



Senior-friendly public space: – four best practice case studies in Denmark

The demographic profile of our society is changing, now and in the years to come. Analyses indicate that within ten or twenty years, those aged sixty-five and over will outnumber those aged fifteen and under. This is something new for Denmark. We have never had a population profile like this before. And it also means that public space will look different in the future – with a different constellation of people and activities. Lifestyle & Design Cluster teamed up with partners in ten other countries to study how we can create senior-friendly public space – now and for the future.

As part of the study, Lifestyle & Design Cluster commissioned a best practice analysis of a small number of projects in Denmark with several characteristics that make them interesting as we think about how senior-friendly public space might look. The study and the analysis were prepared by Karin Bendixen, Bexcom, consultant in inclusive design.

In the analysis, she writes:

“*‘Senior-friendly public space’ that can genuinely deliver will have to satisfy a long list of criteria while at the same time accommodating the age-related loss of functions that seniors can experience as they grow older.*

None of the case studies we selected was specifically framed in terms of seniors’ needs, and none of them satisfies all of the relevant criteria. But all the case studies express certain key ideas that are fundamental to what being senior-friendly means.

Where we have drawn case studies from the field of disabilities – as with the Musholm Holiday, Sports and Conference Centre at Korsør and the Disabled People’s Organisations House in Taastrup – it is because these projects seamlessly integrated their solutions with the seniors and the challenges they confront as they age. These buildings were based on a design strategy that directly addressed the needs and requirements of the seven disability groups. In so doing, they automatically provide for seniors and their needs.

The Holbæk public library worked with exciting design solutions on a number of levels that work equally well for all its users. Their round newspaper table, used mainly by single men, was moved out into open space with a tree planted in the centre – a beautiful example of an innovative and inclusive solution that discreetly helped to include a particular group of seniors.

In most cases, the users of these buildings were involved in the design process. The involvement of seniors, however, varied a great deal and for the most part was not systematic.

One very striking impression was the near-absence in the public sector of inclusive design as a requirement, indeed a strategy, for the design of public space. This is a matter of taking ownership of what is “friendly” – in the context of this project, inclusive design – and viewing it as a tool to be used as well as an innovative and exciting challenge. One example of this was Rigshospitalet (the State Hospital in Copenhagen), which produced its own extremely precise and detailed design manual.

In the course of the research, a clear distinction emerged between seniors and the elderly – between the well and active, and the frail who have lost some of their functions. Is this distinction relevant to how we go about designing senior-friendly public space? Striking throughout was a pervasive lack of expertise about accessibility and how it can work to the benefit of all. The word ‘accessibility’ is still associated with disability. As one designer said, ‘It’s not our intention to design for the disabled so they have to sit in a special place. I wouldn’t care for that myself.’

This project is a contribution to a more nuanced and inclusive approach to designing public space, products, and services that are senior-friendly and in fact friendly to everyone – and pay a socio-economic dividend into the bargain.”

Karin Bendixen, Bexcom
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CASE 1: THE READING CIRCLE, THE TREE AND THE MEN

- Holbæk Bibliotek (Holbæk Public Library)

CASE 2: HJERTELOUNGE: THE FUTURE OF OUTPATIENT CARE

- HjerteLounge (the Heart Lounge), Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen.

CASE 3: THE WORLD’S MOST ACCESSIBLE OFFICE BUILDING

- Danske Handicaporganisationers Hus (Disabled People’s Organisations Denmark House), Taastrup.

CASE 4: AESTHETIC AND INCLUSIVE DESIGN THAT MAKES NO CONCESSIONS

- Musholm ferie-, sport- og konferencecenter (Musholm Holiday, Sports and Conference Centre), Korsør.



THE READING CIRCLE, THE TREE AND THE MEN – Holbæk Public Library

The key idea here is that the library should be an inviting space. The design interior is welcoming, stimulating, and aesthetic. It invites library users of all ages. There are areas for reading, for study, drop-in areas, places for contemplation, meeting rooms, and an atrium.

One special feature of Holbæk Public Library is their “reading circle”. This is a shared space for browsing and reading in the form of a large round table with a full-sized tree at its heart. This is where older male library users, in particular like to come in the mornings to read the papers. Formerly this reading area was hidden away beneath the flight of stairs. The designers wanted to take advantage of the natural light from the skylight overhead. So they placed a tree under the skylight and designed a circular table around it. The tree gives the people at the table perusing the newspapers something to chat about. And the circular table builds a sense of inclusion for the readers as they sit together looking across to each other, yet still individuals.

Small areas in the library have been designated as places for contemplation and feel very much at home. For example, there is an octagonal table that invites the user to feel they are in their own private space. But the table lamps are also charging stations for a laptop. And there is a carpeted reading corner with comfortable armchairs for chatting to friends.

Facts

Address: Nygade 9 - 13, 4300 Holbæk, Tel: +45 72 36 36 06, Email: holbib@holb.dk

Website: <https://bibliotek.holbaek.dk/>

Category: Public amenity / Library

Interior design architect: RITA Arch, Viborggade 47A, Baghuset, 2100 København Ø

Website: <https://ritaarch.dk>

Holbæk Library: <https://ritaarch.dk/projekter/holbaek-bibliotek/>



HJERTELOUNGE: THE FUTURE OF OUTPATIENT CARE – HjerteLounge (the Heart Lounge), Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen.

