15. Universal Design as a Premise for making Public Libraries into Low-intensive Meeting Places

Gerd Berget

Introduction

According to Audunson (2005), there are two main types of arenas, namely high-intensive and low-intensive meeting places. The first comprises the places where we meet people who share similar interests and engagements. The latter refers to places where we are exposed to people with relatively different values and interests. A central point related to the low-intensive arenas is, according to Audunson (2005, p. 436), "that they will facilitate meetings between people who are not exposed to one another on other arenas. Today, such meeting-places with a potential of making us visible to one another across social, ethnic, generational and value-based boundaries are extremely important". The low-intensive arenas are closely related to convivial encounters, which is discussed by several researchers, both in general (Goffman, 1961; Illich, 1973; Valentine & Sadgrove, 2014) and in a library context (Bigby & Wiesel, 2011; Kozubaev & DiSalvo, 2020; Wiesel & Bigby, 2016).

In his original paper, Audunson (2005) focused on cultural diversity when discussing the value of public libraries as low-intensive meeting places. Audunson (2005) argued that public libraries represent low-intensive meeting places and emphasized the libraries' role as promoters of democratic discourse and tolerance. In that connection, communication is especially important: "The concepts of society in general and of a democratic society in particular, presuppose communication across the cultures and demographic groups that the society in question consists of" (Audunson, 2005, p. 433). This reasoning,

however, seems equally valid in the context of people with disabilities, where the public library facilitates meetings between people with and without disabilities.

Previous researchers have reported that many people with disabilities have small networks, low self-esteem, and a number of people experience poor mental health related to isolation and loneliness (Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2014; Honey, Emerson, & Llewellyn, 2011; Sheppard & Badger, 2010; Thurston, 2010). According to Honey et al. (2011), mental health conditions such as loneliness can be improved by reducing social exclusion. Consequently, low-intensive arenas and convivial encounters may be particularly important for these cohorts. Such meetings might also enhance a general understanding of disabilities in society, because exposing people without disabilities to various types of impairments may prompt increased respect and empathy.

Public libraries should be universally designed to ensure accessibility for all users. Otherwise, certain demographic groups might be excluded, and libraries would no longer represent low-intensive meeting places. This perspective paper will explore this issue further. The research question is as follows:

RQ: How can the implementation of universal design facilitate public libraries as low-intensive meeting places to reduce the social exclusion of people with disabilities?

The paper is structured as follows: First, disability will be discussed in a historical perspective. Then, public libraries and their role as low-intensive meeting places and facilitators for social justice and convivial encounters will be discussed. The main focus will be on physical libraries. Finally, universal design is put forward as a premise to fully achieve low-intensive arenas that can reduce social exclusion. The seven principles of universal design will be introduced and related to specific examples of how to increase user diversity in public libraries.

Disability and Oppression

Looking back at history, people with disabilities have been oppressed for centuries. From early human times, impairments have been treated as something divergent and people with disabilities have often been viewed as a lower class.

Throughout history, disabilities have been regarded as a punishment from sin, test of faith or a mysterious act of God (Creamer, 2012). During Nazism, there was even a cruel attempt to eradicate people with disabilities (Vehmas & Watson, 2014). Overall, this user group has been subject to class distinction in a variety of ways, such as lack of labour force participation (Foster & Wass, 2013), reduced income (Polidano & Vu, 2015) and social exclusion (Koller, Pouesard, & Rummens, 2018).

The medical model was the dominating perspective on disability. The medical view entailed that disability was solely related to individual deficits, and was therefore only medical in nature (Toboso, 2011). The solutions to reduce potential barriers experienced by people with impairments were clinical, including medical prevention, rehabilitation or cure (Shakespeare, 2013). No attention was directed towards societal barriers. According to Disability Nottinghamshire (2020), one of the problems with the medical model is that it "looks at what is 'wrong' with the person and not what the person needs". Consequently, there was little effort to improve the environmental barriers, and people with impairments lost independence and control over their lives.

The connections between oppression and disabilities became especially evident in the social debates in the 1970's. The class struggle was particularly visible in "the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation" (UPIAS). UPIAS published a document in 1976 called "*Fundamental Principles of Disability*" (Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation & Disability Alliance, 1976), where they defined disability as a relationship between a discriminatory society and people with impairments. According to Shakespeare (2004), this disability movement had clear connections with both Marxist theory and labour movement traditions. For example, their view corresponded with Marx, who in the book "*Capital*" (Marx, 1867), referred to capital and labour as relationships, not things. For many people, exclusion from the labour market resulted in unsatisfactory living conditions.

In their principles, UPIAS discussed disabilities and referred to class distinctions due to "their condemnation to the status of second-class citizens" (Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation & Disability Alliance, 1976, p. 22). UPIAS

emphasized "continued denial of reasonable income" and "oppressive social conditions" as key factors for the class struggles. Moreover, they stated that: "the absence of an income as of right for disabled people is in our view more than just one more symptom of their oppression and segregation: it is rather fundamental to the way in which Society exacts payment for being 'not as others'" (Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation & Disability Alliance, 1976, p. 22).

