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How do architects experience collaborating with user/experts? Learning from the Accessibility Advisory Council Leuven

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Abstract Rights to accessibility are encoded in policies that govern architecture and other design domains. Studies show, however, that even well-considered legislative measures are insufficient to ensure inclusively designed environments. In this context the potential of user/expertise remains understudied. We therefore investigate how architects experience collaborating with user/experts, and how they understand and use their advice. We focus on collaboration with the Accessibility Advisory Council in Leuven, Belgium, which is largely composed of people with a mobility or sensory impairment and/or autism. Besides observing how architects discuss design projects with the Council, we interviewed architects and analyzed relevant (design) documents. Our analysis shows that architects experience the collaboration with user/experts as instructive, and their advice as complementary to accessibility legislation. User/experts are good at explaining what their needs are and why or how they matter; architects become convinced to apply their recommendations. They become convinced to take into account certain groups they have knowledge about (e.g. people in wheelchairs); for other groups they become convinced to do something, but have insufficient knowledge (e.g. blind people); yet other groups are largely unknown to them (e.g. people with autism or a hearing impairment). Collaborating with user/experts also affects how the architects understand inclusive design; they realize that its meaning is much broader than (wheelchair) accessibility. Moreover, beyond the projects discussed with the Council, they integrate user/expert advice also into other projects. Our study offers architects without experience of collaborating with user/experts a nuanced insight into its added value and its challenges.

Introduction

Inclusive design targets the largest possible group by taking into account the needs and requirements of various users during designing. Products and environments should be useable by all people, to the greatest extent possible (Connell et al. 1997).

In architectural practice, the adoption of inclusive design remains limited (Bordas Eddy 2017, Zallio & Clarkson 2021). In developed countries, Marta Bordas Eddy (2017) attributes this difficult uptake to four elements: (1) a fragmented field of knowledge with many differing and overlapping guidelines, which are reduced to and/or overemphasize wheelchair accessibility in legislative translations; (2) still only emerging attention for inclusive design in education and lacking knowledge among educators (WHO & World Bank 2011); (3) lacking economic incentives (except in Japan (Kose 2011)); and (4) misfit between knowledge representation and designers' needs (McGinley & Dong 2011). This leads to the vicious cycle of underrepresentation of persons with disability experience in society and consequently design processes. In developing economies, the uptake is even more in its infancy (Whybrow et al. 2010), as cultural differences make current guidelines not always compatible (Bordas Eddy 2017).

In Flanders (Belgium), architects tend to equate inclusive design with accessibility. It is associated with a particular target group (people with an impairment) and especially with the healthcare sector, making it less relevant for other 'normal' projects (Van der Linden, Dong & Heylighen 2016). Besides considering inclusive design as ugly and complex, architects see practical barriers like lack of time, budget, and knowledge (Van der Linden, Dong & Heylighen 2016). They may feel insecure about their own knowledge of inclusive design, and want to be sure no aspects of accessibility are overlooked (Wauters, Vermeersch & Heylighen 2014). Therefore they tend to rely on legislation, which proves difficult to integrate in their designs and, in Flanders, is limited to wheelchair accessibility.

The relationship between the human body and the built environment entails more than accessibility, however. Whereas legislation tends to reduce the human body to measurable aspects, architecture is experienced with the whole body and all senses (Pallasmaa 2005). Since architects are found to design mainly from their own experiences and have difficulty to empathize with future users (Imrie 2003), differences occur between architects' intentions and users' experiences (Heylighen, Van Doren & Vermeersch 2013).

One way of gaining understanding of different people's embodied experiences is by accepting their user/expertise as valuable information for design. Elaine Ostroff (1997) describes a user/expert as "anyone who has developed natural experience in dealing with the challenges of our built environment." User/experts are able to share perspectives and life experience to address design issues. Interactions with

them offer architects memorable and intense experiences and their insights are useful during designing.

Involving user/experts is considered central to inclusive design (e.g. Ringaert 2001, Zallio & Clarkson 2021). In architectural education it is one of the most effective strategies for teaching inclusive design (e.g. Lifchez 1987, Welch & Jones 2002). In architectural practice, by contrast, its potential remains underexposed.

