



Design for All in Scandinavia – A strong concept[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Design for All is more than an appealing point of view. It is a concept that offers a set of challenges capable of generating innovation and giving design added value and weight. In the Scandinavian tradition, the concept has developed from a purely social dimension to a design topic that is discussed both in terms of its business potential and in relation to Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR. This article gives a State of the Art of the development of Design for All in the Scandinavian countries: Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland during the past 15 years, beginning with a common review and joint Scandinavian projects, followed by an overall review country by country which include selected case studies over the past 15 years.

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1. Introduction

The past 15 years have seen an increasingly qualified approach to Design for All in terms of methodology, solutions and concept development based on the Scandinavian² welfare model, Scandinavian functionalism and Scandinavian cooperation. Scandinavia's common socio-political background has provided a common platform and has led to a change in direction – from a purely social dimension focused on solutions and design for people with disabilities to a design topic that is associated with business potentials, sustainability, innovation and Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR.

But it was not until the UN member countries signed the UN's "Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities" in December 1993 that accessibility and political action plans really made it onto the agenda in the Scandinavian countries. The Standard Rules were strongly influenced by the disability organizations, and the rules were meant to ensure equal opportunities and political responsibility in the member countries. Various terminologies developed in the various countries and cultures, and even the Scandinavian countries use different terms. Denmark, Finland and Sweden speak about Design for All and accessibility. Norway uses the term "universell utforming" (using the Norwegian term *utforming*, "giving shape"; abbreviated UU) as

well as Design for All, the latter with particular reference to business. However, it is important to note that the term Design for All contains knowledge that is tied to a specific historical and cultural context – not universal knowledge. The new *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2010) use the term *universal design*, which might influence the choice of term in the future. The term accessibility is seeing less and less used.

This article gives a State of the Art of the development of Design for All in the Scandinavian countries: Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland, beginning with a common review and joint Scandinavian projects, followed by an overall review country by country which include selected case studies over the past 15 years.

1.1. Dialogue rather than legislation

The Scandinavian countries have always sought to address issues through dialogue rather than legislation. But over the past ten years, we have come to realize that this approach is not quite sufficient when it comes to pursuing an inclusive society, partly because changing governments pursue varying political priorities and agendas. Therefore, it may be helpful to introduce legislation in certain areas, but legislation alone does not automatically lead to Design for All products or solutions – or even encourage companies, organisations etc to implement Design for All as part of their strategy—it might instead lead to a situation based on the lowest common denominators. But Political decisions and initiatives are essential for implementing Design for All.

The Scandinavian governments have developed substantial (disability) action plans with fixed deadlines to ensure equal opportunities and accessibility.

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¹ Ergonomidesign changed its name to Veryday in 2012 (www.veryday.com).

² In the article the term Scandinavian is used – it normally includes Denmark, Norway and Sweden – but as in the English usage Finland is also included in the term and in this article.

Innovation is high on the agenda in the Scandinavian countries as it is throughout Europe, and in this field Denmark is one of the leaders. The Danish government's programme for user driven innovation has an annual budget of DKK 100 million and runs from 2007 to 2010. The key point in this programme is innovation with an emphasis on the development of methods, processes, interdisciplinary collaboration, products and business models – some of the projects focussing on Design for All (Danish Enterprise and Construction Authority, 2006).

1.2. Dedicated advocates

In addition to the initiatives launched by the Scandinavian governments and their agencies with regard to Design for All other parties contribute with knowledge, debate, communication and method development. Key players among these parties, of course, are the disability organizations, which keep the politicians on their toes. Other interested parties include design and architect associations, design and architecture firms, municipalities and NGOs including Design for All networks.

One of the network organizations in Europe is EIDD – Design for All Europe established in 1993 by the Irish designer Paul Hogan. EIDD has 22 members in European countries, whom are volunteers in promoting Design for All through lobbying, conferences, projects and dedicated national networks. In 2004, EIDD passed “The Stockholm Declaration”. This document forms the political and philosophical basis for the individual national member organizations (www.designforalleurope.org).

1.3. The UN convention and demographics

The Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Scandinavian countries between 2007 and 2009 made it clear that human rights also apply to people with disabilities. Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden already have anti-discrimination legislation in place. As mentioned above, the convention will undoubtedly have a substantial impact on the necessity of and interest in ensuring that all products, buildings, outdoor areas, transport, IT, information, services are designed for All citizens.

