



UNIT 1. MEDIA ACCESSIBILITY

ELEMENT 3. WHAT IS UNIVERSAL DESIGN

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO DESIGN

Other Video Transcript

EASIT, Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training.

This is Unit 1, Media Accessibility, Element 3. What is universal design?

A video on participatory approaches to design. This short video contains an interview with Mia Ahlgren from the Swedish Disability Rights Federation. In the video, Mia Ahlgren explains the importance of involving people with different experiences and abilities in design and development processes.

Ester We're about to meet Mia Ahlgren who works at the Swedish Disability Rights Federation. We're going to talk about active participation in design processes. Hello Mia, can you tell us a little about yourself?

Mia My name is Mia Ahlgren. I work for an umbrella organisation for 46 organisations called the Swedish Disability Rights Federation. We're not that many employees and that means you do many different things.



Mia I work with, among other things, rights for people with disabilities, we all do, but accessibility, universal design, standardisation and many other things.

Ester Many different things.

There are many different terms or names for active involvement. What do you use? Can you discuss these terms a little?

Mia That's true, there are many names. "Design for all" has been used within the EU. But then the Convention for rights for people with disabilities came. They started using the term "universal design". Those who did research on it tie it to the built environment and several principles.

But in the Convention it's more about involving users. That everything new you develop should be made so that as many as possible can use it. Including people with disabilities.

It's also important to make sure that all people you involve are different. We all have different qualities and one such quality could be a disability.

Ester Why is it important to involve users and other stakeholders in development processes?

Mia If you want to be certain that the things you create can be used by as many people as possible you need to involve those who are experts. It is those who face obstacles that knows what doesn't work.



Mia They can make sure the solutions are improved and reach all the way. It is also important, if you're making a ticket machine for example, that you involve those working with public transport. So it will work the entire way.

Ester How does one work with active participation and what should one keep in mind?

Mia I'd like to tell you, speaking of the Convention and rights, that there's another term about active involvement in decision making processes. This is a civil and political right that organisations for people with disabilities have. You need to be involved in political decision making processes. You have to be and there are guidelines on how this can be done in an effective and meaningful way.

One should be involved from the beginning. One should have the means to understand why you're involved and what you can do.

Mia Most of all, what's very important is getting feedback on decision making processes. So you know what you've participated in and contributed to and if you're not allowed to participate, why that is.

In the design processes that you're talking about there are similar conditions, one should be involved from the beginning and be informed of what your involvement has led to.



- Mia But it isn't a right in the Convention, defined as such. There it could be more about individuals participating rather than organisations but sometimes those processes overlap.
- Ester Who can be involved? Can everybody participate?
- Mia I also work with standardisation and there is a European standard. It is called "accessibility through universal design". It deals with these development processes. There we've said that one should start by involving those who can't use a product or a service. The so-called "non-users". They are aware of the obstacles.
- I sometimes say "involve those who don't get to speak first". That's when you put more focus on the questions that need to be solved.
- Ester User involvement could also mean to involve those who currently aren't users?
- Mia Yes, I think that's a good start. That makes it beneficial. You fix things so more people can use it. On top of it being a right to have access to all new developments.
- Ester Can you involve everyone?
- Mia There are lots of design methods to involve users. There are numerous tools. You have to use what's best suited for the target audience.



- Mia You have to go over this together with the target audience so you're sure it's a good fit.
- In Sweden we've worked on something called "Better together" where you'd use different focus groups. Maybe this could be a good approach?
- Others have looked into which types of involvement the user, or the presumptive user, gets the most influence over the process. I think that's important having influence over the process. It could feel meaningless to only be able to try something that someone else made.
- Ester Speaking of design processes, which ones are best suited? Are there times where you don't need or shouldn't involve users?
- Mia It could be a challenge finding people who have the conditions to participate that would also benefit from it. If you create something, I think it's natural to involve those who are supposed to use your product. Unfortunately, you sometimes don't do this until it's too late. I think that's a waste of money.
- Mia If you have the ability to do it, I think a lot of those who develop new things can benefit from it.
- Then comes the other side of it, that I mentioned. When it's on a community level, a political process, user involvement is a must and you need to provide the means for participation.



- Ester What about text production and audiovisual production? These are usually daily and you stress production. How would one involve users in these processes?
- Mia Speaking of universal design, it's about everything new that people develop. When you're improving a process or during development, that's when you need to involve users. They can't be involved in every instance but should be when you're improving something.
- One more thing about universal design. One solution does not fit all. There should be a "menu" of solutions. You can't point out what "dish" some people must pick. Everyone has the right to choose. It must be offered to everybody.
- Ester So that someone without disabilities can use it too because it could be beneficial in their current situation?
- Mia Absolutely, if you're somewhere noisy it helps to have the option to read a text.
- Ester What pitfalls would you say are prominent in this way of working?
- Mia It needs to be mutually beneficial. When you involve non-users, potential users, there has to be some kind of benefit. It could be financial compensation or another sort of benefit. You could work with an organisation that benefits from a development process, that could help them in their daily function. You have



to make sure it's mutually beneficial and that people have the means to participate.

Mia

Nobody should make something meant for someone else. Don't make the user a guinea pig. Create something together.

I want to bring up another thing that I know is a big problem. It's that you view people as their disability. They aren't. All people have different qualities. A disability is just one. We have different things we like. If you're blind it's not guaranteed that you like podcasts. Maybe you want to look for information in a text.

If you put a group together make sure there's a diversity of qualities, ages and so on. Don't view people as their disabilities.

Ester

Okay, one last question. What is the factor of success in active involvement?

Mia

View the process from the users perspective. Users first, plain and simple.

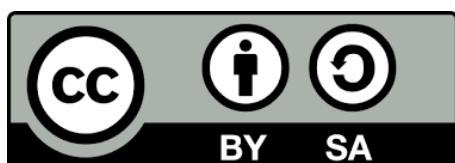
Ester

Users first.

This video was prepared by Ester Hedberg from the Swedish National Association for Dyslexia and produced by Ester Hedberg and Rio Hellgren from the Swedish National Association for Dyslexia.

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