

# Governmental Policy and Personal Experiences. The Development Towards Integration of Mobility Disabled Students into Regular Schools in Scandinavia

PER SOLVANG (\*)

KARIN BARRON (\*\*)

BODIL RAVNEBERG (\*\*\*)

## SUMMARY

Introduction. People with mobility disabilities. Segregation. Formulating the principle of normalization. The politics of normalization. Critical discussions. Starting school as a crucial status passage. Great variety in forms of integration. No single truth about life at a special school. Integration only in the physical sense of the word? Conclusion.

## RESUMEN

Los países escandinavos se encuentran entre los primeros que propusieron medidas para integrar en la sociedad a las personas discapacitadas. Este artículo estudia dos cuestiones íntimamente relacionadas con la propuesta, a saber: ¿cómo intentó o consiguió el principio de normalización, en cuanto que política gubernamental, influir en la mejora de vida de las personas discapacitadas? y ¿cómo vivieron los primeros momentos de la reforma las personas discapacitadas que asistían a la enseñanza obligatoria?. Para ello recurrimos al empleo como fuentes de documentación gubernativa e informes sobre la integración de personas con discapacidad de la movilidad en Noruega y Suecia, así como cuarenta historias de vida de personas con discapacidad de la movilidad, nacidas entre 1955 y 1965. Las entrevistas se centraron en las experiencias vividas en los campos de la educación y el trabajo.

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Fecha de aceptación: 6 de mayo de 1992.

(\*) Department of Sociology, University of Bergen. Hans Holmboes gate 22/24. N-5007 Bergen. Noruega.

(\*\*) Department of Sociology, University of Uppsala. Järnvägspromenaden 19. 753 20 Uppsala. Suecia.

(\*\*\*) Department of Administration and Organization Theory, University of Bergen, Christiesgate 17, N-5007 Bergen. Noruega.

DYNAMIS

*Acta Hispanica ad Medicinae Scientiarumque Historiam Illustrandam*. Vol. 13, 1993, pp. 117-137.

ISSN: 0211-9536

## INTRODUCTION

The Scandinavian countries have, together with Italy (1), been among the leading countries with regard to integration into society for persons with disabilities. In compulsory schooling, this reform took place, in Scandinavia, during the 1960s and 1970s. This article focuses on two intimately related questions concerning the reform:

- 1) How did the normalization principle, as governmental policy, intend to improve the living-situation for people with disabilities?
- 2) How was the reform experienced by some disabled persons who attended compulsory school during its introduction?

Firstly, the article briefly discusses the government policy which led to the process of phasing out special schools and integrating pupils with disabilities into regular schools. Special attention is paid to the mobility disabled. Secondly, using an oral history perspective, the emphasis will be on personal experiences. The analysis will be one of historical comparison between these two versions of a societal process. It will focus on the divergence between the highly generalized and partly static planning perspective expressed in government policy documents, and the dynamic social processes expressed by the disabled persons in their life-stories. In the concluding part, some comparisons with the situation today will be made.

Our sources in this article are: a) central government documents and reports concerning integration of mobility disabled persons in Norway and Sweden; b) 40 life history interviews with mobility disabled persons in Scandinavia born between 1955 and 1965 (2). The interviews are theme centred upon experiences in education and work. In some of our concluding

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- (1) Integration practice in Italy set out in the early seventies. Today more than 90% of the disabled students of compulsory school age are individually placed in regular classes. FERRA, Nora (1990). Abstract presented at *International Conference of integration: In School, Leisure and Transition to Work*, Stockholm.
  - (2) It must be noted that we base our analysis of governmental policy mostly upon Norwegian and Swedish material. The third Scandinavian country, Denmark is only represented in our interview material. This we have paid special attention to in the analysis, letting the Danish material only play a role in illustrating general social processes of interest according to policy and institutional arrangements in Norway and Sweden.

remarks we also rely on interview material collected for a recent study of adolescents with mobility disabilities in Sweden.

### *PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY DISABILITIES*

Very roughly, and according to the custom in the 1950s and 1960s, we can distinguish four groups of disabilities. They are defined on the basis of their medical diagnosis, and include the blind and visually disabled, the deaf and hard of hearing, the intellectually disabled, and the mobility disabled. In the policy documents concerning the normalization reform, these different disability groups are often treated as one. This fact has to be considered in our discussions, but in its main line of argument, the study focuses on the mobility disabled only.

The mobility disabled consist of several diagnostic groups. Defining these as mobility disabled one pays attention to the disabling function concerning the movement of the limbs. In our interviews we have only included severely disabled persons, defined as being unable to manage stairs without help. The interviewees disabled from birth or early childhood, the main diagnostic groups being muscular atrophy and cerebral palsy (3).

