Disability, culture and normative environments
The art and therapy discourse in theatre projects within the disability area

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Abstract: Swedish disability policy is guided by normative principles such as influence, participation and self determination. One way of practicing the policy is to create social settings conductive to the realisation of the aims and objectives in the law. In this article I discuss the condition, content and ideology of one of those normative environments – theatres with intellectually disabled actors. The empirical data collection is conducted in a fieldwork in a municipality in northern Sweden. I intend to discuss the main findings of this study, where the focus highlights the tension present when arranging artistic motivated activities within the frames of the communal social services. The article is based on a study, fully presented in Holmgren (2001).

Introduction

Improving living conditions for persons with disabilities has guided the last disability reform in Sweden (Tideman 1997, Barron 1995a, 1995b, Kohlström 1996, Gough & Modig 1996, Pettersson, 1996). The reform can be viewed as a typical example of the social arrangements in Sweden today, and is also part of a larger ideological shift in the disability area (Söder & Sandvin, 1996). According to Barron, Michailakis & Söder (2000) these changes have included a certain *rights law*; implementation of a specific order for personal assistances, transference of

responsibility for the care for people with intellectual disabilities from the county councils to the communities and the completion of the deinstitutionalisation process.

Within this ideological shift, perhaps the *Act Concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments* (LSS) is the most important change, where emphasis on individual choice and self-determination is explicit.

LSS (SFS 1993: 387) influenced by the Movement for Independent Living, stresses the importance of disabled people's full participation in all aspects of community care. Responsibility for

achieving this objective is borne by society as a whole, but ultimately by the state, local authorities and county councils. The LSS-legislation has been described as a *plus-law*, which means it can only be used when services cannot be received according to general laws on social security and health care. LSS has also been described as a *rights law* and as an *added* legislation it grants additional individual rights to people with disabilities, and gives those entitled to services, the opportunity to apply for certain rights.

LSS is aimed for people with major and long-lasting disabilities, and means an opportunity and a right for the LSS target group to receive certain defined interventions from the municipality. The target group includes: 1) People with learning disabilities, autism or a similar condition, 2) Adults who suffer significant and permanent disabilities or brain damage because of external violence or physical illness and, 3) People with lasting physical or mental disabilities, which are clearly not related to the normal ageing process, if these are major and cause significant difficulties in day-to-day living and therefore mean major needs for support and services (See Gough, 1994).

The authorities' assessments and decisions can also be tried and appealed in court, which means legal claims for people with disabilities. The intention of this legislation is to direct the resources to those who need it most, and people are encouraged to take control over their assistance and oppose the approach of *social engineering* (Tideman & Tössebro 1996, Söder 1996).

Theatre as an ideological shift in the public support system for the disabled

The aims and objectives of Swedish disability policy have been, and still are, ambitious and supported by the principles of *influence, participation, independence* and *self determination*. The overall aim is full participation and equality for people with disabilities (Lewin 1998, Tideman 1997 & 2000, Tössebro et al. 1996). One of the interventions in LSS is the right to a meaningful daily activity, which is a workplace for those (within the target group) who are not employed or studying (Ericsson 1991a, 1991b, Hansson 1993). The ideological change, of which the disability reform is part, has led to new ways of organising and arranging daily activities. Theatre groups with intellectually disabled actors can be viewed as one new – and popular – way of organising daily activities within the municipal care system. But as a cultural activity for people with intellectual disabilities theatre is nothing new, even though some changes has occurred – at least on a formal level.

In a historical perspective one can say that earlier theatres, together with drama, music and painting, had habilitating and therapeutic purposes. In a

sense its idea strived at changing people with disabilities – for example developing the individuals' motor control, communication, self-esteem or social behaviour.

These traditions also become obvious when reading literature and articles in the area (See for example Sommarström et al. 1993, Grönlund et al. 1999, Falk Lundqvist 1992, Dahl-Lundqvist 1995, Hörberg 1984, 1998, Widefjäll et al. 1998, Benigh 1998, Rydén 1998, Ekstrand & Janzon 1996, Rosell 1997, Hellström & Norlén 1987, Lagergren & Wittek 1998. It is also explicit when reviewing international literature (see McCurrach & Darnley 1999, Price & Barron 1999).

