



Welcome to the Library

Universal Design for Active and Social Lives





KOMMUNESEKTORENS ORGANISASJON

The Norwegian Association of Local and
Regional Authorities

COVER PHOTO: Annett Eidsvåg
Garvik loves books and is often found
at Bergen Library. Read more on
page 4. (Photo: Fredrik Naumann/
Felix Features)

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This booklet was inspired by the members of KS Municipal Network for Universal Design, established in 2013 and funded by the Ministry of Culture. The goal is to contribute to an inclusive society by sharing best practices and removing barriers.



“According to the Public Library Act,
libraries should be a welcoming
place for everyone. This means that
they need to be accessible – and free.”

Sølvi Tellefsen, Head Librarian, Lillestrøm Library

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**Bodø Library,
read more on
page 3.**

From "book storage" to meeting place

Libraries in Norwegian municipalities are transforming. What was once a quiet space for borrowing books has evolved into active meeting places, arenas for debate, and cultural venues.

More than half of the population has used a public library, either physically or digitally, in the past 12 months. This is according to a survey conducted by the National Library of Norway in March 2023.

The Library Act is crystal clear: libraries must be for everyone. This includes ensuring they are universally designed. This booklet highlights how libraries across the country have taken steps to become more accessible.

All projects face challenges. The examples in this booklet are not intended to serve as perfect examples, but rather as inspiration and learning opportunities. We have intentionally challenged everyone we interviewed to reflect on what they could have done differently.

Uniting the past and future

“I love old buildings and I love books! Having the opportunity to experience the building details and books here at the Main Library in Bergen has done wonders for my quality of life,” says Annett Garvik.



First construction phase in 1917
Designed by architect Olaf Nordhagen
Designated a historic landmark in 1993



PURE JOY: “I just love being here in this building, in this star-shaped layout, surrounded by books,” says Annett Garvik. The shelves are a bit high, but are listed, so there’s not much that can be done about that.”

She affectionately runs her fingers over the spines of the books in the solid and imposing bookcases made of dark wood in the main room. She slowly rolls between the bookcases, taking in the impressive surroundings.

“There’s something about the atmosphere in old buildings that is inspiring. You get a sense of continuity, of being part of a long line of people who have lived or are still living,” she says and continues,

“I’m a history nerd who loves museums and old buildings, all the places that are often difficult for me to access. That’s why it means so much to me when old buildings are made

accessible. And the Main Library is one of the most beautiful buildings in Bergen in my opinion. The very heart of the city in fact.”

AESTHETICS AND FUNCTION

Books have been Annett Garvik’s constant companion since childhood, in spite of her dyslexia. The wheelchair became part of her life when she was in her 20s. Today, she runs the Instagram account #AccessibleBergen. She assesses how accessible the City of Bergen is for people with a variety of functional abilities.

“That Instagram account is a great initiative. It’s taught me a lot and I was happy when I





ELEGANT: High-contrast stairs that elegantly circle around the lift, installed when the extension with the café and main entrance was built in 2010.

→ saw you posted about the Main Library,” says Anne Marthe Dyvi, advisor for aesthetics, sustainability and functional environments at the Bergen Public Library.

The title speaks volumes about the library’s ambitions. And reflects the challenges faced at places like Main Library: A beautiful landmark building that incorporates today’s library’s ideals, in which transparency and activity, inclusion and diversity are the mantra.

“We’re a community factory! Being together makes us better people, especially when we encounter people who are different from us,” says Dyvi about the library’s important function as a meeting place. For everyone.

STEP BY STEP

The Bergen Public Library is Norway’s second largest public library and was established in 1872. Valborg Platou was the city’s first library director. Her name adorns the square in front of the Main Library, which was completed in 1917 and financed by city residents.

Over more than 100 years, the stately building has been gradually expanded and adapted to the times we live in. In the 2000s, two new extensions and a lift were added to the Main Library. The most recent extension from 2011 houses an auditorium that can accommodate 100 people. And with that, the architect’s original vision was finally finalised: The symmetrical shape he had imagined was a reality.



EYE LEVEL: Height-adjustable desks ensure access for and eye contact with all users: high and low, sitting and standing.



RIGHT HEIGHT: Annett Garvik is pleased that she no longer needs assistance to return books when in a hurry, but can use the automated book return system outside the library.



ORANGE CONTRAST: A library user had pointed out that it was difficult to see the black granite steps leading down to the lower level. A single orange contrast stripe solved the problem.





A HUB OF ACTIVITY: On the day this picture was taken, the Friends of the Earth Norway organisation was holding an event in the café in connection with Vintage and Second-Hand Week. Anyone wearing a hearing aid with the T-coil setting can connect to the hearing loop.

→ In later years, the focus has shifted increasingly towards making the Main Library accessible to everyone. An important milestone towards achieving this was when the new universally designed entrance was completed in 2014.

