

Working Life for Everyone podcast: Amu Urhonen

Interviewer: You are listening to Working Life for Everyone, a podcast where we broaden our horizons about the world of work and discuss the inequalities of the Finnish labour market with people who have dedicated their careers to doing something about them. My name is Jarkko Immonen, and I am one of the career counsellors at the University of Helsinki's Career Services.

Interviewer: Today we talk about ableism and disability activism in working life. I am joined by activist, expert and politician **Amu Urhonen**. Urhonen is a well-known public debater, currently serving, among other positions, as an expert in the 'Performing disability activism' project funded by the Kone Foundation and as chair of both the Abilis Foundation and the Yhdenvertaisen kulttuurin puolesta ('Promoting inclusive culture') association. Previously, she has served as the chair of the cross-disability Threshold Association, as an expert in student health services for university of applied sciences students, as the disability and accessibility ombudsman of the City of Tampere, as the project manager of the project entitled Vammaisuuden vaiettu historia ('Silent history of disability') and as an expert of disability inclusion at the International Red Cross. In addition, Urhonen has a long and varied career in politics in the ranks of the Greens. I can't begin to imagine how you managed to find the time for this podcast, but my deepest thanks for doing so. Welcome to the podcast, **Amu Urhonen**, this is a great honour.

Amu Urhonen: Thank you, it's really nice to be here.

Interviewer: Let's start by defining some concepts. When you saw the interview questions, you noted that we should distinguish between ableism and disablism in order to talk meaningfully about ableism in working life. What do these terms mean, and why is it important to make a distinction between them? Are there good Finnish-language equivalents for them?

Amu Urhonen: Yes, to begin with there are no good Finnish-language equivalents for now. 'Syrjintä' (discrimination) and 'toimintakykyolettama' (assumption of functional capacity) perhaps come the closest. Disablism means direct discrimination against people with disabilities, specifically related to disability. Ableism can be more than that. It's structural discrimination related to assumptions about functional capacity. But staying on the topic of disability, a good example might be that discrimination against disabled people at the workplace is direct disablism. Like not being able to access the workplace using a wheelchair. I use a wheelchair, and that would discriminate against me. That problem is easily solved by making the workplace accessible. Thinking, for a slightly less obvious reason,

that I can only do certain things at the workplace would be ableism. Or that I only belong to a certain space at the workplace. For example, there could be a workstation dedicated to people with disabilities, who would not have access to other workstations. That would be based on the assumption that, in order to be able to move around in all spaces at the workspace, you have to have a certain functional capacity. It's really important to understand this, as I believe I have perceived in discussions that when talking about all of this as ableism we have only touched on direct discrimination, not actual ableism, which is a more serious problem. It is a problem at the level of attitudes, assumptions and structures. If we cannot address the problem, these issues will never be resolved.

Interviewer: Important points. Before embarking on the main themes of this episode, let's talk about you for a moment. Based on the previous introduction alone, I believe it fair to say that you have managed to do many different things in your career. Looking back on your career, what kinds of unifying factors do you see between them? What have been common threads in your career, if any? Are they related to, for example, values or certain themes you have wanted to work on? On what grounds have you chosen what to get involved in and what not? What positions and fields of activity have you sought out?

