Meeting of Council of Europe Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CAHDPH)

Round-table II: Access to justice, sports and universal design for persons with disabilities

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Basic text of the presentation

by

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Universal Design

- Article 2 . Definitions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) states that Universal Design "means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. "Universal design" shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed."
- Article 4 "General obligations" of the UNCRPD at point 1(f) states that States Parties have "[…] to undertake or promote research and development of universally designed goods, services, equipment and facilities, as defined in article 2 of the present Convention, which should require the minimum possible adaptation and the least cost to meet the specific needs of a person with disabilities, to promote their availability and use, and to promote universal design in the development of standards and guidelines".
- The concept of Universal Design (Design for All, in Europe) was developed in 1997 by a working group of architects, product designers, engineers and environmental design researchers in the North Carolina State University.

- There are 7 principles intended to regulate the design of environments, products and communications, evaluate existing designs, guide the design process and educate both designers and consumers about the characteristics of more usable and accessible products and environments.
- The 7 Principles are:
  - Equitable use
  - Flexibility in use
  - Simple and intuitive use
  - Perceptive information
  - Tolerance for error
  - Low physical effort
  - Size and space for approach and use
- There is, therefore, an intrinsic link between Universal Design and accessibility for persons with disabilities. However, universal design is not only crucial to make products, services and facilities accessible for persons with disabilities, it can also be useful for everyone as it increases the usability for many other people: pregnant women, older people, people with functional limitations, etc.
- In short, we can say that Universal Design truly acknowledges human diversity.
- Differently from what happens with accessibility, given the aspirational objective of its principles, Universal Design cannot be mandated in legislation. However, EDF is currently working along with the European standards organisations (ESOs) to develop a European standard on Design for All, which will set out requirements and recommendations for any kind of organisation to achieve accessibility following a Design for All approach. If adopted by ESOs, this standard will become operational early next year.
- This approach is what we need to advocate for towards industry players, public administration and policy makers. There is a need for them to establish a vision and a mission for accessibility, to involve users during the development phase, to check and follow the available accessibility standards, to follow up with users, etc.
- We hope that this European standard will be widely used and public authorities will use it as an award criteria for public contracts, so that the number of organisations and companies with a Design for All approach will increase so contributing to a more accessible, user-friendly, sustainable and inclusive society.