



Christian Hellevang is a senior adviser at The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS). He works with volunteering, leisure time for children and young people, youth democracy, social housing work and universal design. Hellevang has a bachelor-degree in public administration from the Norwegian School of Management and Social Sciences (NKSH), 60 credits (ECTS) in public information from Lillehammer University College and a master's degree in public administration (MPA) from the Copenhagen Business School (CBS). He also has 28 credits from the Nordic School of Public Health in Gothenburg (NHV) and 30 credits in "Health in plan" from the University of Agder (UIA) and 10 credits in universal design from NTNU and 10 credits in universal design from VID. In addition, he has 30 credits from Osmolet in oral narration.

Hellevang has previously worked in The tenants union of Oslo (LBF), The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (UDI), The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir), The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises (NHO), The union of students in Norway and the National Youth council of Norway.

Hellevang has held many positions in various organizations. He has been president of Youth for understanding Norway, president of the tenants 'association in Oslo, president of the Norwegian tenants' association and also a former board member of IUT.

Hellevang has sat on many different juries, now he sits on the Housing Bank's jury for social housing work and Bufdir's jury for good youth work.

Hellevang has been member of many public bodies, among them is the Norwegian Rent Tribunal.

Welcome to Norwegian Nature

Christian Hellevang, *The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS).*

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Abstract

Outdoor recreation is deeply rooted in the Norwegian identity and cultural heritage, but Norway's deep valleys, high mountain peaks and rugged coastline are not accessible to all. That is something many people are eager to do something about.

"Getting into the wild is one thing, however, we also know that ample access to outdoor recreation close to where people live have a positive effect on public health and quality of life. Accessible trails and parks, and easy access to the coastline and waterways are important, while accessible cultural heritage sites can serve as a motivation for many to get out and be active," says Christian Hellevang.

He is responsible for Universal Design at The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) – the largest employer organisation for local governments in Norway. All of the country's 356 municipalities and 11 county councils are members, as well as about 500 municipal, intermunicipal and county council undertakings.

Keywords: *Norwegian, nature, Universal design.*

Context

Sharing best practices

“Since 2013, we have developed a network for Universal Design. More recently, we also developed a network for age-friendly communities. The purpose of both networks is to share best practices. We believe that by learning from each other, we can go even further in creating inclusive communities,” says Hellevang.

To disseminate the insights, ideas and best practices gained through the networks, KS have over the years produced a collection of booklets and videos. They present projects in local communities across Norway – from the grand and innovative, to the ingenious low hanging fruits – that requires smart thinking rather than big investments.

“We have covered everything from schools and kindergartens to town halls and parks. In this article we want to share some of the great projects aimed at getting everyone out and about and into the wilderness for which Norway is so renowned,” says Hellevang.

Tampering with nature?

“It is not uncontroversial. Norwegians crave the unspoilt. So, the question is always: How much can we tamper with nature before we ruin the sense of wilderness? These are some examples that show how elegantly the need for accessibility and the ideal of preservation of nature can be combined, for the benefit of all,” says Hellevang.



Image 1.- A path into the Sognefjell mountains. "It's about challenging myself and feeling empowered", Marianne Brattland, wheelchair user.

High up in the mountains, at the edge of Jotunheimen National Park, a beautifully executed project shows that universal design can be successfully applied to one of our most beloved sites of natural beauty.

In the Sognefjell mountains, a one-point-one kilometre path has been constructed across a mountain plain and lake. The light-weight steel bridges and the gravel paths are designed to blend in with nature. The longest bridge is 47 metres long, but still ultra-thin, only two centimetres thick.

The path allows everyone to walk, be pushed or roll into the magnificent landscape, providing a different experience than taking it all in from the side of the road. The new path connects with existing trails for hikers.

"Being able to enjoy the mountains is one thing, but in everyday life, keeping active where you live is paramount to public health. In the

past decade, authorities have prioritised providing ample opportunities for outdoor recreation in urban areas. The aim is for everyone to have a walking path less than 500 metres from their home. Preferably universally designed,” explains Christian Hellevang.