Amu Urhonen: I guess my values are the thing that guide my actions the most in life. And I've always known in my life what is important. My notions have remained pretty much the same throughout my life. Of course, in your list of my activities, my career may not appear very coherent, and I find it funny to call it a career, since I've just gone from one place to another doing things. I'm a typical generalist in that I've done short-term stints here and there. Disability is perhaps one overarching theme. Quite a few of my professional and elected positions have had something to do with disability. But I have also maybe always had the goal of making the world a better place and changing things for the better. Wanting to change things has probably been the defining factor in my career. And then to the question about how I have chosen things. First of all, you could say that I would certainly not have done precisely these things had I had a genuine choice. I might have pursued slightly different positions. I didn't get to study my desired field right away. I'm not saying this because I'm terribly dissatisfied with my life. But my life's been quite different from what I wanted. Of course, I've made some choices, but those were made in specific circumstances, I think. And maybe I was shy about making choices when I was younger. I was much more focused on security than I am today, which is why I ended up making certain choices. I've always wanted to do things that I can learn from when I've applied for a position, or wanted to challenge myself. And do things where I can be useful. Many people find it funny that I dream of having meetings, for example. Before recording this, I told you that a big dream of mine came true last week when I attended a conference of parties on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Amu Urhonen: Many people laugh at me for enjoying meetings and wanting to engage in association administration. I think that since I'm good at it, it may be something I can offer the world, something I can bring to the table. That's why I've done it, familiarised myself with it and become good at it. And it's probably just that I've wanted to look at areas where I can develop and where I can be useful. Some elected positions and jobs have also come about through wanting to work with certain people. A good team, and, naturally, those positions have also been fun. I've had the opportunity to work with people I like. That's a long answer, but then again it's been a long career.

Interviewer: Yes. You have a master's degree in theology from the University of Helsinki, in addition to which you have studied social policy at Tampere University, among other topics. Has your education benefitted your career? If so, can you provide some examples?

Amu Urhonen: First of all, I think all education is beneficial in principle. I'm a person who thinks that learning and education have an intrinsic value. And just realising that you've gained access to all of that excellent teaching, that I have had access to, that's amazing. What concrete examples can I give? I was thinking about this the other day. In addition to studying theology, my major subject was church history, since history may be the thing that interests me the most. They make a good combination, since I'm also interested in religion. I've also studied social policy, with development studies as a minor. That may be the single most practically useful thing in my career, as I'm even now involved in quite a bit of development cooperation. In elected positions, of course, but also otherwise. It's been useful in a concrete way. But I have noticed that university education also provides the capacity for discussing matters and surrendering yourself to discussion. Had I only read the books on my own, I would not have had to prove to anyone that I understand what I've read. And I wouldn't have had the chance to discuss with smart teachers what I read and my thoughts about it. I maybe wouldn't be able to arrange my thoughts as well as I now can. Of course, you may wonder what use is theology in my field. Well, religion has played such a major role in this society as well as in other societies. And it keeps popping up even in the structures of this secular society. Understanding religion is extremely useful. It's been really useful even in unexpected contexts.

Amu Urhonen: And I have of course gained language skills from my studies. I am also a sexual counsellor by training. That's a kind of course you take. It's considerably lighter than a university degree. Completing the sexual counselling training and serving as one for a while, I've found the skill of thinking and discussing really important too. That probably stems from my theology studies, being able to perceive things and identify the essence of what the client is saying. I continue to study at the Open University, language courses and other stuff. I'm kind of an eternal student. That's not appreciated that much these days, which is annoying. I think people should be studying all the time. And developing themselves. You get so much from it.

Interviewer: As I mentioned in the intro, one of your current positions is as an expert in the project entitled 'Performing disability activism. Acts and stories of activism and the Finnish disability movement'. Could you describe the activities and goals of this project, and your work as an expert in practice?

Amu Urhonen: This is my current livelihood. There are four researchers and myself in the project. I'm an expert. Our goal is to examine Finnish disability activism in the past and present. Who does it, and how is it done? What are the forms of activism, and what are its goals? We are now perhaps at the midpoint of the project. So far, I have mainly conducted research interviews. I've interviewed activists, and we've organised a couple of events where these topics have been discussed. We also have a blog that has been updated, a little sluggishly perhaps, but nevertheless updated. And we also intend to communicate with disability researchers in other countries to see whether Finnish disability studies have something in common or similar to disability activism in other countries. Those kinds of things. I conduct research interviews, organise events and update the blog. And we will write a book as the final product of the project. That's a job for the autumn.

Interviewer: When can we expect the book to be released?

Amu Urhonen: Probably by the end of 2023, I would imagine. It depends on publishing agreements and such. But I think around that time.

Interviewer: Looking forward to it. In the project blog, you write fascinatingly about the relationship between expertise and activism, and whether people can be both at the same time. You also talked about this theme when visiting the Vammaiskultti ('Disability cult') podcast produced by the Finnish public broadcasting company Yle. I warmly recommend that one. At least when I last checked yesterday, it was available on the Areena streaming platform in June 2022. Could you tell us a little of what you think about this theme now and how you have reconciled these roles in your career?