In Flanders in particular, user/expertise seems to find its way to architectural education (e.g. Vermeersch & Heylighen 2015, Ielegems et al. 2021), while professional architects remain skeptical about its value for practice (Heylighen et al. 2016). Architects also have different expectations about involving user/expertise in design: user/experts should give concrete answers to specific questions, check their design, and remove errors (Wauters, Vermeersch & Heylighen 2014). Research suggests that efforts are needed to convince architects of the added value of user/expertise (Heylighen et al. 2016).

The aim of our study is therefore to offer a nuanced picture of the collaboration between architects and user/experts. We focus on the Accessibility Advisory Council in Leuven (Belgium), which is composed and chaired by user/experts. We investigate how collaborating with the Council affects the design process of the architects involved, how they experience the collaboration, and how they understand and use the advice. Our study offers architects without experience of collaborating with user/experts a nuanced insight into its added value and challenges.

Methods and material

Accessibility Advisory Council Leuven

Throughout Flanders urban Accessibility Advisory Councils involve user/experts. Their composition and functioning differ between cities. The Council of Leuven consists of user/experts (residents of Leuven with autism and/or a physical, sensory (vision, auditory) or intellectual impairment), family members and representatives of interest groups. It aims to make Leuven more accessible by giving concrete advice and improve communication between user/experts and mainly architects, city services, event organizers and the hospitality sector (Leuven Accessible 2021). While it has been around for 20 years, little is known about how architects experience collaborating with them. We focus on the Council of Leuven because of the diversity of user/experts and the way they work. The members meet once a month to discuss design projects. During the meetings architects and user/experts

engage in a direct dialogue. The user/experts are no design professionals, their advice is based on lived experience.

Case selection and data collection

The Council's chair provided an overview of the projects and associated architects/firms they collaborate(d) with. To allow studying how collaboration between user/experts and architects evolves, case selection focused on projects discussed with the Council more than once. Furthermore, diversity was sought in terms of scale and program. Eventually, five cases were examined in detail (Table 1), both public buildings and large sites or a combination of them.

Case	**Architecture firm**	**Type project**
't Lampeke	A33 architects	Community Centre
STUK	Neutelings Riedijk	Arts Center
Podiumkunstenzaal	Sergison Bates	Performing Arts Centre
Hertogensite	360 architects	Public space
Burenberg	BUUR (architect) & ION (project developer)	Public space

Table 1. Selected cases

Data collection involved interviewing architects who collaborated with the Council around the selected projects, and inventorying design documents produced by them pluss meeting reports prepared by the Council. Several meetings were observed to collect additional data about communication, the course of a meeting, architects' experiences, and their and the user/experts' attitude. The chair shared meeting reports of the observed meetings a few weeks after the meeting. This allowed comparing reports of self-observed meetings and meetings of the selected cases.

The chair and interviewed architects signed an informed consent form, explaining in detail the study's purpose and approach and how data would be tracked and processed. None of them requested pseudonymization.

Interviews were semi-structured around open-ended questions, giving interviewees the opportunity to answer questions at their discretion or add relevant topics. Documents received from the architects were analyzed in advance to prepare the interview and ask specific questions. These documents were used during the interview to explain the project and choices made. The interview guide contained four parts: general questions, design process before meeting with the Council, design

process after meeting, and lessons learned from this collaboration. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim; during observations notes were made.

Data analysis

The interviews, observations, and analysis took place in parallel. Analysis of the interview transcriptions, design documents, and observation notes roughly followed the Qualitative Analysis Guide of Leuven (Dierckx de Casterlé et al. 2012) and continued till saturation was reached. The guide's combination of traditional and creative analytical approaches proposes a compromise between inductive and theory-driven coding. We translated quotes to English.

Results

Evolution of experience over time

Architects' expectations

The interviews and observations suggest that the Council is not yet well known by architecture firms. The observations made clear that the architects visited it for the first time.

Usually the city services suggest to consult the Council about a design project and ask for targeted advice on accessibility. This often happens during the preliminary design phase, where important design options can still be changed. Some architects contact the Council themselves. For example, A33 architects wanted to obtain feedback in the preliminary design phase to avoid a refusal of the building permit application.

