

Universal Design: Everyone, Everywhere, Every time

Kay Saville-Smith

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 stanchd 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.

