities. As a result, ignorance has not previously emerged as a barrier.

In addition, managers indicate that within the fraternity, there is also the willingness of members to help people with a physical challenge if accessibility is an obstacle. This is in line with the study of McCarthy (2015) which states that fraternities and their members strive for an inclusive and diverse fraternity. Finally, it is striking in this study that only sports fraternities state that activities within the fraternity can be difficult or impossible for students with a physical challenge. This is not mentioned in the literature. But a possible explanation for this could be that sports fraternities are focused on a particular sport that may be difficult to make accessible to everyone.

### Strengths of the research

One of the strengths of this research is that there is saturation. It was estimated prior to the research that saturation would occur if fifteen interviews were conducted. Indeed, after the fifteenth interview it appeared that no new information was added that could be relevant to this research.

In addition, the quality of the collected data is of high quality. The audio recordings are clear and no unexpected or unpleasant situations have occurred during the interviews. Furthermore, the reliability in this study is increased because a fixed topic list is used in a fixed order and the interviews are all conducted in a quiet room.

### Limitations & recommendations of the research

This research focuses on the factors that contribute to the accessibility of fraternities in Utrecht. One of the limitations of this research is that fraternities can be very different per country. As a result, it is not possible to say whether the results of this research conducted in the Netherlands can be generalized to other countries. Furthermore, this research is seen as a first step towards accessible and inclusive fraternities. Because a time limit has been set for this research, not all aspects could be extensively investigated. That is why it was decided to focus on the factors that contribute to the accessibility of fraternities for this research. As a result, other aspects such as the barriers encountered by fraternities are taking a smaller position within this research. Follow-up research is necessary to also map these barriers.



In addition, the population of students with a physical challenge is not interviewed in this research. Due to the short duration of the data collection process, it was decided to examine one population, namely the managers of the fraternities. Because the opinions, thoughts and visions of the students with a physical challenge can be very valuable, it is recommended in this research to include this population in further research.

One of the recommendations given in this research is the implementation of policies that make it possible to voluntarily register and record the physical challenges of members in a secure environment. This with the aim that the board has an overview of what sort of physical challenges students have within the fraternity and what they should take into account as a board. Due to privacy legislation, it is currently not permitted to store this data. Afterwards all data related From this research it is concluded that it can be helpful for managers if they are aware of the challenges of the members. It is also mentioned here that a policy that ensures that managers can store data about physical challenges securely and confidentially would be desirable. According to fraternities, the university could contribute to the realization of this policy. In addition, three tools have emerged in this research that can contribute to an accessible fraternity, namely: a training, a confidant and a buddy system. It is recommended to further develop these tools into practical interventions. With the goal that these can be offered to fraternities as practical tools to make the fraternity more accessible. Finally, this research has shown briefly that fraternities experience obstacles when it comes to admitting international students. The websites of fraternities are sometimes only in Dutch and the official language within a fraternity is most of the time Dutch. In this research nothing else is done with this finding, because it is not directly related to the topic of students with a physical challenge. But it is certainly recommended to conduct further research into this topic.

## Conclusion

In this paper it can be concluded that students with a physical challenge contribute to a more diverse fraternity. They are explicitly named when it comes to diversity within the fraternity. This recognition is a factor that contributes to a more inclusive and accessible fraternity. Although students with a challenge are therefore recognized, most fraternities still have few students with a challenge as a member. This shows that students with a physical challenge are not always able to find their way to the fraternities.

The research also concludes that fraternities' managers have good ideas about tools such as training, the confidant, the buddy system and financial support. These tools can

contribute effectively to the accessibility of fraternities. At present it is not yet possible to securely store the privacy data of students with physical limitations within fraternities while this would be desirable. To make the fraternities more accessible, it has been concluded that there must be a policy for the safe and legal storage of privacy data.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that fraternities are open to students with a challenge and are willing to help these students wherever possible. The openness and willingness shown by managers of fraternities are factors that can make fraternities more accessible to everyone. At the same time, not all premises and locations in Utrecht are physically accessible and managers of fraternities are often still ignorant when it comes to students with a physical challenge. In this research, fraternities have shown that they are open and want to contribute to accessibility in various ways. But the step to become fully physically accessible has not yet been taken. Fraternities do not yet see the students with a physical challenge enough, so the importance of accessibility remains in the background. This research is hopefully a first step towards full accessibility of fraternities for everyone.

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## **Appendix I: Code tree based on the topic list: research into the factors that contribute to accessible fraternities**

### 1 Background

- 1.1 Type of fraternity;
- 1.2 Number of members;
- 1.3 Size of the board;
- 1.4 About the fraternity;
- 1.5 role of the managers of the fraternity;
- 1.6 Type of activities;

### 2 Diversity in fraternities

- 2.1 Concept of diversity;
- 2.2 Diversity within the fraternity;
- 2.3 80-20 arrangement;
- 2.4 Diversity & students with a physical challenge;

### 3 Inclusion in fraternities

- 3.1 Code of conduct inclusion
- 3.2 Positive aspects of the code of conduct;
- 3.3 Negative aspects of the code of conduct;
- 3.4 Inclusion in fraternities;
- 3.5 Means to make the fraternity inclusive;
- 3.6 Barriers to achieving inclusion;
- 3.7 Selections for registrations;

#### 4 Participation in fraternities

4.1 (Physical) accessibility activities;