The interviewed architects seemed to have quite similar expectations. At first they had little information about how the Council functions, so they did not really know what to expect from the meeting. Wendy Vandenberk (360 architects) thought that the Council was similar to Inter, the Flemish center of expertise in accessibility: "Well yes, that was the first time for me and I didn't know well what to expect. I thought it was basically like Inter again. […] And I knew, however, that they were people who had specific experience with certain impairments. But I didn't know […] that there were really different people at the table with an impairment."

Carl Meeusen (Neutelings Riedijk) assumed that the Council was similar to other committees they presented their project to: “I went there myself and I actually thought I was going to end up in some kind of committee, so specialists […]. I was previously not informed either. […] And I get in there and I actually see all sorts of experience-oriented people on that committee. That was kind of a surprise to me at that point.”

Since the composition of the group was unknown to the architects, Berno Bosch (BUUR) and Sander Plets (ION) were surprised by its size. They are used to meetings with one or two people with whom you check your plan once: “What surprised me most when we arrived was that the group was so wide. […] That was a very broad group, which is of course a lot of perspectives to look at.”

The meeting

Kirsten Gabriels (Sergison Bates) describes the course of the meeting as an interactive conversation: “It really is a conversation. … Questions are also asked in between. It's not that we gave a presentation or told a whole story and then the questions were asked at the end. But it was really a conversation 'Can you clarify this?' or 'No, I don't understand that completely.’ or… It was really a dialogue and that, I think, is just very strong about the consultation with the Advisory Council.”

The dialogue between user/experts and architects is crucial during the meetings. Everyone gets a chance to contribute and express their needs. The user/experts can describe clearly what is problematic, Meeusen explained: “They are very good at pointing out what a problem is […] or what we have to take into account. And then it's up to us to find the solution to design for it. It's actually already a bit in the word ‘advice’, the Advisory Council is not coming up with solutions, that’s not necessary at all.”

It is important that architects interpret the user/experts’ comments correctly, Ludo Bekker (A33)[1] stressed. If misinterpreted, the solution to the problem also fails to meet the needs and requirements: “I’m always very open to understand 'What do we really mean?'. There’s a difference between what someone says and the way it’s said and the message behind it. So important for me is to know the message behind it. And if I'm not sure, I also ask 'Do you mean that or...?'”

After a plan discussion, the Council writes a report and encourages the architects to come back in later phases so that they can give more targeted advice. As the design progresses, there are always other points of interest that can be addressed. Four of the interviewed architects did come back with a more elaborate plan, Sergison Bates even multiple times (Fig. 1).

[1] Meanwhile Bekker moved to Ćzaar architecten, which grew out of A33.

Fig 1. Timeline design process Podiumkunstensite, Sergison Bates

Architects' experience with the collaboration

Overall, the interviewed architects experience collaborating with the Council as positive and instructive. It has an added value for them in the design process and of course also for future users. The architects realize the difficulties people with an impairment experience in their environment.

Meeusen describes this as follows: "I immediately experienced the added value because you see much broader the difficulties people experience for which solutions have to be devised. […] And I also thought that everyone there actually had the chance to make such a contribution from different angles." The added value seemed to transcend the architects' expectations: "On the one hand due to the nature of the composition of the Advisory Council, but also really new insights that we may not be able to meet everything yet, because of course you're also limited when designing, in the given building, budget, …"

At first, BUUR and ION had prejudices because they did not know the role of the Council. They took a distant attitude, but eventually the collaboration felt very familiar: "I think the word 'growth process' is right in place […]. Like I just said, first that everyone had his own vision and were a bit suspicious of each other, that we've really grown around the table literally and have grown toward each other and accomplished something in a positive way."

Our observations revealed a similar change in the architects' attitude, from distant to acceptant and actively engaging. Their final experience did not match their initial expectations. The user/experts' comments were very detailed and specific, which surprised the architects. Meeusen put it as follows: "That was a very constructive atmosphere, though. I didn't feel like we were attacked either. So that was a very open and constructive meeting."

The constructive criticism motivated Sergison Bates to further develop the project. They were very enthusiastic and excited: "We never saw it as some kind of obstacle or so like 'Oh now we have to go to the Advisory Council.' It just never was like that. […] It's a very interesting conversation that you have at that moment where you go home and think 'Okay that's what we're going to work on now.'"