Today, however, working with theatre at least in some ways represents something new – an innovation – mostly through the emphasis on putting theatre and culture as an art form in the foreground. It is, so to speak, through artistic performances and not therapeutic outputs the activities receive legitimacy. In this sense, theatre groups as a form of municipally arranged daily activity can be viewed as representing an ideological shift for people with intellectual disabilities.

In the following I intend to discuss the main findings from a study conducted at a theatre with the – ideologically new – ambitions to work with theatre in a more professional way. I will focus on the content and the ideological tension

present when arranging cultural activities within the organisational context of communal social services.

Method

The empirical findings and implications in this article are based on a study conducted in a municipally in northern Sweden. The fieldwork was carried out through a period of six months.

Many researchers have highlighted the methodological difficulties in involving people with intellectual disabilities in research projects (See e.g. Söder 1995, Mallander 1999, Barron 1999, Stalker 1998, Booth & Booth 1994). In this study qualitative methods were used with qualitative semi structured in-depth interviews (Kvale 1997, Starrin & Renck 1996) with both staff and the actors with disabilities, and participant observations (Geertz, 1973, 1988, Ehn 1996). However, due to the purpose of this article, only quotations from the staff are used.

Methodologically, the ambition has been to use an open and inductive methodological approach, in order to present a detailed description of the social life and the motives, assumptions and thoughts guiding the activities taking place at the theatre (Merriam, 1994).

This approach was mainly inspired by ethnographic research, which recurrently has been related to symbolic interactionism (Becker et al. 1961,

Mead 1934, Månsson et al. 1989, Charon 1995). Together with continual conversations with both staff and the disabled actors, the approach has guided the analysis and empirical implications in this study.

Involving people with intellectual disabilities in the research process inevitably raises ethical questions (Oliver 1992, Sauer 2000, Stalker 1998, Barron 1999). In this research project I gained access and informed consent through the professionals at the theatre and they, then, informed and gained consent from the people with intellectual disabilities. I have constantly informed them about the voluntary aspect in participating. Together with the actors with disabilities, I have read the transcribed interviews, and given them the opportunity to alter their opinions. I have also made it possible for the staff to read (and if needed change) the content of the transcribed interviews. Besides these precautions, I have tried to make distinct analyses and interpretations during the research project.

Disability, culture and the issue on meaningfulness

One way of practicing the official principles in the disability policy in Sweden today, is to create conditions and social settings conductive to the realisation of the aims and objectives in the law.
In that sense it's possible to view the social settings the theatre group represents as a normative environment, and the increasing number of theatre groups in Sweden as a result of the widespread and commonly understood idea that theatres are a good way of realising the norms and values in the disability policy. This idea is also visible in the aims and objectives of the theatre I have studied. There, it is stated that one main reason for starting the theatre was the opinion that everybody has a need for self-expression, and that a disability should not be an obstacle to this need. It is also stated that one reason for the relative absence of people with disabilities in cultural arenas, is mainly a result of their dependence on help and support. The following quote is from the written documents of the aims and objectives of the theatre:

"People with disabilities cannot, like non-disabled, participate in these contexts in their leisure time (as for most of us means evenings) because they have no personnel that can follow them".

Further, other cultural activities (within the social services) in the municipality are regarded as unable to integrate the disabled in the community, and without possibilities to satisfy the assumed extensive needs people with intellectual disabilities have. These assumptions, leads to a legitimate conclusion about the need for cultural activities:

"We have to, in whatever way, give these people the opportunity of a meaningful creative activity"

The self-image of the theatre, as representing something new and innovative, is further manifested through a sign on the entrance door, meeting the visitors: *"Welcome to the theatre group – here we do things no one else does"*. The personnel were asked to comment on the underlying meaning of the sign:

"Well, here you are allowed to be who you are. We don't keep strict routines for the day; instead we want the routines to be adjustable. It's not the person but the routines that should adjust"

"Well, we do things no one else does. We don't have the traditional work with Lego and envelopes. We do no ordinary things, things that are not customary, we act".

