

PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE BUILT ENVIRONMENTS: GLOBAL CASE STUDIES AND PRACTICAL INSIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive built environments make facilities accessible and usable for all people, regardless of their physical, cognitive, or sensory ability. In an increasingly interconnected world, our physical spaces must evolve to meet a variety of needs. This study highlights the compelling necessity of developing accessible built environments by examining worldwide best practices using case studies and practical insights as one of the methodologies to inform future design decisions. Selected Case studies were analysed in detail to investigate policies adopted, design strategies used, and the implementation processes involved. It further evaluates the efficacy of these practices, identifying common challenges and successful approaches toward inclusive built environment. The result of the study indicates that by having a through legislation, energetic involvement of community and creative design solutions, an inclusive built space can be achieved. Findings further signify that the worldwide employment of exemplary practices has the potential to greatly improve accessibility and hence the quality life of all the individuals of the society. Studying and analysing the best global practices provide insights for policymakers, architects, and urban planners engaged in the development of inclusive built environments.

Keywords: Accessibility, Built Environment, Inclusive Design, Case studies, Design for all, Universal Design

INTRODUCTION

The growing trends of rapid urbanisation around the globe, an ageing population, and an increasing focus on accessibility emphasize the rising importance of inclusivity in the built environment design. Inclusive design is widely acknowledged as an important component of urban development, aiming to build places that meet the different requirements of all individuals. Inclusivity in the design of built spaces is significant for more than just legal reasons; it encourages social involvement, equity, and increased

quality of life (Imrie & Hall, 2001). Numerous design methodologies have emerged in recent years with the goal of considering the variety of human conditions and abilities when designing. The concept of inclusive design serves as an overarching term that includes universal design and design for all (Heylighen, 2017).

Inclusive design, unlike accessibility-focused solutions, is also about designing settings for all individuals regardless of their ability, without the

need for special accommodation. This approach benefits a wide range of users—not only those with disabilities—and extends across all aspects of the built environment, from buildings and public spaces to transportation systems (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012). Despite the importance of inclusive design in theory and practice, there has been a significant gap in exploration of its application in diverse geographic and cultural contexts. Additionally, there is a lack of integration of inclusive design principles in urban policy and building codes. Furthermore, while inclusive design is often discussed in terms of accessibility, its actual definition with broader aspects including promoting social cohesion, reducing exclusion, and enhancing community well-being—remains underexplored.

This study aims to showcase a range of global case studies, evaluating their successes or shortcomings, and offering insights applicable across different contexts. For this purpose, this study investigates the best practices for inclusive built environments, analysing them from different perspectives and seeks to draw practical recommendations that can be used for future projects. The results of this study may interest built environment professionals, researchers, and practitioners pursuing a more comprehensive approach to design in the built environment.

To accomplish this objective, the paper encompasses a discussion of two design case studies, two planning policy initiatives for training and awareness regarding accessibility, and several examples of global technological advancements.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to explore best practices used globally to surmount the various barriers encountered by physically challenged people through case studies. Primary objectives of the study are as follow:

1. To understand and formulate design recommendations for disability inclusion in the urban environment.
2. To determine the key principles and strategies that lead to successful inclusive design in various contexts.
3. To provide detailed examples of how inclusive design has been implemented in different parts of the world.

4. To extract actionable insights that can inform future architectural and urban planning projects.
5. To encourage the dissemination of best practices and lessons learned among architects, urban planners, and policymakers.

Literature Review

Nowadays, the growing rate of urbanisation combined with the rise in the elderly and disabled population presents a challenge to the design of an inclusive urban environment. (WHO, 2015, Imrie & Hall, 2001). While historically, policy planning has focused on accessibility for individuals with physical disabilities, the recent inclusive design paradigm advocates for designs that accommodate everyone. (Imrie, 2012, Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012). Understanding the concept of disability in urban environment design can serve as a foundation for future research by examining the development of accessible planning and a shift in approach towards inclusive design. Taking down the obstacles that disabled people face is one way to make society more inclusive. Through user-centred research, we can better understand these obstacles for various disabilities in urban settings. The role of technology must also be examined as a potential solution for eliminating numerous barriers faced by individuals with disabilities. (UN, 2018).

