

Consulting on Accessibility: Opportunities and Challenges to Contribute with Oblique Approaches and new Insights

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Abstract. The issue of Universal Design (UD), Design for All, or Accessibility, should always stir up debate. UD relates to society and should constantly be seen from a critical perspective. In Denmark we have experienced a change in mind-set from "good-will" towards implementing accessibility to having formalized obligations, which build on the UN convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, where UD is a central term. Based on 25 years of experiences as a consultant and by way of a Danish example from a complex building project (an architectural competition) the paper will discuss the demands and opportunities that accessibility consultants have today. And how the consultant throughout the building project can contribute with oblique approaches and new insights in order to achieve a universal designed building.

Keywords. Accessibility, Design for All, Universal Design, communication, process, consulting, architecture, societal challenges

Introduction

Equality and integration for people with disabilities in today's society is a crucial issue in a democracy—an issue that concerns the entire society. UD is one of the tools to include all. The development of UD has become a more legally founded strategy for equality. The emphasis has moved away from equality as a moral and normative issue to a basic human right based on legal requirements. Hence, this issue has been managed by the Danish Center for Human Rights since 2010. The paper will discuss the role and responsibilities for accessibility consultants in view of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities giving examples from a specific consultancy job for AART Architects, Aarhus in regards to the Musholm Bay Holiday resort, Korsør, Denmark (2013).

New innovative architecture build by Danish disability organizations with a high level of accessibility have received growing attention among architects, building companies, users and consultants—followed by higher expectations to the consultants on accessibility. The paper will highlight the need for the consultant to see UD as an opportunity for taking part in the design and development process and think in a

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societal context instead of just being responsible for the checklist to ensure that the architects or the developer/owner has fulfilled the building regulations.

1. Insight and Open Doors

It is important to recognise that Universal Design is the result of cross-functional cooperation. There is no one method or approach that we can rely on, we actually have to look to different professions for inspiration and mix and develop the methods to obtain the best result for UD.

Architects and building companies must comply with legislation and standards but they are also gaining appreciation of the fact that they must do more than follow a checklist. The most forward thinking architects and building companies actively engage in UD and develop their own approach in order to sustain their competitiveness and their capability of providing new buildings which live up to accessibility requirements. Guidelines and building regulations are becoming ever more detailed and demanding, but the users also expect full accessibility and inclusion in society.

Already at the beginning of the competition the architects at AART Architect decided that they would appoint a consultant on accessibility, but they wanted not only that. They wanted insight in users demands and their daily life and ideas as well as a focus on how their message should be communicated in a political correct way.

The strategy for the collaboration between the consultant and the architect firm has been open and with the possibility to participate in all parts at any time in the project – which challenge the economy for both parts. The consultant will benefit greatly from participating in the formulation of the project brief, it is important for the future cooperation to understand the various views on accessibility and different degrees of disability.



Figure 1. Musholm Bay Holiday Resort. AART Architects

References

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