Afterword

Rannveig Traustadóttir

In essence, this book asks why societies continue to exclude and marginalise disabled people. It focuses on everyday resistance to the inclusion of disabled people on multiple levels and in different areas of everyday life. The attention is on aspects that create barriers to inclusion – in other words on ‘inaccessibility’ – with the aim to unravel the powers, relations, ideas and practices ‘at work’ in such a way as to exclude disabled people. The book makes a valuable contribution to gaining knowledge and understanding of the persistent forces behind the continuing exclusion of disabled people. A major strength of the book is the multi-disciplinary approach, the variety of disciplines and theoretical perspectives, and the diversity of methods in exploring various arenas of everyday life, working in concert to create a multi-level and insightful analysis. The contributions examine lack of access in a range of different areas of society such as in man-made public urban spaces and transport; knowledge production and the ways the education system excludes disabled students, often in very subtle ways; the shortcomings of laws and policies in securing inclusion; and the ways in which bureaucracy and institutional practices exercise power and control over disabled people.

Of particular interest and value is the detailed exploration of how the exclusion of disabled people is a part of everyday, often taken-for-granted, practices and performances, revealing how barriers appear in unexpected places that have not previously gained much attention. The book also reveals the gap between the sweeping promises of inclusion in international and national policy documents on the one hand and the everyday reality and lived experiences of disabled people on the other. Quite remarkable for many readers outside the Nordic countries will be to discover that these exclusionary practices also take place in the countries widely considered the ‘best’ and most advanced; the Nordic welfare states. The Nordic countries pride themselves on their extensive policies of equality, where everyone should have equal access to services, choices and possibilities. While it is true that, in a global context, the Nordic countries have made the greatest efforts to achieve equality, widespread exclusionary practices still prevail when it comes to disabled people, as is apparent in this book.

This begs the question: why, despite stated goals of equality for all and inclusion on all levels, are so many disabled people still excluded from so many of the key areas of everyday life? The research and analysis in this book attempt to address this question, unravel exclusionary practices and create knowledge and insights that can lead towards inclusion.

In looking for solutions, it is crucial to place today's knowledge and practices in an historical context. It is true that we continue to exclude disabled people. However, we have made enormous progress over the last 50 years or so, regarding the inclusion of disabled people in regular communities and societies. Let's keep in mind that official policies towards disabled people up until the middle of last century were based on the *ideology of segregation and isolation*. In line with these policies, countries around the world built large total institutions to house disabled people, including children, who were kept away from the rest of society. This was largely due to the eugenic policies of the time. The ideology that replaced segregation and isolation was the *principle of normalisation*, which had its origins in the Nordic countries in the 1960s. Yes, it was not until after the middle of the last century that policies of segregation were abandoned and those based on normalisation and integration (as it was called at the time) became national policies in most countries. These policies led to the closure of the large institutions and the development of community-based services. However, many countries still struggle to close the institutions, also in Europe, and some institutions continue to be in operation in the Nordic countries.

The normalisation era made huge gains toward the inclusion of disabled people. Based on the ideology of normalisation and integration, community-based services were established around the world. The first steps were shaky, often characterised by institutional practices within community services. Sadly, the continuation of institutional rules, routines and practices, including the lack of control over one's life, can still be found in disability services, as is confirmed in one of the studies in this volume (see the chapter by Eric Svanelöv and Lena Talman). Disability services as we know them today were developed and designed during the normalisation era. We have inherited a service system based on ideology which aimed to address very different issues and challenges than we face today. Thus, introducing new and innovative policies and practices, based on human rights approaches and a new understanding of disability, can be problematic if the basic underlying ideologies and systems are not compatible with the proposed innovations.

Today's ideology, with its clearest expression in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, emphasises human rights and a social-relational understanding of disability. This new ideology, which has been included in laws and policies in countries around the world – including all the Nordic countries – highlights that societal barriers, in interaction with people with impairments, are the main 'problem' when it comes to the inclusion of disabled people. Thus, it is society and the range of barriers (in man-made environments, labour markets, education systems, practices, prejudices,

stereotypes, etc.), that need to be changed, not disabled people. This book, with its focus on inaccessibility and resistance to inclusion, is an important and helpful tool to move us closer towards understanding the societal exclusionary structures and practices, and how these can be addressed in order for our societies to become inclusive of all.