
Dissecting strategies for creating inclusive societies in twelve western countries, going beyond accessibility concepts and achieving universal usability

Jonas E Andersson^{*1}, Ola Balke^{*†1}, and Terry Skehan^{*‡1}

¹Myndigheten för delaktighet/ Swedish Agency for Participation (MFD) – Sturegatan 3 SE-172 24 SUNDBYBERG, Sweden

Abstract

Since the mid-1960s, the concept of accessibility has evolved into a key notion for making modern welfare society inclusive for large groups of people regardless of their potential cognitive and functional abilities. In the beginning, the concept primarily targeted physical requirements for the built environment (e.g. floor level, spatial configuration, illumination, and signage). In the evolution of the concept in Sweden, accessibility has achieved both secondary and tertiary complementary meanings that refer to strategies for dismantling obsolete attitudes about people with disabilities and for ensuring that artefacts and media are useable by users with a diverse range of abilities, limitations and characteristics.

By the end of the 20th century, many countries used accessibility or similar concepts (e.g. access, barrier-free design, design for all, inclusive design, accessible design) in creating inclusive welfare societies. In 2006, the UN Convention Rights for People with Disabilities (CRPD) associated universal design thinking (UD) to this quest. This paper presents findings from a study on the implementation of accessibility and universal design and similar concepts in twelve countries in three geo-economical spheres. The research material was assembled by key word searches, interviews and questionnaires. Swedish conditions were used as a matrix for creating comparative analyses. The result suggested that national strategies for promoting accessibility and universal design depended upon the chronical debut and the cultural context.

From a Swedish perspective, at least three possible avenues for further development of the concept of accessibility for the 21st century are identified: definition of conceptual theorems, collection of exemplary models and practices, as well as increased use of ICT. We propose to host a session in which 2-3 experts from the countries studied discuss and analyse the conclusions of the study, and give further insights into the realisation of an inclusive welfare state with full potential for participation regardless of age and disabilities.

Keywords: accessibility, universal design, CRPD, strategies, national implementation

*Speaker

†Corresponding author: ola.balke@mfd.se

‡Corresponding author: