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CHAPTER 8

## Disability Studies in the Universal Design University

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Universities have developed innumerable traditions worth celebrating since the foundations of the earliest universities millennia ago. Among these activities, research and teaching are foremost. Providing models for the betterment of society and serving global, national, and local constituents is another crucial contribution. Despite the popular image of the ivory tower, university members everywhere engage diverse publics in a range of settings. However, often outdated customs in higher education continue to hinder the future of the use of knowledge for society instead of fostering their advancement. These customs, often unquestioned, certainly cast doubt on the university's claim to be a continual source of enlightenment and perpetual engine of innovation.

Among the most glaring of universities' failures to live up to universal ideals of inclusion and human rights are ableism and institutionalized discrimination manifest in persistent attitudinal, architectural, and social structural barriers that have excluded disabled and disadvantaged

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people from most universities for most of their history. Nevertheless, we do live in an era in which globally recognized scholars with disabilities, like Stephen Hawking (1998) among many others, routinely make key contributions to knowledge. Here, we discuss the nexus of developments in higher education as captured by the universal design university, physical barriers to diversity and participation in universities (exemplified by the University of Luxembourg), as well as the multidisciplinary field of Disability Studies fostering research on the human right of inclusive education, with particular focus on research in the German-language countries and scientific communities of Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, and Switzerland.

Despite barriers of exclusion, segregation, and stigmatization, disabled individuals like Hawking have demonstrated their talents, knowledge, and perspectives, often having benefitted society enormously. Given this discrepancy, we must ask: How much stronger and more prominent could universities be if they were to open their classrooms to diversity and make their programs and campuses accessible to all? Universal design, or "design for all," seeks to reduce disablement by planning for participation and usage by all in advance. Intellectual, advocacy, and activist discourses facilitating the development of such accessible higher education are joined in the multidisciplinary and global field of Disability Studies, a field of inquiry that sharpens critical dialogue on the social and political constructions of dis/ability and "ab/normality."

Indeed, given the rise of attempts to provide education for all (as discussed below), the numbers of university students who self-identify as disabled or are in need of individualized support to succeed in their studies has also grown rapidly. As the populations of recognized and socially validated disabilities or special educational needs continue to grow, universities must not only address the issues discussed in this chapter, but also provide policies and programs for support and services that continue to vary considerably across societies for current and future students.

As generators of knowledge and as centers of community life in towns and cities, universities have an extraordinary chance—and responsibility—to enhance access to the learning opportunities they offer. As they do so, they show their communities how to remove barriers and the advantages that accrue to all. In embracing paradigms that extend beyond the clinical to include socio-political, minority group, and human variation models of disability (see Scotch and Schriener 1997) in giving voice to diverse participants, and in providing prototypes for the implementation of universal design principles, the university can engage and change public

awareness and attitudes. Advancing the educational and social inclusion of persons with disabilities in higher education provides benefits far beyond the university campus.

To chart the present and future of the structural and cultural advance of the Universal Design University, we emphasize that ideas, cultures, and structures need to be transformed to counter the (dis)ableism prevalent throughout the academy as in society. Only when universities have rebuilt themselves as fully accessible will they be able to claim to be contributing to an inclusive society not only in theory but also in practice.

### INTRODUCING THE UNIVERSAL DESIGN UNIVERSITY

Simply put, the Universal Design University stems in part from applying architectural principles articulated by Ronald L. Mace, who coined the term *Universal Design*, to allow *everyone* access to higher education, a goal that over the years has benefitted from Disability Studies and principles of design for all. While there has been some progress on some university campuses, higher education's outdated customs have more often prevailed, making the realization of design for all inconsistent, even though principles informing university education have long promoted the idea of diversity and inclusion.

Since the student protests of 1968 in Europe and North America that aimed to secure civil liberties, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, the future of universities in many democracies has been near the top of national political agendas. This is especially so today, during the current transformation of the global higher education landscape via such developments as the Bologna process of Europe-wide standardization and as a result of ideological commitments to neoliberalism or the economic crisis of 2008/09, which caused drastic budget cuts in and further marketization in many higher education systems.

At the same time, clearly, myriad age-old barriers to full participation and social inclusion of disabled people in universities persist everywhere. Thus, the "barrier removal philosophy" (Shakespeare 2006: 44) advocated by principles of design for all theory emphasizes enhanced attention and concrete efforts by all groups involved in making higher education a force for innovation and mobility on the path toward the "knowledge society" (Castells 1996).

However, several significant tools for awareness-raising and concrete institutional and organizational change from global to local levels are available. Globally, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons*

with *Disabilities (UN CRPD)*—which has been ratified by 170 countries in its first decade (United Nations; OHCHR 2016)—mandates inclusive education at all levels, including tertiary education and lifelong learning. This treaty, in supporting the human right to inclusive education, stands to benefit all, not only those persons with currently perceived impairments and disabilities. However, as DePoy and Gilson (2010) argue, while the UN CRPD does support the widespread dissemination of knowledge and facilitate the reduction of discrimination and disadvantage, in some articles it lacks the needed detail and defined mechanisms to reach its policy goals—or to enforce them. Moreover, without concrete detail and mechanisms, the UN CRPD can also lead to backlash as forces supporting the status quo co-opt inclusion rhetoric and politically undermine change processes underway at state and local levels (Powell et al. 2016). Nevertheless, as efforts to implement design for all move forward, raising awareness about the UN CRPD's principles should be explicitly joined with other ongoing reform processes that strengthen equality and human rights around the world.

Regionally, in Europe, contemporary initiatives—first and foremost the Bologna process—have elaborated a new model of education that derives from durable strengths in largely state-funded education and training systems. While it remains an empirical question whether public or private universities in Europe are more accessible, state funding, often accompanied by stronger accountability to principles of equality, would likely ensure more access. Across Europe, key goals include not only the support of competitiveness in global markets and individual employability or the maintenance and enhancement of the quality and attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area, but also the flexibility of pathways and enhanced permeability or mobility between vocational training and higher education (Powell et al. 2012), of importance especially to those youth with disabilities who have not had opportunities to participate in secondary schooling that qualifies for college access (Powell et al. 2008). However, this latter social dimension, including inequalities in access to higher education on the basis of social and ethnic background or individual dis/ability status, has less often been discussed in these reforms, despite successful student protests demanding policymaker attention.