Amu Urhonen: What did I write? In other words, my blog entry was based on the observation that I've encountered quite a paradox there. On one hand, I very strongly identify as an activist and consider myself an activist. But in a range of contexts, academic individuals and researchers and even certain authorities belittle my competence on the grounds that I am an activist. Reading certain books or even browsing social media, I've noticed that some researchers cultivate such a juxtaposition. They make a distinction between activists and experts. This has of course been difficult for me, as I'm an activist, and

my activism is heavily substance based and oriented towards issues. My activism is lobbying, arguing for something in front of decision-makers and writing opinion pieces. And I spend quite a lot of time studying things. When you invest your heart and passion the way I do, albeit with the zeal of an activist, it doesn't overrule the fact that I am also skilled at this. I know a lot, and I'm distressed by being belittled because I don't have an academic background and I haven't written articles on it. Yes, in Finland the word 'activist' perhaps has a slightly bad connotation. Many of my interviewees say that they don't want to identify themselves as activists due to the aggressive perception associated with it. I personally don't mind, I'm happy to be difficult. I'm already used to it, and I don't know how to change the world without expressing my opinions. Without demanding something. I think that's my current view, and I think I came to that conclusion in the blog entry as well. Namely, that I'm one person who can have many roles.

Amu Urhonen: My activism does not undermine my expertise. Rather, the definition of expertise could be expanded and used to see who really knows things. If someone wants to downplay my expertise on the basis of me being an activist, that's silencing. You can't go along with that. Of course, you may have to work harder to actually convince others. And it may be that sometimes you don't get heard, sometimes people pass you by. But I can't stop being an activist, that's the person I am. Abandoning activism for reasons of credibility, that's not for me. But I do hope that the expertise of activists would be utilised and appreciated more than it is today in Finland.

Interviewer: I have a meta question that is tangential also to the themes of this project. The first questions have more or less concerned you and your career personally. If I do my job poorly, this discussion may have an unpleasant tinge of inspiration porn. Could you describe what inspiration porn means, and why it should be avoided at all costs? You can also share your assessment of how badly this discussion may have gone in the wrong direction in that sense.

Amu Urhonen: This discussion has not been inspiration porn. First of all, I'm really impressed by your attitude. I've myself just wallowed in such feelings of failure. With professors and government ministers as friends, you do sometimes get the feeling that what am I doing mucking about. You have never said, "Wow, you do this and that even though you are disabled". You've never said, "You're so inspiring!" or "What's my excuse for not doing things if even a person with disabilities can do them?" Those are examples of inspiration porn. Inspiration porn is actually a way of talking, or a mindset, where people with disabilities and their actions are a source of inspiration for other people. And that is instrumentalisation of the person. It's also degrading by raising that person up in the sense that it stems from the really unpleasant ableist idea that people with disabilities are unable to do something. That people with disabilities shouldn't actually be doing this, and yet they are doing it, which is somehow inspiring. It sickens me to the core. I don't exist to be an

inspiration to anyone. And I don't do what I do in my life for other people to get excited about it and be inspired by it. I do it for my own sake, just like anyone else. That's what inspiration porn is. And it's really gross. But I don't think that's what this conversation is about. This is just a discussion about my career.

Interviewer: Thank you for that assessment, I'm happy to hear it. However, I'm risking one more question about you before switching to a broader perspective. You have partly responded to this already, but let's focus on this particular theme. Students often contemplate the constituent parts of a career. What kind of meaning or role have education and studies on one hand and various alternative forms of work, as they are sometimes called, on the other had in your career? For example, volunteering, activism, which we already talked about, or community engagement or, say, parenthood?

