

# 1 Accessible enough? Legitimising half-measures of accessibility in Swedish urban environments

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Staircases are tangible illustrations of inaccessibility: they often lock out and exclude people with disabilities from entering an establishment independently and safely. Although staircases might be an overused and almost clichéd illustration of inaccessibility it is still a fact that many establishments are only accessible via a staired entrance. While conducting fieldwork as a part of a research project entitled ‘Accessibility and its resistance’<sup>1</sup> I and the other researchers found staired entrances to all sorts of establishments, such as pharmacies, health care providers and service centres, shops, restaurants, pubs, art galleries and travel agencies. When interviewing accessibility officers and building permit administrators – the professionals who are formally responsible for enforcing regulations on accessibility in the built environment – I found that they were well aware of these obstacles to independent access and participation. One of them even said: ‘If you go for a walk on the pedestrian street here, I think, I can promise you, 90 per cent of all entrances have two, three steps up.’

During our fieldwork we came across well-planned areas with, for example, wheelchair-accessible entrances, paving and suitable contrast markings. But we also saw and experienced the opposite: uneven cobblestone paving, tilting pavements, unmarked crossings, narrow doors and steep stairs. This inconsistency in accessibility means that people with disabilities are both included *and* excluded as citizens and consumers in the urban environment (Hansson, 2019). Since accessibility is unpredictable it takes planning, time, effort, creativity and help from others to deal with obstacles and hindrances in shopping malls and city centres, and many people with disabilities tend to prefer well-known areas or settings, which they know how best to navigate (Mazurik et al., 2015; Lid & Solvang, 2016; Wåsterfors, 2020).

The forms of accessibility measures required under the Swedish planning and building act depend on whether or not the building is listed, if it is to be reconstructed or if it is open to the public (Svensson, 2015; SFS, 2010: 900). What is required is, in other words, a matter of judgement, which means that technical, cultural and financial aspects are investigated and taken into account. These investigations and decisions made by professionals at the municipalities, as well as their rhetorical and cultural forms, will be the focus

of my chapter. The aim of this chapter is to understand the rhetorical and cultural construction of such obstacles and how inaccessibility is reproduced and ignored in Swedish cities even when it is tangible, known and obvious.

### **Half-measures in the urban environment**

In this section I will focus on how professionals responsible for accessibility work at the municipalities deal with so-called ‘easily eliminated obstacles’. This term, coined in a government bill in Sweden in 1999,<sup>2</sup> refers to obstacles to accessibility and usability in buildings that are open to the public. According to the regulation these obstacles are to be removed if deemed ‘reasonable to remove in view of the benefit of the measure and the conditions at the place’, and as long as the financial implications for removing them are not ‘unreasonably onerous’ (Section 5 BFS 2003: 19). Level differences and lack of contrast markings at entrances are examples of easily eliminated obstacles (BFS 2013: 9). As highlighted in a previous publication based on our fieldwork, a combination of handrails, doorbells and portable ramps are commonly used to deal with staired entrances (Hansson, 2019). But, as an interviewed accessibility officer pointed out, this combination of accessibility measures is not necessarily safe, and it is questionable if it fulfils the requirements of the law:

As if it would be all right to throw out a ramp or rail, it is nothing, it is not safe to use, it cannot be used independently, and because of that we usually do not approve it. But it is, it is the very minimum of what is required to get a building permit, if that is the starting point, although we have a legislation that is quite strict, that says accessibility for everyone, then you should depart from that.

According to the accessibility officer, the described combination of accessibility measures is the very minimum of what is required for a building permit, but it is not in accordance with the intention of the legislation or disability policy. The aim of the policy and regulations is equal and independent access and usability for everyone (Svensson, 2015). The use of a portable ramp is not sufficient since, first, it is not safe and, second, it does not ensure independence or being on equal terms, since someone who cannot climb the stairs will have to ask for help by pressing the doorbell and waiting for the staff to fetch the ramp and help them up. As our fieldwork shows, city centres in Sweden are full of these kinds of half-measures.

There are different ways of understanding and explaining this inertia around accessibility work and stubborn inaccessibility. Previous follow-ups and research on Swedish urban planning has found that the accessibility perspective is not yet fully integrated at the municipal level, and that there is need for more accessibility officers, recourses, routines and knowledge to enforce and supervise the implementation of the regulations in an effective and sufficient way (Hallgrimsdottir et al., 2016; National Board of Housing, Building and Planning,

2018; Zotéeva, 2018). According to international disability scholars, the lack of resources and knowledge is a symptom of the multidimensional oppression of the disabled and constitutes a disablist practice (Imrie, 1996). Able-bodied conceptions and ideology dominate the social-spatial ordering of society and inaccessibility is therefore reproduced as something ‘natural’ and ‘acceptable’ (Kitchin, 1998).