Policy Literature

“A city that is well designed is well designed for all. Accessibility, as a collective good that benefits all, should therefore be considered a central component of good policy to achieve inclusive and sustainable urban development.” (UN,2016)

(Suggestions from a panel of experts at the UNDESA-UN Habitat Forum on Accessible Urban Development and Disability Inclusion, Nairobi, October 28-30, 2015).

Every contemporary community demands effective planning. Every planning system has traditionally placed a strong emphasis on mobility planning, but the larger context in this area is connected to sustainability, education, financial stability, affordability of services, and transportation. Some scholars suggest that there is a strong need to review the evolution of various policies for accessible and

inclusive designs as well as, planning and the policy frameworks (Ostroff, 2011).

For decades, developed countries have considered the issue of accessibility for the disabled and inclusive design. In the 1950s, Europe, the United States, and Japan began designing for the disabled by removing barriers, but the result was special design and segregation (Hamraie, 2017). By the 1970s, Europe and the United States had pioneered the approach to integrating and normalising disabled people into society.

Legal requirements for accessible designs were established, and designing for the disabled became a civil rights issue. (Fleischer & Zames, 2011). The principal objective of design was to eliminate obstacles for individuals with physical disabilities. Michel Bednar was an American architect who advocated for a more universal and expansive approach to design, rather than one constrained to the year 1970 (Fletcher,2002).

The term "disability community" first appeared in the 1980s, as disabled people around the world became more organised and connected in sharing their perspectives (Barnes & Mercer, 2001). The criticism of restrictive laws and design solutions became a hot topic, and in the late 1980s, Ron Mace (a wheelchair user architect) introduced the concept of universal design. In the mid-1990s, Mace and his fellow designers established universal and inclusive design principles. (Fletcher,2002). The principle of inclusivity pertains to all users, encompassing individuals with disabilities. (Reyes et al., 2005).

Review of International Inclusive development Policies

To advance inclusive urban development and accessibility, each nation has been required to adhere to international policy frameworks. The following are the significant international acts that are contributing to this objective.

INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS	OBJECTIVES/GOALS
The World Program of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (1982)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accessibility - Equality
The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities (1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accessibility - Information and communication - Equitable access to opportunities.
The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhance the global framework for disability and socio-economic development - The detailed frameworks for <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Possible design adaptations and the lowest possible cost (Article 2) ii. Standards for accessibility (Article 9) iii. Independent living (Article 19) iv. individual mobility, the liberty to articulate thoughts and the availability of knowledge (Article 20)
United Nations Disability and Development Document (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring accessibility and an inclusive design approach. - Lifting the barriers to the physically designed spaces, employment, transportation, health services, education services, information and Communication Technology (ICTs)
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 2030 Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustainable cities and communities - accessible transport systems and public spaces.

New Urban Agenda 2016, Habitat III

- Policies and strategies to transform current patterns of urbanisation
- Comprehensively integrating the integration of accessibility and disability inclusion within urban development policies and practices. (UN,2016)

International Planning Policy Framework for disability planning.

(Information is based on the report of “United Nation (2016), “Good Practices of Accessible Urban Development”)

The above table clearly demonstrated the gradual changes and advancements in legislation pertaining to disabled access. Recently, there has been a greater emphasis on technological inclusion. The international frameworks compel and facilitate all member states to follow and implement the international agenda, but many third-world countries have failed in this regard.

The social model of disability serves as the foundation for the planning policy laws, which aim to create enabling environments. However, it is the duty of the local authorities to put these design and policy frameworks into practice in order to guarantee the highest level of accessibility and inclusive environments. The built environment is deemed relatively well-structured for diverse societal groups; however, individuals with disabilities consistently face numerous obstacles in their daily lives. Accessibility and social inclusivity are the primary obstacles to the active participation of individuals with disabilities in urban life.

Case studies as a tool to Refine Design practices.

Analysing case studies is an effective tool in architectural research and practice, generating useful insights that inform future design methods. This methodology enables a thorough analysis of already built and being used spaces to assess how successfully the spaces are being used by the users of all groups. Architects and urban planners can better refine their techniques, adopt better practices, and innovate by learning from real-world applications.