The activism for the rights of people with disabilities resulted, among others, in the social model of disability, introduced by Mike Oliver. He explained the foundation of the model as follows: "we were not disabled by our impairments but by the disabling barriers we faced in society" (Oliver, 2013, p. 1024). According to this model, disability was not regarded as something medical, but rather defined as a type of oppression created by society (Abberley, 1999). Moreover, the social model emphasised that the society favours certain types of bodies and excludes others (Hamraie, 2012).

A much-applied alternative model of the social model is the social relational model, also referred to as the Nordic model (Shakespeare, 2004). According to this perspective, disability occurs when there is a gap between the abilities of the individual and demands from society (Gustavsson, Tøssebro, & Traustadóttir, 2005). This gap can be reduced by either changing the environments or strengthening the individual. This contrasts with the social model, which only addressed societal barriers. Another version of the social model is the diversity model. Here, the dichotomy, between ability and disability is removed. The basic principles are human diversity and dignity, and the concept of normality is rejected. Consequently, the term functional diversity is introduced as an alternative to disability. Moreover, functional differences should be regarded as "a source of enrichment" (Toboso, 2011, p. 109) rather than have negative connotations.

The social model proved successful in the context of political activism but has been criticized for having an exclusive focus on disability as linked to capitalism. Oppression is also typically related to power. In this context, Owens (2015) suggests that the work of Hanna Arendt, a theorist on power, is particularly

relevant. Arendt (1951, p. 301) discussed the private and public sphere, and the relationship between them:

> private life in civilized society, is a permanent threat to the public sphere, because the public sphere is as consistently based on the law of equality as the private sphere is based on the law of universal difference and differentiation. Equality, in contrast to all that is involved in mere existence, is not given us, but is the result of human organization insofar as it is guided by the principle of justice. We are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights.

Arendt (1951) emphasised the right to belong to an organized community, which may also be related to participation in society and the importance of low-intensive meeting places. People with disabilities live in the same public society as people without disabilities, and everyone should be regarded as equal citizens. Arendt's perspective has been applied by several researchers, among others Owens (2015, p. 393), who claimed that "an attack on disabled people would be an attack on human diversity".

The link between the disability rights movements and Marxism has also been pointed out by Russell (2001). In the paper "*Disablement, oppression, and the political economy*", Russell (2001, p. 87) stated that "Any struggle for freedom from oppression has something in common with Marxism". The need for jurisdiction was also emphasized: "The very perception that there is a need for legal rights to protect marginal classes of persons suggest that oppression exists, for if members of a particular group were not oppressed, they would not have barriers to remove nor rights to be gained" (Russell, 2001, p. 87).

In context of people with disabilities, there are numerous conventions and guidelines to attend to basic rights, both in society in general and to ensure access to public libraries. One example is the UN "*Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*" (UN, 2006, p. 22), where article 30 addresses participation in cultural life as follows: "State Parties recognize the rights of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities: ... Enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries".

Equal access for all, including marginalized groups, is also embedded in the public library law in Norway. According to this law (Folkebibliotekloven, 2014), public libraries should "promote the spread of information, education and other cultural activities through active dissemination and by making books and other media available for the free use of all the inhabitants of Norway". In other words, the library should provide services to all types of user groups. Moreover, §2 states that "the public libraries comprise library services to users who have difficulties using the library". Therefore, the public libraries have a mandated responsibility towards people who for various reasons are not able to use the library, including some people with disabilities. Consequently, public libraries should offer accessible services to a diversity of users, also the "non-users". In this way, the libraries can play a vital role in reducing social exclusion. Another jurisdiction relevant in this context is the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act (Ministry of Culture, 2020). This law states that public and private undertakings focused on the general public must be universally designed, including both physical conditions and ICT.

Public Libraries and Social Justice

Social exclusion is often related to capitalism and inequities of income. Nevertheless, some groups may be excluded despite being materially well off. According to Pateman (2000), exclusion might be related to attitudes in society such as sexism, homophobia or other forms of discrimination, and there is an intrinsic link between social exclusion and social class. Many people with disabilities are both subjected to low income and poverty (Palmer, 2011) in addition to discrimination (Shakespeare, 2018). Consequently, there is still a significant class distinction that must be attended to in society. In this class struggle, public libraries can play a vital role as low-intensive meeting places, given that the library is designed for user diversity and is accessible for all types of people.

According to Pateman (2000), the class system pervades all aspects of our society, including the organization of public libraries and library usage. He claims that librarians themselves are defined as middle class, which has influenced both

library policies and practice, and might create barriers to library use by certain groups. Pateman (2000) designated the capitalist society as the cause for social exclusion and stated that there is a clear link between social exclusion, class and capitalism. He was also worried about the working-class users because of class distinctions: "while public libraries are used by all social classes, they are a predominantly middle-class institution" (Pateman, 2000, p. 33).

