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## The Category of Otherness Versus Universal Design: The Case of Public Space

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** *The accessibility of a public space to all users is the premise for calling that space public. Accessible public space (physical, digital and social) is a prerequisite for more independent functioning of all users, including people with disabilities and social inclusion. Currently, Poland's construction law obliges project owners and contractors to ensure that the resulting buildings, spaces and services are designed in accordance with the concept of universal design and therefore without architectural, digital and social barriers. This article provides a brief overview of how public space is conceived, an overview of what we know about disability and the term disability itself, and then discusses universal design as a tool for opening up space to all users.*

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** *The article, is an excerpt from a broader study under the banner of universal design, initiated by participation in a university project [Accessibility zone POWR.03.04.00-00-KP04/21-00.]. The content of this text discusses the key concepts contained in the title, to which intertwined chapters are devoted. Closer to the final section there is an attempt to understanding the otherness and there is an emphasis on the need to level and remove social barriers evident in the relationship between all users of the public space. Various methods were used to write the text, among which the most important are heuristic methods and techniques, desk research and questionnaire research.*

**Findings:** *The penultimate section reveals the concept of "otherness," including in light of surveys. The final section is an introductory description of the research currently underway with students on an accessibility audit using the example of a plot of land used by the Faculty of Economics, Finance and Management of the University of Szczecin.*

**Practical implications:** *The results obtained should contribute to a better understanding of the intricacies of personalized, real causes of all users of the public space demand and satisfaction, taking into account the role of the conscious user in real life and human relationship, social and cultural transactions, and to an appreciation of the research workshop of socio-economic geography as a science predisposed to speak more decisively on issues of shaping open, user-friendly public space.*

**Originality/Value:** *Surrounding public spaces are not without architectural, digital and social barriers. Our past shows that otherness was understood differently and that this understanding was harmful to people who looked different than the majority. In order to develop human-friendly spaces, it is important to focus on social barriers first; as they are the starting point for both achieving better socio-cultural performance and reducing the negative impact of existing architectural and digital barriers on all kind of user satisfaction.*

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**“Disability does not have to be an obstacle to success. I have suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis practically all my adult life. However, the disease has not prevented me from developing a great career in astrophysics and leading a happy family life.”**

**Professor Stephen W. Hawking**

***Disability – issues, problems, solutions. No. 1/2013(6), p. 5.***

## **1. Introduction**

Public space is the most important and fundamental factor indicating the vitality of a place; it is both an asset with specific functional characteristics and a place for the transmission of various products, both tangible and intangible, satisfying the various needs of all (consciously or unconsciously admitted to it) users. Public space is a kind of constellation of buildings, the space between them and the atmosphere of the place, which enables residents to lead a certain lifestyle and not another.

Public space gives character to a place there we experience “urbanity” or “rurality”, there we meet “one’s own”, “stranger” or “other”, there we give evidence of our “openness” or “closedness” towards “our own” and “others” (by opening and closing a place through architectural, digital and social barriers or the absence of creating such obstacles), in a place perceived as public space we negotiate social and cultural relations, it is there that basic social (spatial-creative) interactions take place. An area without used, multi-level, active public spaces remains *dead* and also, someone who cannot be seen in the public space remains unnoticed by the local community.

Public space, defined in socio-economic terms, is a collectively used good, intentionally shaped by man, in accordance with social principles and values, serving the needs of local and supra-local communities (Chwalibóg, 2011 pp. 44-45). It is created and co-created (according to social principles and values) by different groups of actors of public space (politicians, architects and planners, residents, visitors, tourists and all its users), who fill this space, create relations in it and constantly interpret and decipher it (Czepczyński, 2011).

Its morphology reflects all the basic diversities of the community, while at the same time the structure and functioning of the society is influenced by the current development and scenery of the place (Pirveli, 2023). Thus, the public character of the space is determined by the collective use of the space, regardless of the age of the user and whether the user is a fully or partially physically fit person, whether the user is characterized by a temporary or permanent disability (Kowalski, 2018 pp.10 and 21).

The multiplicity and importance of the functions of public space, as well as "protecting social diversity: mixing socioeconomic groups, avoiding isolation and segregation, and supporting weaker social groups" (Chwalibóg, 2011 p. 45), can make the public space not subject to appropriation with infrastructure accessible only to some of the so-called able-bodied users of that space.

