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Link to publication from Aalborg University

A Status of Universal Design in Danish Architectural Policies

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Abstract. In 2009, Denmark ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and thereby acknowledged that Denmark, through policies, plans and programmes, is to work for equal opportunities for persons with disabilities and promote Universal Design in the development of standards, guidelines and e.g. architectural policies. An architectural policy is an acknowledged tool for enhancing the quality of buildings and their surroundings. An important quality of architecture is the ability to include everybody, regardless of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture or disability. In 1994, 2004 and again in 2014, Denmark published a national architectural policy. Inclusion as an architectural quality was included, but the focus and terminology changed with every new policy. Based on a desk study about architectural policies, this paper presents how Universal Design is included in Danish municipal architectural policies. On a local level, 34 of 98 Danish municipalities have formulated an architectural policy. None of the architectural policies applies Universal Design, but a few operate with the concept of accessibility, primarily focusing on accessibility for all. This paper discusses how the absence of Universal Design in the architectural policies can be interpreted and how Universal Design can be introduced into future policies.

Keywords. Accessibility, architectural policy, legislation, policy design, Universal Design

1. Introduction

In a recent study [1] about clients'[2] approach to Universal Design and accessibility, it became obvious that none of the clients had made a policy or a strategy about the building´s role in inclusion for all kinds of users. In general, the study showed that municipal clients comply with the Danish Building Regulations only. This study motivated an interest in the status of Universal Design (UD) in the Danish municipal architectural policies that this paper addresses. This is a theme that is underexposed in the literature. In a Danish context, UD is in line with the definition in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD): "the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design" [2, article 2].

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[2] Clients are the professional private or public organisation that commission and fund either directly or indirectly building design and construction and therefore are at the head of the procurement chain defining the aesthetic and functional needs for the design.

On a European level, the number of countries with a national architectural policy has increased since the 1990s and in 2012 this growth was expected to continue [3]. The development of the national architectural policies of the Nordic countries started when the building sector became more market oriented [4]. On an overall level, the function of an architectural policy is to define and chart the framework for architecture in order to ensure a high quality of architecture. An architectural policy can be defined as a strategy for the physical environment, encompassing intentions and focus areas. It can be made on different levels; national level, regional level, municipal level and in organisations. In a Danish context, the Danish Association of Architects [5] points out that a municipal architectural policy is important because municipalities have a strong influence on the architectural development of Denmark due to their role as both planning authority and building authority. It is emphasised that an architectural policy can function as a long-term tool for planning and work on such a policy is argued to enhance the awareness of the local qualities in buildings, cities and landscapes.

An important quality of architecture is its ability to include everybody. Although UD or equivalent concepts are not used specifically in the European directives about architectural quality and sustainability [6][7], the directives do indicate a focus on all kinds of citizens, regardless of age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture or disability, as the concept of *the day-to-day environment in the life of European citizens* is used. Furthermore, it is expected that improvement of the architectural quality will give rise to results and benefits on different levels: socially and economically [7]. Furthermore, with the ratification of the CRPD in 2009, Denmark has acknowledged that it will work for equal opportunities for persons with disabilities through policies, plans and programmes and that it will promote UD in the development of standards, guidelines and e.g. architectural policies. This paper studies how UD is included in Danish municipal architectural policies.

2. Theoretical background

In order to provide an overview, the dissemination of UD in a Danish context is presented, followed by an overview of the focus on the inclusive aspect of the architecture in the Danish national architectural policies.

2.1. Universal Design in the Danish context

Before Denmark ratified the CRPD in 2009 and thereby approved the concept of UD as environments for all people, the building legislation had since 1972 operated with the inclusive aspect of architecture, but without directly addressing the value inclusion. The Danish Building Act of 1972 and the Danish Building Regulations of 1977 operated with considerations for persons with mobility problems or reduced ability to navigate. Then, in 1995, the Danish Building Regulations of 1995 introduced the concept of accessibility. Within the US design community, the concept of UD has not been adopted and was seen as 'design for disability' [8]. A Belgian study stresses that UD has not (yet) come to the foreground in architecture [9]. A Danish study on architects' conception of the accessibility requirements of the Building Regulations in relation to their practice and their needs for a future regulative model shows a similar tendency [10]. The study shows that accessibility is still the applied concept, and has become synonymous with the prescriptive accessibility requirements of the Danish Building Regulations. Furthermore,

accessibility is generally integrated late in the design process because it belongs to detailing rather than the initial phase of developing the architectural idea. The tendency that the legislative accessibility framework dominates the conception of UD is also seen in Belgium [11].