In the book "*Public libraries and social justice*", Pateman and Vincent (2016, p. 1) discussed libraries in context of inclusion, and claimed that the libraries are not as inclusive as they are commonly perceived: "it is widely claimed that libraries are 'open to all' but much of the evidence suggest otherwise". Moreover, Pateman and Vincent (2016, p. 1) argued that the library profession does not focus enough on social exclusion, and "they need to abandon outmoded concepts of excellence and fully grasp the equity agenda". Consequently, they suggested a needs-based library service, founded on the "Marxist principle of 'from each according to their ability, and to each according to their needs'" (Pateman & Vincent, 2016, p. 11). To achieve this goal, Pateman and Vincent (2016, p. 11) recommended user involvement: "all sections of the local community have to be actively engaged in the planning, design, delivery and assessment of library services". This mode of thought has clear connections with universal design and participatory design.

In the paper "*Managing cultural change in public libraries*", Pateman and Pateman (2017) suggested an analytical framework based on Marx and Maslow. In this framework, they suggested a model moving away from the traditional library services to needs-based library services. In this approach, there is a focus on non-users and the users with the greatest needs, which according to Pateman and Pateman (2017, p. 214) should have a positive impact on the libraries: "Public libraries will be transformed from institutions of social control into agencies of social change". Further, they suggested evaluating libraries not based on circulation, memberships and visits, but the ability to contribute to social outcome. Finally, Pateman and Pateman (2017) asserted that by applying critical leadership, the librarians will be more aware of systems that support oppression. Consequently, they might be able to take a clearer role in removing social exclusion and class distinction.

According to Popowich (2018), there is a crisis in public libraries because of material changes in the production and organization of labour relations. This is also a statement put forward earlier by Buschman (2003), who among others emphasized the importance of preserving the public sphere. This is also in accordance with Audunson (2005).

Social justice and inclusion have been debated by several scholars. Vincent (2012, p. 350) discussed the potential roles libraries may actually play in increasing social justice, addressing the issue of user diversity: "For libraries, it must involve embracing equality and diversity; focusing on a needs-based service and targeting resources towards those who need them most". This view is supported by Dadlani (2016, p. 16), who argued that both the library profession and research within library and information science should have a "deeper engagement with extant philosophical literature on social justice". Public libraries have a great potential in reducing social exclusion and increase social justice. As Audunson (2005) suggested, much of this potential lies in being a low-intensive meeting place. Moreover, libraries facilitate convivial encounters to promote social justice (Bigby & Wiesel, 2011).

Low-intensive Meeting Places and Convivial Encounters

Audunson (2005) reflected upon the necessity of low-intensive meeting places and discussed how very few arenas have the capacity of being meeting places for all types of people. Although this issue is discussed in a multicultural context, the reasoning might be equally valid for other cohorts, such as people with disabilities. Audunson (2005, p. 434) referred to Habermas and his theories of the public sphere, arguing that the civil society loses independence because of marketization: "Civil society becomes invaded by the market and consumption takes the place of discourse and reasoning". Buschman (2003) also referred to Habermas in a library context and emphasised the importance of the public libraries as public spheres. Buschman (2003, p. 8) referred to a crisis in the public libraries due to the increasing capitalism: "librarianship is a classic case study of the dismantling of the public sphere in an era of radically market-oriented public philosophy". This statement is in accordance with Popowich

(2018, p. 6), who claimed that there is a need to "recuperate a notion of democracy and the public sphere" in the public libraries.

Public libraries have a great potential in reducing social exclusion and class distinction because of the characteristics related to low-intensive meeting places. In this context, researchers have also discussed the public libraries and their role in facilitating convivial encounters. Conviviality refers to encounters that are neither long-term relationships nor free mingling in public spaces. Such encounters occur "when strangers engage in a shared activity with a common purpose or intent" (Bigby & Wiesel, 2011, p. 265). Bigby and Wiesel (2011) discussed the importance of such meetings for people with intellectual impairments, who often have limited social networks. Moreover, this user group may have experiences of encounters that may be different from other cohorts.

Convivial encounters can be important in the context of inclusion, because there is no focus on class distinction (Wiesel & Bigby, 2016). According to Bigby and Wiesel (2011, p. 265), such a meeting "provides people an opportunity to step outside a fixed identity; for example, to shift from a person with intellectual disability to a more transient identification as a library user". Through these encounters: "people construct temporary shared identifications (e.g., as gardeners in a community garden), but which do not repress the differences between them" (Bigby & Wiesel, 2011, p. 265).

