Right | Results from the All Inclusive Sarajevo workshop showing lighting and seating designs that local organisations could produce and sell

Support strategy

Inclusive design is being taken increasingly seriously and will play a central role in developing socially sustainable products and services. Rama Gheerawo and Jo-Anne Bichard discuss the sector's future

We can all benefit from inclusive design. Most of us already do, but we just might not realise it. How many of us have been in a Ford or Toyota recently - both are companies that have rubbed shoulders with inclusive design - or used a kitchen utensil with a chunky grip, or a lever tap, or automatic doors? All have been developed with older or disabled people in mind, but they benefit everyone. The influences of inclusive design can be seen around us in many ways and its people-centred focus is now being increasingly recognised as an important part of 21st century design.

Defined in 2000 by the UK government as "a process whereby designers ensure that their products and services address the needs of the widest possible audience", inclusive design links to ideas around social equality and innovation. In today's climate, this approach is becoming ever more important, but to whom is it relevant? Well, the list includes businesses, consumers, policymakers and of course designers, whether professional or in academia.

Inclusive design has been around for a while but has to evolve to meet the new challenges of this century. Historically focused on older people and disabled people, it now

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needs to address other excluded groups. The expertise gained from product design and the built environment should be refocused so that other design disciplines such as fashion, new media and service design can engage.

More collaborative approaches should be developed, where designers and users work on an equal footing to create ideas and this should be brought into commercial development processes and timeframes. Inclusive design should not "ghettoise" itself as a social ideal but should change its attitude to move from a satellite position to a central one in mainstream design thinking.

Most importantly, the relationship between inclusive design and social innovation, another growing movement, needs to be explored. As a concept, social innovation now has currency within society, government, academia and business. It manifests itself in many different ways in various contexts. It extends from public service and policy innovation to initiatives in assistive technology and aspects of civic participation and creative entrepreneurship.

In all of these areas, design has a key role to play. It can make policy visible and participation possible. In particular, inclusive design can deliver innovations of social value to communities and markets. The relevance to social innovation is uncanny.

The Include 2011 conference organised by the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design at the Royal College of Art, seeks to discuss and debate the conflicts and convergences

between inclusive design and social innovation. This is the sixth in a series of biennial conferences that have run since 2001. Based at the RCA, Include brings together designers, design educators, design researchers, users and industry to meet and share ideas, practices and experiences.

Keynote speakers will include Bill Moggridge, director of the Smithsonian Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum and co-founder of IDEO, Ezio Manzini, professor of industrial design at Milan Polytechnic and a leading thinker in the field of sustainability and social innovation, and Professor Sarah Harper of the Oxford Institute of Ageing, emphasising the importance of population ageing across the whole debate.

Over 100 papers from academics and designers will explore the direct relationship between inclusive design and social innovation in four conference streams.

Design Practice takes an "on the ground' look at how designers and organisations are involving users. From social innovators working with communities in India and China to designers from technology companies, case studies are drawn from industry as well as academia. Papers also discuss how design can support children with autism, let grandparents and grandchildren engage more meaningfully, and assess if people with disabilities are being left behind by advances in touchscreen technology.

Design Theory is about capturing methods and describing the tools and techniques used

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SAFE SEX IS GOOD SEX AT EVERY AGE

in inclusive design, outlining areas where they can add value to social innovation. A new session on evaluating existing methods and processes bears testament to the rise in interest in people-centred approaches, as design organisations across the globe create books and websites to share their learnings. Another strong theme that surfaces is the need to better describe the art of translating data from users into inspiration for designers, and to turn raw insights gathered from research into design briefs.

Public Life contains papers on building communities, transport, buildings and public spaces. The built environment, an important part of inclusive design history, is well-represented with ideas describing the inclusive

retail environment and wayfinding solutions for older office workers. More experimental projects are included such as a bus designed by the older passengers themselves. There is a global flavour, with researchers from the Far East presenting alongside work from South Africa's Constitutional Court. Civic engagement, social entrepreneurship, and security threats in public space also feature, representing some of the pressing political concerns of today.