“Next on the to-do list is an extensive upgrade of the technical infrastructure, such as the electrical system, heating, lighting and ventilation. The Agency for Development in the City of Bergen is the commissioning party. This will make the Main Library a better building to spend time in for everyone for the next 100 years,” says Dyvi.

NEW VERSUS OLD

A good example of a challenge that arises when accessibility requirements go head-to-head with historic landmark requirements are the book-

cases in a star-shaped layout in the main room.

– “They’re part of the original interior and subject to special protection. This means that we cannot move them or make interior changes to the bookcases. But we have made adaptations to the sight lines: We have moved the information desk to make navigation easier,” explains Dyvi, and adds,

– “In old buildings, you need to figure out good solutions within the constraints imposed.”

– “I get very annoyed when it’s hard to get around a new building. But with old buildings, I understand that accessibility was not a consideration when it was built. At the same time, it’s no fun to be excluded from history. This is why it is so important to make an effort,” adds Annett Garvik.



SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING: Old buildings often twist and turn a bit, so wayfinding is important. At the Main Library, all rooms have black contrast letters on the door frames. Strategically located and colourful counters make it easy to find staff members.

“To me, the library is the very heart of the city centre.”

Annett Garvik

“As a wheelchair user, the new entrance is nothing short of magic because now I can finally go to the library on my own,” wrote Garvik in her Instagram review of the Main Library.

Before, she had to use the back entrance, which meant going down a (far too steep) ramp to the basement to access the lift. Which did not exactly give wheelchair users a sense of being welcome.

THE VALUE OF INDEPENDENCE

“Before the new entrance was built in 2014, I rarely went to the library because I couldn’t go there alone. Now, it’s one of the places in Bergen I visit most often,” says Garvik.

The latest addition to the library was made in 2022: Newly renovated public areas with new rooms and functions and better lighting in

what used to be a dark basement. This is where the Sustainability Lab is located, which has everything from sewing machines to 3D printers and laser cutters, as well as a bookable meeting room and podcast and film studio.

“Not everything is 100% accessible. There was a bit of horse-trading between preservation and accessibility. But sometimes, perfect can be the enemy of good,” says Dyvi.

Garvik has a few suggestions for improvements. Dyvi takes notes diligently.

“It will always be a work in progress. Running a library requires continuous improvement efforts. We will continue to adapt to new needs and update our services at the intersection of societal development, user input, legislation and political decisions about our activities,” she says. ●





Anne Marthe Dyvi, advisor for sustainability, aesthetics and functional environments, and Marit Skotvoll, head of operations and joint services, Bergen Public Library

Solutions:

- Threshold-free main entrance with automatic doors to replace steps and heavy doors (2014)
- Lift to all floors next to the main entrance, so wheelchair users do not have to take the service lift (2010)
- Lift adjacent to the stairs
- Height-adjustable book checkout and return machines (2022)
- Height-adjustable desks
- Wheelchair-accessible outdoor book return slot (2022)
- Hearing loop in all rooms where events are held (2022)
- Information desk relocated to the main room to increase its visibility
- Clearer signage and markings with text and contrast colours for easy wayfinding
- New lighting in some of the public areas (2021–2023)
- Placement of bookcases to allow sufficient space for a wheelchair
- New power outlets for user charging, so that the cables are not a tripping hazard in the work areas on the mezzanine
- New bathrooms with colour contrast on floor and walls
- Accessible toilet
- Step-free lower floor improved with level thresholds where possible

What we could have done differently:

- Once all the technical upgrades are in place, such as lighting and ventilation, we plan to improve the wayfinding system. The project spans over several years.
- We've made a few accessibility improvements on our websites, insofar as possible with today's solution. The National Library of Norway has launched a project to create a national digital infrastructure.
- Valborg Platou square, the urban space that connects the library to the Bergen Storesenter (Shopping Center) and parts of the Nonneseter Abbey ruins, consists of stone in various shades of grey. The disorderly grid pattern, poor contrast on the steps and height differences make it difficult for visitors with a visual impairment to navigate. The City of Bergen has plans to improve the square.

“It will always be a work in progress.”

Anne Marthe Dyvi

Social inclusion

Today's libraries do much more than book lending.

Bergen Public Library offers free classes, activities and events every week. When we were there, it was Vintage and Second-Hand Week in Bergen and an event organised by Friends of the Earth Norway was in full swing in the café. Those with a hearing impairment in the auditorium can connect to the hearing loop, which is installed in all rooms where public events are held.

“What matters most is the opportunity to participate on equal terms. For many people with hearing challenges, a hearing loop is essential for participation,” says Jan Erik Hagesæter, a representative of the National Federation for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for Western Norway.

“Knowing that the audio will be transferred directly to my hearing aid from the hearing loop makes it easier for me to take part in events organised by the library. I don't have to worry

about whether or not I will hear what is being said,” says Hagesæter and points out that this is something experienced by more people than you think. In fact, one million Norwegians have some form of hearing impairment.