My point of departure in this chapter is that such half-measures in the urban environment can be understood as a hybrid construction at the intersection of conflicting norms, values and interests in society. The requirement of accessibility is a strong norm underpinned by conventions, policy and legislation, but this is also the case for other norms, policies and regulations. As pointed out by Rob Imrie (1996), form and aesthetics tend to be prioritised over functionality and accessibility as long as architecture and design are defined mainly as art. Moreover, as shown by the disability researcher Camilla Nordgren (2009), the norms on full participation and accessibility are also challenged by norms on security and fire safety.

In my analysis, I use the conversation analyst Anita Pomerantz’s (1986) concept of ‘extreme case formulations’ to identify how inaccessibility and exceptions from the accessibility norms and regulations are justified, normalised, and legitimised by different sorts of descriptions and arguments. My argument is that a rhetorical and cultural analysis can be a way to identify resistance to accessibility today, and that not only should policies, legal frameworks and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) be studied, but also the ways of reasoning and legitimising strategies employed by professionals who are formally responsible for enforcing accessibility requirements. Since my informants’ arguments and descriptions depart from how accessibility is usually defined and understood, I will start by discussing the concept of accessibility more generally before I proceed to my analysis of their rhetoric.

### **Standards, and moments of congruity**

Accessibility is a general principle of the CRPD. As stated in the convention, accessibility is a prerequisite for the full enjoyment of human rights for people with disabilities. Without accessibility neither equal opportunities nor independent living nor participation in all aspects of life are possible. Although accessibility cuts through and underpins all parts of the convention the term is not clearly defined, and accessibility is used in different senses in the convention (Lawson, 2018).

The CRPD defines accessibility as an *ex ante duty*, which means that it is a duty that should be fulfilled in advance to ensure independent access. When used in this sense, accessibility addresses measures that should be designed, planned and implemented before the need for access is raised. Accessibility, then, is about the minimum standards, regulations and guidelines on a group level that should be used in the built environment and in design (CRPD,

2014). Used in this sense accessibility is an objective, evaluable and measurable concept (Iwarsson & Ståhl, 2003).

Since this way of defining and implementing accessibility is based on standards on a group level, an establishment can be defined as accessible even though it is not built for someone outside the standardised norm (Imrie, 1996). Within disability studies and the disability movement, a subjective definition of accessibility is therefore advocated (Imrie, 1996; Iwarsson & Ståhl, 2003), one which is more focused on actors' practices and experiences than on standards. Accessibility defined from the individual or subjective perspective thus departs from the more everyday way meaning of 'accessible', which is often associated with something being approachable, attainable, available or possible to take part in (Iwarsson & Ståhl, 2003).

The individual and subjective definition of accessibility opens up a situational and contextual understanding of accessibility. Used in this sense accessibility is situated and describes a moment of congruity between the individual capacities and environmental demands (Lid & Solvang, 2016). Congruity can be achieved by different means, such as design and environmental changes, but also through technical aids and assistance (Hedvall, 2009; Lid & Solvang, 2016). This situated and contextual understanding of accessibility is actually also found in the CRPD, in the sections in which accessibility addresses different forms of live assistance that should be available to ensure access when it is needed. Used in this sense, accessibility is granted by getting help from others (CRPD, 2014) and not only by an accessible physical environment or design that matches the functional abilities of the individual (Iwarsson & Ståhl, 2003). I argue that this actor-oriented understanding of accessibility within the convention is less known, since UN conventions are typically seen as universal declarations and standardisations.

When accessibility is tied to a specific situation, the meaning of the concept starts to overlap with another concept in the CRPD, that of 'reasonable accommodation'. Unlike accessibility that is to be fulfilled in advance, reasonable accommodation is required in a given moment and situation, i.e. when it is needed and asked for. Reasonable accommodation, then, is an *ex nunc* duty, that is an immediate duty that rises in the moment a person requires modifications and adjustments to enjoy the human right of access (Nilsson, 2018). The difference between accessibility and reasonable accommodation is not clear-cut, but the duty to continuously work with accessibility measures on a general level precedes the duty for reasonable accommodation on an individual level (Nilsson, 2018; CRPD, 2014).

