TRENDS IN UNIVERSAL DESIGN

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In the epistemological fault zone that designers are currently traversing, the renaissance ideal of *designing for the universal person* is gradually being transformed into a post-modern goal of *universal designing for the relevant variety of real people in real situations*, thus also for people with permanent, temporary and / or situational functional limitations.[1]

Universal Design is gradually becoming a global concept that represents integral and inclusive design for everyone. Originally it focused on the built environment and the designs and appliances that take into consideration the current diversity of its users, limber or not, aurally and visually impaired or not, overweight or slender, more or less intelligent. This design approach also takes into consideration the future needs of people in terms of life cycle, and of temporary or (later) permanent function limitations, and 'handicap situations'.

The Universal Design concept / paradigm has been further criticized and shaped in numerous local conferences and symposia, but specifically in the larger global UD conferences, with participants from all over the world who have contributed to an analysis of trends in the social, academic and professional perception of Universal Design.
After the very successful UD2012 Conference in Oslo, the Norwegian Delta Centre published 'Trends in Universal Design' [2]
It gives an anthology with global perspectives, theoretical aspects and real world examples, an inspiring analysis of recent cultural shifts in design thinking. Two years later, at UD2014 'Three Days of Creativity and Diversity' in Lund (Sweden) the report was used in an interesting workshop, where the spotted trends were further analyzed and criticized.

Three major shifts were pinpointed :
- From politics / regulation, to INNOVATION
- From accessibility to INCLUSION
- From barriers to SUSTAINABILITY

A general conclusion might be that the concept of Universal Design (UD) has gradually acquired global significance in the social, the academic, and the professional field, and is now going mainstream. However we also see that there is not yet a methodological framework to structure underlying scientific investigation and to support related teaching.

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[1] Froyen, H. (2012). Universal Design. A methodological approach. A pathway to human-friendly and elegant architecture. Boston, MA (USA): Institute for Human Centered Design, p.6 (Introduction)

[2] Haugeto, Åse Kari. (2013). Trends in Universal Design. An anthology with global perspectives, theoretical aspects and real world examples. Oslo : Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs, The Delta Centre. ISBN 978-82-8003-101-3

Legislation, in the form of prescriptive codes and standards guides the design practice and sets minimal standards, but it contributes little or nothing to the academic debate.

'Prescriptive approaches', with laws and regulations, are of crucial importance of course in guaranteeing basic human accessibility rights, but these will not suffice… Critical thinking is required to draw rational inferences about design, from prescriptive rules that rather emphasize the How-it-should-be-done, but that don't explain How-it-affects-users.

'Descriptive approaches' in contrast, are performance based, they require understanding, they honor architecture as a science-based art and emphasize full creativity (not just requirements), and multi-sensorial experience & elegance.
We firmly believe that certainly the design education process should be guided by a 'Descriptive approach' and subsequently our conclusions to this end all fall under the heading 'Constructing a UD Culture'

Conclusion 1. Universal Design (co-)education
Universal Design, in an educational setting, entails a return to the real world, to immediacy and to personal experiences away from abstraction. The academic world offers possibilities to act as SENSOR for social and economic realities and changes. Simultaneously it also provides space and time in its role as an INCUBATOR for innovation, for steps towards the shaping of a more human-friendly environment for all.

Conclusion 2.
At the beginning of the 21st Century, no longer the technical question 'Which techniques to use ?', but the anthropological question should be central : ' What human-made (social / physical / virtual) environments do we want, how accessible, usable and enjoyable by all, in all circumstances and in all stages of life..?'
The anthropological question at the heart, and the design of physical, social and virtual environments should be thoroughly Human-Centred.

Conclusion 3.
Universal Design, or Design for All, as a utopian construct, deeply rooted in human rights and in human search for comfort and elegance, echoes the motto of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and by virtue of its 'unattainability' entails a constant need for regeneration in mentality, culture, dynamics, processes, ethics and in values.

Analysis of trends in UD

Åse Kari Haugeto, Head of the Delta Centre. *Trend Spotting at UD2012 Oslo*

- From politics / regulation to **INNOVATION**
- From accessibility to **INCLUSION**
- From barriers to **SUSTAINABILITY**

● Analysis from a Scandinavian (trendsetter) perspective

● Trends or actions ? (cf. national action plan on disability policy, 'From Patient to Citizen', 2000) ? Or both ?