The final stream *Home and Health* directly relates to the domestic environment and the human body. The medical field is well-represented with projects ranging from assistive technologies for people with specific disabilities to mobile clinics for rural areas

that could benefit vast, isolated communities. Footwear and clothing also feature, as does the design of services and systems, breaking away from the more traditional product design focus. Work also deals with more sensitive areas such as cognitive impairment and psychological needs.

The international flavour of Include - the previous conference in 2009 had delegates from 29 countries - also gives insights into what is happening around the world. Many countries will give national updates, such as the US where inclusive design, under the terminology of universal design, has steadily grown over the latter part of the last century, Norway, where the government-supported ambition is to have the whole country univer-

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sally designed by 2025, and Japan, which is seeing the most rapidly ageing population of any country.

There is a shift in the way inclusive design is being applied and this can be equally beneficial to the social innovation approach. People are being seen not just as the subject of research, but as authors of their own solutions. This democratisation of design does not herald the death of the designer. Instead it evolves their role, asks them to be more responsive to the world around them and to share creative leadership. Inclusive design and social innovation both see people as central to the design process, as participants, as commentators, evaluators and even instigators.

Inclusive design and social innovation also need to be linked to environmental sustainability which has gained rapid visibility over the last ten years. This is closely aligned to social sustainability, which in turn, has parallels to inclusive design. The effects of environmental change do not just affect the environment, they also affect people and the groups of people that inclusive design and social innovation seek to benefit, are the most likely to be affected by changes in the environment. The connections and trade-offs need to be further understood.

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Whilst embracing the new, the Include conference does not lose sight of the hard-fought victories that the inclusive design movement has won over the years. Ageing population remains a frontline topic of discussion and rightly so - it is often cited as the second biggest challenge after climate change. This is not just about grab handles and ramps, it is about realising the opportunities.

Older people represent a significant potential market and are shifting the consumer balance of power away from the young. Companies can no longer ignore the needs of older spenders, many of whom hold most of the financial assets in developed countries despite products and services being marketed at younger age groups. Older people also have a role to play in social innovation and entrepreneurship that needs to be articulated.

Work at the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design reflects these ideas with some projects demonstrating the value of a socially innovative approach. All Inclusive Sarajevo is an ongoing project organised by Senior Research Fellow Julia Cassim in collaboration with Kulturanti, a Bosnian design-led NGO and funded by The British Council. Four Royal College of Art alumni led teams

of designers from Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia, and worked with local organisations who employed hearing-impaired people with no formal design skills. Together, they co-designed a range of designer goods that utilised existing technical skills and production capabilities. The ideas have been refined, have been exhibited in Bosnia, Belgrade and Zagreb and are on sale creating an income

stream for their makers. This experience gave them the entrepreneurial confidence to build new businesses and the workshop will be replicated in Zagreb in 2011.

Other projects aim to push the boundaries of inclusive design. There are many design projects with older people but few look at under-studied areas such as dementia or those considered taboo such as sexual

health. Designer Gregor Timlin tackled design and dementia on his project with Bupa. His cutlery, crockery and table designs give care home residents a more independent, dignified dining experience, a key area for improving their quality of life.

Andy Chen, a graphic designer, tackled the issue of representing positive sexuality for older people, a topic that raised eyebrows

at first. His engagement with gay, lesbian, transsexual and heterosexual communities led to a more respectful and understanding approach. He found that designing for older people is not just about meeting functional need such as better packaging or bigger font sizes. It is also about emotional expression, their right to intimacy and their ability to enjoy an active sex life.

Inclusive design has a big history, and it has a big future. Social innovation is also rapidly rising in popularity and profile. Both bring great potential benefit to each other, using similar language and having equitable ideals. In many ways, they are non-identical twins, bearing some resemblance to each other though having distinct and distinguishable features. If common ground can be established between the two, there is the very real possibility of making design more people-centred, and ensuring that, in turn, design plays a key role in the socially-based developments that will be needed to meet the challenges of this century. |