To conclude; the aims and objectives together with the personnel's descriptions show that more than artistic reasons alone were under consideration when starting the theatre. Its existence also reflects a municipal responsibility: to create meaningfulness (within the daily activity) for people with intellectual disabilities; to offer opportunities for individual emancipation and opposition towards professional routines; and contribute to personal growth and emotional development for people with disabilities. These arguments serve as the basis of the theatre groups' self-image, which most importantly deals with organisational flexibility and ideological innovation.

"It can't become a freak show"

Even though it was announced in the local newspaper that the theatre was about to start and needed actors (with intellectual disabilities) and that they themselves applied for the job, each applicant had been assessed by professionals. In this assessment it was necessary for applicants to show certain skills and abilities to be approved and thus offered a job. The reason why, becomes explicit when talking to one of the personnel:

- *You don't put a person with severe disabilities on stage. Even though he can stand up and walk by himself, you don't put a person who can't answer yes or no on stage...just because he has certain behaviour...*
- *Does it mean that not everybody with intellectual disabilities is suitable for acting?* I asked her.
- *Exactly, not all people with intellectual disabilities are suitable for acting.*

The *qualification process* was formulated with reference to the particularities in acting, but also due to the professional role following certain characteristics when working in a theatre where the actors are intellectually disabled.

The demands on the individuals' cognitive abilities and physical skills lead to the somewhat incisive conclusion that, although the theatre group is intended for people with intellectual disabilities, you still cannot be *too* disabled. This is explicit in the following statement from one of the personnel:

> *"It can't become a freak show! The people on stage need to know who they are and why they're on stage. That presupposes that you need to have certain skills to be able to function as a member of the theatre. You don't put a person on stage, just because that person is confused and giddy and argues that he or she fits to play a birch, and just have to stand there swinging, you just don't do that. And it is also necessary [to have skills] to make me feel secure in my role as a leader. I don't want to put up something that is looked upon as a freak show.*

Another reason why the people with disabilities had to show certain skills is because they, as representatives of such an innovation within the social service culture, in both word and action, needed to represent something fundamentally new. It is thus important for legitimacy, to be able to live up to the expectations placed on the theatre from surrounding environments. In a human service organisation perspective, this corresponds well with Hasenfelds (1983, 1992) view of the importance in viewing such organisations as open systems and, as such, very sensitive for expectations and social norms in a contemporary society. Following this line of argument, Meyer & Rowan (1977) argues that, for human service organisations, the most important aspect for legitimacy is not the technical proficiency of the work in the organisations, but more on conformity with dominant cultural symbols and belief systems, that is, *institutional rules*.

One example of how the theatre viewed itself as innovative – and thus in accordance with predominant cultural norms and institutional rules – concerns the reputation of traditional daycentres. These are portrayed as too strictly structured in terms of time and too occupied with non-developmental projects and work. As a consequence, it is argued, this has led to restricted opportunities for people with disabilities to affect and have influence over their daily work. Furthermore, many of the distinguished features of the theatre, which are described as more enlightened and meaningful, become plausible mainly through this contrast. In that way, awareness and meaningfulness is created, which nurtures and gives legitimacy to the work in the theatre.

> *"Ok, we belong to the municipal social services, but later on we are go-*

ing to be part of our right element so to speak...among theatres and leave this social care context. We are going to be part of something we really belong to".

The opposition towards traditional day-centres mainly targets the character of its work tasks, which are described as rather meaningless and impeding individual development and as too structured in relation to time. The personnel repeatedly commented upon the changes and the differences towards the traditional daycentres, although some (institutionally motivated) similarities exist:

"I think you have to have some comprehensive guidelines. In that sense, the theatre group looks like other care arrangements... involuntary so to speak. It involves in a sense certain necessities, for example you have to have a certain amount of people in the group, morning meetings, ADL-days[1] and lunch every day. But I feel that here, we have extended these moments with theatre and painting and experiences to an entire event".

