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Ilona Gurjanova has been offering graphic design and design management services to clients for over 35 years. Since 2004, as the president of a professional design organization, Ilona has collaborated with both private and public sectors, playing an

active role in shaping Estonian design policy. Since then, she has been involved in international and EU projects.

She has been the lead curator of multiple design projects across more than 15 countries. Her initiatives include founding the Tallinn Design Night Festival (Disainiöö), the Estonian Design Prize Bruno, the Estonian Design House, and Size Doesn't Matter. Moreover, she has organized several traveling exhibitions, the most recent being Upmade in Estonia.

Currently, Ilona is a lecturer at universities and colleges. Her extensive experience includes serving as a board member of BEDA (Bureau of European Design Associations) and EIDD (Design for All Europe), as well as being a jury member of international competitions. She also contributed to an international committee evaluating the level of design education in Estonia and Lithuania.

Ilona has authored articles on design awareness for local media and provided interviews to both local and international outlets. Her accolades include the Annual Award from the Cultural Endowment in 2009, the Foreign Ministry's Cultural Award in 2017, and several other recognitions.

Tallinn for All : Celebrating 20 Years of Inclusive Design and Social Innovation

Abstract :

Tallinn for All : 20 Years of Inclusive Urban Design

Launched in 2010, Tallinn for All celebrates two decades of advancing inclusive design, social innovation, and urban accessibility in Estonia. This initiative, born from Tallinn's European Capital of Culture 2011 preparations, aimed to eliminate discrimination against marginalized groups and enhance city life for all. Through participatory projects like the Gulliver Map, accessibility audits, and social design solutions (e.g., RFID terminals for the visually impaired), the project transformed public spaces, transportation, and cultural venues. Its legacy highlights the power of co-creation and user-centered design in fostering equitable, sustainable cities. The 20th-anniversary events (29 Sept–5 Oct 2025) will feature exhibitions, workshops, and public discussions, inviting locals and international guests to explore the evolution of Tallinn for All.

Keywords :

Design for All, inclusive design, Universal design, Social innovation, Urban accessibility, Participatory design, Sustainable cities, Smart cities, Social equity, Diversity in design, Public space design, co-creation, Community engagement

Introduction

Tallinn, September 2025 – This autumn, the Tallinn for All initiative celebrates its 20th anniversary, marking two decades of pioneering work in inclusive design, social innovation, and urban accessibility. Launched in 2010 as part of Tallinn's preparation for its role as European Capital of Culture in 2011, the project was a response to concerns about discrimination against marginalized groups—such as the elderly, young mothers, and people with disabilities—and aimed to improve the quality of life for both locals and tourists by making the city more functional and accessible.

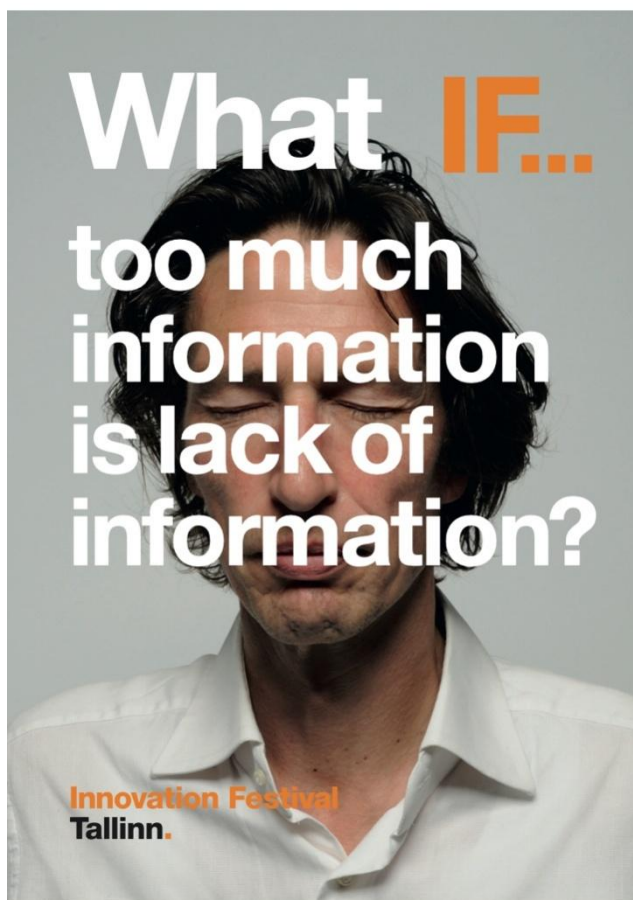
The initiative was spearheaded by the Estonian Association of Designers (EAD), in collaboration with international partners such as the Estonian Academy of Arts (EKA), the École Supérieure d'Art et de Design de Saint-Étienne, and EIDD-Design for All Europe. More than 100 people were involved, including city officials, students, professors, designers, specialists, and people with disabilities, reflecting a truly participatory and inclusive approach.