“It's simply not right to exclude such a large group of people,” says Hagesæter.

He recommends seeking professional expertise when installing a hearing loop and sound system.

“The technology is continuously evolving. One of the reasons that the sound system is so good here is because the Main Library enlisted the help of professionals when upgrading the audio system,” says Hagesæter and emphasises the importance of involving users during the design and testing phases.

“They're the ones who know what works and what doesn't.”



1) HEARING LOOP & SOUNDPROOFING:

“Architects tend to prefer shiny, hard surfaces, but these create an echo that makes things difficult for those of us with a hearing impairment,” says Jan Erik Hagesæter. He is impressed by the auditorium at the Main Library, which has good soundproofing and hearing loops.



2) MAINTENANCE & TRAINING:

There is no point to having high-quality equipment if the staff does not know how to use it or whether it works. “This is something we come across often. But not here at the Main Library, where everything has been thought through,” says Jan Erik Hagesæter.

Facilitating quality of life

The planning of Halden's new library did not start at the drawing board, but with a living conditions survey.



New library
in former
shopping centre

Opened in 2022
Public space of around 1,400 square metres



LOTS OF VISITORS: Access is easy from both the street and car park.

“And the survey is the reason we’re sitting here today,” says Gun Kleve, special adviser in the Department for Community Development in the Municipality of Halden.

‘Here’ is a former shopping centre in the northern part of the Halden city centre. It turned out to be the perfect location for the new library, which opened in January 2022. Kleve goes back a few years:

“In the past, the focus was perhaps more on land plots, streets and roads and the actual design of the building when planning city centres. But being a municipality with poverty-related problems, we also wanted to focus on social factors this time,” explains Kleve.

The survey clarified which area had the most residents with less education, lower incomes and a high percentage of rental flats. Several parallel processes in the municipality resulted in a plan that would give the area a boost in several ways.

MEETING PLACES

One of the goals was to establish meeting places – both outside and inside. This is why the municipality secured the building via the Halden municipal pension fund. The pension fund purchased it first and then sold it to the city.

“It’s important that people have the possibility to meet people of different generations and socio-economic backgrounds. The library forms the heart of the building, a place where people can spend time, whether rich or poor.





SAFETY FIRST: Handrails, markings and stair nosing make stairs safer to use.

→ “It’s all about the possibility to learn: to read books, learn something new, learn about democracy so to speak. And it’s about the possibility to meet other people. That in itself can help prevent loneliness. There are a lot of people who live alone in the city centre,” says Gun Kleve.

A THRIVING CITY CENTRE

Several other municipal organisations that used to be spread across the city and were housed in tight quarters were also relocated to the shopping centre, now called ‘Skofabrikken’, such as the Family House (which houses child protection services, pedagogical & psychological services and the maternity and child healthcare centre), a youth centre, cinema and volunteer centre. The restoration of a school and sports arena is also in the works.

“The ultimate goal is to have a thriving city centre, keep families in the centre and achieve a more diverse group of residents in the area,” explains Kleve.

The library used to be located further away in an old converted school. In more recent years,



CLEAR LANGUAGE: White letters against a dark background promotes better readability.



TWO IN ONE: The light shaped like a tree not only emits light, but also absorbs sound.

maintenance had become a challenging issue, with a leaking roof and defiant lift.

– “The lift was old and often out of service for longer periods of time. This made it difficult for many people to use the library,” says Bente Bjørk, occupational therapist and universal design adviser in the Municipality of Halden.

When the new library was in the design phase, several aspects were already in place.

– “Take the shopping centre lift, for instance. It was not an option to install a separate lift inside the library itself, but the old one had to be used, which is located just outside,” explains Bente Bjørk.

“Being a municipality with poverty-related problems, we also wanted to focus on social factors.”

Gun Kleve



COMFORTABLE SEATING: Armrests are important for being able to get in and out of the chair safely.



REGULARS: Ingrid Brekke (left) and Wilhelmine Martinsen started nursing studies in the autumn of 2023. They get together at the library in Halden every Wednesday to study.



KEEPING IT SIMPLE: Solid wheels make it easy to move the bookshelves around.

→ Another consideration was the bathrooms. The space just outside the main entrance has been significantly improved, linking together the outside areas and making Skofabrikken accessible to everyone.

“There’s no point in having a building with a fantastic interior if it just sits there like an island.”

TIME WILL TELL

Both floors of the library have an information desk.

“We imagined that everyone would go straight to the desk, but it turns out that it is little used, so we plan to move it to a more central location,” says head librarian Sven Lilleheier about the reception desk at the top.

He also believes it may be a good idea in some areas to wait with adding orientation lines.

“It’s easy to plan everything on paper and assume which direction people will walk and add the orientation lines there. But user experiences will reveal how people actually use the library.