## **2. Literature Review: What do we Know about Disabilities?**

More than a billion people worldwide are affected by some form of disability, with nearly 200 million of them experiencing significant functional difficulties. These are the latest figures based on the 2010 global population estimates. This is higher than previous estimates from the World Health Organization, which date back to the 1970s, and which suggested it was about 10% (Niepełnosprawność..., 2013 pp. 9-10).

In the European Union alone, people with disabilities make up about 14% of the population aged 15-64 (Tomala, 2021). The employment rate for people with disabilities globally stands at 44%, more than half that for people without disabilities (RAMPA, 2022). In Poland, people with disabilities who have legal confirmation of disability amounted to nearly 4.7 million, according to the results of the 2011 National Population and Housing Census (in reality, this number is much higher, ranging from 5 to 7 million).

Thus, the number of disabled people in Poland accounted for 12.2% of the country's population compared to 14.3% in 2002 (Biuro Pełnomocnika...). (Reviewing these and other indicators describing the statistical picture of the disabled, one can ask whether there is a lack of representatives of this social group in the public spaces of my locality, or whether they are there, but are not visible, because encountering physical and social barriers in the public space I visit, they are discouraged from being with everyone. It is also possible that, avoiding contact with the dissimilar, they choose digital space as a place to express their presence and to work).

The number of people with disabilities is steadily increasing, due to an aging population, an increased risk of disability in the elderly, and a global increase in the incidence of chronic diseases that cause disability, such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and mental illnesses (Niepełnosprawność..., p. 10). Disability patterns in a given country are influenced by health trends, environmental trends and other factors, such as traffic accidents, natural disasters, conflict, diet and substance abuse.

Stereotypical views of disability overwhelmingly apply to wheelchair users and a few other "classic" groups, such as the blind and deaf. However, the experience of disability resulting from the interaction of the condition, personal and environmental factors varies considerably. While disability correlates with disadvantage, not all people with disabilities are equally disadvantaged.

According to scientific studies, people with more severe disorders often experience greater disadvantages (Grammenos, 2003; Grech, 2008) results from the *World Health Survey* show that the poorest people, women and the elderly, as well as people with low income, the unemployed or people with less education, are at increased risk of disability (WHS, 2022). Survey data from *Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys* in selected countries in Europe and around the world show that children of ethnic minorities are at significantly higher risk of developing disabilities than other children (UNCF, 2008).

### 3. Disability as a Term and Concept

Personal injury, cognitive and mental disorders are an inevitable part of society. Disability phenomenologically is treated in accordance with the models of social behavior adopted at a particular episode of civilizational development and the intellectual-scientific currents formed. Historically, disability has been defined differently and there have been numerous solutions to offset its effects.

The information compiled in Table 1 shows the far very difficult road that people with disabilities or disorderly or different-looking people went through until 1990, when a law was passed to prohibit discrimination against people with problems or different-looking people (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Selected examples of the perception of the disabled in the historical process

Antiquity and the Middle Ages
Ancient Greek culture: there was acquiescence to killing children with perceived body defects (Barnes and Mercer, 2008 p. 32).
The medieval Christian world: handicap almost always aroused fear and pity (Ryan and Thomas 1980, Thomas 1982, Barnes 1997). The perception of fear was also supported by some biblical passages “that disability is a punishment for sins committed” (Barnes and Mercer, 2008 p. 32).
Turn of the 18th and 19th centuries
More developed countries: people with disabilities became the subject of biopolitics – numerous secure institutions were established. In the countries of Europe at the time, a large-scale system of social control was established, including hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, shelters, schools and colonies (Cohen and Scull, 1983).
Turn of the 19th and 20th centuries
Special schools and, to use contemporary terms, vocational activation facilities for the blind and visually impaired were established on the territory of divided Poland. Their performance was negligible, for there was a lack of conviction that a blind person could actually acquire the skills and competencies to function independently (Grodecka, 1996).
In Europe and North America (including the US) there were so-called <i>Ugly Laws</i> , imposing social restrictions on people whose physical appearance was gross or could frighten "normal" people (Bogdan, 1996, Gerber, 1996).
First half of the 20th century
Social theory followed the laws of medicine, defining as disabled people with physical, sensory and cognitive impairments (Dartington et al., 1981 p. 126), therefore unable to perform important social roles and functions, making disabled people dependent on

