

Inclusive Libraries: Architecture, Services, Library Collections and Training Combine in an Accessibility Project in the Libraries of Catalonia

English translation of the original paper: Bibliotecas inclusivas: arquitectura, servicios, fondo documental y formación se fusionan en un proyecto de accesibilidad en las bibliotecas de Cataluña

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Abstract:

Inclusive Libraries is an accessibility project arising from cross-departmental work in four main areas: architecture, services, library collections and training. The project began in 2015 on the initiative of the Public Libraries Network of the Government of Catalonia, in conjunction with the Public Libraries Network of the Province of Barcelona, who together represent over 400 libraries. The work involves related proposals which provide accessibility to more than just the building for people with sensory, cognitive and/or physical disability. The project's aim is universal design for optimum accessibility to meet needs for reading, culture and access to information. It includes access to buildings as well as services and activities, library collections, support materials and training for library staff, using a cross-departmental approach. Universal access combining different fields empowers people with functional diversity to become independent and access public libraries under the same conditions as other users. Modern libraries become accessible, normalising places.

This paper provides an overview of the Inclusive Libraries project with examples of accessibility, some already implemented, from a wide variety of Catalan public libraries including:

- *A listed building dating from the late 19th century (Tarragona Public Library), with all the associated problems.*
- *A newly constructed building dating from 2003 (Armand Cardona Torrandell Library).*
- *A library opened in 2018 (Montserrat Abelló Library) which has incorporated numerous accessibility ideas from the work in the Inclusive Libraries projects.*

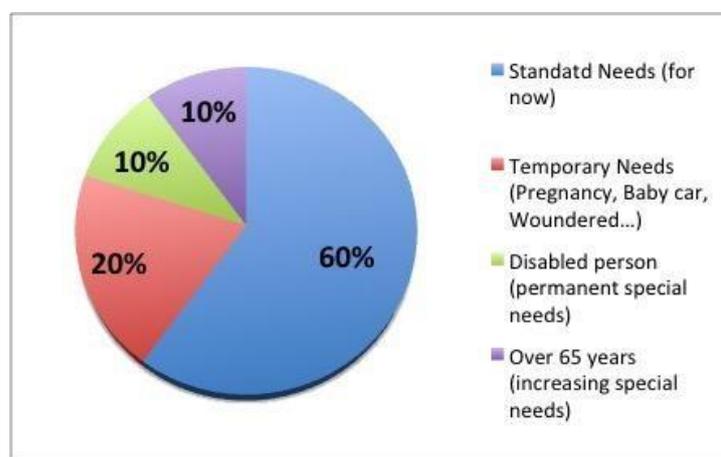
Some of the measures implemented include: accessible routes using tactile floors from outside the library entrance to the interior and the furthest corners of the library; pictogram signs; installation of induction loops; digital magnifying glasses; specific software; activities interpreted in sign language; book clubs for people with intellectual disabilities; audio and Braille information leaflets; library collections adapted to different reading needs, such as sign language, braille and easy reading; audiobooks; films with audio descriptions and subtitles for deaf people; and specific training for staff.

Keywords: universal design, libraries - barrier-free design, libraries and people with disabilities

Introduction

According to information from WHO, 15% of the world's population has some kind of disability, which in numbers represents more than one billion people. The chart in Figure 1 from 2016, based on data from the *Comité Español de Representantes de Personas con Discapacidad* (Spanish Committee of Representatives of Persons with Disability, CERMI), shows that diversity represents 40% of the total population. One of the biggest hurdles is a lack of sufficient policies and standards.

Figure 1. Diversity in the community



Stephen W. Hawking said: "Disability need not be an obstacle to success". As democratic institutions, public libraries have an important role to play as agents for promoting social inclusion and must therefore guarantee citizens' right to access information, culture and reading. According to the regulatory and legal framework including the UNESCO Manifesto, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, laws on libraries and accessibility of different IFLA members, the Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development signed in 2014 and the European Disability Strategy 2014-2020, public library services are provided on the basis of equal access to everyone.

