



THE NORDIC REGION FOR ALL

Nordic co-operation on universal design and accessibility



Nordens Välfärdscenar



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INTRODUCTION

AT SOME POINT in our lives, we have all experienced encountering obstacles in our environment and surroundings. In many cases these obstacles are created by people. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) inspires and focuses on universal design. It highlights the government's responsibility to make improvements, since accessibility is a right. Governments are responsible for systematically removing obstacles and creating inclusive solutions for everyone, regardless of functional capacity, characteristics and preferences. We need cross-border co-operation if the Nordic region is to function for everyone - not only across countries but also among policy areas and sectors.

The Nordic countries, including the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland islands, want to work together as effectively as possible to make society more accessible. The Nordic Council of Ministers has commissioned a report with proposals for areas of co-operation with regard to universal design and accessibility. The work is funded by the Council of Ministers' Sustainable Development Strategy. Since the report was commissioned, the UN has adopted sustainability goals as part of Agenda 2030; these are related to universal design in several ways, which makes co-operation even more relevant.

The proposals for areas of co-operation were developed with input from a Nordic panel, which used the countries' official reports and experiences as its basis. The group members include representatives from disability organizations and people with experience in disabilities and special accessibility needs. They come from across the Nordic region and autonomous territories and complement each other with their related expertise and experience. The group has contributed to knowledge gathering which resulted from study visits and two working sessions. Good examples were presented and common challenges discussed at these sessions.

The report is primarily aimed to policy makers at the Nordic level. It may also be of interest to people who work with sustainable development as well as universal design and accessibility at the national, regional or local level. Differences in the conditions for participation and equal opportunities between women and men or girls and boys, respectively, were also described where such information exists. The project and the panel were coordinated by the Secretariat for the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability at the Nordic Centre for Welfare.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CO-OPERATION FOR A NORDIC REGION WITH BETTER UNIVERSAL DESIGN

The panel emphasizes the importance of people with disabilities, through their organizations, being involved in the activity proposals presented below.

The report uses the term "universal design" or an equivalent. The definition appears in the Scandinavian translations of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Emphasizing the value of universal design

The main challenge, according to the panel, is that the advantages of universal design are not widely known. The importance of encouraging sustainable development right from the start, and the connections to the UN's Development Agenda 2030 need to be made apparent. Efforts need to be made to raise awareness of the value of a society that works for everyone.

THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:

- Making the benefits of universal design and accessibility better known by mentioning this objective in strategic plans for sustainability and inclusion.
- Including universal design and the inclusive-society perspective in international profiling of the Nordic Region.

Research

Research in the area of universal design and accessibility indicates there is a need for stronger Nordic research collaboration.

THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:

- Charting Nordic research efforts in areas such as the following:
 - different needs/aspects of universal design and accessibility in terms of physical environment, transport, information and communication including ICT (information and communications technologies and services)
 - universal design for learning (UDL)
 - demographic research related to universal design and housing policies
 - socio-economic research
 - cost/benefit analysis of universal design.

Education

There is a common need to increase knowledge of universal design among public sector workers across the Nordic region.

THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:

- Developing a course for universal design in the Nordic region at the college level, potentially based on existing materials.
- Including more universal design in existing higher education, such as for architects, designers and engineers. Use good examples from the Nordic educational sector.
- Organizing a recurring Nordic Conference on universal design to increase awareness at the local, national, and Nordic level.

Benchmarking using Nordic comparisons

There is a need to be able to compare efforts and results of work on universal design and accessibility in the Nordic region. The purpose of comparing statistics on, for example, housing, transport and ICT is to highlight the positive developments and to draw attention to areas where development has stopped. Comparing data among countries can also draw attention to border restrictions and increase opportunities for companies to have the entire Nordic region as a market. Comparing statistics should never be used to 'worsen an achieved quality level' but rather should always aim to improve the situation and exchange knowledge.

THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:

- Comparing the Nordic countries' regulations in order to improve accessibility across the entire Nordic region.
- Connecting these comparisons to the UN convention and Agenda 2030 for sustainable development.
- Initiating a project that identifies indicators that enable comparisons among the countries' efforts within universal design. Examples of potential questions:
 - How much accessible housing is there?
 - Who experiences obstacles in their physical environment?
 - Do municipalities have action plans for universal design?

Standardisation

Within universal design and accessibility, the need for a more thorough Nordic effort with respect to international standardisation activities has increased.

THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:

- Identifying some current international standardisation processes within universal design and accessibility which are important for Nordic countries.
- Strengthening the Nordic voice in international standardisation processes by holding Nordic preliminary meetings that include user groups.

Tourism

The Nordic region has huge potential to stand out as a leading region for accessible tourist destinations. Several regions are dependent on tourism and many travellers require better accessibility. This includes the elderly, which promises to be a group with great purchasing power in future.

THE EXPERT GROUP RECOMMENDS:

- Including universal design/accessibility in quality marketing for tourist destinations. It can also be included in the marketing of sustainable tourism.
- Marketing the Nordic region internationally as an accessible and universally designed region.

VALUE ADDED THROUGH NORDIC CO-OPERATION ON UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND ACCESSIBILITY

There are several strong reasons for Nordic co-operation in this field. The Nordic countries have a consistent level of ambition and similar systems for inclusion and preparations for demographic trends. This provides a good basis for planning where we in the Nordic countries should direct our attention in order to build a strong society.

