**Some key points from Valerie Fletcher's presentation at Auckland Conversations**

Valerie is the CEO of the [Institute for Human Centered Design](#), which is an international NGO. It's core business is:

- Education and Training on Accessibility and Universal Design
- Technical assistance
- Consulting on Accessibility and Inclusive Design (physical and digital)
- Design Services (physical and digital)
- Research – contextual inquiry with user/experts in-situ
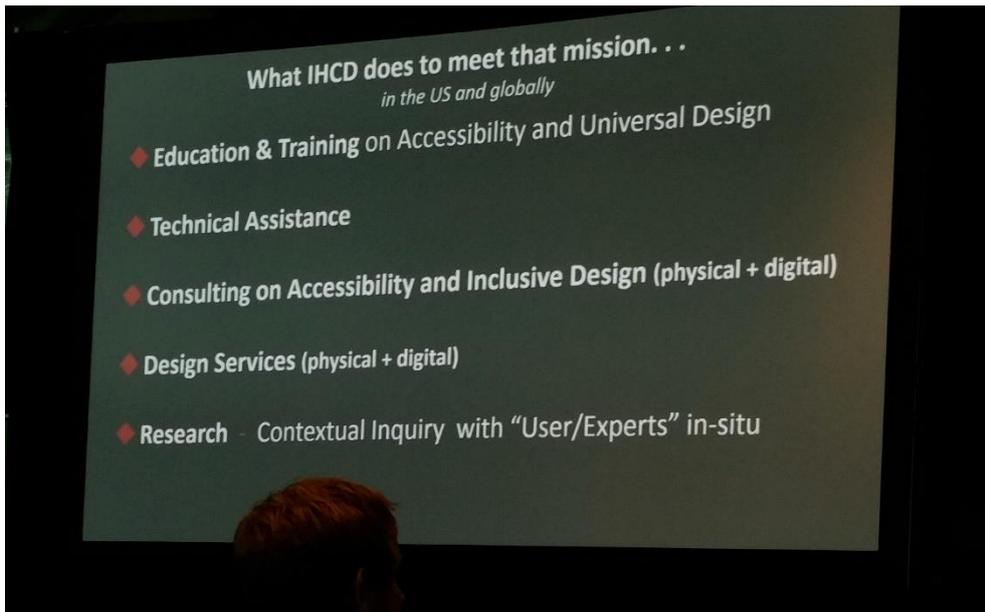
There have been unintended consequences of focusing on disability rights and accessibility.
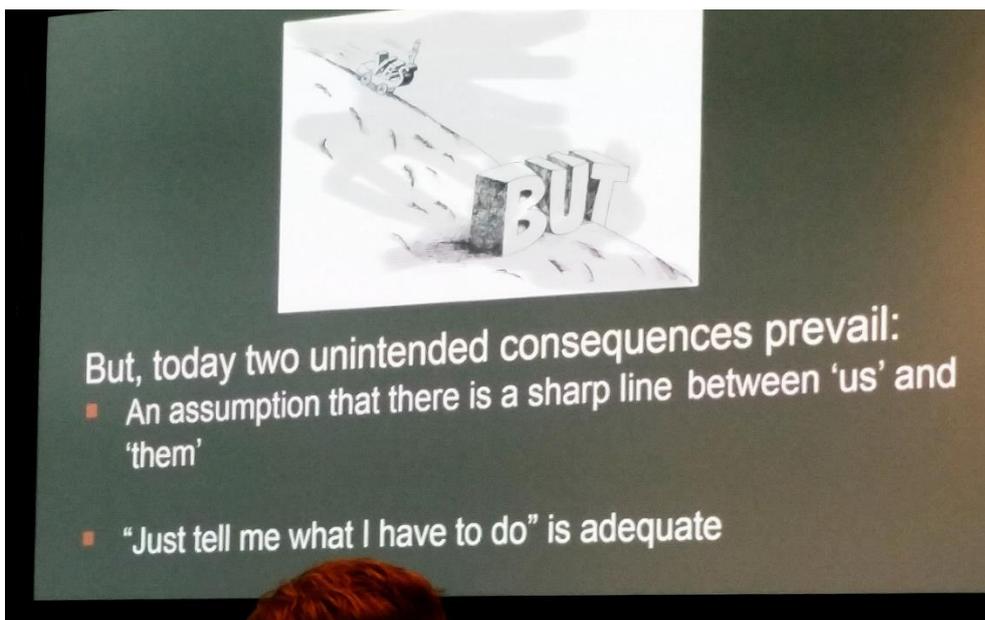
"User experience is different from designer experience" but we rely on designers to do the right thing. We still have a "sharp line between us and them, but there is no sharp line." And "there is no

recipe for big ideas when all anybody hears is, just tell me what I have to do". Users are rarely included in design processes. Valerie asks, "Is that inspirational to a young designer – just tell me what I have to do?"

