

# A New Approach to Sports Activities: Designing for Diversity

Health, Sport and Inclusion: A Vision for Luxembourg's Future  
Auditorium, CHL Centre, Luxembourg, 12 June 2025

## Our vision:

- To make Luxembourg a model of an inclusive, caring society, where every individual – regardless of age, health conditions, origin, culture, religion or physical (dis)ability – has access to suitable and sustainable well-being solutions,
- To position Luxembourg as an innovation hub for inclusive, health-focused sports, drawing inspiration from the principles of Design for All.

## Our aims:

- To create physical activities opportunities and an inclusive sports environment for all ages and abilities, fostering a truly inclusive sports culture,
- To prevent dependency and reduce healthcare costs (considering the financial burden for the government) related to Luxembourg's ageing population,
- To encourage an active lifestyle to minimise age-related dependency and promote longevity and health through sports,

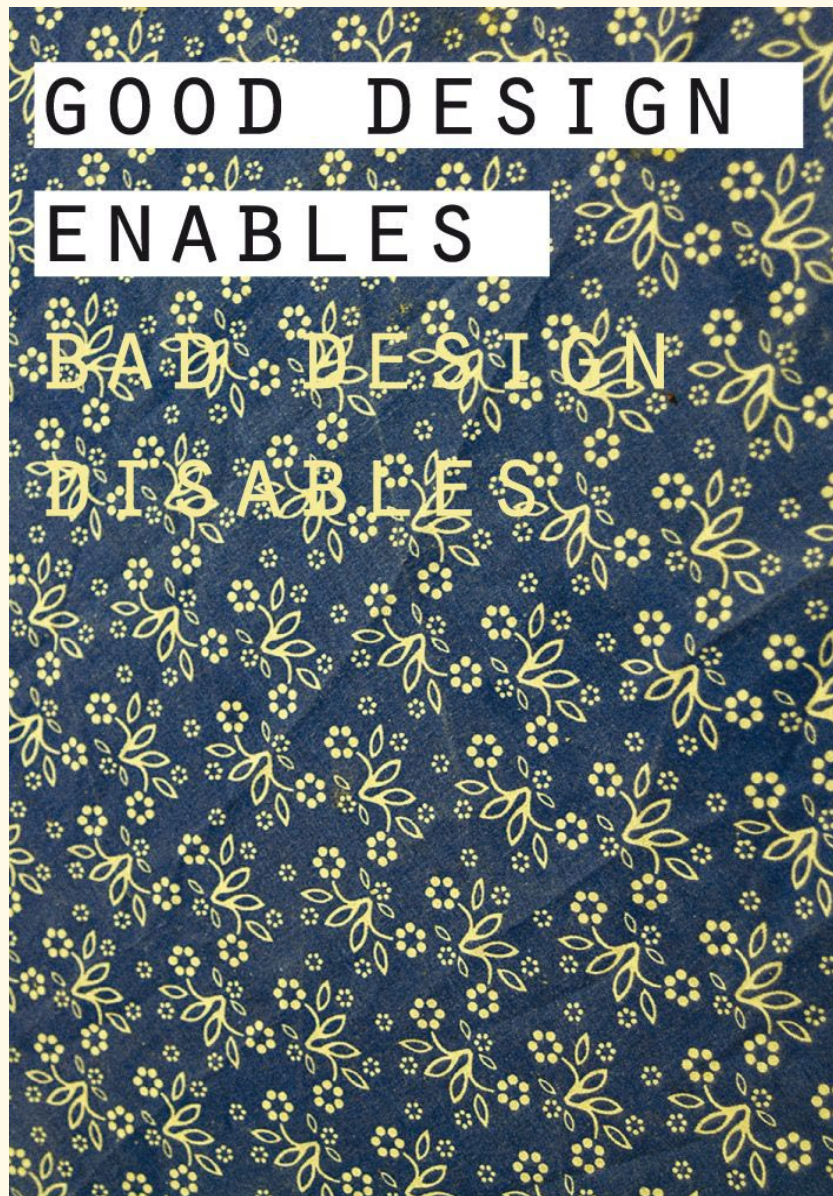
- To establish a new financial model all for longevity and well-being (mental and physical), replacing the model of curing people after the event with the promotion of prevention,
- To drive innovation in design and adapt urban planning and infrastructure, advocating for accessible and inclusive urban planning and designing to create environments that support movement, health and well-being for everyone,
- To unite public and private stakeholders around sustainable physical and mental well-being for the greater benefit of everyone.







Let's start at the beginning:  
What exactly is Design for All?



Paul Hogan

President Emeritus  
EIDD

1993

Design for All is design for human diversity,  
social inclusion and equality.

Source: EIDD Stockholm Declaration© 2004 – [www.dfaeurope.eu](http://www.dfaeurope.eu)

So what do we mean by human diversity?