### *SEGREGATION*

Studying the process of integrating people with disabilities into regular schools, the 1950s can be taken as a starting point. At this time, institutional care was the norm for people with disabilities.

In Norway we find two special schools for the mobility disabled at this time. Both were partly run by the mobility disabled's own organisation, and were situated close to two small towns in the eastern part of Norway. In Sweden we find several special schools, the largest of them situated in the big cities of Gothenburg and Stockholm. Here, the schools were run by the Government. In addition, special classes in regular schools were common here. In the mid 1960s one half of the estimated population of severely

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(3) Our interviewees are too young to include people with poliomyelitis. Though, it must be noted that institutional arrangements for this group influenced the treatment of the mobility disabled, especially in the 1950s, but also in the following years.

mobility disabled youngsters in Sweden attended this type of educational arrangements (4).

Generally, the special schools were widely accepted as the best way to educate disabled students. Though, the need for special schools for some moderately mobility disabled students was objectively mostly due to problems moving around in a regular school building. This is also reflected in the fact that in the 1950s some individuals attended regular schools, and the Norwegian organisation for the disabled was from their Swedish counterpart advised against setting up a special school for the mobility disabled (5).

However, the necessity of passing stairs at school, which was required in most school buildings built in Scandinavia until the 1960s, made it difficult attending regular school for mobility disabled students. Others, especially people with more severe mobility disabilities required in addition special educational resources (6). Important was individual help to conduct practical tasks and support for reading and writing.

#### *FORMULATING THE PRINCIPLE OF NORMALIZATION*

The Scandinavian countries in the 1960s can be described as wealthy. We find a high standard of social security and public education. The Scandinavian welfare systems were also undergoing a rapid growth in this period, but the disabled were lagging after, and their situation was discussed in the media. In Sweden, a series of newspaper articles and radio programmes put the situation of the disabled on the agenda in the early 1960s. The rising welfare state had a problem to deal with.

A leading voice in the Norwegian debate was the author and film

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- (4) HANDIKAPPADE elever i det allmänna skolväsendet (1982). *Statens offentliga utredningar*, nr. 19, Stockholm.
- (5) NORGES HANDIKAPFORBUND (1991). *Fra veldedighet til rettighet. Historien om Norges Handikapforbund*, Oslo, p. 228.
- (6) Special education can be defined as «individualized education for children and youth with special needs». It can be said to have been growing from an initial awareness that some children require a type or intensity of education different from regular education in order to achieve their potential. DEUTSCH SMITH, Deborah; LUCKASSON, Ruth (1992). *Introduction to Special Education. Teaching in an age of challenge*, The University of New Mexico.

producer Arne Skouen. Himself being the father of a mentally disabled child, he described the special schools as «a destructive policy of segregation, a system representing maltreatment and infringement upon unhappy children» (7).

Important in defining the ideological content of the Swedish reform process was an article by Bengt Nirje. Here, the mentally disabled are focused upon, and Nirje points out normal patterns and rhythms of life as important from a humanistic point of view. This in opposition to the often perverted rhythms of life shaped at the large institutions with dormitories (8). This line of argument can be said to be an important force behind the normalization principle. Though, already in the late 1950s we can find similar thoughts as those presented by Skouen and Nirje. The Dane Niels Erik Bank-Mikkelsen formulated normalization as a goal for the mentally disabled when stressing the importance of an everyday life and social environment as close to regular standards as possible. The ideas of Niels Erik Bank-Mikkelsen are also said to be directly underlying the development in Sweden (9).

It is interesting to note that both Skouen and Nirje seem to stress social well being as more important than purely educational considerations. Generally, in Norway and Sweden we can see the integration of disabled persons in regular schools as paired with a general struggle for the rights of the disabled. This corresponded well with a more optimistic view of the disabled in the 1950s and 1960s. In this period of rapid economic growth there was a considerable need for labour which can be said to have influenced the acceptance of the normalization principle in public policy (10).

Ideologically important was the relativist perspective viewing disability as shaped by the societal environment in the interaction between the society and the disabled individual. The disabled person was not to be seen as handicapped in her- or himself, but the handicap was shaped by society, physically by architectural barriers and socially by prejudices towards

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(7) NORGES HANDIKAPFORBUND (1991), *op. cit.* (n. 5), p. 334.

(8) NIRJE, Bengt (1969). Normaliseringsprincipen och dess innebörd för omsorgerna om de utvecklingsstörda. *Psykisk Utvecklingshämning*, nr. 1, 1-9.

