

STOCKHOLM

A CITY OF A WIDE ACCESSIBILITY POLICY

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UNIVERSAL ARCHITECTURE IN THE DESIGNER'S EYE – ACCESSIBILITY, USABILITY,
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Abstract

The built environment is not always designed from an inclusive perspective but can often become excluding for a large number of people. The city of Stockholm adopted in 2011 a policy which describes a number of guidelines for how the municipality should work to make the city available and accessible to everyone. Does the city live up to their policy and how do they ensure they work according to their intentions? This study was realized as a single case study. The policy document "Stockholm a city for everyone" was scrutinized and subjected to a close reading process. I addressed five key questions to officials for the Stockholm City during a telephone call. The study shows that the City of Stockholm has no central control or clear idea whether the goals are reached in each project or not.

Keywords: disability, accessibility, City of Stockholm,

Introduction and background

Planning a day with some shopping, having a cup of coffee and visiting a library or museum might not cause much problems for most people. This could even be just a casual Saturday. To others this is far much more complicated, - the elevator at the cinema showing the movie he or she planned to see is out of order or the store with the nice t-shirts has a staircase at the entrance, the library has no clear signing to the loan desk and at the museum you must enter the building from the backside, maybe the acoustics aren't designed to work for someone with hearing difficulties. The city should be available for everyone they say, but is it? About 20 percent of the Swedish population have some problem that makes them fall in the category of people with disabilities, this problem may be a born or attracted deficiency.¹

Being in a relationship with a wheelchair user the situations above is a part of my everyday life, this might make it extra interesting for me to see how the municipality work with these issues and how they make sure that all of their citizens have the same possibilities to use the public space. This could be reflected in this paper since it makes me upset every now and then. Also, being a student within the field of architecture it's very interesting for me to look into these matters.

Stockholm municipals' policy document about accessibility states: "Stockholms stad ska fortsätta att ställa högre krav på tillgänglighet än de byggregler som gäller. Kraven ska tillämpas inom stadens förvaltningar och bolag, samt i avtal med andra som bygger."² This means that the City of Stockholm has higher requirements on accessibility then the building regulations in Sweden. This no matter if they are the developer, if it is one of the companies owned by them or if they have an agreement with someone else. I would like to find out if and how this is the case.

It is easy to take for granted that a building owned by the city of Stockholm, a municipality with pronounced ambitions to shape an inclusive city, has a built environment that is welcoming and well-designed to work well for all inhabitants. This is not always the case. The architecture is not always designed from an inclusive perspective but can often become excluding for a large number of people. How does the city make sure they live up to their intentions?

Issue

How does the City of Stockholm evaluate the intentions about accessibility they state in the document; "Stockholm a city for everyone. Participation programme for people with disabilities 2011–2016" and how can they ensure the policy is followed?

Object

The city of Stockholm established a policy on the second of May in 2011 which ensures that the municipality undertakes to follow certain commitments about accessibility. I will look into the document; "Stockholm a city for everyone. Participation programme for people with disabilities 2011–2016" and investigate what the city actually has committed in the question of accessibility in the built environment and if they do anything to make sure they fulfill their intentions.

¹ Funka, *Statistik*, Available: <http://www.funka.com/design-for-alla/tillganglighet/statistik/>, 2016, (Retrieved 2016-12-03)

² *Stockholm – en stad för alla Program för delaktighet för personer med funktionsnedsättning 2011–2016*, p. 7

Method

This study was realized as a single case study. The policy document "Stockholm a city for everyone" was scrutinized and subjected to a close reading process. The reading supplied ground for formulating a set of five key questions. These questions were addressed to officials for the Stockholm City during a telephone call. The interviewees were promised anonymity and informed about the intention for the study. The calls were recorded as hand notes.

Theory

I think it should be important for all architects to announce these matters and the developer of a project should not even have to bring it up, we should all integrate the subject in our design process. Most architects want to design nice buildings, but how nice are they if they are not usable for basically everyone? It is difficult to argue with private developers to pay for not just "some kind of solution" but to pay for a well-designed, inclusive architecture if not even the state or the city hall of the capital want to pay for it, or does not prioritize it. To have this information on our hand gives us power in discussions both with private companies and municipalities all around Sweden. It cannot be impossible to argue that the capital of Sweden should state a good example for the rest of the country.