Case studies are extensive analyses of architectural projects that provide insights into the design process, decision-making, and consequences. This level of understanding is crucial for determining the factors which contribute to the success or failure of

Architectural projects. A thorough examination of case studies also provides a deeper insight into the design process, decision making and ultimately the future outcomes of final Design. (yin, 2009).

Case studies are essential for extending architectural knowledge and practice. Case studies boost design expertise, enlighten decision-making, and encourage continual development by offering extensive insights into real-world applications. They provide a wealth of empirical knowledge, contextual understanding, and inventive ideas that are essential for designing successful, sustainable, and inclusive architectural settings. As the discipline of architecture evolves, thorough study of case studies will remain an important instrument for learning and development, ensuring that future projects are informed by past experiences.

Methodology

This study utilises a multifaceted approach, integrating qualitative case studies, policy analysis, and an examination of technological progress to investigate the principles of inclusive design within both policy and practice. The research encompasses three principal elements: design case studies, planning policy initiatives, and technological innovations. Each component has been studied and gives a clear insight on how to apply inclusive design principles via exemplary practices and changing trends of the field.

Two Design case studies are selected based on successful application of principles of Universal Design and variety of geographical and spatial hierarchy by staying within the research framework. Next identified case studies are two different policy initiatives which emphasise awareness of Inclusive urban design practices by introducing practical training. These case studies are finalised based on the effectiveness in adoption and fostering of accessibility standards in urban development across various societal sectors. Third is the concluding element of research where influence of technology

on promotion of inclusive design is examined by discussing worldwide advancements of technology and its positive use in accommodating diverse users' needs. The collected data from all these case studies are analysed through thematic analysis, identifying key trends, challenges, and lessons learned in each area. The research utilised a cross-case synthesis to compare the approaches taken in different geographic and policy contexts, and to assess how technology is reshaping inclusive design. Key findings were then used to develop a set of recommendations for future inclusive design initiatives.

DESIGN CASE STUDIES



New road, Brighton before renovation. Source: (Living Streets, 2016)

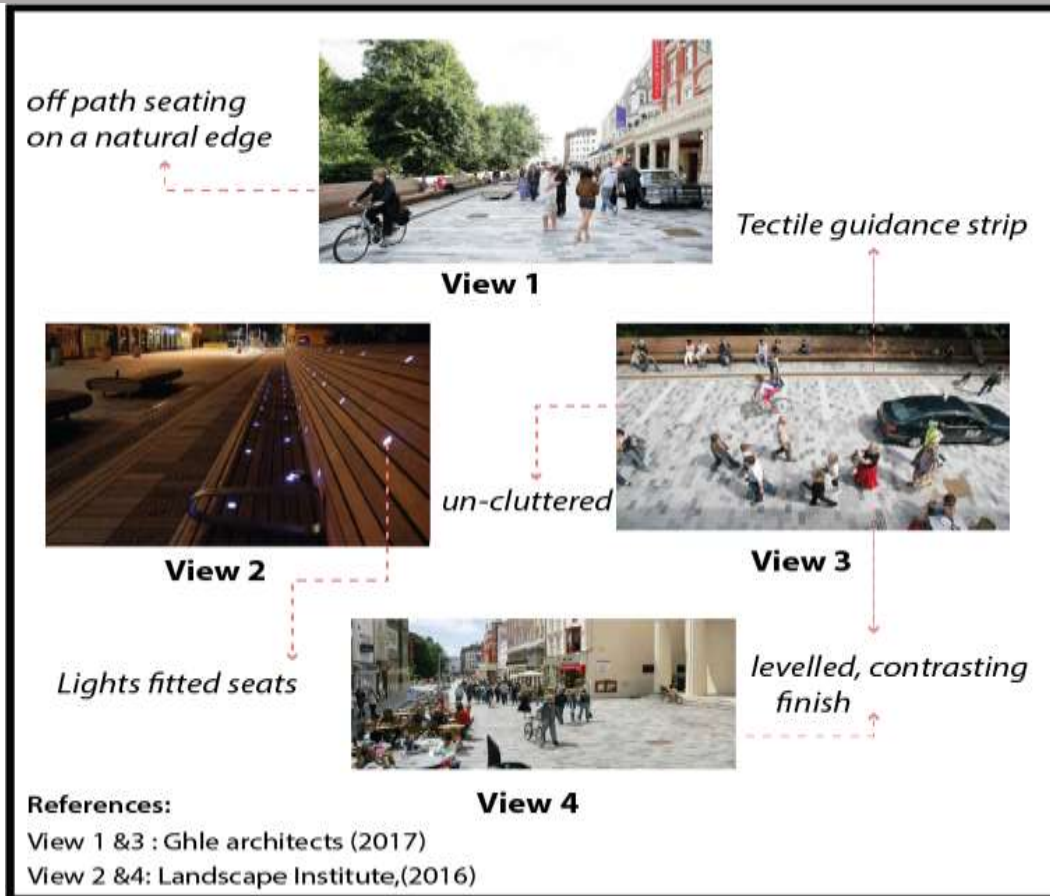
Brighton and Hove City Council collaborated with Gehl Architects to convert this shared space that prioritises accessibility and inclusivity for all users. The redesign removed all rigid features obstructing the free movement like traditional traffic signals and curbs, resulting in a more integrated and pedestrian-friendly environment.