(9) GRUNEWALD, Karl (1986). *The intellectually handicapped in Sweden. New legislation in a bid for normalization*, Stockholm, Svenska Institutet.

(10) SÖDER, Mårten (1981). *Vårdorganisation, vårdideologi och integrering. Sociologiska perspektiv på omsorger om utvecklingsstörda*, Uppsala Universitet.

people with disabilities. The handicap was not a characteristic of the individual, and not possible to change, but something related to society, and possible to change.

Following this line of thought, a central mean is pointed out to be the adjustment of social institutions so that they can include disabled persons, eg. in compulsory schools. Paired with a principle of participation in regular social institutions, this meant an overall idea of adjusting the school architectonically and pedagogically so that also disabled students could fit in. The focus was not so much on reducing the institutions' demands for students with disabilities, or supporting the disabled individual to fit existing conditions. The main focus was on adjusting the environment so that the disabled students could fill a «normal position».

### THE POLITICS OF NORMALIZATION

In Norway in the late 1950s the education in special schools was planned to be furthered by building a great number of new schools for disabled youngsters. These plans became criticised during the 1960s and finally stopped in 1969 by parliament. A new principle had entered politics, conceptualised as the principle of *normalization*.

«The new thoughts which were introduced in the 1960s can be characterised by the key concepts: *decentralization, normalization and integration*» (11).

Also the Swedish development can be described using such terms. People with disabilities should be brought into the society as regular citizens in social settings as normal as possible (12).

In much of today's debate we often see the integration reform presented as a reform that took place in a clear cut form; first a period of segregation, then the policy turned into integration. This is not the case when we take a look at what actually happened. As will be shown later in the article, there were many types of organisational solutions between segregation and integration.

(11) *St. meld.*, (1989-90), nr. 54, p. 20.

(12) ATT vara handikappad (1981). *Statens offentliga utredningar*, nr. 10, Stockholm (pp. 17-18).

In the governmental documents from the reform period, however, the integration reform is presented as a new policy of normalization described in highly generalised terms.

Firstly, people with very different disabilities are mostly seen as one homogenous group. Normalization is introduced as a new overall principle, which shall be abided by when possible. Because of the ideas of decentralisation present at this time, individual assessments were made by local specialist authorities such as doctors, psychologists and special teachers.

A further line of thought in the governmental documents in Norway and Sweden is the definition of normalization as treatment by normal societal institutions. People with disabilities shall not be treated by special institutions set up only for the disabled, but receive their service from the regular institutions, eg. in medical treatment, education, work and social welfare. This is partly a specification of the general idea of normalization, but far from a concrete statement about how this benefits persons with disabilities.

Arguments for and reasoning about how the normalization principle was going to benefit people with disabilities are rare. Mostly, it is just stated that it is beneficial for the disabled to live at home and attend a regular school. *How* this is to be conducted by state policy means is an aspect, which is overlooked.

### CRITICAL DISCUSSIONS

Concerning the concrete question about segregation or integration the debate was hard. Many were sceptical against the integration reform, and others saw it as the only mean for securing the disabled's social rights. These debates took place both outside and inside parliament.

In Norway, the teachers, represented by the Teacher's Union (*Norsk Lærerlag*), criticised the governmental integration policy. They were against a, so called, «coercive integration» and a closing down of the special schools. Also many parents were sceptical to the official integration policy. They did not want a coercive integration and argued that the well-being of the disabled students was paramount to all other aspects. They argued that the view of the teachers and parents was not represented in the governmental planning of the new law. Many parents feared that the politicians would

make reservations which could weaken the implementation of the integration policy. Because of this, teachers and parents joined together in 1974 and established an organisation for the Norwegian special schools. In 1978, the Teacher's Union threatened to strike against the new school law. They argued that the lack of resources would hamper the implementation of the law.

The disability organisations were important actors in raising the question of normalization and furthering the reform process. However, in the Norwegian organisation of the mobility disabled one could not agree upon the question. The leadership argued for the reform, but many of the members saw the reform as forcing integration upon them. The opposition was also strong among deaf people. Many of them supported segregation as a means to develop the sign language, and were resistant to the pedagogic principle of integration through lip reading.

Special education plays an important part in the discussions of normalization of disabled students. As indicated earlier, this has little relevance to the situation for some of the mildly mobility disabled, who do not require special education. This part of the normalization reform is thus of limited meaning to some mobility disabled persons, and illustrates the unspecified character of governmental reasoning.