Once the orientation lines are in place, we need to be sure that the furniture is effectively placed – and kept in place – so that we’re not sending people into no man’s land.”

POPULAR DESTINATION

After the library opened, it has become a popular destination for locals. During all of 2021, the old library had 46,000 visitors. That number was partly the result of the pandemic, but the following year, the total number was close to 150,000, and around the same in 2023.

Two locals who use the Halden Library often are nursing students Ingrid Brekke and Wilhelmine Martinsen. They get together to study here every Wednesday.

“We’ve discovered that we get a lot more done here than at home. We can book a group room, but like to sit here,” say the two students about their favourite spot in a quiet corner of the second floor.



A POWER HOUSE: “Homework help, lectures, kindergarten field trips, a study place – and book loans. The library offers all these things and people take advantage of this,” says head librarian Sven Lilleheier.

They almost never went to the old library.

“Only if we were there on a school field trip, never on our own.”

IMPROVED PUBLIC HEALTH

Over the past ten years, Halden’s public health profile has improved in many areas, such as higher education. Other areas are more challenging.

“There are many factors that have an impact, such as bad advice. That makes it all the more important that the municipality does what it can to shift things in the right direction. This is why the library and everything inside it is so important. It’s free and it’s accessible to everyone,” concludes special adviser in the Department for Community Development Gun Kleve. ●



Bente Bjørk, occupational therapist and universal design adviser, and Gun Kleve, special adviser in the Department for Community Development in the Municipality of Halden

Solutions:

- Direct access from the car park, with plenty of accessible parking spaces
- Main entrance from the street at the end of the pedestrian street. Street level has been upgraded for easier access
- Clear marking of all columns
- Marking of all windows and contrast
- Height-adjustable counter
- Information desk on every floor
- Orientation lines
- Signage with good contrast: White on black
- Stage for events

What we could have done differently:

- Bathroom in the library itself, not the common area. This was not a priority or option
- Separate lift in the library (the book lift can be used, but is hardly ideal). Visitors now have to go out into the hallway to take the lift to other floors. We plan to provide information/signs about this.
- Information desk on second floor is not used much and will be relocated
- It is not possible to access the stage with a wheelchair.

Lillestrøm's new meeting place

The library has given the growth municipality of Lillestrøm a meeting place for everyone. During the first year alone, it welcomed close to 600,000 visitors.



Opened in 2022
Building with three floors of around 1,000 square metres each



NEW ACQUAINTANCES: They used to nod to each other, but after the Lillestrøm Library opened, Øivind Langset (left) and Reidar Askildsen have gotten better acquainted. They meet at this table – together with a group of others – regularly.

We call it the mini Deichman,” say Øivind Langset and Reidar Askildsen with a smile, making reference to Oslo’s largest library.

It is here at the newspaper table in the Lillestrøm Library that they have gotten to know each other better. They used to nod to each other, but these gentlemen now meet regularly to chat and read together with others. There’s no need to agree on a date because after only a year since opening in 2022, the library already has a group of regulars, all with the same habits. Between 1,000 and 1,500 people use the library every day.

“I started coming here after I retired because I suddenly had lots of time on my hands. I’m part of a small group that gets together two or three times a week,” says Øivind.

He almost never set foot inside a library in the past, while Reidar has always been a frequent user. Now both of them very much enjoy the city’s new meeting place.



SOUND-ABSORBING: The lamps provide light while muffling sound. The chairs are solid and have armrests to make it easy to get up and sit down.

“A building like this makes you understand why you pay taxes,” they claim.

GROWTH MUNICIPALITY

Tax revenue was in fact one of the reasons why Lillestrøm was able to spare no effort in building the new library.

“We’re the ninth largest municipality in Norway and the fastest growing one after Oslo. We’re experiencing rapid commercial and population growth (with a current population of around 95,000) and the majority of residents are of working age. This gives the municipality relatively high tax revenue,” says Sølvi Tellefsen, who has been involved in the project from the very start. The building houses a library, offices, school of music and performing arts and a large rehearsal space. The library’s inventory and technical equipment carry a price tag of around NOK 25 million.



→ CLOSE TO THE TRAIN STATION

The building is located opposite the railway station, which also happens to be the country's third busiest transport hub, after Oslo S and the National Theatre. The library's neighbours are a school of music and performing arts and a youth centre, all of which are connected by a popular park.

"The library is positioned as a natural gateway to the city centre, a block from the start of the pedestrian street," says Sølvi Tellefsen, pointing out that this location is absolutely essential.

"The library is intended for everyone in the entire municipality. There is no point to having a building with a universal design if it is difficult to get to. It's easy to reach by foot, bike, bus, train or car, which can be parked in the underground car park, which has a lift."

