

Academic summary

Inger Marie Lid: Accessibility for all? A discussion on disability and concept of human focusing on ethical problems related to Universal Design, human diversity and participation as citizens

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The thesis is structured in four parts with a closing concluding part. Part one gives an introduction to the topic and presents the theoretical perspectives and method. Disability, accessibility and universal design are complex phenomena, thus a complexity is needed also when approaching these topics. A relational model for theorizing disability is applied. The relational model is developed in Nordic countries, and comprises individual factors and environmental factors, explaining disability as a gap or a misfit in the interaction between individual and environmental factors. Disability and accessibility are analyzed as complex phenomena, involving human beings viewed in a citizen perspective and the social and material environment involving politics, law and architecture. Disabling barriers is analyzed as emerging from a misfit in this person-environment interaction. The concept of person emphasizes a shared vulnerability; and disability is viewed as a human condition. The thesis is inter-disciplinary. Qualitative interviews and studies of political and legal documents are employed together with readings of philosophical and theological texts. The Theoretical perspectives include phenomenology, hermeneutics and critical realism.

In part 2 accessibility and Universal Design is discussed related to political and legal texts, the UN-Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Norwegian accessibility and discrimination law (DAA). The focus moves from this macro level to a micro level, presenting the analytical findings in the qualitative interviews with pedestrians in Oslo. The interviewees involves grown up people with sight loss, mobility restrictions using individual devices and also some grown-ups without such impairments. In the interviews the focus is on the people-environment interaction in a social-material field of inter-action. This part ends with a discussion on situated knowledge as developed from individual perspectives including individuals with impairments. By this analysis, accessibility is discussed as a complexity, in order to contribute to the theoretical development of Universal Design as strategy and concept.

Part 3 discusses disability as human condition in a philosophical and theological perspective. This part starts out by introducing the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum and her theory of justice, *Capabilities Approach*. Nussbaum`s political philosophy brings forth a concrete proposition as to how the government can protect and encourage people`s right to live in accordance to their inherent dignity. Nussbaum includes disability as a human condition in her political concept of person. Thereafter the thesis develops a concept of person emphasizing people as vulnerable, with dignity and needs. From this discussion on anthropology, the concept of accessibility and Universal Design is analyzed on a more abstract level, discussing accessibility as an opportunity to participate in society as a person among persons. The thesis argues that disability and impairments needs to be accepted as a dimension of human life. Thus disability and impairments should not be framed in *theodicy* but rather framed within the theological anthropology. Eugenics is discussed from the perspective of diversity, asking how accessibility for all also includes facilitating for human vulnerability in order to give room and place for diversity. This ethical discussion is framed in *disability studies*, focusing on individual experiences as source for profound insight into the

eugenics issue. An Aristotelian ethical approach, with interest in good life for people with various abilities and disabilities, is chosen as a more productive perspective than a utilitarian perspective.

Part 4 provides a discussion on interpretation of a right to the city as a right to urban life. Focusing on facilitating environment in urban public places, the thesis examines to what extent Universal Design implemented in urban planning and refurbishing processes also improve accessibility. By studying a local refurbishing project in Oslo municipality the focus is on enacting accessibility, with interest on participation in the political processes. Due to the planning and building act, those who are stakeholders and have relevant knowledge should be included in planning processes. Universal Design as a new objective is given a concrete interpretation by those engaged in the process when the strategy is implemented at a concrete and detailed level. This implementation also reveals differences between the interpretation of Universal Design and accessibility as experienced by individuals. The analysis indicated that more comprehensive knowledge on Universal Design and accessibility is needed, emphasizing the human dimension and impairments as part of human diversity. The discussion focuses on to what extent accessibility and Universal Design is, or could be implemented as a dimension in architectural quality in urban environments.

By taking a first person perspective as a starting point in developing knowledge to inform the theoretical content of Universal Design, this thesis discusses the implications of vulnerability and impairments as a dimension of human life, involving individual and political perspectives together with theology and ethics. When linked to human vulnerability and disability as a human condition Universal Design may contribute to develop more inclusive environments. There is however a risk that the strategy will fall short on developing its democratic and ethical potential if the concept is detached from human embodied vulnerability.