## **Methods and data**

During a period of three years (2018–2020), I and two other researchers<sup>3</sup> conducted fieldwork in small and large municipalities in Sweden. Our main methods were thematic qualitative interviews and go-alongs (Kusenbach, 2003) with persons with disabilities, but we also studied, for example, reports

on so-called easily eliminated obstacles presented to one of the municipalities where we conducted fieldwork. Although we used a number of different methods, all the data emerges from concrete situations and places, so the narratives, experiences, descriptions and arguments we found show everyday dealings with accessibility and inaccessibility. This chapter focuses on the municipal work of enforcing and implementing the rules and regulations on accessibility in general and, specifically, on easily eliminated obstacles.

This chapter is based largely on data collected through interviews I conducted with six professionals who are involved in some part of the process of initiating and supervising accessibility work at the municipal level. Three are accessibility officers, two administrators of building permits, and one is a traffic planner. Although their specific tasks and responsibilities differ, my thematic analysis reveals recurring patterns across their experiences of, and reasonings on, accessibility measures. I have analysed reports on easily eliminated obstacles based on the type of barriers they concern and on how these barriers are dealt with. In particular, I have tried to focus on how the interviewees account for the municipal decision on the measures requested.

### **How accessibility is questioned and downplayed**

A recurring theme in the interviews was an affirmation of the importance of accessibility and the need for improvement. The accessibility officers, traffic planners and building permit administrators all displayed knowledge about existing shortcomings in both newly built environments and existing premises. They all pointed out the need for more time and resources, and for enhancing knowledge and skills at their departments and elsewhere. The importance of accessibility for all and different forms of measures might be questioned by colleagues at the same or other departments, or by builders, architects or general public. All of the interviewees had previously or recently experienced a lack of knowledge of disabling barriers and an ignorant and negative attitude towards accessibility issues from colleagues and others. As the traffic planner I interviewed said:

There are questions that I get quite often, sadly enough, questions like ‘Do we really have to work with this when, so few are in a need of the measures?’ ‘Is it really that important?’ ‘Can’t we just ignore it?’

To deal with negative attitudes to accessibility seemed to be a part of their work. They all talked about how they tried to change others’ attitudes by explaining and arguing for the importance of accessibility. From their perspective the negative attitude was due to ignorance and they insisted on the need for education and training since a disability perspective is not a part of general knowledge or education.

The described experiences of the interviewed professionals are in accordance with previous Swedish research and reports which highlight a need for

more recourses, time, efficiency, knowledge and full implementation of an accessibility perspective at municipalities (Hallgrimsdottir et al., 2016; National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, 2018; Zotéeva, 2018). But although knowledge, time and resources might contribute to change and to removing many barriers in the future, there are still many different interests that must be dealt with in urban planning. As a matter of fact, research on traffic planning shows that conflict of interest is an actual barrier to accessibility (Grönvall, 2004).

When accessibility measures at a given spot are described and discussed in the reports on easily eliminated obstacles and interviews, the complexities of implementing norms and regulations on accessibility become evident, as well as the conflicts between them. The accessibility norm may be challenged and sometimes even outcompeted, although the accessibility officers claimed the importance of accessibility for all.

To pinpoint how and when inaccessibility is rhetorically and culturally legitimised I will use Anita Pomerantz's (1986) concept of 'extreme case formulations'. Formulations of this kind are justifications, defences, explanations or arguments that are built on maximising the case or description to convince others. Everyday statements such as 'everybody does it', 'all the time', 'completely' or 'everywhere' are some common components of the formulations. The extreme cases are used to defend the legitimacy of an argument, to propose that a phenomenon is objective rather than socially constructed, or to argue that a behaviour is right since it is common (Pomerantz, 1986). The extreme case formulations in this chapter are articulated to describe obstacles to accessibility as 'normal' and 'legitimate' since they, for allegedly objective reasons and circumstances, cannot be dealt with. Furthermore, the accessibility measures that the interviewed professionals implemented are legitimised since they are common and something of a praxis, although they do not contribute to accessibility for all.

To illustrate this, I will present and analyse three extreme case formulations. In the first two, half-measures are legitimised and conceptualised as acceptable by being described as 'the only way' and 'just as good' as other ways of dealing with accessibility issues. In the third example the extreme case is built upon designating accessibility measures as something objectively ugly and inappropriate in the specific context. The design of accessibility measures is here conceptualised as disturbing the aesthetic or historical atmosphere. To understand why accessibility measures are conceptualised in this way, and why inaccessibility is sometimes legitimised and normalised, I will use the anthropologist Mary Douglas's (1966) analytical focus. In her famous study of purity and danger Douglas focuses on what is considered as impure, dangerous and dirty in the given culture to reveal cultural classification systems and social order. I will use the same analytic focus to understand why accessibility measures are sometimes, but not always, seen as a disturbance or distortion – something 'dirty' – of the architecture or design.