<p>physically healthy and socially productive people (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970 p. 12).</p>
<p>Numerous war conflicts, civilizational disasters, and anti-humanitarian social experiments justified by “social hygiene” policies concerning people with disabilities resulted in a law being passed in 33 U.S. states in 1938 "authorizing the forced sterilization of women with mental retardation" (Barnes and Mercer, 2008 p.44). In Europe, Hitler's Germany is notable for its systematic program of exterminating “those undeserving of life in society” (Burleigh, 1994 p. 194).</p>
<p>From the point of view of society, disability is a disorder, and "the values that bind society together must support the interests and activities of the majority, and therefore promote dynamic independence and achievement resulting from competition, especially in the professional sphere. In addition, they also cause side effects, stigmatizing and creating a negative image of it and handicapping people in these very important aspects of life” (Topliss, 1982 p. 112).</p>
<p>In North America and the United Kingdom, the practice of creating specialized facilities for the “most handicapped or dangerous” developed (Parker, 1988). Individuals described as mentally ill – were considered a problem representing a social “burden” that should be isolated in secure institutions. A huge number of people with disabilities were holed up in detention centers. This was justified by the argument that it was being done for their own good, so that they would not be a burden on others (Goffman, 1961). Long-term inmates were “written off” as “socially dead” in detention institutions, merely awaiting the end of their lives in them (Miller and Gwynne, 1972).</p>
<p>Second half of the 20th century</p>
<p>A self-contained scientific field of <i>disability studies</i> emerged, enabling interdisciplinary research. Technological advances and approaches based on the concept of human rights and independent living for people with disabilities have created “a much better environment for the disabled, allowing them to participate more widely in the gainful employment market and live relatively independently” (Finkelstein, 1980 p. 11). An international movement started by people with disabilities has played and continues to play a key role in these changes (Driedger, 1989); the main goal of this movement is to challenge the deeply entrenched medical discourse and view disability as a tragedy of the individual (Blackmore and Hodgkins, 2012 p. 71).</p>
<p>There was a realization of the fact that (contrary to expectations) democracy, neoliberalism, free market economy, globalization not only do not solve a number of conflicts related to dissimilarity, “abnormality,” but sometimes even foster the emergence of new ways to exclude carriers of “abnormality” in physical or intellectual-psychological development (Drabarz, 2020 p. 28).</p>
<p>NGOs, managed by the beneficiaries themselves, i.e. the recipients of the services they provide, began to appear in large numbers; they create conditions for the development of the disabled, contributing to the search for systemic solutions, implementing projects to promote and support inclusion and equality (Blackmore and Hodgkins, 2012 p. 72). They play a large role in the spread and implementation of the sociopolitical model of disability (Barnes and Mercer, 2008 p. 18), as well as in the recognition of disability as a collective identity of people with disabilities as a minority, for years associated with discrimination and exclusion of their role (ALSO).</p>
<p>In 1985, Canada included disability as a human rights category in the <i>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms</i>.</p>
<p>In 1990, the <i>Americans with Disabilities Act</i>, or ADA, was passed in the U.S. (Doyle, 1999 pp. 209-226). (It is the world's oldest and most comprehensive piece of disability anti-discrimination legislation).</p>

In 1992, the <i>Australian Disability Discrimination Act</i> was passed.
In 1993, a provision on discrimination against the disabled was included in the <i>Human Rights Act in New Zealand</i> .
In 1995, the <i>Disability Discrimination Act</i> was adopted in the UK.
<b>The 21st Century</b>
The phenomenon of disability is still a topical issue, and society and governments are facing increasingly complex challenges related to it (Tikhonov, 2020 p. 27). The box lists a set of laws that form the legislative basis for the current century: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, signed by Poland in 2007, ratified in 2012, 1997 Charter on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 1992 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Part II: Non-discrimination and Citizenship), 2012 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Europe 2020 – Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth of 2010, European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 – Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe of 2010, Education and Training ET 2020 – Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training Act – Higher Education Law. The recommendations of the Council of Europe and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities treat universal design as a tool for access to social rights for people with disabilities.
In Polish anti-discrimination law, the key is: Act of August 27, 1997 on vocational and social rehabilitation and employment of disabled persons. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of December 13, 2006, drawn up in New York constituting the primary international anti-discrimination legislation. European Accessibility Act (EAA) of March 13, 2019, approved by the European Parliament under the name Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council (EU) 2019/882 of April 17, 2019, which is a directive aimed at creating common standards for goods and services adapted to the needs of people with various disabilities throughout the European Union. The requirements in 2019 of the adopted directive are expected to take effect on June 28, 2025 and apply to the business sector. The accessibility requirements apply to operators who offer, among other things: computer operating systems and hardware, payment terminals and self-service terminals, devices that enable telecommunications services, e-book readers. The directive also includes services provided to consumers; these include, for example, electronic communication systems, retail banking, e-commerce services, distribution of e-books (EAA).