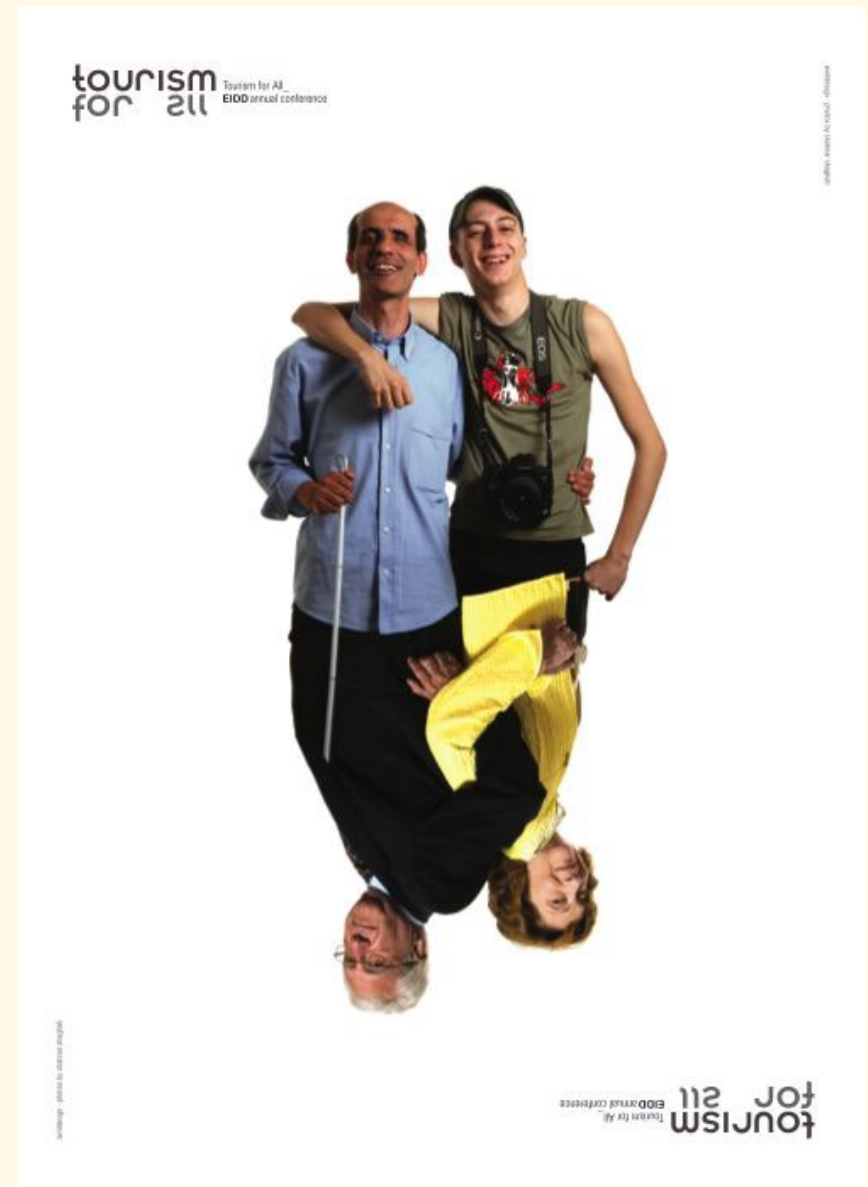


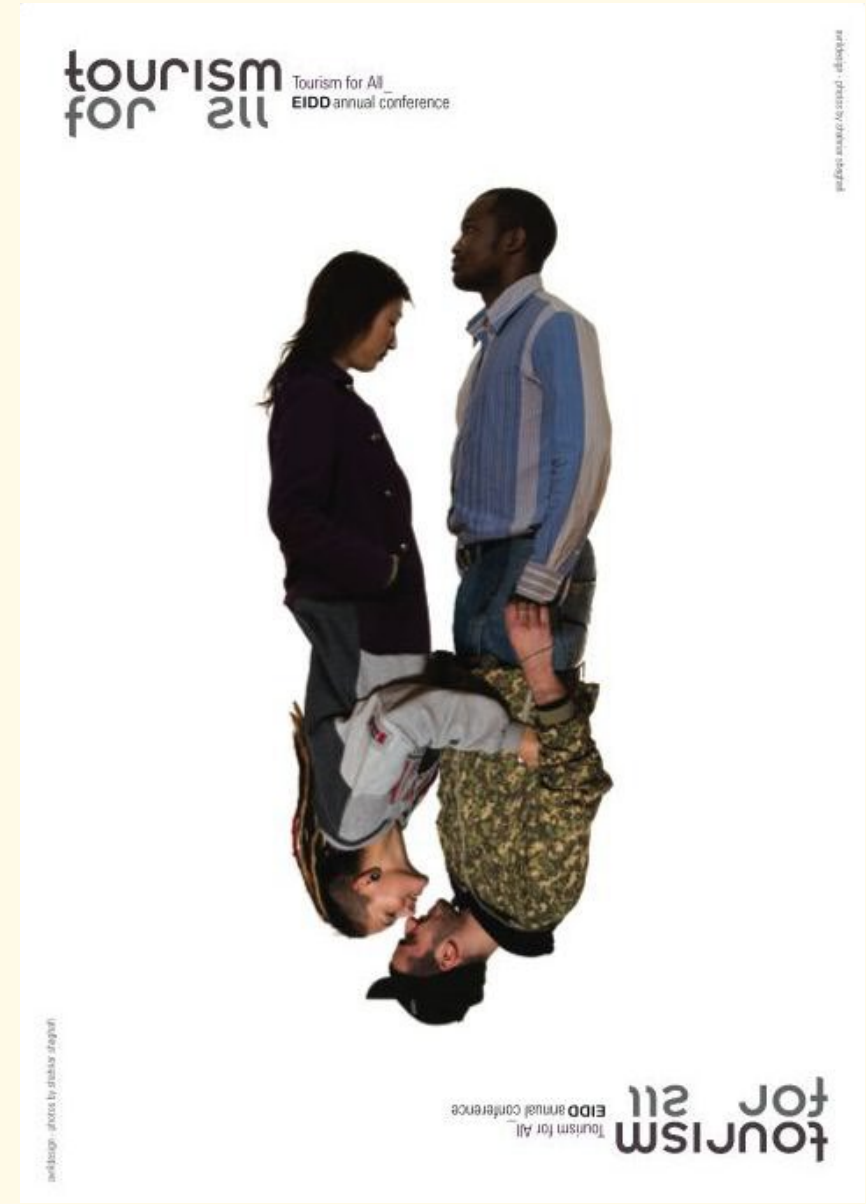


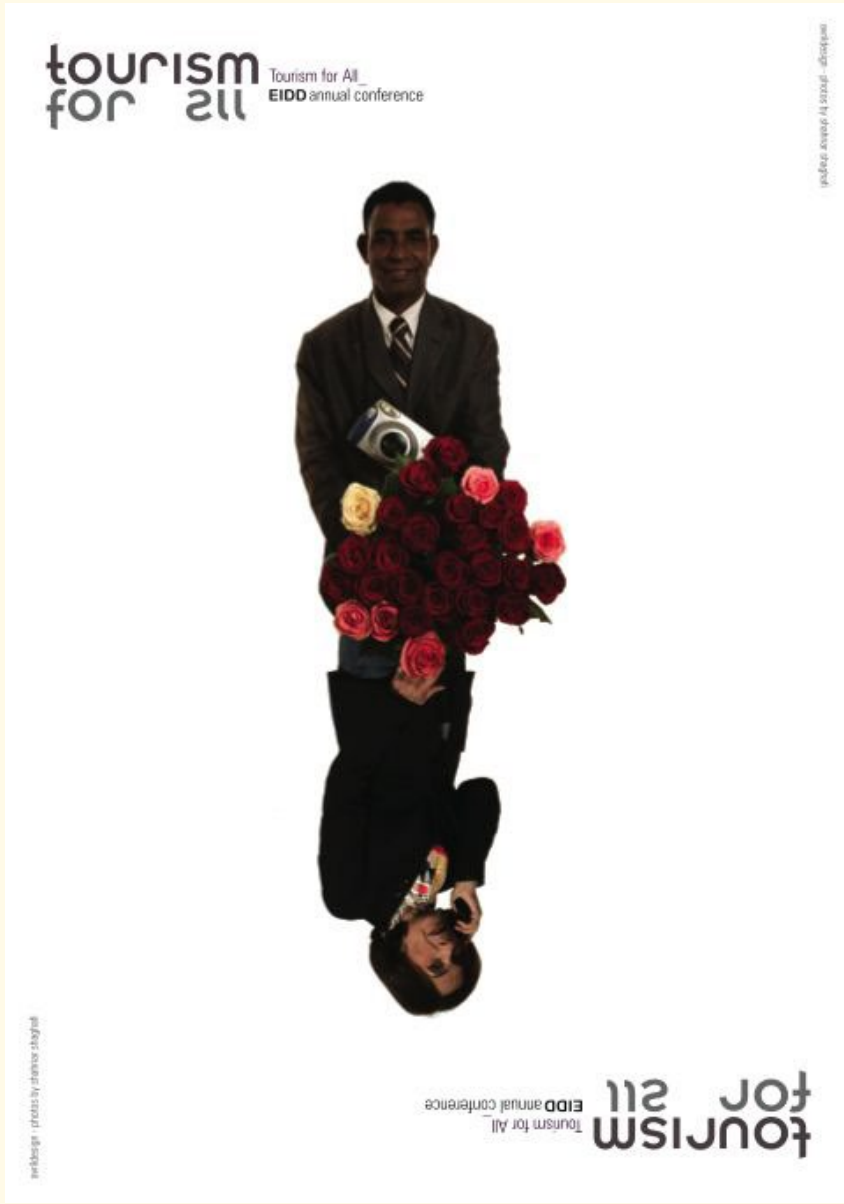














tourism  
for all  
Tourism for All  
EIDD annual conference

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There is nothing new about human diversity: the terracotta warriors of Emperor Qin Shi Huang





And not only in China: 11<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Egyptian  
spearmen and Nubian archers.

No two are identical



The Grand Egyptian Museum, Cairo



“The practice of Design for All makes conscious use of the analysis of human needs and aspirations and requires the involvement of end users at every stage in the design process.”

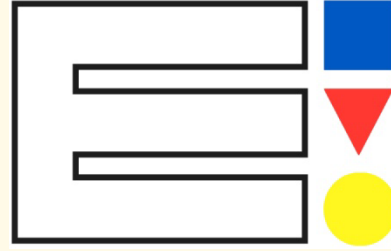
Source: EIDD Stockholm Declaration© 2004 – [www.dfaeurope.eu](http://www.dfaeurope.eu)

Why?