Amu Urhonen: In my case, I don't know if you can talk about a career since I've done so many things. I've messed about with this and that according to what I've come across and the assignments I've succeeded in getting. As I said, my education has not necessarily made a great difference to my professional career. The disability history project is maybe something that matches my education since I have studied church history. And development studies have been useful in development cooperation. But in that field, I've mainly held elected positions. Namely in the development cooperation projects of the Abilis and Threshold organisations. I guess activism has come in handy in being able to demonstrate my skills and establishing networks in such positions. Of course, activism is maybe a slightly double-edged sword. As I said, activists in Finland are seen as slightly angry people. And people don't like anger in Finland. I know I'm a pretty critical by nature, which I know has closed some doors for me too. People have thought that they may not want someone with such a fiery disposition working in their workplace. Or they are looking for a calmer person for a certain position. Networks have naturally made a difference in where you hear about open positions. In the case of my current job, a group of acquaintances just started thinking about the project. And my current supervisor Reetta Mietola asked whether I would be interested. Had I not been an activist myself, or if I didn't know Reetta, I would not be here either. I'm sure a lot of things have affected what I've done. At the same time, there have been many times I've just personally decided to go for something that I'm interested in. For example, you can't really argue in politics on the basis of having a specific education. Things go according to votes, experience, gender quotas and these kinds of things, which maybe makes it a little more random than in working life.

Amu Urhonen: Actually, one thing that I've been thinking about and find interesting, which may not have anything to do with the question, is how different things are valued in careers. I've headed various organisations, chaired them for 20 years. I can tell you that if I apply for a salaried position such as an executive directorship, I'm told that I don't have management and leadership experience. That feels totally absurd, as I have usually managed very small organisations. In small organisations, even people in elected positions have quite a lot of

practical leadership duties. I find it interesting that the work you are doing on a voluntary basis is not necessarily valued in the same way when you are doing it for a salary. You have to justify it more, explain its real meaning in your CV or job application. That I've actually been in charge, instead of just chairing board meetings. That it actually means what it means. I've also noticed in my career how these various skills are valued. And then about parenthood. It's been interesting to notice, living in Tampere, which is the most wonderful place in the world, that the distance between Helsinki and Tampere seems to be great. I have worked in Helsinki, almost all of my career has taken place in Helsinki. At the moment, I don't have an office, but if I did, it would probably be at the University of Helsinki. A lot of employers seem to think that this distance is enormous. I'm often asked how I can keep up with the travel and how terrible it is. You get the feeling that people are taking my circumstances and life into consideration to the degree that it veers towards patronage.

Amu Urhonen: And I can see in myself that I may wonder whether a job-seeker with small children can cope. Then I realise that it's not my place to judge something like that. Of course, you have to take care of people's wellbeing and be interested in it. But you can't start patronising people. That's a fairly general and winding reflection on the topic. Of course, many things have had an impact on my career, both negatively and positively.

Interviewer: Let's move on to the societal level. On the basis of what has been said so far, it's already clear that you have had the opportunity, or have been compelled to examine ableism in working life from a range of perspectives. What does it look like today from the perspective of a highly educated person? Where and how can it be seen, particularly in terms of the professional life and labour market of highly educated people?

Amu Urhonen: That's a really good question, and I think it would be nice to have more research on it. I'm sure my own trade union could do a bit too. I've also chaired the committee for people with higher education in the public sector in my union, and I'm a trade unionist. We could do more to make this matter better known. What we do know is that there are a lot of highly educated people with disabilities in Finland who cannot find a job. Accessibility is a really big issue, or there are a lot of deficiencies in it. In concrete terms, it is evident in people not being sure whether they will be able to get to the workplace. A good example of structural ableism is the implementation of the Web Accessibility Directive in Finland, which Finland by the way actively opposed. It was implemented, but only in the case of public websites and systems. But there are also a variety of intranets at workplaces, and the accessibility requirements of the directive do not apply to them. It does not extend to screen readers for visually impaired people or other aids. I find it a really interesting mindset that people with disabilities are not supposed to work in the organisation, but are instead supposed to be its clients. I think this is a really concrete and rather sad example of the problems Finnish people with disabilities can encounter. The assumption that disabled people do not work is so strong. That they don't even try. Not even legislators think that it is

necessary to ensure the opportunity to work for disabled people. There may be a range of other problems related to attitudes, as well as directly to regulations. In other words, our legislation is lacking strong sanctions or obligations for employing people with disabilities.