Accessibility legislation versus user/expert advice

Architects' experience with accessibility legislation

Accessibility legislation fosters architects' awareness to pay attention to user diversity, but provides little explanation. According to Vandenberk, applying the regulation is not always easy: "You read the rules in the legislation, [...] you try that but sometimes you don't quite know the meaning behind it, the origin of that rule. And so, you can't always execute that perfectly in detail according to the spirit of the rule, the origin of the rule."

Bekker experiences similar difficulties. The idea behind some rules is unclear, and specialists cannot always answer questions about the meaning of the standards: "One of the major problems within the accessibility decree is that there are some really stupid things in it that I can't understand. If you have a difference in level of more than 18 cm, you have to bridge that level difference with a slope plus a staircase or a staircase plus an elevator, but if you have a slope, you don't need stairs anymore. Someone who can take a staircase can also walk up a slope of 5%, which is nothing. What's the problem? No one can give me an answer, and yet that's in that decree. ... All streets in the city are in slope, they're accessible, most of them anyway."

Furthermore, the accessibility norms only prescribe those aspects that can be objectively verified, which feels restrictive and incomplete for Mark Tuff (Sergison Bates): "Certainly I feel in the UK often accessibility is reduced to […] something that can be put down into a diagram and conveyed to the professional bodies that need it and there's a kind of tick ... Of course, these are important, they have to bring a certain kind of standard to new buildings but what I found so interesting about meeting the Accessibility Advisory Board is that what they bring is something quite different and certainly more sophisticated than these simple diagrams."

Added value of user expert advice

The added value of user/expert advice showed during the observations, as we illustrate with the case of Burenberg (Fig. 2). During the design process, accessibility-related difficulties arose due to the topography of the site. Because the park garden is divided into a lower and higher part, the legislation was difficult to apply. Placing a slope according to the standards would have too much of an impact on the experience of the space, according to the designers. Their initial idea was therefore to place only a staircase and expect people who cannot take it to reach the higher garden via the surrounding streets. Through the conversation with the user/experts, the designers very quickly understood the importance of equal use and decided they had to find another solution.

The designers started investigating different options to shorten the slope. The Council's concession was that the slope may be a little steeper than the standards prescribe. The designers further found a way to lower the landscape, allowing the slope to be less steep in the end. In this way, they found a solution together so that the slope can serve almost everyone. Moreover, placing the slope slanting considerably reduced its impact on a historic wall on the site.

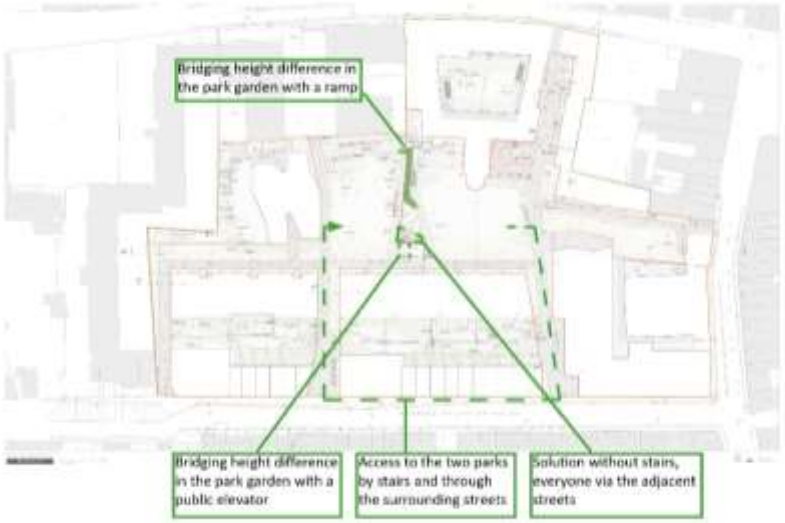

Fig 2. Analysis masterplan Burenberg, BUUR

Impact of the collaboration

Application of advice

To gain insight into how architects apply the user/experts' recommendations, we analyzed the plans of the selected cases using colour codes (Fig. 3). Three categories of recommendations were distinguished: exactly applied, differently applied, and not applied.

Fig 3. Legend application advice

For Gabriëls the application of the advice depends on the type of comment: "It always depends pretty much on what the comment was, so for some things a very concrete comment was made that we then literally incorporated into the design."

