



Ergonomics in Design for All/ Newsletter

Dear Members and Friends of the International Ergonomics Association (IEA),
Ergonomics in Design for All Technical Committee,

**Welcome to our twenty fourth newsletter:
it includes also a focus on the first Romanian inclusive design guide.**

Have a look at it, enjoy it!

With very best wishes, I wish you good luck with your work,

Isabella T. Steffan

IEA Ergonomics in Design for All TC

Past Chair

CONGRESSES

THE IEA2024 CONGRESS

By **Erminia Attaianesi**, IEA TC EinDfA Chair

Dear EIDfA TC members,

I would like to share with you a recent message from Maggie Graf,
Vice President and Secretary General of IEA:

Don't forget that the final dates for submitting abstracts to IEA2024 is coming soon. People who submit an abstract (proposal) can decide later whether they want to extend it into a 6 page article or not. Only the articles will be published by Springer in the congress proceedings. Abstracts are only to ensure that you can give a presentation or a poster, if it is accepted, at the event but they will not be published. Although this event will be offered as a hybrid and online participation is therefore possible, there is much less interaction with peers than attending in person. You get to meet the people whose names are on the publications that you have valued. You get to talk with others who are working in the same field and learn lots of useful tips that never come up in formal presentations. You get to form friends for life.

IEA2024 will be hosted on the beautiful JeJu Island, Korea. The island is easily accessible through an international airport, with convenient connections from major hubs in Asia. The event will take place at the International Convention Centre, offering world-class facilities for presentations, discussions, and networking opportunities.

Members who are interested to submit a paper proposal on topic inherent Ergonomics in Desig for All are welcomed.

Call for abstract submissions extended

The deadline for the second round of the call for papers has been extended to 21 March 2024. The abstract submission outcomes will be announced on the 5th of April 2024 following a peer review process.

Details about the abstract submission requirements and format can be found here:

<https://www.iea2024.com/submission/01.html?sMenu=01>.



**BETTER LIFE ERGONOMICS
FOR FUTURE HUMANS**

FOCUS

THE FIRST ROMANIAN INCLUSIVE DESIGN GUIDE.

Did you exclude or were you excluded? It Includes You.

By **PhD Arch. Iris Popescu**, AMAIS, Romania

As in other countries of the world, Romania is also one where there are a lot of biases and misconceptions regarding IDEA - Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility.

*"Can we not make all spaces accessible? It will save costs."
"We have created a special place for people with disabilities."
"The space is accessible. It has a ramp."
"Accessibility = Help"*

These are just some of the accessibility biases encountered so far. We have many questions about public spaces and who are the people with and for whom we are building an inclusive society. From the definition of "disability" in relation to the built environment, to the possible categories of people and how they intersect, to who faces exclusion caused by architecture and design and what are the similarities between the obstacles encountered. For example: what do a mother with a baby in a stroller and an athlete practicing parkour on city streets have in common?

For decades now, accessibility solutions and inclusive design have been developing mostly in parallel with architecture, intersecting only in certain cases, usually at the end of the project. I agree with this view that these topics are considered the "uninvited guest" or the "special case" (Joe Boys, 2014). I have felt the same while trying to discuss with other architects or designers about these topics and why we should prioritize them in our professions. Because, even though inclusive and inclusion are on the tip of everyone's tongues nowadays, they are not a regular part of the architectural design process.

I used to see these topics the same way, until I had my aha-moment, an empathy exercise while I was in my last year of Architecture University, doing research for my diploma subject. I am part of Generation Y, I am a Millennial, so it is easy to understand the somewhat vigilante spirit that stimulated me to strive to find a topic that might have a beneficial impact on the community. During a break from this research, I was taking a stroll through one of Bucharest's parks and I noticed a couple of blind people with their baby in a stroller. At that moment I realized that during my six years of university, the topic of designing for somebody who cannot see never came up. A lot of architects and designers like Juhani Pallasmaa or Kat Holmes raise the concern that a far too big amount of the contemporary world is built out of images and visual information, and that architecture has lost most of its complexity.

There is a lot of pressure to have great renderings, good looking iconic projects and not so much interest shown to other social and

the discussions we had in the design workshops about accessibility came down to ramps and, most of the time, at the very end of the project. Bringing not much joy to me or my colleagues. Thus, I started looking for as much information regarding people with disabilities and the involvement architects have on this topic.

Getting out of my social bubble I quickly found more information on how powerful social segregation is in our country. So much so, that you might even say that there are two separate worlds, that of people with disabilities and that of those without disabilities.

People with permanent disabilities face an isolation phenomenon that is caused by at least two reasons:

- ❖ The subjective one: the attitudes of people without disabilities towards people with disabilities. Those without disabilities tend to take too much pity on people with disabilities or they are afraid to talk to the person or they completely ignore the person and the topic of disability;
- ❖ The objective one: the unfriendly and most of the times completely inaccessible built environment. Space is a powerful instrument that can amplify or limit a person's abilities even if there is no disability certificate. This is why in 2014 I decided to start an NGO, AMAIS, because I feel that we, as architects and designers, are directly responsible for the impact the built environment has on society.

I have noticed, often, that it is not enough to impose, through laws or regulations, the changes necessary in architectural projects to include people with abilities or characteristics different from what Neufert shows as standard. You also need to bring a layer of education in the development of responsibility of architects towards the community to make accessibility a priority in architecture. Otherwise, if an inclusive dialogue is not generated in the community, in which all interested actors can participate, including those who were "invisible" until now, even if the built environment ends up being made accessible according to the law, it is very possible that social segregation persists.

We need to understand that accessibility is not only for people with permanent disabilities, that all these changes are beneficial to everyone, because they are a natural part of architectural design and stimulate a civic and normal attitude, which is more than just respecting the letter of the law.

If we wish to improve the accessibility of the built environment, we must first change mentalities

physical aspects of our projects. Back then, that was the day I realized that all

A possible solution to turning accessibility into a priority in architecture, might be our educational and research platform, AMAIS - The Alternative Methods of Social Segregation Association, which offers educational experiences complementary to the existing academic system. Understanding inclusive design as a professional or researcher requires creating an inclusive environment for yourself with the help of a diverse team before applying its principles to private or public projects. Our mission is focused on building an equitable society for people with permanent, temporary, and context-based disabilities, by applying the principles of inclusive design through architecture, technology, and social projects.

This long-term project revolves around the idea that to be able to start prioritizing accessibility and inclusion for the built environment we need to create inclusive dialogue contexts between diverse social and professional categories, people with and without disabilities. These contexts that we generate, build, or facilitate play an important role in developing independent living skills for people with disabilities and, implicitly, self-confidence. At the same time, they are also a powerful catalyst for the empathy and listening exercises that people with and without disabilities need, to understand that, in fact, each of us has a role to play in creating a truly inclusive society. And, perhaps the most important part for the work, all AMAIS' projects had and have the role of making architects or designers experience first-hand the importance and power of the built environment in the cohesion of a community. As architects or designers, we certainly cannot solve the general problems of society, but it is our role to identify the obstacles created so far by the built environment and provide an inclusive framework for interaction to facilitate the identification of solutions.

Through these contexts, AMAIS starts a dialogue about and with the misfits, the unpredictable, the uninvited people who are different from the norms and standards imposed by society. Because if you think more about this, how many of us do fit in these norms throughout our lives?

Designing for human diversity begins with identifying situations of exclusion. These can manifest themselves in countless ways depending on: abilities, age, gender, and sexual orientation, social or professional category, race, ethnicity, nationality, education, religion, or belief.

To understand what inclusive design means, an important step is understanding our biases, where we create exclusion and become humbler when it comes to thinking that we know all our users' needs.