Because the “experts” DO NOT (cannot) know it all.

Because no two human beings are the same.

Where does Design for All come from?



## **EIDD – DESIGN FOR ALL EUROPE**

ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF LIFE THROUGH DESIGN FOR ALL

Established in Dublin in 1993 as the European Institute for Design and Disability

now (2025) becomes:

**E**quality and **I**nclusion through **D**esign for **D**iversity: Design for All



# EIDD – Design for All

Equality and Inclusion through Design for Diversity

41 members in 19 European states, plus 1 each in Australia, China and Libya

head office in Austria:

- DfA associations
- designer associations
- design promotion centres
- creativity and innovation centres
- schools of design, architecture and town planning
- consultancies and businesses
- associations of people with disabilities
- foundations
- cities and regions
- design museums and institutes

countries with members  
countries with contacts



## EIDD *is* Design for All, we:

- Constitute the bridge between Design for All and other communities
- Act as pathfinders, establishing innovative new applications of DfA in different areas
- Organise conferences to study and disseminate DfA in different sectors

# Selected International Conferences

- 2002: Design for All and Higher Education, Royal Academy, Brussels
- 2003: Design for All and Equality, Dublin Castle
- 2005: Culture for All, German Federal Government Press and Visitor Centre, Berlin
- 2006: Work for All, Waterford, Ireland
- 2007: Tourism for All, Milan Triennale, Italy
- 2008: Housing for All, Cité du Design, St. Etienne, France
- 2009: Culture for All II, Vilnius European Capital of Culture, Lithuania
- 2010: Design for All in the Balkans (Work for All II), Belgrade
- 2011: Tallinn for All, Tallinn European Capital of Culture
- 2012: Cities for All: Helsinki World Design Capital
- 2013: Cities for All: Cultural Heritage, Avila
- 2015: Food for All, Milan Expo 2015
- 2018: Cultural Heritage for All, Aurum Centre, Pescara
- 2020: New Challenges for DfA: Social Aspects of European Capitals of Culture, Rijeka ECoC (online)
- 2021: Design for All Education in Formal and Informal Contexts (online)
- 2023: Cities for All: Designing for the Future, Palace of the Primate, Bratislava
- 2024: Gaia: Design for All for the Future of the Planet, Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal





# What is this all about?

Dispelling some myths:

It's about inclusion, but not (only) about disability

It's about humanity, but not (only) about caring for "others"

It's about design, but not (only) about tables and chairs

it's about culture, but not (only) about art

it's about sport, but not (only) about winning in competitive sports

It's about return on investment, but not (only) short-term ticket receipts

It's about identifying the challenges facing design today and tomorrow:

increasing human diversity:

abilities, ageing, (im/e)migration...

... climate change, artificial intelligence, conflict and emergencies...

... and using design, holistically, to face them

Of course those challenges include disability and ageing

Disability and ageing are not watertight containers,  
but part of the social inclusion agenda.

Let's put this into focus with an exercise

Please stand up

If you have a registered disability, please sit down (or remain seated)

If you use glasses, please sit down

If you have ever broken an arm or a leg and worn plaster, please sit down

If you have ever accompanied an elderly friend or relative to the doctor, a museum, a show, a sports event... please sit down