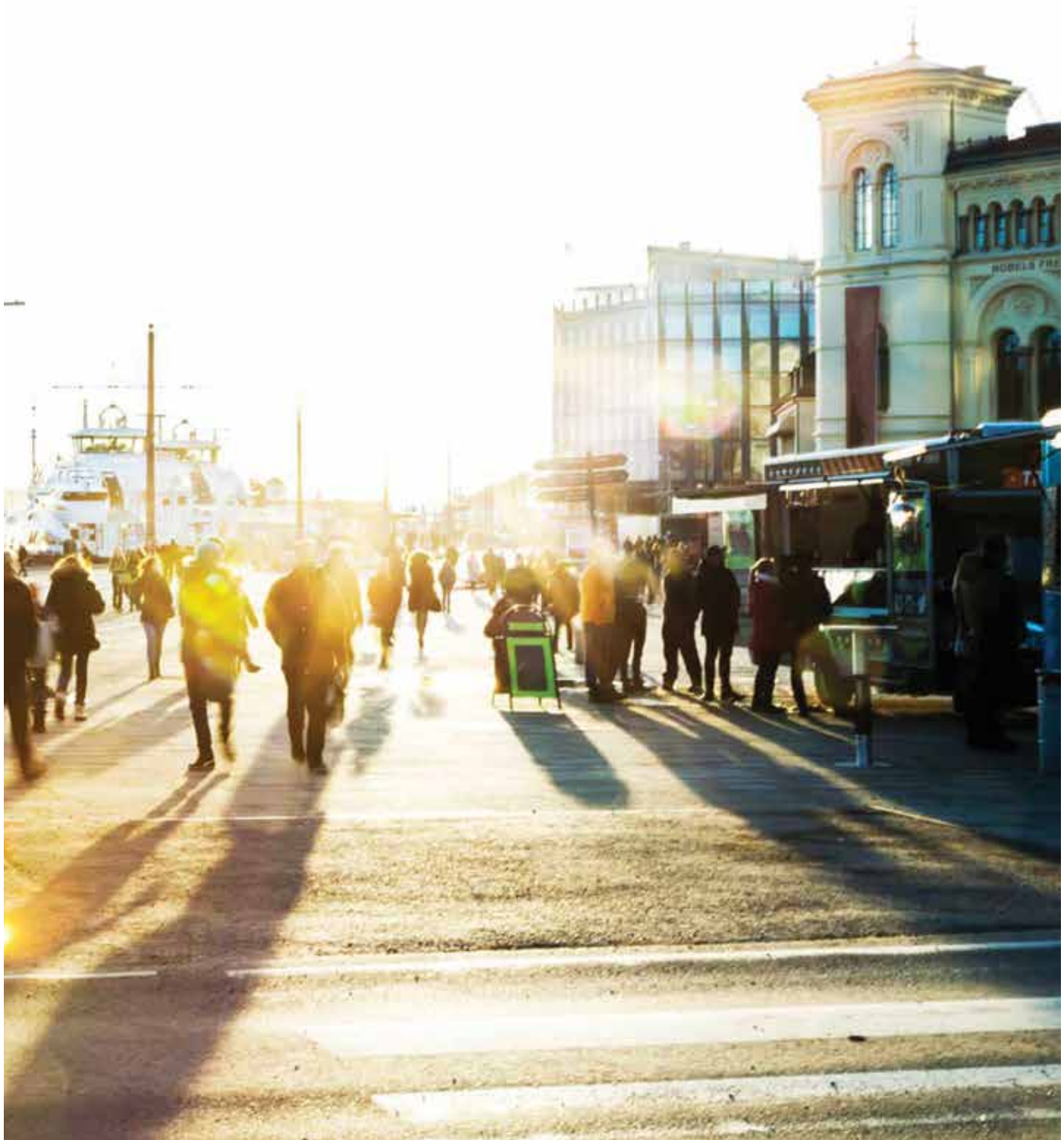
Major similarities among our welfare models often make sharing experience and knowledge in the Nordic region more effective than in other international contexts. Sharing best practices and learning from other ones is easy. There are rich opportunities to learn lessons in another Nordic country and then apply them in a different context. At the same time, the differences enable exchanges that can contribute to innovations through new ideas and ways of thinking and acting.

Yet another reason is the Nordic countries' shared values in terms of human equality, the right to protection and opportunities for self-fulfilment. In addition, there is a strong culture and tradition of involving the target groups and civil society in developing policies and services.

The Nordic countries share common definitions of functional impairments and disability. The approach is characterized by a definition relative to the social environment which says that it is mainly the environment that prevents individuals from participating. This definition differs from the individualist perspective where the individual's disability is considered the problem.

Research on complex contexts can be relatively costly. Nordic co-operation can contribute to more efficient use of resources and dissemination of knowledge. Joint educational courses for professionals as well as representatives from disability organizations provide added value at the Nordic level. Educating many at once is more cost effective and can increase opportunities for creating cutting-edge expertise in the Nordic region.

There is a potential joint Nordic market for the construction industry, tourism and ICT services, which could be strengthened by collaboration. Accessibility makes the Nordic region more attractive and competitive both as a market and as a tourist destination.



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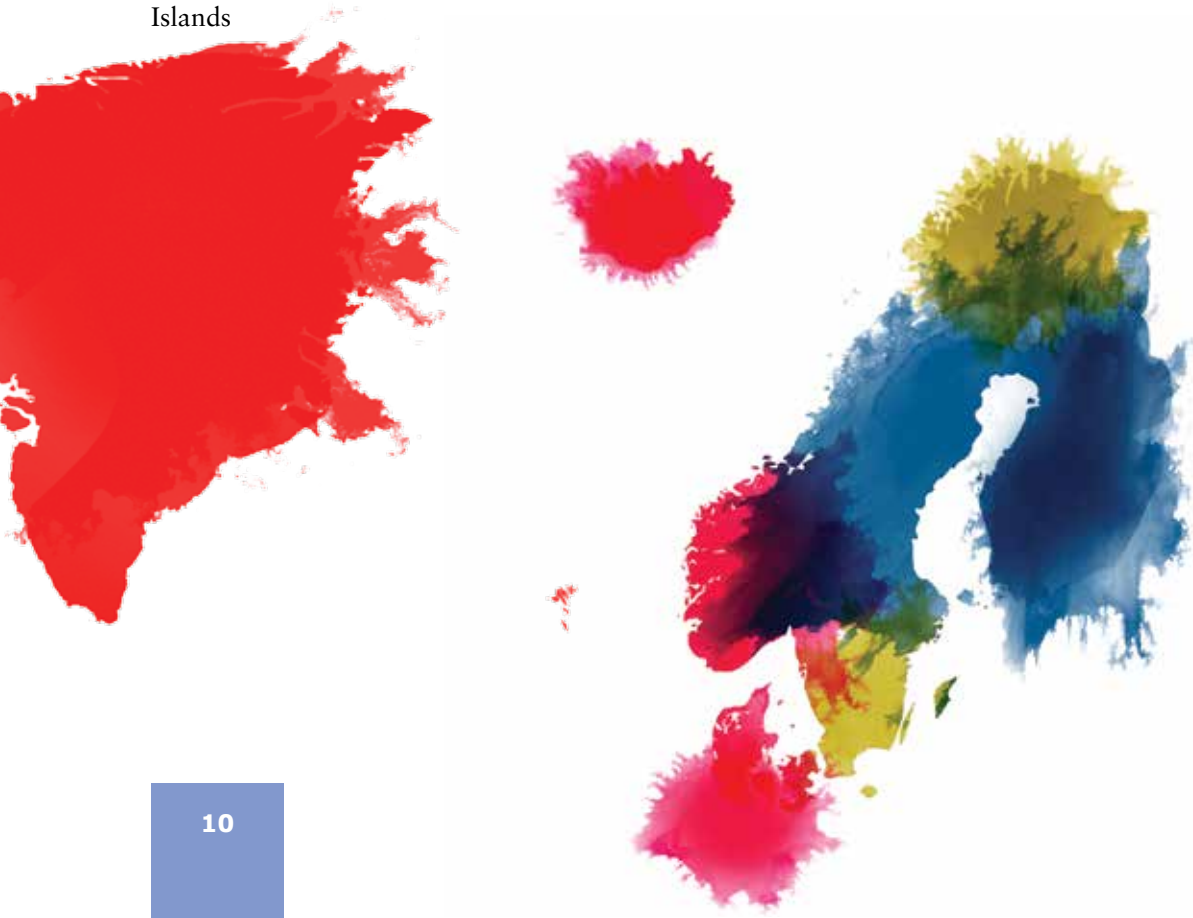
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IN THE UN CONVENTION on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2006), universal design is defined in Article 2 (on general principles) as follows:

“Universal design” means designing products, environments, programs and services so they can be used by everyone to the greatest extent possible without needing to be adapted or specially designed. “Universal design” shall not exclude assistive devices where such items are needed for particular groups of persons with disabilities.