It is important to design inclusively, thereby solving problems related to the built environment. But to succeed in having an inclusive approach, first we need to change the mindsets related to human diversity, in all its forms.

In Romania, as in other parts of the world, the problems related to the improper way of addressing accessibility and the built environment are mainly caused by:

- ❖ biases: accessibility and inclusion are treated as a "special case" and are not a natural part of the design process (yet);
- ❖ lack of theoretical resources (books) in Romanian and

Architectural education plays an important role in overcoming this perception of 'special cases' that accessibility and inclusion have.

To sum it up: EDUCATION would also be the answer, as it is for many other issues we are facing here.

That is why this summer was important for AMAIS (and the last two years). I have published the first Romanian inclusive design guide - Inclusive Design: Empathy Exercises in the Design Process.



Figure 1: © AMAIS 2022,
from the Empathy Retreat organised in Sibiu.

It started from the stories of the least visible, of the "uninvited", "unpredictable", "different from the norm", for whom the built environment can become a daily series of closed doors or a race full of obstacles.

The guide does not offer accessibility solutions, materials, or dimensions, it is a collective manifesto to remind us all the responsibility we bear towards the community. It is an invitation for dialogue and a reiteration of the importance of long-term inclusive design for people as diverse as possible. For me, for you and for society in general. It is a call for change, empathy, and creativity.

Why? Because no matter in which category you think you fall into now, your needs and abilities will change over time. You can always turn into the "uninvited" guest. The subject includes you.

Moreover, because not everybody would be interested in buying the book or it could be inaccessible (eg. language barrier, format), we have also created a website in Romanian and English with basic information about accessibility and inclusive design where people who are interested can start their search for the topic.

As always, the theoretical info is emphasized by the personal experiences gathered from diverse contexts of interaction we have generated, offering access to real and intersectional perspectives on IDEA.

NOTE Text contains excerpts from "(Inclusive) Design - It all starts by listening", "Inclusive Design: Empathy Exercises in the Design Process" and "Public Spaces Without Barriers" written by the same author.

references;

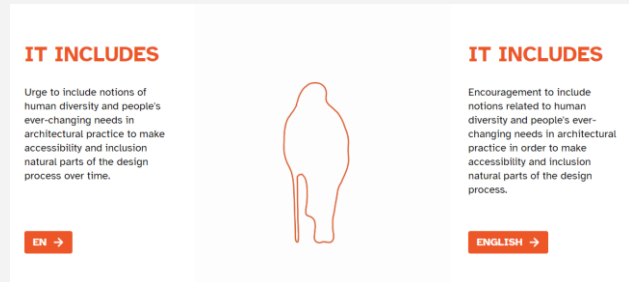
- ❖ unfriendly lingo, because most of the terms are from laws, norms, and standards;
- ❖ no strategy of preparing professionals from diverse domains to specialise in this field.



The **2023 Architecture Annual** has been organised by OAR Bucharest, edited by Iris Popescu and Arch. Mihaela Șerban, representatives of AMAIS (Alternative Methods of Social Integration Association), having the topic of Inclusive Bucharest. The UNINVITED is an installation as part of the Annual. This included 6 different perspectives on the city of Bucharest and the role of architects in solving situations of exclusion.

See: <https://www.anuala.ro/en/>

More: <https://amais.ro/2023/11/13/the-uninvited-anuala-de-arhitectura-2023/>



The **first inclusive design guide in Romania** has been launched as part of the Architecture Annual 2023. The book is called "Inclusive Design: Empathy Exercises in Design" and was printed through the Architectural Stamp Tax, funded by the Romanian Order of Architects.

More: <https://include.amais.ro/>

Contact: **AMAIS**,
iris.popescu@amais.ro

Promoting Ergonomics in Design for All is a core activity of our EinDfA TC.
You can find information about objectives, domains of interest, members of the TC here:

<https://iea.cc/member/ergonomics-in-design-for-all-eindfa/>

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