The Problem with "Inclusion"?
It Is Done to Someone by Someone

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Abstract. In this paper, we aim to contribute to an enhanced theoretical ground for Universal Design (UD) by examining the concept of "inclusion", presenting a conceptual critique of it based on our research on categorisation and UD, and proposing a way forward. This study is based on a comprehensive analysis of a range of photographs related to inclusion and exclusion collected during five recent research projects. We employ theories on categorisation and UD to inform our critique and discussion of inclusion. The findings show that inclusion 1) entails categorisational ambivalence, 2) upholds patterns of norm and deviation, and 3) results in power being redone, rather than undone. Consequently, inclusion becomes paradoxical, where efforts to promote equity and empowerment simultaneously become another reification of existing power structures and marginalisation. To address this issue, we propose moving beyond "inclusion" to "nonclusion" and the corresponding "nonclusive design" as a foundation for UD. This entails a shift in categorisation towards design that resists categorisations of bodies, persons, and roles. We argue that such a shift can usher in a new paradigm regarding how the path towards a society where everyone belongs can be conceptualised and realised.

Keywords. Universal Design, Norms, Inclusion, Nonclusion, Inclusive Design, Nonclusive Design, Categorisation, Disability, Accessibility

1. Introduction

While there are certainly many reasons to identify, acknowledge, and remedy exclusion, current ways of thinking and working based on norms and deviations seem to uphold the exclusionary patterns that they seek to dismantle. Universal Design (UD) has always had all people as the intended target group, but in practice, it is still largely understood to be about disabled people [1,2]. Almost 40 years have passed since Ronald Mace famously said, "Universal design is a concept whose time has arrived." [1,p.152]. The concept is more well-known today, but its development is still impeded by the same misconceptions that Mace pointed out. First and foremost, the understanding that UD is primarily intended for disabled people.

"Inclusion" is both an act and a state [4]. It is a global phenomenon that underpins both policy and research. In this study, we focus on the performative side of the term.

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According to Dunne, the growth of inclusion has largely occurred uncriticised. Social inclusion has become a self-evident, taken-for-granted good, and a 'truth' [5]. Spandler notes, "the notion of social inclusion is difficult to critique because, like other concepts in the Government's 'modernisation' agenda (such as 'choice', 'user involvement' and 'recovery'), it is presented as self-evidently desirable and unquestionable" [8,p.3].

Inclusion comes with inherent power structures and presumed norms [7], where someone defines what it means to be included and then adds a person or a group to "the included". The one including is positioned as a fully able, normal person, i.e. what Garland Thompson has helpfully defined as "the normate" [8]. The asymmetrical relation between "includer" and "included" creates and upholds what we will here call a normate logic, with the normate positioned at the centre and the deviant at a distance from that centre. This asymmetry has largely remained tacit and escaped critical scrutiny in extant UD literature. In the words of Wexler, "The term inclusion, with its multiple underlying ideologies and meanings, often obscures historical and problematic power relations" [9,p.41]. Simply put, it is not innocent "to include" someone. Thompson argues that "[s]imple inclusion offers minimal to none lasting social change or ideological equality" [10,p.1489]. Maybe it is time to ask if inclusion delivers on its promises of a society for all.

In this paper, we aim to contribute to an enhanced theoretical ground for UD [3,11] by examining the concept of "inclusion", presenting a conceptual critique of it based on our research on categorisation and UD, and proposing a way forward that does not rely on normate logic. The study is based on extensive analyses of a range of photographs related to inclusion and exclusion collected in five recent research projects. In the study, we focus on the photographic features of the material.

2. Theory

In our critique and discussion of inclusion, we draw on theories from Universal Design and Categorisation.

2.1. Universal Design

At the heart of the paper is UD, a concept with a rich history and prominent position in current conventions and policies around the globe. A great deal of hope is tied to UD as a silver bullet solution to solve exclusion. UD is still tightly connected to disability, despite its origins, which focus on creating a society for all. However, the concept also has untapped potential in terms of the kind of change it can bring about regarding how *human differences* are understood and dealt with in society [12].

