Public information- Barrier or bridge?

The use of universal design of information to improve accessibility and inclusion to the physical library: how library information can act as a bridge or a barrier to the physical library for people with disabilities.

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A visit to a public space like a library is a journey through different professional spheres and domains. Your success might be defined by both the cityscape, the public transport system, the building itself as well as the staff and services offered at the library. All areas that are formed and described in different ways by public or private actors. Each step of the way may or may not be accessible and knowing how to avoid the gaps might mean the difference between success or failure.

For persons with disabilities, the access to useful and reliable information can be defining for how, when and if they choose to visit recreative public spaces like libraries. Several first-person narratives and academic papers describe the lengthy information retrieval process, and the problems arising from insufficient or incorrect information (e.g., Lid 2016, Lingsom 2012, Catapano 2020).

Susan Lingsom describes the journey into the public space for a person with disabilities as a temporal journey, that includes four phases: anticipation, preparation, reflection, and recovery (Lingsom 2012). The process is iterative, the four phases are repeated both before, during, and after the physical journey. All these phases require specific information and missing, or faulty information might be detrimental to each phase.

In the paper I explore how information about programs and events at public libraries might affect patrons with disabilities and their decisions to attend cultural events.

Based on descriptions of 50 events at 10 different Danish public library systems and interviews with 3 young persons with physical impairment, I have explored what Ron Maces original thoughts of "designs being both functional and attractive" might mean in an information context as well as how information might help achieve Steinfeld and Maisel's focus on the users experience of e.g., wellness and social integration in the 8 goals for universal design. (Mace 1985, Steinfeld and Maisel 2012).

The examination shows that event descriptions on the library websites and information and services aimed at persons with impairment or disabilities on the library websites, is often sparse, faulty, or missing. In the cases where information is available it is often separate from the rest of the information and institutional in both aesthetic and language.

The interviewees experienced that library information aimed at them was separate from the general information, or as one interviewee stated, the accessibility information on the library webpage was "a whole different world".

The interviewees to some degree mirror the experience of the library information, onto their expectation of the library itself. If the event information and accessibility information is separate or lacking, they expected their experience at an event may also be lacking.

Based on the interviews I conclude that dividing information into "general" information and "special" information in both placement, graphic design, and language, creates an informational "heterotopia of deviance"(Foucault 1984). This effects the reflections on both anticipation, preparation, and recovery for the interviewees and thus the motivation to participate in events and programming at local libraries.

This paper aims to suggest a model for library communication that considers both Lingsoms phases of the temporal journey into public space, and the goals for universal design on a social and emotional level for the individual, in the

hope of creating library information that support access to the library as public space on a physical, emotional, and social level.

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