Demographic developments are particularly important. Technological development is another trend that largely benefits people with disabilities. Design for All and user-friendly products and services can play an important role in compensating for functional impairments and in enabling participation and independence. Furthermore, they can be a source of added value and commercial potential (Lindberg, 2006).

1.4. Joint Scandinavian projects

The common Scandinavian platform has formed the basis for joint Scandinavian activities and projects that have provided momentum and inspiration for the development of methods, solutions and strategies related to accessibility and Design for All.

Through a substantial number of Scandinavian projects, conferences and publications, the Nordic Council on Disability Policy (NHPR) and its secretariat, the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues (former Nordic Cooperation on Disability), has helped to disseminate Scandinavian knowledge and experience about Design for All to professionals, private individuals, agencies and government ministries in the Scandinavian countries. This effort includes the conferences and contests *The Modern Journey*, 2003, *Culture for All*, *City Planning for All*, and *Tourism for All* as well as the magazine “*Form & Funktion – Nordic Design for All Magazine*” published by *Nordic Cooperation on Disability* (2002–2004).

In 2002, a joint Scandinavian committee under the NHPR issued a weighty report: “*Design for Alle/universell utforming i Norden – strategi for sterkere samarbeid*” (Design for All in the Scandinavian regions – a strategy for enhanced collaboration), which formed the basis for a Scandinavian action plan on Design for All 2005–2007 and also sparked some of the projects mentioned above.

In recent years, the NHPR and the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues have focused more on welfare, disability policies, equal opportunities and children.

1.5. Scandinavian promotion efforts

There has been quite many as well as spectacular Design for All dissemination and promotion projects in the Scandinavian countries over the past 15 years.

During the first years of the Danish government action plan, disseminating information about Design for All to a wide range of recipients was a high priority; this took place in the form of newsletters, campaigns, publications and conferences aimed at manufactures, construction, IT and transportation. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Danish Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs ran large accessibility campaigns focussing initially on senior citizens' needs and later on younger people. The campaigns involved TV-ads, folders, postcards, print-media ads, and posters in all Danish train stations. The Danish Ministry of Culture gave out “*The Accessibility Award*” in 2001 through 2003, and the Danish Centre for Accessibility published a large number of exemplar collections (books and websites) relating to architecture, culture and educational institutions as well as reports about Smart Homes, packaging and other key topics.

From 1998 through 2004, no fewer than three magazines about Design for All were launched. The Danish “*Tilgængelighed for Alle*” (Accessible for All) published by Danish Centre for Accessibility, the European “*Crisp & Clear – European Magazine on Design for All*” published by EIDD and the Scandinavian “*Form & Funktion – Scandinavian Design for All Magazine*” published by Nordic Cooperation on Disability during 2002–2004. The target groups were designers, architects and political decision-makers, and the magazines were based on journalistic principles which were a new way of promoting the Design for all message.

The Norwegian Ministry of the Environment has been the most active department in relation to Design for All; among their initiatives is a website on universal design and a newsletter that was launched in 2003, mainly with information on government initiatives and construction. Byggforalle.no is another website established by the government agency Statsbygg; it mainly provides information about accessibility in the built environment.

Since 2004, the Norwegian Design Council (NDC) has had Design for All as a key focus area visible on their website and in the same year they established a new Design for All category in their Awards for Design Excellence and Young Talents Awards.

The Delta Centre is a Norwegian government Resource Centre for Participation and Accessibility for persons with disabilities founded in 1994. The Delta Centre is involved in projects and networks and has issued a wide range of publications on universal design. Their objective is to help put individual initiatives and services into a larger perspective. They work across sectors in areas that include all life arenas with the goal of improving conditions for people with disabilities.

EIDD Sweden is behind the project DESIGN FÖR ALLA.SE (2005–2008) together with SVID (The Swedish Industrial Design Foundation), Handisam (The Swedish Agency for Disability Policy Coordination) and HSO (The Swedish Disability Federation). The purpose was to increase the demand for Design for All know-how within public procurement and private enterprises. In the context

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