*Source: Own elaboration based on the items cited in the table.*

Disability, according to the latest definitions, is a condition in which a person with some impairment faces social barriers due to the fact that the culture, the space in which we function, is adapted to the fully able-bodied. Whereby, we speak of "disability" when a disproportion arises between an individual's capabilities and the layout of the environment or society's requirements for functionality.

The main task in achieving full participation and equal status in society is linked to social structure planning (EP, 2016). In order to achieve sustainable, much better development prospects – quoting the mentor of world-renowned astrophysicist Professor Stephen W. Hawking – we must support people living with disabilities and remove those barriers that prevent them from participating in the community, in education, in finding decent work, and “hear their voice” (Disability...2013).

#### 4. Discussion: Universal Design as a Tool to Open up Spaces for all Users

The term *universal design* first appeared in the United States in 1985. The author of the idea was Ronald Mace, a disabled architect. He assumed that design should be based on building an environment and creating products and services that are accessible to the widest possible audience, regardless of age, ability and capacity, cultural background and other differentiating characteristics (Mace, 1985, p. 148; HAPI, 2015).

In 1997, to develop the principles of universal design, he formed a team consisting of architects, designers, engineers and scientists<sup>2</sup>. Originally, 7 principles of universal design were created, and in 2009 the concept was supplemented with an 8th principle (Mace, 1985) (Table 2).

*Table 2. Principles of universal design*

Principle	Description	Guidelines
<b>1. Equitable Use</b>	useful for people with different abilities and skills	a. Ensure the same usage patterns for all users: identical when possible; equivalent when not. b. Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users. c. Privacy, security and equality regulations should be equally available to all users. d. Make the design appealing to all users.
<b>2. Flexibility in Use</b>	wide range of individual user preferences and capabilities	a. Provide a selection of uses. b. Customize access and use for right- or left-handed people. c. Facilitate accuracy and precision of use. d. Provide adaptability to the user's pace.
<b>3. Simple and Intuitive Use</b>	easy to understand regardless of the experience, knowledge, language skills, concentration level of the user	a. Eliminate unnecessary complexity. b. Be consistent with user expectations and intuition. c. Take into account a wide range of literacy and language proficiency. d. Arrange the information according to its importance. e. Provide effective prompts and feedback during and after the task.
<b>4. Perceptible Information</b>	message effective regardless of the environment or the user's sensory abilities	a. Use different modes (graphic, verbal, tactile) to redundantly convey relevant information. b. Provide adequate contrast between the relevant information and its surroundings. c. Maximize the "readability" of relevant information. d. Distinguish the elements so that the instructions

<sup>2</sup>Team composition: Bettye Rose Connell, Mike Jones, Ron Mace, Jim Mueller, Abir Mullick, Elaine Ostroff, Jon Sanford, Ed Steinfeld, Molly Story and Gregg Vanderheiden, Konrad Kaletsch, (The 7 Principles...).

		or directions are simple (easy and unambiguous). e. Ensure compatibility with various techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.
<b>5. Tolerance for Error</b>	Minimize the danger and undesirable consequences of accidental or unintentional activities	a. Arrange items to minimize hazards and errors: most frequently used items, most accessible; hazardous items eliminated, isolated or shielded. b. Provide warnings about risks and errors. c. Provide safety features in case of failure. d. Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.
<b>6. Low Physical effort</b>	design used efficiently and comfortably and with minimal fatigue	a. Allow the user to maintain a neutral body position. b. Use a solution that requires reasonable operational forces. c. Minimize repetitive activities. d. Minimize prolonged physical effort.
<b>7. Size and Space for Approach and Use</b>	size and space allows access, reach and use regardless of the body size, posture or mobility of the user	a. Ensure clear visibility of important elements for any seated or standing user. b. Make access to all elements convenient for any seated or standing user. c. Adjust for differences in hand size and grip. d. Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal aids.
<b>8. Perception of Equality</b>	minimize the possibility of an individual being perceived as discriminating or discriminated against.	