Instead of a balanced view on social and spatial mobility, the Bologna process documents almost completely neglect social mobility and focus on educational exchange across borders, still the province of elites and

not available to all students (Powell et al. 2012). Issues of accessibility, architecture, and accommodations in learning environments have hardly been expressed. Yet throughout Europe, as elsewhere, lasting disparities among social groups in entering and graduating from higher education persist (Shavit et al. 2007), and the physical state of university facilities in many countries is appalling, despite being considered elite spaces for the privileged few. The necessary improvements to these systems addressing such challenges include international legal charters, scholarship, and universal design concepts. In line with these developments, in 2010 a disability strategy was adopted by the European Parliament that supports the rights of disabled people to full and equal participation in society (European Commission 2010) following Article 9 of the UN CRPD: “governments must ensure that disabled people have ‘access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications . . .’ It identifies the need for a mix of actions, including legal redress, to ensure that social justice for disabled people becomes enshrined in the activities and actions of providers of goods and services” (Imrie 2014: 287).

In addition to the global UN CRPD and the European Commission's regional strategy to support the UN CRPD, at the local level, a decisive response to these widespread educational and social inequalities would be for universities to embrace the principles of universal design *fully*, such that the design of services, products, and environments “is usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (Mace 1997: 1). Seven principles have guided universal design from the beginning: (1) equitable use, (2) flexibility in use, (3) simple and intuitive design, (4) explicitly perceptible information, (5) tolerance for error, (6) low physical effort, and (7) size and space for approach and use (Mace 1997; see Preiser and Smith 2011).

Given exemplary organizations that embrace principles that are seemingly utopian but also eminently practical, the Universal Design University is no longer simply a figment of the imagination. Indeed, universal design offers useful tools—some specifically described below—to help universities meet societal expectations held for higher education. Yet to be realized, design for all must become a fundamental goal for the remarkable diversity of teachers and learners, planners and personnel, who together guide, sustain, and enrich higher education.



### *Defeating Ableism, Removing Barriers, and Enhancing Accessibility in the Universal Design University*

To explore necessary steps toward the Universal Design University, we discuss barriers and identify strategies already in use to increase accessibility on multiple levels. First, around the world, *attitudinal barriers*—from hostile approaches, prejudice, and negative stereotypes to stigmatization, marginalization, and segregation—have severely limited the participation and contribution of people with disabilities to community life. Social, scientific, and legal changes provide increasing opportunities to challenge such views and improve the reactions to and treatment of people with disabilities. Gradual shifts from containment and compensation toward care and citizenship (Drake 2001) are taking place, with the latter bolstered by the global diffusion of human rights, disability movement protests (Barnartt 2010), the “disability revolution” (Heyer 2015), and the global norm of inclusion.

Yet the likely most tenacious barrier of ableism is exemplified in the taken-for-grantedness of meritocratic myths,<sup>1</sup> such as the faulty belief that only those who are considered to be “able”—however this is currently defined and measured with various instruments—should or could access university education and succeed (Buchner et al. 2015; Wolbring and Yumakulov 2015). We simply do not know how many youth with disabilities would succeed in postsecondary education were their aspirations not voided by low expectations and institutionalized discrimination (Powell [2011] 2016). Thus, the Universal Design University would open itself to the idea that individuals, previously excluded, can contribute to it as it supports them in reaching their learning goals through reduced barriers as well as accommodations, advocacy, and activism.

Second, *social, cultural, and educational structures* exhibit institutionalized selection processes and discriminatory practices that reduce the learning opportunities and expectations of disabled children, youth, and adults—or those who are socially and educationally disadvantaged. Having negative effects early in the life course, such structural and cultural barriers have often given universities an easy way out: the group eligible to apply for entrance is kept artificially low, particularly among educationally disadvantaged groups, including migrants and youth with impairments who are much more likely to have attended special schools and classrooms that often limit transitions to vocational training and higher education (Pfahl and Powell 2011). While women once had to battle to gain access

to universities, in many countries worldwide they have quickly become the majority in participation as well as attainment (Schofer and Meyer 2005: 909). Yet in contrast to strides made toward gender equality, racism and ableism remain pervasive, despite the fact that with each additional social group, the extension of learning opportunities has proved successful. The expansion of the quintessentially private *and* public good of education has been self-amplifying.

The Universal Design University would identify groups whose contributions have been artificially limited by oppression and selection processes and ultimately supply bridges for these groups to enter—and participate fully.

Third, students with disabilities who do make it onto campus or can use digital learning platforms are confronted with a range of *environmental and communication barriers* that hinder their academic and social participation. Campus innovations range from adapted signage and disability service centers to diversity-oriented instruction and Disability Studies. Universities around the world have directly addressed such known obstacles and, in implementing new principles and programs, provided pathways to the future Universal Design University. The following sections discuss such barriers and strategies to overcome them, from the global and national to the local.

All universities orient themselves to international norms of academic advancement and professional development. Whereas internet-based universities serve users in networks varying in size and shape, brick-and-mortar universities also relate to neighboring spatial environments and diverse local communities. In any case, a university always serves much larger and diverse groups than its current students, staff, and faculty members because the campus is *per se* a center. The public expects universities to both guard established knowledge and search continuously for discoveries that will improve human well-being and enhance capabilities (Nussbaum 2006).

### *Universities as Role Models: From Educational Expansion to Inclusive Education for All*

Because of their cultural influence and economic significance, public and private universities are uniquely positioned to be important role models, to set new standards, and to provide community services. As these organizations carry out the tasks of research, education, and training as well as

professional preparation, their responsibility to realize both excellence and equity in their programs is heightened by the considerable state and philanthropic support that they enjoy. No longer reserved for a small minority, university studies have become an integral part of lifelong learning for many. Offering cultural events and intellectual resources open to entire communities, universities that enhance accessibility can better achieve their extended mission to provide possibilities for learning far beyond current faculty, staff, and students. All the more reason to rethink how the university can better serve *all* citizens—including those who have already passed through its doors and those who will in the future, physically or virtually.

Every level of education has expanded in countries throughout the world, including higher education, since World War II, a transformation leading to the “schooled society” (Baker 2014). Such educational change interacts in myriad ways with broader societal developments, such as shifting paradigms of dis/ability. Concrete legal innovations—such as prohibitions of disability discrimination in dozens of countries (Quinn and Degener 2002)—were affected by the global disability movement’s advocacy initiatives (Charlton 1998; Groce 2002) and protest activities (Barnartt 2010) that emphasize the power of new social movements in bringing about change (see Heyer 2015). But before activists and advocates succeeded in securing their rights and gaining access to integrated public schools and inclusive classrooms in the last quarter of the twentieth century, they had to survive asylums, eugenic forces, and educational exclusion prior to World War II and in the first decades thereafter (Powell [2011] 2016: 36).