Public libraries are created as places to exercise the right of access to information, culture and reading. They are places that facilitate life-long learning to guarantee future opportunities. They offer special services and materials for those users who cannot use ordinary services and materials. They offer programmes aimed at all members of the public, adapted to users' different needs along with support materials and documents to enable access to reading, information and culture under similar conditions for all library users.

Since the first libraries were opened, users' needs have changed as society has evolved. Libraries are now immersed in modernity and an avalanche of technological advances that have modified access to information, culture and reading. There is frequently an imbalance between the needs of the most vulnerable citizens, including persons with disability, and the facilities, services, activities and collections provided for them in libraries.

Inclusive Libraries Project

The Inclusive Libraries project was promoted in 2016 by the Government of Catalonia's Public Libraries Network, in coordination with the Public Libraries Network in the Province of Barcelona, with one main goal:

To ensure that Catalan libraries were inclusive spaces, not just in compliance with the legal framework and theoretical standards, but also to provide future opportunities to everyone with a disability and thus guarantee their full integration into society.

The Inclusive Libraries project seeks to respond to one of the major objectives of public libraries: providing a service, being accessible to all citizens and giving an opportunity for present and future development for everyone, particularly for persons with a disability, whether it be physical, intellectual and/or sensory. Ensuring all public library users have the same opportunities requires an analysis of the state of library facilities, services, activities, collections and programmes on offer, through the prism of users with disabilities. For this, staff training is essential.

Existing barriers to use in public libraries needed to be identified and modifications and adaptations made. The work was undertaken by four working groups, each consisting of specialists in the following fields:

- Architecture
- Services and activities
- Library collections
- Training

Based on the work of the four groups, several actions were carried out. Recommendations were drawn up to create a model of an accessible library, taking into consideration the diversity of users in terms of disability and structuring the recommendations into the four fields. The recommendations were summarized on a poster: What must a library do to be inclusive? The IFLA document *Access to Libraries for Persons with Disabilities: Checklist*, by B. Irvall and G. S. Nielsen was translated, as its content was considered highly relevant to the work being carried out in the project.

On 28 November, the 1st Inclusive Libraries Conference was held at the Jaume Fuster Public Library in Barcelona, with sessions structured into three main blocks: architecture, library collections and services. Members of the different working groups and persons with disability took part to share their experiences in using public libraries. A video of good practices from around the region was produced. A logo was created which is currently used to identify the accessible collections.

The Directory of Public Libraries of Catalonia was updated with inclusive services and activities offered by libraries. The services included:

- Sign language interpretation services for storytelling, book presentations, talks and discussion groups, among others.
- Book clubs: easy reading for persons with intellectual disabilities and reading aloud for people with vision disabilities.
- Leaflets and information in different formats: Easy reading and audio books, among others.
- Exhibitions of materials used by different groups of persons with disabilities.
- Workshops: learning the Braille reading and writing system, learning sign language.
- Sign language conversation groups.
- Talks and discussions with specialists in disability.
- Shows on the topic of disability or performed by persons with disability.
- Guides to specialist reading on disability.

- Training in ICT and mobile devices for the elderly.
- Library extension service and activities in day-care centres and nursing homes in the city.
- Training library staff on disabilities, treatment, reading and information needs, sign language and adaptation to easy reading, among other topics.

Since 2017, the library service has carried out training sessions for staff at all the libraries in Catalonia with regard to the care and attention of users with disability. 200 public employees have taken part so far. For 2018 this training is to be broadened to more specific areas for librarians, such as reading needs, access to information and culture and materials adapted to different needs.

Ongoing Challenges and Future Directions

The challenge for the future involves joint, cross-departmental work on a strategic plan to provide a route map for improving accessibility in public libraries in Catalonia culminating in fully inclusive libraries. Actions in the strategic plan include:

- Finalising the document developing the guidelines from the four working groups for an inclusion plan in all Catalan libraries.
- Assessing current facilities through accessibility reports produced by experts for progressing towards inclusion in buildings, services, activities and collections.
- Creating a bank of good practices that includes services, activities and collections.
- In-service training for library staff regarding disability and the care and needs of groups with different disabilities.

