

INTRODUCTION

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In 2013 Dubai Crown Prince and Chairman of the Dubai Executive Council, H.H. Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, launched “My community... a city for everyone” and Dubai was selected to host the 2020 World Expo. These landmark events are driving the goal for Dubai to become “the world’s most sustainable and accessible city by 2020”. In the short term Design District D3 has been identified as an opportunity to develop a zone which will set the benchmark for accessibility and placemaking in Dubai.

It is important to note that whilst the focus of “My community... a city for everyone” is on the disabled it is in the context of promoting inclusivity and the recognition that the disabled are members of a much larger grouping- the ‘vulnerable’ members of the travelling public. The recognition that accessibility affects a much larger proportion of the population is game- changing. It is no longer a minority requirement but a majority benefit.

Accessible placemaking starts with the recognition that a poorly designed environment can restrict users’ ability to access services and facilities. Accessibility issues have historically been inextricably linked with the ‘disabled minority’

whose demand for equal rights has driven the implementation of world- wide legislation mandating equal access for the disabled. However, throughout the world a demographic shift towards an ageing population and an increasing reliance on support services is highlighting the cost and impact of accessibility issues as a wider social issue.

The reality is that we live in a world where a large proportion of the population can be classed as ‘vulnerable’ at some point in the travelling day. Insensitive non- inclusive design will impact to an increasing extent on the quality of life of vulnerable users as they get older. There is a growing need to ensure that people are not unnecessarily ‘disabled’ by poor design and management of the built environment.

Increasingly designers are now recognising that although many of the solutions adopted in accessible

environments were originally designed for the ‘disabled’ they are equally applicable to vulnerable users and the community as a whole. This recognition that an accessible environment is also an inclusive environment is the key to adopting a ‘design for all’ approach (Universal Design) that has both economic and social benefits.

The recognition of ‘who’ we are designing for is therefore as important as ‘why’ we are designing.

Associating the issue of accessibility only with the disabled minority fundamentally underestimates both the scale of the problem (because the majority of vulnerable people will not be registered as disabled) and the benefits of the solutions to the whole population.

