

Events

DAI. Drawing for Accessibility and Inclusion

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On December 2nd and 3rd, 2022, in conjunction with the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (celebrated on December 3 each year since 1981), the first edition of the international conference *DAI. Il Disegno per l'Accessibilità e l'Inclusione* (DAI. Drawing for Accessibility and Inclusion) was held in Genoa. This is an interdisciplinary discussion space created for the presentation and sharing of application experiences and research activities focused on the issues of accessibility and inclusion, and linked by the use of knowledge, methods and tools peculiar to the discipline of Drawing. As announced by the conference call for papers, in fact, "In recent years, scholars in the field of Drawing and Representation have been paying increasing attention to the issues of accessibility and inclusion of diverse audiences in various spheres of daily life and from spatial, socio-cultural, and cognitive perspectives. Research concerning and experimentation on these emerging issues are increasing in contemporary society through the use of techniques, strategies, and methods founded on the disciplinary Drawing tradition". The aim of the conference was, therefore, to build an open field, itself inclusive, within which to gather the experiences of scholars working in various ways on issues of accessibility to outline possible

paths of interdisciplinary investigation and to facilitate the creation of research groups or networks, including international ones, that can capitalize on their expertise and the diversity of their points of view to provide effective and competitive solutions to the challenges emerging from contemporary society. The conference, promoted by a group of scholars belonging to the Drawing community who have long cultivated an interest in the issues of accessibility and inclusion by sharing a common cultural ground (Marco Giorgio Bevilacqua, Cristina Cándito, Enrico Cicalò, Tommaso Empler, Alberto Sdegno), was sponsored by the associations AISM (Associazione Italiana Sclerosi Multipla - Italian Multiple Sclerosis Association), ALI (Associazione Ligure Ipoudenti - Ligurian Hearing Impaired Association) and UICI (Unione Italiana dei Ciechi e degli Ipovedenti di Genova - Italian Union of the Blind and Visually Impaired of Genova), which operate in the tertiary sector and face real-life scenarios on a daily basis, acknowledging the needs expressed by the many specific situations and proposing concrete answers to the instances that emerge from the experiences of illness, handicap or disability. The presence of these associations made it possible to trigger and make proactive a much-needed dialog

between researchers, who often approach their investigation areas with a theoretical outlook not always related to real case studies, and practitioners, who live the daily experience of non-inclusion often not being able to access advanced solutions or experimental pathways.

The conference has taken as its acronym the abbreviation *DAI* (Come on), which, in addition to summarizing the reference areas, is enriched with an exhortative meaning: an encouragement to overcome the excluding obstacles and difficulties that preclude the full involvement of all people in the various spheres of social life, but also an incentive for researchers and planners to discuss and engage in a complex and as a yet little-explored field of inquiry, as stated in the call for papers.

The program occupied two days; the opening morning, coordinated by Cristina Cándito, chairwoman of the first edition of the conference, included a representative series of institutional greetings: Angela Celeste Taramasso, Rector's Delegate for Equal Opportunities and Inclusion of the University of Genoa; Adriano Magliocco, Deputy Director of the Department of Architecture and Design of the University of Genoa; Cinzia Leone, coordinator of European research projects on the themes of

equality, accessibility and inclusion; Cristina Bellingeri, Disability Manager of the Municipality of Genoa; and Francesca Fatta, President of the Unione Italiana per il Disegno. Cristina Cándito's opening speech introduced the reasons for the conference, declaring its purpose in light of a renewed definition of the concept of disability, no longer confined to material issues found in architectural or environmental space, but instead extended by incorporating the guidelines of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, signed in 2006 and ratified by Italy in 2009. In fact, the objective of the Convention is to "promote, protect and guarantee the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity", where disability lies in the set of conditions that, in relation to the presence of barriers of different kinds (physical, psychological, sensory, cognitive, social), impede the full participation of people in society, based on the principle of equality among citizens. The same concepts were argued with great clarity in the keynote speech by Maria Giulia Bernardini, a philosopher of law and researcher at the University of Ferrara, who emphasized the fundamental legal transition taking place from the medical model used by the ICIDH (International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps), which provides for the classification of disabilities according to their type, to the social model proposed by the ICF (International Classification of Functioning) in 2011, which no longer takes into account diagnosed limitations but the individual's functioning abilities, highlighting an evolving concept of disability and reversing the normative approach in a positive way. The conference sessions focused on four topics, with the