Ron Mace introduced the concept of 'Universal Design' in a widely referenced issue of Designers West, an interior design publication [3]. Mace described UD as a design approach that aims to move away from specialised, costly, and unattractive solutions for limited groups, instead focusing on designing for 'everyone'. Mace viewed individuals with disabilities not as a distinct group requiring separate solutions, but as a valuable source of knowledge. He characterised UD as design that can be used by all people. By deliberately focusing on mainstream solutions, Mace envisioned UD as tacitly providing accessibility and blending seamlessly into its environment. However, this approach also created a tension between utilising knowledge gained from disability experience in design and marketing these products without mentioning disability at all [13].

UD is a guiding approach to design processes and societal development, based on a view central to the argument we develop in this study: that there is only one population – not a normal population and a deviating one [14]. The understanding of UD as primarily a process concern can be traced back to Mace and the mid-80s and has repeatedly been highlighted by Steinfeld et al. [11,15,16]. In 1985, Ron Mace stated this as follows:

> "Universal design is ultimately about changing attitudes throughout society, emphasizing democracy, equity, and citizenship. Universal design denotes a process more than a definite result." (Mace 1985, cited in [17]).

2.2. Categorisation

Inclusion presupposes an inside and a corresponding outside. This division is created and upheld by categorisations, giving advantages to some and disadvantages to others [18]. The connection between inclusion and categorisation is important to note. With Foucault, we view the categorisation of people as inherently linked to power dynamics [19]. Thus, categorisations are not simply neutral descriptors but mechanisms through which power is exercised, shaping technology, design, norms, and social order. Categorising someone is always a choice, and multiple categorisations are always possible, including no categorisation [2].

Categorisations can be quite sticky, and it is easy to get stuck in a category. As Ahmed puts it: "we can be constrained even by the categories we love" [12, p.4]. To emphasise the active processes that are involved when someone, for instance, decides to put a number of pictograms of persons in a row on a toilet door, we use the term 'categorisations' rather than 'categories' in our research [21]. Categorisations are often performed invisibly or in a tacit manner. However, they involve power structures, as they value certain perspectives and silence others, and are always done to someone and by someone[18,21].

3. Method

In our studies on categorisation and UD during the last five years [12,22], we gathered a range of photographs related to inclusion and exclusion. Participants submitted 92 photographs as part of citizen science studies [23] on inclusion and exclusion [21], and we took some images ourselves as part of observational studies, all in all, more than 300 photographs. The underlying analysis has had a hermeneutic [24] character and included both formal analysis sessions using NVivo and informal activities such as discussions of denotations, connotations and categorisations present in the photographs [25] at project meetings, seminars and presentations. This has continuously advanced our understanding of what the photographs express, and over time, allowed us to identify and mature in our interpretation of patterns in the material. The findings in this paper should be seen as a conceptual discussion, rather than a systematic empirical investigation, of what inclusion creates in relation to categorisation [18,21] and power structures [7,20], based on selected photographs.

4. Findings

The findings comprise three sections showing how inclusion entails categorisational ambivalence, upholds patterns of norm and deviation, and leads to power being redone rather than undone.

4.1. Inclusion entails ambivalence – what, when and how to categorise

Inclusion involves choice. Multiple categorisations are always possible [18] and this appears in the photographic material as a number of ambivalences regarding 1) what and when to categorise and how to categorise 2) gender and 3) dis/ability.

Below are three photographs of toilet doors (Figure 1). To the left is a door with a large wheelchair pictogram where someone has put an all-gender sign on top of it, this way changing its categorisation. In the middle, is a door where someone has chosen to display an astronaut in a wheelchair instead of the traditional RI sign with a person in a wheelchair. To the right, is a door with a pictogram of a water closet with handrails, categorising and highlighting the functionality of the room instead of whom it is intended for.

Figure 1. Three photos in a row, displaying categorisational ambivalence.

The first ambivalence concerns what and when to categorise. A traditional method is to categorise bodies, people, and roles. While this is a prominent categorisation pattern in the material, there are also other ways to categorise that refrain from categorising bodies, people, and roles. One such example is categorising a function instead of a person (see our discussion regarding "nonclusion" later in this paper).