The Committee for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has adopted a general comment (No. 2) on accessibility. The comment was added because accessibility is critical for people with disabilities to be able to participate fully and equally in society and thus exercise their fundamental human rights and freedoms. Accessibility is also described as a way to invest in society and as an integral part of the sustainable development agenda.

The strict implementation of universal design applies to all new goods, products, facilities and technologies that make society accessible to all people, including those with disabilities.

Accessibility to what is offered publicly is a right for people with disabilities. This right should be ensured by strict implementation of accessibility standards. Obstacles found in existing objects, facilities, goods, products and services must be eliminated gradually and systematically with continuous monitoring in order to achieve full accessibility.

On an individual level, there is a right to reasonable accommodation which applies to all services and environments that are open to the public. Government is responsible for ensuring that the protection against discrimination applies to reasonable accommodation. As a minimum, it specifies when services or facilities are to be set up in accordance with accessibility standards in place and when availability of, or access to, a facility or service can be guaranteed by reasonable accommodation.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Objectives for the social aspect of sustainability appear in the "*A good life in a sustainable Nordic region*" sustainability strategy (Nordic Council of Ministers 2014). This includes increased diversity and employment of groups excluded from the labour market. The strategy shows that people with varying functional capacity, people with an immigrant background and single-parent families are at the greatest risk of falling into poverty. Powerful political action is needed here so that as many people as possible can escape poverty and make a living.

Nordic co-operation for the inclusion of people with disabilities is a multidisciplinary matter. The Nordic Council of Ministers for Health and Social Policy has four priority areas in its current strategy (Nordic Council of Ministers 2013). First is to ensure social security in the Nordic

region in a constantly changing labour market. Equal opportunities for people with disabilities are promoted in part through increased universal design.

THE VALUE OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Universal design includes the entire range of human diversity. Physical and cognitive abilities are included, as are body size and shape, linguistic characteristics and functional variations based on gender and age. If we develop products, buildings, environments and systems with this diversity in mind from the outset, then we can create a more functional and useful world for all. This ethical platform is one of many things which form the basis for co-operation for a sustainable society within the UN.





Research previously compiled in the activities of the Nordic School of Public Health (NHV) shows the consequences to health that limited participation entails. In Sweden, illness has been shown to be ten times higher among people with disabilities than in the general population (Swedish National Public Health Institute 2010). Participation, influence and accessibility are described as being essential determinants of health.

– There is a negative effect on health when people, for various reasons such as lack of accessibility, are limited in their choices and desires.

This is according to Evastina Björk, associate professor at the Norwegian Technical Sciences University (NTNU). To reduce the adverse health effects, you need to take a broad user perspective early on in the planning stages.

It is a matter of increasing the skills of those who work with these issues by educating them: architects, engineers, consultants, developers and builders. The design of physical accessibility is often determined by the minimum levels of regulatory requirements. In practice, the price per square metre

is crucial when it comes to construction, and it is apparent that some facilities will need to be slightly larger in order to be fully accessible for persons with physical disabilities. But the short-term savings can be very costly in the long run when modifications need to be made afterwards.

Evastina Björk believes that we need to have a fundamentally ethical discussion about everyone's right to participation and activities, even if it is difficult to quantify. – It is easy to measure and communicate quantifiable variables, but much more difficult when it comes to activities, participation and quality of life, she says, and stresses the importance of education:

– I believe in education on many different levels – even in elementary school we can discuss the fact that everyone has equal rights and that there is a natural variation among people. Children have a natural understanding without prejudices and preconceptions.

A clear and exacting regulatory framework for accessibility is another factor for success. Evastina Björk highlights Norway as a model country thanks to the authorities' foresight there.

– In Norway you can see it starting to happen spontaneously, thanks in large part to the regulations.



There is a strong economic sustainability argument for universal design since illness results in social costs. Fundamentally, it helps prevent obstacles and it promotes participation, independence and mobility. Not least in the labour market, where people with disabilities make up a large part of those excluded (EU-SILC 2010).

Accessibility is increasingly becoming about the aspect of quality. Universally designed environments are necessary for some and pleasant for everyone. Universally designed planning and new construction entails both costs and savings, and can often be regarded as an investment (Swedish Disability Federation 2012). A lack of accessibility also entails costs since complete environments need to be supplemented with expensive custom modifications. The Finnish report "Efficient and Sustainable Accessible Flats" (Esteetön kerrostalo tehokkaasti yes kestävästi) shows that costs for accessibility that stem from building regulations and building instructions are minor (1-2%). Especially compared with special accommodation and repairs where costs are significantly higher.

Universal design means thinking ahead, doing it right the first time, and designing for the long term in a sustainable manner. The difficult aspect of proving profitability here is measuring the economic value of independence and participation. A detailed understanding of the business being measured is also required. One example is a Norwegian study of costs, advantages and effectiveness: "Universal Design Based on Visual Impairment" (Fuglerud, Halbach and Tjøstheim 2015). It demonstrates aspects of both the added value of implementation of universal design and the complexity of doing such studies.

There are many market advantages to be won in both the short and the long term through universal design. Standardized accessibility measurements across the countries would benefit both the people residing in social environments and the construction industry, which could operate in a broader market. The same advantages apply to the development of welfare technology and accessible ICT.

Both the private and public sector would benefit from more supply and demand in the Nordic region, which is one of the facts that the Nordic Welfare's "Connect" project investigated.

Universal design and accessibility are important for both the conference and event industry and for tourism, where the topic is known as "Tourism for all". Tourism for all includes those with physical disabilities who use a wheelchair, cane or walker, those with impaired vision and hearing, cognitive impairment or mental illness and the elderly with reduced mobility, a weak heart or other health problems. People with temporary disabilities, like those experienced after an injury, for example, are also included, as are people travelling with a lot of luggage, pregnant women and those travelling with small children and prams. Tourism industry staff also benefits from accessible environments.

Large groups of elderly people with resources will mean increasing numbers of tourists with varying levels of functional capacity who expect good accessibility. The World Organization of Tourism has adopted several resolutions, declarations and recommendations on accessible tourism. Several organizations in "Visit", the Nordic countries' tourism trade association, are active in the field of accessible tourism.

Magnus Berglund, the Scandic hotel chain's Accessibility Ambassador: ALL MONEY IS EQUALLY VALUABLE

- I propose a Nordic conference on tourism issues and accessibility! This says Magnus Berglund, Scandic's Accessibility Director, who is enthusiastically looking for Nordic co-operation in this field. The arguments are persuasive:

- Few people understand the enormous market that opens up when you focus on accessibility, he says. There is an unmet potential for the business community here.

Scandic's successful work regarding accessibility has been highlighted and praised many times. Basically, there is a desire to realize the oft-expressed intention - that all humans are equal - with concrete content, not just words. But businesses do not survive on praise and pats on the shoulder alone. For an investment to be sustainable in the long run, it also needs to be profitable. And that is exactly what Scandic's commitment to accessibility is.

- In 2005, following our investment in accessibility and education for all staff, we took 15,000 hotel nights from our main competitors over the course of one year, says Magnus Berglund. And that is just the conference portion, there are also individuals and groups.

A BIG OPPORTUNITY FOR BUSINESS

A big opportunity for business It is all about common sense: with approximately 15-20 percent of the population having some form of disability, with a greater proportion of older people with money and with an increase in travel, it goes without saying that the totals we are talking about are huge.

