Universal Design:
Everyone, Everywhere, Every time

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Universal design conference, Sydney
20-21 August 2014

Disasters and Universal Design

Today I want to talk about disasters
  • The apparent opportunities they present
  • Why those opportunities are missed
  • The way disasters confront us with aspects of the universal design challenge previously missed

My comments reflect:
  • Observation around the redevelopment of Christchurch post-earthquake
  • Three years research into older people, resilient communities, and adverse weather events

My focus is mainly but not entirely on homes
Disasters and the Phoenix

Is there anything good about disasters?

- Pronounced phoenix effect in the post-event, pre-recovery planning
- A belief that anything is possible in destroyed city.
- A view that all the technical innovations not adopted in the past will find a new space.
- Private distress will be staunch by a public commitment and action to develop a better built environment.
- Our built environments will be cleansed of the mistakes of the past.
But will we be cleansed?

- Despite the Canterbury Earthquakes, in 2050, 68% of the NZ stock will still have been built prior to 2006.
- Even in Christchurch there are the old barriers to renovating and building homes with universal design are two-fold:
  - Vicious circle of blame
  - Innovation chasm

Imprisoned to the Past

- Insurance:
  - Key financiers of post-disaster rebuild on an individual level or where there is a large scale disaster
  - Fundamentally conservative
  - Replace like with like
  - Reactive rather than proactive
Imprisoned to the Past

- Planning and Building Regulations and Standards:
  - Even on an emergency footing planning has been typically changed to extend traditional suburban footprints
  - No appetite for the introduction of new standards for new builds
  - Limited procurement muscle from Government
  - Some innovation by private developers around pre-fab and LifeMark and in the retirement village sector

Imprisoned in the Past – The Building Industry

- Largely duplicating past designs.
- Significant issues around building cost and affordability.
  - Economies of scale? Actually no.
  - Significant number of building company collapses.
  - Commerce Commission has released warnings of anti-competitive behavior including cover-bidding.
- Householders typically have little capacity to impact on build design, build quality or cost.
- Increased margins through bigger rather than better.
- Continuing to target the upper quartile of house prices.
The Affordability Conundrum

- The size fraud in a new guise
- Build, design and amenity - cost cutting focus
- But affordability problems arise from:
  - Free floating liquidity feeds house prices
  - Land prices reflect current house prices
  - Upper quartile dwellings are not what people need
  - House need is not expressed as house demand
  - Productivity and regulatory barriers
  - Lack of incentive to integrate affordability

So if a Disaster Won’t Do it What Will?

- Banish the oxymoron
- Universal Design is for the disabled
  - Focus becomes - Specialist housing and public buildings
  - The logic is - Environments are always functional
    - If environments don’t work the problem is the individual
    - Disability is caused by individuals not environments
    - Disability is a minority, ‘other’ set of conditions
    - For everyone else:
      - (children) environments will become functional when they grow up
      - (older people) not the future anyhow
So if a Disaster Won’t Do it What Will?

- Branding:
  - Is UD really compelling to your average punter?
  - Can the builder/developer/regulator/planner really get it?
  - Does it resonate with the minister, councillor, investor?

- Building Synergies

Three Critical & Synergistic Platforms

- Affordability:
  - Entry cost
  - Operating cost
  - Maintenance
  - Adaptation

- Liveability:
  - Homes for life
  - Homes for living

- Resilience:
  - Protection
  - Fast recovery
  - Low cost recovery
If we want:

• Homes and spaces, buildings and places
  • For everyone
  • Everywhere
  • In good times and bad.

• We need:
  • Solutions
  • To demonstrate
  • Raise expectations
  • Demand leadership and action
  • Provide the business cases.