

# Universal Design and Social Equity

Enhancing Inclusivity in Outdoor Recreation



**KOMMUNSEKTORENS  
ORGANISASJON**

The Norwegian Association of Local and  
Regional Authorities

**COVER IMAGE:** The Hamaren  
Walking Trail in Fyresdal. Read more  
on page 16. (Photo: Fredrik Naumann/  
Felix Features)

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The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) is the organisation for all local governments in Norway. KS is Norway's largest public employer organisation. All of the country's 357 municipalities and 15 county councils are members, as well as about 500 municipal, intermunicipal and county council undertakings.

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.

"Accessibility for all through universal design is a key principle for reaching important target groups, and should be pursued where it is appropriate and does not negatively impact natural values or the quality of experiences."

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On outdoor recreation, from the Norwegian government's action plan: "Sustainability and Equality – A Universally Designed Norway 2021–2025"

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### **Year of Outdoor Recreation**

2025 is the Year of Outdoor Recreation in Norway, a national initiative held every ten years with the goal of increasing participation in outdoor activities across all groups in the population. The initiative is led by Norsk Friluftsliv, the umbrella organisation for 19 major voluntary outdoor recreation organisations, in collaboration with the Ministry of Climate and Environment.

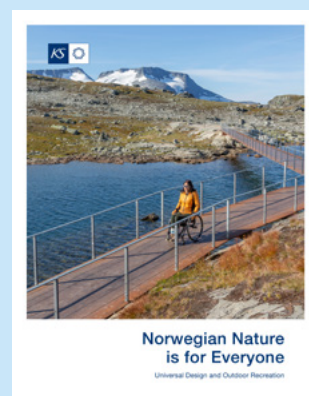
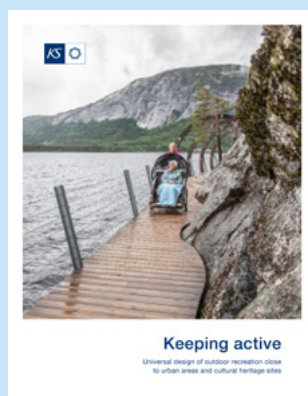
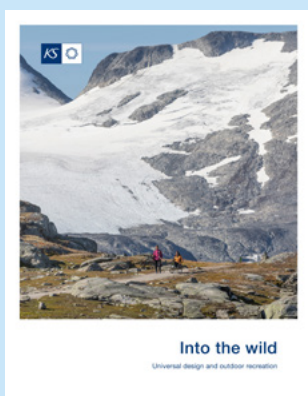


# Let's explore the outdoors!

This booklet showcases a selection of universally designed outdoor recreational areas in Norway that enable even more people to be active, social and enjoy nature – regardless of functional abilities.

Outdoor recreation is deeply rooted in the Norwegian identity and cultural heritage, contributing significantly to quality of life and health. The more people can engage in everyday activities in their local surroundings, the better for public health. Accessible trails near residential areas and easy access to coastlines and waterways are crucial.

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.



**SIMILAR PUBLICATIONS:** For even more examples of universal design that inspire people to explore the outdoors, order the booklets *“Into the wild”* (2022), *“Keeping active”* (2022), and *“Norwegian Nature is for Everyone”* (2023) by contacting [ordre@lupro.no](mailto:ordre@lupro.no). All KS booklets are free of charge. They can also be found online: <https://www.ks.no/fagomrader/velferd/universell-utforming/booklets-on-universal-design/>

**HIGH ABOVE HØLEN:** Marianne Brattås was passionately involved in the fight to save the Hølen viaduct and is very pleased that the railway bridge has been reopened as a footpath.



# From railway bridge to footpath

With a secure grip on her crutches, Marianne Brattås, 49, marches over the Hølen viaduct – the old railway bridge that has become an easily accessible and popular footpath.

“I like to go out and walk, often several times a week,” says Marianne.

Today, she has walked from her home on the north side of the city centre to the Hølen viaduct. She uses crutches because she has osteoarthritis.

“It’s better to have a few aches and pains after being active than complete stiffness because I’ve been sitting still. I like to use the pathway as a starting point for a longer walk into the woods – also on crutches.”