MEETING PLACE

The library has three floors. The first floor serves as a meeting place, with an information desk, sitting areas, quiet zones and two stages – the one designed as an amphitheatre and the other with a flexible layout and soundproof carpet. The second floor has a zone that is designated for children and families and has a kitchen. This floor also has a special zone for young people – with a well-equipped multipurpose room – and a library garden. The third floor is the quietest of the three, tailored to learning, tutoring and meetings.

POPULAR DESTINATION

Around a year and a half after the library opened in the autumn of 2022, the head librarian is still very pleased.

"According to the Public Library Act, libraries should be a welcoming place for everyone. This means that they need to be accessible – and free. There was a need for this kind of gathering place. We really struck a chord with residents and the library has become a place where people come to experience something, get together and



NEW MEETING PLACE: Lillestrøm's new meeting place is very centrally located close to bus and train routes and only a block from the pedestrian street.



ROLL RIGHT UP: The round table has plenty of space for a wheelchair.

get help or assistance," says Tellefsen.

People flock to the library and in the course of only 14 days in November 2023, for example, there were around 23,000 visitors. But Tellefsen & Co. are not content with high visitor numbers alone. The library also needs to reach out to the people.

"Meeting all requirements for universal design does not necessarily mean that everyone can take advantage of everything we offer. With support from the Norwegian Directorate of Health, we've developed the streaming platform LibraryTV. It gives people the possibility to watch recorded events from home or if they live at an institution," says Sølvi Tellefsen.

The directorate has also provided funding for digital instruction. It's offered at the library in the form of home visits organised through the visiting librarian service.

SELLING HOUSES

Social sustainability is also a focus area for head librarian Tellefsen. This is why the library works with a realtor every Christmas.

"It's not just any kind of houses that are sold, but gingerbread houses. The houses are made by preschoolers and then sold to private individuals and the business community, and the proceeds are then donated in their entirety to organisations that work with children." ●



CLARITY: A dark door and light walls make it easy to navigate inside the building.



GREEN SOUNDPROOFING: A large wall with real, green plants creates a soothing and serene ambience and muffle sounds. Booths provide privacy and a sense of intimacy. But their design does not make them accessible to wheelchair users.



Sølvi Tellefsen,
Head Librarian,
Lillestrøm Library

Solutions:

- Wheeled bookshelves provide flexible furnishings
- Furniture with armrests
- Sound absorbers in the ceiling
- Noise-reducing lighting
- Noise-reducing textile art
- Green plant wall with sound-absorbing effect
- Lighting in fixed bookshelves
- Height-adjustable information desk
- Access solution outside of opening hours (self-service) at wheelchair-accessible height
- Hearing loop
- Clearly marked columns
- Vegetable garden with plenty of room for four-wheelers between the planters

What we could have done differently::

- Dropped the floor-mounted power boxes for charging phones and computers – these are trip hazards and become easily defective because not everyone understands how the cover on the floor works
- Orientation lines leading to the main entrance are often covered with mats – a different solution is needed here
- Build an integrated wheelchair spot in the amphitheatre
- Internal lift can be difficult to use – a different type should have been installed
- Install newspaper and magazine shelves lower
- Better contrast on a number of signs

Knowledge is key

Having technical solutions in place is not necessarily synonymous with a universal design.



Oslo Main Public Library with six floors
19,260 m²



STORYTELLING: “I believe that storytelling is the most important tool we have to promote understanding. We need to use the power and value inherent to it to communicate about books with stories about being different,” says Anne Aagaard.

Orientation lines, handrails, contrasts, lifts, door openers – the list of assistive devices and aids is long. But it should be longer, according to Anne Aagaard, service designer at Deichman, Norway’s largest public library, with a main library and several branches in Oslo.

“The Public Libraries Act is clear. The fundamental principle is that the library, which in many ways is the mainstay of our democracy, is intended for everyone. So, it is our job to ensure this,” she says.

MORE THAN ORIENTATION LINES

Oslo’s new main library, Deichman Bjørvika, opened in the summer of 2020. The spectacular building has six floors full of books and more.

“It’s a new building, so naturally it meets all technical standards when it comes to universal design, although the escalators and lifts could have been wider,” Aagaard points out.

But her focus is not primarily on the technical solutions. She is currently working on a strategic initiative to fulfil the requirements laid down in the Public Libraries Act.

“Universal design is a matter that is close to my heart and is about so much more than orientation lines and lifts, to put it simply. After all, universal design encompasses far more than just disabilities and visual, hearing and cognitive impairments. It has innumerable other aspects and is quite a complex and challenging task.”



“Universal design is a matter that is close to my heart and is about so much more than orientation lines and lifts.”

Anne Aagaard



ILLUMINATED SHELVES: Lighting makes it easy to find what you need.



TWO IN ONE: Soundproofing and lighting in one. The ceiling also has a soundproofing design.

→ **BITE-SIZED CHUNKS**

In 2023, Aagaard began working to gain an overview of the knowledge already present in the organisation and the current approach to universal design. She is guided by four key principles.