The development can be described as a movement from order and general solutions, to learning processes, creativity and personal representations. The theatre is looked upon and understood as an arena in which they produce *"feelings and abilities that we all is actually car-*

rying within us". In that way it becomes meaningful working with theatre, something that is accentuated by the way in which it enables the individuals to develop their skills, abilities and social behaviour. This becomes clear in the following conversation between two personnel, talking about the actors with disabilities:

- I think these persons stand for their opinions more today...
- And they have also become more positive
- Yes, and they take part more in the group...

The emphasis on the development of personality and individual skills and abilities, contributes to the legitimacy in working with theatre. The argument is further strengthened by the increased time and space given when working. Theatre is, therefore, seen as a better activity/work when striving towards meaningfulness for people with intellectual disabilities.

Art and the issue on legitimacy

The articulated aims and objectives are shifting from theatre as a goal in itself to theatre as a means to attain other goals. One example of the former is the emphasis on how cultural activities, in themselves, enable individuals to develop their personality and identity. Another example includes the theatre's possibility to individualise work and

offer flexibility for testing one's own ideas and projects. An example of the latter primarily concerns the role of the theatre as the instrument for realising the new ideology and the objectives of the Swedish disability policy, which includes principles as participation, independence and self determination. It also includes more pragmatic considerations; which most clearly puts emphasis on – in some way – changing the people with disabilities working at the theatre.

Maybe it is difficult to distinguish between the work as meaningful in itself (which might include positive effects on the individuals) and the work as solely a means or a method. One crucial difference, however, is the role of professionals. When talking about the theatre as a means to reach other goals, the professionals consequently view their own role as enablers – whether it is about improving or changing the individuals' personality, communication, motor control, social behaviour or ability to perform. When emphasis is on the work as a goal in itself, it is rather the participation in an artistic and cultural context that enables personal growth, sharpened individuality and a sense of identity among the actors with disabilities. Here the professional role is more about having an overall responsibility and by supporting and recognising the individuals' contribution to a creative atmosphere. The following can serve as examples of objectives the theatre (as a means) can realise:

"I can't expect them to be some computer-geniuses, but they can be geniuses in other ways. And I hope that we [as staff, my remark] can help them to become that, geniuses in theatre".

"The aim with the theatre is that we should strive towards improving their self-esteem and their self-confidence and make them see that they are also cut out to be something... Just meeting each other every day makes it possible to strengthen these people. And if they become strengthened in this group, nothing prevents them from suddenly attaining a job at a company in the labour market".

The quotations give a somewhat pragmatic picture of the theatre's ability to offer actors with intellectual disabilities a meaningful and positive development. Viewed in this light, the activities represent the basis for a *changing project*, in which the disabled actors are supposed to be changed, improved and emancipated. The theatre becomes the tool to bring about human change and improvement. Even though the following quotation indicates a certain amount of ambivalence and uncertainty, it also represents yet another example of the importance of learning processes and the double outcomes these learning processes are expected to give rise to:

"It will happen sometime with the persons we have here now. They are

going to grow and develop on this journey, as shall we [as staff, my remark]. And in the end we should have something to show people, a performance, and we will see if we perform just for ourselves or for others. It's not the most important thing that is to make things happen and just have these people here".

The *duality* in the aims and objectives becomes explicit, where one aspect is focused on people changing, something that's possible through that the professionals – using theatre as a method – in a "meaning sense" do something with the actors with intellectual disabilities. Another outcome when emphasising theatre as a method, seems to be the task of enlightenment and contribution to a greater understanding among the general public, of what it means to live with an intellectual disability. In other words, besides running the theatre-work forward, the objective can also be said to have an informative and educative ambition.

"[Through the theatre]...we want to show that people with intellectual disabilities are not worse human beings than anybody else. They too have the right to act and also to be part of society. They are no hidden people, but working as everybody else. Even though it's not noticed generally, they still work and function, but it doesn't show".

