Universally Accessible Public Spaces for All: Learnings from The Journal of Public Space

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The Global State of Accessibility: a crisis on the horizon

- Cities and Territories Under Demographic Pressure
- Millions of Lives at Risk
- Inaccessible infrastructure is widening the gap of inequality
- Closing the gap: Future proofing with universal design

POLICY BRIEF
LOCALIZATION to solve the ACCESSIBILITY CRISIS
Recommendations to States Parties for immediate action

2020
Today, more than half of all persons with disabilities and older persons live in cities with:
- Inaccessible transportation and public spaces
- Inaccessible digital infrastructure
- A lack of access to adequate housing, employment, health and education (UNDESA-2019)

2050
- 70% of the world’s population will live in cities while 60% of urban settlements remain to be built (UN Habitat)
- Over 2 billion persons with disabilities and older persons will be living in urban communities by 2050 (UCLG)
The Journal of Public Space

- 2022 Special Issue on “Universally Accessible Public Spaces for All”
- Delivering on Abu Dhabi Declared Actions with City Space Architecture in cooperation with UN-Habitat.
- Evidencing progress and learnings to make public spaces inclusive and accessible – in line with SDG 11, CRPD and New Urban Agenda.
- 19 articles, case studies, editorials, viewpoints from cities and local governments, academia, institutes, OPDs, NGOs, professionals
- Launched across World Urban Forum 11
JPS Special issue rationale

- Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) are rarely involved in academic & knowledge production spaces.
- OPD engagement is key to collect evidence on experiences, expertise, and practices to inform urban policy, strategies and actions responding to realities.
- There is a need to raise awareness on what accessibility is and how to approach planning and design from a human rights lens.
- Misconception of accessibility despite instruments & global frameworks (e.g., SDG 11.7) – often mistaken for proximity.
Contents, scope & areas

Key issues & themes discussed
- Accessibility policies & standards
- Age-Friendly Cities
- Awareness, training, eductation
- Community engagement
- COVID-19 measures
- DRR, Resilience & safe evacuation
- Intergenerational use
- Mental health & urban design
- Navigation & wayfinding
- Right to play (arts & playgrounds)
- Streets & parks
- Safety & shared spaces
- Participation & inclusive design
- Placemaking
- Mobility & transport
- Integration of Universal Design in urban planning & design

Cities & geographic focus
- Banjarmasin
- Barcelona
- Bulawayo
- Dutch Metropolitan Area
- Gothenburg
- Hong Kong
- Los Angeles
- Nairobi
- New Mexico
- Oslo
- Quito
- Solo
- Sydney
- Ulan Baatar
- Varanasi
- Victoria
1. **Call to action on public spaces**: Calling for protection and promotion of open public spaces in our cities as they serve as the nexus of our everyday lives. Universally accessible public spaces are key to inclusion, participation, health & wellbeing, social interaction and to fight stigma.

2. **Data & evidence gap**: Lacking data and evidence on accessibility and disability inclusion in urban areas—despite SDG 11, NUA and legal frameworks. Therefore, increasing need to share practices, learnings, and experiences.

3. **Gaps in inclusive urban practices**: Lack of common understanding amongst urban stakeholders of what accessibility is and what inclusion means in practice. We are looking at diverse groups in cities, and accessibility is for everyone.

4. **Implementation gap**: There are standards and policies—but implementation is lacking. There is a need for articulating actions on accessibility and often LRGs and stakeholders find it difficult to articulate commitments and actions. Hence, people, policy & practice needs to go together.

5. **Participatory & inclusive design**: Representative organizations should be involved as key partners in urban practices, including research and data collection initiatives. Their expertise and first-hand knowledge are key to shape critical & inclusive policies, programs and practices.

6. **COVID-19 revealed accessibility gaps**: Evidenced that accessibility is not integrated across systems, practices, and services—impacting persons with disabilities and intersecting groups disproportionately. This deepened inequalities and maintained discrimination and barriers to equal education, health, housing, and livelihoods.

7. **Shifting perspectives in academia**: Findings suggested the need to broaden the academic discourse and promote a rights-based approach to disability and accessibility and to mainstream this across disciplines.

8. **Accessibility as core development principle**: Accessibility is often not seen as a core pillar and component of sustainable urban development, or overall sustainability and resilience objectives. Accessibility and universal design must be seen as integral parts of solutions to urbanisation challenges.