Some comments are very clear and mainly a matter of straightforward implementation. For example, for a ramp whose initial design meets the standards, the user/experts still recommend providing intermediate platforms for more comfort. Other comments require more time to come up with creative solution: "Then the people in a wheelchair said, '4% is nice but it's a long ramp so even though it's not legally required to make an intermediate platform we'd recommend that because otherwise it's really a long way.' That was literally [...] we process that. But other comments [...] are not specific questions or comments. [...] In the foyer, for example, it must also be a pleasant space for people with autism, for example, so how do you ensure that this large space, that you can also create quiet places there, [...] of course, we had to work on that in a creative way."

Other recommendations are differently applied. For example, Bekker will apply recommendations about signage and flashing lights for fire protection, but has not yet decided where and to what extent: "[...] the icons. I don't know how far we'll go in that. The flashing light in each room for the deaf before the fire. I don't know if that should be in every room, the public classrooms, there in the attic, I think I'll put one there and down here because you have to, or maybe just here in the hall, because it's an open space."

The last category covers recommendations that are not applied. On the Hertogensite master plan (360 architects), for example, three elements are indicated in red (Fig. 4). This means that the changes proposed by the Council have not been applied. While the architects mainly took the comments regarding vision impairment, they chose to use the city walls as a blind guide strip, against the Council's advice: "Also one of the concerns was, if you make the blind guide strip along that raised city wall, which is a bench, so at height 35 cm, you can sit on it. There was someone there who said 'If someone is sitting, you can't pass.' But we think of that that seating zone is 1m70 wide, often young people will be there who don't necessarily sit on the edge with their feet on the footpath. They're sitting there in a group, cross-legged or with one leg to the other side. And we also think when you sit there, and you see someone passing with a guide stick, then you will make room. So those

are such things, we don't think you should make an extra blind guide strip if you already have an urban object."

The advice about a resting place for autistic people is not applied either in this part of the master plan. Vandenberk clarifies this choice as follows: "This is [...] a part of a public domain that's just an important connection. This is not the place to make a resting point. A resting point in our master plan, we can find it in phase two, in the park zone. This is the end that's an important connection point."

Another important remark the architects did not follow concerns the separation of traffic flows. They made this choice with a view to the concept of the master plan: "'We want to pull traffic flows apart.' Yes, that's not possible, isn't it? [...] There was actually someone who said of 'yes, actually we always want a footpath, a green strip in between, a bike path, another green strip and another bike path.' Yes, that's impossible on this narrow strip. [...] But that's just something you can't make in this place and from the vision of the design, that was also not the choice to focus on."

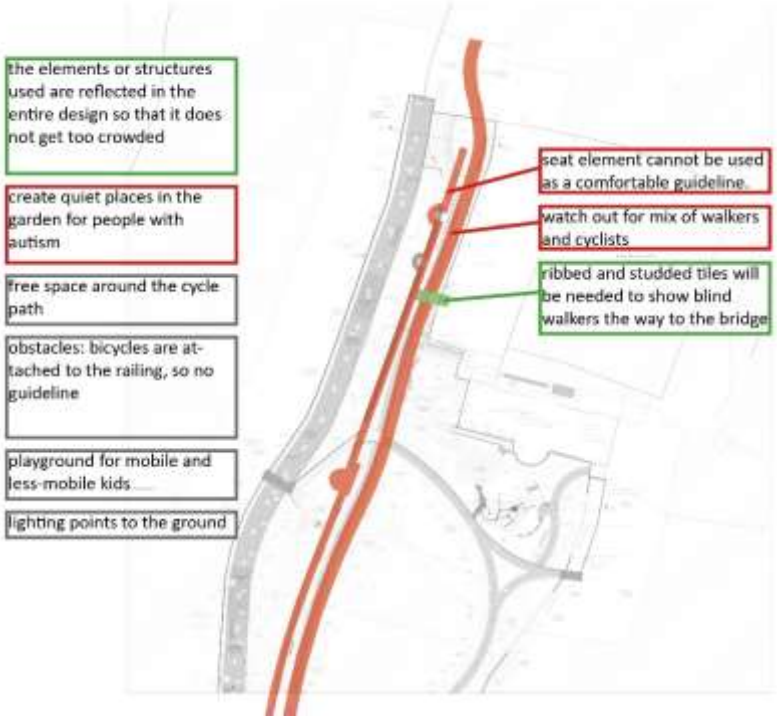

Fig 4. Analysis masterplan Hertogensite, 360 architects

Broader impact

The architects realize that collaborating with the Council changed their vision on inclusive design. Inclusive design became much more than just (wheelchair) accessibility or mobility.