The statute BBR is defining the lowest possible level of accessibility that is accepted and contains the mandatory provisions and general recommendations pursuant to the main statutes of the Planning and Building Act (2010:900), PBL and Planning and Building Ordinance (2011:338), PBF.³

MFD, the Swedish agency for participation, is defining an improved level compared to BBR, however, this only must be implemented by representatives of the state, i.e. authorities, agencies, and counties. The municipalities may adhere but also develop their own objectives for the buildings that are owned by the municipality, still upholding the BBR level as the lowest level for themselves as well as other building developers in the municipality.⁴

Results

The directives from the City of Stockholm for shaping a city for everyone are valid for all committees and boards. It should be applied in all different areas and missions given from the municipality. The underlying guidelines for the policy are UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2011-2015, UN CRPD and the city's own vision for 2030.⁵

Focus on human rights

The city has decided the program "Stockholm a city for everyone. Participation program for people with disabilities 2011–2016" should have a deep focus on human rights. In the program the city states they will follow the directions from UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Among other things, this means that the city cannot discriminate anyone, to let people be independent, that everyone should have the same possibilities and that everyone should be able to be a part of the society.⁶

³ BBR 19, the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning Building Regulations 19, 2011, p. 2

⁴ The Swedish agency for participation. Available: <http://www.mfd.se/other-languages/english/>. (Retrieved 2016-12-17)

⁵ Stockholm a city for everyone, 2011, p. 4

⁶ Stockholm a city for everyone, 2011, p. 5

The city's objectives

The city of Stockholm has a goal to become a hub for accessibility and a safe region with no social or physical barriers. They wish the region to have endless possibilities for all its inhabitants.⁷

The city has committed to set higher standards on accessibility than current regulations and these allies on all the city's work areas, such as administrations and companies, as well as in agreements with other companies. Further the city states that goods and services in the city shall have an accessible and useable environment.⁸

*“Usability” means that goods and services must be designed so that people with disabilities can use them.*⁹

The municipality has also put up indicators to be able to measure how this is perceived and if it is followed. It is the proportion of the city's indoor and outdoor environments that meets the current regulations and the proportion of people with disabilities experiencing the city's indoor and outdoor environment being accessible and usable.¹⁰

Further the city states that every individual shall have a dwelling fitting their needs. The goal is that no matter if a person has a disability or not it should be possible to get hold of a dwelling on the regular housing market. If the person has significant support needs he or she should have access to special forms of housing. The municipals' indicators to measure this is the portion of people with disabilities experiencing they have a functional dwelling.¹¹

How the city grade themselves

Every year each municipality in Sweden grades their own work with accessibility in a survey by The Swedish agency for participation. In this assessment, the city of Stockholm in 2016 graded themselves at 77 percent of the maximum points under the topic *physical accessibility*. That is an increase with 7 percent compared to 2015.¹²

Interviews with officials for the City of Stockholm

The municipal ombudsman for disability matters at the City of Stockholm is new and overtook the title at the beginning of this year. Her function is to support the responsible committee and boards in questions about accessibility and participation for people with disabilities.¹³

⁷ *Stockholm a city for everyone*, 2011, p. 2

⁸ *Stockholm a city for everyone*, 2011, p. 7

⁹ *Stockholm a city for everyone*, 2011, p. 7

¹⁰ *Stockholm a city for everyone*, 2011, p. 7

¹¹ *Stockholm a city for everyone*, 2011, p. 9

¹² *The Swedish agency for participation*. Available:

<http://www.mfd.se/kommunuppfoljning/omraden/fysiskstillganglighet/?selectedKommun=180>, (Retrieved 2016-12-17).

¹³ *Stockholm stad, "Funktionshindersombudsmannen"*, Available:

<http://www.stockholm.se/FamiljOmsorg/funktionsnedsattning/Mojligheter-att-paverka/Funktionshinderombudsmannen/>, 2016, (Retrieved 2016-11-27).