Architects are criticized for only focusing on the 'normal' body when designing [12]. Grangaard et al [13] point out that Danish architectural firms are aware of people with disabilities, but their understanding of users is patient-oriented rather than citizen-oriented. This is seen in the architectural firms' understanding that accessibility should have higher priority in hospitals and care centres that are designed for patients, than in buildings for e.g. education. This means that it is easier for architectural firms to imagine that a guest in a concert hall would need accessibility than an employee working backstage at the same concert hall. A parallel can be drawn to the Belgian study mentioned before [11], where focus on accessibility/UD was found in projects containing an element of care. In Grangaard et al.'s [13] study, it was not the intention of the Danish architectural firms to deny access or a spatial experience. Rather, UD was not a part of the architectural ambition focusing on all people as users. Mace [14] addresses that inaccessible buildings have played a role in defining the understanding of the users. He uses the concept of a vicious circle to describe how the lack of use can result in a denial of the need for accessible buildings, as people with disabilities do not use the buildings. Furhermore, Mace argues that this vicious circle contributes to fixed views of what people with disabilities can or should be allowed to do. An example of this vicious circle-view is found in a study of accessibility in hotels [15], which documents that there exists a view of the business traveller as being a person without a disability.

Mace points out that accessible design traditionally has an institutional appearance [14]. Imrie points out [16] that the importance of aesthetic values in development and design has been emphasised in practical policies of access, as an attitude exists in the design community that regards aesthetics and access as mutually exclusive. Drawing on Kirkeby [17], it can be argued that it requires an awareness about context-dependent knowledge on accessibility to overcome this issue and integrate the inclusive role of architecture from the beginning of the design process in order to unite the aesthetic with accessibility. Kirkeby thus distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge; context-dependent and context-independent. In the beginning of the design process, the context-dependent knowledge dominates, inspires and contributes to the development of the main idea behind the architectural project. Kirkeby characterises the Danish Building Regulations as a context-independent form of knowledge and shows that architects who are accustomed to working with accessibility and UD only use the Danish Building Regulations in the last stage of the design process as a kind of tool for quality control, and not as point of departure for their architectural ideas [17].

This is also argued by Grangaard [18], who shows that a genuine understanding of users, which captures their diversity, does not emerge by itself but through being in contact with them. Experiences with or related to the users can serve as eye-openers, contributing with context-dependent knowledge from that specific context that in the design process can inspire the architectural idea.

According to Kirkeby [19], the prescriptive accessibility requirements do not harmonise with the methodology of the design process because they prescribe the design. Therefore, some architects would prefer to negotiate the design solutions with the building owner and the user instead of letting legislation regulate architecture. Another study [20] points out that architectural firms see possibilities in a performance-based

model. Such a model can create flexibility and encourage innovative solutions because the performance-based requirements are open for an architectural interpretation.

2.2. The development of Danish national architectural policies

Since the first Danish architectural policy was released in 1994 by three ministries (the Ministries of Culture, Housing and the Environment, respectively), the terminology and focus on users have changed.

In 1994, it was stressed that architecture should meet the functional, technological, environmental and social requirements that should be stipulated to ensure buildings of high quality. In this perspective, architectural policy should be regarded as part of a building policy based on respect for the environment, the technological possibilities and consideration for its users [21].

"S*pecial consideration should be given to the need of the weak groups, especially the disabled*" ([21] pp. 280)

Consideration for people with disabilities recurs in later statements from the Danish ministries in the 1990s. In 1995, the Ministry of Housing described in its construction and housing political statement [22] that the Danish Building Regulations 1995 had tightened up the accessibility requirement in order to make new buildings more 'disability-suitable'. A year later, an action programme [23] composed by the same ministry points out that the design of a building should also be practical for 'the elderly and the disabled'.

