

Welcome to KU Leuven, one of Europe’s oldest, innovative, and diverse universities. Outside of the faculty of social sciences you will find this special unique figure which can hardly be identified from its form, as gendered, racialized, or disabled. Its gaze is directed away from the building and its daily occupants and towards the street and the outside world.

**DISABILITY RESEARCH FOR THE REAL WORLD**

*July 4-5, 2024*

KU LEUVEN, Leuven, Belgium

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**CALL FOR PAPERS**

*Disability research for the real world* introduces an opportunity for researchers to engage with the current political and ethical challenges in our world, and to develop theoretical and pragmatic responses. This requires engagement and forward thinking.

Disability studies have seen many different versions and embodiments. The founders of disability studies in the United States, the originators of the social model in the United Kingdom, the philosophical, historical, and pragmatic foundations in continental Europe and the Global South provide the rich palette of disability work that would benefit from being revisited and further developed today.

‘Disability’ is an evolving concept that has benefitted from the currents of modernism and postmodernism. And, although they make little reference to it, the current trends that invite us to “*Acting in an Uncertain World*” (Callon, Lascoumes, Barthes, 2009), recognizing and staying with the “trouble” of our world (Donna Haraway, 2015) marked by disasters, building connections beyond the human (Isabelle Stengers), and to develop a new ethic in tune with contemporary challenges (Rosi Braidotti, Jennifer Deger)... all resonate with disability research, as situations of disability and vulnerability have long embodied these new ways of thinking about our world and its connections.

Disability for the Real World is directly inspired by Victor Papanek’s (1971) “Design for the Real World. Human Ecology and Social Change” in which he advocated for socially and ecologically responsible design of products, tools, and community infrastructures. It is also directly inspired by Tim Ingold’s (20) “Imagining for Real: Essays on Creation, Attention and Correspondence” in which the author sets out to heal the break between reality and imagination at the heart of modern thought and science. Imagining for Real joins with a lifeworld ever in creation, attending to its formative processes, corresponding with the lives of its human and nonhuman inhabitants.

Drawing on these inspirations, the 2024 edition of the ALTER conference invites the development of approaches which, taking as their starting point the wide range of fields to which disability research is applied (work, education, health, family, body, sexuality, artistic practices, identities, mobilisations, etc.), examine past and present situations with a view to shaping the future.

**Framework.** This call for papers is part of the annual meeting of Alter – European Society for Disability Research/Société Européenne de Recherche sur le Handicap (http://alter-asso.org). The Conference will be held on Thursday July 4 and Friday July 5, 2024, at the KU Leuven in the city of Leuven (Belgium).

**Public.**Junior or senior scholars in the humanities and social sciences whose area of expertise is disability research or related issues, such as mental health, as well as professionals and anyone directly concerned by disability involved in participatory research processes are welcome to submit their proposals. Research emerging from the fields of sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, psychology, education, law, political science, architecture, urbanism, and design is particularly sought, but this is not an exhaustive list.

**Languages of the conference.** English, French.

**Scope.** The scope of the 12th Alter conference takes on the challenges and opportunities of contemporary worlds in Europe and around the world. It invites us to turn the trouble and uncertainty generated by environmental and health disasters, violence and migration, on the one hand, and crises in society and science, on the other, into a source of inspiration for disability research that is more in tune with the economic and ecological challenges we face. It also invites us to reflect collectively on the knowledge and expertise we have acquired in the field, bringing it up to date with the present in order to build sustainable futures. The aim is not so much to produce new research as to take a fresh look at work in progress.

Three avenues can already be explored, and others can be proposed:

The vulnerabilities associated with inequality and discrimination are both the effect and the cause of experiences of social isolation and alienation; they can also open up avenues for the recognition and development of new forms of relatedness between humans and nature and between humans and objects (tools, procedures, rules, technologies, etc.).

Against the risk of collapse, today's challenges call on us to reconcile imagination and reality to develop theories and know-how that underpin accessible and inclusive design rooted in material and immaterial cultural heritage.

The epistemological and ontological turns in social sciences have prompted an ethical reflection on research methods in which researchers interested in disability issues have been actively involved, developing consent procedures and clarifying their positions. However, these ethical principles sometimes seem disconnected from real-life situations and require researchers to reflect on their own "ethical performativity in times of disaster" (to combine phrases of Jennifer Deger and Isabelle Stengers).