*'The only way'*

The combination of portable ramps, handrails and doorbells was stated to be the 'only way' to ensure access for wheelchairs users to establishments with staired entrances. The expression was, for instance, used by the previously quoted administrator of building permits when explaining why there were still so many entrances with stairs and steps in the local pedestrianised street:

ADMINISTRATOR 1: If you go for a walk on the pedestrian street here, I think I can promise you, 90 per cent of all entrances have two, three steps up. Unfortunately, we found out that the only solution that works in [name of the city], that makes the roadworks department satisfied and us fairly satisfied is that we recommend doorbells and detachable ramps. The point is that – and handrails of course and – the point of it is –

ADMINISTRATOR 2: with contrast marking.

ADMINISTRATOR 1: and contrast markings on the steps and such things, but... The accessibility into the place needs to be solved in some way. That you ring, the owner gets out, puts down the portable ramp, a ramp that, by the way, does not fulfil the gradient required by the law, if it had it should have been about five, six metres long. The idea is that two rails are put out and that the shop owner then gets out to help the person to get inside with the wheelchair and up the stairs. It is the only solution. The only way –

ADMINISTRATOR 2: The temporary solution. Yes Exactly, Yes.

ADMINISTRATOR 1: Because if you want something permanent, then you would need a permanent ramp, and the roadworks department would not agree on that.

The way the administrator presented the use of portable ramps and associated accessibility measures implies that he knew the requirements of the regulation. He also implied that a permanent ramp would be the ideal measure from an accessibility perspective, but it was not a realistic one, in his point of view. His colleague's interjection, 'the temporary solution', further stressed this point of view and knowledge further since it implied that a portable ramp is only provisional until a better solution is possible. Still the combination of handrails, portable ramps and doorbells was described as 'the only solution' since the roadworks department opposes permanent ramps. An extreme case formulation was thus put to use, and legitimised the interviewees' approach. Later in the interview, it emerged that the roadworks department finds permanent ramps bulky and a hindrance for outdoor seating, cleaning and snow clearance.

By presenting the use of portable ramps, handrails and doorbells as a compromise between accessibility and maintenance the use of these accessibility measures is legitimised. Further, the combination of accessibility measures is described as something of a local model, which implies that it is

common. All together these descriptions contribute to the construction of portable ramps and associated measures as an extreme case (Pomerantz, 1986). In this way the portable ramps are legitimised and perceived as right and acceptable, although this does not contribute to independent access or fulfil the objectives of the regulation, or requirements on the ramp gradient.

### ***‘Just as good’***

Inaccessibility may also be legitimised by presenting special arrangements for disabled as ‘just as good’ as those for able-bodied. These kinds of formulations are found both in plans for new housing estates and in reports, on easily eliminated obstacles, on existing premises. Although the special arrangements, such as a system of ramps instead of a lift, might seem equal when presented in a document, the special arrangements require extra effort and time compared to those for able-bodied. One of these formulations was found in a report on easily eliminated obstacles made to the municipality on a staired entrance to a nineteenth-century building. The municipality required the installation of a handrail, portable ramp and contrast markings. The handrail and contrast markings were installed, but the portable ramp was rejected by the owners of the building. In a joint statement attached to the report, the owners explained that a portable ramp was not needed since a rear entrance could ensure independent access to the establishment: ‘It is possible for a wheelchair-bound [sic], who wishes to enter the shop without assistance from staff, to do so with a wheelchair, on their own, and without hindrance enter the shop via the gate at [name of the street] and the entrance to the shop from the courtyard’ (SBN 2017-002887, *my translation*).

Entrance through the backdoor was legitimised by asserting that it had worked before and that ‘only two handicapped’ (sic) had asked for assistance over the last decade. These descriptions are both ways of rhetorically justifying that a portable ramp is not needed. But ‘just as good’ and ‘only two handicapped’ are not formulations that are built upon extremes and maximisations. Rather the arguments are built upon equalising the different entrances and minimising the need to use the back entrance by referring to that it has only been needed twice. The back entrance is by these means constructed as just as good, or even better, than the suggested portable ramp since it has been used before and since it is described as ensuring independent access, which a portable ramp does not. Although the formulations are not extreme, the report shows that the owners’ descriptions and arguments convinced the municipality, which dropped the request of a portable ramp, although entrance through a backdoor is not in accordance with the regulation’s principle of access on equal terms (Svensson, 2015). The argument ‘just as good’ was interpreted as equalising and thereby implicitly ‘fulfilling’ the requirements of equality.