- A single person with a disability can influence the location of a conference with hundreds of participants, mentions Magnus Berglund by way of ex-

ample. Similarly, one person's preferences can influence an entire family's holiday decision. Magnus Berglund is convinced that a concerted Nordic accessibility initiative would result in a major profitable advantage for the tourism industry in the Nordic region.

PROFITABLE INVESTING IN ACCESSIBILITY

He points out that this type of issue is often referred to the Ministry of Social Affairs, but that is not what he wants.

- This is an important economic issue, an issue of concern to those responsible for business and tourism issues. It is about how best to accommodate all guests and the fact that everyone's money is equally valuable. That is why we need to meet across Nordic borders - at a conference, for example - and talk about what we can do better in terms of accessibility.

Everyone has the right to take part in public services and be places that are intended for public use or take advantage of services offered there. That is why international obligations no longer allow defining target groups for developments and improvements to users consisting only of supposedly average people. All segments of a population consist of individuals who are different and have different capabilities. When developing, improving and creating conditions for equal opportunities, it makes sense to use those with the greatest challenges as the starting point. What is necessary for some people is almost always good for everyone.



THE NORDIC WELFARE MODEL AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Central to the Nordic welfare model ideology is the idea of inclusion and a society where everyone can contribute, be accommodated, and have the opportunity for self-fulfilment. In addition to a strong sense of community, the model is based on a high employment rate in the labour market and the willingness of citizens to pay taxes, which is a cornerstone of an efficient Nordic welfare model. Trust and loyalty are also important prerequisites (Valkonen 2014).

A sense of community, the inclusion of vulnerable groups and increased employment have both a moral and an economic aspect. Participation in the workplace creates conditions for the generous welfare policies that make the Nordic countries stable as a region, particularly in times of economic crisis (Nordic Council of Ministers 2014).

Demographic trends are a major challenge for the entire Nordic region. An increasingly older population requires new and sustainable solutions for citizens to be able to contribute as much and long as possible. Not least by being independent in daily life to the greatest extent possible. One way to meet this challenge is through accessibility and universal design (Samuelson, 2015).

Another challenge is the increasing number of sick days that result from mental illness. The social debate in the Nordic region focuses largely on preventive measures to prevent people from developing mental illness.

An additional challenge linked directly to universal design and accessibility is people's work and livelihood. There are major challenges on the labour market in the form of negative atti-

tudes, lack of accessibility and a low level of knowledge about individual accommodation (Svalund 2013). Persons with disabilities should be given an opportunity for employment and to earn a living (Svalund 2013). Universal design involves a long-term, functional strategy to meet these challenges. The strategy can also be used as a tool to meet the major societal changes that stem from urbanization, digitization and individualization (Deltasenteret 2013).

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a starting point for co-operation for a universally designed society. According to Article 4 of the Convention, governments must implement and conduct research on universal design and promote the development of standards and guidelines. Article 9, on accessibility, describes the Convention countries' obligations with regard to measures for full participation in all social environments.

The Disability Convention Supervisory Committee has issued a comment about how Article 9 of the Convention should be interpreted. Among other things, universal design is described as a prerequisite for independent life with human rights and freedoms. Universal design is also said to mean accessibility for everyone in society, not just those with disabilities. The Convention's state parties must enable full participation by systematically removing obstacles. They should also review national accessibility standards and introduce necessary legislation so that the standards are followed.

The Committee also clarifies in its comment that universal design and accessibility are an essential part of sustainable development strategies.

Status of ratification of and reporting on implementation of UNCRPD

Country	Ratified	Protocol signed/ Ratified	Report cycle started/ completed
Denmark	Yes	Yes/yes	Yes 2013/14
Finland	Yes	Yes/yes	No
Faroe Islands	Yes	Yes/yes	Yes 2013/14
Greenland	Yes	Yes/yes?	Yes 2013/14
Iceland	Yes	Yes/yes	No
Norway	Yes	Yes/no	Yes 2015/16/17
Sverige	Yes	Yes/yes	Yes 2012/14
Åland	Yes	Yes/yes	No



PERSPECTIVE ON RIGHTS

It is characteristic of the Nordic model that the distribution policy is aimed at the social community at the group level rather than being governed by individual rights and needs. The individual rights perspective is relatively new in the political landscape. Nordic rules of law concerning equal treatment and equal worth reflect the individual's right to self-expression and protection from discrimination and abuse. It also has a certain foothold beyond the laws on equality and discrimination. Today, the supply of support and services is handled as an individual right for those whose needs depend on functional capacities and characteristics. The rights perspective is also reflected internationally, for example, in UN conventions and co-operation in the EU and the Council of Europe.

Awareness of the need for universal design should be integrated into all areas of society. A rights-based strategy means that functional obstacles can largely be prevented and removed. At the same time, people with disabilities need special assistance, for example, in healthcare and nursing and in education and getting to work.

There are two ongoing social processes for participation and equal opportunities for people with disabilities: one for universal design and accessibility, and the other for necessary individual support. To exemplify: a person with impaired vision will need a screen reader to take advantage of universally designed websites and intranets; a person with severe mobility impairments will need a wheelchair and assistance to use a universally designed polling place. Neither process can be seen as exclusive; they are mutually dependent. To achieve the most effective social development possible, these need to be

distinguished and understood separately, especially because completely different professions and academic skills are needed to support them.

GENDER PERSPECTIVE AND ACCESSIBILITY

Sustainable society is characterized by equality between women and men, girls and boys. The Nordic region has long maintained a high international profile when it comes to rights and gender equality issues. The idea behind universal design is to create equal opportunities for everyone regardless of functional capacity, gender and other social categories. In order to specifically secure rights for women and girls, attention should be drawn to gender perspectives during the planning and analysis of universal design and accessibility.

Nordic gender policy currently focuses on leveling out power relationships between women and men by gathering knowledge, addressing stereotypes, creating conditions for equality in the labour market and having zero tolerance for gender-based violence. By clarifying these issues, the Nordic countries have progressed furthest in the world in their work towards promoting equal opportunities regardless of gender. In addition to the moral aspects, it contributes to the countries' economies when both women and men participate in the labour market.

The Nordic Council of Ministers of Equality highlight participation in public environments in its current co-operation program. The goal of reducing disparities in the conditions for participation among women, men, girls and boys, naturally applies to everyone, regardless of capabilities and characteristics. A highlighted theme is representativeness. The level of human diversity

in our societies should be reflected in the public domain. This requires both increased focus on universal design, and addressing the stereotyped perceptions of groups and individuals with disabilities.

Universal design is a prerequisite for participation in society. Accessibility allows for democratic rights and citizens' rights to live and be represented on an equal basis within the public domain. This theme appears in the UN Committee's general comments to Article 6 of the Disability Convention. Article 8, about raising awareness, also mentions the government's obligation to take action against stereotyping based on gender and disability. Mass media's roles and responsibilities are underscored in Articles 8 and 21. The Convention is the first with an intersectional approach in which attention is drawn not only to functional capacity but also gender, ethnicity and age, to counteract discriminatory treatment.