Through the collaboration with the Council, the meaning of inclusive design is much clearer for Gabriëls: “[...] what I have now noticed very strongly here, because of the cooperation with the Advisory Council, is that inclusive design of course goes much further than just designing for wheelchair users, for example. […] So that's also about [...] that the building can be used by really everyone.”

The introduction to user/experts and the cooperation also broadened the architects' vision on diversity. Sander Plets explains: "But above all it is about opening your mind a lot more and indeed you have to try to take different groups into account as much as possible and especially you can empathize with their world and How do they think? How do they reason? That that's very important."

Bekker highlights that the target group is much broader than only people with an impairment. Architects must design for the future users: “It's basically that the designer creates for all users, all current and future users. The current users we may have an idea of, but future users we have no idea of. [...] These can be people with an impairment, but also people with lower income or health problems, family problems, psychological problems.”

A misconception about inclusive design is that architects only have to follow the legislation in order to make a project accessible to a wide audience. According to Meeusen, inclusivity actually should not be imposed on the architects, but become self-evident: "Tension in the inclusivity, all those requirements that arise from it, […] those are good steps. But it doesn't make the design easier, because yes, even more requirements are imposed. […] And to make it workable and livable, you have to do that in a way that of course works and doesn’t disturb. […] On the other hand, I’d also say I think that this inclusivity shouldn’t be imposed anymore in the sense of it’s just like with sustainability. [...] things like sustainability and inclusivity, they actually should become self-evident."

By collaborating with the Council, BUUR gained many insights on a theoretical level of inclusive design. At the same time, they had the opportunity to apply these insights to a concrete project, which also has a huge impact on practice. The cooperation was an instructive process with several positive consequences for future projects. According to the interviewed architects, several comments made by the user/experts were taken to other projects.

Through the collaboration with different architects, the staff of different offices get to know the Council. For example, Meeusen gave a presentation in the office about the project discussed with and the advice received from the Council. The collaboration was unique for him and he shared his experience with his team. Other team members spontaneously included elements that are exactly applicable in new

projects: “But I’d say paying attention to broadening our vision on inclusivity, that's what I found very interesting about it. […] And the interesting thing is that I see it now and then popping up in other projects, so that something of it has been picked up by the staff and included in other projects.”

Discussion and conclusion

Research suggests that architects are not yet convinced of the added value of user/experts (Heylighen et al., 2016). This motivated us to investigate the collaboration between architects and user/experts of the Accessibility Advisory Council Leuven. Aspects addressed include how the architects experience the collaboration, accessibility legislation versus user/expert advice, and the impact of the collaboration. As these themes feature in research on the international (lack of) attention for inclusive design (Bordas Eddy 2017), discussing our local case study has broader relevance.

Since the role of the Council was unprecedented for the interviewed architects, they did not know what to expect. Due to the application of accessibility legislation, they had some experience with user diversity. Our analysis suggests that the interviewees are indeed familiar with the standards, but the underlying idea or meaning is not always clear to them. Moreover, the guidelines are limited to wheelchair accessibility and impose minimum and/or maximum sizes, while the relationship between the human body and the built environment entails much more than accessibility (Pallasmaa 2005).

This is where the experiences of user/experts play an important role. Like other user/experts (Vermeersch & Heylighen 2015), the Council members focus on identifying spatial qualities. Moreover, they can clarify their needs and requirements, which are not all summarized in the accessibility legislation. In this way it becomes clear to the architects why they must apply certain standards and recommendations in the design process. Last but not least, the user/experts give constructive advice and help find acceptable solutions that are feasible instead of just focusing on problems. As a result, the Council proposes solutions that occasionally deviate from the norm.

