





Decision Support Tools and
Policy Initiatives in Support of
a Universal Design of
Buildings



*Different approaches towards the
implementation of accessibility in Europe –
Which solutions should be promoted?*



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Ladies and Gentleman,

As you are attending this workshop, I believe that you are what I use to identify as „accessibility insiders“. This means, that you have any sort of particular interest in the subject and this means also, that you have another look to accessibility than the majority of people. I need not to tell you, that this other look, does not necessarily make your lives easier.

Now, we could expect that at least among these “accessibility insiders” there is a perfect harmony and all of us have the same convictions. But this is obviously not the case and there is still a need for concertation and clarification.

I would like to make a short excursion to the “accessibility-history” and for that, use the figures set up by my friend Maarten Wijk, a Dutch architect, who was one of the main initiators of the European Manual and later, of the European Concept for Accessibility.

Folie 2

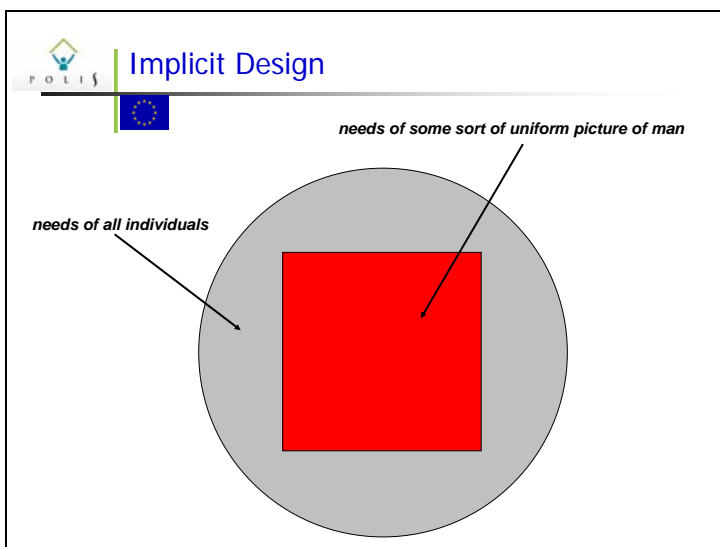


Slide 2: "building for the disabled" versus "accessibility for all". The slide features the POLIS logo and the European Union flag in the top left corner. The title is in blue text. Below the title is a bulleted list of design approaches:

- *Implicit Design (up till 1970)*
- *Designing for the Disabled (1970/1990)*
- *Integral Approach / Universal Design (1990/2000)*
- *Human Diversity (2000+)*

Maarten's story starts in the sixties and has not yet ended. It is very likely, that accessibility will be a never ending story because always when a step forward has been achieved, our expectations also have moved forward. But let us look at the past and talk about implicit design, design for the disabled, universal design and human diversity.

Folie 3



Slide 3: Implicit Design. The slide features the POLIS logo and the European Union flag in the top left corner. The title is in blue text. Below the title is a diagram illustrating the concept of implicit design. A large grey circle represents the "needs of all individuals". Inside this circle is a smaller red square representing the "needs of some sort of uniform picture of man". Arrows point from the text labels to the corresponding shapes in the diagram.

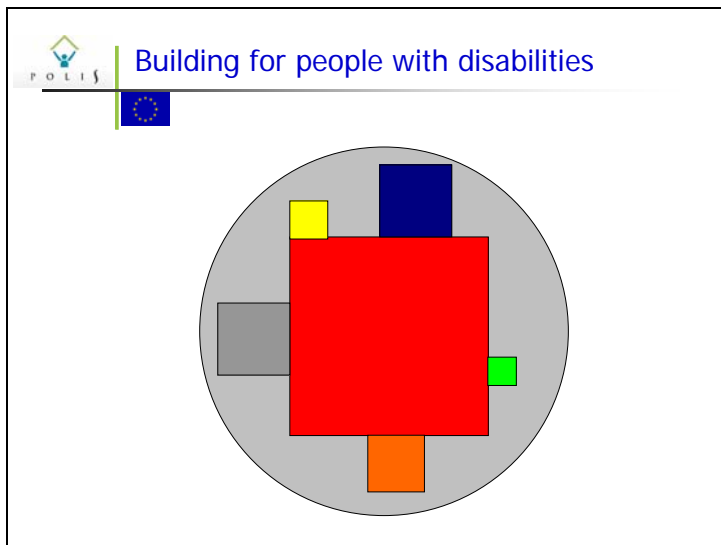
Before the term « accessibility » was ever used, some 40 to 50 years ago, the environment was designed according to some kind of uniform picture of man. This

picture was a kind of compromise of the physical capacities of a healthy adult person. Human diversity or human limitations were not necessarily a worry of the build industry. Such a uniform design however creates a conflict between the environment and the particular needs of its users.

Graphically you could illustrate this conflict with a square in a circle. The circle represents the needs of all possible users of the environment and the square represents the needs of some standard person. It is obvious that there is a lot of free space in the circle.