To summarise, it can be stated that the shifting understandings about the theatre's possibilities and desirable future outcomes, result in documented aims and objectives that are somewhat vague and multifaceted. As a consequence, this gives rise to certain ambivalence in relations to the more fundamental and ideological direction of the theatre work. This finding can be interpreted and understood as a consequence rising from emphasising either the process or the (alternative) outcomes as the theatre's main objective.

Social interactions and individual representations

Working with theatre is characterised by learning certain roles and behaviours and through its identity formative and self-expressionistic character. At the same time there are many different activities, in addition to rehearsals and acting, which constitute a working week. That is partly due to the anxiety among the personnel that too much rehearsal would inevitably lead to a feeling of boredom among the actors with disabilities and partly due to an opinion that theatre for people with intellectual disabilities contains many different activities, where rehearsal is but one. Conversely, one might argue that many different activities can be understood as theatre, when involving actors with intellectual disabilities[2]. The following quotation exemplifies how legitimacy, in being involved in many different activities, is manifested not at least due to the fact that the actors are intellectually disabled.

"[Working at the theatre]...is about many things...writing manuscripts, producing music and songs', dancing, reading and just sitting and talking to each other...that is also theatre. To learn that you may in fact say the wrong thing and you may in fact do this and that, and it's not wrong anyway. Because this group is a special group, and we are also expected to train them and make them more independent, and to make them grow as individuals."

They put into practice all aspects of the theatre's aims and objectives (as they are described); practical issues are necessary, as are more individually and social care-oriented tasks. In the latter, the focus is most clearly concentrated on work with (and on) people with disabilities. Different activities also created a need to undertake different roles by the staff, which stretched from pedagogically confirmative and socially framing roles to a more assigning, correcting and structural function. Nevertheless, the planning and practising of different activities left a high degree of personal space to influence and take part in conversations. Additionally, the structural flexibility in carrying out the tasks in the daily work was used by the actors with intellectual disabilities to sharpen their own individuality and self-image. The following event can serve as an example, when I'm sitting in the office, talking to the personnel:

"Julia, Peter and Mary are repeatedly appearing in the doorway, every time adorned with new wigs, glasses and clothes. "Look", Peter says, when they don't immediately fall in the personnel's field of vision. "Look, Petra and Amy, just look at us now" they say laughing. On each occasion they are being met with comments, which are humoristic and formulated within the language of delightfulness. "But look..." or "But wow, how nice you look..." are examples. Julia, Peter and Mary just stand in the doorway, waiting to be commented on, they laugh, and leave just to find another reason to come back".

Different activities, lead to shifting roles as staff, although their role mainly involved and was focused on offering space, parting in the conversation and activities, limiting the degree of control and creating a climate with a high degree of comfort, where laughter among the people with disabilities indicated to what extent they succeeded in their ambitions. It was also obvious how insinuations, devastating replies and expressive overtones to a high extent characterise the social interaction between the people population at the theatre.

The dependence on public expectations

As argued above, different activities "sharpened" how the personnel related

to the actors. I interpret this hovering as an effect from the influence the surrounding society has on the theatre group, a surrounding society from which they need to receive legitimacy. I argue that rehearsals, more clearly than other activities, gave rise to social roles between the disabled and personnel that most certainly indicate differences between "*us and them*".

Because the audience is absent, and only a few of the activities will later on be displayed to the general public (through a performance), it is understandable that the social relation in those activities suggests reciprocity and confidence. In contrast, it is perhaps also understandable that the professional ambitions and a future audience (and need for legitimacy) lead to a more serious and formal manner when rehearsing.

Thus, the professionals' responsibility and assignment, is on the one hand to realise the aims and objectives of the theatre, and on the other hand to prepare an artistic performance together with actors with intellectual disabilities. In these two senses, they are representing something fundamentally new, which – due to the institutional rules – can't leave an impression of being a freak show. Perhaps one might look upon the particularities of the theatre as an effect of running a theatre within the municipal social services, as an effect when implementing artistic activities in an ideological motivated social care arena.

As a consequence, this leads the professionals to recurring reflections about the fundamental ideas in running the theatre, the aims and what one wants to achieve, the value and development of people with intellectual disabilities and, not at least, the ambiguity about the theatre's social façade.