To resolve the conflict among user groups in the communal space, it was enhanced with a premium paved surface. A granite stone finish was utilised to

THE NEW ROAD, BRIGHTON, UK

The New Road in Brighton, UK, is an early example of inclusive urban design in central Brighton serving as a cultural hub and a heritage centre. It is bustling with commercial activity, which includes various shops, bars, a variety of restaurants, 2 theatres, a library and the pavilion. (Living Streets, 2016a). Originally it was a regular street, viewed as a typical dysfunctional, underperforming, and an alley situated in a notable location. The area featured narrow sidewalks, a broad roadway, and a bicycle lane, which was often utilised for vehicle parking, pedestrian crossings, and inadequate road signage as obstructions (Sell, 2015).

guarantee the structure's capacity to support vehicular weight. The size and tone of the paving blocks vary depending on who uses them. A tactile pavement strip extended the full length of the street to assist the visually impaired. A natural pathway adjacent to the park was designated for seating, resulting in a lengthy wooden bench oriented towards the central public area. The street dynamics were entirely altered with the introduction of new pavements, seating, and lighting, facilitating navigation for individuals with disabilities. (Ghle Architects, 2017), (Landscape Institute, 2016).



Views of the New Road Brighton after the Redesign. The redevelopment has produced a lively and inviting atmosphere without any official traffic regulations and established New Road as a model for urban planners and policymakers looking to create accessible public spaces. It serves the needs of a wide range of users as a fully transformed inclusive shared space. It contributed to the development of a new urban culture and is now a popular tourist destination for both locals and visitors.

THE ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS IN SHINJUKU (TOKYO, JAPAN)

The Tokyo Shinjuku Accessibility Improvement Project is an effort to make inclusive urban living by creating a more equitable and navigable cityscape in Japan. Growing awareness of the need for inclusive urban environments, especially in densely populated districts, prompted the idea of Shinjuku's accessibility improvements. The aim was to make Shinjuku an accessible model so people of all abilities could navigate it independently. This case

study comes under the design innovation strategies, and it examines the renovations Tokyo Government had made and their effects on inclusivity of the city. Before Redevelopment:

Prior to the redevelopment of Shinjuku numerous obstacles were present that hindered the mobility and independence of individuals with disabilities. Narrow sidewalks, steep curbs, and limited access to public areas including public buildings and transports were the major obstacles. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government (2016) stress upon the fact that all these barriers hinder the daily regular activities of people who rely on wheelchairs, as well as those who are visually impaired, or face any other mobility challenges. Most of the public transportation station were inaccessible, only few of them were equipped with ramps and elevators. The existing tactile paving were also very limited and not in a good situation. (Yamamoto, 2018).

Redevelopment with Inclusivity:

Improving accessibility in Shinjuku involved several different steps, such as upgrading infrastructure,

making technology better, and getting the community involved. The design process included comprehensive consultations with disability advocacy organisations and urban design specialists to pinpoint and mitigate specific accessibility obstacles. (Yamamoto, 2018). Major changes made were.