Aligned with growing citizenship rights and notions of personhood, the past half-century has witnessed an unmistakable shift in emphasis from medical to social and political models of dis/ability, based on the core idea that not individual deficits but rather cultural and structural barriers disable people (see Poore 2007). This has facilitated a redirection of research and policy initiatives away from rehabilitation and treatment of individuals and toward contextual conditions and barrier-filled environments, human rights charters and anti-discrimination legislation, and mechanisms of social control and exclusion. Today, the debate about strategies to reduce educational exclusion has shifted to facilitating factors to realize inclusive education for all, with the emphasis especially on human rights (Degener 2014).

International organizations, and especially the UN, have been influential in both the establishment of human rights (including inclusive education for all) and the call for equality and social justice for hundreds of millions of disabled people worldwide. To reach such overarching goals, education is assumed to be absolutely vital. In the international calls for education for all and then for inclusive education, a range of organizations has provided ideas, standards, and legal texts to facilitate such transformation (such as UNESCO; see Kiuppis and Sarronaa Hausstätter 2015).

#### *United Nations Convention: Human Rights, Inclusive Education, and Access to Universities*

On December 13, 2006, a quarter century after the 1981 *International Year of Disabled People*, which was a year dedicated to recognizing and celebrating the contributions of people with disabilities to community life, the UN General Assembly adopted the UN CRPD with similar goals: to promote and protect the human rights, dignity, and freedom of disabled people around the world (United Nations 2006), leading to a “human rights model of disability” (Degener 2014). As did its ancestors, this first human rights treaty adopted in the twenty-first century has raised awareness tremendously about disability as it insists on the reduction in discriminatory practices and stigmatization that have limited the participation and contributions of disabled people throughout history.

Educational rights extend to universities via the convention’s vision of accessible environments and an inclusive education system. The UN CRPD’s Article 24 on education states the extent to which different levels of access to education are to be guaranteed, from childhood education and care via schooling, vocational training, and higher education to lifelong learning. Education systems that are inclusive are viewed to be of fundamental importance to the development of individuals and community life. Without such inclusive systems, persons will neither be enabled to become fully participating citizens nor individuals who reach their potential and freely develop their personality in order to maximize their capabilities (Nussbaum 2006). Lacking prior schooling and credentials, individuals who suffer disadvantages early in the life course are unlikely to access higher education or to find adaptations or accommodations sufficiently compensatory—and thus have limited access to formal learning opportunities in the future (see Priestley 2001).

Alongside debates at national and local levels about how to ensure democratic participation by citizens and how to secure highly qualified workforces, at the international level, the UN CRPD sets a progressive and ambitious agenda of learning throughout the life course. To be successful, such reforms must engage the ideas, norms, and policies evident in institutionalized education systems that continue to segregate or separate, such as those in Germany and the United States (Powell [2011] 2016). Without high-quality primary and secondary schooling and permeability between school forms or tracks, learning opportunities at the postsecondary level, whether vocational training or higher education, will necessarily be limited. Reflecting the stratified societies and education systems of which they are an influential part, universities and those responsible for their governance have in fact carefully guarded access to these hallowed grounds, upon which elite civil servants and professionals have been prepared for power.

Nevertheless, especially over the past half-century, universities have considerably broadened their missions, a long-term shift toward more socially useful, organizationally flexible, and broadly inclusive universities that valorize diversity. Among the common trends that have shaped and influenced higher education systems are the evolution from elite to mass to universal participation in postsecondary education, increasing labor market opportunities and rising incomes for highly educated experts, the self-amplifying growth of knowledge, and government patronage and supervision (see Clark 1993; Baker 2014). Yet recent and ongoing fiscal challenges in higher education systems along with rapid privatizations globally, threaten important initiatives to enhance accessibility and provide services for students with disabilities because universities suffer from the broad retrenchment of public support.

Regardless of the financial constraints, the UN CRPD emphasizes the importance of investments and adaptations (such as the reduction of architectural barriers) not only in primary and secondary schooling but also in vocational training as well as in higher and adult education. Without such modifications, the playing field will not be even for all. Even in the wealthiest European countries, such as Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, and Switzerland where higher education is significantly supported by state funding, education and training opportunities beyond primary and secondary schooling are still seriously lacking for individuals with recognized “special educational needs” (Powell et al. 2008; Limbach-Reich and Powell 2016).

Thus, the persistence of stratified access to tertiary education and the reproduction of class inequalities—based upon elaborate social selection procedures in tracked secondary schooling—are among the most significant challenges facing European universities. Mobility and permeability have become buzzwords of European reform processes in higher education via the Bologna process and vocational training via the Copenhagen process (Powell et al. 2012). But highly stratified secondary schooling, along with the impermeability between vocational education versus training and higher education in countries like Germany, determines the life chances of each cohort (Pfahl and Powell 2011). Still, the UN CRPD emphasizes that countries “shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities” (UN 2006: Art. 24, Section 5).

Progressive policies and practices show the way forward to meet global norms of educational equality. As the UN CRPD’s mandate is carried out on multiple levels of governance, there is still much to learn from others and much to do in order to transform university campuses. The academy, like other institutions, must accept the responsibility of making education and employment more inclusive by reducing barriers, enhancing accommodations, and emphasizing diversity and universal design.

#### *Universal Design Principles Facilitate Access to and Success Within the University*

Youth with disabilities who have obtained the certificates necessary to access tertiary education are often hampered in doing so by the lack of available support services they need. Increasingly, such services have been provided on campuses in the United States, supported by codified rights to education and programs like the Universal Design Initiative of the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD). Such policies and innovations in a range of organizations demonstrate that the previously taken-for-granted boundaries of student dis/ability were illegitimate, as disabled students succeed and contribute to these learning communities. Aiming to extend the above-discussed changes, the UN CRPD demands adjustments in education policies and university programs around the world.



Yet, to surpass compliance and create a truly welcoming community that recognizes and values diversity requires more than rules and regulations. Equally, if not more important, cultural shifts in attitudes, awareness, and analytical methodology are necessary. Indicators of such shifts include the existence of academic offerings that examine disability as a universal human experience that nevertheless exhibits tremendous cultural and policy differences, even within regions. Next to attitudinal and architectural adaptations, innovative instructors can implement universal instructional design (discussed below) to facilitate the learning progress of all their students. Usually, such adaptations require few additional resources even as they benefit all participants.

