

Accessibility in public spaces – a comprehensive approach



ACCESSIBILITY in public spaces is becoming an increasingly complex issue for local authorities around the world. This is largely due to trends such as ageing populations, the importance attached to prolonging independence for people with physical limitations, and the increasing number of regulations and guidelines to be complied with.

RESEARCH shows that many people over the age of 61 are confronted with health issues affecting their mobility. Nevertheless, they need to be able to go about their daily business independently for as long as possible. In addition, a significant proportion of the younger population is equally physically challenged, at least for part of the time – not just the disabled, but also people with a broken leg, carrying heavy shopping bags or pushing a pram. They all have a fundamental right to be able to navigate our public spaces relatively unhampered.

GUIDELINE This is not easy to achieve, as is shown by the many unfortunate errors that result from someone overlooking a particular guideline – slopes that are too steep for wheelchairs, confusing roundabouts or crossroads, or obstacles such as lamp posts, bicycle stands or billboards that block the way.



ACCESSIBILITY MANUAL In our presentation, we will show how local authorities can manage accessibility in their public spaces more effectively and efficiently by adopting a comprehensive “Design for All” approach, in which awareness of accessibility issues quickly becomes second nature to everyone involved. We will give examples of cases in an international context and show how local authorities, designers and architects could all work more effectively together by using an “accessibility manual”. This document describes the requirements of public spaces from the point of view of the end users, combined with relevant regulations and guidelines that need to be complied with.



PUBLIC SPACE Unique to this approach is that, for each public space, the guiding principles are taken to be the sensory perceptions of the end users – seeing, hearing, feeling, interpreting, moving, doing and physiological well-being. Combined with details of existing rules and regulations, the result is a comprehensive and easily accessible overview of everything that should be taken into account when constructing or making changes to specific public spaces. By adopting such an approach, local authorities can not only avoid costly mistakes, but also play a leading and exemplary role in creating a world in which accessibility is – and remains – achievable for everyone.



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