

ABSTRACT
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Accessibility - A changing process in Austria Different positions in the last twenty years

Twenty years ago nobody had an idea or interest at this topic. In Austria-affected persons were living on the margins of society, sometimes in closed centres.

In public no one had an interest to invest thoughts and money for this minority group.

In small steps and over a longer period the public authorities started with first measures for physically impaired people, for example simple ramps on the backside of an office-building, sometimes installation of elevators, no more-no less.

We speak about a period of more than 10 years with no significant improvements.

The beginning of the 21st century brought first a change - the European Union started with programs for disabled people, then the national governments had to adapt the national laws - a long process started. In this time different Austrian standards were developed, first also for physically impaired people, but also first steps for people with sensory impairments - a very difficult topic to the present day.

Our „Austrian standards“ were more and more well developed and it was easier to comply with the guidelines, for example barrier-free toilets, ramps, elevators, automatic doors and so on - but it was much more difficult to create valid standards for this category of persons with sensory impairments - there are too many different demands of visual impairments, blind persons, hearing impaired people and deaf people.

It's a failure of lawmakers, editors of the relevant standards and finally of the industries because they don't develop standardized and useable products.

Therefore we have a lot of different products, a lot of different views, a lot of different decisions how to manage this topic.

Now we are in the situation that we have a lot of experts holding different views.

It is very difficult for the clients to decide how to reach the goal of accessibility, some are very engaged to this topic, but more of them invest a lot of energy to avoid expensive measures.

At the end of the day all clients -as twenty years before- are willing to install all necessities for physically impaired people but reduce considerably their engagement for the sensory impairments.

So it's the point that the experts have to do a really good job to create accessibility in all fields of impairments because still the laws and special standards are always lagging behind.

Accessibility of public buildings protected as a historic monument

A specific topic is the implementation of barrier-free-measures in historic buildings - there are much more difficulties as there are in new buildings - in Austria the „National Heritage Agency“ is vested with all legislative and executive powers, stands all over interests of measures for disabled people - each project takes a lot of engagement and insistence to achieve the requested aims.

Recently there is more mutual understanding on both sides - that's why we could execute a lot of barrier-free-projects in historic buildings - of course it's a very sensitive process but very interesting to create this solutions in difficult conditions.

Sometimes the historical background helps us to develop important steps. In this case we realized several important solutions in the house of the government of styria, a valuable Renaissance building- with major support of the „national heritage agency“

Landhaus Graz - accessible toilet, lifting platform