Despite the lack of public insight, it is possible to interpret the shift from informal to formal social interactions, as due to the dependence on the general public's, not the least media's and colleagues', views of how a performance by a theatre with actors with intellectually disabled *ought to look like*.

To summarise; institutional and ideological expectations contribute to an understanding of 1) the changing role of the personnel, 2) the qualification procedures when the theatre started, 3) the relation between appointed roles and personal skills and cognitive abilities, 4) the fear concerning freak shows, and 5) efforts in maintaining a (internal and external) legitimate social façade.

Theatre, individuality and identity

Besides the structural changes, another aspect of the theatre, which is looked upon as meaningful, concerns its flexibility in offering space for the disabled. This partly corresponds with the view of theatre as a cultural art form, where exceeding boundaries and individual representations are put in the fore-

ground. Further, offering space for personal expression and role-playing is the source of an improved self-image and a feeling of identity. On a number of occasions during the fieldwork, the theatre group was engaged in different public performances, for example in a report in TV, a Christmas play, a Lucia play and several smaller performances for eager visitors at the theatre. Those performances all gave rise to pride and a feeling of being seen on the basis on artistic performances, through which they are able (and allowed) to create a narrative about themselves.

A number of theorists agree that our social identity is formed in our meeting with other people and through our interaction with the surrounding world (see for example Mead 1934, Festinger 1957 as do representatives on the labelling theory, e.g. Becker 1963, Goffman, 1973, 1974).

When the disabled actors are offered space in the theatre, and together with meeting an outside audience, they receive answers to the question of whom they really are. The individuals become visible, confirmed and socially valued because of their performances, creating a feeling of fellowship in the group – an "*us-feeling*" – and as time goes on, a stronger social bond between the members of the theatre group is built.

It is then a plausible interpretation that these experiences might offer strength and create mental preparations concerning "*real life*" in the societal community. In this perspective it can be argued that the theatre group enables culture to grow in a double sense. First, a form of cultural production is taking place in the theatre's daily work, where the artistic efforts result in a performance, which can, as stated earlier, have an impact on the individuals self-image and an identity of being socially valued. But secondly, in the theatre group another kind of culture is also growing, in the sense that the individual actors are given space and an opportunity to, together with and in relation to the surrounding and the audience; create a joint cultural sense of belonging and a collective feeling of identity. If the theatre also attracts a lot of attention, it might further increase the feeling of fellowship, collective identity and of being a representative of an innovation, which might lead to increased self-esteem and better self-image.

This leads me to argue that the theatre group as a social arena, through its structural and social conditions, offers an increased opportunity for social interactions for people with intellectual disabilities, both with the personnel and the surrounding environments. Maybe this is part of the explanation for why none of the actors with disabilities wanted to go back to the work they had before the theatre started its practise.

Normative environments and institutional orders

As a social phenomenon, the theatre is marred by an institutional order, which to a high degree can be said to have its origin within the traditional social care ideology. With regards to these cultural particularities, the theatre group can be seen as an institution, in the meaning of social agreements supported by societal conceptions about people with intellectual disabilities and how social care should be arranged (See further in Olsson 1995).

Institutionalisation becomes visible in the descriptions about what is needed when working together with people with intellectual disabilities and in other structural circumstances. This concerns for example the social and pedagogical function with the morning meeting, the ADL-days, the personnel's need for diaries as a means for information exchange between the theatre and the group homes, the people changing aspects in the aims and objectives and, not least, the social boundaries between us (as personnel) and them (as disabled). These circumstances can be understood against such an institutional framework, which includes a shared definition of reality – a reality that is, so to speak, taken for granted. Legitimacy becomes central and is linked to a certain, well-defined, scope of action.

This article shows that the professionals' scope of action stretches from, on the one hand theatre as a goal in itself, to definitions of more wide character on the other hand, in which individual development and people changing constitutes the most distinguished features. This corresponds well with the character of what Hasenfeld (1983, 1992) calls human service organisations, where human beings constitute the *raw material* in the working process. This means that it is the persons, to whom the organisation is intended to help, that are expected to change in some way.