In architectural structures and communicative diversity—such as ramps, way-showing systems, Braille signage, sign language interpretation, and accessible websites (see Web Accessibility Initiative 2016)—improvements have been steady, but gradual. Universal design has focused on the built environment, spatial mobility, and product use. Such considerations are particularly important in campus planning, restructuring facilities, and building projects. Just as ramps facilitate access for a wide range of users, from parents with prams to wheelchair users to delivery personnel, signage can assist everyone to navigate both familiar and unfamiliar spaces. For example, the *International Symbol of Access*, ubiquitous in spaces from international airports to local parking lots, provides daily interactions with issues of accessibility; moreover, it actually facilitates individual mobility *per se*, while using the most prevalent symbol of disability worldwide to do so (Ben-Moshe and Powell 2007). Interestingly, diverse local interpretations of this symbol mirror the shift from exclusion to inclusion of disabled people in the human rights revolution. That is, whereas the traditional icon displays an object (the wheelchair), newer icons show the human user as an active rider, asserting the primacy of personhood and participation. Symbols, buildings, and legal conventions all reveal the significant transformation in disability paradigms from medical to social models and from exclusion to inclusion (Heyer 2015).

#### *Toward the Universal Design University in German-speaking Countries*

While higher education access for students with disabilities has moved up the agenda as, for example, becoming a major priority for recent governments in the United Kingdom (Hurst 1998; Harrison et al. 2009), this is

not yet the case in Luxembourg or in other German-speaking countries. Achieving disability equality demands a proactive approach, effective implementation of legislation, and measures ensuring compliance.

In fact, across the German-speaking countries discussed here, many of the newer developments found in the United States and the United Kingdom have been hampered by lack of awareness, legal stipulations, and financial provisions as well as the tenacious educational segregation discussed above that seriously limits the eligibility of youth with disabilities to attend universities in the first place (Powell et al. 2008). Many individuals with invisible disabilities or chronic illnesses, however, do attend, having never been selected out of the general education system during primary or secondary schooling. For many students with recognized impairments or disabilities who do make it to campus against the odds, further barriers hamper their learning opportunities and thus limit their success.

Paving the way forward intellectually is Disability Studies, introduced above, a burgeoning multidisciplinary field with its own journals, conferences, and courses of study.<sup>2</sup> The development of this field of study itself must be considered both as an indicator of shifting paradigms of dis/ability and a facilitator of such change within the university, even if debates about the utility and potential of universal design and of social model thinking that advocates a barrier-free utopia are ongoing (e.g., Shakespeare 2006). The availability of Disability Studies in official curricula facilitates the broadening of learning opportunities and critical reflection of issues of inclusion/exclusion and ableism.

Even where Disability Studies courses are regularly offered and disability services offices have gathered years of experience, cooperation among administration, faculty, staff, and students is still needed to take accommodations and services “beyond compliance” and to build “pedagogical curb cuts” (Ben-Moshe et al. 2005). Universities that adapt principles of universal design do already exist. Applying universal design principles to teaching and learning, for example, scholars at the University of Washington have adapted the original principles developed at the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, conceptualizing Universal Design of Instruction (Burgstahler 2005, 2015; see also Bowe 2000). Likewise, colleagues at Canada’s University of Guelph have developed a similar concept, Universal Instructional Design.

Disability Studies principles reorient the original tenets of universal design noted above to the specific interactive situations of teaching and learning, characterized by (1) being accessible and fair (equitable); (2) demonstrating

flexibility in use, participation, and presentation; (3) being straightforward and consistent; (4) conveying information that is explicitly presented and readily perceived; (5) providing a supportive learning environment; (6) minimizing or eliminating unnecessary physical effort or requirements; and (7) accommodating learning spaces for both students and methods. As ideals, universal design concepts provide a vision for the future. Moreover, they already serve as important guidelines for restructuring that have been applied and implemented broadly.

### CASE STUDY IN DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY: THE UNIVERSITY OF LUXEMBOURG

We now move on to a case study of diversity, inclusion, and accessibility by reviewing the establishment of the University of Luxembourg.

As also briefly described in Chap. 3, Luxembourg, among the world's smallest but also most diverse countries, lies in the heart of Western Europe. Bordered by Belgium, France, and Germany, Luxembourg today hosts one of the European Union's three capital cities. A crucial crossroads over centuries of European history between Europe's Germanic and Francophone regions, the country has experienced remarkable migratory flows, resulting in an ethnically hyper-diverse and multilingual population. Reflecting this cultural diversity, the education system emphasizes language learning and multiculturalism—key issues in diversity and inclusion. At the same time, however, education in Luxembourg tends to be highly selective and its education system stratified, limiting access, diversity, and participation.

#### *Founding the Inter/national University of Luxembourg*

At the tertiary level, the national flagship University of Luxembourg was founded in 2003, upon the initiative of a small group of elite decision-makers as a private, government-dependent institution (*établissement public*) directed by a board, the *Conseil de Gouvernance*. The majority of funding is provided by the state, although third-party funds have risen considerably, enabling an expansion of research. Relying heavily on faculty, staff, and students from other countries to develop, the University of Luxembourg organizationally replaces several postsecondary training institutes: the *Centre Universitaire de Luxembourg*, which had provided

a range of short-cycle courses across the humanities and social and natural sciences; the *Institut Supérieur de Technologie* (engineering); the *Institut Supérieur d'Études et de Recherches Pédagogiques* (primary school teacher education); and the *Institut d'Études Éducatives et Sociales* (social work education). The University of Luxembourg's founding principles of internationality, multilingualism, and interdisciplinarity would seem to auger well not only for diversity, but also for the multidisciplinary study of "dis/ability" and for inclusion as a multidimensional concept.

The university's new campus in Esch-Belval rises alongside preserved steel factory smokestacks, among the largest construction sites in Western Europe in recent decades. Unlike its larger neighbors, especially Germany, which created and nurtured the evolution of the centuries-old Western form of the research university (Baker 2014), Luxembourg waited to found its national research university until this century. Since its founding was recent, a unique opportunity was provided to innovate.