In 2007, the government launched the next national architectural policy [24] 'A Nation of Architecture, Denmark, settings for life and growth'. This policy accentuated that architecture of high quality also should focus on aspects that were not immediately visible e.g. the aspect of accessibility.

Since the first policy was launched in 1994 a development has taken place with concepts of accessible and accessibility for all being introduced. Furthermore, notions of the 'elderly and the disabled' have been supplemented with the terms 'mobility-impaired' and 'parents with prams'. This can be argued to constitute an opening to user groups related to UD. Furthermore, accessibility was included in one of the policy's ten target areas. The aim of target number four was an innovative architecture that was also healthy, accessible and sustainable.

The latest 'Danish architectural policy – Putting people first' [25] presented by the government in 2014 operates with the notion of accessibility for all and outlines that this also includes people with disabilities. The accessibility concern is present in relation to social sustainability to create diverse and inclusive areas and in relation to health in order to create surroundings that encourage social interaction and physical activity for all.

In general, the national architectural policies have stressed the interplay between architectural policy and local planning. Changing ministers have encouraged Danish municipalities to formulate their own architectural policies and, together with different organisations and stakeholders, to initiate projects that could inspire and strengthen the municipalities in their work with architectural policies e.g. a project based on an architectural baton [26] and another about visions [27] suggesting different tools. None of the projects, however, operates with accessibility, UD or people with disabilities.

For a number of years, the Danish Association of Architects has focused on motivating and supporting Danish municipalities with development, formulation and execution of an architectural policy. A leaflet intended as inspiration [28] describes motivation, benefits, cultural heritage and organisational aspects of developing an

architectural policy. Although the association's chairwoman [29] points out that the Danish Building Regulations should demand a higher level of e.g. social sustainability in order to comply with the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, similar focus on social sustainability is not found when this association campaigns in favour of architectural policies. This tendency is quite similar in the architectural press.

The last two times a national architectural policy was formulated and released, the magazine Arkitekten[3] published a theme issue about it. Here, prominent architects made statements about their expectations or comments on the national architectural policy. An exception was Helle Søholt [30], a founding partner in the architectural firm Gehl Architects. Helle Søholt addressed diversity and activities, values and basic security for all groups and cultures, when she pointed out that an architectural policy had to support the human basis, and answer how we support an open and inclusive society and other values of welfare that we want to advance. If that is not possible, she questions the relevance of an architectural policy.

3. Research design and method

The data reported in this paper stem from a desk study about the status of architectural policies in Denmark. The study consisted of a mapping of the 98 Danish municipalities and their architectural policies to find out whether they addressed these themes:

- New architecture
- Cultural heritage
- Green spaces/nature/landscape
- Urban density/transformation
- Sustainability/climate adaptation
- Universal Design/accessibility

Furthermore, the study mapped whether the municipalities had a strategy or a policy entirely about UD or accessibility.

All quotations used in this paper have been translated into English by the author.

4. Analysis

The analysis is structured in two parts. First, the result of the general architectural policy-mapping is presented, followed by an analysis of what kind of segment or users accessibility/UD should address according to the municipalities. The second part is about the municipalities´ conception of accessibility in relation to architecture.

4.1. UD and accessibility in architectural policies

The mapping (Table 1) showed that 34 Danish municipalities (34.7 %) of 98 had formulated an architectural policy.

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[3] Members' journal for the members of the Danish Association of Architects published by The Danish Architectural Press

Table 1. Danish municipalities with an architectural policy.

Having an architectural policy	Preparing an architectural policy	Without an architectural policy	Policy or strategy on accessibility
34	1	63	3

In general (Table 2), green space and cultural heritage were themes that the majority of the architectural policies addressed, followed by sustainability and urban density. Of the 34 municipalities with an architectural policy, one of them addressed UD but eight addressed accessibility somehow in their architectural policy. In addition, another policy one explained that green space should be for accessible and to the delight for everybody and one focused entirely on 'disabled-friendly' urban furniture. Furthermore, that particular municipality and two others (one with an architectural policy and one without) had drawn up an independent strategy/policy on accessibility.