Second, the material exhibits ambivalence regarding traditional ways to categorise and new emergent ways to categorise gender. One example is the categorisation of gender on toilet door signs. Genders are sometimes kept separate (e.g., 'man, woman', 'man, woman, third gender'), sometimes combined (e.g. all-gender signs), and sometimes not categorised at all. These varying categorisations can be interpreted as ongoing hegemonic negotiations regarding how to understand gender [22], or, in other words, as ambivalence regarding how to display categories.

The third ambivalence involves how to categorise dis/ability. In the material, there are several examples of signs that do not use an RI sign with a person in a wheelchair, such as the photograph in the middle in Figure 1. In line with Williamson [13], we

interpret the many alternative pictograms to the RI symbol as an ambivalence related to stigma, leading to people trying to come up with less stigmatising pictograms. Sometimes these solutions are less successful, as can be seen in the middle photo, where the shift in signage, while presumably well-intended, does not change the stigma connected to dis/ability.

4.2. Inclusion upholds patterns of norm and deviation

Inclusion means that someone is positioned as the one to determine who is part of the norm and already included and who is to be included. An example is when people add long rows of pictograms to achieve inclusive signage. This strategy has the drawback of making assumptions about people. Additionally, no matter how many pictograms one puts in a row, for example, on a toilet door, there will still be some people who are outside or who do not identify with any pictogram.
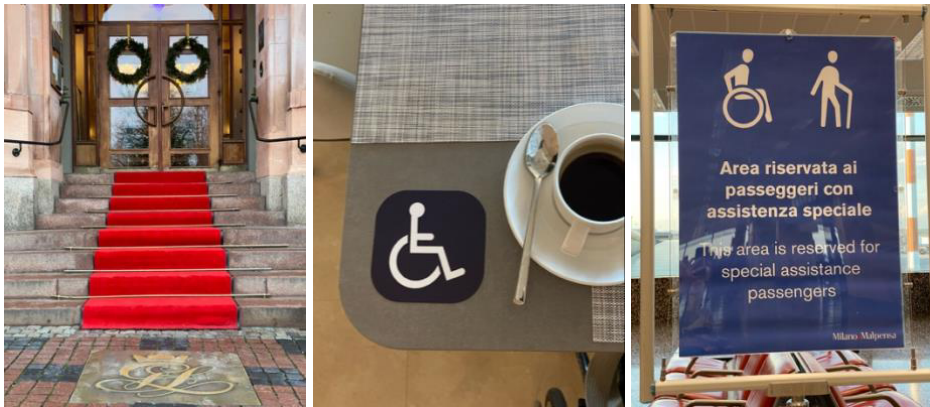

Figure 2. Three photos in a row show division in norms and deviations.

Above are three photographs (Figure 2): To the left, an entrance with a red carpet leading up eight steps into a hotel with a separate entrance for guests who do not use stairs (the latter is not shown in the photograph). In the middle, there is a table at a restaurant with a large wheelchair sign and other tables without this sign. To the right, a separate row of seats at an airport and a sign saying these are for "special assistance passengers".

The photographs show an environment, a product, and a sign, all relying on and exhibiting the distinction between norm and deviation. The leftmost photograph illustrates how the assumed norm is unmarked, whereas the other two photographs show how deviations are marked. Taken together, these photographs illustrate how inclusion is built on a normate logic whereby the norm is positioned as already included, and the deviation is positioned as what is to be included.

4.3. Inclusion leads to power being redone rather than undone

While often well-intended, strategies and practices based on inclusion always carry delimitations and demarcations, and thus, are always exclusive. In this way, inclusion leads to power being redone, rather than undone [20].

Importantly, the division into norm and deviation is not only visible in older constructions but also in new buildings and environments in the material. Below are two

