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How can we address barriers faced by people with disabilities through inclusive design?

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Research Aim

The aim of this research is to investigate how inclusive design can be used to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities and allow them to feel included in our society.

Abstract

Disability is not an inherent limitation but rather a result of society failing to provide appropriate accommodations for individuals with impairments. Many people with disabilities could navigate daily life in the same way as their able-bodied counterparts if spaces were designed with inclusivity in mind. However, urban planning and design have historically prioritized able-bodied individuals, creating barriers that exclude those with disabilities. To ensure equal access and participation for all, planning policies must be restructured to support inclusive environments.

This research explores the question: "How can we address barriers faced by people with disabilities through inclusive design?" By examining the physical and societal barriers faced by individuals with disabilities, this study aims to demonstrate how inclusive design can foster inclusivity and accessibility. The research will investigate different types of impairments, the challenges they present, and how thoughtful design interventions can mitigate these obstacles.

Through a review of existing literature and qualitative interviews with people who live day to day with physical and intellectual disabilities, this study will identify key barriers that individuals with disabilities encounter—such as inaccessible buildings and inadequate infrastructure. I will ensure participants fully understand the study and share their stories voluntarily, without coercion. Ethical considerations are crucial, as the subject matter may be sensitive.

The findings are expected to highlight the urgent need for inclusive design principles in urban planning, reinforcing the idea that no one should be considered "disabled" simply due to a lack of accessibility in the built environment.

What is Inclusive Design?

Inclusive design has been identified as a space that is accessible to everyone, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, age, sexual identity, religion, nationality and disability (ActiveSustainability, 2025). Methods in ensuring an area or building uses inclusive design may include using ramps or elevators for wheelchair users.

Research Objectives

- ✓ To explore relevant literatures to create an effective analytical framework.
- ✓ To use the analytical framework to identify the best-case studies that effectively show how inclusive design can be used to break down barriers for people with disabilities.
- ✓ To gain insights into people's opinions by conducting interviews with experts and local communities with disabilities.
- ✓ To develop recommendations on how to integrate inclusive design into planning policy.

Methods

Literature Review

To create an effective framework for identifying case studies and analysing interviews

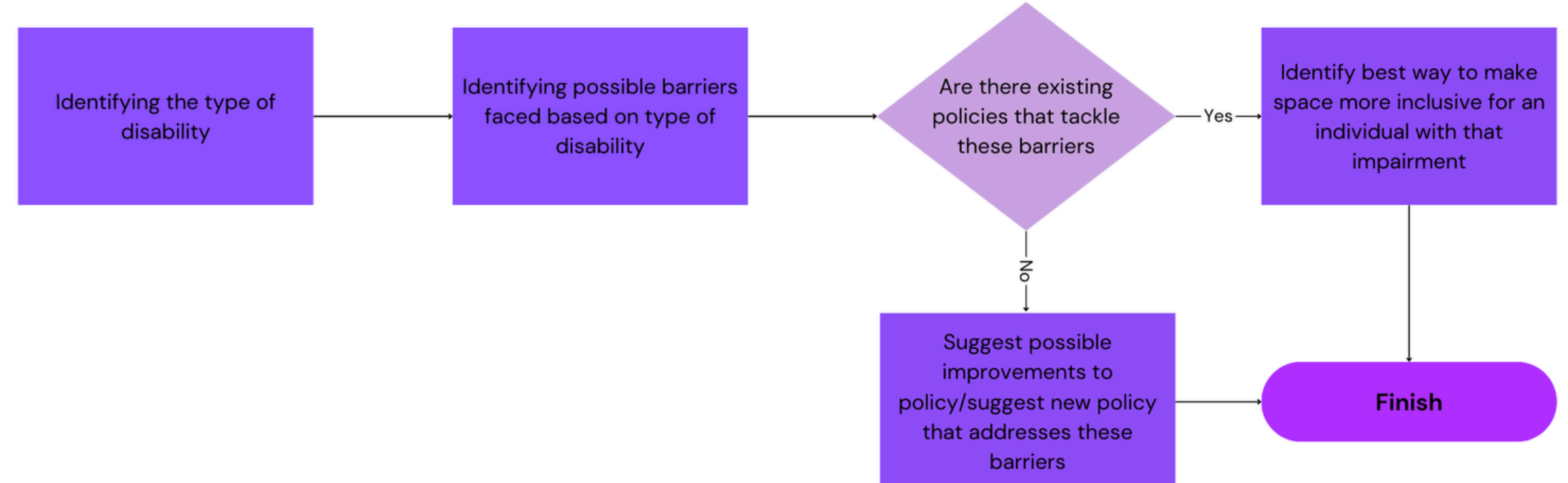
Case Studies

To provide evidence for the effectiveness of using inclusive design

Interviews/Survey

To gain understanding of peoples experiences and their own opinions on inclusive design

Framework



Key Findings

- ✓ The UN convention defines disability as people who have long-term mental, physical, sensory or intellectual impairments which in interaction with certain barriers might stop them from effectively participating in society on an equal basis with others (Leonardi et al, 2006)
- ✓ In policy, there have been many different policies introduced that aim to make spaces more inclusive. The Sites and Housing Plan 2011- 2026, includes policy HP2 which lays out Oxford City Councils plan to ensure that houses are more accessible, including ensuring that homes have wheelchair access (Oxford City Council, 2017).

References

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