The dichotomy between "*community presence*" and "*community participation*" was also discussed by Bigby and Wiesel (2011), who related this to social inclusion, where convivial encounters may play an important role in promoting inclusion: "Such an encounter between strangers may lead to friendship and a longterm relationship, and in this sense can be understood as a bridge between community presence and community participation" (Bigby & Wiesel, 2011, p. 265). Moreover, Bigby and Wiesel (2011) argued that libraries comprise a good arena for convivial encounters, which may be related to the qualities of being low-intensive meeting places, as emphasised by Audunson (2005).

Convivial encounters may also increase tolerance. Audunson (2005, p. 437) claimed that in the context of low-intensive meeting places, tolerance

"presupposes that we are exposed to other values, interests and preferences than our own and, that we re-conciliate ourselves with their existence and accept them as legitimate". Convivial meetings might achieve exactly that, and there seems to be a common perception that public libraries have the potential for playing a key part in this context. This potential was described by Audunson (2005, p. 438) as follows: "a new dimension has been added to the libraries' role as instruments for democracy. Today, we become partisans for democracy by providing low-intensive meeting-places that can promote cross-cultural contact and communication".

In early studies of encounters, such as the work by Goffman (1961), there was a focus on the tension that could arise due to differences between people, such as class, gender or abilities. According to Wiesel and Bigby (2016), later theorizations regarding such encounters have addressed more positive aspects, among others by focusing on social change and reduced prejudice (Valentine & Sadgrove, 2014). Consequently, convivial encounters that typically might occur in low-intensive meeting places such as public libraries should potentially contribute to reduce oppression.

In a design fiction paper, Kozubaev and DiSalvo (2020) argued that the role of public libraries might be endangered, and looked at how future design spaces in libraries can support the concept of conviviality. Kozubaev and DiSalvo (2020) discussed how the future of public libraries is affected by the rise of global capital. They suggested that there is a broader decline of public space, where for instance public parks have given away areas for more private spaces, such as shopping malls. They also argued that libraries are expected to evaluate their services based on economic productivity, which is closely related to global capitalism and corporate management. In this context, social interaction would not be considered a measurable outcome of the library services. Consequently, capitalism may cause a decrease of low-intensive meeting places and hence increase social exclusion for certain cohorts.

So far, this paper has focused on physical libraries. A significant portion of the library services, however, has become digital. This development is positive for many people, since it may save time not having to visit the physical library to solve certain information needs. Further, for people with impairments related to

for example vision, hearing or movement, it might be easier to utilize a digital library because the physical barriers are potentially removed. It is, however, important that the libraries fulfil demands for universally designed ICT solutions, such as accessible web pages and search user interfaces. Otherwise, the digital services are not accessible for all. In this context, guidelines such as The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (W3C, 2018), also referred to as WCAG, may be valuable, although not all needs are sufficiently attended to in this standard. Moreover, digital encounters may be facilitated through online events such as digital books clubs or language cafes. Nevertheless, when libraries become more digital, there is a risk of less people visiting the physical library, which may affect the libraries role as meeting places.

The capitalistic ways of measuring the value of public libraries has also been discussed by Aabø and Audunson (2002), who argued that well-established economic models do not accurately estimate the value of public libraries. They suggested that three conditions must be fulfilled to be useful for public library evaluation: "they must be able to measure non-use values as well as use values, they must be capable of integrating valuation motives which extend beyond the pursuit of individual self-interest, and they must not violate the assumption of rationality" (Aabø & Audunson, 2002, p. 5).

Fincher and Iveson (2008) emphasized that libraries are typically perceived as safe spaces by marginalized groups compared to other forms of open public spaces. Moreover, they claimed that it seems "most productive to recognize all library encounters as premised on the capacity of those who use the library to mutually negotiate their common status as library users in the moments of their encounters" (Fincher & Iveson, 2008, p. 188). Consequently, one does not address fixed identities or differences between the patrons, but rather treat everyone in the same manner. Again, this argument consolidates the public libraries as low-intensive meeting places that facilitate encounters between various cohorts, which can reduce social exclusion for many people. According to Wiesel and Bigby (2016), such an approach allows people from minorities or excluded groups to become recognised within their communities, which is also the argument put forward by Audunson (2005) in relation to cultural diversity. It

289

also seems like a strong argument in favour of universal design, where diversity is regarded as a norm rather than exception. In such a perspective, no user groups should be regarded as "minorities".

From Accessibility to Universal Design

Equal inclusion of users with very different characteristics is a premise for a meeting place to be defined as low-intensive (Audunson, 2005). To accommodate for user diversity, however, the public library must be accessible for everyone, comprising the physical building, the collection and the services provided by the library. Universal design is an important tool (and mode of thought) in this context.