We are all “others” for somebody

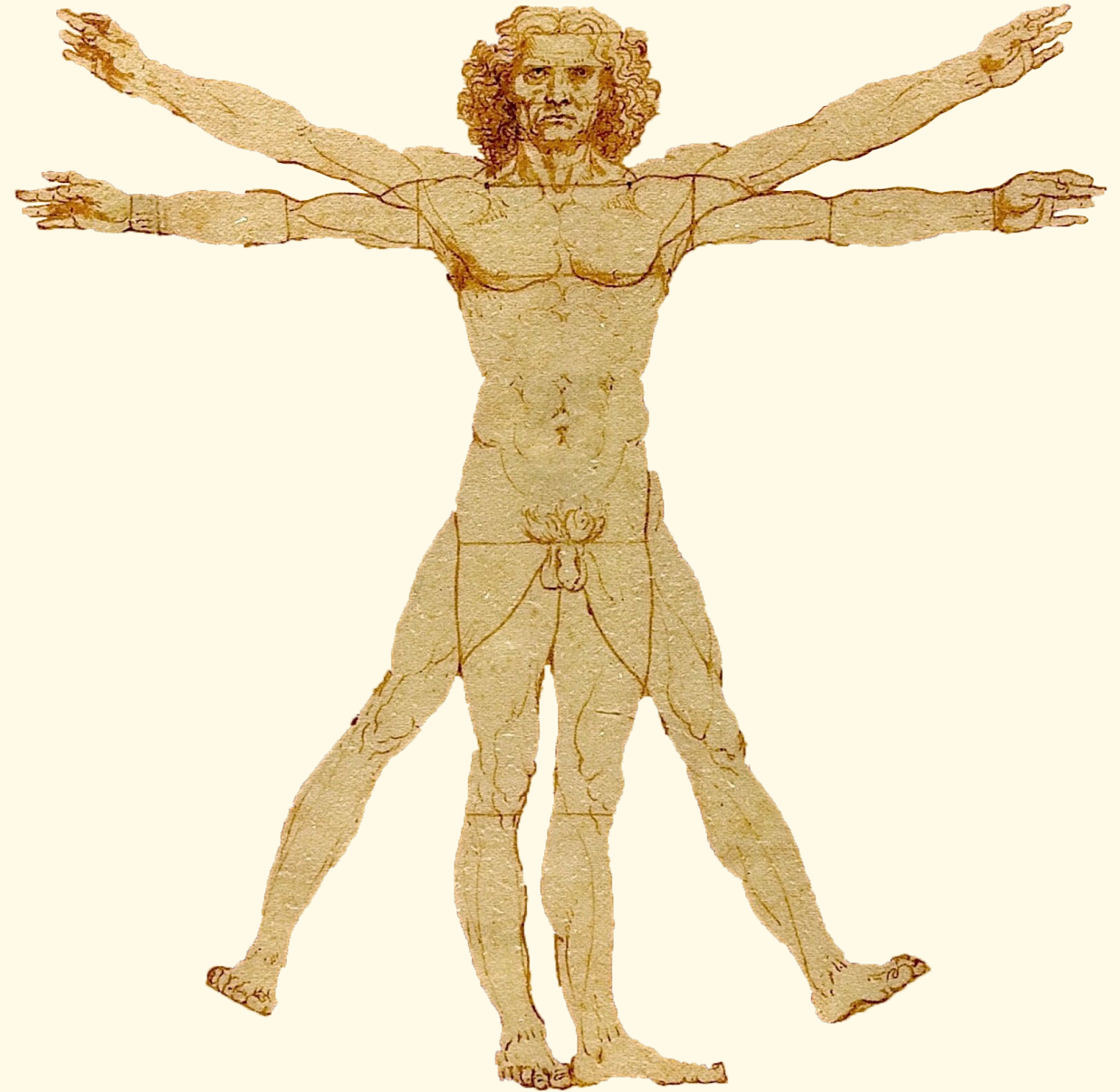
Men for women, women for men

Natives for immigrants, immigrants for natives

Monoglots for polyglots, polyglots for monoglots  
(OK, there are not many monoglots here in Luxembourg, but that’s an exception)

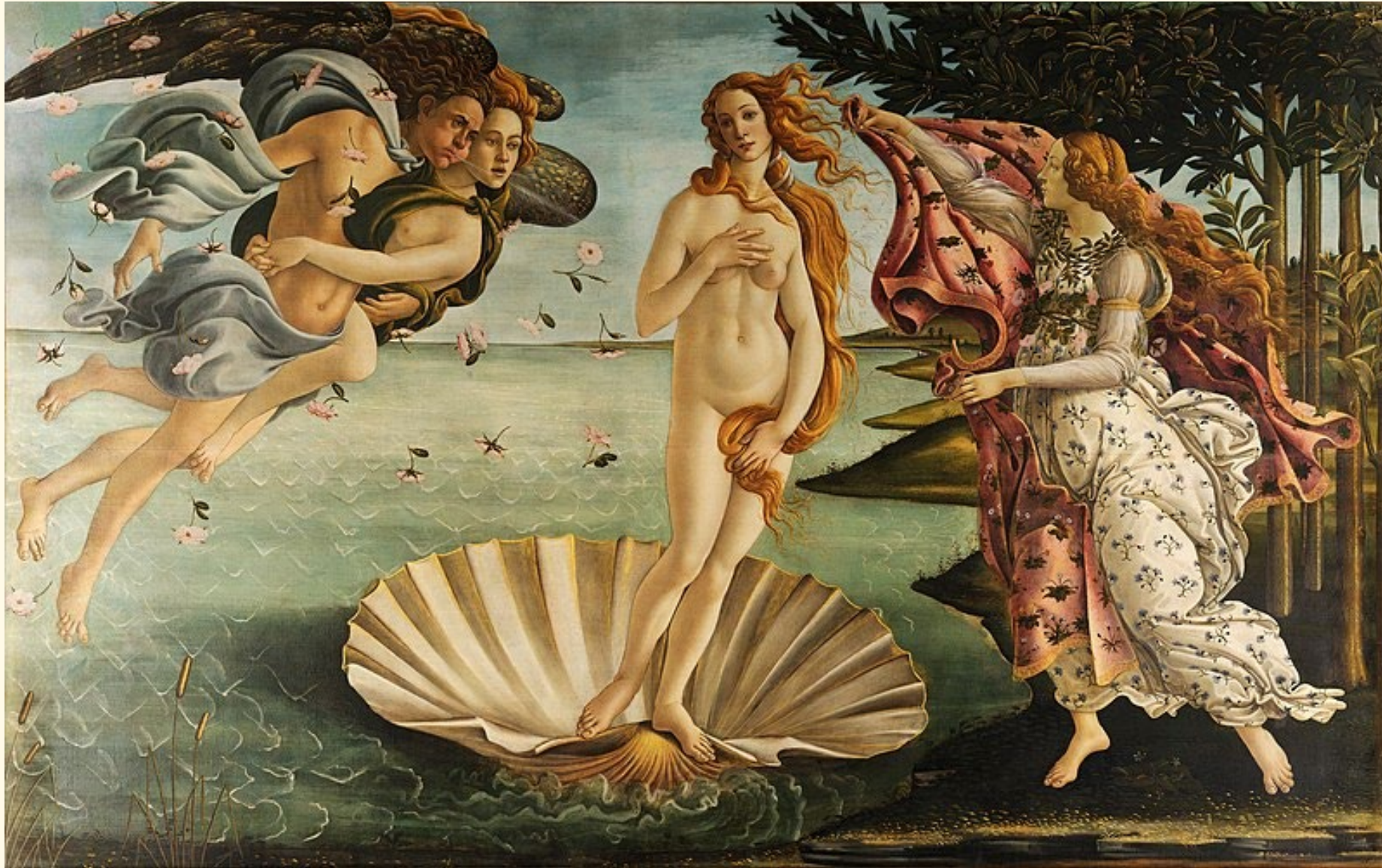
And so on... So it’s no big deal, is it?