“We need to strengthen the knowledge and expertise of the staff, find smart solutions for the rooms and services, and listen to borrowers. A library is so much more than a place to borrow books, which is what makes my job so challenging,” says Anne.

The solution is to break it down into bite-sized chunks. Take, for example, the wide range of smart solutions for the rooms. Aagaard’s method entails finding the contact points, i.e. all the locations and objects with which visitors interact – such as displays, returns, book collections, doors, furniture, shelves, seating and counters

– and answering the following question: How do borrowers experience all of these things?

Or in terms of the collection:

“Which books do we display? Books with easy text? Audio books? Male and female writers? Different ethnicities? Has the diversity perspective been addressed? We need to be active listeners, structure the findings and find the right solutions. Cultivating a culture of collaboration with others who have the right expertise is extremely important,” she says.

ASK THE USERS

This is why she works together with different organisations and associations. These partnerships have resulted in, among other things, a concrete training project based on a deck of cards. Each card has a different theme. One



CLEAR LANGUAGE: The library is often teeming with children and prams. There is a plan in place to establish a new young children’s department on the first floor to help reduce pressure on the lifts.

card, for instance, has the picture of a counter on the front and the back lists a number of factors that should be considered in connection with it, such as practical aspects like placement and height, though also how borrowers should be treated.

Other cards offer insight into who the borrowers may be, the types of challenges they may have and what the library has to offer them.

“Take this one, for instance,” says Aagaard and shows one of the prototype cards. The front reads:

‘I have autism’. The back tells about what is important for persons with autism, such as ‘I want to sit in a safe place’ and ‘I don’t want to sit close to people’.

– “Obviously, it’s essential that this is not something I learn about by googling, but from

the users themselves. For example, 70 people from the national autism association) and 82 from the ADHD Norway organisation told us what is important for them at a library,” explains the service designer.

The same principle applies to the content on the cards that read ‘I have anxiety’, ‘I have dementia’, ‘I have a visual impairment’, ‘I am deaf’,

‘I do not speak your language’, ‘I have ADHD’, and so on.

EMBEDDED KNOWLEDGE

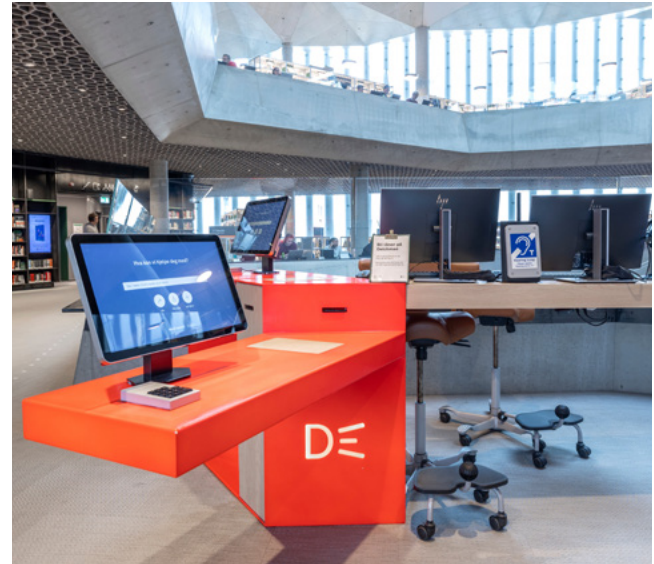
The goal is to empower the staff through knowledge, so that they know how to best interact with those with various types of challenges in different situations. To Anne Aagaard, universal design is primarily about mentality.

“It matters little if only a few people have





EASY ACCESS: Chessboard with easy wheelchair access.



PLENTY OF SPACE: Room for a wheelchair.

→ the right mindset. It needs to be embedded throughout all layers of the organisation.”

That is why she takes different approaches to knowledge sharing, one of which is this set of cards.

“The idea is that the library staff can choose topics from the cards, read about them, discuss them and enhance their knowledge and awareness. This is something that all libraries can do by simply making the cards available in the breakroom. It’s an easy way to develop competence,” she says.

Another approach is to assign internal ambassadors.

“This is all about employees taking ownership, so that I’m not just going around saying ‘Listen up!’ I have considerable faith in a bottom-up approach and have found my tribe of ambassadors, who are very enthusiastic about this.”

USEFUL WAKE-UP CALL

One of the ambassadors is Jørgen Strømme, who has technical responsibility for the rooms and equipment.

“Anne has organised various courses and activities. These have made us a lot more aware of all different aspects of universal design. It’s been a useful wake-up call,” says Strømme, who believes that this knowledge benefits the entire organisation.

“To a much greater degree than today. Anne’s work has advantages for everyone in thinking in terms of universal design on all levels,” adds Strømme.

COLLABORATION

Part of Aagaards’ work is a partnership with the City of Trondheim. The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs has provided funding for a project focusing on universal design in the library’s digital channels.