In Norway an interesting and diversified position was taken by the influential Blom Committee. Its members did not see integration as dependent on education in a regular class, in a special class, or in a special school. The important question was that students received an education suited to them, and found acceptance and membership in a stimulating social environment. The committee also emphasized the importance of disabled individuals' own experiences and opinions as to what extent an integration process should be implemented (13).

With the reflections of the Blom Committee in mind we will turn the attention to the personal experiences of the disabled themselves. We will see that the generalised conceptual ideas about normalization and integration underlying the policy reform represent complex social processes, some of them suggested in the report of the Blom Committee.

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(13) KIRKE- OG UNDERVISNINGSDEPARTEMENTET (1970). *Innstilling om lovregler for spesialundervisning m.v.*, Oslo.



The personal interviews are made with people who attended compulsory school during the reform years, covering the period between 1962 and 1981. Many of the interviewees and their families have thus found themselves in the middle of changing politics, in which they had to find their way through from the first day at school.

### *STARTING SCHOOL AS A CRUCIAL STATUS PASSAGE*

The interviews show that starting school involved a conflict between the practice of segregation and the new principle of normalization (14).

The interviewees have usually been growing up under regular family conditions. The institutional surroundings up to school age have not been segregated, except for periods of hospitalization. Between the parents, brothers and sisters and the disabled child, an affective family relationship has developed. Also the relations to neighbourhood children are developed in the regular setting, only with some limitations participating in outdoor play. This is the situation at the micro level of the 6 to 7 years old child, the age of starting compulsory school in Scandinavia in the 1960s.

Focusing on the meso level, the institutions, disabled children were, in the discussed period, educated in special schools, from which there were only a few in each country. This meant that disabled children had to leave their families at the age of 7, living in dormitories. In Norway this was often the case because the special schools were located in the countryside. However, even when living in daily travelling distance, as was the case for mobility disabled youngsters living in the big cities of Sweden, the special school was seen as a drastic interruption of the child's social situation.

The experiences of a Swedish disabled man, Ingemar, born in 1965, points at this institutional regulation imposed upon him and his family.

Ingemar was going to enter compulsory school in 1972. At this point of time it was much discussion about what type of school he should enter. The school authorities wanted him to attend a special school, and the family doctor suggested special school because «it was for my own good». His parents strongly opposed this. They did not want him to enter a

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(14) Methodologically, it must be noted that the interviewees have little recollection of this period in life. Their knowledge is based on what parents and other relatives have told them about this period of time.

special school, but had to work very hard to avoid it. They finally managed to get him into a normal school, and the teaching staff there were cooperative. Today, he is very glad about this, that he has attended a normal school all of the time. It was nothing peculiar to him, he points out, except for the fact that he sat in a wheel-chair.

The wish to attend regular schools did not involve this kind of problems for everybody represented in the interview material, but special school were proposed for around 3/4 of the interviewees. All the parents of children living in normal family settings objected to this (15).

The pattern at this point is clear. The special school was in most cases proposed. This was usually done through doctors, the first «gatekeepers» the family came in contact with controlling admission to the different institutional arrangements. Coming in contact with doctors opposing integration, which seems to be rather common in our material, parents objecting to special schools had to look for other ways to ensure normalized living situation for their children. They had to find other «gatekeepers» who would support them in their struggle for regular schooling.

This was made possible by the fact that there were persons in the educational system who supported the idea of integration. This idea had been introduced into the institutional system of education, both in the form of a public debate and as discussions in the internal forums of the teaching profession. However, the parents themselves had to find individuals who were willing to put into action the integration idea. This was often done by the teaching staff at the nearby regular school. The headmasters, who were reluctant to integration, were however willing to listen to the parental wishes, and in many cases the parents seem to have succeeded in their struggle for regular schools.

This process, as reported in our material, can be seen as the state starting to impose a new policy. This policy gave local specialist authorities influence over individual school-placements. This development made it possible for parents to actively strive towards integration. Parents of disabled children played thus an important role in implementing the normalization policy in the Scandinavian countries.

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(15) Only two persons reported a family background that we consider as not normal. One woman had been cared for in an orphanage from birth, and one man refused to talk about his family background, but indicated this as having been highly problematical.

*GREAT VARIETY IN FORMS OF INTEGRATION*

Presenting the issue of integration as a question of segregation only or integration only does not fit very well with the experiences of the interviewees. This we will show in some examples. Also a Swedish governmental report from 1980, looking at the integration reform in retrospect, expresses this fact listing 18 specified concepts applied to integration (social integration, educational integration, etc.) (16). This clearly indicates the many different forms of conducting the overall principle of normalization.

