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## CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

### **An 'Academic Workplace' on Deinstitutionalization. Partnering practice, policy, and academia to radicalise De-Institutionalization and inclusion as a socio-spatial and cross-policy issue.**

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De-institutionalization (DI) is framed and recognized internationally as a lever for the realisation of inclusion for citizens with disabilities. In international research, policy and practice, DI is predominantly framed as the dismantling of institutional care to pursue inclusive living, housing, and working in the community. We can hereby, among others, refer to the checklist recently developed by the European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care (2019) or the Guidelines on Deinstitutionalization as described by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2022). The renewed emphasis on DI is also promoted in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium), which has a very slow response to DI compared to a.o. the Nordic countries.

Although DI is widely promoted, there is no consensus as to how to conceptualise and address DI. Quite recently, sharp critiques are formulated as ambiguities and complexities can be seen both in the goals and implementation process

([https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/crpd/cfi-deinstitutionalization/submissions/2022-07-06/Academic\\_W\\_Ghent\\_Uni-06-07-2022.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/crpd/cfi-deinstitutionalization/submissions/2022-07-06/Academic_W_Ghent_Uni-06-07-2022.docx)).

Research shows that persons with disabilities who are physically integrated in the community do not necessarily have the experience of belonging in society; that repressive institutional cultures continue to come into play when people with disabilities live in the community; that there is a risk of not having access to (specialised) care and support; and that they risk lacking social and financial benefits or meaningful interactions and relationships in society. This phenomenon is referred to in international research as 'institutionalisation at home', 'community institutions', 'extrusions' or 'asylums without walls'. DI thus refers not only to the location and nature of the architectural and spatial embedding, but also to an institutional culture/professionalism and autonomy.

Therefore, there is an urgency in Flanders to support innovation in policy and practice and to gather knowledge on conceptions and strategies of DI. In that spirit, the Flemish Agency for People with Disabilities provided funds to establish the Academic Workplace De-Institutionalization (AWDI) at Ghent University. In this lecture we provide an insight in this unique collaboration between practice, policy and academia to tackle the challenges mentioned before, to inspire policy and generate new

insights with regard to DI. In the coming years, the AWDI is committed to connecting the experiential knowledge of people with disabilities, their networks, professionals, policymakers but also architects and urban planners to stimulate innovation in the field and policy and create qualitative living environments. The AWDI will do so by conducting a variety of action research projects, setting up learning networks in which all relevant voices are involved and building up and disseminating knowledge. Thus, this lecture refers to the central theme "Engaging everybody: caring neighbourhoods and compassionate communities" "but it also tackles the topics described under "Change management implementation: macro, meso and micro level".