Accessible Cities. HOW?

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I recently attended an event organised by Architects for Peace, 'Visions and Values for Melbourne's Public Space'. Michael Smith, an architect, was one of the speakers. His presentation contained a slide 'Melbourne the most liveable city', followed by 'who cares?'

On the other hand, if Melbourne focused on becoming the 'most accessible capital city' in the world where accessibility features are invisible, and visiting, residing, working, and studying people with disability and their carers can go around the city effortlessly, well how fabulous would that be! This inadvertently would mean that our city is welcoming for people with all abilities! With more cities and towns now targeting for 'most accessible city/town' label, the willingness of decision makers responsible for our cities and towns to go through the hard task of working through our existing conditions and systems to make an accessible built environment is being demonstrated. A remaining question, though, is 'how' does one go about ensuring that we are on the right track in terms of understanding how to make an accessible city and then going ahead to achieve that successfully.

At City of Melbourne Townhall. Attendees at presentation by Adam Johnson (3rd from right) included representatives from Deakin Uni, Melb Uni, the private sector, and various CoM departments.

The answer to the question of how to make our cities 'most accessible' is being explored by Adam Johnson. In his PhD, Adam is investigating how the City of Bunbury (WA) can become the 'Most Accessible Regional City in Australia' (the MARCIA project). Recently Adam was the guest speaker at a 'Designing for Access and Inclusion' event at the City of Melbourne organised by Mary Ann Jackson. Attendees were mainly from policy making and project management backgrounds working in public design/ works/ systems within the City of Melbourne as well as University researchers investigating Universal Design and/or engaged in interdisciplinary work. Adam's presentation briefly covered key processes, findings, and recommendations. A key process is 'Participatory Action Research' (PAR) which enables the 'researched' (the most profoundly impacted) to become the 'researchers'. A crucial finding is that, 'Design' is both key barrier and facilitator. This raises the question of "If public infrastructure is not fully accessible, what is wrong with the process of public design?", and "who is responsible for public design?" The conversation around the room was mainly, firstly, about the lack of awareness and training of the various teams involved in the whole process of designing and building inclusion and, secondly, how the legislation in place (DDA1992 and its sub-ordinate legislation and the BCA) inadequately deals with public design at neighbourhood scale.

The conversation shared amongst the various attendees indicated common design and delivery gaps, i.e, engaging the right team, lack of knowledge of various disabilities, lack of Universal Design training at Tertiary level, and lack of understanding and misinterpretation of legislation, to name a few hurdles in successful project production. Adam's work has identified, more or less, the same themes: design staff and contractors' competency would greatly benefit from specific training in Universal Design (UD) and co-design, technical support is required, best practice benchmarks and checklists need to be documented, active seeking and sharing of best practice in UD is necessary, and engaging with people with disabilities (co-design) is imperative.

Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992, Disability (Access to Premises- Buildings) Standards 2010, NCC BCA Volume 1 Part D3 Access for People with a Disability, and Australian Standard AS 1428 Designing for Access and Mobility are all phrases with which the Australian building industry is familiar, albeit not the actual content of the documents. In themselves though these documents are of limited relevance to neighbourhood scale accessibility. The process of universal design is perhaps a way forward of achieving accessibility at this broader level.

Mary Ann Jackson Laws Article

Models of Disability and Human Rights: Informing the Improvement of Built Environment Accessibility for People with Disability at Neighborhood Scale?

Abstract

In the 21st century, even with the advent of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the existing built environment still fails the neighborhood accessibility needs of people with disability. People with disabilities' human right to the neighborhood is, at face value, enshrined in legislation and 'much' built environment accessibility legislation is in place. But, built environment accessibility practice has been, and continues to be, shaped by a hidden discourse based on theoretical underpinnings little understood by built environment practitioners. Similarly, built environment practitioners have little understanding of either the diversity of the human condition or the accessibility needs of people with disability. (continued here: http://www.mdpi.com/2075-471X/7/1/10)
Already downloaded over 2,700 times!

Congratulations

To Mary Ann Jackson on passing her 'Confirmation of Candidature' milestone for her PhD, PhD working title is Improving neighbourhood built environment accessibility for people with disability: the role of the Universal Mobility Index (UMI) Process?

If you would like to discuss collaboration possibilities across the areas of accessibility, research or architecture for any of your projects, please contact our office.

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Outside Victorian Parliament (below). Mary Ann Jackson, Adam Johnson, and Saumya Kaushik (not in picture) visited Christien Couzens MP-Member of Geelong, where Adam shared his PhD research and put forward some suggestions on how Geelong can become an accessible city. City of Bunbury and Geelong share many similarities like being on the waterfront, their proximity to the State capital's like Perth and Melbourne, respectively. Geelong in its journey to become an Accessible City can benefit a lot from Adam's PhD research work. With major organisations like TAC, NDIS, Worksafe headquarters now relocated to Geelong and with Geelong being named a UNESCO City of Design, it's a great opportunity for Geelong to strive towards becoming the most accessible city in Australia.

At Melbourne University. Mary Ann Jackson, Adam Johnson, and Saumya Kaushik were invited to mid-Semester Critique for Master of Architecture, UniMelb, Studio 30, 'The Co-housing Challenge: Choice-Control Participation Inclusion' with Studio Leader Andrew Martel (2nd from right). Each student presented their design ideas for the site, demonstrating how an inclusive community interaction can be encouraged by simple design interventions, further explaining their floor plan for SDA apartments (accommodating two individuals with significant disability and their carer). A co-housing design studio such as this one is challenging in many ways, the design student is encouraged to think about the budget, has to be mindful of not exceeding the prescribed total floor area as it is common to design large spaces for wheelchair users under the assumption that more the better along with being mindful of retaining the homeliness of the unit as two individuals possibly with absolutely different needs and attitudes will be sharing the common spaces. Housing design studios such as these are extremely important, as housing is a basic human requirement often not given enough emphasis in an architecture student's life.

Transport Standards Review - have your say!

The third five-year review of the Transport Standards will be undertaken by the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities in consultation with the Attorney-General's Department and the National Accessible Public Transport Advisory Committee and the Aviation Access Forum. Closing date for submissions is 30 November 2018.

https://infrastructure.gov.au/transport/disabilities/third_review_tor.aspx

Accessibility in the Built Environment

Visionary Design Development Pty Ltd is an award-winning, transdisciplinary consultancy operating at the intersection of human needs and the built environment. We strive to deliver an equitable, accessible, built environment and believe that the best, people-centred, outcomes result when accessibility is continuously considered from project outset to completion and beyond.

We collaborate with many different practices across planning, architecture, and design, on projects of varying scales, achieving better accessibility outcomes for everyone and satisfying regulatory requirements.

We engage with all levels of government, government agencies, and the NGO/NfP sector, internationally, nationally, and locally, to deliver comprehensive insight into built environment accessibility.

We work with Universities, Professional Associations, Disabled Peoples Organisations, and LGAs and Advocacy groups building capacity to improve built environment accessibility outcomes.

We co-create with individuals, business, NGO/NfPs, and government to achieve people-centric, accessible built environments, whether existing or new, across all stages of procurement, design, and delivery.

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Design

- Accessibility focused architectural projects
- Inclusive Project Management
- Home mods (NDIS, OT, and individual projects)