What an Inclusive Public Library Should Be

Creating an inclusive library requires cross-departmental work with excellence at its heart, not just by complying with existing regulations, but also by seeing architecture as an essential element for ensuring access to the building, culminating in accessibility by offering services and activities to different groups of persons with disabilities. The following are examples of accessibility proposed or implemented in libraries with highly diverse origins and characteristics.

Three Realities: Accessibility in Catalan Libraries

Case Study 1. Tarragona Public Library: a listed library

Tarragona Public Library is a state-owned library managed by the Government of Catalonia. It is part of the Public Reading System of Catalonia. The library was founded in 1846 following the expropriation of church property, with the aim of safeguarding and conserving the library collections from the monasteries of Santes Creus, Poblet and other monastic orders in the province, although it was originally conceived as a residential college.



Figure 2. Tarragona Public Library

It is a unique building in the monumentalist, academic style, mixing brick and stone. It consists of a ground floor, first floor and attic. There is another floor in the corner tower and at the bottom is the main entrance through round, arch doors preceded by steps. The library houses a valuable heritage

collection, including 318 manuscripts from the 10th to 18th centuries, 230 incunabula, 401 volumes from the library of the Viceroy Pedro Antonio de Aragón and around 35,000 volumes from the 16th and 19th centuries.

The listed heritage status of the building is an obstacle to architectural changes for accessibility. However, an accessibility report was recently produced which made suggestions worth highlighting. They related to relocation of the reserved parking, changes to the main entry including the removal of steps and the installation of a lift and changes to the toilet area.

There is a reserved disabled parking space in the Gasòmetre street. This is a busy street that slopes steeply and the parking space is on the right, so wheelchair users have to proceed after getting out of their vehicle along the road until they reach the zebra crossing. Once on the pavement, as access via the main entrance is impossible due to the steps, users have to circle round to the far end of the building to enter via the Fortuny street entrance. This road is also sloping.

The proposals to improve accessibility from the audit by the architectural and consultancy firm Rovira-Beleta Acceibilidad, included moving the reserved parking space in Gasòmetre street to Fortuny street, above the pedestrian crossing to make the route to the current adapted entrance as short as possible.

Figure 3. Changes to the parking and entry



The changes proposed for accessibility in the main entrance further justified relocating the reserved parking space. The library is on the corner of t Gasòmetre and Fortuny Streets. The entrance is inaccessible to wheelchair users or persons with motor difficulties, as it has a single step from the level of the pavement to the interior of the building at the Fortuny street door, and three steps at the Gasòmetre street door. Once inside, the library can only be accessed up a semi-circular marble staircase, which does not comply with current regulations. It has ovolo moulding on the steps; the stair tread and riser are not colour contrasted; and although there is a small non-slip strip, it is not wide enough. The steps have a continuous handrail with circular cross-section on both sides which does not strictly meet regulations with regard to double handrails, or dimensions, extending at least 0.3m beyond the ends of each section of the stairs. The staircase cannot be modified as it is listed. The following proposal was made to provide access to wheelchair users.

It was proposed to remove the step at the Calle Fortuny Entrance and to replace the single step with a ramp with a second option of raising the pavement to the level of the existing step. One of the roads from which the library can be accessed is sloping. Modifying the step by providing a ramp that permits wheelchair access eliminates the current difference in levels. This modification would affect only half the entrance, coinciding with the opening of one of the doors. The free movement provided by this modification is over 78cm wide. The other door would be permanently closed (right door). Preferably, the left door would open from the door jamb to facilitate the entrance and exit of wheelchair users. The second option involved modifying the pavement by raising it to the level of the step and starting the slope of the ramp at the kerb, in line with the right door (fixed door). This action would require the pedestrian crossing to be moved to the corner of the street to permit access to the pavement from the road.

