



Investing in your future
Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013
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Westkans – Design for All by Bart Vermandere

Westkans is an independent research consultancy in the field of accessibility. They operate in West-Flanders. From the rich heritage of Bruges in particular, they have built a broad expertise. They provide feasibility studies, access advice, guidance and tailored advice after final checks. More practical information can be found on the website www.toegankelijkvlaanderen.be

Universal Design.

Mr. Vermandere refers explicitly to the principles of Universal Design - Design for All. Applying Universal Design offers a clear added value as well on new design as applied to historic buildings. He shows us a lot of good practices. Using Design for All makes a historical building as easy to enter for the wheelchair user as the mother with a buggy. Out of an aesthetic point of view, it's necessary to seek the best solution for each specific situation. Sooner or later, we all have the need to an easy accessibility. Universal design makes it possible.

Applications

In modern architecture, the table without legs creates more space and accessibility. The act of handles in the wall, or the subtly inlaid lines will support and strengthen the lines of a staircase. Subconsciously you are driven forward.

Aesthetics can be linked to function

Mr. Vermandere shows us examples of pure aesthetic design. There is no link at all to any function: a missed opportunity to accessibility.

Open design

Designs from the freedom of an open space where only the start is planned, provide more opportunities and increases accessibility. Generally, a freer thinking about shaping features an added value. Designing for everyone is taking into account the human diversity and change.

Subtle aesthetic while maintaining authenticity.

Using invisible interventions enhances accessibility. Authenticity can thus be maintained. A major challenge lies in the subtle aesthetic and accessibility in the design process. Again, Westkans shows us many examples.



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Chains.

By avoiding bottlenecks they create opportunities. Some examples. A building can be so well adapted but if the toilet is inaccessible, the whole building will be useless. It is important to monitor the chain of accessibility. Accessibility of public transport is also raised. Custom trams, but also simple interventions that promote access to the tram. Gradually it fits in the transport chain more and more. The safety of passengers is important.

Public domain.

In the public domain simple interventions sometimes gives amazing results. By increasing locally the footpath, there is no separate slope. Creative use of different material (a wooden platform seamlessly between a wood and brick construction) may increase walking directions. A nice example of historical building: Ford Napoleon in Ostend. Access was created by building a new ramp, which is used by each visitor. At the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent is the invisible elevator a good solution. Accessibility by providing clear information is also an issue. Airports are good examples. By a clear, simple language, they open an unfamiliar environment for the traveller.

There are possibilities.

It's possible to design well and to create well. Plans, site visits and good product knowledge are important. More information can be found on the website www.toegankelijkgebouw.be.

This lecture contains many good examples. You can view or download them on the website <http://www.box.net/shared/zoylevb0cv>