

Accessibility and Inclusion

HACKING EVERYDAY COMMUNICATION PRACTICES TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Below are the notes for our Workshop at 36C3 in Leipzig

Who are we, and why are we here?

Erdbeerblau is a trained Graphic Designer, Interaction Designer and Anthropologist.

Vishnee is a social scientist who is currently working on a PhD in the field of Human-Computer-Interaction (HCI).

We met during our master's in Science and Technology studies (which is a field in sociology concerned with people and technology).

Together we have organized a lot of events over the years. We have collected resources and tried to figure out how to best deal with other people's needs and expectation in the process — and now we want to share what we have learned.

Over time the focus of our quest to find solutions for has shifted a bit. As we have been doing this for a while now, people started asking about our experiences and wanted a little help with their own projects. We went from trying to figure things out for ourselves to sharing our knowledge with others. This past year, we have been working to make our knowledge available for others in a worksheet you can download. We are also organising workshops and have given academic presentations on the topic. All materials are available on the project website: www.angela.is/SocialTech

What are we doing today?

We are going to talk about practical issues of accessibility and inclusion.

This is not going to be a very in-depth theoretical session. We want to explain the basic idea into what we are trying to do and then do some exercises in which we can learn from each other's experiences.

We are going to use terms like inclusion or accessibility, which have definitions, policies and moral norms attached to them. We do not want to discuss them here much further today. But we do provide short working definitions of what those terms mean for the purposes of this project on the handout.

Working Definitions

As a starting point, you can find our working definitions of accessibility, inclusion and diversity below. They are very short and may look overly simplified to some of you. These definitions are intended to give an easy-to-understand overview for anyone new to this conversation.

Accessibility

Access is about physical needs. An accessible environment means the particularities of someone's body (and mind) will be accommodated. Accessibility here does not include other forms of discrimination such as racism, sexism, social class, ...

Inclusion

Accessibility is an integral part of inclusive practices. Being inclusive here **means dealing responsibly and respectfully with all structural disadvantages** a person or community might experience. This includes but isn't limited to issues relating to (dis)ability, gender, race/ethnicity, class, religion, ...

Diversity

Ideally **a state where people** of many different backgrounds can **exist as equals**. Diversity is an end goal, but diversity reproduces itself the same way homogeneity does. It is widely acknowledged that diverse companies, working groups, communities, ... are usually more open and inclusive in whatever it is they do.

Background

The basic idea is the following: things are done a certain way, for certain imagined audiences. Almost everything in the world we live in is standardized to a certain extent. Standards came with industrialization. Before mass-production, everything from tools to clothing was made individually, and for a specific purpose. Creating a statistically average standardized user made it possible to produce many copies of the same item. Standards are a great thing in theory, because they aim to reduce the complexity of everyday life in a way that's manageable.

If you will, standards are a way of operationalizing human needs.

But standardization also creates new problems.

Let's say you want to make a contact form for your website. Traditionally, one would not sit down and brainstorm how to address your audience beforehand. You'd have a drop down list that contains the choices "Mr.", "Mrs", and maybe "Ms". Now that used to work reasonably well for a number of people. But while it sped up the process of creating a contact form, it is also excluding many people: everyone who is not a Mr or Mrs, or where their identity does not match what's written on their passport. And that's a lot of people.

While there's no conclusive numbers, a scientific estimate¹ puts the number of trans people in the US alone at 1 million. Of these, **30% identify as non-binary**, **68% don't have an ID** reflecting their correct gender.²

The results of a marketing survey³ show that **5.9% of Europeans identify as LGBT** when asked directly with a **y/n question**, ranging from 7.4% in Germany to 1.5% in Hungary. When given opportunity to select a sexual orientation somewhere on the Kinsey scale, the share of people who identify as not only heterosexual is nearly twice as high (10%)

So that's a large number of people that don't fit into all sorts of common assumptions and standards for how people deal with the world and the people in it.

I bet most of you are carrying a bag of random adaptors to attach your devices to other devices. It might be annoying to carry a bag of cables everywhere, but just imagine adaptors simply wouldn't exist the same way wheelchair ramps or unisex toilets often don't.

Most of you know how it feels when a product or service just doesn't work for our own needs. It might be alright, but not much more, even if there's potential. If you're anything like me, if you buy a tool with a weird handle that you can't grip, you just print a new handle that works for you.

We often can't get producers to make all new handles, at least not in the short term. But we can share our print files with others that need them, and maybe show them how to adapt it to their needs.

We propose the same approach for interacting with people.

Often our options are limited and we have to work with what is already there. But there is always some wiggle room to adapt things to fit certain peoples' needs. We just need to do it.

For example, when planning an event in a pre-existing building, we cannot change the layout of the building, but we can make it easier for people to find their way to a conference room. We can also help people who have trouble standing up for a long time with providing some extra chairs in the entrance hall or during the coffee break.

We can put up signs and maps to help people find their way or provide extra space for wheelchair users so they are still able to see and listen to a talk or presentation.

Some more numbers for context: The WHO World Report on Disability⁴ puts the number of people with *moderate and severe disability* at **16.4% in the EU**.