In the stories of the interviewees, several forms of segregation and integration can be found in one and the same biography. Carl, a 27 year old Swede, who is mobility disabled, experiences this. He has been using a wheel-chair most of his life. Also, he has slight problems with hearing and visual perception.

Carl lived his first six years in a small town. He attended a special school, and lived in adjacent dormitory facilities up till the 6th grade. Then he was hospitalized for some months, and the teacher at the hospital questioned his placement in a special school where many of the other pupils had additional intellectual disabilities. Carl then started the 6th grade once again, this time 3 days a week in a regular school-class close to the special school. He describes this as «my happiest year as a child. I felt as one of them, even if I was there only three days a week». Starting the 7th grade Carl moved to his parents home and attended the nearby regular school. He had his own personal assistant to help him with manual tasks. Here he felt just placed in a class, he did not «get into» the class as part of a collective. To illustrate this, Carl points to the fact that he never visited one of his classmates at home during the three years he went to this school.

After compulsory school Carl went to a *Folkhögskola* (17) which offered regular secondary education. He describes this as «the greatest years I

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(16) HANDIKAPPAD, integrerad, normaliserad, utvärderad (1980). *Statens offentliga utredningar*, nr. 34, Stockholm.

(17) *Folkhögskola* is a Scandinavian school form originating from the farmers' movement and the influential clergyman Grundtvig (1783-1872) in the late 19th century Denmark. Today, the schools are situated in the countryside with dormitories. A normal course usually lasts for one year. The school offers a vast variety of subjects, especially common are sports, religion, all creative disciplines and social work. The schools give no marks, they are not valued in the labour market, and the outcome of the education is highly dependent upon the students' own initiatives. In Sweden, these

have had, they have had a great influence on me, the way I am, how I live, everything 'actually». Carl did not feel himself as a «handicapped person», as he had felt in compulsory school. To illustrate this, he mentions that he participated in trips to the woods and that he got drunk for the first time in his life.

Important to notice is that Carl's story is very much a story about the social aspects of going to school. Discussing different forms of segregation and integration he always stresses the social situation he found himself in. Carl can serve as an illustrative case for the whole interview material.

The real integration and normalization is, for Carl, the three days a week in a regular class in the 6th grade, and the years at the *Folkhøgskola*. Also from the 7th to the 9th grade, he attended a regular class, but here he did not feel as a socially integrated member of the class. This must also be interpreted as a result of entering the class as a new student, a generally difficult social situation, and surely complicated by a disability.

At one of the Norwegian special schools we find an institutionalised practice of partial integration. Here it was a reversed form of integration, that is, non-disabled pupils from the small nearby town were included in the school. One of the interviewees participated in a struggle against a plan to close this school, and telling about this he also describes the positive aspects of the way integration was arranged at this particular school:

«They had built a close to equivalent, but more modern school in X-town. Well, they didn't actually teach there, the idea was that you should enter a normal school, and then live at the dormitory there. At our school we saw that type of integration as nothing for us, we didn't need it because we had the integration the other way around. Also, we participated in the life in the nearby Y-town just as much as if we had attended a normal school there. The inhabitants were also very keen on keeping the school, the mobility disabled were looked upon as a natural part of the life in the town».

Another form of partial integration is represented by the other of the two important Norwegian special schools for the mobility disabled, which is mentioned in the first sentences of the above citation. Originally, this was a special school with dormitory and caring facilities. As was the case with

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schools also offer a combination with standard secondary education with normal exams and marks.

the Swede Carl in his 6th grade, integration here started with the intellectually most well functioning students being given the opportunity to attend regular school, but still living in the special school dormitory. This did not always work out as successfully as for Carl. Here the Norwegian girl Ingrid —28—:

«[Still living in the special school dormitory] In the 7th grade I was transferred to the regular school. They meant that I had not anything at the special school to do, I was too good for it. This was in 1977. At this time it was not that unusual attending regular schools among people with disabilities. So I was transferred to a regular school. To this day I can not understand why I went to a normal school there, and was not allowed to move home to my parents and attend the nearby regular school there. Well, at first we were 5 mobility disabled in the same class. The other pupils in the class had to carry us up and down the stairs. Not surprising that it caused problems. In addition, I had not learned at the special school what you are expected to in the 7th grade, and I was used to this rather small special school. Also, some of the teachers showed negative attitudes towards us. So, there was a great deal of problems, but I soon found out what I had to do to survive. I made it quite good after a while».

The organisation of placing disabled pupils in a regular class is obviously conducted without much experience of integrating pupils with disabilities. Ingrid is also pointing to the importance of her individual resources in the integration process.