The term universal design was originally coined by Ronald Mace, and defined as "the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design" (Center for Universal Design, 2008). Universal design entails measures that will make the whole society usable by all types of people, regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation or abilities. User diversity is elaborated on in more detail in the definition of universal design that is applied by the Design for all Foundation (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012, p. 28):

> [T]he intervention on environments, products, and services with the aim that everyone, including future generations, regardless of age, gender, capabilities, or cultural background, can enjoy participating in the construction of our society, with equal opportunities participating in economic, social, cultural, recreational, and entertainment activities while also being able to access, use, and understand whatever, part of the environment with as much independence as possible.

This definition is especially applicable in a library context, because it also comprises participation in cultural activities.

A common misconception of universal design is that it is solely related to disabilities. However, definitions of universal design that include examples of user diversity (such as the definition by the Design for all Foundation), typically emphasise gender, sexual orientation, age and cultural diversity in addition to abilities or functional level. Consequently, universal design addresses all types of

user groups, including cultural diversity, which was discussed by Audunson (2005).

The overall purpose of universal design is that everyone should have equal opportunities for full participation in society. Consequently, no needs are regarded as "*special needs*". However, there might be a need for different solutions to cover concurrent needs. An example would be for a person to get from the ground floor to the first floor in a library building. The need would be the same for everyone, simply to get from point A to point B. Nevertheless, the solutions required might vary. A person carrying heavy books, pushing a pram or relying on a wheelchair might request an elevator, while others may prefer using stairs. In this perspective, neither the elevator nor the stairs are regarded as the "main solution" or "the special solution". They are both potential means of solving the same need, to help people get from one floor to another.

Within the universal design way of thinking, the need for diverse solutions is taken into consideration from the beginning of the design and planning process of every environment and service. Universal design has therefore also been associated with participatory design, which is a design tradition that involves real end-users in all phases of design, production and testing of products and services. Although participatory design traditionally has been applied in human-computer interaction contexts, it is purposeful to use this methodology in a library context as well.

Before the introduction of universal design, accessible design was the predominant approach to accommodate facilities for users with disabilities. This type of design can be defined as "design that meets prescribed code requirements for use by people with disabilities" (Story, 1998, p. 4). Accessible design was often accomplished through so-called "special design" that made many people with disabilities feel left out and segregated (Story, 1998). Accessible design is often added on after the end of the original design process, indicating that the designers have clearly not planned for user diversity. Typical examples of accessible design are ugly wheelchair ramps, stair gliders or huge handles. Successful universal design, however, is unnoticeable, because all the accessibility measures are included in the original design. By not considering

user diversity from the beginning of the process, certain users may feel stigmatized because they cannot apply the main solution used by most people. One example is "back-door access" found in certain buildings, including public libraries, where people in wheelchairs must use a service entrance rather than the main door to enter the building (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012, p. 18). Consequently, some user groups may avoid visiting the library because they feel stigmatized or not welcome. Universal design should ideally not rely on any such "special solutions". This stigmatization was also emphasised by Iwarsson and Ståhl (2003, p. 61), who claimed that "universal design is about social inclusion while accessibility measures implemented after the basic design of a building or a product represents exclusion".

Universal design has been criticized for being an unachievable goal, among others because there is no possible way to design something that suits everyone under all conditions. As a result, alternative approaches have been suggested, such as "design-for-one" (Harper, 2007) and "User Sensitive Inclusive Design" (Newell, Gregor, Morgan, Pullin, & Macaulay, 2011). Story, Mueller, and Mace (1998, p. 13) argued that universal design should be regarded as a design process rather than an achievement, and stated that "universal design provides a blueprint for maximum inclusion of all people". Others have commented on issues related to lack of guidelines on how to actually achieve universal design (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012). As a response to this criticism, the seven principles of universal design were developed. These principles have been applied in a variety of contexts.

The Seven Principles of Universal Design – A Tool for Inclusion

To better facilitate universal design and support planners and developers, a set of seven principles were introduced (see Table 1). These principles were initiated by The Center for Universal Design, and developed by a group of architects, product designers, engineers and environmental design researchers. The purposes of these principles were to build on the existing knowledge base, educate designers, guide the design process and to evaluate existing designs (Story et al., 1998). Principle 1-3 and 5-7 are quite general, addressing all types of abilities and the

various shapes of human bodies. Principle 4, however, is more closely related to specific abilities or functions, such as vision and hearing.

Principle	Definition
1. Equitable use	The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities
2. Flexibility in use	The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities
3. Simple and intuitive use	Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level
4. Perceptible information	The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities
5. Tolerance for error	The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions
6. Low physical effort	The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue
7. Size and approach for use	Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility

Table 1: The seven principles of universal design (Story et al., 1998)

By applying the seven principles in a public library context, the libraries would most likely increase the potential of being low-intensive meeting places. For instance, according to principle 1, the library should be useful and marketable to people with different abilities. By becoming an attractive service for a variety of people, the user groups in the library will also be more diverse, and the library transforms from a high-intensive to a low-intensive arena. To achieve this, however, there is a need to look more closely at the other principles, which focus more on the actual design of both the physical library and the collection, that will make the services usable for a more diverse user group.