## THE BATTLE

A Western Norwegian dialect reveals that this avid walker is a newcomer to Hølen, a small town located under the old railway bridge in the Municipality of Vestby, south of Oslo. When she first moved here, railway traffic along the Østfold Line had long been relocated to a new double track. The Hølen viaduct was sealed off and had fallen into disrepair over the years, while discussions continued about what would be done with it: demolish or renovate?

“It’s better to have a few aches and pains after being active than complete stiffness because I’ve been sitting still.”

Marianne Brattås

Marianne was among those who were committed to having the bridge restored: “The viaduct is a cultural heritage site and has always been important for Hølen as a link between north and south and as a landmark. The bridge is very conspicuous where it spans high over the river and you can see it from different directions,” she says.

Footpaths were eventually created on both sides of the bridge, but the viaduct itself left a breach in the landscape, a ‘missing link’. Walkers needed to go down into the Hølen town centre and then up again on the other side of the river if they wanted to continue along the footpath.

A solution presented itself when the Municipality of Vestby purchased the Hølen viaduct from Bane NOR for one krone, while Bane NOR, the district authorities and Norwegian Environment Agency helped finance the renovation. The bridge reopened in newly refurbished splendour in the summer of 2021 as an easily accessible walking and cycling path. The viaduct now links together the south and north side of Hølen and has created a continuous footpath of five kilometres from Kjennstjernet to the Sonsveien station. The entire route is a government-controlled recreation area.



**1) DERAILED:** The 150-metre-long Hølen viaduct connects the old train route between Kjenn and Sonsveien station to create a continuous footpath. **2) FULL SPEED AHEAD:** The railroad tracks have been removed and the bridge itself is now a wooden path that can be used by walkers, cyclists and everyone else with wheels.



**NATURE AND CULTURAL HISTORY:** The ‘Smaalensbanen’ gateway marks the start of the path on the north side.

→ Esben Eyde, a recreational consultant in the Municipality of Vestby, is absolutely delighted. The new path can be used by virtually everyone, regardless of functional ability, without major modifications.

### A STROKE OF GENIUS

“It’s a stroke of genius to use old railway tracks because they are flat to begin with,” he says.

Not to mention their exciting cultural history, small bridges and other elements from when trains used to run along the tracks. The footpath and viaduct are signposted with information on Hølen and the Smaalen Line.

The municipality has not had a working counter, so it is not known exactly how many people have used the path.

“It’s taken some time for people who live in the area to establish new habits, but we’ve seen

over the past year that more and more people are using the path for both recreation and as a transport route to school, kindergarten, work and the train station,” says Esben Eyde.

The bridge is an attraction in itself, with many people travelling to the area just to see it.

The recreational consultant is pleased with anything that makes it easier for people to get out and about.

“Not only is it a great way to stay in shape, but it is also well documented that being out in nature is good for us. Even though the footpath is located in a rather urban setting and not far from traffic on Osloveien, you can still have a positive nature experience,” he says.

Kristina Dignes, coordinator for outdoor recreation in Akershus county, shares this viewpoint.



**TAKING A BREAK:** Rest area with picnic table at Kjennstjernet.

“It has been important to create a recreational area that is naturally flat in an area with little other accessible recreational possibilities,” she says and continues,

“The best part about this footpath is that it’s appealing to everyone – without it being specially designed for people with disabilities.”

### POPULAR

Out on the Hølen viaduct, Marianne stops for a moment and rests on her crutches while enjoying the views from the high bridge.

“It’s nice to see Hølen from up here,” she says. She is passed by a few cyclists, children from the activity school and people on foot.

“Even though I like to walk in the woods, it’s also nice to have an easily accessible option. I have no doubt that there are now many more of us who go for a walk in Hølen.” ●



Kristina Dignes,  
Coordinator for  
Outdoor Recreation  
in Akershus county

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### Solutions:

- Renovated the railway bridge to create a flat and easily accessible walking and cycling path
- The bridge connects existing footpaths to create a continuous route of five kilometres between Kjenn and Sonsveien station in Vestby, just south of Oslo.
- New fences, guardrails and handrails
- Wooden path along the 150-metre-long bridge, with asphalt of varying quality along the path north and south of the bridge
- Lighting
- Benches
- Signs with information and ‘Smaalensbanen’ and Hølen centre

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### What we could have done differently:

“Better access from the centre of Hølen up to the bridge. The current two access routes from the centre are somewhat steep on both sides of the river. With a wheelchair, you either have to have strong arms or an electric chair,” says Kristina Dignes, coordinator for outdoor recreation in Akershus county.