At Rigshospitalet, the aim was to create a space for outpatients in the cardiology department that felt as much as possible like home. As the patients come in, they find an atmosphere of nature and tranquillity. A beech wood beautifies the back wall of the hall, and the privacy partition screens are decorated with flower motifs. Patients with heart conditions who might normally be hospitalised can now receive treatment and minor surgery as outpatients. This meant taking a completely new approach to the design of the outpatient clinic and the waiting areas in Rigshospitalet's cardiology department.

The HjerteLounge is an innovative and inviting space in which patients can feel secure and safe in the company of family members.

The HjerteLounge is divided into a waiting area and a private area. There is plenty of room to move around. The furnishings were selected to reflect the range of activities taking place here, but also to facilitate the work to be done. A dining table can be used for small information meetings and roundtables, but there is also more secluded seating, chairs for older patients and reclining chairs for patients who need to lie down to rest or sleep. There are privacy partitions between these chairs. The colours are muted but contrasting. For the linoleum floor, the designers chose a different colour from the ubiquitous grey of the hospital. They wanted the HjerteLounge floor to match the atmosphere of nature and the forest.

The furniture and décor still had to meet the hospital's exacting requirements for safety, accessibility, hygiene, and ergonomic correctness. The designers were guided by the hospital's Design Manual for Waiting Areas at Rigshospitalet, which meticulously describes the requirements for the different types of rooms and furnishings as well as describing users and their needs.



Facts

Address: Rigshospitalet, Dagshospitalet afsnit 2144/ 3142, Medicinsk Kardiologisk Klinik, Rigshospitalet, Inge Lehmanns Vej 5, 2100 København Ø

Website: <https://www.rigshospitalet.dk/presse-og-nyt/nyheder/nyheder/Sider/2019w/november/rigshospitalet-indvier-ny-hjerte-Lounge.aspx>

Category: Waiting room, Outpatients clinic

Architect: Agnete Kjær, Kuben Management



THE WORLD'S MOST ACCESSIBLE OFFICE BUILDING – Danske Handicaporganisationernes Hus (Disabled People's Organisations Denmark House), Taastrup

The Disabled People's Organisations Denmark House aims to be the world's most accessible office building. Its great central atrium – with a flood of natural light, a high ceiling and greenery at its centre – draws the visitor inside. A central staircase leads up to the third floor, and four bright colours guide the visitor to the building's four office wings. The colours make it easy to navigate the building. The reception area to the right of the entrance is long and extended and designed on two levels, so as to suit everyone. An overview board with tactility shows the plan of the building, and a special wayfinding strategy is used.

The furnishings used vary according to setting. The cloakroom rails and shelves are on two levels so as to be within reach of someone in a wheelchair or with restricted shoulder movement as well as at standing height. The cafeteria offers a choice of many types of chair in different colours, both with and without armrests, so there is a chair to fit everyone.

In the hallway, specially designed benches have back-support cushions mounted on the wall, a wedge cushion on the seat, and knobs that can be used to support yourself as you stand up. The House is packed full of specially designed solutions such as the small 'orientation knobs'. One knob means you are on the first floor, two knobs means the second floor and so on. Lifts can be operated by hand using an elevator button, or with a foot panel. There are hearing induction loops in reception, in the elevator and in the meeting rooms. There are rooms with couches and recliners where people with a mental disorder or cognitive disability can rest.

Electric sockets are always in colour contrast to the wall they are mounted on. There are good acoustics in the corridors, and the air exchange rate is two and a half times that of a standard office building.

The House has very easy access and there are excellent parking facilities for all types of vehicle including vans and electric cars. There is also a tactile-marked route from the S-train station that can be followed to the building. There are automatic doors and stair-free access, with a wayfinding floor line leading into the building and around the atrium.



Facts

Address: Blekinge Blvd. 2, 2630 Taastrup

Website: <https://handicap.dk> specifikt om huset: <https://handicap.dk/huset>

Architect: Architects: Cubo & Force4 <http://cubo.dk/projekt/handicaporganisationernes-hus/>

Category: Office building



AESTHETIC AND INCLUSIVE DESIGN THAT MAKES NO CONCESSIONS – Musholm Ferie-, Sport- og Konferencecenter (Musholm Holiday, Sports and Conference Centre), Korsør

Musholm's ambition was for this building to be the "norm" for accessibility. And in 2016, they won an award as the world's most accessible holiday, sports and conference centre. The holiday centre is for everyone and invites everyone with its welcoming architecture. From the beginning, the objective at Musholm was to seamlessly and aesthetically integrate accessibility so that the rooms, for example, would not emphasise special equipment or give an impression of aiding disability.

You can see how accessibility is an integrated feature of the design in the twenty-four bedrooms. All the doors are painted in strong contrasting colours and the room numbers are painted directly on the doors. As well as making it easy to find your room, it's decorative. The room door handles are specially and inconspicuously designed so they are easy to open even with an elbow. There is stair-free access everywhere, and windows and curtains are operated by remote control. The cabinets have been specially made to provide easy access to the hanging rail, and a ceiling hoist, if you need one, can be run right into one side of the cabinet and stored out of the way. The ceiling hoist tracks are integrated into the walls, so that you don't see them – just as the bathroom sink is adjustable.

The multipurpose hall has excellent natural light supplemented with pleasant artificial light so as to support lip-reading for those with hearing difficulties. The shape of the ceiling and the use of wood overall means that acoustics are good. The multipurpose hall also has an activity ramp with a handrail used by seniors for training.



Facts

Address: Musholmvej 100, 4220 Korsør

Website: <https://musholm.dk>

Architects: AART architects og landskabarkitekter Urbanlab Nordic

Website: <https://aart.dk/projekter/musholm>

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