Principle 2 emphasises flexibility in use, entailing that literature should be available in a variety of formats, from printed books to "easy to read books", talking books and Braille books. Moreover, the reference services should be provided both through self-service machines and an actual reference desk that allows for direct communication with a librarian. Principle 3 has a more cognitive focus, stressing that the design should be easy to understand for everyone. This

means, for instance, that the arrangement of books (for example based on the Dewey Decimal Classification System) and the interface of the self-service checkout machines should be understandable for people with little experience with the library, be accessible for people from various cultural backgrounds and by people with various types of cognitive impairments. In this principle one can clearly see the universal focus, since current concentration level is also included, acknowledging that people might perform differently in various contexts, for example due to fatigue, stress or illness.

Principle 4 requires perceptible information and emphasises sensory abilities. For libraries, this entails providing signs in large enough letters for most people to be able to read, providing alternative information, for instance through sound, tactile images or Braille alphabet. Principle 5 regards tolerance for error and is probably the least relevant principle related to public libraries, except for when using the self-service machines or borrowing computers at the library. Principle 6 addresses low physical efforts, which means that for instance entrance doors should not require too much strength to open. Finally, principle 7 deals with body size and approach for use. This principle would for instance require that bookshelves are not too high, so children, short people or wheelchair users can reach books from the upper shelves. Another example would be to install adjustable tables or self-service machines, so the users can adjust them to the preferred height.

By applying the seven principles of universal design, the library should be usable for people of different sizes, ages and with various abilities or cultural backgrounds. Consequently, such measures would enhance the library as a low-intensive meeting place and thus support the library's function as an institution that enhances social justice.

Universal Design – A Premise for Social Inclusion?

The overall purposes of universal design are equal opportunities and social inclusion, which are also premises for a classless society. D'souza (2004) argued that universal design should be regarded as belonging to the paradigm of critical theory in terms of knowledge generation and conceptualization. According to

D'souza (2004, p. 4) "social reality consists of multiple layers and includes several segments of society. By probing into these layers, the critical researcher can identify and provide voice to the oppressed".

Benefits of universal design are many, such as social emancipation, helping people create a better world, empowering individuals, increasing quality of life and enabling people to live independently. This is also clearly seen in the catchphrase "*separate is not equal*", which was applied when the universal design concept was first introduced (D'souza, 2004, p. 4). In the beginning, there was a focus on accessibility for a few groups. In the later years, however, the universal design movement has focused on the needs of the majority, comprising of a wide range of minorities.

Human geographers have also been engaged in universal design. They have addressed oppression of groups, and many have switched focus from emphasis on physical access to processes that produce disabling spaces. It is difficult to imagine how you can regard a library as a low-intensive meeting place without being universally designed. Inclusive meeting places presuppose environments and facilities that may be utilized by all types of people. Physical design may prevent ease of movement and mobility for several user groups (Imrie & Edwards, 2007) thus, excluding many cohorts from using the library. Examples would be people in wheelchairs who cannot physically access the library, visually impaired people who find it challenging navigating the library or transgender people who rely on access to gender-neutral bathrooms. Consequently, spatial practises might cause oppression of people. Universal design then becomes a key to reduce social exclusion and facilitate low-intensive meeting places with convivial encounters.

Bickenbach (2014, p. 1326) referred to universal design as "an aspirational message about the equality of human worth as manifested in the messy and detailed actual world of products, buildings and city streets". In addition to making a more inclusive society, universal design may have another important purpose. According to Bickenbach (2014, p. 1320), universal design in combination with a universal social policy will also initiate "the process of social disappearance of disability".

An important aspect of universal design is user involvement. This corresponds well with the suggestion by Pateman and Vincent (2016) to actively engage users in the library, from planning to design, delivery and assessment. By including user diversity from the beginning of the design process, participatory design can contribute with a useful methodology to better understand user needs.

One challenge related to the universal design mindset is conflicting needs between groups. For instance, while visually impaired people might prefer tactile features in the floor to facilitate navigation, such measures might make it worse for people in wheelchairs to move freely. Another example is when the needs of different groups have been set up against each other, among others due to limited resources. For instance, in the US, there was a campaign to introduce gender-neutral bathrooms in the universities. However, when these were completed, there were reactions from people with disabilities, because the institutions did not provide accessible toilets for people in wheelchairs. It was, for instance, claimed by one person using a wheelchair that "*someone with gender identification needs can at least get into a bathroom*" (Gockowski, 2016). In these cases, scarce resources result in a class struggle between oppressed groups. Consequently, enough resources are needed to avoid such disputes, and the principles of universal design may be applied by making environments that are usable for all. In the bathroom example, the issue could be easily solved by applying universal design principle 7, where appropriate space is provided for all types of users in all bathrooms. This would result in an accessible environment for all, and remove potential conflicts between groups.