The 12th *Alter* conference seeks contributions that address, from a theoretical or empirical perspective, one or more of the following research axes, though not exclusively:

1. **Between Heritages and Futures: Redefining Contemporary Disability Scholarship**

This axis includes a perspective of evolving understandings of disability scholarship. We particularly invite studies into how the past informs and intersects with the current and requires updating and reform of disability scholarship, especially papers on practices that bridge divisions at the intersection of disability, gender, and (de-)colonization.

1. **Cultural repertories of designing *with* disability**

This axis includes studies that analyse the 'cultural repertoires' of ways of thinking, doing and living with disability, their possible hybridisation in the different areas of people's lives and the forms of relatedness they produce.

1. **Disability policies in the face of major societal challenges**

This area focuses on the changes in disability policies in line with current challenges, and their potential intersection with other social issues such as the environment, urban planning, education and work, or with measures targeting other forms of inequality such as gender, migration and single parenthood. We will be looking at the extent to which, and the ways in which, climate change, health crises and soaring inequalities are impacting on policies and services for people with disabilities, as well as the effects of these changes on the day-to-day lives of the people concerned.

1. **Material and Immaterial Inclusive Designs**

This area focuses on creative processes that draw on the diversity of material and immaterial heritages to create inclusive spaces/devices. Starting from a critical reflection on ways of thinking about inclusion, it brings together theoretical and/or empirical proposals in the fields of design and engineering (including social engineering) that take into account cultural repertories (language, body techniques).

1. **Ethical Performativity in Times of Catastrophy**

This axis includes work on the ethics of participation, mutuality and interdepenence in the context of disability research, law, policy and professional practice. Contributions that involve updating and reforming current guidelines and that push research practice forward are especially invited.

1. **Technology and Innovation**

This axis includes work on the contributions of disability technology and innovation. We particularly invite disability scholarship on technology in the area of communication (including social media), genomics (including genetic counseling), transport and navigation (e.g. the self-driving car, collaborative cartography). We also invite contributions that explore innovations in education, health, architecture and urbanism (including smart homes and cities).

**Submission.**Proposals must be submitted no later than **January 14, 2024** on the Alter conference website. To submit, it is required to create an account on the Sciencesconf platform if you do not already have one: <https://alterconf2024.sciencesconf.org/>

Proposals can be introduced *individually* (20 min.), or *as a group* in the form of a joint session with three to four presentations (20 min. per presentation). In the latter case, a presentation of the session is required in addition to the abstracts of the papers themselves. Proposals can be written in English, or French according to the following guidelines:

* Title of the paper or session;
* *For an individual submission*: an abstract of maximum 3500 characters (spaces included) stating the originality, the problematic, the methods and results (depending on the practices of the discipline) and an indicative bibliography.
  + *For a joint session proposal*: an argument in support of the session proposal of maximum 3500 characters (spaces included), specifying the names and institutional affiliations of the authors of the session, and the titles of their papers. A file with abstracts for each paper of the session, following the same guideline as proposals for *individual submissions*, must be attached.
* The theme of the paper (see above)
* The language chosen for the paper or session (English, French, Sign Langage).

**Decisions** of the Scientific Committees will be notified **February 29, 2024**, on the understanding that by submitting a proposal for a paper or a session, the author or the person in charge commits to attend the conference if their proposal is accepted.

**Indicative references**

# Rosi Braidotti (2019) *Posthuman Knowledge*. Polity Press

Michel Callon, Pierre Lascoumes, Yannick Barthes (2009) *Acting in an Uncertain World. An Essay on Technical Democracy*. MIT Press.

## Jennifer Deger (2019) Ph*one & Spear. A Yuṯa Anthropology.* Goldsmiths Press.

Donna J. Haraway (2016) Staying with the Trouble : Making Kin in the Chthulucene.Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2016.

Tim Ingold (2022) *Imagining for Real: Essays on Creation, Attention and Correspondence*. Routledge.

# Victor Papanek (2005, 1*971*) *Design for the Real World.* *Human Ecology and Social Change*. Chicago Review Press.

Isabelle Stengers (2015) *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism.* Open Humanities Press.