Installing a lift would overcome the stairs in the main entrance. With this intervention, all users could access the building through the main entrance. It would require a reduction in the work zone in the children's room (2.45m x 1.20m) and lowering the level of the floor to the same height as the

accessibility have been proposed, as they permit the inscription of an obstacle-free circle with a 1.20m diameter by means of a small modification to distribution, permitting the inclusion of a new toilet with transfer space on one side.

Case Study 2. Armand Cardona Torrandell Library: a Library Constructed 15 Years Ago

The Armand Cardona Torrandell Library, inaugurated on 11 April 2003, is in a comparatively recently constructed building covering 1,582m² over two floors. It offers a local service to residents in the western part of the city.

Highly aware of groups of persons with disabilities, the library has invested in services, activities and collections adapted to needs regarding reading and access to information since its inauguration in 2003. In 2017, as part of one of the strategic working lines of the city's public library network, an accessibility study was commissioned from the company Enrique Rovira-Beleta as a starting point for an accessibility plan. The library has staff who specialise in accessibility and a person who knows sign language. Since the start of 2018 the library has had a person with intellectual disability on its staff.

Figure 6. Armand Cardona Torrandell Library



Some of the improvements in accessibility carried out so far include window signs, an induction loop, activities leaflets in varying formats, activities for groups with disabilities and reading support materials.

One of the characteristics of the Armand Cardona Library is the use of large openings onto the different spaces with large glass walls which initially were not signed, creating a sensation of vertigo among users on the first floor and causing users accidentally to bump into them or fail to realise they were there. The solution implemented just a few weeks after inauguration was to attach vinyl signs.

In early 2017, an induction loop was installed in the meeting room for people with hearing disabilities who use hearing-aids or a cochlear implant.

Figure 7. The meeting room



A mobile induction loop was also installed for the same purpose in the information and loans counter, but it can be moved when needed to any other part of the library.

Since the start of 2017, the Library has offered all users an activities leaflet adapted to easy reading, which uses a system of colours and icons to identify the type of activity and target public, making the leaflet accessible to people with intellectual and cognitive disabilities. Pictogram representation of content has been used and an audio format is available.

Special activities for groups of people with disabilities have been developed and include:

- Book club for people with intellectual/vision disability. With regular meetings in the library.
- Activities to normalise disability.
- Family reading and writing workshop in Braille given by a blind person.
- Story-telling in sign language and signing classes for babies aged 0 to 2.
- Story-telling interpreted in sign language.
- Author's presentations of books featuring main characters with disability.

Reading support materials including a digital magnifying glass have been provided. Collections have been diversified with the acquisition of material suitable for easy reading. Large print, audio books, stories adapted for sign reading, easy reading and pictographic language have been acquired.

Case Study 3. Montserrat Abelló Library: A Newly Constructed Library Inaugurated in 2018

The Montserrat Abelló Library is a member of the Municipal Libraries Network of the Province of Barcelona and is part of a public system consisting of 413 facilities, comprising 401 libraries and 12 bookmobiles, which provide services to the whole of Catalonia.

The library building used to be a 1924 factory that was a pioneer in silk production. The building covers 3,300m² and is the first public library in the city of Barcelona with BREEAM certification (<https://www.breeam.com/>) the world's leading sustainability assessment and certification system for buildings.

The Library features tactile floors in its main entrance and also inside the building. The directional tactile floors use colour-contrasted building materials detectable by a cane for people with vision disabilities. The lift has transparent doors to facilitate communication with deaf people or persons with intellectual disability. Buttons are indicated in relief and Braille, with information provided via screen display and audio. There are colour contrasted relief and braille signs and colour contrast has also been used on the doors, sockets, furniture and signs. Windows are combined with food for visibility. Ergonomic door handles have colour contrast and there are lever handles on hinged doors and fixed handles on sliding doors for toilets. All of these features make the building easy to operate for people with physical disabilities or low mobility and easy to detect for people with vision disabilities.