Disability is defined as „difficulty in functioning“, so these are all people facing problems in their daily lives. For people **60 years and older**, the number of people with moderate and severe disability jumps to **41.4%**.

That's roughly **84 million people**, more than the current population of Germany. And all of those people don't fit the standards that have developed over the last century.

We do not want to say that everything sucks and that nothing ever changes for the better. Standards slowly adapt when the world around them demands it.

Many of us grew up in a world where it was totally normal to smoke inside, even in places like hospitals or on airplanes, which is not allowed anymore.

We looked at the numbers for respiratory issues. While people don't think about these often, **64 million people worldwide** are estimated to live with **chronic obstructive pulmonary disease**. **330 million people worldwide are estimated to have asthma**. **14% of children globally** suffer from **Asthma**.⁵

And these numbers are getting even more extreme when we take in new studies around the effects of air pollution.

We could go on for a while, but I think it's becoming clear that if you add all these together, barely anyone fits the standards the world is made for.

Congress is a particularly good space for this conversation because a lot of issues that are commonly overlooked are being talked about. There are dedicated community efforts like C3blind and C3auti, the CrewCrew, ...

Congress as a whole is a good example how inclusive environments don't just happen, we have to actively create them together. Just like everything else we really want.

We think changes have to start small, so rather than looking at big plans, we want to talk about small, everyday tasks and practices. This begins with making things that are normally invisible, visible.

We want to share issues that we encountered and that other people have shared with us.

Sharing experiences and building practices will be at the core of this session.

Set Up, Play, Rewind

Using the metaphor of analog tape recording, we came up with three categories: Set Up, Play and Rewind.

These categories are a useful way to organize our process. This model is, of course, a simplified version of reality. There aren't clear boundaries between the phases.

Planning, getting feedback and adapting whatever it is we are doing cannot be separated, but it is often easier to think them as different tasks or stages of a project.

Set Up: Planning and Maintenance

With “Set Up we” want to emphasize that planning is important and you need to start thinking about access from the beginning rather than have it end up being an afterthought. Set Up includes planning, preparation and infrastructure. These are things you’ll typically think about before an event starts and that will impact your choices going forward.

At the same time they are less obviously interactive than the topics covered in “Play”.

In this workshop and in the documents we work on, we intent to provide a starting point to challenge our tacit assumptions and consciously reflect on problems that are often perceived to be too minor to even be noticed by those in charge. Many of us want to be super inclusive and accessible, but how can you adapt and establish your practices to work for others? What are the questions you might need to provide answers to?

Play: What you actually want to be doing

The considerations from the Set Up stage need to be put in practice. Creating accessible spaces is a continues effort that doesn’t stop with planning or having good intentions.

After all, planning and organizing are just a means to an end. The “Play” stage of a project is the part you actually want to be doing, the event, business ... that’s at the core of all the planning. We want to equip you with all the questions you need beforehand you need them. In “Play” we deal with questions that arise in direct interaction with your clients, customers, audience, visitors,... Planning is important, but being able to respond to whatever comes up is even more valuable when dealing with the people around you and their needs.

Rewind: Reflection and Feedback

At some point, you probably want to know what went well and what didn’t — and if it makes sense to change things up a bit in the future.

“Rewinding” is an important part of any learning process, where you reflect with others on the different organizational aspects of your project. In particular, it helps to build a sustainable communication network and can make it easier to hand over information and responsibilities if needed.

To sum our approach up:

Creating communication channels is creating space. When building things and envisioning new events, services and environments, we can (and should) create them to be accessible and inclusive from the beginning – and that means talking about (and reflecting on) people’s needs.

Second exercise of the workshop (40 minutes, small groups)

Third exercise of the workshop (30 minutes, group discussion)

Help us collect resources!

We could only give you a glimpse into potentially useful questions to ask when aiming to adapt more inclusive everyday practices. There are a lot of topics that we couldn't cover here.

The examples from our talk and many more can be found in the compilation we are currently working on. It is called **Finding Useful Questions** and is a collection of questions to get started and work with to adapt inclusive and accessible practices to different contexts.

The questions are supposed to bring up a range of issues, but as this would far extend the scope of one document, they cannot be in-depth resources for learning all about all the problems brought up. This is why we would like to ask for your help in compiling a list of resources for anyone interested in going deeper.

If you know any good, easily approachable resources (in English or German) that can help get people started thinking about inclusion and access in practice, please let us know.

We'd love to hear from you: workshop@angela.is or v.neumann@lancaster.ac.uk.

The current state of materials is available on the project website: www.angela.is/SocialTech

Sources:

- 1) Transgender Population Size in the United States: a Meta-Regression of Population-Based Probability Samples, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303578>
- 2) 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey Report, <http://www.ustranssurvey.org/reports>
- 3) Dalia Research, Counting the LGBT population, <https://daliaresearch.com/blog/counting-the-lgbt-population-6-of-europeans-identify-as-lgbt/>
- 4) WHO World Report on Disability, https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/
- 5) WHO Global Impact of Respiratory Disease, <https://www.who.int/gard/publications/en/>