Table 2. The focus of Danish municipalities in the 34 architectural policies.

Green space/nature	Cultural heritage	Sustainability/ climate adaptation	Urban density /transformation	Accessibility	UD
24	23	17	11	8	0

None of the architectural policies used the concept of UD. In one municipality, Høje Tåstrup, which was preparing an architectural policy, there has been an interest in UD in the local disability council. However, minutes of a meeting [31] showed that UD was turned down by the municipal facility management department. The explanation was that the design principle that should be used to meet the CRPD had not yet been defined in a Danish context and additionally that the municipality complied with the Danish Building Regulations.

Table 3 shows how the polices define the users of accessibility.

Table 3. The definition of users in relation to accessibility in the architectural policies.

All / Everybody	All; people have different needs (diversity)	People with disabilites
Svendborg Municipality, 2008 Gladsaxe Municipality, 2011 Bornholm Municipality, 2012 Viborg Municipality, 2014 Haderslev Municipality, 2016 Rudersdal Municipality, 2016 Frederiksberg Municipality, 2017	Copenhagen Municipality, 2017	Helsingør Municipality, 2003 Ballerup Municipality, 2012; (Disabled-friendly furniture)

Eight of the policies operated with a definition of users focusing on everybody, expressed by the use of 'all' and the use of examples of this diversity; people with disabilities, elderly people who are walking-impaired and parents with a pram. One policy used exactly the same wording as the national architectural policy of 2007 [24]. Another policy accentuated that everybody should feel welcome in the city and therefore the city should be accessible for all, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or disability. The policy for the capital of Denmark was different because it accentuated that people are

different and have different needs, and furthermore pointed out an openness to future citizens and activities "*Also those we do not yet know*" [32] p. 38.

Even though none of the architectural policies were based on UD, they used a definition of 'all' that was similar to the approach of UD, where 'everybody' are users of UD. The year of the policies indicated that the definition of users in the CRPD and the national architectural policy could have influenced the local policies.

4.2. Accessibility, presented as an architectural aspect

Among the eight architectural policies that actually operated with accessibility, a general understanding existed that accessibility was an aspect of architecture. Nevertheless, the presentation and the focus varied.

Four policies introduced accessibility in an introduction describing that good architecture also implies accessibility. One policy explained that good architecture pays attention to everybody, and consequently is accessible for everybody. Subsequently, none of these four policies wrote more about accessibility in their policy. They could be characterised as being on an 'Introduction' level. The rest of the policies went a step further and could be characterised as examples of an 'Integration' perspective.

One policy aimed at improving the quality of the urban space through integration of accessibility with architectural quality, health and climate adaptation in choices about the design of urban space. Another policy put forth the ambition to design accessibility solutions as an integrated part of architecture, ensuring equal access and good experiences for all of the capital's users. A third policy pointed out that it was important to remember the aesthetics and the general architecture when working with accessibility. Thus, when the municipality established parks and roads, it wanted to show regard for many different target groups in a way that promoted an architectural idea and the whole as well. A fourth policy outlined the idea of working with accessibility as a design parameter.

The views contained in these policies can be seen as expressions of an experience of accessibility as something that is usually added at the last minute instead of being included in the architectural process from the beginning. The emphasis on 'integration' can be seen as a necessary element to consider at an earlier stage in the process.

Table 4. The focus in the view on accessibility.

Introduction; an aspect of good architecture	Integration	Integration; characteristics
Helsingør Municipality, 2003	Haderslev Municipality, 2016	Choices in urban space
Svendborg Municipality, 2008	Copenhagen Municipality, 2017	Equal access and experience for all
Bornholm Municipality, 2012	Frederiksberg Municipality, 2017	Architectonic area + whole
Viborg Municipality, 2014	Gladsaxe Municipality, 2011	Design parameter

5. Discussion

Despite the fact that the CRPD was ratified by Denmark in 2009, none of the Danish policies applied the concept of UD. This shows that the concept is still unknown. However, several of the local municipal policies are inspired by, or use, fragments from the national policies about e.g. accessibility.