The UN is currently (March 2016) formulating a comment on Article 6 about women and girls with disabilities. The draft of the comment includes language concerning Article 9 on accessibility. They underscore the need for new measures, in part to meet current and future professionals in architecture, design and engineering, and in part to promote an integrated gender perspective in the architecture and construction sectors. The comment is intended to guide implementation of the Convention's articles. If society is to become more universally designed, then there is a need for greater focus on differences being a natural part of human diversity. The realization that the average person does not exist will need to be supported.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACCESSIBILITY AND EQUALITY BASED ON FUNCTIONAL CAPACITY

Diversity occurs when society welcomes the uniqueness of each human being. Societies that welcome differences and encourage equality work for a variety of identities, regardless of functional capacity, gender, age, ethnicity, faith and other aspects of identity. Attitudes and prejudices about different social groups are barriers to diversity. A lack of accessibility also prevents people with disabilities from participation on equal terms.

Legislation is a tool that can promote diversity and equal treatment by combating discrimination and abuse. The Nordic countries handle disabilities and the lack of accessibility in different ways. The individual's right to equal treatment is promoted in constitutional laws, occupational laws, educational laws and laws against discrimination. The laws lay down fundamental rights and freedoms such as the principle of equal treatment and the right to privacy. In some countries, lack of accessibility is classified as discrimination. Finland, Norway, Sweden and Åland classify a lack of accessibility as a form of discrimination in their laws against discrimination. Denmark and the Faroe Islands also have protections against discrimination of persons with disabilities, but only in the labour market. Laws against discrimination in Iceland and Greenland do not protect persons with disabilities specifically.

Planning and building regulations, along with recommendations and accessibility standards, contribute to universally designed physical environments. Occupational laws prohibit discrimination on the basis on various grounds and can promote equality by requiring action plans for dealing with discrimination.

Overview of protection against discrimination

Country	Disability a reason for discrimination in all areas of society	Lack of accessibility a reason for discrimination in public spaces	Disability reason for discrimination in the labour market
Denmark	No	No	Yes
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes
Faroe Islands	No	No	Yes
Greenland	No	No	No
Iceland	No	No	No
Norway	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes
Åland	Yes	No/yes	Yes

STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN IN THE NORDIC REGION

Denmark

Denmark's action plan, "A society for all", contains a number of significant initiatives regarding accessibility in the section entitled "Innovative solutions, new technologies and increased accessibility". In it, there is an initiative for the construction industry that represents the first steps towards accessibility that is more oriented towards universal design.

Finland

Finland's VAMPO Disability Policy program was in effect from 2010 to 2015 and is currently being evaluated. Municipal accessibility plans exist, like the Helsinki Accessibility Plan.

Faroe Islands

The Faroe Islands do not yet have a strategic plan for the implementation of universal design. The disability organizations' umbrella organization, MBF, together with Visit Tórshavn,

has created an overview of accessibility in the tourism industry in Tórshavn. MBF is part of a working group that will produce a tourist guide for tourism in the Nordic region. The group's members are from the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland. Co-operation with Norway and Scotland is also ongoing.

Greenland

Greenland does not yet have a strategic plan for the implementation of universal design.

Iceland

Iceland A parliamentary decision on universal design refers to the UN Convention and states that new construction in Iceland must be accessible to all.

**Åse Kari Haugeto, section manager for Deltasenteret:
NORWAY'S NEW ACTION PLAN FOR UNIVERSAL DESIGN**

Among the Nordic countries, only Norway has an action plan that focuses on universal design. The new plan is in fact already the third in the system with the same focus.

- It is difficult to say for certain why this is so, says Åse Kari Haugeto, section manager for Deltasenteret, which is the Norwegian National Competence Centre for participation and accessibility, which follows up on the action plan for universal design.
- Universal design has been firmly rooted in politics and at the official level for a long time. A lot of people looked forward to this third plan with anticipation.

The fact that the focus on a universally designed society has such strong support at the national level has had positive effects: The concept is well known and there is a broad societal understanding that design needs to be universally accessible. This applies in all areas: education, culture, transport, construction, outdoor environments...

This does not mean that it is all smooth sailing in Norway. There is reluctance in some areas and some people think that the requirements are too strict.

- There are several different types of currents in society, says Åse Kari Haugeto. Everyone is in favour of the idea of a society that is accessible to everyone but when it comes to practical action, the effect is in fact remarkably often dependent on individuals.

Developing society in the right direction requires both a carrot and a stick. Well-developed legislation is the stick. For example, if a new law is in effect regarding digital learning platforms in schools - they need to be accessible to students and teachers as well as parents.

- The carrot is the advocacy work that goes on: sharing experiences with each other, developing best practices, doing motivational work and demonstrating the potential, says Åse Kari Haugeto.



Norway

An action plan for universal design is set for the period 2015-2019. The plan will focus largely on information and communication technology as well as welfare technology.

In the transport sector, universal design appears in several points in the National Transport Plan (NTP). The current NTP is for the period 2014-2023, but work is already continuously underway on the NTP for 2018-2027. Measures to promote universal design will be included. In the transport sector, universal design appears in several points in the National Transport Plan

(NTP). The current NTP is for the period 2014-2023, but work is already continuously underway on the NTP for 2018-2027. Measures to promote universal design will be included. The transport sector has come a long way with its commitment to integrate universal design into its regular operations.

The Government continues to support standardisation efforts through grants to projects in the Norwegian standard. A number of standards for universal design have been developed in recent years.

Statsbygg has developed a plan to include universal design in public buildings, in part in conjunction with other maintenance. Operators in the construction industry are important to ensure the universal design of public buildings. They can serve as a model for counties and municipalities with respect to structured commitment to universal design of public buildings.

Accessibility of public web pages has been legislated.

Sweden

Swedish Parliament adopted the action plan called "From patient to citizen" in 2000. The goal was an accessible society by 2010 and the strategy was based on the fact that the action plan would be valid until 2016.

Åland

Åland The action program called "An Accessible Åland" was adopted by the provincial government on 27 June 2013 for the disability policy years 2013-2016. In connection with its operations report, the provincial government's departments must follow up and report on measures taken in the "From talk to action" annex every year (Annex 4-5, Follow-up 2013 and Follow-up 2013-2014).

ÅDA, Åland's Digital Agenda, is also included in the community service reform. ÅDA will develop IT digitization and make it accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities; it will be overseen by a Swedish consulting firm.

In the tourism strategy for Åland 2012-2022, there is a group that looks at the strategy solely from the disability perspective. A comprehensive accessibility inventory has been carried out at 40 sites and tourist destinations and an Åland accessibility guide will be drawn up.



Niina Kilpelä, architect, The Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities (FPD) Accessibility Centre:
HELSINKI'S STRATEGIC WORK TOWARDS ACCESSIBILITY

The goal of the Helsinki project called "Helsinki for All" was a city where it's easy for everyone to move about and be active. Pathways and parks must be easily traversed, buildings and public transport need to function smoothly. Public services must be universally designed.

In addition, there is a permanent project manager and a delegation for accessibility issues, which reports to the city government about its activities on an annual basis. The delegation's main objective is to coordinate and promote accessibility work in Helsinki.

The fact that Helsinki came in second place in the EU's accessibility contest "Access Awards 2014" is largely the result of the "Helsinki for All" project.