Conclusion

Since the beginning of history, people with disabilities have been oppressed in various ways. The fight for equal rights is often described as a class struggle, promoting inclusion and social justice. The work by Audunson (2005) on public libraries and their value as low-intensive meeting places that promote social inclusion and democracy is an important contribution to the field of library- and information science. Although Audunson (2005) applied a multicultural context,

his reflections seem equally applicable to other minorities, such as people with disabilities.

Low-intensive meeting places and convivial encounters seem to play a vital role in reducing social exclusion and class distinction. Better mental health, higher tolerance and removal of class distinctions may all be positive outcomes of increased contact between user groups who typically do not meet in other arenas. However, public libraries should be universally designed to be able to fulfil their role as low-intensive meeting places. Otherwise, several user groups will be excluded, thus reducing the user diversity that is a crucial foundation for public libraries in their role as low-intensive meeting places. Although full inclusion is not yet achieved, public libraries have a great potential in increasing the social justice and reducing oppression. To achieve that, librarians need to be aware of and engaged in making (and keeping) the libraries into low-intensive meeting places. There is also a need for more user engagement in the design of the public libraries, both regarding buildings, collections and services. Finally, it is important to a preserve the public spaces that facilitate convivial encounters.

References

Aabø, S., & Audunson, R. (2002). Rational choice and valuation of public libraries: Can economic models for evaluating non-market goods be applied to public libraries? *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 34*(1), 5-15. https://doi.org/10.1177/096100060203400102

Abberley, P. (1999). *The significance of work for the citizenship of disabled people.* Paper presented at the Paper presented at University College Dublin

Arendt, H. (1951). *The origins of totalitarianism.* Cleveland: Meridian Books.

Audunson, R. (2005). The public library as a meeting-place in a multicultural and digital context: The necessity of low-intensive meeting-places. *Journal of Documentation, 61*(3), 429-441. https://doi.org/10.1108/00220410510598562

Bickenbach, J. (2014). Universally design social policy: When disability disappears? *Disability and Rehabilitation, 36*(16), 1320-1327. https://doi.org/10.3109/09638288.2014.932447

Bigby, C., & Wiesel, I. (2011). Encounter as a dimension of social inclusion for people with intellectual disability: Beyond and between community presence and participation. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability, 36*(4), 263-267. https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2011.619166

Buschman, J. (2003). *Dismantling the public sphere: Situating and sustaining librarianship in the age of the new public philosophy*. Westport: Libraries Unlimited.

Center for Universal Design. (2008). About UD. Retrieved from https://www.ncsu.edu/ncsu/design/cud/about_ud/about_ud.htm

Creamer, D. B. (2012). Disability theology. *Religion Compass, 6*(7), 339-346. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2012.00366.x

D'souza, N. (2004). *Is universal design a critical theory?* Paper presented at the Designing a More Inclusive World, London.

Dadlani, P. (2016). Social justice concepts and public libraries: A case study. *Advances in Librarianship, 41,* 15-48.

Disability Nottinghamshire. (2020). The social model vs the medical model of disability. Retrieved from http://www.disabilitynottinghamshire.org.uk/index.php/about/social-model-vs-medical-model-of-disability/

Fincher, R., & Iveson, K. (2008). *Planning and diversity in the city: Redistribution, recognition and encounter*: Macmillan Education UK.

Folkebibliotekloven. (2014). Lov om folkebibliotek [The Public Libraries Act]. Retrieved from https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/1985-12-20-108?q=folkebibliotek

Foster, D., & Wass, V. (2013). Disability in the labour market: An exploration of concepts of the ideal worker and organisational fit that disadvantage employees with impairments. *Sociology, 47*(4), 705-721. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512454245

Gilmore, L., & Cuskelly, M. (2014). Vulnerability to Loneliness in People with Intellectual Disability: An Explanatory Model. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities, 11*(3), 192-199. https://doi.org/10.1111/jppi.12089

Gockowski, A. (2016). WVU opens gender neutral bathrooms, ignores handicap accessibility *Campus Reform*. Retrieved from https://www.campusreform.org/?ID=7229

Goffman, E. (1961). *Encounters*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Gustavsson, A., Tøssebro, J., & Traustadóttir, R. (2005). Introduction: approaches and perspectives in Nordic disability research. In A. Gustavsson, J. Sandvin, R. Traustadóttir, & J. Tøssebro (Eds.), *Resistance, reflection and change: Nordic disability research* (pp. 23-44). Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Hamraie, A. (2012). Universal design research as a new materialist practice. *Disability Studies Quarterly, 32*(4).

Harper, S. (2007). Is there design-for-all? *Universal Access in the Information Society, 6*(1), 111-113. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10209-007-0071-2

Honey, A., Emerson, E., & Llewellyn, G. (2011). The mental health of young people with disabilities: impact of social conditions. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 46*(1), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-009-0161-y

Illich, I. (1973). *Tools for conviviality*: Harper & Row.

