



© Funka Nu

# Access the unexpected

We all know the value of conducting skilled access audits and the benefits they can deliver. We also know they can provide opportunities for exploring a host of creative options, especially where unique or complex challenges present themselves. Here, Susanna Laurin shares two case studies from Sweden and demonstrates just how innovative approaches and solutions sometimes have to be.

by Susanna Laurin, CEO, Funka Nu

At Funka Nu, we love assignments that are extraordinary, challenging or fascinating. Of course we do all the regular accessibility and usability work, but we try to broaden the minds of both ourselves and our clients by reaching out for accessibility with a more holistic approach. We would like colleagues in the industry and customers to look a bit further - try to move away from what users 'have to do' and go beyond the regulations, and concentrate more on people. In essence, accessibility is about the whole

of life, so why not concentrate on the positives? Or, in more formal terms, access to pleasure, cultural heritage and aesthetics, is just as important as being able to pay taxes in an accessible way.

## Underground inclusion: ABBA the Museum

One of our more recent assignments at Funka Nu was working with ABBA the Museum in Stockholm. Pop music is one of Sweden's successful exports and as ABBA has achieved legendary pop music status, the museum is expected to attract many visitors



An exterior view of the ABBA Museum

© Sharon Hahn Darlin

from different countries, different ages, different backgrounds and abilities. One of the challenges the Museum faces is that it is actually located underground.

**Underground inclusion: ABBA the Museum**  
The Swedish law on accessibility states that all new public buildings should be accessible. So, even though the Museum is privately owned, they have to comply with the same accessibility rules as a museum run by the Government.

We carried out an access audit before the Museum opened to the public. The displays were not completed so we were unable to test the accessibility of orientation and signs at the time. However, the building, as it was, with an entrance, ramps, toilet facilities, and elevators, as well as the arrival and parking spaces, was all audited during our time there.

To conduct an access audit early on in the design and development process is highly recommended as it can enable clients to make any necessary or informed alterations and with the possibility of minimising costs. All too often, we get an assignment because the client has received complaints about their accessibility, and that usually means that something



The reception area of the ABBA Museum still under construction

© Funka Nu

expensive has to be reconfigured. This is problematic for more than one reason, because of the way that Swedish regulations work: the responsibility for adjusting the accessibility is only mandatory if it can be made at a reasonable cost.

In general, some aspects were not factored in soon enough, such as, some visitors needing seating, children of all ages engaging with the building or

people of smaller stature visiting the site – these were just some of the considerations to be given further thought. However, Funka Nu is confident that the Museum wants to address the issues raised during the auditing process.

Contrasting markings are an example of features that are relatively straightforward to incorporate. Whether on stairs or on glass walls, it is possible to uphold the design elements yet make them as accessible as possible. It does not necessarily have to come at great expense.

One of the problems that we come across regularly also arose in this instance; the accessible restroom had plenty of turning space for wheelchair users, but necessary features required to make the facility usable, were placed out of reach, rendering it ineffective for many users. It presented real issues for independent use. One might wonder how architects or designers think disabled people actually look like. of the Naval Museum in Karlskrona (Marinmuseum Karlskrona) in the south of Sweden. Here, the physical limitations of the submarine makes it difficult to provide accessibility for all, but the goal is to make as much of the exhibition as possible, accessible for as many people as possible. A pragmatic form of accessibility is of course



A view of the front entrance of The Naval Museum at Karlskrona

## Underwater inclusion: The Naval Museum in Karlskrona

Another exciting project Funka Nu is working on is a submarine. It is not as miraculous as it might sound, because the submarine is placed on dry land as part

needed here, since it is crucial to keep the object considerably intact to ensure a genuine experience is had by visitors. The alternative would be to rebuild the submarine completely in order to make it fully accessible to everyone, but then the attraction risks losing its authenticity.

This is where Funka Nu normally comes in – supporting the client in making well-considered decisions and establishing ambitions, whilst also looking for innovative solutions to stretch the possibilities.