Niina Kilpelä, who is now an architect at that FPD Accessibility Centre, was involved in the project, which went on between 2002 and 2011.

– The project produced a tremendous amount material that can be used in future and serve as a basis for further work, she says. It was a basic survey of daycares, schools, swimming pools, service centres... well, basically all public activity.

The project materials, the foundations for the future of a universally designed Helsinki, are now available on the city's website . Documents there include the city's accessibility plan, an accessibility meter which lists indicators for accessibility, instructions for construction, as well as a database with information on signage for accessibility along with a set of icons.

What do you think, has Helsinki become accessible?

– The project formulated the basic ideas; we defined what makes something accessible and what needs to be built new or rebuilt. A lot still needs to be done, but the materials that were gathered thanks to the project are unique in Finland.



WHAT STRENGTHENS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A UNIVERSALLY DESIGNED SOCIETY, AND HOW CAN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES CONTRIBUTE?

The expert panel has listed areas that strengthen the development of universal design and highlighted some good examples below.

RESEARCH

There is some research on universal design and use in the fields of architecture and health care. In the past, many researchers in the field of health care gathered in connection with activities at the Nordic School of Public Health Sciences. There is a Nordic network for research on universal design in the field of architecture.

Larger studies regarding universal design and the economy are lacking, such as the link between demographic data, building research and research on universal design. We currently also lack forums, both within the countries and at the Nordic level, where we can discuss sustainability on the basis of universal design. Furthermore, we lack broader knowledge of the value of universal design in the construction sector - in relation to ethics, attitudes and quality rather than simply economics.

Creative expertise is needed among engineers, designers, planners and architects in order to understand user needs and plan accessible environments, products and services. The users need to be involved in the process in order to find new solutions and ensure that already implemented solutions really work. It is important to highlight research on the user's role and the valuation of responsibility and knowledge. One area that needs to be strengthened in general is the field of cognition with a focus on research-based knowledge of user needs.

No rules or instructions can replace the influence of those who will actually spend time in the environments and use what is provided. Users and civil society should have an influence on research, planning and education. The "nothing about us without us" concept has become part of the UN Convention. It establishes the obligation to consult with disability organizations on the issues that concern them. The creative expertise is responsible for finding the best possible solution that works as well as possible for as many people as possible in the context for which it is planned.

**Per-Olof Hedvall, Certec, Rehabilitation Engineering Division at the Institute of Design Sciences at the Technical University of Lund:
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES ON UNIVERSAL DESIGN**

There were 34 countries from all continents represented at the most recent major conference on universal design held in Lund in 2014. The 2016 conference in York also has a lot of participants. There is considerable interest in the topic throughout the world, thanks to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in which universal design is identified as a path towards a more inclusive society.

An international research conference on universal design is held every other year. A broad target group can participate and get an overview of what is happening with regard to the topic and then explore the trends and future opportunities. The International Conference on Universal Design was held in Oslo in 2012, in Lund in 2014 and is to be held in York in 2016.

– The conferences are targeted towards everyone who is interested in universal design, says Per-Olof Hedvall, Certec, one of the founders. We gather individuals who may themselves have a disability, representatives of various organizations, municipal officials who have universal design as their mission, as well as government officials and researchers.

This wide audience also affects how the conferences are presented. The content has to be interesting for everyone. Researchers can publish studies, architects can present their cases and traffic engineers can present the latest universal solutions in the field of public transport.

– It is important that the conferences be inclusive, not just a presentation of scientific papers, says Per-Olof Hedvall. The participants can decide for themselves how they wish to participate, with a case, a paper or by setting up an exhibition.

The foundation is the understanding that everyone has something to learn from one another and that research and development have to be done in parallel.

It is difficult to measure the effects of a conference, but the impression is that knowledge-sharing has been quite successful, considering both the wide range of content and the participants' occupations and nationalities

– I have noticed that there is an increasing interest in universal design in Sweden, says Per-Olof Hedvall. This may not be due to the conference alone, but I think it is responsible in part.

The National Agency for Participation sees universal design as important, the Swedish Disability Federation has decided to work with universal design, as has DHR - all strong indications that pressure is mounting.

– We already know that the 2018 conference will be held in Ireland and there are two countries that would like to host the conference in 2020 - for this type of conference, it is rather amazing to already know where it will be held four years from now! says Per-Olof Hedvall.



INNOVATIONS

Goods and services as well as environments and concepts can have different uses for people with different functional capacities. Both designers and users benefit when large user groups participate in development. Societal challenges in the form of exclusion and demographic trends can be met if enough people participate in society and also use products and services and can move freely and independently in different environments. We need to think in new ways if we are going to achieve this.

Nordic Innovation, under the Nordic Council of Ministers, is an agency for Business, Energy and Regional Policy, MR-NER. It manages various projects relevant to the field of universal design and welfare technology. The projects aim to promote development and create conditions for smarter solutions that meet the needs and challenges of tomorrow. One example is the innovation competition called Nordic Built Cities. It welcomes ideas and projects related to society-for-all solutions in a creative process with other innovators. Special focus is placed on the challenges of demographic change.

The Independent Living Challenge, arranged by Nordic Innovation, welcomes innovators who have proposals that focus on greater independence. The goal is to make life more convenient, both for persons with disabilities regardless of age and for staff in the fields of health and welfare. The National Post and Telecom Authority (PTS) in Sweden also organizes innovation competitions. Their purpose is to increase participation when it comes to digital solutions, by promoting innovations that focus on universal design and design for all.

EDUCATION

Universal design is a subject in an education in architecture, among others. Nevertheless, knowledge of universal design is still needed in many post-secondary education programs. Professionals who are responsible for universal design of environments, technology, goods and services, need a good understanding of its benefits and user needs. These include, among others, urban planners, designers, architects, technicians and engineers.

Lund Technical University offers courses in universal design via Certec. Mid Sweden University has an "International Master's Programme in Design for All". Existing Nordic post-secondary education in universal design should be supported and strengthened in future efforts. There is already co-operation among educational institutions, including the Arcada in Finland and the Norwegian research laboratory for universal design at the University College in Gjøvik.

In addition to a significant need for educating Bachelors in architectural and design schools, as well as engineering and construction designer programmes, in-depth education for professional operators is also needed. SBI at Aalborg University has established a research-based Nordic Master's Degree in universal design (60 ECTS). It is aimed specifically at operators with at least two years of practical experience in the construction sector. The goal is an intra-disciplinary and multidisciplinary level of knowledge among the participants.

**Camilla Ryhl, senior researcher at the National Building Research Institute,
Aalborg University in Copenhagen:
MASTER'S PROGRAM IN UNIVERSAL DESIGN AND ACCESSIBILITY**

Research shows that people who work in construction in various capacities have limited knowledge about accessibility. Everyone is an expert in his own field but lacks insight into the entire construction process. Participants in the Master's programme in universal design at Aalborg University in Copenhagen learn how to ensure that everyone has access to public spaces, from new parents with prams to elderly and disabled persons.

– Shortcomings in accessibility are often the result of a lack of knowledge, says Camilla Ryhl, senior researcher at the National Building Research Institute, Aalborg University in Copenhagen. Hence the need for our Master's programme.