A visit to the establishment raised questions of how thoroughly the municipal investigation had been since I found out that the described ‘independent access’ through the backdoor was a mere fabrication. To get



to the backdoor which, according to the owners' statement, would ensure independent access for wheelchair users, required a 60 metre detour through two locked and heavy doors.

***'Does it have to be white?'***

A third way of legitimising inaccessibility is by referring to measures as inappropriate in the given context. These kinds of formulations are built upon the importance of preserving a special architecture, style or cultural heritage. The potential conflict between form and function is also acknowledged in the regulation which states that the historic, cultural or artistic value of a building is not to be distorted when changes are made (Svensson, 2015; SFS, 2010: 900). In the interviews there are several examples of obstacles and barriers that were presented as acceptable by referring to this part of the regulation. Removing uneven cobblestones, changing an entrance or removing a staircase can all be presented as 'unthinkable' due to historical or cultural value. The extreme case (Pomerantz, 1986) is here constructed by stressing the importance of preserving the specific architecture or historical period. In the interviews there are examples of when even easily eliminated obstacles such as contrast markings were framed as 'unthinkable'. Even in buildings where several accidents and falls had taken place, markings have been ruled out on the basis of the cultural heritage norm. There is also resistance to accessibility measures in newly built premises, and tactile paving slabs or benches with backrests can be met with protest from architects. If the design of the measure does not fit, if it is not in accordance with the surrounding design, colour or style it is perceived as inappropriate and a disturbance. The measures challenge the social order and, similar to our cultural (and often implicit) definition of dirt, the measures are defined as 'a matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966: 36). This categorisation might explain why the measures arouse strong feelings and are conceptualised as ugly and inappropriate – or in Douglas's words, as 'dirty'. Like a stain on a carpet or clashing colours they are to be avoided so to not distort the design or architecture.

Contrast markings, too, are neglected not just in historical locations, but also in newly built premises. The reports on easily eliminated obstacles show that contrast marking tends to be forgotten in the latter, and several reports studied concern this accessibility measure. One of the studied reports contains no fewer than 30 remarks on missing or inadequate contrast marking in a newly built concert hall. According to the interviews the contrasts in colour between the surface and the line could be perceived as 'ugly'. One of the interviewed accessibility officers summarised a protracted discussion about the colour of a contrast marking as follows:

ACCESSIBILITY OFFICER: 'Couldn't it be – does it have to be – couldn't it be red?' she says. [Interviewer laughs] No it can't, since then there will be no contrast if it's grey and red. No, there has to be a contrast of light.

The argument the accessibility officer was recounting concerned the colour of contrast marking on a large staircase. The landscaper suggested a red flower-patterned marking since she found the traditional white contrast line ugly. The accessibility officer, on the other hand, insisted on white due to the need for contrast. Since the contrast marking is all about enhancing contrast of light and colour I, as indicated in the quote, started to laugh during the interview. Apparently, the accessibility officer did not have to convince me of the importance of contrast, but during the interview she described to me what a hard time she had had to convince the landscaper. Despite the accidents that occurred on the unmarked staircase it took a long time to add the traditional white contrast marking.

This argument and conflict between security and design shows how accessibility measures can be neglected and inaccessibility normalised even in newly built premises due to the framing of strong contrasts as ugly or inappropriate.

### **Conclusion: legitimising half-measures**

To put lines of contrasting colour on steps might, from an outsider's point of view, seem quite easy to do. A staircase or step might also seem easy to replace with a ramp. But as my interviews with professionals show, the framing of some obstacles as 'easily eliminated' is misleading. The term positions stairs, steps and other obstacles from a merely instrumental perspective. The objects are perceived as 'in the way', as hindrances to full participation and inclusion and as something which therefore cannot be removed quickly enough. As the psychologist Kathrina Mazurik and her colleagues (2014: 197) point out, instrumental perspectives 'lead us to neglect the diversity of meanings and values associated with obstacles'. As their study of a shopping mall shows, visitors with disabilities deal with obstacles and hindrances pragmatically. They are not preoccupied with whether or not they are discriminated against or excluded. Instead, they have accommodated to the environment and focus on running their errands and getting on with everyday life.