For decades, the children of the elite had been sent off to study at universities in such countries as Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and Switzerland to learn in established Europe-wide networks, thus ensuring Luxembourg's embeddedness and influence in (Western) Europe. Somewhat paradoxically, at the same time that European borders are becoming more porous, and spatial mobility everywhere supported, Luxembourg has invested heavily in establishing a new national university. In so doing, it has provided, at long last, an alternative for Luxembourg youth who had traditionally sought higher education abroad. Yet the university was founded against considerable resistance, both pecuniary and ideological, due to the long-standing custom of educating elites in other countries within cosmopolitan networks (Braband 2015).

Today, Luxembourg hosts a highly international university in terms of faculty, staff, and student body: the world has come to the Grand Duchy, fostering the mobility and exchange of ideas crucial for path-breaking research and teaching, and ensuring that issues of diversity and inclusion take center stage. With the university's growth in size and reputation has come a rise in its rankings, having entered the Top 200 since 2015. This validates the foresight of policymakers who decided that Luxembourg, too, should have a research university. Yet could this university be a model for accessibility and universal design as well? After all, universities as living and learning communities require the participation of diverse constituent groups to thrive.



### *Laws Facilitating (Campus) Accessibility in Luxembourg*

The guidelines of the UN CRPD, ratified by Luxembourg in 2011 as well as Grand Ducal laws mandating access to all public buildings (in force since 2001), suggest that the Belval Campus should be accessible.<sup>3</sup> Questions of student, staff, and faculty diversity are all at issue when considering the barrier-free campus that provides an inclusive environment for teaching, learning, and research. While it is difficult to foretell all the barriers that hinder the participation of individuals with impairments or illnesses, obstacles such as architectural misjudgment or behavioral carelessness unfortunately continue to be ubiquitous, from the building without automatic door-openers to the locked accessible bathroom used as a storage closet. Progressive construction guidelines need to be accompanied by sensitivity training to reduce or completely avoid such situations that disable. To what extent does the University of Luxembourg's new campus meet the architectural and other standards of the Universal Design University?

An example of how barriers are reproduced even on a brand new campus is the student services office. New students seeking to officially register with the *Service des Etudes et de la Vie Etudiante* face architectural, infrastructural, and technical barriers. The office is inaccessible to students who use wheelchairs or wayfinding systems because it can only be reached via a stairway; the elevators to it have been reserved for administrators, and the floor is accessible only with an electronic key. The signage simply announces the barrier, but not how to actually get to the office (see Image 8.1).

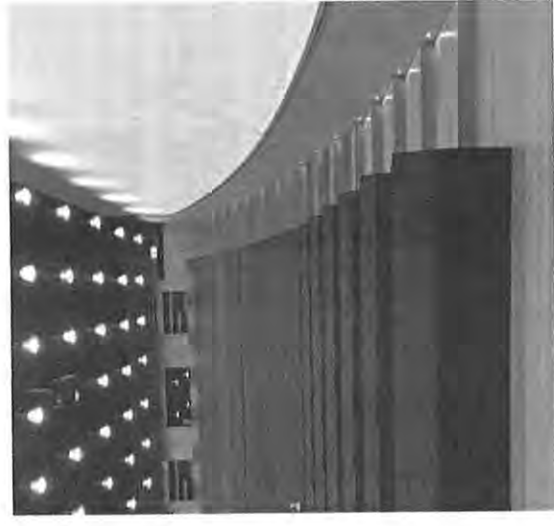
The list of challenges and barriers grows longer, as the main lecture halls only allow students using wheelchairs to sit in the last row (see Image 8.2). The pathway from the new university rail station does not provide needed guidance on the pavement (see Image 8.3).

Very few automatic opening doors exist. And signage pointing to parking spaces for those with limited mobility is lacking. These deficits are in flagrant violation of current Luxembourg law.

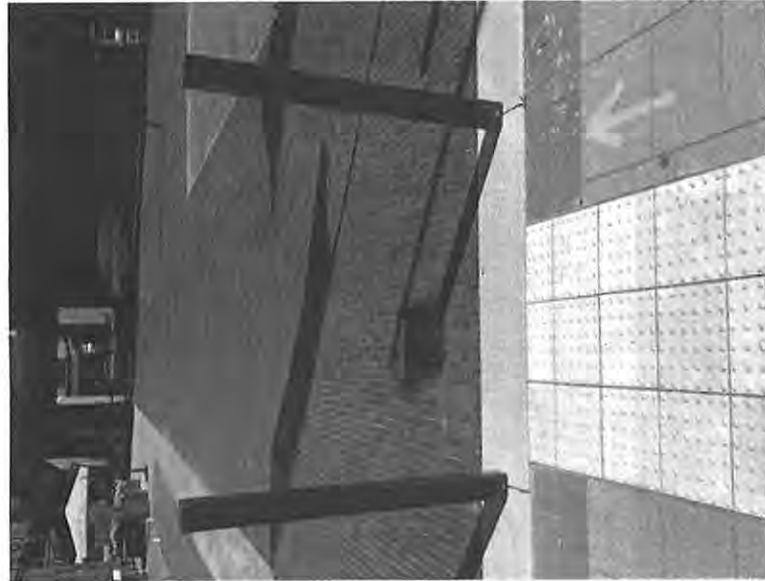
Beyond architecture, normative and more ideational barriers exist. Services and support for students with disabilities and illnesses are crucial for making an inclusive learning environment. In 2011, Luxembourg not only ratified the UN CRPD, but also passed a law that defined services and accommodations (*accommodations raisonnables*) for students with special educational needs after primary schooling. Yet, there is no foreseeable automatic extension for postsecondary education and there is no national



**Image 8.1** Signage directing to the University of Luxembourg's Student Services Office: accessible only via stairs (Photo © JJWPowell)



**Image 8.2** Lecture hall, University of Luxembourg: wheelchair users access only the last row, top (Photo © JJWPowell)



**Image 8.3** Tactile pavement for guiding people with visual impairments in Esch-Belval ends abruptly where the campus begins (Photo © JJWPowell)

law that guarantees the rights of students to receive accommodations or adjustments to curricula in higher education. Thus far, applications for such specific changes within the university have been on an *ad hoc* basis with individual solutions sought—and found. Nonetheless, if successful in gaining admission, students remain in a position of requesting special treatment, a situation dependent on the good will of faculty and staff, instead of enjoying their human right to inclusive (higher) education.

