

Welcome speech of Mrs. Barbara Berninger,  
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## **Expert workshop of the EuCAN – European Concept for Accessibility Network**

Mr Sagramola,

Dr. Neumann,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are delighted that you have chosen Berlin for today's presentation and publication of the **European Concept for Accessibility – From theory to practice**

and I would like to welcome you most warmly to the Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment.

We are also particularly happy because this expert workshop illustrates that we in Berlin are on the right track when it comes to implementing Design for All.

Berlin earned special recognition when it received the European Commission's Access City Award 2013. Berlin is proud of having won this award, but it is also an incentive for all the stakeholders in Berlin to keep up their good work.

'No barriers' is a challenge to the planning and construction process. This challenge has been unfairly overlooked for too long. Changes in our society, not least of a demographic nature, have made the call for barrier-free construction a central consideration for public rooms and buildings. Barrier-free access is associated all too frequently only with disabilities, especially walking disabilities. However, today we are well aware that barriers of different kinds affect virtually all of us – from colours or fonts that are more easily perceived than others to floor coverings that offer more or less support and acoustic conditions that facilitate or hinder our orientation. The Berlin cityscape is becoming increasingly colourful. As in many other German and European cities, the population of Berlin is becoming more diverse, with a rising proportion of older adults. The city of Berlin seeks to adapt to this prospect and present itself as a liveable, welcoming German capital. Public outdoor space, and its accessibility to all of its residents as well as its visitors, will play a pivotal role in achieving this goal.

With the publication of the 2007 manual on Barrier-Free Planning and Construction in Berlin, the Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development issued a planning tool for public buildings that addresses many questions of barrier-free access at an early phase of the planning process. The manual makes an important contribution to the prevention of planning errors so that new buildings are designed to be more accessible and usable for all.

With binding “Guidelines for a barrier-free Berlin” in construction, housing and traffic and transportation, we will ensure that barriers in everyday life are reduced or eliminated, especially for people with sensory impairments.

Being our department’s experts for implementing accessibility in Berlin, Ms Stude and Mr Grenner will tell you in detail how Berlin is putting into practice the requirements of a city for all.

The background for the growing attention for the subject is the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – UN Disability Rights Convention. The Convention calls for more self-determination and participation in public life for all mankind and sets new standards. The Federal Republic of Germany has committed itself to these specifications with the National Action Plan "Our path to an inclusive society" of June 2011. The Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment supports this general social concern. The term "disability mainstreaming" and Design for All should be the beginning of an important part of management and planning processes.

Berlin should be accessible in all its diversity, without obstacles. Therefore, our task will be to continue changing public buildings and spaces so that they can be used by everyone independently, simply, intuitively and comfortably. Berlin can and will play a leading role here. The principles of Design for All remain a challenge which will determine the quality of our city.

Accessibility benefits everyone and creates quality of life for all residents and visitors in a city. Accessibility is also a fundamental pre-condition for dealing with the challenges created by demographic change. Creating accessibility is a continuous process. It is important to involve all players in the planning process and also to set priorities, whether in designing a public space or the transport infrastructure.

Together with a handful of fellow enthusiasts, I set up the “Barrier-free City for All” working group within the EURO CITIES network in March 2010. There was a lot of scepticism when this group was established – today it has become one of the most active working groups of that European network, because its members show such passion and zeal. They debate with representatives of cities, experts, affected parties, associations, universities and companies about the respective successes and failures in promoting accessibility and they devise urban strategies to enhance accessibility at the European level.

We would like to use this network to ensure that your work and expertise can contribute to making the implementation of the European Concept for Accessibility a practical success.

Our cities and municipalities urgently need well-trained planners, architects and experts on Design for All.

I wish you every success for today’s event and for the implementation of the European Concept for Accessibility.

Barbara Berninger