In the early seventies the organisations of people with disabilities started to insist on the importance accessibility as the members of these organisations were excluded from many activities because of the barriers encountered in a hostile environment.

Folie 4

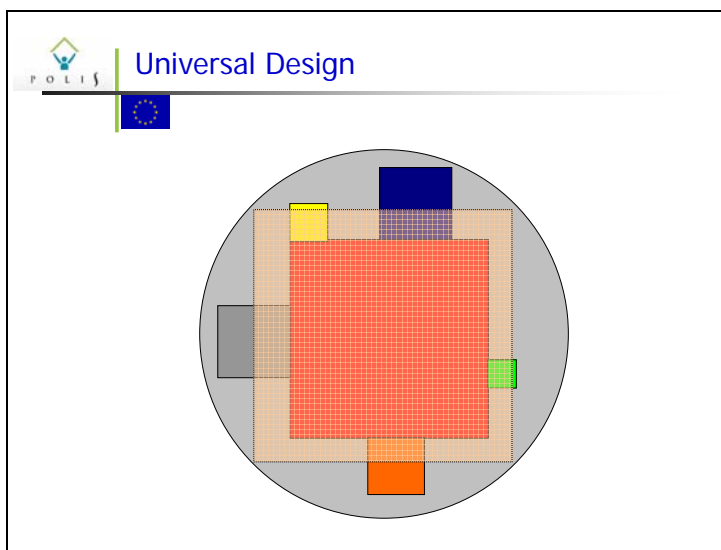


For many years, the organisations representing different categories of disabilities, started to describe their specific needs in manuals and guides, using a lot of different criteria, symbols and rules. The term “accessibility” became a stigmatised term, as it was understood as “designing for people with disabilities”. In the daily practice “design for disabled people” was nothing else than implicit design completed here and there with some specific adaptations for some particular categories of users.

Graphically this can be illustrated by smaller squares representing the specific needs of some particular categories of users. But even adding these smaller squares to our first square in the circle, there is still a lot a free space to be covered.

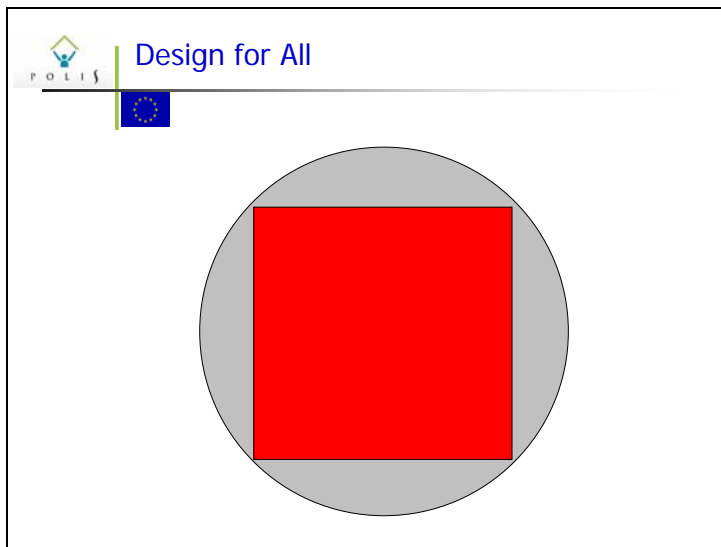
Additionally, all these different particular criteria made things very complicated in a way that the build industry was not really interested.

Folie 5



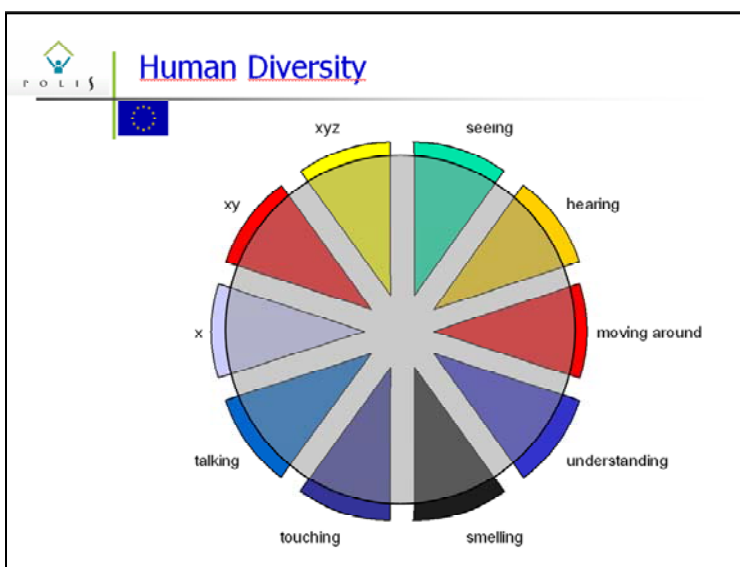
In the eighties and early nineties, the organisations of people with disabilities became aware of this phenomena and this was the beginning of a new approach called Design for All or Universal Design depending on the countries. The strategy was to combine all the different needs of different categories of users in one single package and thus, to enlarge the definition of the typical users of the environment including children, elderly people, mothers with prams, and so on.

