Inclusive Design - A lasting Paralympic Legacy

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The most accessible games ever

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games have been hailed as the most accessible Games ever. Indeed, for many disabled people, a visit to the Games was probably unique in the accessible experience the park and venues provided.

The creation of an inclusive environment is now being used to inspire a lasting change in the way built environment professionals are taught about access and inclusion.

The Built Environment Professional Education Project (BEPE) - launched by the Minister of State for Disabled People last year - is a joint Government and Greater London Authority project focusing on education and training. The aim is to help maximise the long term legacy impact of the Paralympic Games.

“"The focus of this project on training and education will mean a lasting Paralympic legacy which will inspire future generations of built environment professionals to achieve truly accessible and inclusive environments for everyone."” Lord Coe

Can Inclusive Design become second nature?

Can changing the way we teach and learn about inclusive design help to make social inclusion second nature for all built environment professionals?

Why after more than 40 years of technical access standards and despite the introduction of equality legislation are there still examples of new and recently refurbished buildings that are not as accessible as they could be?

How often do you see people struggling up stairs because they can't find the lift; or trying to negotiate heavy doors; or trying to manoeuvre around spaces that are narrow and awkward with a pushchair, wheelchair, a guide dog or a wheeled shopping basket; or where layouts are confusing and signs illegible; or where poor acoustics result in so much noise that you can't hear yourself think?

The long term aim of the BEPE project is that built environment professionals are equipped from the outset of their education with an understanding of how we all - including disabled and older people and families with small children - perceive, use and experience buildings, places and spaces. A thorough knowledge of the key best practice technical access standards and the relevant legislation is important, but understanding the human element is essential.

How do you teach your students about the principles of inclusive design?

How many architects, planners, surveyors, and engineers finish their formal professional education with a real understanding of how disabled and older people perceive, use and occupy space?

Can changing the way we teach and learn about the principles of inclusive design help to deliver the standard of inclusion we achieved in the Olympic Park in all design projects?
Initial analytic work for the BEPE project confirmed that currently very little time is spent studying inclusive design, in some cases it is optional, in others non existent, and where it is taught the time taken to teach it is considerably less than that used to study other subjects such as environmental sustainability. The research also identified that students are keen to have more inclusive design training and that they are rarely assessed on their learning in this area.

How often are disabled educators and experts directly involved in student teaching?

Why do we generally (and often without realising it) still design to segregate and exclude and only consider these issues when we need to comply with legislation or good practice guidelines?

What educational resources will help to change this so that access and inclusion becomes second nature?

What will help to inspire creative and innovative teaching and learning in this area?

I am keen to listen, engage and discuss these issues and to learn how to take the project forward in conjunction with you, the educators of our future architects.

Victoria will share some initial ideas for taking the project forward, such as an inclusive projects web site where you could upload examples of good practice in inclusive design education. So do please bring along examples of your inclusive design projects.

Notes