Image 2.- A suspended path over the lake. "We want as many people as possible to be able to get out into nature, not just the most active people", Aslak Momrak-Haugan, Project Manager.

Fyresdal, in the south of Norway, is surrounded by wild and beautiful nature. Municipal authorities had an ambition to create an accessible activity park that is suitable for as many people as possible, in every age group, regardless of functional ability.

The park is situated close to residential areas, and natural hubs such as schools and kindergartens. The highlight of the two-point-four kilometre trail, is a suspended wooden bridge, clinging to the rock above a lake.

In January 2022, the activity park won the Grand Award in the International Design Award competition, hosted by the International

Association for Universal Design.



Image 3.- A bridge in harmony with nature. "The Midgard Serpent refreshes the meaning of Universal Design. It is not a matter of dull facilitation, but creating exciting design for everyone", Anne Reidun Garpestad, Project Manager.

Another wooden bridge, in the south-western part of Norway, has made a beautiful lake more accessible. The so-called 'Midgard Serpent' combines aesthetics and ambitious architecture with Universal Design – and thus creating something better than if they had focused on one or the other.

Named after a terrible sea monster in Norse mythology, the footbridge wriggles like a serpent across the Frøyland lake. It is made of 33 000 narrow lime pine timber planks, and looks almost like a twig – its organic form and colour blending perfectly with the surrounding nature.

The Midgard Serpent connects one side of the lake with the other, making the 16-kilometre trail around the lake more accessible to those who prefer shorter trips. The idea came from the local Residents'

Association, and the footbridge was funded in a way which in Norway is considered ideal: A combined public and private venture.

The footbridge has become more than a convenient shortcut; it has become a landmark, and an attraction in itself.



Image 4.- Going up to the treetops!. "You must believe in the impossible", Truls Korsæth, Project Manager.

That is also the case with another project, situated in a suburb in Oslo: The Stovner Tower is another proof that the ideal of a society where everyone can participate on equal terms can inspire spectacular architecture.

It all began with a hairy idea, enthusiasts with a plan and a municipality that cares about universal design. The idea was to allow people to enjoy the surrounding forest from a new perspective – high above the treetops. It is part of an urban regeneration project, adding qualities to one of the most socially challenged urban areas in Oslo.

The 260 metres long walkway spirals up with a gradient allowing wheelchair users to get to the top without the help of others. The Stovner Tower forms the heart of a universally designed activity park and trails.



Image 5.- Feeling the waterfall. "I don't think people take notice of the fact that this is a universally designed space. It just is", Kari Bergo, Landscape Architect.

A contrast to these grand designs, is the more subdued path constructed by a waterfall in Western Norway: Here, the landscape architect wanted to allow everyone to get so close to the waterfall, that they can feel the spray.

However, she did not want any railings, high walls or other constructions that would ruin the experience of wild nature. The seemingly unimpressive path is the result of a comprehensive

landscape analysis.

The trail meanders in harmony with nature, circling around rock formations and between shrubs – for minimum impact. The orientation lines are natural – dark kerbstone in contrast to the lush greenery. The paved path does not rise too high in the terrain, making it safe without railings.



Image 6.- A sleepover under the sea spray. "It was magical to watch the wet and windy weather, while ships sailed past in the night", Gro Eileraas, Wheelchair user.

Last, but not least, to ensure universal access to nature, you also need accommodation suitable for all. The Norwegian Trekking Association owns and manages many cabins across Norway. In recent years, they have made a conscious effort to ensure that more of them are accessible to all.

One of the newly constructed Floke Cabins by the ocean in southwestern Norway, is twice as big as the others and universally designed. This too got its name from Norse Mythology, the Viking king

Floke, who was the first to settle in Iceland. Here, you can experience the stormy seas, from the comfort of a warm and safe space.

“I hope you have been inspired by these examples. They represent just a few of the great projects featured in our latest publication ‘Norwegian Nature is for Everyone’, issued in January 2023,” says Christian Hellevang, adding that: “We are happy to share our materials with our international friends, and I invite you to get in touch.”

References

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