#### *Barriers Beyond Architecture: Goodwill and Empty Promises*

At the University of Luxembourg, the proportion of students acknowledging a disability or special need, less than 1% of all students, is, despite

recent increases, very low in international comparison (Limbach-Reich 2016). This has much to do with the highly selective secondary educational system described above. Without reduced structural and cultural barriers, it will hardly be possible to ensure equalized transition rates to tertiary education in Luxembourg. In Chap. 7, Fradella pointed to the importance of role models in higher education. Yet, even the number of staff and faculty with disabilities at the University of Luxembourg remains unknown. These issues have been raised in the mass media, yet thus far no comprehensive program of structural and cultural barrier removal has begun.

#### *Steps Toward the Universal Design University in Luxembourg*

Currently, there is a proposed law that would enable students with recognized impairments and illnesses to receive an extension of their state subsidies for additional semesters (*Conseil de gouvernement. Résumé des travaux du 4 mars 2016*). This is certainly a step in the right direction. The following areas, among others, should be discussed, with the benefit of experiences from other universities:

##### *Admissions and Enrollments*

In terms of admissions, barrier-free universities should acknowledge and consider affirmative action programs to compensate for the reduced learning opportunities made available to those with special (educational) needs during primary and secondary schooling. The University of Luxembourg could move to revise its policies or at least allow organizational units and disciplines to do so in their areas. Such regulations providing affirmative action could also support students wishing to continue their studies at M.A. or Ph.D. level. Throughout higher education, alternative methods of assessment could be authorized to ensure participation.

##### *Supporting Social Integration of Students and Mobility Issues During Studies*

Regarding social integration, student dormitories should be accessible and programs should support all students in joining social, cultural, and athletic activities. The planned primary school near campus should be a school devoted to inclusive pedagogy and ensure accessible programs for children and youth.

Moreover, as undergraduate students at the University of Luxembourg are required to spend a semester abroad—maintaining the country's tradition of educational exchange and mobility—everyone should have access

to this subsidized program, and partner universities should be expected to provide at least similar accommodations and support for students, which at times may be more comprehensive than at the University of Luxembourg. Indeed, such a provision could also be a mechanism for learning from others, if University of Luxembourg's students bring back ideas and good practices from universities more advanced in accessibility.

Likewise, in the University of the Greater Region network that links universities in the neighboring regions of Belgium, France, and Germany with Luxembourg ([www.uni-gr.eu](http://www.uni-gr.eu)), a charter on issues of access has already been enacted. However, this too, along with its implementation, must be monitored (see <http://www.uni-gr.eu>). Overall, planning at the University of Luxembourg should address aspects of accessibility explicitly and as a matter of course.

#### *Accessibility as a Central Topic of Research and Teaching in the Multidisciplinary Field of Disability Studies*

Debate and dialogue about diversity and inclusion as well as disability and discrimination would facilitate awareness-raising. While such topics are at the heart of Disability Studies, which we turn to next as the intellectual counterpart of fostering accessibility and inclusive education in higher education, they extend to a range of disciplines across the university, from architecture and engineering to computer science and legal studies. Sensitivity to issues of diversity and inclusion is needed throughout the curriculum. Indeed, the university has just welcomed its first professor of architecture and is actively recruiting a professor to teach Inclusion and Diversity. In teacher training, inclusive education principles, supporting positive views, and proactive work with diverse groups are areas to develop. Perhaps especially important for the empowerment of students who self-identify as disabled are the humanities and social science disciplines that have over the past quarter century contributed considerably to Disability Studies.

#### CONTEMPORARY DISABILITY STUDIES IN AUSTRIA, GERMANY, LUXEMBOURG, AND SWITZERLAND

What facilitates the development of Disability Studies and which barriers hinder its (multi)disciplinary flourishing? In this section, we mirror the developments in higher education and universal design within the contemporary discourse of Disability Studies in German-speaking countries

where critical Disability Studies scholarship relies on collaboration among members of the disability (rights) movement, advocates, and academics (see Pfahl and Köbsell 2017). Within the academy, despite general barriers to multidisciplinary fields of study and persistent disability discrimination, more positions have been devoted to research and teaching in Disability Studies. Debates on intersectionality—which studies the multiple roles the disenfranchised can occupy, making them subject to systemic injustice—along with diverse disciplines are discovering the richness that the complex subject of dis/ability offers university research and teaching.

Despite successes, however, scholars in German-speaking countries have struggled since the mid-1990s to fully develop all the necessary resource bases and features of a self-reproducing multidisciplinary field. To review how Disability Studies developed over the past ten years, we sketch some of the most relevant institutions, events, and actors that have actively produced such knowledge (see, e.g., Köbsell and Waldschmidt 2006).

Early in this century, an exhibition called “The (Im-)Perfect Human Being” was organized by Dresden’s Hygiene Museum. Sponsored by a major disability-related philanthropic foundation, Campaign Human Being (*Aktion Mensch*), the exhibit also hosted a watershed conference in Berlin. A foundational Disability Studies event in Germany, where German-speaking scholars connected with those from Anglophone Disability Studies, this led to further conferences (see Lutz et al. 2003). Charting the development of networks and associations as part of this growing new social movement, Swantje Köbsell (2006) reports how centers for independent living, ambulant caregiving service providers and self-help organizations, and educational and scientific organizations joined political action groups to weave this tapestry.

Over the past decade, several organizations were founded to raise awareness, to represent disabled people and to secure equal rights. Most recently, a network of disability organizations collectively known as the *Behindertenrechtskonvention* or *BRK-Allianz* [Disability Rights Convention-Alliance], or the CRPD Alliance, collaborated to produce a report on the gaps between political rhetoric and the lived experiences of people with disabilities throughout Germany (BRK-Allianz 2013; see [www.brk-allianz.de](http://www.brk-allianz.de)). Such organizations have been enormously influential in providing opportunities for dialogue and the coordination of political and social action, as well as in ensuring that issues of disability mainstreaming in policymaking are openly discussed.



### *Current Subjects in German-language Disability Studies*

German-language Disability Studies are principally concerned with two main issues. One is to examine the formation of medical, pedagogical, and welfare systems that classify and serve individuals, but that also often stigmatize and segregate. These interlocking systems establish powerful relationships through their myriad organizations, professional and power relations, and their specific representations of disability and modes of interaction with their "clients." The second concern is to reconstruct the life experiences of disabled people in order to manifest societal discrimination or oppression and then suggest necessary changes on multiple levels, from the local to the global. Shared concerns among all German-language Disability Studies scholars lie in enabling disabled people to live independently and in enhancing accessibility, cultural and political participation, educational inclusion, and improved living conditions and well-being throughout contemporary Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, and Switzerland.