Amu Urhonen: I think it's funny, since I worked at the Threshold Association for 10 years or even more, first as an employee and then as the chair. And we hired almost exclusively people with disabilities. We had very few non-disabled people working there. Everything went well, and it was really great, and the work community was truly diverse. Research has shown that diversity is actually a great asset for workplaces, organisations and businesses. This way, many different viewpoints arise in the work, improving the output. As far as I know, not much has been done in general about this in Finland. That's my feeling based on the research I've read and my discussions with experts. There are solemn speeches, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment even conducted a survey on improving the employment of people with disabilities. But not much has been done about it. And that leads to a situation where finding a job becomes increasingly difficult for people with disabilities. Sometimes downright impossible. That's sad. Even the survey, which I read a few years ago, felt like it focused on everything but the legislation drafted at the Ministry. It mentioned services for disabled people and those kinds of things, but not much was said about what the labour administration itself could and should do. What kinds of regulations, rules and demands should be imposed on professional life. Compared to the United States or the United Kingdom, discrimination in working life is not very well identified in Finland, for example. Neither legislatively nor in practice. It's quite easy to not hire a person with disabilities on any grounds. Positive discrimination is applied very rarely in Finnish professional life. Maybe I veered off the topic a little again, but the situation is not good.

Interviewer: You didn't veer off at all, but gave me a good opportunity to promote other episodes of the podcast. This survey by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment will be discussed in another episode with the survey's author Anni Kyröläinen, so let's delve into that in more detail in that episode. And we have discussed, to a degree, the benefits and strengths of a diverse work community in the episodes of this podcast focused on racism. Please join us in listening to them as well.

Interviewer: Now I have to reveal what a fanboy moment this interview is for me personally. In 2011, you wrote the *Kompastuksia* ('Stumblings') pamphlet on disability policy, where you analysed and commented on Finnish society and its disability policy with vivid turns of phrases. That book made an indelible impression on me at the time, and I've leafed through it many times over the years. As part of the book, you drew up a thematic list of measures to improve the equitable treatment of people with disabilities in society. In the part on working life, you demanded, among other things, that people with disabilities must be hired for their skills, not for charity, and that they must be paid an appropriate salary for their work. You also pointed out that you have to be able to try out working without losing your social security even when you are not sure you will be able to carry on. These certainly sound like things that should be self-evident in a welfare state. It's now 11 years since the

publication of the book. What is the current situation, has anything changed? Are these things any closer to being considered self-evident than they were at the time?

Amu Urhonen: The problem is that we don't know. It's been 20 years since the last proper scholarly survey on the employment and working life of people with disabilities was conducted. Just yesterday, receiving these questions, I was flabbergasted by the span of 11 years. My daughter is 11 years old, and she was born an eternity ago. Unfortunately, these things have not changed, legislation has not changed to any degree. The Finnish League for Human Rights recently had a campaign aimed at paying people with developmental disabilities an appropriate salary for their work. I don't think that has led to anything either. And we simply don't know whether the participation of disabled people in working life, or their employment, has increased, since there are not many statistics on it. I'd say there is not much ambition in this regard in Finland. Here we are extremely allergic to any kind of quotas and obligations. This is already evident in accessibility legislation. They don't want to make it any stricter, not to mention many other elements of the legislation. I can't answer this question with solid, research-based facts. I simply don't know. The number of people with developmental disabilities in exemplary employment and daytime activities has not decreased. Apparently, they have not entered the labour market in large numbers. Still, every now and then I read in the papers and hear that someone has found a job. Unfortunately, it's not a mainstream phenomenon. Actually, I have to add one more thing. I know, it's the activist complaining again, but the phenomenon that worries me a lot has even gotten worse. I mean that since daytime activities became a subjective right for people with severe disabilities, a trend has emerged in my sphere where disabled young people attending a special school are not guided to pursue secondary education, which would be quite reasonable, what with our education pledges and so on. Instead, they are directed to daytime activities.