A third form of partial integration is the special class for disabled students within a regular school. This we can say is the minimum version of integration in school as being defined receiving treatment from normal societal institutions. Anne —25—, a Danish girl describes this system which she experienced all of her time in compulsory school. The school, which in Denmark provided a, so called, centre class (*centerklasse*), was situated 30 kilometres from her home town.

«In my centre class we were relatively many, 6-7, normally there are only 3-4. Another girl and I were mostly integrated in a normal class, so we weren't there that much. For school work I mostly used a typewriter. I can write with my hand, but I'm rather slow. What I needed help for was going to the toilet and to eat. In the special class it was two teachers and a nurse. We went there to eat. We didn't get much social interdependence, that was difficult. The other pupils weren't asked to help us, the school had decided that it would be too large a burden for them. We didn't do much together with them, socially. Also, we were picked up by bus and

driven to our home town at the end of the school day. That was one of the disadvantages attending a school so far away from home».

Also in this type of partial integration, the main problem concerns the social aspect of being an «integrated» student. The student gets education and related support inside the frame of a regular class setting, which works out well, but socially she or he does not have any position in the class.

As presented earlier in the paper, in the governmental documents the educational motives are of great importance. For the interviewees, the stories concerning various forms of segregation and integration are mostly focused on the social aspects of school. By stressing this, we do not insinuate that the pedagogic reasoning was not important and proper for the integration reform. What is important to note is the great significance payed to the social aspects of school by the interviewees themselves. Looking back at their past as students, the evaluation of their experiences of integration centres around one aspect, their situation at school with respect to having a normal social role.

The great variety of practices conducting the integration policy can be seen as closely connected to a transition period in policy making. Transferring from the new to the old, the transition phase can be expected to contain certain institutional arrangements of partial integration. To test this hypothesis, some comparisons with the situation today may be of interest. When the principle has been implemented for 20 years one could expect to find a unified form of integration. This does not, however, seem to be the case for persons with mobility disabilities (18). There is still possible to find support for segregated education, especially among young disabled persons themselves. In our biographical interviews concerning the reform period, we find, different ways of experiencing the special school, but both the positively and negatively biased reports focus on the social meaning of segregated education.

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(18) This is even more apparent among the deaf and the mentally disabled. The first group claims to represent a cultural minority, with sign language as their language. They prefer a segregated school system to a certain degree. In the case of the mentally disabled we often find special classes within a regular school. There are also special teachers strongly supporting this type of partial integration because of perceived difficulties of social integration of the mentally handicapped students in a regular school class.

*NO SINGLE TRUTH ABOUT LIFE AT A SPECIAL SCHOOL*

Having to leave the family at the age of 7 and live in a dormitory far away from home can be detrimental for the child. Attending a special school can have important consequences for the whole life-span depriving the individual of the opportunity of normal social contacts with local classmates, and with the family. Also, social impulses from non-disabled peers is an important socialisation component which students in a segregated school environment are denied. In the material we can find some descriptions of these processes, eg. by the Swede Carl, who attended a special school the first years of compulsory schooling:

«I became too much trained in socialising with the staff, I got a very special way of relating to adults. Intellectually, I was the best functioning in the class, and I received special treatment by the staff. I got some problems with this when I entered the normal school. When my opinion was that the teacher said something foolish, I told him in adult language. This was difficult to handle for the teachers and the other pupils. In one moment I rallied with screaming wheels around the corridors, and in the next I negotiated with the headmaster about something at school I found totally wrong. I was something like an adult in a child's body (*lillgammal*)».

This type of concrete statements about the negative socialisation effects of the special school are rather rare. By the interviewees who experienced special school, this process of special socialization is generally described in rather vague terms. It was hard leaving home at the age of 7, but life at the special school was seldom experienced as bad in itself.

Negative effects from attending special schools are expressed by interviewees who have no personal experience of this type of school. They distance their own «normality» from the «handicapped». They see disabled persons educated in special schools as very reserved, and afraid of «going out in the world» and participate in society. They are also reported to be self centred and always complaining about how bad their situation is. One disabled woman (Margareta, aged 28) with academic education presented this view of the socialization process that leads to a certain role:

«The girls dress like small grandmothers, they are sensible, no rebels there. They have never been able to go out on their own, test the limits, they have entered the conformity at once. They have had no mates to run down their parents with, they have got the feeling they were different, another type of human beings».

