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## "A Different Light"

### **A Different Light – 24 September 2022 – “Hundertwasser building is stunning but is it accessible?”**

It was a long time coming. Over a quarter of a century in fact. The Hundertwasser building. I remember back in the 90's my mother who was then the art teacher at Whangarei Boy's High School being so distraught when she found out the Regional Council turned down the Austrian Artist's offer to redesign their building by refusing to sell it. In 2008 well after Hundertwasser's death, a new proposal was developed to build his original vision of the building. It took a further 13 years of extraordinary fundraising, layers of collaboration and a district wide referendum to realise the unique vision and complete the project. It is an astonishing building, authentic and genuine. Its design is totally out of the box.

Standing outside the building looking at the undulating entrance way, I have to ask myself “is this accessible?” I have been told both in the planning stages and subsequently after it was built that it is compliant with the NZ Building Code and therefore it is deemed accessible. I feel however that the architects of the Building Code never envisaged such a design. Looking at the entrance way it's hard to imagine someone who is either blind or has low vision being able to either navigate their way into the building or its surroundings due to the randomly placed bulbous humps in the pavement that are over one metre high. I wrote to the CEO of the Whangarei District Council suggesting the installation of ground level tactile indicators that would mark out a pathway around the mounds into the building. They are those yellow bumpy things in the footpath in front of traffic lights and pedestrian crossings. A simple low-cost solution, that would remediate this issue and make that particular journey accessible.

The CEO of the Council at the time, happily passed this suggestion onto the Hatea Arts Precinct Trust (formerly called "Whangarei Art Museum Trust"). who then passed it onto the NZ representative of the Hundertwasser Foundation. His response was hostile to say the least. One could even say vaguely frenzied. He said my letter came across as "veiled blackmail" and that the pathway into the building was a lot better than a trip up to Parehaka or a walk on public land in the forest. He said that the suggested solutions would absolutely not keep within the "design theme" of the building and "would be a retraction and dilution of the authenticity of the Hundertwasser building".

Looking at the building entrance, I am somewhat torn. As far as accessibility goes, it's not that bad but it's not that great at the same time. I can only imagine what it would be like for a blind person to approach the building or anywhere around it. So not being blind myself I have asked Blind Low Vision NZ to review the building and to distribute a survey to the Blind community in Whangarei. So readers, what are your thoughts?? Have you got any opinions on the accessibility of our Hundertwasser building or surrounding areas? Let us know and do the 2 minute survey on our website [tiaho.org.nz](http://tiaho.org.nz) under News & Events.

*Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.*