Induction loops have been used at counters and counters are low and open at the front to facilitate a frontal approach from various perspectives. The toilets provided are more accessible than regulations require with thirteen toilets spread over the different floors of the building. Regulations state that two should be accessible. This building exceeds regulations with six accessible toilets including transfer space on each side. All the elements are colour contrasted; lever taps are accessible to people with physical or motor disabilities and there is

Figure 8. Special activities

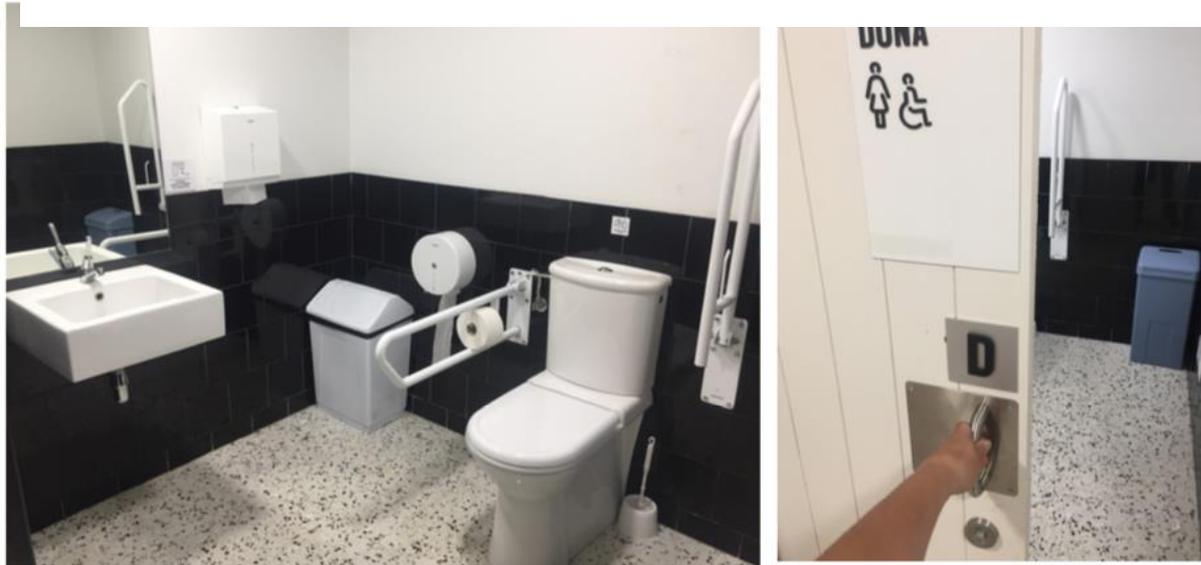


Figure 9. The Montserrat Abelló Library.



an emergency button 15cm from the floor in the case of a fall. The sliding doors have the previously mentioned characteristics of colour contrast, relief and Braille signs. The doors have lever handles with a vacant/occupied indicator outside and can be opened from outside.

Figure 9. Toilet facilities



Furniture and accessories have also been designed to consider persons with disabilities. The bottoms of the stairways have been protected to prevent accidental knocks for people with impaired sight. Colour contrasts have been used in the different construction materials on the stairs. Coat hanging facilities are at different heights and accessible to shorter people, children or wheelchair users, and are colour contrasted with the rest of the furniture and walls.

The Montserrat Abelló Library has a collection adapted to different reading needs and uses pictograms to identify documents.

Conclusion

An inclusive library goes beyond existing regulations to seek excellence in all aspects, based on four key pillars: architecture, services and activities, collections and staff training. Design of the building and facilities has been targeted to people with different abilities. Specialist services have been devised. Collections in alternative formats are provided. Most importantly, staff are trained to be aware of different needs in the clients they are serving and given knowledge and skills to make appropriate responses.

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