The two-year program is aimed at a wide range of people with at least two years of practical work experience in the construction sector: architects, engineers, construction consultants, occupational therapists, developers, builders, consultants, contractors, landscape architects, municipal officials responsible for construction issues...

– The objective is to raise awareness. That is why we are eager to help participants learn to think more broadly than the regulations and to see the interdisciplinary context.

The programme includes modules that cover both the ethics and economics as well as the strategic implementation of universal design. After completing the programme, participants will be able to work with universal design in a broad and innovative manner and discuss new reasons why it is a good idea.

The first class will complete their education in the spring of 2016. The next class begins in September, 2016. The programme has a Nordic profile and actively caters to participants from all the Nordic countries.

– Assignments that are given throughout the program, including the master's dissertation, can be linked to students' own experiences and their jobs in their home country, says Camilla Ryhl.



RAISING AWARENESS OF THE RIGHTS AND BENEFITS OF UNIVERSAL DESIGN

A lack of accessibility constitutes an obstacle for large groups of people. They are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from participation in society, which violates core values about people's equal right to participation. The prevailing norms surrounding gender as well as functionality serve to control, directly or indirectly, the way people treat each other. That is why a critical approach to these norms is important. Criticism of norms is an important component in the change process that works to accommodate groups with inferior roles in society. In our modern society, the norms for "how a person should look, act and be" remain very restrictive.

Several operators and activities in society have important roles and responsibilities for making people with disabilities visible and making it clear that equal rights apply to everyone. Not least, the media have an important role and a responsibility not to stereotype people with disabilities. They must work to reflect the diversity of people in the entire society (Article 35, 3 and 19 of the UN CRPD).

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR A LOT OF DIFFERENT REASONS

Making the disability perspective mainstream and promoting participation can provide benefits based on more than just the ethical perspective. This includes the economic incentives involved in meeting the demographic trend in which the older population is increasing.

**Guðrún Jónsdóttir, Director of Stigamót:
ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE STÍGAMÓT CRISIS CENTRE**

Women and men, girls and boys can all be subjected to violence in varying degrees. There is ongoing work in various ways to tackle the problem in the Nordic region. Prevention is part of the solution. There are important aspects to accessibility and counteracting the isolation of persons with disabilities.

There can be several barriers that prevent persons who need accessibility, support and service from getting help when they have been the victim of a crime. Among other things, access and expertise are often lacking in the social organizations in charge of protecting and supporting vulnerable people. The same applies to access to persons like those charged with administering justice and providing legal assistance. We need to make some major efforts to deal with these problems.

In Reykjavik, there is Stígamót, a centre for victims of sexual violence. In the past, the centre's premises were not universally designed. There was also a lack of personnel who know sign language or with expertise in communicating with people with intellectual disabilities.

The fact that persons with disabilities are subjected to violence to a greater extent than the rest of society was a crucial reason for Stígamót in Iceland investing in better services, including better accessibility. The organization, which helps victims of sexual abuse and violence, has hired a lawyer with expertise in the field of disabilities. They also moved to new accessible premises.

– Our previous premises were not accessible, said Guðrún Jónsdóttir, Director of Stígamót, and points out that despite improved accessibility, limitations still exist for persons with disabilities.

Helga Baldvins- og Bjargardóttir was hired as a specialist. She is a lawyer, educator and has studied in the field of disabilities. One of her most important tasks is to find people with disabilities who are victims of sexual violence and abuse. She works with information, raising awareness and visiting environments where people with disabilities are found. Her service is also part of Stígamót's improved accessibility - she makes it possible for more people with disabilities than ever to benefit from the assistance.

The organization has also produced new, easily accessible materials, some of which have been translated from other Nordic languages.

Thanks to better access, the organization called Tabú now has a place at Stígamót. Tabú organizes self-help groups led by, and for, women with disabilities.

- I think that through our improved accessibility we have met a need that we were unable to meet in the past, says Guðrún Jónsdóttir. It is not easy to measure, but my impression is that we have more visitors with disabilities now. I hope that even more will be able receive our offers of assistance in future.



SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION

Building regulations and processes in the Nordic countries and autonomous regions are similar in several ways. Existing accessibility rules should be taken into account for new buildings and renovations. In several countries, reasonable judgements are made on a case-by-case basis. In such cases, it is determined whether a property owner or business needs to modify an existing environment to make it functional for more people.

Despite the fact that rules and recommendations for accessibility are often found throughout the construction process, mistakes are often made. The Danish National Building Research Institute has analysed construction processes and found that mistakes occur throughout the construction process, not just by architects but also by the builders, inspectors and clients responsible for the actual building. The benefits and value of

universal design should be made clear to everyone involved.

There is a great need for accessible housing. Not least because the older population is increasing. In the report "Housing for the long-term - building community with smart accessibility of living environments" (Samuelson, 2015), the researchers for the Swedish government suggest that Sweden should improve the accessibility of existing housing stock. Sweden needs more housing for the elderly, even in weak markets, with a focus on forms of housing that provide a possibility for community. Furthermore, Sweden needs to make it easier for seniors to move into - or remain in - homes they can grow old in. Sweden should also promote research and other advances in knowledge about accessibility and community in the housing market to prevent isolation, loneliness and poor health.



Despite the fact that the demographic challenge applies to the entire Nordic region, compromising on accessibility of new housing construction is debated in all countries. Certain policy-makers believe that the housing market requires, and is satisfied with, fewer accessible units, for example, for people with mobility aids. Universal design advocates, on the contrary, believe that a lack of accessibility will sooner or later result in high costs. There will be a need for renovations and welfare technology solutions as a result of citizens' increasingly limited participation and independence.

Iceland's authority for built environments has compiled materials in which statutory and recommended accessibility measures can be compared. The Swedish National Housing Board led a project for the harmonization of the Nordic countries' building regulations using accessibility as the basis in 2015-2016 (Boverket 2016). The Nordic Council of Ministers' Border Obstacle Council is also working with the issue at the instigation of Åland and Finland but with emphasis on noise and fire protection.

Networks for official co-operation on built environments and transport have previously been governed by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Nordic Council of Ministers has also conducted several projects on its own and through its institutions, including "City for All", "Culture for All" and the standardization of building regulations. The Nordic networks are perceived as extremely valuable for the exchange of knowledge and as a driving force in national policies.

ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT

Accessible transport is a key aspect of universal design. Whether or not people can get from point A to point B independently, and choose whether to stop off at points C and D along the way, all depends on the design of the transport system. General differences exist between the ways men and women travel, but the overall assessment is that accessible transport systems benefit everyone, regardless of gender and functional capacity. There is co-operation among the Nordic authorities in the field of transport under the supervision of the Public Roads Administration in Norway: the Nordic Roadways Group for universal design (NVF-uu).

The EU passenger-rights directive and other transport directives have had a major effect on the design of new systems, but there are still some shortcomings and needs, such as standardization in the field. The universal design of transport systems or a lack of accessibility can make a big difference for people travelling across borders. Escorting, assistance and digital accessibility of the booking system and support services are central to the universal design of transport. This includes all types of vehicles on roads, rails, waterways and in the air.