Amu Urhonen: And daytime activities are often, to put it bluntly, handicrafts. It's not a career, it shouldn't be anyone's career in life. I've seen cases like this, and I think even one is one too many. It worries me a great deal, and there's not a lot of talk about it. I don't know why that is. Maybe they are thought of as lost causes, but no one is a lost cause. It's sad nevertheless. Of course, the survey we mentioned is a good thing. It's good that these things are done and matters investigated. But I feel like they don't really lead anywhere. That's not good. And of course, as I said that I don't know, producing knowledge and compiling statistics would be important to be able to assess and monitor this matter.

Interviewer: Do people have any typical misconceptions or misunderstandings about people with disabilities or ableism in working life? Or, from a slightly inverted angle, about physical or digital accessibility? If so, now is the perfect time to rectify them.

Amu Urhonen: Where to begin? Yes they have. During my career, I've worked with many different people, also with architects. I've even been married to an architect. Okay, I know that my ex-husband was really pro-accessibility. But not all architects are, with many thinking it's just an unnecessary addition or an unpleasant obligation that has to be carried out. I've also on many occasions heard people saying that accessibility is something expensive. In fact, this is not the case. When accessibility is implemented in a functional and well-designed manner, it's not that expensive, considering the entire lifespan of the building. At the end of the day, it doesn't cost that much. And it's not ugly either, as people often think. It's perhaps not considered a human rights issue in Finland. Instead, the argument is that there are so few people with disabilities, or they won't be coming here. This misses the point that human rights apply to every individual. They have to be realised for each individual, regardless of whether there are 10,000 people or just one. This comes across really often when I talk to people about employing people with disabilities. There are even disability organisations in Finland that do not hire people with disabilities. That may be their attitude, or that of employers in general, not just disability organisations. I find it quite shocking that disability organisations have that kind of attitude. They don't necessarily trust the skills of disabled people, and they may be afraid that such people take up an inordinate amount of other employees' time. Or that it's something that's just really unusual. There are a wide variety of such false beliefs. There are such beliefs also related to social security. There's one thing I'd maybe like to say, thinking lately a lot about self-discrimination. When we conducted a survey on the participation of disabled people in the activities of political parties, we observed very clearly that even party activists with disabilities are discriminating against themselves. It's probably similar in the labour market. You have to keep in mind that people with disabilities live in this ableist world, which may result in themselves not having the courage to apply for these positions. Or pursuing certain positions.

Amu Urhonen: I think it would also help to talk to people with disabilities in a slightly different way and take a more encouraging stance. To make a conscious effort. I've seen what happened when we at Threshold hired a disabled person who may have been a little uncertain of how it was going to go and whether they would be up to the task. Everything went well, and they became a top-level expert. Everyone is guilty of ableism. I also occasionally find myself guilty of it in my life and in other contexts. The good news may be that when people with disabilities get a job and the opportunity to work, it often goes quite well. Of course, there are always different circumstances in professional life, but disability may not be the deciding factor. Perhaps there are misconceptions related to this. I don't know, but I've given this a lot of thought. If we constantly talk about how attitudes are a problem and that they must be changed, listing the misunderstandings, it may lead to these misunderstandings just being reinforced instead of being changed. Is it time to talk about how things really are? And to provide good examples? I don't know, but sometimes it feels like we're not getting anywhere. We are only repeating notions and that things must surely be worse elsewhere. In Finland, people are very certain that everything is hunky-dory, saying that at least we have it better than in developing countries. Looking at developing countries, they will be overtaking us soon. They actually want to make a change. And about

attitudes, I'd say that I'm bothered by the discussion on attitudes where our legislation is praised, with the alleged problem being that people do not comply with it. Perhaps the law is perceived as something so sacred that people don't want to tamper with it. To me, a law that is missing elements that would actually oblige compliance is not a very good law.

