Universal Design in hotels and resorts: a teaching tool for architects and designers

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Abstract. Hotels and resorts are an interesting subject for architects since they combine many functions, requiring various spaces and facilities. This places many demands on the process of designing hotels given the diversity of people, including those with disabilities, who stay and work in them and the wide range of activities that these establishments must accommodate. This presentation proposes that hotel and resort design is well suited to teaching UD and will show how all users' requirements can be met through the design process. Examples of designs and guidelines for accessible and inclusive hotels based on UD principles are presented and discussed.

Keywords. Hotels, Resorts, Universal Design, Design-for-All, Disabilities, Accessibility, Architecture, Education.

Introduction

Hotels or resorts must accommodate a diverse range of people, both as guests and as employees. By offering a wide variety of facilities and functions, visitors may quite often spend their holiday or working conference almost only in the resort or hotel, making it *a destination in itself.*

Visitors include guests of all ages and abilities, some of whom may have a disability or have specific access requirements due to their age, stature or health condition. The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, (UNCRPD) includes the right to equal access to leisure and tourism (Article 30). It was formally adopted by the European Union in January 2011 [1] but, as shown in a study by CEN (2012), the implementation of design standards relating to accessibility of buildings and environments, including hotels, remains relatively weak. [2]

National building regulations usually include access requirements in hotels to cater for the needs of *people with disabilities*. Most of these regulations are not based on an

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inclusive, UD approach but are rather formulated to consider certain numbers or percentages of people in the population, particularly those who have motor or sensory disabilities. *Designing for people with disabilities* is a narrower perspective, in contrast to Universal Design, which in this context, seeks to create high quality, safe and comfortable environments for all guests, including those with disabilities. The wider perspective of Universal Design (or "Design-for-All") is not generally taught to architecture students in Europe, as shown in a survey by Esser and Klenovec (2009) [3] and for this reason it is not a common practice in design work.

1. The Goal of Designing Hotels to be Accessible for All

From my perspective as an architect, specialising in accessibility and being an advocate of accessible tourism for all, I believe that hotel design projects, whether in new-build or refurbishment of an existing building, demand a user-centred approach, taking into account the principles of Universal Design and the requirements of the widest range of users. I strongly believe that the key to achieving an accessible hotel or resort is essentially a combination of deep knowledge of UD, coupled with the firm decision that *access for all* will be a prime objective of the project.

2. Essential elements of accessible hotel design through the UD approach

Drawing on my experience in UD /Design for All, this presentation will refer to the main functions and design principles which I have described in my recent publication, *Accessible Hotels: Design Essentials* [4]. In particular, I will show examples of good design indicating how, following the UD approach, the architect can respond to guests' functional requirements and the demands for high aesthetic quality, creating accessible, comfortable and attractive hotels for everyone. These examples will include the design of key indoor and outdoor spaces, (lobbies, guestrooms for all, breakfast and dining areas, conference facilities, pathways, gardens, swimming pools…) their layout, choice of furnishings, fixtures, equipment, materials and colours.

The UD approach does not restrict the designer to any particular aesthetic solution or style. Each designer may develop his or her design solution, taking into account the requirements of all users, from the overall concept to the last detail.

By seeing hotels as multi-purpose facilities that must be highly tuned to the needs of *all* their users, we will show how the UD approach to hotel design contains lessons for the design of many other kinds of buildings and facilities.

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