“Better surface on the footpath south of the bridge. The gravel here contains waste asphalt, which is coarse and not easy to roll on. There is a noticeable difference from the surface on the north side, which is made of a fine gravel that compacts well to become a solid and stable surface,” says recreational consultant Esben Eyde from the Municipality of Vestby.

**NEW FACILITY IN OSLO:** Sonia Marløv effortlessly rolls out onto the bathing ramp at Huk. The smooth surface is also ideal for anyone who simply needs a stable footing to get into the water.





# A fjord for everyone

A wheelchair is no obstacle when Sonia Marløv, 25, tries out the new bathing ramp at Huk in Oslo. The water temperature is a different story.

“I normally never swim outdoors in Norway, but I’m willing to do it for a good cause,” she says with a smile, referring to her commitment to universal design.

Sonia uses a wheelchair and has helped assess accessibility in public transport in Oslo for Ruter, among other places. Today, she has taken the bus from Nydalen, where she lives, to the popular Huk beach at Bygdøy.

## OVERDUE MAINTENANCE

At Huk, the city has made access a lot easier for everyone to get to the swimming area. A wide and 60-metre-long continuous wooden swimming platform has been constructed with a ramp to make it easy and safe to get into the water, whether you use a wheelchair or need a stable surface to walk on. In the past, visitors had to cross the sand to get to the old swimming ramp. Now, there is no need to be anxious about tripping in the sand or getting wheels stuck.

“We received a lot of inquiries from the public about better access, whether they want to go swimming or go for a walk,” says Jens Åke Jensen, an architect and project manager in the Agency for Urban Environment.

“Many people did not feel entirely safe walking here,” he says.

The Huk area was difficult to navigate, with asphalt paths that ended abruptly and turned into gravel. There were no edges in several places and the asphalt was crumbling into the sand in other areas.

## SUITABLE FOR MOST

The new swimming ramp and pathway were completed by the start of the 2023 swimming season and Sonia is able to wheel over to the water’s edge without a problem. She parks her wheelchair on the ramp while she uses the railing to support herself as she makes her way into the water. It has been 20 years since she last swam outdoors in Norway.

“Sorry, but you’ll have to pardon my French in a moment,” she warns as her toes hit the water.

A few seasoned bathers down at the end of the quay announce a maximum of 16 degrees in the Oslo Fjord on this late summer day. But Sonia is determined to get in the water. And sure enough, she utters the expected expletives – which will not be repeated here.

It turns out to be a short dip. She shivers her way back to her wheelchair.

“The swimming ramp is nice, but there are stones at the bottom where you walk into the water and that’s a bit challenging for me,” she says before wheeling away to the facilities building with an accessible bathroom to get dressed. →



**1) EASY VISIBILITY:** The end of the handrails is painted yellow. **2) PRACTICAL AND ECO-FRIENDLY:** The new access path and swimming ramp are 60 metres long and make it possible to get all the way down to the water's edge without crossing sand. The wooden ramp rests on top of the ground, so it can be removed without causing damage to nature.

### → USER-CENTRED DESIGN

The Agency for Urban Environment prioritised user involvement in designing the new swimming ramp – resulting in concrete changes from the drawing board to the final result: The first drawing of the wooden path was narrow, but made wider after receiving input from user groups. This resulted in more room for people to stop together or pass each other without having to move to the side of the ramp.

“There is a better flow and it feels safer now,” says Jens Åke Jensen.

### CONSIDERATION FOR NATURE

The wooden path has clear edges, but no handrails before the swimming ramp actually begins. Handrails along the entire path would be helpful

for some user groups, but would have resulted in a more dominant presence in the landscape.

It was important not to destroy the nature experience, while at the same time making the area more accessible to more groups. Huk is a protected nature area where it is not permitted to create a permanent structure in the rocks. No rocks were blasted to construct the path and ramp.