The municipal ombudsman for disability matters has so far led to believe that it can be difficult to follow up the municipality's intentions and to be a part of the complete process of new built projects to be able to ensure that the goals for the city also is a goal in each project. She has understood that it can be problematic to, early in the projects, engage the architects enough in the subject of accessibility. Another issue seems to be the generally high speed in today's building projects, which makes it difficult to control the final quality. Still, there are no faults with the ambitions from the city. Furthermore, she finds it hard to answer whether the municipality evaluates if they do work according to the decided goals or not, in order to create "a city for everyone".¹⁴

This is what the former municipal ombudsman for disability matters in the City of Stockholm said in an interview in Dagens Nyheter 2009:

*Målet att bli världsbäst på tillgänglighet till 2010 är uppkäftigt och käckt men eftersom det inte finns några kriterier för vad det innebär så känns det mer som en slogan än som något konkret.*¹⁵

My translation of this is: The goal of becoming the world's best city when it comes to accessibility for 2010 is bold and dashing but since there are no criteria for what it means, it feels more like a slogan than something concrete.

*Ansaret ligger på fastighetsägarna, men att det efterföljs ska stadsbyggnadskontoret se till. De saknar dock resurser för att genomföra tillsynen.*¹⁶

My translation of this quote is that the responsibility lays on the property owners, but no matter if that is the city themselves or not, the city planning office should ensure it is followed. However, they lack the resources carry out the supervision.

Official at the Administration for sports and culture at the city of Stockholm ensures on the other hand that the city sure do follow-up and evaluate their goals for accessibility. During two years, mainly the summers, a group of engineering students have conducted field studies, evaluating all public buildings owned by the city. To do this they have been working with an assessment protocol, developed based on the document *Stockholm a city for everyone*. Through this work, they found that they needed to complement a number of existing buildings with elevators and signs. The protocol turned out to work better for street and park environments, but worse for buildings and therefore required some revision and adaption.

¹⁴ The municipal ombudsman for disability matters, phone interview by Fredrika Vennström, 2016-11-25.

¹⁵ Dagens nyheter, "Funktionshinderombudsmannen: "Vad menas med världens mest tillgängliga huvudstad?"", Tillgänglig: <http://www.dn.se/sthlm/funktionshinderombudsmannen-vad-menas-med-varldens-mest-tillgangliga-huvudstad/>, 2009, (Retrieved 2016-11-27).

¹⁶ Dagens nyheter, "Funktionshinderombudsmannen: "Vad menas med världens mest tillgängliga huvudstad?"", Available: <http://www.dn.se/sthlm/funktionshinderombudsmannen-vad-menas-med-varldens-mest-tillgangliga-huvudstad/>, 2009, (Retrieved 2016-11-27).

Further they have also always an accessible consultant in the early stage of the projects and they are actively working to reach the goals of the city.¹⁷

One of the city's landscape architects, brings up that the city earlier used to have employed accessibility experts at the traffic office, who has the responsibility for the outdoor environment in the city. These experts used to be a part of the projects and examined the drawings to make sure the accessibility aspect was not forgotten anywhere. Today the regular officials are supposed to handle the questions on their own. As far as she knows no evaluations of the accessibility are done today.¹⁸

Conclusion

The City of Stockholm has formulated quite ambitious but open objective in order to make it possible for all citizens to live as independent and unhindered as possible. However, it is difficult to know whether the municipality really live up to their own goals and directives as it seems difficult to say who will ensure that it is done or how they follow it up. It seems the municipality does not have a good way to centrally make sure that the municipal committees and companies follow the policy, but this does not prevent individual evaluations and follow-ups to find out how their own department are doing. I think there is a risk that this could be a bit problematic since it can be troublesome to define what accessibility aspects to measure and how to measure them. It is even more difficult when they are not using a proven instrument for this or take the help of persons with disabilities to develop their own evaluations.

I have compared the information I received in the interviews with the municipalities own grade in the assessment at Swedish agency of participations homepage. By this I find it quite hard to see how the work with the physical accessibility in the City of Stockholm could possibly have become so much better during one year, as 7 percent, when the municipality does not seem to have a central strategy for the work with these questions.

The municipality does not have any central control whether the goals are reached in each project or not since the city planning office does not have a budget for this.¹⁹ Maybe the goals of becoming the leading city in the world when it comes to accessibility are, just as the former municipal ombudsman for disability matters in the City of Stockholm states, just a slogan and not real objectives that will be achieved. This is hard to answer at this time without making a major survey of the entire municipal committees and companies.

¹⁷ Official at the Administration for sports and culture, phone interview by Fredrika Vennström, 2016-11-25.

¹⁸ Landscape architect, Stockholm Stad, telefonintervju av Fredrika Vennström, 2016-11-28

¹⁹ See quote p. 4

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