Hasenfeld (1983) means that all organisations need raw material as input to be able to produce its product. He views human service organisations as *institutionalised organisations* striving to maintain moral values from surrounding environments. The moral aspect in the organisation, makes it necessary for them to, in a way accepted by the surrounding environment, work on the *raw material*, i.e. the people. This means that, "*the core activities of the organisation are structured to process, sustain or change people who are under its jurisdiction*" (see pp 4-5).

The manner in which the theatre derives its legitimacy is both complex and somewhat obvious. The immaterial nature of theatrical work collides with institutional expectations within the social care system for people with disabilities. However, legitimacy then resurfaces through an emphasis on the undisputed meaning that being involved in cultural activities has for people with

intellectual disabilities. The difficulties in defining the action scope is based on a somewhat naïve, but fundamental, question: Are *the activities of the theatre group primarily to be understood as artistic work or are they to be understood as an arena for social care*? In my opinion, the empirical data make it possible to understand this issue from both perspectives reflecting what I call, *indecisiveness*. Indecisiveness can also be understood as a somewhat natural consequence stemming from the difficulty in liberating oneself from the structural and mental experiences of traditional social care activities.

Most members of the theatre – both staff and the actors with disabilities – have been shaped by traditional social care arrangements, even though they now explicitly oppose such traditional structures and arrangements. In this new situation, where distancing can serve as a marker for the new reality, it becomes somewhat difficult to integrate new ideas and ideologies in the daily work at the theatre. Because the theatre, as an institution, strives at internal and external legitimacy, the integration of the new logic is necessary in order for the group to be able to present itself to a broad audience as if the institutional order was natural. Berger & Luckman's (1979) view on the function of the integration is, in my opinion, corresponding with the conditions of human service organisations. Most clearly this is done by the way the personnel and the people with intellectual disabilities distance

themselves from the logic and ideals of the traditional social care arrangements and settings. Actions, activities and (desired) social identities mark the limits for the organisational order and by doing so, it also legitimate the theatre as an innovation.

Theatre as art or therapy?

The ambivalence shown earlier – theatre as a goal or a method – can be understood as an effect derived from viewing the fundamental ideas and activities at the theatre as primarily art or primarily therapy.

In the former – *theatre as art* – emphasis is mainly on the meaning of the performance and on a wish that, on stage, together mediate the impression of the theatre group as just a theatre group. Equality, participation and democracy are in focus, as is the importance of artistic activities for people with intellectual disabilities, who are looked upon as (as a group) educable, and on the way to independence. Social relations produce reciprocity and joint influence with a focus on the common learning processes in the theatre. Through this focus, the view on the theatre group as meaningful and innovative is maintained.

In the latter – *theatre as a method* – the activities are given meaning through the degree to which they succeed in bringing about abilities and skills to the actors with disabilities; e.g. improving motor control or social, verbal and cognitive skills and increased independ-

ence. The emphasis on theatre as a therapy, i.e. as a method, brings about a view on the actors with disabilities as (individually) dependent, and in need of professional care, which determines the complexity in the roles given to them.

The experiences from traditional care arrangement, together with the dependence on recognition from the surrounding society, lead however to the possibility to talk about this indecisiveness as a form of *institutional indecisiveness*. Engaging in cultural activities as an art form within the municipal social services, most certainly legitimises the theatre groups' deviance from an *ordinary* theatre. It follows, that the issue of theatre as art or therapy must, due to the empirical implications in this article, be described as theatre as both art and therapy.

Gurgens (2003) puts forward an interesting argument in the goal/method debate in relations to the integrating ambitions within disability arts. She argues that in the field of theatre, new conceptions need to be introduced in order to capture the social meaning for people with disabilities to be part of cultural activities. With reference to Eidheim, Gurgens (ibid.) proposes the concepts of *assimilation* and *incorporation*, to capture the different forms of integrating processes for disability arts in a societal context. She means that, when it comes to theatre for people with disabilities, segregated theatres incorporated in the society can be seen

as a process of integration. Following this argument, the theatre debated in this article can be viewed as segregated, but still able to be integrated within the big cultural picture in society. This could, not at least, have positive consequences for the individuals populating the theatre. As stated by Gurgens: "*To participate in theatre groups together with people you have a lot in common with, can be enriching and comforting for many people. It is a big difference between being excluded from the society as a whole and to relinquish from this society and instead choose a smaller fellowship, for example a segregated theatre group*" (p.15).