And yet our world  
cities, buildings, products,  
communications, services, systems...  
is all designed just for this man:  
Leonardo's Vitruvian man





Or at the most for this woman: Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*



The classical design responses to identifiable categories consist in what we call “add-on” approaches: a special adjustment is made to an existing environment, product, communication or service so that it will also be accessible to the members of that given category.



### Examples:

- Special versions of software for blind users
- Temporary (and often quite unstable) ramps in exhibitions
- Horrendous “standard” bathrooms for a mythical “third gender”

In terms of economics, it makes no sense.



## How NOT to do it

Location: Church of the Salute, Venice

Pete Kercher – Luxembourg – 12 June 2025





## How to overcome it

Location: Cathedral of the Holy Name, Chicago





bathrooms can be both  
accessible and  
aesthetically pleasing

Location: Grand Hotel San Marino

The human society paradigm: this is where we come from ...





...and this is what we have built...





...as is this.





Too many are like this



Corso Monforte, Milano





...and we still build some like this.



we think we can correct everything with technology





and “smart” cities







doesn't sound like a lot. But, with 600.000 people that is 43.000 participants. It was pretty good. Hi. So. One project I was involved in was accessibility of cities for children. Because I'll tell you a story. Behind my house there is a wading pool. It is low. It is for children. In the summer that's what they do.

"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man."

George Bernard Shaw

The big question:  
what is design?

A common concept of “design”:  
luxurious, expensive, superfluous,  
  
not very useful  
or even usable



“A plan or scheme conceived in the mind and intended for subsequent execution”

Source: Oxford English Dictionary



“the transformation of existing conditions into preferred ones”

Herbert Simon

## Pompeii: the accessible route, Arch. Maria Grazia Filetici





## Pompeii: the accessible route: details



Let's talk about accessibility:

who is that for?

Some people need it, but everyone benefits



## People with disabilities in Italy

2014: 6.7% of the population = 4.1 million

2020: 7.9% of the population = 4.8 million

2040: 10.7% of the population = 6.7 million

Source: Censis, Press release dated 3 May 2014 - [http://www.censis.it/7?shadow\\_comunicato\\_stampa=120959](http://www.censis.it/7?shadow_comunicato_stampa=120959)

## People with disabilities in the EU28

2014: an estimated 16.0% of the population = 80 million

Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights - <http://fra.europa.eu/en/theme/people-disabilities>

Accessible tourism is worth €800 billion per annum

Source: UNWTO Conference on Accessible Tourism in Europe, Republic of San Marino, 19-20 November 2014



Then there is demographic change:

Accessibility concerns us all,  
not only those with a disability recognised by the state

## European Union Population Statistics\*

	2004	2050	Change
Overall population	456,8 m	449,8 m	- 1,5%
Working age population	67,2%	56,7%	- 52,2 m
Children (0-14 years)	16,4%	13,4%	
Elderly (65+)	16,4%	29,9%	+ 59,2 m
Very elderly (80+)	4,0%	11,4%	
Elderly dependence ratio	24,5%	<b>52,8%</b>	
Young dependence ratio	24,4%	23,7%	
Total dependence ratio	48,9%	<b>76,5%</b>	

\* Based on membership in 2004

Source: Eurostat 2005

## Italian Population Statistics

	2009	2050	Change
Overall population	59.870 m	57.066 m	- 4,68%
Working age population	65,4%	53,3%	- 8.898 m
Children (0-14 years)	14,2%	13,5%	
Elderly (65+)	20,4%	33,3%	+ 6.692 m
Very elderly (80+)	6,0%	13,4%	+ 4.075 m
Elderly dependence ratio	31,2%	<b>62,2%</b>	
Young dependence ratio	21,7%	25,3%	
Total dependence ratio	52,9%	<b>87,5%</b>	

Source: Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects, The 2008 Revision*.  
Figures elaborated by P. Kercher.

