Co-Designing with People with Learning Disabilities: an architectural perspective

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“promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities”

To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to 

a) Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces;.....

Are buildings accessible for all people?
Research problem

Lack of Self-Advocacy

Building Standards and Regulations

Architects' Attitude Towards Learning Disability

Lack of Architectural Guidelines for People with Learning Disability
What is learning disability?

• Usually not visible.
• Someone with learning disability might find a difficulty:
  • Understanding complicated information.
  • Learning some skills.
  • Looking after themselves.
  • Everyday activities.
Research aim
To fully include people with learning disability in creating accessible architectural guidelines
How can this be achieved?
Methodology

Phase 1: Exploratory phase
- Interviews + observations
- PWLD preferences and patterns in using public buildings
- Case study choice

Phase 2: Primary phase
- Walking interviews + observations
- The barriers that face PWLD in the built environment
- The architectural features PWLD like

Outputs
- Previous architectural guidelines for designing for PWLD and individuals with autism
- Guidelines for working with PWLD
- The evaluating process of...
Co-Design with People with Learning Disability

- Considering that people with learning disability are among society’s most vulnerable citizens.
- Special approaches and techniques must be considered when dealing with them.
- In order to enable them to generate information and share knowledge on their own terms.
Phase 1

Exploratory phase
Enabling techniques

Field observations
- Collaboration with self-advocacy organization.

Interviews
- Employing a co-researcher with a learning disability.
- Use of different communication tools (e.g. cue cards).
- All participant facing material are in easy read format.
- Use open questions.
- Face-to-face and verbal admission.
- Building rapport.
- Familiar locations.
Key finding of phase 1

70% of the sample had positive comments on commercial buildings
Lessons learned from phase 1

**Accessibility notes for participants**

- Easy-read is not necessarily accessible
- Cue cards are a great prompt
- ‘What is your learning disability?’, is a stressful question

**Accessibility notes for the co-researcher**

- Following up with the interview questions from a paper is hard.
- Holding the recording device is inconvenient.
Phase 2

Primary phase
Enabling techniques

Workplace + field observations

• Employing a co-researcher with a learning disability.
• Working in a self-advocacy organization for people with learning disability.

Walking interviews

• Employing a co-researcher with a learning disability.
• Use of different communication tools (e.g. cue cards).
• All participant facing material are in easy read format.
• Use open questions.
• Face-to-face and verbal admission.
• Building rapport.
• Familiar locations.
• Activities/games.
• Follow the participant lead.
• The centre was visited before the interview to locate, seats, escape space and toilets in case needed.
Key findings of phase 2

Familiarity is critical for people with learning disability.

Shopping centres are entertainment facilities for people with learning disability.

People with learning disability are accessibility experts.

People with learning disability want to be heard.
Lessons Learned from phase 2

- Visuals over verbal
- Verbal over written
- Make it personal
- Be Interactive
- Be Patient
The added-value of the co-researcher

- Conversation facilitator
- Accessibility officer/advisor
- Recruiter
- Allow a bigger observation space
- Tackle prejudice
Conclusion

- People with learning disability need to be included in research about people with learning disability.
- In order to do that, we need to bridge the communication gap between research and the learning disability community.
- Co-researcher/facilitator from the learning disability community is one way to bridge that gap.
- People with learning disability have a great hidden potential that needs to be explored.
Thank You

Questions

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