

# *The Principles of Safer Space: What and how?*

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# What are safer spaces?

- The concept of safer space traces back to the 1960s and 1970s in the American queer and women's movements
- The **primary function of the principles is to design, create and uphold an inclusive environment**, allowing therefore particularly the vulnerable groups to join, participate and engage in the event/space.
- It attempts to make **power relations** that affect our everyday life visible
- The principles of safer space refer to **social attitudes** and **practice**, not referring to physical aspects of the safety such as exit routes in case of emergency
- The principles also support people and participants to become aware of their own actions and attitudes and unconscious biases
- **We all have the responsibility constructing socially accessible space** that is supportive and non-threatening

*Safe space*

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*Safer* space

# Safer space policy in the City of Helsinki

- The Central Library Oodi was among the first services to implement the principles of safer space both for public and personnel
- The internal Human Right Network for employees conducted a workshop in 2019 to draft and formulate the principles
- In 2020, swimming halls and cultural centers will design and implement the principles of safer space
- Each services **creates their own set of principles of safer space**, but you can receive support from the City Executive Office to design the process for designing the principles
- In the future, the goal is to mainstream the policy of safer spaces throughout all the events and services of the City of Helsinki

# Case Study: Central Library Oodi

- The Central Library Oodi developed separate sets of principles of safer space for the personnel and the public; the idea came from a librarian Samu Eeve
- For the personnel Oodi organised two workshops with around 50 participants
  - In the workshops participants discussed the issues that made them feel unsafe
  - The discussion did not touch upon the “merit” of the challenges and whether the it should have caused unsafety but the **focus** was on how one could make the situation better → What principles would foster safety?
- All the principles were collected and two people developed a set of principles based on the ideas and **the final version was agreed together**
- All new employees are familiarised with the principles of safer space
- Issues that came up in the discussions: Discrimination, racism, aggressive behaviour from customers, sexism, harassment, gossiping, harmful jokes

# TAKING INTO ACCOUNT OTHERS

**”We are individuals, who take into account other people. Humour is allowed but if someone is offered, we know to stop. One can make mistakes, it is humane! Everyone has the right and the responsibility to gently point out inappropriate behaviour. We will address the behaviour, not the person. We will ask for forgiveness and we will forgive. We will learn from our past mistakes.”**

# Case Study: Central Library Oodi

- Data collection:
  - Workshop for young people (25 people)
  - Asking library visitors what makes the space safe/unsafe (80 people)
  - Online questionnaire (130 responds)
- The purpose of the public principles is to communicate that library is truly inclusive and welcoming for all groups who otherwise might not feel welcomed
- **The principles applies to everyone utilising the services of Oodi**
- Issues that came up from the public: drugs, noises, the lack of gender neutral bathroom, the lack of diversity and inclusion, guards, biased attitudes from the personnel
- The principles have been well received by the public

## **Non-discrimination**

Everyone has the right to be at the library. Idle hanging out is allowed, even encouraged. Racism and discrimination have no place at the library. Remember this when interacting with others.

## **Respect**

Always take other people into consideration. Everyone has the right to visit the library unharassed. For any larger gatherings, please reserve one of the bookable work facilities.

## **Comfort and well-being**

Oodi is our common living room. Everyone should respect the comfort and well-being of others. Behave with this in mind. We will take action against any undesired behaviour.

## **Promise**

Our staff are here for you. It is our job to make sure that Oodi is a safe place for everyone – tell us if you are worried about something.



# Case Study: The Principles of Safer Space for Human Rights Network

# The Principles for Human Rights Network

## To be heard, to be seen and to be understood

Everyone gets the space and the time to articulate their own thoughts and views. We allow people to take time to process the information and think. We listen actively and be present. We encourage and respect each other. Everyone has the right to follow the discussions quietly and also leave the conversation.

## Constructive and kind atmosphere

Everyone is welcome to the Human Rights Network despite their job title or position or previous experience. Each participant is valuable. We create together accepting and open atmosphere for discussions.

## Diversity and the right to self-determination

Everyone has the right to define themselves. We will not make assumptions about other person's identity or background. Diversity to us means among other things the diversity of gender, ethnicities, bodies, abilities and sexuality.

## Responsibility for your own behaviour and to intervene

Everyone has the right to bodily integrity and emotional integrity. Each one of us have the responsibility to intervene when we notice inappropriate behaviour, physical, verbal or sexual harassment or tell about it to the organisers.

# The Principles for Human Rights Network

## Accessible spaces

We organise the events of Human Rights Network in spaces that are accessible. Accessibility means among other things the possibility of using wheel chair or guide dog, guideposts, gender neutral bathrooms and induction loops. It is the responsibility of the organisers to inform the accessibility information in advance.

## Communication

We communicate through different channels in a clear and simple language. We will take into account the diversity issues in the language and photos we use. We will not use discriminatory language that contributes to othering.

## Participatory

We need everyone to advance human rights. We will develop and utilise different participatory methods that support people with different kind of thinking and learning practices. We will also ensure that no one is forced to participate.

## Commitment to the principles

We will go through the the principles of safer space at the beginning of each event and the principles are displayed throughout the event.

# In conclusion

- The implementation of safer space policy advances especially human rights of vulnerable groups by creating inclusive, welcoming and compassionate environment
- It is an excellent tool to create commonly agreed and shared principles that foster non-discrimination. Safer space policy also establishes an element of accountability.
- Use “we” form when writing the principles
- The **process of creating the principles** is the main most essential and fruitful component of the policy, not necessarily the final outcome. The process contains the important elements of *discussing, reflecting* and *jointly developing* a set of principles.
- Therefore never copy the principles.
- **Redo** the process in a couple of years to see whether the principles need an update.

***Thank you!***