*Source: Own elaboration based on The 7 Principles..., NDA, ALSO.*

The concept of universal design initially applied only to architectural design. Over time, it has also been applied to other areas of design, such as industrial design, transportation, computer interface design, web services, information and communication technologies and systems, websites, but also education and training (EAA).

The term "universal" does not mean solutions that will satisfy everyone, but will provide the largest possible number of people – usability of all items needed for life and access to services in all areas of life, including, education and training at different levels (Habias and Kozłowska, 2010 p. 13). Universal design is also called design for all or inclusive design.

The “accessibility” guaranteed by the project, is treated as a necessary condition for participation in various spheres of life and building independence for people with disabilities. This is specified in a number of documents, a significant number of which are listed in the last row of Table 1.

Thinking in terms of universal design is intended to lead to the creation of physical and cultural environments that enable people of all fitness and ability levels to undertake daily activities, in safety and comfort, without unnecessary restrictions



and obstacles. Its goal is integration, bridging the physical and, more importantly, mental barriers between people “without” and “with” disabilities, based on the principle of “the same entrance for all” or “the same opportunities for all” (Thematic report..., 2007).

The catalog of solutions includes and assumes the removal of architectural barriers, digital barriers and social barriers. It therefore goes beyond the technical conditions with their guidelines for the design of public spaces for people with disabilities and beyond the existing understanding of the accessibility of the building for people with disabilities. Whereby, the main task in achieving full participation and equal status in society is linked to social structure planning (EP, 2016).

In general, the idea is to design in such a way that, by definition, without emphasizing that it's about people with disabilities, we create spaces (services, programs, etc.) that are accessible to all – i.e., design equally for children, seniors, the visually impaired, the hearing impaired, those with physical or mental disabilities, pregnant women, parents with a young child, those with insufficient knowledge of the local language so that everyone can navigate sidewalks, streets, buildings, and use information, services and facilities on the same basis as people without disabilities.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the report of the Norwegian committee established to design legislation to protect people with disabilities from discrimination (EP) state that universal design is a strategic approach to the planning and design of both products and the relevant environment, aimed at promoting an inclusive society for all citizens and ensuring full equality and opportunity for participation.

The concept of universal design paves new paths of thought and creates its own terminology (Thematic report..., 2007 p. 11-16), based on the principle of equality to a greater extent than the concept of general accessibility for people with reduced functionality<sup>3</sup>. Universal design is a common term for all activities that deal with shaping the environment, encompassing local community planning, land use, architecture, construction work, production, including analog, digital and social product.

The Polish-language handbook for barrier-free design translates the philosophies of universal product and environment design into facilities for practitioners in such a way that physical, social and digital spaces can be used by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation (Kowalski, 2018). The range of people against whom barrier-free design should be applied is wide and includes

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<sup>3</sup>Terms: *reduced functionality or functional impairment mean that a part of a person's body or one of their physical or cognitive functions has been completely destroyed, damaged or significantly impaired (Thematic report..., 2007).*

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people in wheelchairs, using crutches, canes, people who are blind and visually impaired, people who are deaf and hard of hearing, people of short and tall stature, people with intellectual disabilities, people with mental disabilities, people with temporary disabilities, pregnant women, parents with children, the elderly, children, foreigners who do not know the local language (Kowalski, 2018; The 7 Principles..., NDA, ALSO).

Currently, Poland's construction law obliges project owners and contractors to ensure that buildings under construction are designed in accordance with universal design, that is, as accessible and safe for all. The legislative provision, along with the possibility of receiving funding<sup>4</sup> for work adapting certain sections to the needs of all users, without conflating “able-bodied” and “disabled” as people with mutilations, can definitely speed up the removal of architectural barriers.

Even though the Supreme Audit Office's (SAC) report on the accessibility of public space for the elderly and disabled shows that none of the 94 buildings in the 24 communes inspected complied with standards enshrined in legislative documents, the inspected buildings are not free of barriers that prevented people with disabilities from using them freely.