## Luxembourg Population Statistics

	2009	2050	Change
Overall population	486 m	733 m	+ 50,82%
Working age population	63,3%	56,7%	+ 107,9 m
Children (0-14 years)	18,8%	16,6%	+ 30,3 m
Elderly (65+)	18,9%	26,7%	+ 103.9 m
Very elderly (80+)	3,7%	7,4%	+ 36.3 m
Elderly dependence ratio	29,9%	<b>47,1%</b>	
Young dependence ratio	29,7%	29,3%	
Total dependence ratio	59,6%	<b>76,4%</b>	

Source: Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects, The 2008 Revision*.  
Figures elaborated by P. Kercher.

## Portuguese Population Statistics

	2009	2050	Change
Overall population	10.707 m	10.015 m	- 0.06%
Working age population	61.4%	48.3%	- 1.737 m
Children (0-14 years)	15.3%	13.3%	
Elderly (60+)	23.3%	38.4%	+ 1.351 m
Very elderly (80+)	4.4%	11.0%	+ 0.631 m
Elderly dependence ratio	37.9%	<b>79.5%</b>	
Young dependence ratio	24.9%	27.5%	
Total dependence ratio	62.8%	<b>107.0%</b>	

Source: Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects, The 2008 Revision*.  
Figures elaborated by P. Kercher.

With its vigorously growing population, Luxembourg is the exception, not the rule, but ageing still keeps pace with the European average.

Now let's look at the composition of your population.



## Life expectancy at birth in Luxembourg

Males: 81 years

Females: 85 years

Source: *La Démographie Luxembourgeoise en Chiffres*, Edition 2024, [www.statistiques.lu](http://www.statistiques.lu)

## Migration in Luxembourg in 2024

Immigration: 26,964

Emigration: 16,588

Net increase: 10,376

Source: *La Démographie Luxembourgeoise en Chiffres*, Edition 2024, [www.statistiques.lu](http://www.statistiques.lu)

## Resident population in Luxembourg in 2024, by gender

Males: 338,274

Females: 333,776

Total: 672,050

Source: *La Démographie Luxembourgeoise en Chiffres*, Edition 2024, [www.statistiques.lu](http://www.statistiques.lu)

## Resident population in Luxembourg in 2024, by nationality

Luxembourgeois: 354,372

Foreigners: 317,678

(of whom Portuguese: 90,915)

Total: 672,050

Source: *La Démographie Luxembourgeoise en Chiffres*, Edition 2024, [www.statistiques.lu](http://www.statistiques.lu)

Design for All starts out from the assumption of human diversity to achieve social inclusion and guarantee equality for everyone.

Instead of making “reasonable provision” for “special categories” of people, it assumes human diversity as its basic precept.



“Special categories” for design today are people with disabilities and the elderly.

With our ageing population, children will be a minority in 50 years’ time.

The same applies to immigrants, both permanent and temporary, to religious, ethnic, sexual minorities...

Every time we talk in terms of “special categories” for design, even if the laudable aim is to include them, what we are doing in practice is creating new social discrimination.

That is a design message:

what is its relevance to sports and health?

Where is the Design for All approach relevant in sports and health?

- sport and health facilities (the hardware)
- but also sport and health programmes (the software)

All very fine in theory...

...but how do we go about it in practice?

## EIDD Stockholm Declaration©

“The practice of Design for All makes conscious use of the analysis of human needs and aspirations and requires the involvement of end users at every stage in the design process.”



The Design for All methodology is eminently suitable for engaging the public in suitable sports activities

Again, the EIDD Stockholm Declaration states:

“Everything that is designed and made by people to be used by people must be accessible, convenient for everyone in society to use and responsive to evolving human diversity.”

And that “everything” also includes processes and programmes.

Involving experiencers in the design process means that each design is site-specific.

Why? Why not just copy a successful design from somewhere else?

Because the context is always different, the people are always different...

A model that works very well in one context may be counterproductive in another, building hope and expectation, but creating disappointment and failure.

A product or a model that includes in one place may exclude in another.

Communications that function in one place may be meaningless in another.

The three most frequent barriers to good design are prejudicial responses:

“It cannot be done”

“It is too expensive”

“We’ve always done it that way”

The first is an error in design thinking.