Imrie, R., & Edwards, C. (2007). The geographies of disability: Reflections on the development of a sub-discipline. *Geography Compass, 1*(3), 623-640. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2007.00032.x

Iwarsson, S., & Ståhl, A. (2003). Accessibility, usability and universal design—positioning and definition of concepts describing person-environment relationships. *Disability and Rehabilitation, 25*(2), 57-66. https://doi.org/10.1080/dre.25.2.57.66

Koller, D., Pouesard, M. L., & Rummens, J. A. (2018). Defining social inclusion for children with disabilities: A critical literature review. *Children & Society, 32*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12223

Kozubaev, S., & DiSalvo, C. (2020). *The future of public libraries as convivial spaces: A design fiction.* Paper presented at the Companion of the 2020 ACM International Conference on Supporting Group Work, Sanibel Island, Florida, USA. https://doi.org/10.1145/3323994.3369901

Marx, K. (1867). *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen oekonomie.* Hamburg: Verlag von Otto Meissner.

Ministry of Culture. (2020). Act relating to equality and a prohibition against discrimination (Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act). Retrieved from https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2017-06-16-51

Newell, A. F., Gregor, P., Morgan, M., Pullin, G., & Macaulay, C. (2011). User-Sensitive Inclusive Design. *Universal Access in the Information Society, 10*(3), 235-243. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10209-010-0203-y

Oliver, M. (2013). The social model of disability: Thirty years on. *Disability & Society, 28*(7), 1024-1026. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2013.818773

Owens, J. (2015). Exploring the critiques of the social model of disability: The transformative possibility of Arendt's notion of power. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 37*(3), 385-403. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12199

Palmer, M. (2011). Disability and poverty: A conceptual review. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 21*(4), 210-218. https://doi.org/10.1177/1044207310389333

Pateman, J. (2000). Public libraries and social class. In *Open to all?: The public library and social exclusion* (pp. 26-42). London: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries.

Pateman, J., & Pateman, J. (2017). Managing cultural change in public libraries. *Public Library Quarterly, 36*(3), 213-227. https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1318641

Pateman, J., & Vincent, J. (2016). *Public libraries and social justice.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Polidano, C., & Vu, H. (2015). Differential labour market impacts from disability onset. *Health Economics, 24*(3), 302-317. https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.3017

Popowich, S. (2018). Libraries, labour, capital: On formal and real subsumption. *Journal of Radical Librarianship, 4*, 6-19.

Russell, M. (2001). Disablement, oppression, and the political economy. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 12*(2), 87-95. https://doi.org/10.1177/104420730101200205

Shakespeare, T. (2004). Social models of disability and other life strategies. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 6*(1), 8-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/15017410409512636

Shakespeare, T. (2013). The social model of disability. In L. J. Davis (Ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader* (pp. 214-221). New York: Routledge.

Shakespeare, T. (2018). *Disability: The basics*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Sheppard, K., & Badger, T. (2010). The lived experience of depression among culturally Deaf adults. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing, 17*(9), 783-789. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2850.2010.01606.x

Steinfeld, E., & Maisel, J. L. (2012). *Universal design: Creating inclusive environments*. New Jersey: Wiley.

Story, M. F. (1998). Maximizing usability: The principles of universal design. *Assistive Technology, 10*(1), 4-12. https://doi.org/10.1080/10400435.1998.10131955

Story, M. F., Mueller, J. L., & Mace, R. L. (1998). *The universal design file: Designing for people of all ages and abilities*. Raleigh: Center for Universal Design.

Thurston, M. (2010). An inquiry into the emotional impact of sight loss and the counselling experiences and needs of blind and partially sighted people. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 10*(1), 3-12. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733140903492139

Toboso, M. (2011). Rethinking disability in Amartya Sen's approach: ICT and equality of opportunity. *Ethics and Information Technology, 13*, 107-118.

UN. (2006). Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf

Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation, & Disability Alliance. (1976). *Fundamental Principles of Disability*. London: UPIAS and The Disability Alliance.

Valentine, G., & Sadgrove, J. (2014). Biographical narratives of encounter: The significance of mobility and emplacement in shaping attitudes towards difference. *Urban Studies, 51*(9), 1979-1994. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098013504142

Vehmas, S., & Watson, N. (2014). Moral wrongs, disadvantages, and disability: A critique of critical disability studies. *Disability & Society, 29*(4), 638-650. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2013.831751

Vincent, J. (2012). The role of public libraries in social justice. *Prometheus, 30*(3), 349-351. https://doi.org/10.1080/08109028.2012.702057

W3C. (2018). Web content accessibility guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. Retrieved from http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21

Wiesel, I., & Bigby, C. (2016). Mainstream, inclusionary, and convivial places: Locating encounters between people with and without intellectual disabilities. *Geographical Review, 106*(2), 201-214. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2015.12153.x