We began with an access audit and reported on how we thought the submarine could be made more accessible, which of course made our overall recommendations and discussions all the more interesting. Some of our recommendations were straightforward, such as suggesting, relocating some items to accommodate greater wheelchair access, and ensuring visitors of smaller stature were made aware of any sharp edges as they moved through the submarine, but, the overall approach had to be unique in order to respond to the unusual characteristics of the space.

Our first recommendation was unusual; we had to help the very ambitious client appreciate that in reality, a real submarine is fundamentally inaccessible to many people, not just disabled people. The routes are narrow, a level of physical fitness is needed to negotiate the spaces, and visitors are required to bend down or stretch in order to get around some of the intricate parts of the submarine. Therefore, one positive way of making the experience more available and user-friendly is to explain, in advance, what the space and surroundings are like, so visitors appreciate what they are likely to face before they decide to visit. This way, informed decisions can be made and time can be allowed to consider available options, otherwise the experience risks being potentially intimidating for some.

Our second recommendation was to make available a variety of options for different types of journeys through the museum according to visitors' physical requirements. This was so visitors could choose from shorter or easier experiences, to longer visits including some challenges, or perhaps explore the whole tour - where visitors can visit the submarine,



Some of the spaces within the submarine have proven to be clearly inaccessible and a challenge for many visitors

© Funka Nu

climb on the structure, crawl around and experience what it is like to be in confined spaces within the submarine. Accommodating these varying options allows for visitors to engage with the museum in way that suits their personal preferences.

Our third recommendation was to provide a virtual tour of the submarine, so that the main part of the museum can provide additional possibilities for discovery and sharing further knowledge about the submarine. Virtual tours can also act as previews on websites, and be combined with pedagogical material to be utilised in schools.

### The success of involvement

When we audit more conventional environments, we use our own methodology and tools, and try to exceed the client's expectations, or, where possible, deliver something unexpected.

We believe the experts we work with are incredibly important, but the clients we work with, become even more so. Our approach involves offering more than hours and hours of expertise, we collaborate closely with our clients and their staff. This means, we can provide the most cost effective service, yet provide a greater quality of work as a result. Does this sound strange?

We like to involve our client's staff where possible so there are opportunities to share our knowledge of accessibility beyond immediate project work. When our experts walk through a building,

measuring, testing, taking photos and writing reports, most people they meet wonder what on earth is going on. Some people ask questions, but others are shy or absorbed in their work, so they say hello and don't engage any further. If we on the other hand, start projects with a short introductory training session inviting all staff to attend, later, many people choose to actively participate and gain a lot of learning along the way. This way we achieve many things; the most important might be the spread and rise of awareness, but often we gather innovative suggestions or get asked challenging questions that make us think, and ultimately, they inspire us to develop new solutions when we meet new people. We all have our own experiences, we all have different points of views, and many interesting stories to tell – and quite often, two brains can think better than one.

For our clients, this process can be the start of a totally new way of increasing efficiency and satisfaction in the workspace, whether it is rethinking acoustics, or orientation or structure. To present accessibility as a democratic right and a very human interaction, can make it seem much more attractive and approachable as a subject - and it is less likely to appear as regulatory insistence or a restriction in some way.

### Walk the talk

Funka Nu's audit methodology is formatted as an educational and web-based tool that is user-friendly and applicable to non-experts. We combine

illustrations with clear explanations, providing information on why each element is important and to whom. After our clients and their teams have conducted an initial review and conducted surveys, our accessibility experts carry out quality checks and do any necessary testing that's required to apply their technical knowledge.

Funka Nu's own checklists are much more elaborate than those used by regulatory bodies. This is because not all important accessibility issues are covered by law. For example, allergy is one issue that is not mentioned by law and thus often forgotten. Also, something we call 'reversed accessibility', namely getting out of a building, during an emergency, is rarely part of either recommendations or testing.

Our plans to make our working checklist more accessible and user-friendly originally came about because our experts struggled to work with the existing material produced in the public sector. It was unappealing, it was formatted in Excel spreadsheets and required substantial knowledge of legislation and regulations. Questions such as: 'Check that the angle of [something] is five degrees' - meant that we needed to explain the results in substantial detail to our clients because a result of four or six degrees was not always possible to interpret. Was a lower degree better or worse?