The most significant recent change relating to disability in (higher) education has been the above-mentioned UN CRPD. Deliberations about the implementation of the convention continue in regard to interpreting legal aspects, standards, and fundamental principles. Society-wide debates now include the quality of inclusion, especially in education and employment, in the areas of health, accessibility, and political and social participation. The most encompassing debates have been about schooling. This is because of the lack of equality and excellence in education, reflecting the persistent and ongoing segregation of the vast majority of students classified as having special educational needs. The equalization of educational opportunities and life chances requires inclusion of students with disabilities in all general schools and a transformation of stratified education systems (Pfahl and Powell 2011; Powell [2011] 2016).

The UN CRPD ratification has fostered awareness and debate in both academic discussions and policy debates on the topics of inclusion and participation of children in schooling and on issues of accessibility and anti-discrimination in Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. As a result, Disability Studies in Education, defined here loosely as education research that explicitly addresses issues of dis/ability and inclusion, has grown over the past decade in all four countries. While school integration and inclusive education have been important topics since the 1980s, at least in Austria and Germany, they have recently gained more

salience in general debates in German-speaking countries (see especially *Zeitschrift für Inklusion online* [Online Journal for Inclusion] 2016: No. 2; 2017: No. 1-2; 2014: No. 1-2 on higher education).

With the UN CRPD, then, awareness and debate about issues of exclusion and inclusion have risen steadily over the years. Questions of rights and standards of implementation continue to be contested, as do questions of how to measure the qualities and quantities of inclusion, especially relating to education, work, public life, and health. Studies in German analyze the WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (Hirschberg 2009) or discuss fundamental questions regarding recognition, participation, and the legal status of people with impairments (Graumann 2011). Emphasis on theories of the body, however, limits current German-speaking Disability Studies, which has given less attention to issues surrounding learning and cognitive abilities. This is problematic given that invisible and non-physical forms of disability are also of increasing significance in higher education.

Such topics have only gradually reached the education system in German-speaking countries, in which, as discussed above, highly stratified school systems have traditionally not been oriented to human rights, but rather to status reproduction. In all four countries, only a minority of pupils classified as having "special educational needs" are included full-time in the general classroom (Powell [2011] 2016). Most inclusive learning environments are offered in primary education. Thus, the majority of students of secondary schools have to attend special schools, which very often do not offer the higher secondary school-graduation certificates needed to access higher education. This situation can be considered the main cause for the low prevalence of students with disabilities in higher education in Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. Nevertheless, the goal of inclusive education has received substantially more attention, from educational politics to the university training of teachers.

Recent studies in Germany show that two out of ten students currently enrolled at universities self-identify as disabled in their studies, more so because of psychological rather than physical issues (Hauschildt et al. 2015). Based on these and other life experiences of students in educational institutions, participatory research strategies have been (re-)introduced to German-speaking countries that challenge elitist knowledge production on disability and emphasize self-advocates carrying out their own research projects (Buchner and Koenig 2011). In Austria, Petra Fliieger and Volker

Schönwiese (2011) provide an overview of contemporary studies in their edited volume *Menschenrechte—Integration—Inklusion* [Human Rights, Integration, Inclusion]. Most importantly, Disability Studies scholarship addresses the institutional conditions and causes of exclusion and inclusion, critiques clinical and individual-deficit models, and develops strategies for enhancing capability and ensuring qualification.

#### *Further Institutionalization of Disability Studies in German-speaking Countries*

Although intersectionality perspectives have grown, Disability Studies continues to struggle to influence mainstream disciplines. Throughout Disability Studies, the importance of participatory research is acknowledged, but still comparatively rare. Social structures that determine access, participation, and the distribution of privileges require deeper examination. Research on everyday life, and the influences and practices of the professions on people with disabilities, must be embedded in broader social and political dynamics; in other words, life history research should analyze the impact of discourses, policies, and practices. Multidisciplinary syntheses of cultural, sociological, psychological, and educational approaches should clarify the structures and processes leading to disablement.

Thus, the institutionalization of Disability Studies in both universities and in extra-university research institutes remains limited. Few exceptional universities devote resources to Disability Studies even though research project proposals to state-funded research agencies and other third-party sources have become more important. In this competitive context, reputable journals and other high-quality publication outlets are crucial. Within Europe, the dominant locale in Disability Studies remains Great Britain, and the dominant scholarship language remains English. With some exceptions, translations of Disability Studies' key texts into other languages and vice versa have been modest, which makes the accumulation of research and scientific advancements more challenging. Therefore, the issue of language hegemony is ever-present.

Despite the notable developments of disability activism, anti-discrimination legislation, and the rise of intersectionality as a theoretical approach to enhance equality and inclusion, then, Disability Studies remains in a marginal position with regard to mainstream social science

disciplines. As in the United States, Great Britain, and elsewhere, the founding and development of Disability Studies in German-speaking countries have been strongly linked to the disability movement. Joint research on questions of gender, sexuality, and disability relies to a large extent on networks devoted to these topics, with a few university centers providing organizational support. Indeed, larger universities that have established courses of study in Gender Studies are most likely to have stronger Disability Studies, largely because of the considerable overlap between the two fields in research interests, theories, and methodologies (Pfahl and Köbsell, 2017).

Whether in sociology or education, history or political science, significant studies of disability exist in the German language. Clearly, a focus on disablement (a phenomenon rising over time) and ableism (a persistent feature of cultural contexts around the world) provides a most significant and challenging topic for a range of disciplines. However, the lack of positions for many scholars (let alone activists) in the academy, insufficient career perspectives, and the weak institutionalization of Disability Studies in universities and research institutes have limited the sustainable development of Disability Studies scholarship in Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, and Switzerland.

An open, multidisciplinary network is necessary to bring together researchers working on key Disability Studies topics within and outside the disability movement. Like Gender and Queer Studies and other academic fields that grow alongside new social movements, Disability Studies raises crucial questions about problems of representation and giving voice to marginalized people. Because direct or personal representation is challenging to achieve and individuals always have multiple memberships in social groups, it is time for Disability Studies in German-speaking countries to revisit questions and conditions of participation in Disability Studies, as well as in Disability Studies' intellectual, political, and social agendas (Pfahl and Köbsell, 2017). Increases in advocacy in social policy and in science, and on global, national, and local levels, will occur mainly through affected interest groups and their representatives. The struggles described above, of establishing structures and expanding dialogue both within Disability Studies and within mainstream disciplines, need to be shouldered by as many people as possible in an international network that connects the four German-speaking countries.