Stairs and lack of contrast markings are all part of the wider urban environment and cultural context in the shopping mall and elsewhere. Although from a technical or even economic perspective they might be easily eliminated, from a socio-spatial one they stubbornly linger on. Such artefacts are all part of the socio-spatial ordering, layout and design, and if and when they are to be removed or changed, this order is challenged. If a staircase is replaced with a ramp there is a need to use some of the space of the street or pavement which might challenge the way maintenance work or outdoor seating is organised. From a maintenance perspective the ramp might be perceived as an obstacle or hindrance if the conflict of interest is not dealt with. Even changes that seem even smaller, such as a white line on a step, might challenge the socio-spatial order by challenging the design, architecture or historic value of a building. Something more drastic, like removing or changing the staircase of a listed building, might be considered sacrilege.

The half-measures of the urban environment are legitimised and normalised by referring to conflicting interests' that cannot be dealt with in any other way. As my analysis in this chapter shows, maintenance work or preservation of a design may be considered more important than ensuring independent, equal and secure access. As Rob Imrie points out (1996), these norms and practices are disabling and reproduce disability both spatially and socially. Architecture, planning and legislation that prioritise cultural heritage, form and aesthetics over usability ignore the socio-political impacts of the built environment. Space is an active constituent of social relations and power and defines who belongs and who does not (Imrie, 1996; Kitchin, 1998). When accessibility is outcompeted and downplayed, its very meaning is stretched to its limits. Although access is not completely denied, it is conditioned, dealt with when it is needed and therefore unpredictable. To visit the healthcare centre, pharmacy, post office or to go for a stroll is only possible when the circumstances are 'right': when the doorbell works, the staff have time to help out or a friend, personal assistant or passer-by can help you find your way. Half-measures that ensure reasonable accommodation rather than independent and equal access reproduce what Imrie (1996) calls the 'stereotypical disabled' who is subordinate, dependent and in need of special arrangements. Although previous research shows that people with disabilities adapt and find ways to manage obstacles and hindrances, it is also evident that they have to plan their visits, ask for help and be creative (Mazurik et al., 2014; Lid & Solvang, 2016; Wästerfors, 2020).

Both lack of accessibility – such as staired entrances – and accessibility measures – such as a ramp – may challenge the socio-spatial order of the city and arouse strong feelings. Interviews and go-alongs from our research project are filled with experiences of frustration and shame to relief and pride (see also David Wästerfors' and Kristofer Hansson's chapters in this book). The expression of these feelings reveals that both accessibility and inaccessibility challenge the social order of our culture and ways of classifying spaces and places. What is perceived as 'a matter out of place' (Douglas 1966: 36), depends on the cultural context.

To eliminate or change artefacts that hinder mobility and participation is therefore not only about technical skill and competence, but also about negotiating and compromising between conflicting norms and values of socio-spatial, rhetorical and cultural ordering. To be able to convince other departments, colleagues or the general public, the accessibility officer, traffic planner or building permit administrator has to present accessible measures and design as a part of, or in accordance with, the design, architecture or layout of a place. To present accessibility measures or a specific design as an improvement for everyone, not only for people with disabilities, is a common way of legitimising and normalising accessibility measures and so-called universal design. In the interviews, ramps, contrast markings and other measures were described as enhancing access and safety for parents pushing prams and the general public. Accessible design and measures are, in other words,

formulated as what Pomerantz (1986) calls extreme cases, which legitimise a need to adapt or change the socio-spatial ordering of the pedestrianised street, or to make exceptions from the planned design or architecture of the planned construction.

‘Barrier removal means rebuilding society’, as the disability researcher Tom Shakespeare (2014: 39) puts it. As highlighted in this chapter, barrier removal is not to be framed as easy in any way. Shakespeare questions if a barrier-free society is even achievable since the implications are extremely far-reaching. Even though a barrier-free society is probably a utopia that can or will be attained, the conflicts of interests, norms, values and regulations that circumscribe barrier removal must be acknowledged and openly discussed.

## Notes

- 1 The chapter was written as part of a three-year research project entitled ‘Accessibility and its resistance: Everyday deviations from spatial and social practicability for persons with disabilities’ carried out through a collaboration between Lund University and Malmö University and funded by Forte, *The Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare*. The project is ethically approved (dnr 2018/145).
- 2 *Regeringens proposition 1999/2000:79 Från patient till medborgare – en nationell handlingsplan för handikappolitiken*.
- 3 David Wästerfors and Kristofer Hansson, the other editors of this anthology.

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