“I felt it was important that we did not do this alone, so the Trondheim Public Library and Deichman have joined forces. We are two libraries with different perspectives and funding situations that are trying to find common principles shared by all libraries in Norway,” says service designer Aagaard. ●



RIGOROUSLY TESTED: The signs have white lettering against a black background in a reader-friendly font that is used throughout the city. Aagaard was previously involved in a project to design a new visual identity for the City of Oslo. The Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted and Dyslexia Norway are among those who contributed to the final result through rigorous testing.



Anne Aagaard,
Service Designer,
Deichman

Solutions:

- Signs with universally designed fonts in lower case letters – the white line around the signs is important for many users, such as those with dementia
- Sound absorbers in the ceiling
- Noise-reducing lighting
- Handrails with lighting
- Orientation lines
- Search databases and return counters at different heights

The list is not comprehensive, but shows examples of solutions

What we could have done differently:

“We are focusing on one contact point at a time, and do not yet have a complete picture of what works and what doesn’t,” says Anne Aagaard.

GREATER AWARENESS: “The goal is for it to be easier for everyone to use the library and our websites. Anne’s work increases awareness about universal design and helps us to organise our work more effectively,” says her internal universal design ambassador Jørgen Strømme.

The hub of the city

Four times the visitors. Close to 700 annual events. This is what has been achieved since the Bodø Public Library moved out of outdated, cramped quarters and into a large, flexible new building ten years ago.



Bodø Public Library also houses the children and youth library, café, meeting rooms, study rooms, an art showroom and exhibition room.

Opened in 2014
6,300 m²



FOCUS ON LIGHT: Smart use of light creates contrasts that make navigation easier. Avoiding reflection and glare is also important.

At a prime waterside location, two landmark buildings stand side by side: Stormen Concert Hall and Stormen Library. The majestic building with ocean views is quite a contrast to the old library, which was housed in the former city hall built in the 1950s.

“The library was in very poor condition. If you used a wheelchair and wanted to go up to the second floor, you had to ask the staff for help and be escorted to the lift, which was accessed from a hallway at the back,” recalls Sissel Hughes, head of collection development at Stormen Library. It was also a cramped space that was poorly suited to anything other than the lending of books.



PLENTY OF SPACE: Head librarian Stine Qvigstad Jenvin (left) and departmental head Sissel Hughes point out that good aisle width between the rows of bookshelves makes it easy to get around.



→ A WHOLE NEW WORLD

“We barely had room for people to stand, so there were only around 12 events each year,” says Hughes of the old site.

By way of comparison, the new building organised 684 events in 2022, ranging from intimate readings to major productions by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK). Stormen Library replaced the outdated main library and four branches, with around 120,000 annual visitors combined.

“The number of visitors has quadrupled with Stormen,” adds Hughes. She has worked at the Bodø Library for 20 years and has witnessed major changes.

“The library is no longer restricted to the lending of books. The Public Libraries Act clearly states that libraries are to be an activity and meeting place for everyone,” she says.

INDEPENDENCE IS KEY

This means that both the building and its contents must be one-size-fits-all. Several groups were involved in this process, including Jarle Arntzen and Sidsel Agathe Ofstad Simonsen from the Bodø branch of the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted.

“It is important to obtain input early on so that you can avoid having to correct mistakes afterwards,” says Arntzen.

“Exactly, and although we were involved a little late in the process, the overall results turned out well,” adds Ofstad Simonsen.

She lives a 30-minute walk away and likes to visit the library often, preferably in the company of others. She especially enjoys coming here with her children and grandchildren. She and Arntzen, both of whom were born with a severe visual impairment, believe the library meets the required criteria.

“It is important that aspects like surface indicators and contrasts are incorporated,

because otherwise we are completely dependent on an escort wherever we go. That limits our independence,” says Ofstad Simonsen.

During their tour of the library, they point out that the markings on the steps should be clearer.

“Because it’s difficult to distinguish the tread edge,” says Arntzen.



UP CLOSE: The signs, both with white lettering against a dark background and vice versa, work well. “What’s most important is that there is nothing in front of the signs because we need to be able to read them from close up,” notes Jarle Arntzen.



SIMPLER SOLUTION: Instead of the traditional categorisation system, Stormen has opted to organise books in a simpler way. “Making things easier to find is also part of universal design,” says departmental head Sidsel Hughes.



MORE CONTRAST, PLEASE: The stair tread edges have faded over the years. Sidsel Agathe Ofstad Simonsen’s wish to see a more distinct contrast will soon be granted.

Better markings are to be implemented. The municipality has identified the improvement potential of the building and measures to rectify previous mistakes and shortcomings have already been taken.

FOCUS ON LIGHT

On their way up the stairs, Arntzen and Ofstad Simonsen commented positively on the lighting under the double handrail. The smart use of light creates contrasts that make it easier to get around the building.

