

Availability and accessibility

One of the areas of emphasis of the Lapland University of Applied Sciences strategy is managing distances from the viewpoint of accessibility: *“The long distances of the north pose challenges for the everyday lives of individuals and the practice of various occupations. In addition to competence in and development of logistics, the development of different ITC technology solutions and methods plays a significant role in improving reachability. Lapland UAS wants to continue the strong development of distance learning and invest in developing remote services for industry, business and wellness, remote health care, mobile services and accessibility.”* (Lapland UAS Strategy ... n.d.)

The Lapland UAS strategic area of emphasis of managing distances highlights the perspective of service users, which is a significant value-based choice that reflects the Lapland UAS values. In this context, we should consider the concepts of availability and accessibility and how they are interlinked and different from each other. In everyday life, availability and accessibility are often considered synonymous. Availability deals with a potential selection of services, adopting the service provider’s perspective to describe services that, in principle, may cover the entire country but, in practice, may be located far away from the user, and it may also be the case that the opening hours do not meet the user’s requirements and the professional skills of the staff are insufficient. Accessibility, by contrast, adopts the service user’s perspective to describe opportunities to make use of the services; in other words, whether the service can be used quickly and easily, for example, and if it meets the service needs of citizens. Accordingly, it is important to specify not only the type of service but also whose perspective and interests and which geographical area are emphasised when looking at the availability and accessibility of services. (For more information [in Finnish], refer to *Mahdollisuuksien maaseutu. [Rural opportunities.] ... 2014, 33–34.*)

Digitalisation seems to have become a buzzword – almost a mantra – in official and public discussion as well as among those using and providing various services, from the viewpoints of both availability and accessibility, in aiming to manage the challenges of geographical distances in everyday life. Besides decreasing distances, digitalisation may also increase them. In addition to the place of residence, digital qualifications and resources constitute a key precondition for the optimal realisation and utilisation of digitalisation. Digital citizenship is gradually becoming one dimension

of citizenship and a default norm with dimensions that may both exclude from society and integrate into society.

I would like to thank the writer of the column, Emeritus Professor Hannu Katajamäki, and the writers of the articles for their versatile problematisation of distance management and accessibility. You made it, with a total of 29 articles!

Best wishes for the Christmas season to every writer and reader of the articles

Leena Viinamäki

References

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