The SAC also noted that solutions to improve the accessibility of public spaces were missing from the preparation and design stage of the project. 40% of cases in 21 communes were found where design, technical or tender documentation did not include solutions for people with various disabilities (Czechowska, 2019).

## 5. Otherness as a Term and Concept

International, EU and national legal provisions are likely to contribute to the removal of architectural barriers from our public spaces (access to green or recreational areas, to cultural, sports and entertainment centers, to offices of various levels and functions, to educational institutions, etc.), and as people now in their 20s and younger grow up, digital barriers will also disappear.

A somewhat more difficult barrier to overcome, because not subject to legislative prohibitions and orders but a reflection of mentality, customary law, and the degree of awareness of disability and realization of one's own role in the process of removing the discomfort felt by another person who is slightly different from you, may prove to be a social barrier. This is because it is an expression of a historically shaped collective memory (mentality) perceiving people with ailments as “other”, “weaker” in need of help or sick and hence dangerous or even worse (Table 1).

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<sup>4</sup>The money for this purpose is transferred to poviats at the beginning of each calendar year. They are disbursed by local governments through poviat family assistance centers (Parker, 1988).

In addition to this, the social barrier or lack of awareness of the “non-otherness” of people with disabilities has another resonance – namely: the formalization of building laws mandating adjustments to a building to accommodate the needs of all users (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** *One of the lighter examples of sham compliance with the law and the creation of what should be eliminated*



*Source: Own archive.*

Otherness, as a phenomenon, is born in the consciousness of an individual or in the consciousness of society and is rooted in the social structure, and is therefore made visible in sociotopography (Figure 1). The way of feeling or experiencing otherness is in accordance with the prevailing or emerging value system in a given social environment; it is expressed in the behavior of an individual or group in relation to the environment (historically formed value system – see Table 1; new value system – see Table 2).

Otherness manifests itself by isolating a particular social group (here:) with special needs from the non-other. This isolation is either the result of one's own choice or is imposed and enforced. The need to isolate the others or to isolate oneself from the others is born with the existence of the desire to depreciate or feel unaccepted for otherness or self among others (Pirveli and Rykiel, 2007). Otherness is a phenomenon that resides within the social structure; its spatial reflection is a physical barrier or a social barrier that has a spatial expression, although the spatial expression of a social barrier is not always physical (Pirveli, 2023).

It can be created by privileged groups to mark their presence or to manifest separateness, superiority or dominance. However, barriers are also created to separate unacceptable social groups from each other. Repeatedly, formalizing legislative requirements or not being aware of the needs of people with problems (social cause) is the reason why there is a physical barrier (Pirveli and Rykiel, 2007).

Barrier functions can be performed by walls, laws, including administrative bans and orders, but also by the physiognomic features of both developments and people on the street, as well as the behavior of these people.

The most important catalyst for barriers is social acceptance; otherness thus disappears with increased tolerance and self-awareness. Otherness, as a social phenomenon, is reflected in the legal, political, customary, ideological, cultural, social spheres, and is manifested in both physical and social space – both objective and subjective.

An empirical study of the others and strangers in the public consciousness was conducted in the academic community of Szczecin in 2007 (Pirveli and Rykiel, 2007) and repeated in 2022<sup>5</sup>. 40 responses to ten survey questions each were received electronically.

In the current paper, the results of only two questions are considered (the first question analyzed: Who is a stranger? The second question analyzed: what should be the treatment of the stranger: a) elimination: yes, no, I don't know, b) isolation: yes, no, I don't know).

The structure of responses to the question of who are the strangers from both surveys is presented in the footnote<sup>6</sup>. Respondents identified two categories of people as strangers: spatial and non-spatial. Spatial categories in the 2007 study were correlated with distance.

The more remote areas residents were concerned with, the more they were strangers to respondents. The only exception to this rule was the greater stated strangeness of residents of the city's other housing estates than of its districts. The exception was

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<sup>5</sup>The empirical material is stored in the author's own archive.