“The more severe the visual impairment, the greater the need for light. But it is important that it be the right kind of light, namely from above. Otherwise, you end up blinded by the glare, they explain, emphasising that there is no one solution that works for everyone,” says Arntzen and Ofstad Simonsen, adding that:

“There are a wide range of needs, so what is most important is to find solutions that work for the majority. One thing is for certain: universal design not only benefits the groups that truly need it, but offers advantages for everyone.”



ROOM FOR MAGIC: The enchanting multipurpose room is often used for performances and storytime. Only steps lead down to the floor but a ramp can be placed when needed.

FLEXIBLE BUILDING

The objective with the Stormen Library was clear from the very start. It was to be a flexible building.

“How libraries are used has changed considerably over the past ten years, and we can now easily adapt the building to different needs and events,” says head librarian Stine Qvigstad Jenvin.

The mobile bookshelves are especially convenient. But to make sure the solutions are used properly, the staff needs to understand what universal design actually means in practice.

“We are acutely aware, for instance, that there should be no obstacles and that it should be easy for everyone to access everything,” says the head librarian and departmental head.

They also have a focus on enhancing knowledge in other areas.

“That is why we have had experts from the assistive technology centre visit and everyone who reserves a room is strongly urged to use the sound system. Someone once said that they didn’t have a need for it. To which we responded that hearing impairments cannot be seen with the naked eye,” says Sissel Hughes. ●





Head Librarian
Stine Qvigstad Jenvin

Solutions:

- Custom lighting that creates contrasts for easier navigation
- The right brightness in every area: 200 lux in the corridors, 300 lux in the information boards and reading lights that can be adjusted up to 800 lux, brighter light in the reception area than elsewhere
- General lighting principle is smart lighting, with the amount of light emitted adjusted according to the natural daylight
- Shielding to avoid reflection and glare
- Bookcases with lighting
- Flexible furnishings with wheeled bookshelves
- Double handrails with lighting
- Signs with good contrast
- Clear contrast between doors and walls
- Orientation lines leading to information desk
- Simple book categorisation
- Soundproofing
- Heated pavement
- Sufficient width between bookshelves
- Hearing loop
- Lift with voice announcement
- Floor-to-ceiling sound-absorbing walls in auditorium
- Computer with large print keyboard and flexible monitor
- Uniformed staff

What we could have done differently:

- Better marking on columns
- Clear stair tread edges
- Less information on some of the signs, especially directory signs on each floor with only supplementary information for that floor
- Orientation lines directly inside the main entrance
- Orientation lines to the desk in the children's department on the third floor
- Braille under the handrails with floor information
- Different placement of accessible parking
- Better braille information in the lift
- Book return machines may be too high for some users (return desks are right next to them)
- Signs in Sámi
- Sound carries from the courtyard outside the library

A number of these issues are already being improved.



SIMPLIFICATION: According to head librarian Stine Qvigstad Jenvin, the sign contains much too much information, so all excess information will be removed.

Clear message

Not only should the building be designed for all users, but so should the library's Facebook page and website.

Film without subtitles? Long texts? Small print? Text with poor contrast? The library makes every effort to avoid such things. In 2016, an EU directive established the minimum accessibility standard for websites in the public sector. This requires, among other things, audio descriptions of video recordings online and a universally designed intranet and extranet. At the Stormen Library, staff strive to make communications as accessible and clear as possible, both on the website and Facebook pages.

“We do not have a separate communications department, so there are a number of different individuals who post on our channels. That is why we are working to increase everyone’s awareness about universal design,” says head librarian Stine Qvigstad Jenvin.

“Universal design involves much more than removing barriers in the building itself; it also includes how our services are presented,” says departmental head Sissel Hughes.

Light that calms

The children’s department is located at the far end of the top floor of the library, so that kids can play and make noise without disturbing other library users.

And when it comes to sound, Stormen has learned an important lesson.

“When we first opened, we simply switched on all the lights here. It turned out that the light triggered much higher levels of activity in the children. So, we dimmed the lights. This created a completely different and much calmer atmosphere, which has had a clear effect on the children,” explains departmental head Sissel Hughes.



This is how universal design is defined in Norway



Illustration: Bly.as

Norway bases the understanding of universal design on the 1997 definition and seven principles by Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State University (US).

The principles were developed by a group of architects, product designers, engineers and environmental design researchers, led by the late Ron Mace.

Universal design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

Seven principles of universal design

1

EQUITABLE USE

The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

.....

2

FLEXIBILITY IN USE

The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

.....

3

SIMPLE AND INTUITIVE USE

Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level

.....

4

PERCEPTIBLE INFORMATION

The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

.....

5

TOLERANCE FOR ERROR

The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

.....

6

LAV FYSISK ANSTRENGELSE

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

.....

7

LOW PHYSICAL EFFORT

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

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