The argument can be said to give yet another perceivable motive for exercising cultural activities for people with disabilities. Although this represents a multifaceted practice, I would suggest, following the ambivalence shown in this article, a more ideological debate when it comes to the basis and legitimacy when working with theatre. Cultural activities for people with disabilities today must be understood by using more complex conceptualisations instead of reducing the analysis to an integration/segregation dichotomy. The phenomenon, thus, is more complicated not least because, following Gurgens: "*of crucial importance is not only what you do, but also how you do it and how you think and feel when you are doing it*" (p.17).

Disability art, ideology and welfare state solutions

Through its structural changes and social relations in the daily work, the theatre represents a new and interesting activity in the area of social care for people with intellectual disabilities. In this article I have discussed the conditions for this new form of daily activity. The indecisiveness that characterizes the ideology of and social life inside the theatre has been interpreted as based on an uncertainty towards the more fundamental aspects of the aims and objectives of the theatre's practice. The uncertainty could be understood as an effect caused by different ways of thinking about the conditions for and the content of cultural activities as municipal daily activities for people with intellectual disabilities.

These changes, together with the legitimating effects received through distancing from traditional social care settings have, in a sense, given an opportunity to a new definition of the situation – *a new definition of reality* – for the members of the theatre. How this new reality will take form and be internalised is an empirical question. The process through which the internalisation will be put into practice, will however give space to reinterpret and challenge the discourse, which has been producing "*truths*" about the meaning of intellectual disabilities, societal efforts, professional virtues and disability theory (see Solvang, 2000).

The idea and ambitions with a theatre as a daily activity has been guided by good intentions, in which meaningfulness and (double) cultural growth is the most explicit features. However, as shown in this article, through disparate institutional orders and the problems identified in defining the main ideological alignment, these intentions must be regarded as still not adequately formulated. The empirical implications derived from the analysis of the theatre as an arena for social care, I would argue, targets a historically recurring and perhaps inevitable condition involved in ideological and normatively originated organisations and practises for people with intellectual disabilities.

On the one hand, through an ideological shift in the disability policy and strengthened legal rights, people with intellectual disabilities in Sweden today are acknowledged to have influence, freedom of choice and the right to self-determination when it comes to defining ones life project. As a consequence, this enables people with disabilities to, socially and physically, be part of societal contexts (e.g. cultural activities as theatre) they for different reasons earlier were denied. This calls for reinterpretations of existing ideologies and practices in the work (together) with people with disabilities.

But on the other hand, striving towards inclusion and societal participation, when formulated within welfare state

contexts, always risks falling back on prevailing normative ideas about methods and objectives in working with disabled people. The risk emanates from ambitions of finding new institutional orders within already existing structures – it answers to the question on how the practice/organisation *essentially* should be understood.

The potential dilemma, as debated in this article, involves the delicate challenge in creating new institutional practices (e.g. theatre) within normative environments, without reducing people with intellectual disabilities into pawns in a ideologically originated and politically decided game. This, I would argue, highlights a risk of maintaining a view on practices for people with disabilities as a kind of *normalisation practices* where the aim essentially is focused on realising the objectives of the disability policy and to be in accordance with current ideology and institutional expectations. This for instance how people with intellectual disabilities *ought* to be involved in cultural projects.

Notes

[1]ADL often refers to *activities of daily living*, and means that the individuals stay at home one day a week to exercise and practise some daily living activities – such as cooking, cleaning, washing, etc. – to increase there ability to function independently which are seen as having a positive effect on their self-image

[2]The weekly timetable indicates i.e.; book reading, cleaning, physical training, reading the newspaper, "Friday fun", etc.

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