“Everything was done as considerate of nature as possible. We laid down cloth, created a foundation and built the wooden path so that it can be removed again,” explains the project manager.

Wood as a material was chosen because it is a warmer and more natural material than concrete in a beach zone.

“Wood is more expensive to maintain, but Huk is one of the most popular beaches in Oslo and



**3) ON THE SWIMMING RAMP:** New outdoor shower with two heights, temporarily out of order due to a water leak when the picture was taken.

we also have to create an area that is inviting and inclusive,” says Jensen.

He emphasises:

“An area like Huk is never truly ‘finished’ in terms of a universal design. We can now see how people experience the current solutions and then build on those experiences further during the next phase.”

### **NOT COMPLETELY CONVINCED**

After her dip in the water, Sonia wraps herself in a warm hoodie with the logo of her favourite performer, TIX.

“Did this leave you wanting more?”

“No, no, no! Wheelchair ramp or no wheelchair ramp, it’s too cold in Norway to swim outside – I think I’ll stick to swimming in warmer countries.” ●



Jens Åke Jensen,  
Architect in the Agency  
for Urban Environment,  
City of Oslo

### **Solutions:**

- Continuous wide and 60-metre-long wooden path that provides access to the water
- Wooden path that is easy to roll on
- Swimming ramp that lets wheelchair users access the water’s edge
- Handrails on both sides of the swimming ramp
- Swimming ladder on the quay
- Benches
- Outdoor shower with two different heights
- Design adapted to landscape in beach zone
- Wooden construction that can be removed without causing damage to nature

### **Price tag:**

NOK 3.5 million

### **What we could have done differently:**

“Researched and tried out a recessed ramp solution in the water for wheelchair users who need to stay in their chair. This would’ve required a different placement and foundation because it is not permitted to pour a concrete foundation on the seabed,” says Jens Åke Jensen, architect in the Agency for Urban Environment, City of Oslo.

**100 KM:** Every month,  
Lasse Eie walks 100 km.



# Better health every step of the way

Until now, it was hardly possible to walk along the lake. Now everyone can access the waterfront. “I walk here every day because it’s good for my health,” says Lasse Eie, 77.

Things could have gone either way when the retired teacher was admitted to hospital for his third surgery.

“The doctor said that the success rate was 50-50,” says Lasse Eie matter-of-factly.

The kilos flew off and his condition was not at its best after surgery, but one day, he thought, “How can I get stronger?”

He also longed for a bit of fresh air. So, one day in 2014, he simply started walking.

“It’s not heavy exercise. I simply go for a stroll, but at least I’m on my feet and end up walking 100 kilometres a month – all year round.”

Many of these walks have been along the Mjøspromenaden, close to where he lives. Whereas it was almost impossible to get to the waterfront in the past due to shrubs and narrow, random trails, the promenade now offers a continuous path.

## **MULTIPLE OBSTACLES**

“Gjøvik borders Mjøsa and for years, people have wanted to have easy access to the water and an attractive beach area. But there have

been various obstacles to this, such as industry, not to mention a huge landfill,” explains Erik Månnum, property manager in the Municipality of Gjøvik.

For a long time, it was unclear what kind of development would take place in the area, which is walking distance from the Gjøvik city centre. Tests showed that the soil conditions at Huntonstranda did not allow for construction due to large quantities of methane gas.

A user participation process later concluded with a preliminary solution: the construction of two illuminated basketball courts. The first ball was dribbled here in 2022. There is a large parking area next to the courts, from where it is only a short walk to the promenade. The promenade, which has gradually grown to around three kilometres in length, will be extended further in 2024 and currently ends in Rambekkvika. Along the path is a marina, swimming beaches, playgrounds, workout equipment and wooden building that houses both a lakeside sauna and kayak rental point. There are also two accessible toilet facilities along the promenade. →



→ The old wooden benches were replaced in 2020 by solid orange benches with armrests and bring colour to the path at regular intervals.

### **NO MATTER THE WEATHER**

Lasse Eie is the type of man who likes to keep both body and soul healthy.