4.2 Mandatory activities;

4.3 Introduction time;

4.4 Ask for physical challenges on the registration form;

4.5 Experience with students with a challenge on participation in activities;

4.6 No participation in activities by members;

4.7 Unsuitable activities for students with a physical challenge;

4.8 Barriers during activities;

4.9 Tools / success factors during activities;

4.10 Participating as a student with a physical challenge within the entire fraternity;

4.11 Participation as a student with a physical challenge in commissions, year clubs or disputes;

#### 5 Accessibility

5.1 (physical) accessibility of own premises;

5.2 (physical) accessibility cafe / party location;

5.3 Being aware of improving accessibility;

5.4 (physical) accessibility of other locations;

5.5 Accessibility barriers;

5.6 Possibilities / solutions for the (physical) accessibility problems;

5.7 (auxiliary) means to make fraternities more accessible;

5.8 Social acceptance and accessibility for students with a physical challenge;

#### 6 Policy and experience:



- 6.1 Role of the board for students with a physical challenge;
- 6.2 Physical challenges that are experienced as challenging within fraternities;
- 6.3 Positive experiences with students with a physical challenge;
- 6.4 Negative experiences with students with a physical challenge;
- 6.5 Willingness to admit students with a physical challenge;
- 6.6 Personal experience of board members with people with physical challenges;

## 7 Contact between members themselves within the fraternity

- 7.1 Negative attitudes / exclusion of students with a physical challenge;
- 7.2 Importance of social skills;
- 7.3 Group formation;
- 7.4 Differences between students with and without physical challenges;
- 7.5 Acceptance of students with a physical challenge;
- 7.6 Barriers to contact between students with and without physical challenges;
- 7.7 Positive experiences in the contact between students with and without physical challenges;

## 8 Support

- 8.1 Financial support from external organisations;
- 8.2 Tools for students with a physical challenge;
- 8.3 Training / courses for creating more awareness about students with physical challenges;

## **Appendix II: Topic list research into the accessibility of fraternities**

### **Background**

Can you tell something about your fraternity (vision, number of members, religion)?

What kind of fraternity is (name)? Social club / sports club / culture club?

What kind of activities do you undertake as a fraternity?

What are your functions within the fraternity?

How big is the board?

### **Physical challenge**

To your knowledge, are there students with physical challenges (limitations) within (name) the fraternity?

Identify the restrictions:

The population of students with a physical challenge is very diverse (Agarwal, 2013). In this study, the term "physical challenge" refers to the following groups:

- (a) people with reduced mobility (loss of upper or lower limbs or limitations, poor dexterity and damage to one or more organs of the body);
- (b) people with visual impairment;
- (c) people with hearing loss (partial or total inability to hear);
- (d) chronic diseases (sleep deficiency, chronic fatigue, chronic pain, ADHD, autism and epilepsy) (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff, 2000).

After hearing this information, do you think there might be more students with a (physical) challenge within the fraternity?

### **Introduction time**

What does your introduction time look like?

What activities take place during the introduction time?

Is there a hazing within your fraternity? If yes, is it mandatory?

Have you ever experienced that it was difficult to let students with a challenge participate in the fraternity with activities, hazing, the introduction time or other components? Why? How was this solved / addressed then?

### **Diversity in fraternities**

What do you mean by the term "diversity" in the context of this fraternity?

Is there a lot of diversity in people within your fraternity?

Is there ever attention for awareness within the fraternity for differences between people? If so, in which ways (activities, special days)?

### **Inclusion in fraternities**

What do you generally think of the code of conduct for fraternities that has been drawn up by the university, is something missing, needs something else?

The code of conduct states:

C. Ensures an inclusive character of the student organization where every student feels safe and welcome.

Have you consciously considered students with a (physical) challenge at this point? Or more about other target groups?

Is intensive attention paid within the fraternity to the code of conduct in which inclusion is central?

If so, in which ways is attention paid to the code of conduct?

Do you think your fraternity is already inclusive for students with a physical challenge? If not, what is needed to achieve this for students with challenges?

What are possible obstacles in this regard?

Is this fraternity inclusive for everyone at the moment?

### **Accessibility of fraternities**

Do you have your own fraternity house where you meet?

Is this building physically accessible (stairs, toilets)?

Have you ever thought about improving accessibility? If so, in what ways?

Where do your activities / drinks / parties take place? Are these places accessible?

### **Participation in fraternities**

Do you ever consider the (physical) accessibility of activities within your fraternity?

How many compulsory activities are there within your fraternity?

Are you asked at the introduction time whether students have a challenge? To prepare for the introduction? If so, how do you organize this?

Does everyone actually participate in activities?

Has it ever happened that people could not participate in activities? Why didn't this work then?

How was this solved then?

Are there activities that you actually don't think are suitable for students with a physical challenge? What kind of activities are these?

### **Experience & policy**

Do you realistically think that students with a physical challenge can participate in everything within the fraternity? Or do you anticipate problems?

Do you think that someone with a challenge fits socially within your member group? Are there certain limitations where you provide more challenges for this? For example, if someone needs a lot of help or has difficulties with communicating?

Have you ever studied the subject of physical challenges and inclusion?

In your opinion, are there differences between students with and without challenges? If so, what is this in?

Do you have positive experiences with students with a physical challenge within the fraternity? And what makes it positive and works?

Have there been lesser experiences with students with a physical challenge within the fraternity? What caused the obstacles here?

### **Support**

Do you receive financial support from the university or another sponsor? If not, forms this a hindrance?

Is it desirable for more money to be made available to fraternities to create more inclusion for students with physical challenges (for example, to make the premises more accessible, to purchase aids or other facilities)?

What do you think would be needed to make your fraternity even more inclusive than it already is (money, resources, a course that provides insight into accessibility, advice on possibilities)?