This citation supports the official picture of the effect of the special schools upon the socialization processes, as far as there were any specified views from the political authorities initiating the integration process. Above all, school integration was an outcome of the believed benefits of the local community schooling. Challenging this view, we find the biographical interviews showing a complex empirical reality. An important element in the biographical interviews is that the special schools in the 1960s and early 1970s, to a large degree, are given a positive evaluation by those who went there. The schools offered an environment which protected its students from the, sometimes, brutal reality in the regular school. One Swedish woman, Greta —35—, states the following about her transfer from a local school to a special school far away from home:

«The six first years I went to a small school. In the 7th grade I attended a bigger school. Then I wanted to go to the special school in Z-city which my sister had attended, but my parents wanted me to try the normal school so that I could live at home. Well, there were lots of problems; with the bus, with the stairs at school, and I don't know what, a terrible year it was. Puberty was a period when I tried to hide the handicap as much as possible, but entering the bus I had to creep. In the 8th grade I was allowed to enter the school in Z-city. As a 14-year old I could move to the big city, it was fantastic. I didn't care much about the school work, it was the social things that were important, many visitors, parties, we were a gang that knew each other well. You didn't feel as an outsider. To walk in a funny way was of no importance, most of the others walked even worse, or used a wheel-chair. But when I finished the compulsory school I moved out, I was afraid of getting an institutional damage (*institutionsskada*). Though, it was a great time, I still meet my friends from then».

In the case reported here the special school offers an environment of equals in the difficult years of adolescence. It gives the opportunity to a social integration into a peer group that obviously has meant a lot to this woman's social well being. What she describes from the years at the special school is a regular youth socialisation process, but in her case it is important to note that she only spent a few years there and was then able to choose another place to live. This is also the pattern of other interviewees who describe their years at special school as valuable. Some attended this type of school only in their early adolescence, but others, who spent a longer time there, also stress this part of their special school career as being particularly valuable.



Another function of the special school in the period under study, is the forming of a consciousness about one's rights in the developing welfare state bureaucracy. Lisa —34—, a Danish woman, who attended a regular school, tells of a meeting which influenced her future life. Aged 18, she met a group of disabled boys who had attended special schools:

«They asked me, why don't you have a car Lisa?, we all have one, and I thought "oh god, can I drive a car?", and then they helped me. This, my parents weren't even able to dream about. (...) I felt a little bit pressed, this were some tough boys who had been fighting with the authorities for a long time. Some of them sounded like lawyers, they had read all sorts of things. (...) They had been to institutions, tough people, things happened in a peculiar way in that world».

Lisa's experience does not only concern rights in the welfare system. It shows that special schools can be a forum for opposition and political activism. Pointed out later in the interview, Lisa's entry into disability politics was stimulated by the meeting with people who had attended special schools. We can, thus, identify another social role of the special schools, the making of client competence and political activism. Together with the importance of social integration in adolescence, this points at important social functions of the special schools. What characterises the positive evaluation of the special school system of the late 1960s and early 1970s is the social meaning it had to the students. It offered a place in a setting of equals which often was more «normal» concerning social integration than that of a regular school class. Living in the local community and attending a regular school does not automatically fulfil the needs of disabled students. This is one of the elements inherent in the dynamic and complex social processes to be found behind the general idea of normalization.

#### *INTEGRATION ONLY IN THE PHYSICAL SENSE OF THE WORD?*

The policy concept was normalization. Later, in the 1970s, the concept of integration was introduced. This concept focuses, though not intended, on the complexities in the normalization process. To us, integration can be understood as something in between segregation and normalization. Tina's accounts of her school experiences, in the 1960s, supports this view:

«They payed special attention to me, that I can see afterwards. It was a normal primary school, that means stairs and things, it was difficult to be

handicapped there. They took care of me and made me stay indoors in the breaks with another handicapped pupil. Today they don't do it like this. I believe I was seen as fragile, and so I was, a girl who always cried, they only had to say "boooh" and I cried. I was different also in this respect, not exactly the fighting type. (...) The stairs had the effect that I often came last, always a bit behind the others. Then there were some girls who were very helpful. I didn't get a position in class that made them wait for me because of myself. It was more these helpful-caring-girl things that made me not totally isolated».

This Danish girl, today aged 35, attended a regular class, but she did not take a «normal» social role in the class. She was integrated, but mostly in the physical sense of the word. This problem inherent in the normalization reform has been discussed in previous studies (19). The social situation of being an outcast in the classroom can result in joining other outcasts at school, or as Tina, relying on «samaritans».