“I don’t want to live a life on repeat, I want to learn something new and keep my mind young.”

This 77-year-old has never cared about the weather, but goes for a walk every day, come rain or shine. For a long time, he was accompanied by his daughter’s dog, Skadi, until the dog became ill and had to be put down.

“What’s great about having a dog is the first of all, that you have a responsibility and secondly, you have company, not to mention that it makes it easier to talk to people. In other words, I would not have started talking to strangers along the promenade if I weren’t walking with Skadi,”

smiles Lasse, and adds that he meets a lot of positive people on his daily walk.

“Who have probably had a rougher go than I have.”

It’s a cloudy day and few people are walking along the promenade.

“But on a sunny day, it’s full of people here,” says Lasse.

He is very pleased with the path: the location, width, benches and lighting. But he does have one thing he would like to request from Erik Månrum from the city:

“There’s one thing that we pensioners who use this path talk a lot about and that we feel is missing. It would be fantastic to have a small coffee stand where we can sit down and enjoy a cup of coffee.” ●



**1) BENCH WITH A VIEW:** Solid benches are placed at regular intervals along the promenade.  
**2) WOODEN BUILDING AT FREDVIKA:** The building houses both kayaks for rent, a bookable sauna and toilets.  
**3) HEALTH WALK:** Lasse Eie started walking for health reasons and this retired middle school teacher has just kept going.



Erik Månnum,  
 Property Manager in  
 the City of Gjøvik

**Solutions:**

- Parking spot right next to the promenade
- The promenade is a wide footpath
- Solid gravel surface
- Contrast via grass on both sides of the path
- Benches with armrests
- Lighting
- Accessible toilet in wooden building that also houses a sauna and rental kayak point
- The sauna and kayak rentals are run by the Gjøvik division of the Norwegian Trekking Association, the bathrooms by the city
- Illuminated basketball courts right next to the parking area
- Festival area (Fredvikafestivalen)
- Marina for sailboats
- Workout equipment
- Playgrounds for children
- Grassy areas that are used as meeting places by both young people and families

**What we could have done differently:**

“This is a project that has evolved over time, with increasingly more plans for the future, where user involvement will play a greater role. If we were starting completely from scratch today, we might have involved the users more from the beginning,” says Erik Månnum.



# Go for a stroll above the trees

Wheelchair? Pram? Crutches?  
No problem! The Treetop Path in  
Telemark – at a dizzying height –  
was built for those  
who dare.







**MINIMALLY INVASIVE:** The goal was to disturb the woods as little as possible when building the path. Some of the posts were lifted into place by helicopter, while others were transported by lightweight equipment.

→ Hmm, what can they come up with now? The first project, the Hamaren Trail in Fyresdal, was already well established and embraced by locals, thanks to its central location and universal design. So, in 2019, the local authorities began to toy with new ideas for a second project in connection with the Ministry of Culture and Equality subsidy scheme for innovative activity arenas. The working title was ‘Taking Hamaren to new heights’.

“Precisely because we wanted to move to higher ground in one way or another. And, of course, it had to have a universal design,” explains Forestry Manager Aslak Momrak-Haugan, while pointing in the direction of the Treetop Path, recalling the initial reactions to the plan.

## RECOGNISED THE POTENTIAL

“A lot of people thought this was nothing but nonsense.”

Not surprising, considering the municipality of Fyresdal’s plan: A kilometre-long, two metre-wide spiral-shaped path linked to the Hamaren Trail constructed in wood several metres over the treetops. Fifteen metres at the highest point, with benches and a lookout point, and an incline that was suitable for all users.

“But lots of people also recognised the potential it could offer. The Hamaren Trail was oriented towards the local community and part of the municipality’s ambition to be the best in the country in public health. After all, we have amazing nature here, but it can be too steep and



**REWARD:** Aslak Momrak-Haugan & Co. initially visualised views from the entire path, but the Danish architectural firm, EFFEKT Architects, felt that the effect would be completely different if the path led to a lookout point, offering views of Vikfjellet mountain.

difficult for many people to access. Hamaren was an easy way to enjoy the outdoors close to the school, kindergarten, and nursing and care facilities,” says Momrak-Haugan.