As part of this milestone, the XX Tallinn Design Festival / Disainiöö—the largest design event in the Baltic region—will take place from 29 September to 5 October 2025 in Tallinn, Estonia. This year's festival is a celebration of diversity, creativity, and collaboration, bringing together global thought leaders, designers, and innovators to explore how design can create a more inclusive and equitable world.

A Vision for Inclusive Urban Spaces

Tallinn for All was an international project designed to stimulate design innovation by involving disabled people and other users in problem-solving. The initiative focused on three core objectives:

1. Transforming Tallinn into a more accessible and comfortable tourism destination through social involvement, without discriminating against any group.
2. Achieving tangible results that draw public attention to the importance of inclusive design, stimulate innovation, and demonstrate the potential for economic growth.
3. Introducing the "Design for All" methodology to participants through hands-on experience, fostering a culture of user-centered design.



The project was structured around three main challenges:

- **Accessibility in Tallinn's Old Town and cinemas.**
- **Information design for public transportation.**
- **Social design, including products and services for visually impaired people.**

Key Achievements and Innovations

1. Gulliver Map Project

Inspired by Japanese architect Junzo Okada, the Gulliver Map was installed in Tallinn's city center. This large-scale, interactive map invited residents and tourists to share their experiences, highlighting both the joys and challenges of navigating the city. The project provided critical insights into accessibility barriers and opened a dialogue between citizens, designers, and policymakers.



2. Accessibility Audits

Teams of students and experts conducted detailed audits of Tallinn's public spaces, including cinemas, bus stops, and tourist routes. Their findings led to tangible improvements, such as the introduction of low-floor buses, clearer signage, and inclusive wayfinding systems, many of which were later adopted by the city.

3. Social Design Solutions

Innovative projects, such as RFID-enabled information terminals and tactile maps, were developed to assist visually impaired travelers. These solutions emphasized user-centered design, ensuring that technology and infrastructure serve everyone—from tourists to locals with disabilities.



4. Collaboration with the Black Nights Film Festival

The initiative partnered with the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival (PÖFF) to audit and enhance the accessibility of its venues, setting a precedent for barrier-free cultural experiences.

Methodology and Participatory Approach

The project followed a structured roadmap:

- Briefings to working groups, focusing on 10 main urban challenges, with three selected for in-depth exploration.
- Research, including street surveys and design audits for cinemas.
- Seminars and workshops on topics such as "Cities for All" and "Mobility."
- Concept development, translating research findings into actionable proposals.

Mentors from across Europe, including Francesc Aragall (Spain), Julia Cassim (UK), and Avril Accolla (Italy), guided participants through the process, ensuring a high standard of innovation and inclusivity.

Legacy and Lessons Learned

Over the past two decades, Tallinn for All has demonstrated the power of co-creation and design thinking in shaping inclusive cities. Its success lies in bridging the gap between top-down policies and grassroots participation, proving that meaningful change requires collaboration across sectors.

Key lessons include:

- Companies must evolve their design processes to better meet diverse consumer needs.
- Administrations must ensure that no citizen is excluded by social evolution or market trends.
- Professionals must integrate "Design for All" criteria and user participation into their practice.

The project's impact was recognized with the DME Award 2012 for Best Non-Profit, and its findings were showcased internationally, including at an exhibition in Helsinki.

Join the Celebration

The 20th-anniversary events will feature exhibitions, workshops, and public discussions, inviting locals and international guests to explore the evolution of inclusive design in Tallinn. This year's festival promises to be a landmark event, celebrating 20 years of innovative, socially significant, and forward-thinking design.

Why Attend?

- Network with 100+ global leaders and Estonia's most pioneering designers.
- Explore transformative design that revitalizes forgotten spaces, such as this year's venue—the historic Krulli manufacturer.
- Engage in meaningful dialogue on diversity, sustainability, and innovation with visionaries like Patricia Moore (USA), Rama Gheerawo (UK), and Cameron Sinclair (USA/UK).

For more information, visit Tallinn for All's official platform.

Conclusion

Through initiatives like Tallinn for All, the Estonian Association of Designers has championed accessibility, social inclusion, and the global recognition of Estonian design. By advocating for inclusive policies and fostering international collaborations, the association continues to prove that design is not just about aesthetics—it is a powerful tool for social change, equity, and sustainable development.

As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of Tallinn for All, the Estonian Association of Designers remains committed to building cities that work for everyone—where creativity, inclusivity, and community drive progress. Here's to the next 20 years of designing a better world, together.

Estonian Association of Designers,
Tallinn Design Festival,
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