Universal design is a response to a changed demographic reality. Perhaps it is a concept whose time has come?
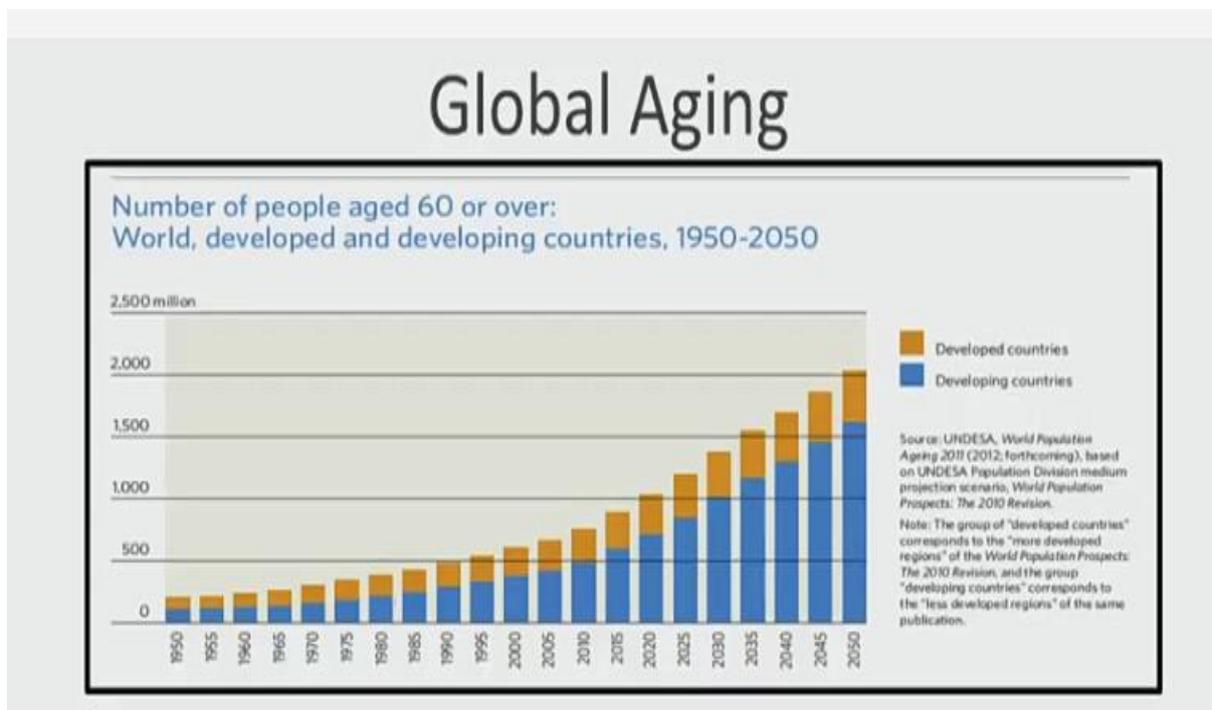
Most of the growth to 2050 is in developing countries (shown in blue). It is growing disproportionately to developed countries. It shows that population ageing is not due to wealth.

"The cohort of older people is not 65 to dead", said Valerie, inferring that being close to dead is the way some people view older people. Those in the younger cohort (60-75 years) have high

expectations for their lives and their cities and communities. If we don't solve the problem of how to create greater independence for older people, we shall all end up paying.

One of the advantages of investing in design and paying attention to design is that "design is incredibly cost effective." "You don't keep investing every day and pay by the hour for good design. You do it thoughtfully upfront". In other words, it is a one-off payment if it is done right, and if it is done right the first time.
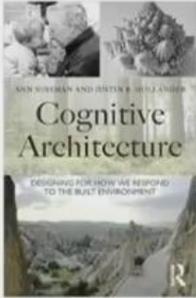

There are more children now with disabilities that are brain based and are the leading cause learning difficulties. We must find ways to overcome this if they are to benefit from an education and from employment.

Neuroscientists are finding out more about how our brain works. The book, *Cognitive Architecture: Desiging for How We Respond to the Built Environment* by Ann Sussman and Justin B Hollander reports on several new findings and helps architects and planners better understand humans and their psychology and behaviours. In one experiment they used eye-tracking software and found that architects look at buildings in a different way to others.

Those people who graduated top of the class some time ago were taught how to tick the boxes, but this is not the kind of problem solving we need today. You can't design for the average anymore.

Valerie Fletcher said, "I don't use [the term] "Universal Design" much because it is watered down in my country. It is like the froth on the top of the coffee of accessibility".

There are several interpretations of universal design and different countries have adapted the classic seven principles published by the Center for Universal Design in North Carolina in 1997.

India's UD principles cover equitable use, usability, cultural context, economic diversity, and aesthetics for social integration. Economic and cultural inclusion are central to their approach.

Valerie went on to discuss the work of the World Health Organization and the Millennium Goals. The World Health Organization says removing barriers is no longer sufficient. We must employ methods and designs that facilitate inclusion, and ensure that economic growth is also socially just and environmentally sustainable.

"This is a world in which we need designers to help us figure out how to really be able to celebrate the diversity of our world in the 21st century.

Valerie concluded her presentation with several examples from across the world.

The full presentation can be found on YouTube Auckland Conversations: Designing with People in Mind: http://conversations.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/events/designing-people-mind

The presentation was followed by a panel discussion with Jane Bringolf, Founding Director, Centre for Universal Design Australia, and Martine Abel, Specialist Advisor with Auckland Council.

Jane Bringolf

31 October 2016