● 'Trends' in the philosophical & socio-political dimensions of UD (MACRO), rather than 'Trends' in the daily professional practice of UD (MICRO)

One step back:
Analysis of trends in Design

During the 1980s and 1990s architecture retreated from a former interest in the social sciences and the needs of people, into its traditional domain as a profession concerned primarily with aesthetics (Milner and Edge 1998)

Milner, J. and Edge, M. (1998). 'Universal Design: A Social Agenda Within the Ecologically Designed Built Environment' in "Shifting Balances: Changing Roles in Policy, Research and Design". Proceedings of IAPS Biennial Conference, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, 14-17 July 1998, 31

Analysis of trends in Design

'Designer-centred design'
'Technology-centred design'
'Market-centred design'

Whitney, P. (2003). Design in a Global World. Interview with Professor Patrick Whitney, 4 November 2002, EAAE News Sheet 66, June 2003, 21
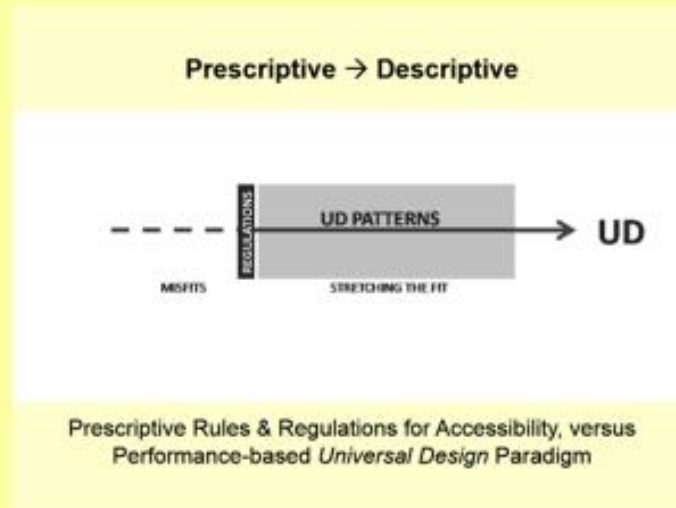
Shift to Human-Centred Design
As an absolute prerequisite for Universal Design

Analysis of trends in UD

A. From politics / regulation to **INNOVATION**

Prescriptive → Descriptive

Prescriptive Rules & Regulations for Accessibility, versus
Performance-based *Universal Design* Paradigm

Analysis of trends in UD

B. From accessibility to **INCLUSION**
- Inclusion in : *En-abling* Social – Physical – Virtual worlds.
- Inclusion in new 'Cultural Model'

Models of disability				
Model Dimensions	**Religious Model**	**Medical Model**	**Social Model**	**Cultural Model**
Roots	God(s)	Natural World	Social structure	Human thought
Localization	Evil Force(s)	Individual	Society	Representations
Problem level	Punishment or gift	Measurable defect	Interaction pattern	Identity
Explanation	Cosmology	Natural Sciences	Social Sciences	Humanities
Quality of Life	Marginal, Exceptional	Diminished	Being-in-the-world	Transformational
Approach	Existential ("Why?")	Technical ("How?")	Justice	Critique

Devlieger, P., Rusch, F., & Pfeiffer, D. (2003). Rethinking disability as same and different! Toward a cultural model of disability. In P. Devlieger, F. Rusch, & D. Pfeiffer (Eds.), Rethinking disability: The emergence of new definitions, concepts, and communities. Philadelphia: Garant, 9-16

Analysis of trends in UD

## C. From barriers to **SUSTAINABILITY**

'Sustainable Architecture built on the Perspective of Universal Design'

- Environment
- Economy
- Equity
- **Elegance**

Herssens, J., Dujardin, M., Froyen, H. (2014). Designing for Sustainability: A Framework for Sustainable Architecture built on the Perspective of Universal Design. In : Khan, A.Z. Architecture and Sustainability: Critical Perspectives. Leuven : KULeuven

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Human-Friendly
Physical Environments - Social Environments - Virtual Environments
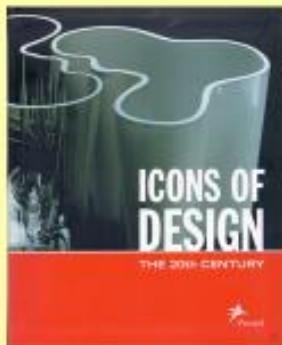
Aalto Vase, 1936

Metro Copenhagen, 2014

Smartphone

At the beginning of the 21st Century, no longer the technical question, ' What technological solution..', but the anthropological question should be central : ' What built environments do we want, how accessible, usable and enjoyable by all, in all circumstances and in all stages of life..?'

THANK YOU

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UD Housing Lab
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