

Concept for a “Barrier-free City for All” working group

I. Context

Societal and demographic change has made calls for barrier-free building a central issue in the context of public spaces and buildings. Freedom from barriers is too often associated with the disabled – especially people with mobility problems.

However, today we are very much aware that the various types of barriers affect virtually everyone in a city. It may be that certain colours or letterings are easier to see than others, it may be a question of certain floor coverings that are more or less secure to walk on, or of acoustic conditions that make it easier or harder to find ones way around.

Nowadays, freedom from barriers is understood in an all-embracing sense. According to the principles of “Design for All”, every design measure should aim to benefit everyone – including the disabled.

We can start from the following assumptions:

- 10% of the population is crucially dependent on freedom from barriers
- 40% need freedom from barriers as a necessary support
- 100% see freedom from barriers as enhancing their quality of life

So “Design for All” aims to make it possible for everyone – including the disabled – to participate fully and equally in urban life, and applies the idea of **inclusion** to all aspects of design – all individuals are accepted as they are and are able to fully participate in society. This also means that special solutions for the disabled will become unnecessary and future generations – whatever their age, gender, abilities or cultural background – will be able to use and enjoy social, economic and leisure activities as independently as possible.

The principle of social inclusion is central to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – which also mentions the goal of achieving an “enhanced sense of belonging”. In the past, this concept was not part of the core vocabulary of the human rights discourse. It symbolises a specific focus of the Convention on the idea of social inclusion based on freedom and equality as a counterweight to the injustice of social exclusion.

Mobility and contact between people in public spaces should be – literally – free of all obstacles; there should be no barriers to accessing a city in all of its diversity. People should be able to move around freely and meet each other according to their capabilities. But this in no way means that respect for existing buildings and quality of design in public spaces has to be relinquished.

II. Goals

The idea is that, in the “Barrier-free City for All” working group within the EUROCITIES network, there will be an exchange of experience on developing and designing cities without barriers. The objective is to draw a wide range of players into the process and identify interesting plans and solutions.

Social sustainability in the process of transforming public spaces should be increasingly supported, people’s sense of identification with their own city strengthened and “easy living” promoted, especially in major metropolitan areas.

The themes for an exchange of experience include

- Barrier-free planning and construction (renovation) of public buildings and housing
- Contribution to training and further training of architects
- Access for all to public local transport
- Barrier-free traffic planning
- Standardisation issues
- Tourism for all – barrier-free service chain
- Barrier-free health facilities
- Access to the education system and the working environment
- Barrier-free access to the media
- Labelling scheme for projects of particular merit

The main focus of the exchange of experience will be on how to successfully organise the interface between administration and implementation and to develop forward-looking solutions in collaboration with associations and organisations. This includes developing concepts in areas such as education, tourism (including concepts for museums), housing, commerce and the service industry.

III. Expectations

The idea is that the “Barrier-free City for All” working group will make it possible to learn about interesting experience gathered by other cities, bring together a network of players and thus help to drive conceptual and practical developments in the field of “barrier-free cities”.

Within the framework of a joint project, goals and tasks will be formulated that help the participating cities to reinforce the political status of work in this area and take concrete steps towards further implementation of the goal of the “Barrier-free City for All”.

At the end of the project, a “Future Seminar” or a “Future Conference” will be organised to present the results and discuss the tasks cities will face in the future and

possible solutions.

Work schedule for the “Barrier-free City for All” working group

A work schedule ensures that the cities involved operate in a focused manner. The main elements of the schedule are:

- Formation of the “Barrier-free City for All” working group – under the chairmanship of Berlin
- Discussion of the themes to be addressed
- Review of the current situation in the cities involved in the working group on the basis of a questionnaire (local concepts and identification of best practices)
- Discussion of concrete themes for an exchange of experience, chosen according to the results of the questionnaire
- Analysis of EU programmes of relevance for a joint project
- Project development (e.g. a city campaign with labelling scheme for evaluating and rewarding best practices)
- Project realisation
- Future Seminar/ Future Conference involving further cities

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Stockholm, November 2009