

The Toilet Paper



Inclusive Design of Public Toilets

We should like to welcome you to the first Newsletter from the Inclusive Design of 'Away From Home' (Public)

Toilets in City Centres research project. The aim of the research is to improve our knowledge about the design of public toilets for ALL users, be they young or old, able or disabled, but also those with differing beliefs and experiences of toilet design. The research also aims to explore the

assumptions and attitudes that shape the requirements of both toilet users and providers.

The research will be taking place until Spring 2006 and will look at toilet provision in London, Manchester and Sheffield. We will also be talking with a wide variety of users, either in focus groups or one-to-one interviews, to find out how the current design of away

run by local authorities and those used in cafes, pubs, restaurants etc., meet or fail to meet peoples needs.

With October's implementation of Part 3 of the DDA, access to the city centre should become much easier for all people with disabilities. This research hopes to record the changes made to accessible toilet provision and see if designers are getting it right.

Project beginnings

The project began in September 2003 by initially asking if the lack of public toilets stopped people traveling to the city centre. A review of previous research led us to conclude that toilets are indeed an important factor. In fact, the lack of public toilets could be considered one of the weak links in the transport chain that enables people to leave their homes and travel to city centres.

The project has also reviewed other areas of concern including different

ways of involving users in 'user centered' research. We have also systematically reviewed the various building regulations and British Standards that are referred to when designing all toilet facilities but especially accessible (disabled) toilets. We are now putting this knowledge in the field with our pilot case study of the Clerkenwell area of London.

However, it is October's implementation of Part 3 of the DDA that the

research foresees being an important agent for change. In October, owners of existing buildings will be required to make 'reasonable' changes to their toilet provision, under guidelines set out in the building regulations. Over time, the improved building regulations coupled with the DDA should lead to more accessible cities, towns, parks etc and of course more accessible toilets.



Meet the Team



Professor Julienne Hanson is interested in public toilets because they represent a very private, domestic function that in this case takes place in public space.



Professor Clara Greed Of the University of the West of England, has published many papers on the problems of public toilets in the built environment and is the author of 'Inclusive Urban Design: Public Toilets'.



Ms Jo-Anne Bichard is the Research fellow on the project and has previously researched Women's Turkish Baths and neuroscientists.

“Disabled toilets are poorly designed... Why don't architects and designers consult disabled people”.

Focus Groups

Since March we have conducted 5 focus groups with a range of different users whose concerns have included urostomies and continence. We have also spoken with parents and paid carers of children and young adults with special needs. The focus groups have given many people the opportunity to share their experiences of the best and worst of public toilet provision. Unfortunately most

experiences have been negative, further emphasizing the need for wider knowledge on the problems of accessing disabled and standard toilet facilities. A major concern that has arisen amongst all we have spoken with so far, is regarding the space of the toilet. Other concerns have been voiced regarding ventilation, lighting and of course cleanliness. The need for

adult sized changing benches has been raised by parental and professional carers. Most people we've spoken too agree that maintaining good toilet facilities would be difficult without an attendant. We anticipate that as the research continues many other toilet design features will be discussed and links made between groups who share the need for a particular design feature.



Personas

The information given at focus groups has been translated into 'personas'. These are narratives that represent the concerns of a group of people who share similar circumstances, which can then be used to

communicate specific needs to designers and architects. So far we have built 5 personas representing a range of different users' needs concerns and wishes regarding toilet design. All personas are constructed

in consultation with the focus group who participated in the information gathering. This is done to assure an accurate persona is constructed that represents the specifics of the group's needs.

Pilot Case Study: Clerkenwell

Our pilot case study in the Clerkenwell area of London is currently underway. Clerkenwell has been described as London's 'medieval village' with many historic streets and buildings. However it also provides a good example of an urban area without any on-street local authority public toilet provision. Coupled with a lively bar and club scene, the lack of public toilets could be responsible for a rise in street urination. We will be asking businesses and residents if they have noticed any particular problems in relation to this.

We have been distributing surveys, asking local businesses about their provision of accessible toilets, especially in relation to October's implementation of the DDA. We have also been asking people on the street for their preferences regarding public toilets, including if they know where the nearest one is. We hope to be speaking to many more people during the forthcoming Architectural Biennale, as well as assessing how an area without on street public toilets will provide facilities for visitors.

If you live or work in the Clerkenwell area and would like to contribute to the research regarding issues such as the problem of street urination, the lack of on-street toilet provision, and especially experiences of the area's lack of accessible toilets, please contact Jo-Anne Bichard on 020 7679 8224 or by e-mail at: j.bichard@ucl.ac.uk



Closed Public Toilet, Clerkenwell Green.

Fixtures and Fittings

At one of our focus groups, parents were talking about their concerns about needing to take upwards of half an hour to change their child. This would sometimes lead to embarrassment and hostility with respect to other toilet users. The design solution became obvious; a timer for the accessible toilet. The timer would incorporate a visible and audible 'countdown' timer, controlled by the user from inside the cubicle, but also visible to someone queuing outside,

showing the count down to when the toilet will become vacant. The timer will override any 'automatic' aspects of the cubicle (lighting, flush, door lock) so that the user is fully in control of the setting. The timer needs to be re-settable but with a time limit after which the door will unlock (not open) and / or an alarm or intercom link will be activated (to minimize potential anti-social use. The timer would also be good for Automatic Public Conveniences or 'superloos' where the

users feel intimidated by the automatic technology. The timer would restore a sense of control.



In 'Superloos', a timer would restore a sense of control to the user.

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We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.vivacity2020.org

Advisory Committee

The Inclusive Design of Away From Home Toilets in City Centres research project regularly meets with its advisory committee to report on the progress of the research . The committee has been gathered from a range of toilet interest groups, local authorities and manufacturers and

includes: The Centre for Accessible Environments, The British Toilet Association, Is There An Accessible Loo, Westminster, Sheffield and Manchester City councils, British Institute of Cleaning Science, W&G Sissons, Armitage Shanks, and the Disability Rights Commission.



Toilet news

Toilets are a fascinating subject to the world's news media, with a toilet story appearing daily from somewhere across the globe . Currently the big news from the USA concerns the glitches in Seattle's new automatic

toilet facilities. Problems include the doors failing to shut and the long cleaning times resulting in queues of people waiting to use them.

In the Philippines capital Manila, a shortage of classrooms to double as

polling rooms meant that toilets were used as polling booths in last month's elections. Meanwhile closer to home Torbay council were recently presented with a petition of 20,000 signatures against proposed toilet closures.

About Vivacity 2020

Vivacity 2020 is a university based research consortium comprising of the University of Salford, UCL, Sheffield Hallam University, London Metropolitan University

and the University of the West of England. The research project has been funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and is looking at

a range of aspects to city centre living including housing, crime and the environment, as well as day to day aspects such as adequate public toilet facilities.



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