The question is, however, why the uptake of UD in architectural policies is lagging. Would a national policy based on UD have contributed to the dissemination of UD, as national policies are to large extent a driver for local initiatives, or are there other or barriers or reasons for the absence?

I suggest that Kirkeby's [17] distinction between the role of context-dependent and context-independent knowledge in the design process, might provide an explanation of why accessibility does not play a significant role in the municipal policies. Kirkeby argues that the prescriptive accessibility requirements in the Building Regulations constitute a context-independent form of knowledge that is activated late in the design process. Architectural policies, on the other hand, outline and contextualise needs and visions, as they define a prioritised plan for a specific municipality. However, this plan is difficult to realise, as accessibility is widely understood as the prescriptive requirements defined in the Building Regulations. The problem with this is that the prescriptive requirements that define the level of ambition of accessibility only focus on isolated technical solutions, and not on the role played by these solutions in ensuring inclusion and equality. In this perspective, there is a discrepancy between the Building Regulations and the architectural policies concerning the framework they set for accessibility.

This can also be seen in the way that a user is understood and defined in these documents. The findings thus illustrate that the majority of the policies about accessibility used the concept of 'all' when defining the user. The use of the term 'all' might not be based on a carefully thought through idea of what 'all' means, nevertheless the term is much broader than what is implied in the understanding of accessibility in the Building Regulations. This is characterised by a strong patient-focus on the user – giving support to Mace's suggestion [14] that accessible design traditionally has had an institutional appearance.

As the accessibility requirements are prescriptive, and architectural firms only focus on accessibility late in the process rather than from the beginning [10], accessibility is not immediately compatible with an architectural policy and its principal approach. Nevertheless, UD could operate on this level because of its ethical value equality, but this would require moving away from considering access and aesthetics as mutually exclusive concerns and understanding users as patients, focusing instead on issues of equality and citizenship.

Potentially, UD could bridge these gaps, but this will require that UD is regarded as a desired value of architecture, and that the building sector becomes familiar with the concept of UD. In order to create a greater consciousness about UD, its role for value creation on a socio-economic level could be a driver in the process.

If the aim is to let future policies focus more on the inclusive role of architecture, and to use the concept of UD, an effort in several fields in the building sector will be necessary. A new methodology of working based more on context-dependent knowledge is one approach to proliferate UD. Knowing what difference an inclusive environment means for life quality makes UD less obtrusive, and could help break with the mindset attached to accessibility as something for the few and as something that is built into the project late in the design process.

Another approach is to instigate a joint effort in relation to the building legislation. A new performance-based model with a strategy for UD as a tool for documentation could change the way of working by opening the eyes of the building sector to the purpose of the architecture. This legislative/institutional intervention would create less reliance on prescriptive requirements and, in the process, raise the status of the inclusive

role of architecture, as it will be brought into play from the very start, when a project is being planned and designed. Common to these efforts is knowledge, and especially context-dependent knowledge. There is a need for knowledge that can inform and create understanding among the actors in the building sector and the municipalities to open their eyes to UD as a value and a means of achieving value creation, and to unite accessibility with aesthetics.

6. Conclusion

This paper indicates that neither national architectural policies nor municipal architectural policies have taken the concept of UD to heart and used it as a driver for more inclusive architecture. The concept of accessibility is used in the national policies from 2007 and 2014 and in eight municipal architectural policies. The focus is on everybody; accessibility for all. The analysis identifies two different views on accessibility in relation to architecture; 'introduction' and 'integration'. 'Introduction' characterises the policies that regard accessibility as an aspect of architecture in their introduction, without writing anymore about this theme elsewhere. The 'integration' view characterises the policies that want to integrate accessibility in the design process e.g. as a design parameter. These policies elevate the theme of accessibility from solely being a requirement in the Danish Building Regulations to becoming an architectural question. The discussion emphasises that UD can serve as a driver for focus on the inclusive aspect of architecture in architectural policies. However, an effort in several fields in the building sector is needed in order to achieve success. One area is the building legislation. With a performance-based model, in contrast to today, the actors in the building sector need to focus from the start on inclusive aspects and UD. Knowledge is needed that can function as an eye-opener and create understanding about UD and the diversity of the users.

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