INCLUSIVE URBAN DESIGN THROUGH MUNICIPAL POLICIES

Learning with Singapore and Norway

Gonçalo CARDOSO DIAS, 1 Marcus ORMERO, 2 Fernando MOREIRA DA SILVA 3
1 CIAUD, Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, g.cardoso.dias@gmail.com
2 SURFACE, University of Salford
3 CIAUD, Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade Técnica de Lisboa

ABSTRACT

Accessibility is becoming a major issue throughout these past years, it can be seen in different perspectives (e.g. human right issue, ageing issue, handicapped issue etc.), but whatever perspective you use it is an issue that needs to be addressed through a multi-disciplinary approach. Inserted in a research where the main question is "how to make inclusive the Portuguese urban design heritage?" this paper focuses on the municipal policies experiences in Singapore and Norway and what they can contribute to the Portuguese Case.

KEYWORDS


1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is inserted on a broader research that poses the question “how to make inclusive the Portuguese urban design heritage?” Believing that the answer to this question is along the lines of the municipal policies one of the steps is to identify and learn with the best and most recent practices. This paper focuses on the cases of Singapore and Norway because they illustrate different proceedings and approach’s to encourage the promotion of accessibility through municipal policies.

2. SELECTED CASES

2.1. Singapore

Singapore is an island city-state that faces the problem of the fast ageing population, the projections point to 1 in 5 residents to be 65 and above. To prepare themselves to an ageing population the Committee on Ageing Issues was established in 2004, focused on the discussion and promotion of proposals related to ageing issues. Accessibility was identified has one of the key factors to maintain the links between the elder population and the community. So, with the concept of “ageing in place” in mind an Accessibility Master Plan was developed and put in to practice with four strategic points [Goh10]:

1) Mitigating existing challenges;
2) Tackling future challenges upstream;
3) Maintaining existing accessible and elder-friendly features;
4) Raising awareness and capabilities of the industry and stakeholders.
To surpass the issues related with the pre-existing situations the Building and Construction Authority, formed a team to promote and encourage the upgrading of the private sector buildings, working with the owners and users to identify the difficulties and set basic accessibility features. Also, an Accessibility Fund was established to help to support the costs of the upgrade, this fund was only made available for 5 years and would co-pay up to 80% of the cost to provide the basic accessibility features, limited to a cap per project. In order to lead by example an effort was made to provide the public sector buildings with basic barrier-free accessibility, public housing was also subject to a programme to provide elevators to the public building blocks, and the Land Transport Authority took actions to promote accessibility in the transport facilities.

To tackle the future challenges upstream the bet was made on promoting Universal Design, publish two Universal Design guides, organising the BCA Universal Design Awards and review the “Code on Barrier-free Accessibility in Buildings”. The first document was based on the need of wheelchair users, and with the accessibility master plan was reviewed with the industry and stakeholders to ensure that the build environment is seamlessly connected and meet the needs of all to the greatest extent possible.

Maintaining the accessible infrastructure and raising awareness and capabilities of the industry and stakeholders were approached trough education, betting specially on the younger generations and the stakeholders. It’s necessary to highlight the introduction of legislative measures, the accessibility rating system and the setting up of an International Panel of Experts on Universal Design to review Singapore’s policies and practices.

2.2. Norway

The Norwegian Ministry of Environment betting on the dissemination of the Universal Design principles began to work with a group composed by 17 municipalities, each one facing different challenges, trying to achieve 7 unified goals [Larsen10]:

1) To raise awareness and achieve results throughout the entire municipal administration – across sectoral dividing lines and in all municipal activities;
2) To encourage local community measures through cooperation with trade and industry and other actors from private and public domain;
3) To achieve physical solutions that are satisfactory accessible, safe, environmentally sound and aesthetically appealing;
4) To further develop targeted collaboration with municipal Councils for the disabled and other relevant user groups;
5) To increase competence among all parties responsible for planning, implementation and operation of municipal activities;
6) To serve as a role model and motivate other municipalities to implement more Universal Design thinking;
7) Provide input and take part in the dialogue relating to national Universal Design efforts.

In order to achieve these goals the group held bi-annual meetings that served to exchange knowledge between the municipalities and the ministry. These meetings revolved around matters chosen by the municipalities to be discussed, an each time they would send three or four representatives selected from different sectors and levels of the administration depending the topics to be discussed. It’s also important the presence and involvement of the Councils for the Disabled, composed by politicians, experts and disabled representatives, at all of the meetings.

Another significant aspect to achieve the goals is the involvement of different groups, politicians and experts in the work developed by each municipality, through steering committees and project groups, in some cases reference groups and interest groups were consulted.

In addition to the goals presented by the Ministry each municipality chose sub-objectives that they wished to emphasize, this generated debate and enthusiasm within the local communities.
3. CONCLUSIONS

Although these two cases show a different approach to the same subject, both have good practices that should be adopted in the Portuguese case. Beginning with the view of Universal Design shown by the Norwegian government as a “long-term national strategy” and admitting that “Universal Design requires inclusive planning”[Lund10]. In reality the strategies used by the Ministry and later on by the municipalities tend to go more along the lines of Inclusive Design, maybe this term is not used due the political weight of the Universal Design nomenclature. What is important is that the thoughts and the methods have changed and become an integrated part of the community planning and activities.

In times of a global economic crisis, prioritizing spending is vital especially when the government asks the municipalities to create a society for all without providing the necessary financial means.[Larsen10]

Even before the economical recession that Portugal is facing, one of the major criticisms to the Portuguese case is that the law does not predict any support lines for the adaptation of the pre-existing buildings [Cardoso Dias10], in Singapore the authorities understood this and prepared the Accessibility Fund, with a set of rules designed to ensure the good use.

In both Norwegian and Singapore cases there was the need to get the entities, stakeholders and users involved in the processes to ensure the best results, not only that, but the developed work is constantly being monitored by the authorities creating means to appeal, usually trough participation, to the population.

Education takes a vital part in both cases, the education of the population, especially the younger generations but also the education of the stakeholders and technicians that need to deal with this issues in a daily basis.

Another word for the creation of entities that deal directly with the accessibility issues, in Singapore they have the Committee on Ageing Issues, in Norway, each municipality has The Council for the disabled, both of these entities take a figure head in the policy making that leads to planning or in the planning itself. In Portugal we have the National Institute for Rehabilitation, and in some cases the municipalities have a figure amongst their organization that deals directly with accessibility issues, in both cases directly related with the disabled, and usually not heard on the municipal planning processes.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Fundação Ciência e Tecnologia for believing in this research and assigning the grant with the reference SFRH/BD/48924/2008.

5. REFERENCES