photographs of newly built constructions (Figure 3). To the left is a recently finished university building, constructed around a "social staircase", which dominates the space. Students and teachers who do not use the stairs are left to use the elevators, which are tucked away in a darker area to the left of the staircase. The right image shows a photograph from the entrance to a new office block. When entering the building, there is a revolving door to the right and an ordinary door to the left. The space is categorised with a sign on the ordinary door saying "Only entrance for" and then a pictogram of a person in a wheelchair and a baby.
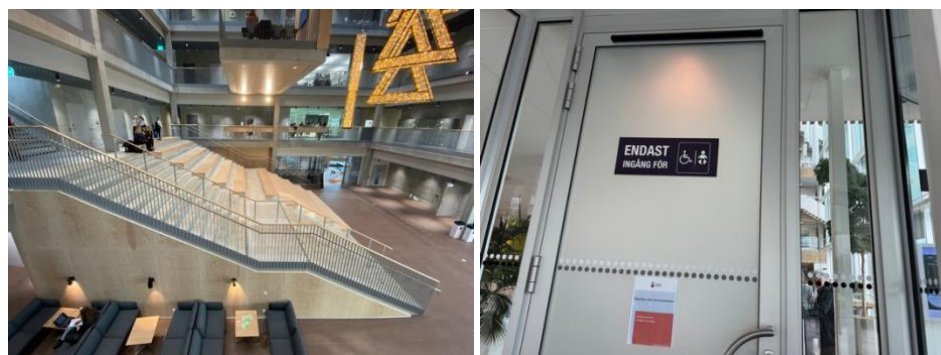

Figure 3. Two photographs showing how power structures are reified in new constructions.

These two environments are intended to be used by all people. However, the patterns of norm and deviation the environments exhibit are manifestations of the prevailing normate reasoning. Despite being finished just a year or two ago, they showcase yet another reification of the currently dominating power structures, in which some people are tacitly included as part of the norm and others are supposed to be included.

5. Concluding Discussion

We doubt that inclusion holds the key to creating the lasting social change that Thompson [10] asks for. Based on our findings, we argue that inclusion is something of a paradox, where genuine efforts to promote social equity and empowerment simultaneously become yet another reification of power structures and marginalisation. The main problem with inclusion is that it is done to someone by someone (Figure 4). All these long lines of debated icons depicting people, bodies, and roles, and all efforts to come up with less stigmatising ways to categorise, seem to obscure a vicious circle of includer and included going on.

Moving forward, understanding diversity will be just as important as ever before, demanding continued studies and use of lived experience, anthropometry, and other ways to identify and acknowledge human difference. There is a rich body of knowledge connected to accessibility and usability, which will play a crucial role in the future as well. However, understanding and acknowledging diversity does not necessitate putting categories of bodies, persons or roles on display or dividing visitors of environments and websites into separate groups.

It should be noted that categorising is human and that categories are essential cognitive features. When a child grows up, it learns what counts as "a lamp", "a dog", etc, and what does not. Here, it is important to note that we do not argue for avoiding

categorisation. This would not be possible. However, we *do* argue that the habits and practices resting on categorisation of bodies, people, and roles that have been established over the decades need to be challenged, and that purposeful use of categorisation can help change oppressive power structures.

Figure 4. It is not innocent "to include" someone.

UD has a long history, but it seems to be stuck in old ways of thinking based on normate logic. In real life, these divisions into norms and deviations become narratives and choreographies, dictating who can go where, enjoy what, and contribute to what. The markers of not fully belonging are hidden in current terminology and practices. This creates what we might call a "band-aid diversity", where each act of inclusion becomes a new band-aid the symptoms of a divided society but without changing it at its core. Thus, inclusion-based UD is an incomplete goal that cannot and will not act as a bridge to "a society where human difference would be *missed* if it were not present" [10,p.1491].

We propose the following: move beyond "inclusion" to "nonclusion" and the corresponding "nonclusive design" as a foundation for UD [26]. This entails a shift in categorisation: "Nonclusive design means design that resists categorisations of bodies/roles and that does not come with predefined or presupposed limits in terms of whom it is meant for" [12,p.85]. One concrete example of nonclusion can be seen in the rightmost photo of a toilet door in Figure 1, where the people and families that are often found on toilet doors are replaced with a water closet with handrails. By refraining from categorising "who" and instead describing the nature of the room and its features, one can establish a shift in narrative wherein the focus is redirected away from the individual towards the environment. This shift in categorisation "from person to function" represents one of the patterns identified as part of "Nonclusive Design" in [12] and further elaborated upon in [2,22,26,27].

We argue that such a shift in categorisation on a larger scale can usher in a new paradigm regarding how the path towards a society where everyone belongs can be conceptualised and realised. It is time to revisit the roots of UD, aiming for citizenship, democracy, and changes in attitudes in society. UD has always been nonclusive.

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