

## AN INTRODUCTION TO INCLUSIVE DESIGN

"No new architecture can emerge without a new kind of relation between designer and user, without new kinds of programs. (Kenneth Frampton 1983)

### Inclusive Design- one of many terms

Inclusive design is one of many terms currently in use in built environment professions, the building industry, and in the wider arena of local and central government. It shares a similar background and has similar aims to many other terms such as universal design, design for all, lifespan design, and most recently, 'respect for people' and designing for diversity.

The term universal design originated in the USA. It initially grew out of the disability movement, but in time came to mean designing for all people. It became formalised in 'Seven Principals of Universal Design' drawn up by a working group of architects, product designers, engineers and environmental design researchers. The Council of Europe's Resolution ResAP(2001)1 on the introduction of the principles of universal design into the curricula of all occupations working on the built environment, which was adopted by Council of Ministers on 15 February 2001, clearly also uses the term universal design whilst at the same time saying:

"For the purpose of this resolution the terms "integral accessibility", "design for all" and "inclusive design" are understood to have the same meaning as the term "universal design", which is used in this text."

Most recently and closer to home, the RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) in its 'Criteria for Validation' and ARB (Architects Registration Board) in its 'Prescription of qualifications' have adopted the phrase 'universal design for access'. The meaning of this hybrid term is however not defined.

Despite the RIBA and ARB's choice of terminology, 'inclusive design' is overwhelmingly the term of preference for those who already teach and research in this area in the UK. There is shared belief that inclusive design is better suited to the UK context and value system. The UK Institute of Inclusive Design actively promotes inclusive design and most recently (Oct 2002) the Helen Hamlyn Research Centre and the Design Council have created a new inclusive design education resource web site that illustrate inclusive case studies:

[www.designcouncil.org.uk/inclusivedesign](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/inclusivedesign) .

'Inclusive design' responds to the concern that the term

'universal design' can be misleading, suggesting that it seeks 'universal solutions' to problems which meet the needs of all people. In fact some of those known for their strong advocacy of universal design in the USA have recently declared a preference for the clarity of the term 'inclusive design' (Steinfeld, Tauke 2002)

The intention, however, is not to spend time making distinctions between the various terms, nor to declare one better than the other, but rather to draw and build on related work, regardless of the terminology used, in order to support and illustrate the arguments for and information about inclusive design education.

### Definition and premise of inclusive design

Inclusive Design is a process that results in inclusive products or environments which can be used by everyone regardless of age, gender or disability.

(adapted from Shipley 2002)

It is however an evolving and complex concept, whose definition can be extended to address not only age, gender and disability, but also race, income, education, culture etc... .

It is useful to supplement this open ended definition with an understanding of the basic premise, which lies behind inclusive design and its consequences, that is:

the built environment can exclude and discriminate against certain groups in society at certain times.

This premise means that inclusive design begins not only from an aspirational standpoint (i.e. designing for all), but also a critical one.

In order to find new ways to create and maintain environments that cater for the needs and desires of all people, we must also understand what has prevented us from doing so in the past. This critical position ensures that we are better able to address any obstacles or shortcomings that exist in our processes and skills; obstacles that may potentially prevent even the most willing and knowledgeable professionals from creating and maintaining inclusive environments.

Inclusive design relies on a holistic and sustainable understanding of the responsibilities, of those who shape the built environment in relationship, to those who populate it.