title, borrowing from that of the conference itself, adding the adjective related to the specific thematic areas identified: Drawing for spatial, socio-cultural, cognitive, psycho-sensory accessibility and inclusion. Approximately 25 contributions were featured within the sessions, returning an overview of the experiences conducted by the participating authors and research groups. At the conclusion of the first day, the round table discussion with the spokespersons of the associations representing people with disabilities took shape as a particularly significant moment, capable of expressing the profound sense of the conference by achieving its overriding purpose, which is to build effective relationships between scholars active in accessibility research and social workers in the tertiary sector. The testimonies reported by the associations allowed clarifying some detailed aspects, highlighting the needs of people with disabilities with greater concreteness and precision and widening the margins of the investigation fields in a concerted and interdisciplinary way, as the slogan 'nothing about us, without us' incites the participatory design of solutions for disability. Specific conditions such as deafness (represented by Effetà Liguria - Conoscere la disabilità uditiva, Associazione per la difesa dei diritti degli audiolesi - Knowing Hearing Disability, Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Hearing Impaired, and ALI, Associazione Ligure Ipoudenti - Ligurian Hearing Impaired Association), blindness (represented by UICI, Unione Italiana dei Ciechi e degli Ipovedenti - Italian Union of the Blind and Visually Impaired), autism (represented by ANGSA Liguria Onlus, Associazione Nazionale dei Genitori di Persone con Autismo (National Association of Parents of Persons with Autism) and multiple sclerosis (represented by AISM,



Fig. 1. Cover of the book of conference proceedings.

Associazione Italiana Sclerosi Multipla - Italian Multiple Sclerosis Association) bear physical, cultural and psychological needs that require a commitment to ensuring maximum autonomy in decision-making and use for people with disabilities. In this type of response, the different application areas of the discipline of Drawing lend themselves ideally to the versatility of communicative solutions (from graphic language to wayfinding systems) and of interaction between user and real space (from multisensory to tactile model) or virtual (from augmented reality to services in the metaverse). The crucial theme reported by the associations, on which numerous experimental initiatives operate, is that of identification, emblemized among others by the experiential workshop on multiple sclerosis *Senti come mi sento*

(Feel how I feel), itinerant throughout the national territory, aimed at enabling, by means of special simulator devices, the direct experience of the conditions and physical sensations associated with the pathology.

The venue and the way the conference took place were also established in the spirit of expanded accessibility: the two days were held at the Sala Quadrivum in Piazza Santa Marta, a conference hall with a high degree of both physical and auditory accessibility due to the presence of ad hoc technological facilities. Participation was allowed in blended mode to ensure maximum adherence even remotely; in addition, a stenotype service with real-time subtitling made accessibility strategies even more effective. During the conference, a space dedicated to the exhibition of tactile models and maquettes enabled blind people to come into direct contact with the applications and research topics presented by the speakers.

The volume of the conference proceedings, published in open access by Publica and available as early as the days of the initiative, brings together the 50 contributions proposed by nearly 90 authors, and bears witness to the lively activity of a large group of scholars who, for some time and with diverse skills and interests, deal with issues related to accessibility and inclusion. The mosaic of experiences given back by the volume reaffirms a now well-established approach in the field, aligned with the cultural transformation that from the penalizing label of disability, applied to a narrow category of people and de facto stigmatizing, has moved toward the virtuous pursuit of the requirement of accessibility, understood as a positive quality attributed to solutions, services, spaces and places designed to cancel diversity and receive the multiplicity of needs expressed by an inclusive society. This approach has physiologically incorporated all recent normative and strategic guideline references

on the issues involved, debunking one of the most sterile clichés on the subject of disability, namely that it is a condition that affects a minority of people, stereotypically identified by the universal symbol, exclusionary in itself, of the wheelchair. On the contrary, disability takes many forms, often invisible or however undetectable, and requires not only the use of a perspective of critical relativism, but above all, to consider the evolving nature of the human condition, which inevitably places each individual, in the course of his growth, in front of the need to experiment with reduced ways of using and accessing spaces, knowledge and services. It is only through this progressive awareness that it is possible to acquire the importance of the shift from the goal of equality to that of the protection of difference, which implicitly places the individual at the center of choices by ensuring that he has the conditions to independently and actively influence society.

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