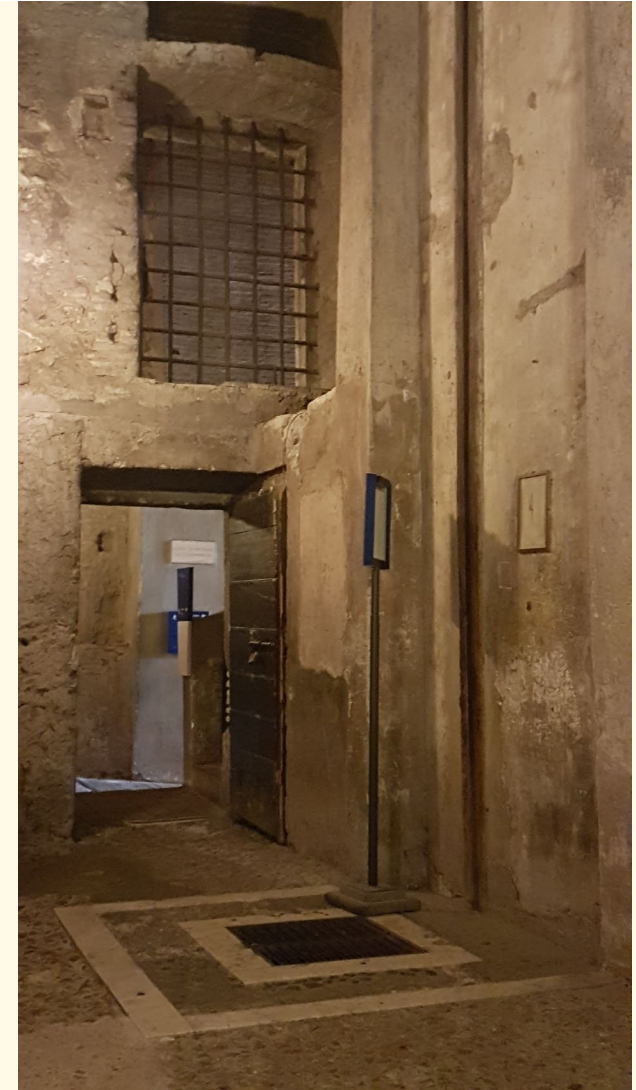
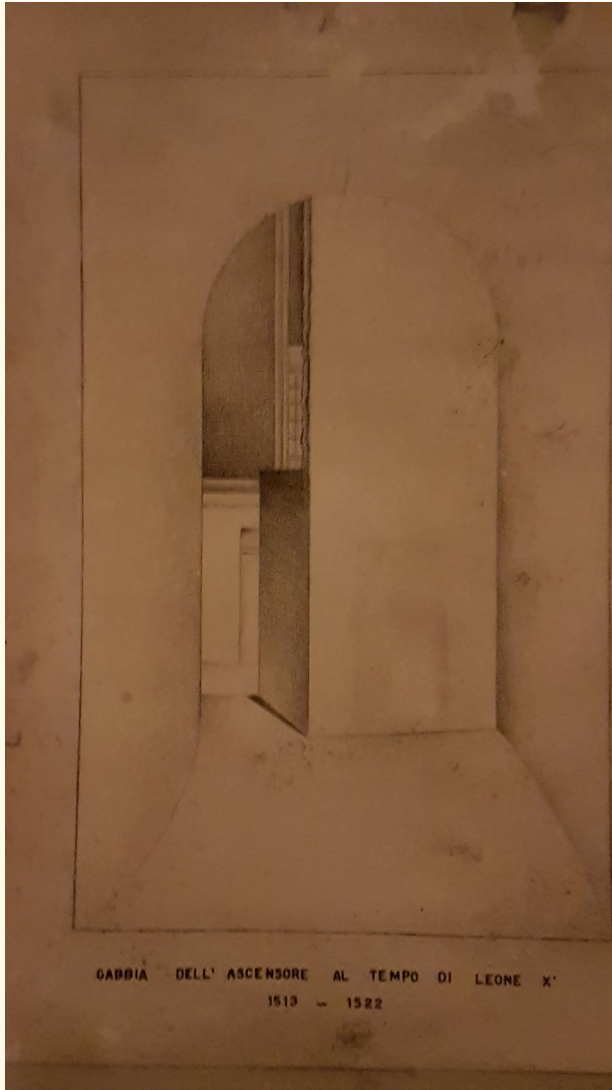
“Impossible” means you are not thinking outside the box:

your mindset is too narrow,

you have not exhausted the options.

“Impossible” is not part of the creative’s vocabulary.





Don't believe them when they tell you it can't be done  
Location: the Renaissance lift well in Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome

The second is an error in accounting practice:

“The art of economics consists in looking not merely at the immediate but at the longer effects of any act or policy; it consists in tracing the consequences of that policy not merely for one group but for all groups.”

Source: Henry Hazlitt, *Economics in One Lesson*, 1946

The principle:

rethinking the concept of Return on Investments in our places, products,  
communications and systems

as an investment in quality of life, positive experience and happiness

to reduce healthcare costs generated by solitude and depression among the elderly

How?

Accessibility and Design for All in society, culture and sports enable participation

Participation enables socialisation and physical activity

Socialisation and physical activity generate endorphin neurotransmitters

Endorphins delay the development of depression and the resulting psychosomatic conditions and physical pathologies

A reduction in psychosomatic and physical pathologies means lower healthcare costs

## The moral

We all know that interventions can be expensive.

But what about the cost of non-intervention, in the medium and long term?

Investments in sports infrastructures and activities today can drastically reduce the cost of healthcare tomorrow.



Just a thought before we close: what do we mean by “sport”?

The Olympic *altius, citius, fortius*, or something else?

That depends every time on the people for whom we design: everyone is welcome, with their different needs and aspirations.

They are all our experiencers.

And they will be the subjects of the lectures that will follow this one.

Yes.. there was a third prejudicial response:

When people say “we’ve always done it that way” it is a sign of fear of change.

It is intrinsically conservative: the opposite of innovation.

But... it is a manifestation of justifiable fear:

fear of the pace of change.

We must not despise that fear, but respect it and help people overcome it

Thank you for your attention  
Vielen Dank für die Aufmerksamkeit  
Merci de l'attention  
Merci fir Är Opmierksamkeet

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