To many interviewees, integration only meant this type of physical integration, and was accompanied by social isolation. In this way, the normalization reform failed to a certain extent to institutionally regulate normal living conditions for persons with disabilities. Some interviewees, however, experienced satisfactory social life in regular schools. Important factors seem to be personal characteristics, social integration in the class, neighbourhood and family relations. One Swedish woman, Margareta —28—, described her childhood and adolescence in these terms:

«I had no identity as handicapped up till the age of 12. I participated in all kinds of children's games. I have often wondered how I did it, but in some sense I was one of the girls, also when running around in the wood. (...) Ending secondary education I had great hopes and large plans for the future. Anything could happen, I felt. I wanted to live in the whole world, learning languages, all sorts of things. [She has also realized these plans to a certain degree travelling alone in Asia and South America]».

This citation expresses a kind of real normalization. Margareta has a disability to consider, but it only involves solving practical problems. She did not feel as a disabled person integrated among «normals», but as a normal person with a disability.

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(19) SÖDER (1981), *op. cit.* (n. 10).

Here, our analysis concludes with a sociological argument. In addition to segregation in special schools, we may speak about *two* other roles, integration *and* normalization. The last one relying very little upon the institutional regulation measures of the state. The possibility of achieving normal living conditions seems to be closely connected to social relations in the private sphere. The limitations of the state become apparent. A good integration of pupils in peer groups is difficult to fulfil through political plans and regulations. Educational measures can be planned in the normalization process, but social interaction mostly takes place outside the direct control of educational authorities. Also, the social interaction is not much discussed in the official documents. In the biographical stories of disabled persons, this aspect is of the utmost importance.

### CONCLUSION

The governmental documents from the reform period is mostly dealing with normalization and integration in highly generalised terms. This is related to a policy of decentralising the decision making to local specialist authorities. The incentives for the reform is the presumed benefits of attending a regular school and living in the local community together with one's family. The issue concerning special education also plays an important role.

The initiating period of the integration reform, as expressed by the interviewees, focuses on the social meaning of the educational institution. The main themes are the possibility of social relations with classmates, experiencing a natural role of childplay, and the preparing for adult life in adolescence. These aspects were not necessarily achieved by integration as placement of the disabled students in a normal setting. The «real» social integration was, for some, offered in the special school settings, and physical integration in regular schools meant social isolation.

We can conclude by stating that social life is the most central theme compared to other possible themes, such as medical diagnosis and treatment and the pure educational situation, both also focused in the interviews. It is interesting to note that these two areas are thoroughly regulated by the state, through the professions and institutions of medicine, psychology and pedagogy. Social integration then, takes place to a large degree outside the

direct control of state policies. Important here, is the fact that the professions and institutions of the sciences of social interaction; sociology and social psychology, had a weak position at the time, at least compared to the professions of psychology, education and medicine.

In short, our historical comparative study shows that the educational parts of the integration reform are well conducted, seen from the mobility disabled interviewee's point of view. The difficult part is the social integration. This can partly be seen in relation to a lack institutional arrangements in society, at least in the 1960s, for regulating social interaction (20).

Comparing our findings from the reform period in the 1960s and 1970s with today, one could be tempted to look upon them as expressing a transition period. They can be seen as experimental solutions in a period demanding new organisational forms. However, this is not fully the case. Comparing our historical perspective with the present, we can point at a recently conducted series of interviews with mobility disabled adolescents in Sweden (21). This study shows that the organisational solutions and reported social processes from the reform period also is the case in the 1990s. Some disabled students find a fully socially integrating position in regular schools, but others report experiencing special schools as a relief from «the lack of understanding» at the regular schools. Also, the social setting at the special schools is reported to be of great value. A possible conclusion of this that regular schools are still not managing to supply it's mobility disabled students with a social setting that stimulates social integration.

It has been argued that the integration process was initiated as an answer to the concrete problems faced in the early 1960s, especially concerning the care of mentally disabled persons (22). Then, it has later developed into an overall ideology for all types of societal treatment of people with disabilities. We can then ask if the reform of integration and normalization

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(20) This type of argument is also developed in a sociological study of the care and integration of mentally disabled in Sweden. Integration is pointed out to be limited to efforts that can be manipulated by the state authorities. These often fail because one do not pay enough attention to the mechanisms of segregation present in the social reality. *Ibidem*.

(21) BARRON, Karin (1992). *The transition to adulthood for young persons with disabilities*, [unpublished manuscript], Uppsala Universitet.

(22) SÖDER, Mårten (1992). Normalisering och integrering: Omsorgsideologier i ett föränderligt samhälle. In: SANDVIN, Johans (ed.), *Mot Normalt?: Omsorgsideologier i förändring*, Oslo, Kommuneförlaget.

has become a goal in itself, which implies problems at the social interactional level. Advising the policy makers of today, one should maybe again put weight upon integration and normalization as *means* for adjusting societal practices concerning people with disabilities.