The Copenhagen Metro has tracks with glass walls at some stations. The glass walls prevent people from falling down on the tracks and are of great benefit to people with impaired vision, balance or mobility. Danish regional trains have "flex rooms" - compartments with additional space for people with prams, bicycles, extra luggage or a larger wheelchair, for example.

WELFARE TECHNOLOGY

Welfare technology is an umbrella term in the Nordic region, which is most simply and broadly defined as "technologies that help or provide welfare services". The definition also comprises the potential to prevent the need for other social assistance.

The development of welfare technology should always embrace several fundamental aspects of universal design. One example is "sustainable building" where smart technology will account for a portion of the solutions in future. The development of assistive devices can affect accessibility requirements and building standards. Similarly, the welfare technology field interacts with digital accessibility and standardization. Research and education are also likely to be affected by continued technological developments in welfare technology.

The importance of welfare technology for universal design is strengthened in all of the Nordic countries by government organizations focusing on the field.

DIGITAL INCLUSION

Everyone has the right to social information and services based on individual needs. Everyone needs to be able to take advantage of what is offered as the services become digitized. If universal design is applied from the beginning, new obstacles to participation can be avoided. Universally designed digital environments lead to improved participation for women and men who encounter obstacles in the physical environment. This is why it is important that the processes take into consideration the fact that all categories of web sites and e-services should be universally designed from the outset.

US legislation concerning accessibility puts pressure on global IT companies to develop services so they are accessible. In the EU, partially harmonized requirements for public procurement have been developed within standardization.

Norway's "Regulation on Universal Design of Information and Communication Technological (ICT) Solutions" clarifies that all new websites that cater to the general public must be universally designed after 1 July 2013. All ICT solutions must be universally designed by 2021.

STANDARDIZATION

Since the European Union adopted and ratified the UN Convention, activities in the field of standardization have increased. The general comment on accessibility stresses the importance of accessibility standards and is based on such development in essential elements. Guide 71 (Guide 6 in Europe) provides guidance for those responsible for standardizing how accessibility requirements can be implemented depending on the industry standard being developed. An updated version of the guide was released in late 2015.

ISO 26000 is a standard with guidelines for social accountability. It focuses on sustainable development and includes references to universal design. Work is also in progress on a standard for sustainable procurement, ISO 20400, where Sweden is a driving force behind including references to universal design.

EU standardization organizations have been tasked with developing standards for the procurement of accessible information and communication technology, ICT, and the built environment.

The first standard for appropriate accessibility requirements for the procurement of ICT was launched in 2014. An equivalent standard will be developed for built environments.

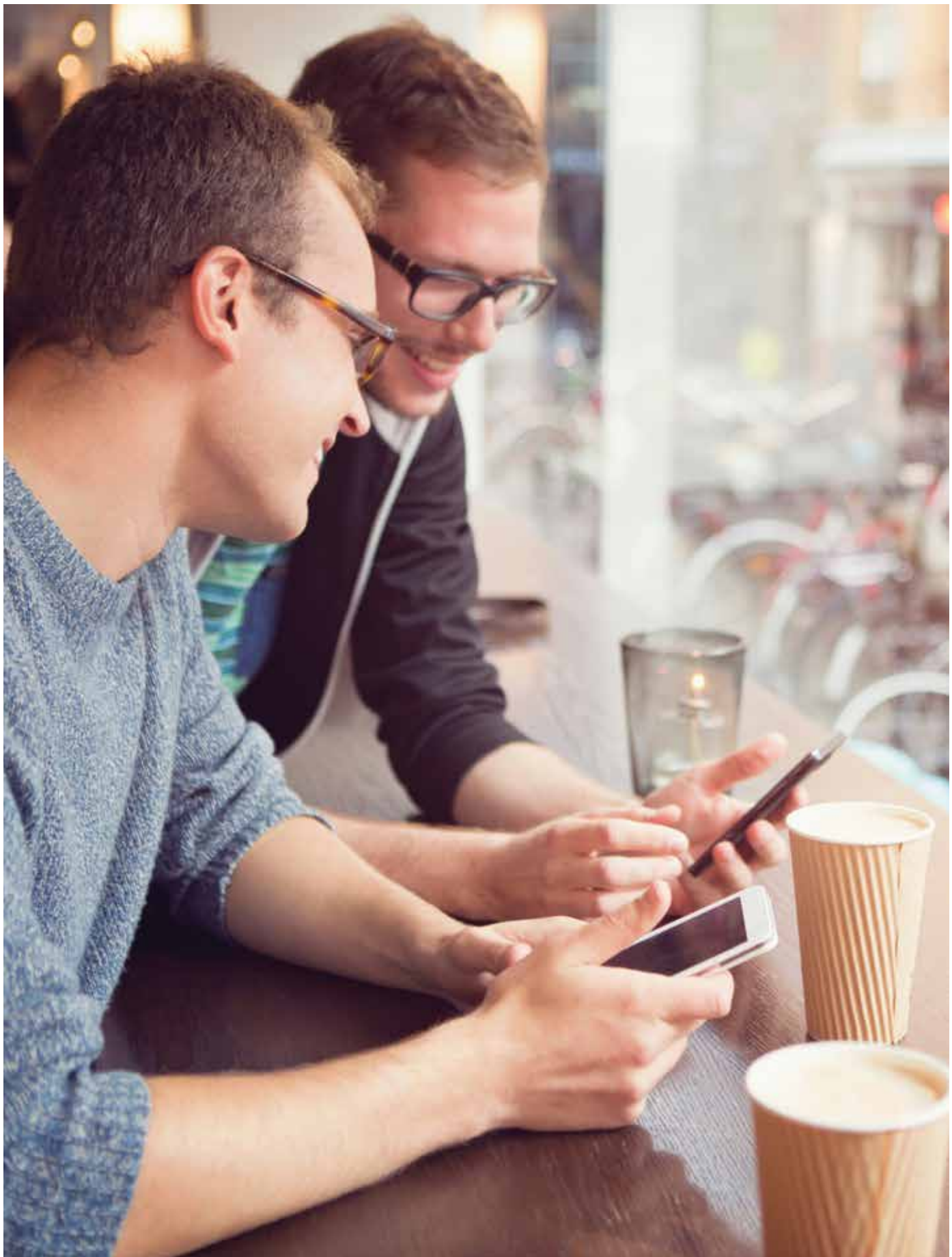
How industry standards will incorporate accessibility requirements is handled within the context of another task at the European level. This task also concerns new standards for developing products and services with a design-for-all perspective that is comparable to universal design.

Even if standards are developed in the context of ISO, CEN and corresponding groups, work still needs to be done at a Nordic level. Particularly in fields like the built environment, where requirements are expressed in mandatory regulations related to law. A joint Nordic approach to universal design and accessibility would increase the chances of both the approach and the issues being reflected in other standardization processes. Nordic co-operation on the issues would also improve the conditions for disability organizations to participate in the standardization processes. Educating participants from these organizations in the standardization work at the Nordic level would also be appropriate and an efficient use of resources.

A standard has been developed in Norway for how to involve users in ICT development. In Sweden there is a model where the involvement of disability organizations and other interested parties is strengthened because the project fees and costs for foreign travel are subsidized. The participation of Swedish disability organizations has increased sharply since 2010.

Standardization is an important topic for research. International co-operation involving the participation of several Nordic countries is currently in progress.





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