At Funka Nu, some of our staff have dyslexia and we know that a combination of text, illustrations and video can make life easier for many people. Not least of all, our clients, who can then gain a clearer overview of accessibility from reports that contain and display results in a variety of ways.

## Welcome to the real world

Some of our consultants have been known to lock themselves in a toilet cubicle and use the emergency alarm. Often clients will explain that alarms have been tested and that there is no need for us to spend time on them. But we believe there is real value in testing them anyway. Aside from checking if there is an alarm installed or that all alarms are operating; it is what happens when the alarm is triggered that is truly worth testing.

As our testers have discovered, after they have locked themselves inside toilets and operated

available alarms, they may have to wait for some time for a response. So much so, that they often have time to complete writing their final reports waiting for someone to respond to the alarm. Because very often, one of four things happens outside:

- in the reception area, or where the alarm sounds and flashes, no one notices the alarm - at least not for a long period of time
- staff do notice the alarm, but no one knows what the alarm means or where the toilet in question is located, and no instructions are available
- staff know that the alarm means someone needs help in one specific restroom, but they do not know what to do about it. Many scenarios can unfold, including: 'Am I allowed to open the door from outside, what if someone pushed the alarm by mistake? What if someone is injured? Should I call an ambulance first? Should we be doing this, if the person in there is aggressive?'
- staff know where to go and what to do, but not how to actually open the door. Is there an extra key or tool for this situation? Or should I break the door or lock?

This can go on for quite some time, so if our expert gets very hungry, it is of course possible to stop the experiment and unlock the door from the inside - even if that might seem like cheating.

With an accessibility expert locked in a toilet, and preferably another expert outside the toilet documenting what happens when an alarm goes off, problems like these are easily resolved. By including real life scenarios like this in our access audits, our clients tend to remember us. And, more importantly, they tend to change the way they look at accessibility and start to devise more inclusive processes. Instead of developing one specific project on accessibility and then moving on to focus on gender issues or integration of immigrants, the clients that succeed in accessibility are the ones that make both the accessibility requirements and compliance part of their everyday life.

This is one of the reasons our accessibility auditing and testing is practical, hands-on and fun to do. We try to live the situations we test. So whenever you see a checklist or protocol stating that something 'is there', think again. Is it really enough that the alarm is present and makes a sound when you press it?

by Susanna Laurin

For further information about Funka Nu, visit the Funka Nu website

[www.funkanu.com](http://www.funkanu.com)

For further details of ABBA the Museum, visit the Museum website

[www.abbathemuseum.com](http://www.abbathemuseum.com)

For further information about the Naval Museum in Karlskrona, visit the Marinmuseum website

[www.marinmuseum.se/en/](http://www.marinmuseum.se/en/)

Advertising feature

THE HOPPER®  
common sense on crutches

### Carrying on crutches made easy



'It's made a huge difference to the quality of my days.'  
Rob, London

'Life is easier now. Thanks Hopper!'  
Karen, Manchester



[www.thehopper.co.uk](http://www.thehopper.co.uk)

### An Innovation for Crutch Users

Do you use crutches or a frame? Then chances are you're reading this in the kitchen next to the kettle, sipping the cup of tea you can't carry anywhere. Whilst crutches and frames are useful, there's that major drawback - carrying things - or, rather not being able to carry things.

The Hopper is a new product that solves this problem, helping you manage independently. Designed by a crutch user, it has a range of pockets for carrying the essentials of daily life such as drinks, snacks, papers, ipad, mobile and just about anything else. The Hopper doesn't get in your way and keeps everything right in front of you for easy access. It's comfortable, durable and

made from a quality water-resistant fabric.

Invented by Simon and Catherine Bland, the idea for the product came after Catherine broke her leg.

'We made The Hopper so Catherine could cope on her own at home and at work while on crutches, and now we're excited to have a product that can help so many people. It just really works. Feedback has been 100% positive and our customers love getting some independence back.'

The Hopper is available from [www.thehopper.co.uk](http://www.thehopper.co.uk)  
Contact Catherine and Simon [office@thehopper.co.uk](mailto:office@thehopper.co.uk)