### **VERY POPULAR**

“The Treetop Path is a commercial project, something that can attract tourists,” says the forestry manager, who acted as construction manager for both projects.

“We had great faith in the Treetop Path and were determined to make it happen.”

The Ministry of Culture and Equality contributed NOK 4 million, NOK 1 million was donated by local contributors (private and business sector), NOK 4.5 million came from

**“The Hamaren Trail  
was part of the municipality’s  
ambition to be the best in the  
country in public health.”**

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Aslak Momrak-Haugan





**FIRST CONSTRUCTION STAGE:** When the Hamaren hiking trail in Fyresdal was completed, the municipality literally aimed even higher.

→ other funding sources and the municipality put NOK 7.5 million into the pot. In June 2023, four years after the first ideas were sketched out, the Treetop Path opened – to the delight of locals and visitors alike. The goal was to attract 30,000 visitors the first year. This number exceeded 53,000 by September 2023. The construction itself makes an impression on the vast majority, but what impresses people most of all is the universal design.

“The fact that it can be used by everyone, regardless of age or functional ability,” says Momrak-Haugan.

### **THRILLED TRIO**

A cheerful trio of outdoor enthusiasts wholeheartedly agrees. Norunn Ova Johnsen, 76, Reidun Brauti, 77, and Berit Verstad, 78, are all from Lunner and headed to the Treetop Path together with the rest of their group from the Skade Sports Club. The women drove 100 kilometres to experience the pathway.

“It’s wonderful to enjoy the outdoors and get some fresh air without wearing ourselves out. We’re very impressed by how well made it is,” says the trio, who have already been here several times. They go for walks as often as possible, including every Tuesday with their sports club. This trip to the Treetop Path is their annual outing, with breaks and coffee along the way.



**MADE THE TRIP:** Norunn Ova Johnsen, 76, Reidun Brauti, 77, and Berit Verstad, 78, love to go for walks and are delighted with the Treetop Path.



**CHILDREN'S IDEA:** The wooden lean-to was designed in close co-operation with school-children, who sketched out ideas.





**FOCUS ON NATURE:** “Fyresdal decided early on that it would not be focusing heavily on holiday cabins, but on nature experiences,” explains the forestry manager.

→ “Walking is not only good for the body, but also social. When you’re walking, you hardly notice that you’re getting exercise,” they laugh. The women are surprised that the height is not as scary as you might expect.

“Maybe it’s because of the railing and that the path is so well built and wide,” they say.

### **MANAGEABLE INCLINE**

While enjoying coffee and a packed lunch at the very top, just past the highest lookout point, sisters-in-law Ada Bustgaard, 79, and Lisbeth Bustgaard, 73, summarise the experience.

“It’s absolutely wonderful! Seeing nature this way, with views of the mountains and water, is very unique,” they say.



**BREAK AT THE TOP:** After walking the kilometre-long path, sisters-in-law Ada and Lisbeth (left) Bustgaard enjoy coffee and a packed lunch.

Both go on nature walks often, but it has become a little more difficult for Lisbeth after a leg operation.

“I have some balance issues and when I walk in the woods, I always use walking poles. But this was very doable for me, probably because of the incline. I would normally be much more exhausted than I am now. But this was a walk in the park.” ●



**CLEAR LANGUAGE:** As tempting as the design may be, bicycles and skateboards are prohibited to avoid chaos along the path.



Aslak Momrak-Haugen,  
Forestry Manager in the  
municipality of Fyresdal

#### Solutions:

- One-kilometre-long Treetop Path
- Two-metre-wide path
- Constructed of wood
- The incline exceeds four percent in a few places, but dialogue with the Norwegian Association of the Disabled resulted in an exemption
- Bench made of recycled materials at the lookout point
- Accessible restroom at the start of the path
- The restroom is cleaned twice a day and all trash bins emptied daily

#### In hindsight:

“In the grand scheme of things, there is little we would have done differently. We got caught in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic and a war in Europe, resulting in high prices for wood and steel. This could have stopped the entire project, but the politicians recognised the potential and helped us to make it happen. This kind of project involves a lot of different processes and bureaucracy does not always facilitate progress. This has to be taken into account when developing bold ideas.”

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