<sup>6</sup>Spatial category: *Inhabitants of neighboring continents* (2007 - 3.33, 2022 - 1.39), *Inhabitants of neighboring countries* (2007 - 2.64, 2022 - 4.42), *Inhabitants of neighboring regions* (2007 - 2.39; 2022 - 1.9), *Inhabitants of neighboring housing units* (2007 - 1.78; 2022 - 3.08), *Individuals living in the same housing unit* (2007 - 1.36; 2022 - 5.0). Non-spatial category: *Individuals of different religion* (2007 - 2.08; 2022 - 3.00), *Mentally ill individuals* (2007 - 2.42; 2022 - 3.00), *Individuals with much lower education* (2007 - 2.33; 2022 - 2.1), *Individuals with different political views* (2007 - 2.28; 2022 - 5.00), *Individuals with a different sexual orientation* (2007 - 2.11; 2022 - 2.01), *Individuals of a different race* (2007 - 2.11; 2022 - 1.9), *Individuals of a different nationality* (2007 - 2.08; 2022 - 3.89), *Individuals of different religion* (2007 - 2.08; 2022 - 2.08), *Individuals with much higher income* (2007 - 1.92; 2022 - 0.8), *Individuals with much lower income* (2007 - 1.67; 2022 - 1.61), *Individuals with much higher education* (2007 - 1.67; 2022 - 0.5), *Individuals of a different sex* (2007 - 1.56; 2022 - 0.3), *Individuals of a different profession* (2007 - 1.44; 2022 - 0.8), *Older individuals* (2007 - absence of question; 2022 - 4.6), *Individuals with lower intellectual capacity* (2007 - absence of question; 2022 - 3.6), *Wheelchair users* (2007 - absence of question; 2022 - 2.9)

illustrated by the well-known phenomenon that housing estates in the city are more of a social phenomenon than a spatial one (Rykiel, 1999).

For 2022 survey respondents, distance is no longer a measure of strangeness. Perception of inhabitants of other continents as strangers fell radically (2007 - 3.33, 2022 - 1.39), while it increased – concerning residents of neighboring countries (2007 - 2.64, 2022 - 4.42), neighboring housing units (2007 - 1.78; 2022 - 3.08) and individuals living in the same housing unit (2007 - 1.36; 2022 - 5.0).

The increase in the aforementioned indicators may be an expression of various processes, including the hyper-personalization of needs and the increase in the generational split and hence the dissimilarity of related people<sup>7</sup>. The strangest non-spatial category in 2007, which was mentally ill people (2.42), turned out to be even stranger in 2022 (3.00). Strangeness of those with differing political views increased more dramatically (from 2.28 to 5.00).

In contrast, the disappearing strangeness is the non-spatial category of a person of a different sex (from 1.56 to 0.3). In the questions about strangeness in 2022, several new non-spatial items were added, while the five-point scale was left unchanged: the average rating of the elderly as strangers is 4.6, those with lower intellectual ability 3.6, and wheelchair users 2.9.

In both years, when asked about the legitimacy of eliminating strangers from society or isolating them from society, respondents spoke strongly in the negative. Instead, they admitted that they had encountered the phenomenon of calls for the isolation and even elimination of strangers in the public space of Polish cities, which they consider definitely reprehensible.

## **6. Ending**

Universal design, also known as design for all or inclusive design, is superimposed, as repeatedly noted above, on the elimination of architectural, digital and social barriers. Universal design and inclusion are key to achieving the right to education and training, according to the UN Convention (13/12/2006) on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the first legally binding act to include reference to the concept of quality inclusive education and training (UDE).

The University of Szczecin, recognizing the importance of universal design and the role and place of higher education institutions in training the awareness and self-awareness of research and teaching staff in seeing all people on a similar basis, launched the Accessibility Zone Project (POWR.03.04.00-00-KP04/21-00).

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<sup>7</sup>A more detailed analysis of the 2022 survey results is planned as a separate publication by the author.

One of the main goals of training the staff of several faculties, is to implement the principles of universal design in the curricula. Responding to this appeal, many employee-participants are pursuing universal design topics in their own classes. One such example is a jointly conducted study with Spatial Economy students to locate architectural, digital and social problem spots in the Faculty of Economics, Finance and Management (at Mickiewicza 64) and propose solutions.

For this purpose, a special Accessibility Audit template was developed. Information gathered through inventories and updates of existing floor plans and layouts, the young generation of future planners learns to perceive problems known to them and previously unnoticed.

A joint publication (report or coverage) by the author and five students is planned for the near future.

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