Folie 6



In our picture now, the first square representing the implicit design has become bigger and takes more space in the circle as all the smaller squares have been integrated, but there is still a lot of free space. We have to admit, that a square will never completely cover all the space in a circle, and we must stop thinking in terms of a standardised picture of people.

Folie 7



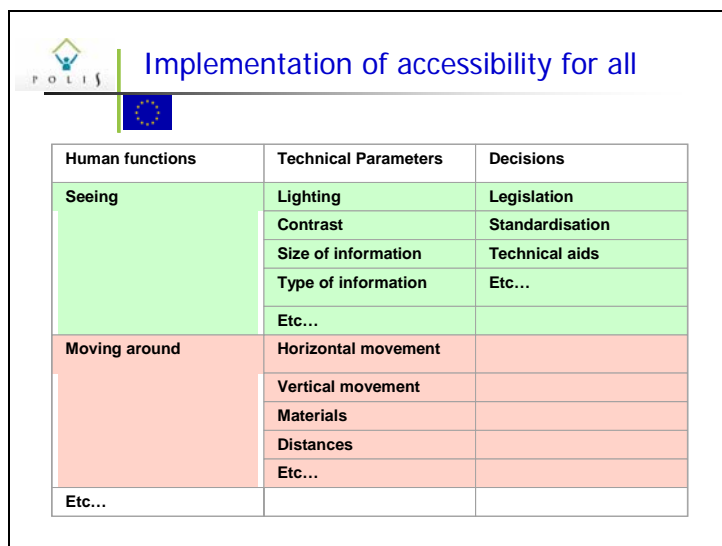
Instead of separating people into particular categories, we should concentrate on human functioning. We should look at all the aspects of this functioning and try to

identify solutions for each aspect. These functions are things like looking, listening, smelling, touching, understanding, moving around, handling, breathing, being cold or warm, and so on.

In our graphic, the circle of human needs is now divided into sectors representing the aspects of human functioning.

The challenge now is to identify solutions for each of these aspects with the hope of covering each function with a complete set of solutions.

Folie 8



Human functions	Technical Parameters	Decisions
Seeing	Lighting	Legislation
	Contrast	Standardisation
	Size of information	Technical aids
	Type of information	Etc...
	Etc...	
Moving around	Horizontal movement	
	Vertical movement	
	Materials	
	Distances	
	Etc...	
Etc...		

Looking at human functioning and at human diversity, we should be able – in the long term – to cover the entire circle with criteria for lighting, acoustics, temperature, space, structure and all the other environmental parameters.

If we succeed in doing so, equal opportunities and full participation will have a good chance to become a reality.

So far, so good. This sounds logical, but why does it not work?

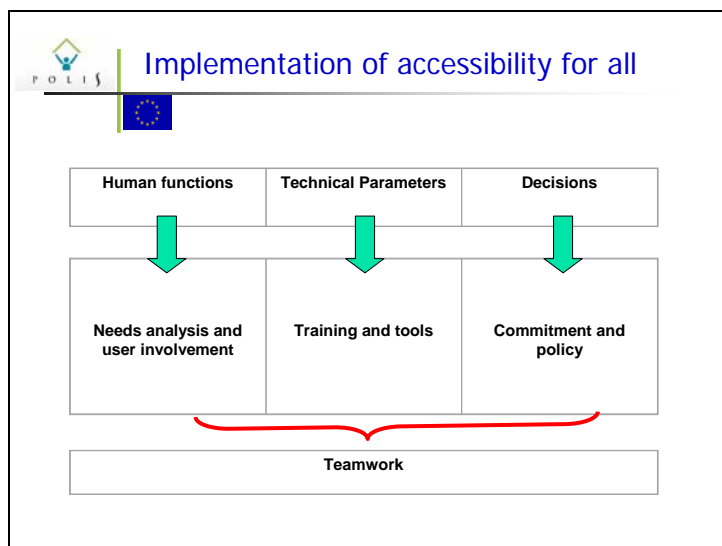
The major problem seems to be the fact, that different stakeholders at different levels have different competences, different terminologies, different priorities...

In some countries the organisations of people with disabilities have a good lobby and can take influence on policy making, but the necessary knowledge for the technical implementation is still missing.

In other countries the technical knowledge is available, but accessibility is not yet a priority on the political agenda.

In many countries, the user organisations have difficulties to acquire the competences needed for a successful discussion with politicians or technicians.

Folie 9



The implementation of accessibility for all however is teamwork between the user organisations, the technicians and the decision makers. This means that each partner must make the effort to understand the language and the priorities of the others in order to negotiate actions and activities leading to the successive, consequent and competent elimination of barriers.

The research project POLIS is trying to facilitate this team working through the creation of a set of instruments linking the needs analysis, the finding of technical solutions and the development of arguments for a correct decision making. During the last months we have seen that this is quite a big challenge, but we are confident that we will succeed and we hope, that your feedback during this workshop will help

us to check whether our approach “in theory” meets your expectations in “practice”.
So, please do not hesitate to share your ideas.

Thank you,
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