### CONCLUSION: DIS/ABILITY STUDIES, UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES, AND DIVERSITY FOSTER INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION

In this chapter, we have identified many facilitators of Disability Studies that should be further strengthened to make universities more inclusive in Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, and Switzerland—countries in which German is a key language and together comprise the largest language community of Europe. The potential of Disability Studies in German-speaking countries continues to develop. While the field is appropriately wide open, we can sharpen and unfold its critical powers by recognizing its subversive status and engaging the insights from Disability Studies worldwide, across language, disciplinary, and cultural boundaries. Academic disciplines are enriched through research and collaborations with Disability Studies and, just as importantly, with community members with disabilities, that uncover the processes that lead to exclusion and foster inclusion. The presence and activities of faculty, staff, and students who have experienced disablement are a crucial source of knowledge for the university—society's key institutional repository of knowledge and the location of its interindividual transfer.

Universities must find new ways to engage forces that disable and recognize the barriers that have been built to limit access, particularly for those individuals already discriminated against early in the life course. All members of academic communities can be sensitized and further educated in a domain that nearly all of us experience, which is why disability policy must be universalized—and to which universities must actively contribute (Zola 1989). Through continual exchanges and dialogues with disabled members of the university community, leaders and administrators may improve the conditions not only for those currently disabled but also for everyone.

We conclude by combining Disability Studies approaches within the German-speaking countries with global insights into universal design principles and organizational and attitudinal barriers. Cultural-cognitive beliefs of “normal” abilities and narrow meritocratic selection processes prevent academic institutions and disciplines from opening themselves to the knowledge, experiences, and perspectives of students, staff, and faculty with disabilities. Yet in an aging world in which rates of impairment are ever increasing, and medical advances extend the capacity for living with illness, such knowledge is becoming increasingly important.

Universities as teaching and learning organizations must acknowledge the different conditions and facilitators of learning among diverse student bodies. Although public universities in these four countries have yet to meet the norms of universal design fully, many private universities have even fewer legal requirements that guarantee the provision of individualized technical aides and personal supports (like sign language interpreters). For instance, the most visible barriers, manifest in the case study of the University of Luxembourg, are architectural and structural barriers that make campuses so difficult to negotiate. All kinds of universities, however, have opened their doors—somewhat—largely due to pressure from students, staff, and faculty with disabilities and other advocates. In these countries, most universities are public, with responsible administrations that have implemented numerous relevant policies. Indeed, a major organizational hurdle is the lack of coordination of services provided to individuals by diverse social service systems and funding bodies (Dannenbeck et al. 2016).

Transferring lessons from other countries and other levels of education, such as anti-discrimination laws and regulations and monitoring by universities, facilitates “disability mainstreaming” in higher education. Especially in public universities, the state has a duty to enhance accessibility and to fully implement UN CRPD's relevant articles through public funding conditionally tied to the reduction in barriers. In terms of programs and curricula, barriers in the regulations of student enrollment, progress, and qualifications can be reduced through accommodations (now tested for decades) in all courses of study (e.g., Burgstahler 2015). The establishment of service centers facilitates the provision of supports and contributes to the coordination of universal design in learning as well as the removal of extant barriers (Aust 2016). Broad support from outside and within the university is necessary for students, staff, and faculty to create an inclusive university that ensures that all community members reach their educational goals.

In sum, Disability Studies and activists together with the legal guarantees of inclusion and equality established by the UN CRPD have created a multidimensional, resourceful, and emancipatory perspective on disability. This view reduces overreliance on an outdated and impossibly facile conception of dis/ability as a binary with clear positive and negative characteristics. In fact, diversity among learners has always driven innovation in education, whether it be the development of new curricula reflecting universal design in education that include all potential learners or the conceptualization of universities as organizations at the heart of inclusive communities.



Principally, the way forward is in expanding diversity to include individuals and groups currently outside the boundaries of “normalcy” on all levels. As participation in higher education continues to grow worldwide, issues of access, equality, and inclusion will become more central—and the lessons learned will extend far beyond the university campus.

## NOTES

1. “The term ableism was coined by the disabled people’s rights movement in the United Kingdom and North America to indicate the cultural preference for species-typical physical, mental, neuro, and cognitive abilities which was/is often followed by the disablement/disablism of people who are judged as lacking required physical, mental, neuro or cognitive abilities” (Wolbring and Yumakulov 2015). Without reviewing here extensive debates within Disability Studies, both *ableism* and *disablism* have been used to refer to the presumption of able-bodiedness and to indicate the pervasive discrimination and oppression that result from disregarding ubiquitous differences in ability in all social groups, cultures, and societal domains, and especially from ignoring and rejecting the human rights of people with disabilities. For examples in planning and architecture, see Imrie (2014); in special education, see Hehir (2005); in higher education, see Madriaga (2007).
2. For example, the Society for Disability Studies (SDS), the Nordic Network of Disability Research (NDRR), and the Center for Disability Studies (CDS) at the University of Hawai’i organize conferences in the Americas, the Nordic countries, and in the Pacific rim. And seminal publications have reviewed accomplished scholarship (e.g., Albrecht et al. 2001; Barnes et al. 2002; Davis 2013).
3. This section on the accessibility of the University of Luxembourg’s new Belval Campus relies on joint work with Arthur Limbach-Reich, the University’s Disability Coordinator, published in German (Limbach-Reich and Powell 2016).

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## CHAPTER 9

## Structural Competency and African Contexts: A Mixed Methodological Approach to Interrogating Strategies for Greater Health Equity

Esther L. Jones

Diversity and inclusion in the American health care system constitutes, arguably, one of the most important and far-reaching areas of concern for social justice currently and historically. Patient-oriented issues such as affordability of care, access to care, and equity of care, as well as diversification of physician training, are primary points of focus for health justice advocacy at the micro-level. Medical sociologists Jonathan Metzl and Helena Hansen argue that the cultural competency model has emerged as a method that attempts to reduce patients' overall experience of stigma and poor health outcomes by producing more culturally sensitive physicians (Metzl and Hansen 2014: 126). Less often considered, however, are the macro-level, systemic, and structural challenges to equity in health care delivery: that is, the organization of institutions and policies of neighborhoods and cities, and of economic infrastructures (Metzl and Hansen 2014: 127). How, for example, do zoning laws that position poor communities closer to roads and polluting facilities expose these citizens to

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