Editorial

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‘All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players’ – So it will not be an ideal situation if our urban designs inadvertently exclude some individuals’ ability to even take to the stage, simply because of lack of consideration, imagination or careful design on our part.

Equality is ensuring individuals or groups of individuals are treated fairly and equally and no less favourably, specific to their needs, including areas of race, gender, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation or age. The degree to which equality is understood and implemented could be one measure of the degree to which a society can regard itself as civilised.

‘As you are I was, as I am you will be.’ That famous gravestone inscription also brings to mind the possibility that our personal state or social identity, which is often regarded as fixed or constant, might in reality be somewhat more transient than we care to acknowledge.

If we are all in a transient state, then the *possibility* emerges that we may experience different social identities in time. Therefore if we judge another’s state harshly now or simply fail to recognise the differences, then, among other things, we may unwittingly judge and prejudice our future selves.

So it is not a massive stretch to comprehend that a key responsibility of any transport professional or urban designer or engineer is to provide urban spaces that are not only fit for purpose, but intrinsically fit for people and fit for people of all types.

I was once responsible for a planning application and reviewing the draft proposals with a local authority planner who pointed out that a recess in my building line might make a good spot in which a mugger might lurk. Being a young inexperienced chap at the time, the notion and sense of drama amused me because I thought the planner was rather exaggerating the possibility and being rather over zealous in regard to her understanding of risk. She then went on to explain that she herself had been mugged in an almost identical street layout to the one I was proposing, and I realised the ignorance of my own position. The planner shared her experience with great poise and this made me contemplate my own inadequacy and lack of knowledge, or lack of ability to recognise that other individuals have had different experiences to myself.

In this first issue of a two-part themed issue of *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers – Municipal Engineering*, we explore some of the issues around accessibility and infrastructure. This issue focuses on designing urban spaces for pedestrians and for those with disabilities, and the importance of the link to public transport.

While these issues were always important, the growing urban populations around the world and the increasing recognition of the importance of sustainable modes arguably makes them more significant than ever.

In their considered paper on tactile paving, Ormerod *et al.* (2015) review the effectiveness of tactile paving in relation to older pedestrians by analysing a significant sample of users. They usefully explain the legal context for designers. They note the importance of the gradient at the crossing and consider issues around the impact on wheelchair users, awareness of users, detectability, colour variety and shades of colour/contrast that may help inform designers in achieving optimum installations, as well as providing recommendations for future research.

Practitioners may sometimes reflect that whilst there have been some improvements in the design of permanent installations, temporary streetworks can often be less well considered where signing, guarding and accessibility can at times be quite poor or even non-existent. In their paper, Atkin *et al.* (2015) trial modified signing and guarding arrangements with a range of visually impaired individuals to assess the degree to which their comfort can be improved when negotiating temporary traffic management arrangements for streetworks. A key finding is that individuals respond differently to cues and so information should be communicated in advance a variety of ways. Also, individuals appreciate detailed information about their journey. Perhaps if completely blind but travelling a familiar route, we can understand that roadworks along the route could essentially change what was safe and familiar into an unknown and potentially frightening assault course.

Tennøy *et al.*’s (2015) paper evaluates the Norwegian national standards for usable and safe environments for the sight impaired. It highlights the challenges facing practitioners and the need for more comprehensive design guidance to support

practitioners as well as the need for training. The paper contains an interesting discussion of other relevant work and standards.

Evans' (2015) paper on accessibility and user needs is focussed on pedestrian mobility and urban design in the UK. Evans recognises the wide range of factors that need to be considered to produce an optimum design solution. The paper outlines mapping tools and techniques that may assist the designer to comprehend and communicate the many facets and considerations. Whilst the paper outlines a challenging way forward, I like the fact that the paper recognises the many sometimes conflicting factors and attempts to find a way to enable them to be digested and translated to inform design decisions. This potentially provides for an evidenced-based approach.

Lowe *et al.*'s (2015) paper describes the process that enabled extensions to the Metrolink light rail system to be as accessible as possible. Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) established a consultative group entitled the Disability Design Reference Group (DDRG), and this group provided the necessary focus to secure the intended outcome. Setting the legal and project context, the paper provides case studies and guidance on securing an accessible end project through an inclusive design process. As the authors surmise, the approach may well provide an excellent or even exemplar basis for securing accessibility in many types of urban realm projects.

Providing some useful legal context and statistics, Mehmood *et al.*'s (2015) paper examines the degree to which the Wolverhampton interchange, UK, is accessible and what lessons can be learnt through a multi-faceted audit approach. As with the previous paper, it highlights the importance of consulting users during the design stage and also the heightened challenge of successfully designing for wheelchair users and the visually impaired.

Zhu *et al.* (2015) describe the car-free design concept deployed in the Changzhou high-speed rail station area development in China as well as the wider strategic context. They essentially provide excellent advice on project objective setting, citing the importance of, for example, the continuous nature of the pedestrian network in linking multiple destinations, the elimination of conflict with motorised traffic, minimising distance, visual amenity and provision of areas to socialise.

Ceccato's (2015) thoughtful paper examines the challenges in further improving safe mobility in Stockholm, Sweden. Providing useful statistics on travel and fear of travel across people types, Ceccato concludes that safety as an individual right has to be further investigated in the context of mobility. It also notes the significant differences between genders and

provides evidence that the current gender-neutral approach has not succeeded, whilst noting that some corrective actions might paradoxically be perceived by some groups as discriminatory.

Collectively, this issue highlights some of the learning that may help result in a better outcome for all members of our societies. In many jurisdictions, governments have introduced legislation raising the importance of design that promotes equality and accessibility. However, even such legal requirements may pale compared to the moral obligation on practitioners to engage with, understand and deliver solutions that embrace this requirement.

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