Amu Urhonen: And we also know that regulation and legislation can change attitudes and people's behaviour. I just noticed a clear example of this, as I'm about to go interrailing in the summer. I noticed that I can't find any information on how to book a wheelchair space on the Interrail website. All of the pages had information on how to book assistance to get on the train, but there are no details on how to book a space in the train. Then I realised that it was because of an EU directive that obliges them to indicate or organise a free-of-charge service to get to a means of transport, be it an aircraft, a bus or a train. But there is no legislation that obliges to describe how to purchase a wheelchair space. This legislation has also guided railway companies to provide information on assistance very clearly on their websites. And to pay attention to it, but not to booking a space. I think this is a good, albeit minor example of how legislation can actually affect behaviour.

Interviewer: You also mentioned potentially self-fulfilling prophecies, trying to get rid of them, or trying to counterbalance a potential vicious circle. Do we have hope for a better tomorrow in a five- or ten-year timeframe? What does ableism in Finnish working life look like at that point? Is there hope for a better tomorrow or not, and why?

Amu Urhonen: You have to believe that there is. We do have good people at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment who are doing a good job and who wish to promote this matter. I believe that since Finland has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, albeit only five years ago, which by the way is shockingly late. However, Finland has ratified the convention, which talks a lot about labour rights. I believe it may bring impetus to this work. And we will do everything in our power to advance and realise these things. I think that campaigns like the one organised by the Finnish League for Human Rights have an impact on the discussion. It gets more and more people to think about these things. I think it's a good question how quickly it will be reflected in legislation. And I think that the idea of employing people with disabilities is becoming increasingly common in other countries too. If the accessibility norm is effective, more and more workplaces will become accessible. So there are good things too that can happen. It of course takes effort, but I'm not afraid of doing my share. And I'm sure there are many others in Finland prepared to do something about it. I have to think that there is hope. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to live.

Interviewer: What would you like to say to our students struggling with discrimination and the challenges brought about by ableism in their lives and careers right now?

Amu Urhonen: Well. I'd like to say that just do it. If you start thinking about what others think or do, you will become depressed and freeze up, which is not a good thing. I've always thought that it's easy for me to exceed all expectations, since there are no expectations of me as a person with disabilities. It's also given me the freedom to think that I'll exceed the expectations of everyone else anyway. Maybe not my own expectations, but those of everyone else, no matter what I do. Even just going out the door exceeds expectations. And I would say that it's worth being difficult. If you notice genuine discrimination, you should intervene. And you should ask why I'm being treated like this, and also bring it up. You may get a reputation for being difficult, which can cause all kinds of problems. But if you do nothing, the world will not improve. And neither will your life. Instead, you should really think and justify your thoughts. Even though I said it's sometimes hard fighting those architects who consider accessibility a nuisance directed at them, these things are often just overlooked. Ableism may come about just because someone isn't thinking about the issue, which can be fixed by saying something about it. If you don't have the courage or willingness to take it up yourself, fortunately there are organisations and people that you can reach out to. Parties who can help advance the process. That's my recommendation.

Interviewer: Anything more you would want to add to our discussion today?

Amu Urhonen: In general about ableism, I'd like to say that it would be really beneficial in Finnish working life to discuss the assumptions associated with the completion of various work-related tasks. Even just spelling out the individual duties and how they are completed. For instance, we've realised that there are people who need aids for playing a musical instrument, who are unable to play traditional instruments and who play music with an adaptive instrument. I know nothing about music, but I've understood that there are unconventional musical instruments. They are used to make, play and compose music. People with such disabilities do not receive music education in this country even on a basic level. The idea is that if you wish to be a musician, you have to be able to play a musical instrument or sing. I think this is a good example of the need to pause and think about all the ways things or work can be done. The ways in which people's abilities can be put to use. How people can use their skills and be useful in the workplace. This kind of much broader discussion is needed in Finnish working life instead of making minor adjustments and giving solemn speeches on how important it is to include people with disabilities. I don't know, speeches are important too, but they should also be put into practice. The things said in the speeches. You need genuine ambition. This is perhaps what I would like to say.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for the interview, Amu. It was a privilege to have you join the podcast.

Amu Urhonen: Thank you, it was fun.

Interviewer: Thank you for listening to Working Life for Everyone. This podcast was brought to you by University of Helsinki Career Services.

[recording ends]