This constructive attitude stimulates the interviewed architects to apply the recommendations. They experience collaborating with the Council as positive and instructive. Thanks to the collaboration, they do realize the added value of user/expert advice in the design process. Combining insights from user/experts and architects thus shows potential to contribute to designing high-quality space (Heylighen, Van Doren & Vermeersch 2013). The dialogue between both provides an interesting form of knowledge exchange (Strickfaden, Devlieger & Heylighen 2009).

What is called “constructive advice” also shows similarities to what Cross (2006) calls “designerly ways of knowing” and might help explain why architects appreciate this form of advice. In the dialogue, we see a similar solution-focused problem-solving approach that aims first for practicality and correctness second. For example, the discussion between architects and Council about Burenberg leads to a slope that does not meet the norms exactly, but fits the site, and is evaluated by the group as better than a system of stairs and elevators. Here, the Council shows they understand the ill-defined nature of design problems: they do not end their advice with a single evaluation, but make suggestions for design directions, e.g. by describing other cases and solutions that work for them, and adapt their advice along the way as in the Burenberg slope example. This is a sign of how problem space and solution space move together (Rittel & Webber 1972).

Another quality of designerly ways of knowing is empathy (Cross 2006). In design, empathy is said to rely on two important steps that tend to be skipped by designers: the ethical decision to apply empathy and the embodiment of others’ experiences (Heylighen & Dong 2019). The dialogue with the Council can help in this. First, the ethical decision is advanced as is illustrated in the architects’ changing attitude throughout the meetings. Secondly, the embodiment step, if not complete, is at least initiated, as is illustrated in the added values described: where legislation is prescriptive, the architects describe the user/experts’ advice as explanatory of why certain prescriptions are important and how they can be interpreted. This aligns with how other scholars advise implementing ethnographic knowledge in design, not as guidelines but as explanatory narratives (Dourish 2006). That this second step is still incomplete, we see in the argumentation when advice is partially/not applied; e.g. the argumentation to skip a guideline where there is a bench, but diminishing the impact of seated persons potentially disturbing the guidance.

Without meaning to suggest an ideal way to involve user/experts in design, we refer back to Sergison Bates’ timeline, which reflects the iterative nature of their design process when it comes to user/expert involvement. This again shows how the designerly nature of the interaction makes it worthwhile to architects.

Besides the dialogue between user/experts and architects, the dialogue among the user/experts themselves is also important part in the plan discussion. It is crucial that the user/experts understand each other's needs and come to an acceptable solution together. A solution for one group is not always good for another. “For example, a curb is very useful as a guideline for the blind, but creates a barrier for wheelchair users.” (Leuven Accessible 2021)

Inclusive design emphasizes designing for a diverse audience, taking into account the needs and requirements of diverse users (Connell et al. 1997). Remarkable among the interviewed architects is their conviction to take into account certain groups, such as wheelchair users, about which they already have knowledge from the standards. For other groups the interviewees are convinced to do something, but have insufficient knowledge. For example, they know that they must provide blind guidance, but its application is not entirely clear. There are also unknown groups

the architects must take into account, such as people with autism and people with hearing impairments. Architects know little about their needs and requirements. This may explain why these user/experts give advice during every meeting. They appear in almost every report.

The collaboration with the Council also has a broader impact on the vision of the interviewed architects. Through this collaboration, they understand that inclusive design is much broader than (wheelchair) accessibility or mobility. Also, the impact within their office and on other projects is worth noting. Advice that is easily applicable is integrated into other projects.

During the meetings, the communication between architects and user/experts plays an important role. The observations and the interviews show that it is not obvious for the architects to verbally explain their plans. Since the user/experts find the experience of a space very important, they appreciate presentations constructed as a kind of 'walk' rather than presentations about the associated concepts. Moreover, the former are also much easier to follow for vision impaired people as mutual connections between spaces are more clearly displayed.

Our study relied mainly on interviews with architects, observation of meetings, and analysis of design documents and reports. A similar study can be conducted with more attention to the experience of user/experts, interviewing Advisory Board members about how they experience the collaboration. Further research can include visiting finished projects together with user/experts with attention to the recommendations formulated by the Council earlier in the design process. In this way, the impact of the advice becomes clear to the researchers and to the user/experts themselves. Finally, their advice can be compared to other forms of advice, e.g. by governmental agencies, Accessibility Advisory Councils in other cities in Flanders, or consultancy firms.

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