1. **Walkways and Pathways:** Sidewalks were expanded and fitted with tactile paving to assist visually impaired individuals. Curb heights were reduced and at some places or ramps were built for wheelchair accessibility (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2016).
2. **Public Transport:** Significant improvements were suggested and then implemented in public transport stations including elevators, ramps, and tactile navigation systems for better accessible to everyone. Low floor buses and priority seating in trains was a great addition for those with mobility impairments. (Tokyo Metro Co., 2017).
3. **Public Building:** Addition of ramps and automatic door significantly bettered the access to public buildings around the city. Further public washrooms were equipped with accessible stalls and amenities. (Yamamoto, 2018).
4. **Advanced Wayfinding Systems:** Auditory signals at crosswalks and braille maps, were implemented to facilitate visually impaired people in navigating the city. (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2016).
5. **Redesigned Public Spaces:** Recreational and open areas now include accessible seating, pathways, and restrooms to facilitate the full participation of people with disabilities in social and leisure activities. (Yamamoto, 2018).

Furthermore, the project also emphasized the importance and need of regular maintenance and updates to ensure the continued efficacy of these improvements.

In summary, the improvement in the accessibility of Shinjuku is an excellent example to demonstrate how with better design solutions an urban environment can be inclusive and easily navigable spaces. By focusing on accessibility and collaboration with community stakeholders, this project significantly upgraded the quality life of people with disabilities

and transformed Shinjuku into a more inclusive and equitable district. Wheelchair users can now easily navigate around the city because of broad walkways and specially designed ramps while visually impaired individuals are comfortable to perform well in the society because of tactile paving and auditory cues. Tactile paving, generally known as tenji burokku, is an outstanding illustration of barrier-free design in Japan. It is usually used in communal areas to assist in the orientation of individuals with visual impairments. (Stevens, C. S., 2007). Cities aiming to improve the accessibility within their urban built areas and urban landscapes may find significant insights to inform future decisions after analysing the best examples around the globe.

POLICY CASE STUDIES

These case studies highlight two distinct initiatives. The aim of which were to enhance awareness and offer skills for disability inclusion. These case studies are derived from UN-DESA (2015).

1- ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES, ISRAEL

In Israel, it is mandatory by law that every municipality ensures its personnel to get training in accessibility services. Based on this regulation, this project deals with education on disabilities and the to get important knowledge and skills to provide accessible services to public. Because of the insufficient funds, local authorities could not manage to implement this beneficial training. Although by getting collective financial help from Ministry of Welfare (75% subsidy) and local funding (25%), many of the municipalities managed to commence these staff training program.

Project Framework and Objectives

Municipalities were initially given resources to help people with disabilities and facilitate them to access various services with equality and dignity from local authorities. The educational seminars further promote meaningful interaction between staff and people with disabilities. It also fosters a better understanding of the diverse tools and resources available by local authorities for the disabled community of the region. Phase 3 of the training provide practical experience to staff members with specific disabilities. For example, practice to

navigate while blindfolded or employing a wheelchair. After the successful completion of the program, lectures were delivered to throw light on different types of accessible services and supplementary resources designed by the program to further improve the effectiveness of accessibility in public areas. The training program is effective, and it gives results quickly. Despite being a low-cost initiative, its effect on eradicating stigma, promoting dialogue, increasing awareness, and nurturing understanding of disability among staff is significant. Several individuals with disabilities were employed as instructors, resulting in a greater understanding of their abilities and the advancement of a vibrant image.

Modifications Implemented

- 1: The staff's perspectives on individuals with disabilities have evolved, leading to the formulation of new accessibility protocols and arrangements.
- 2: The project has facilitated exposure to the significance of inclusion, thereby paving the way for additional inclusive initiatives.
- 3: Individuals with disabilities have been significantly empowered when positioned as instructors, taking on leadership roles rather than being dependent.

Limitation & Challenges

- 1: At first, many municipalities were reluctant to allow the first meeting and surveys that focused on disabilities because they were worried about dealing with stigmas and opening a Pandora's box of grievances.
- 2: Out of over 300 towns in Israel, only 45 municipalities have taken part; the main barriers are prejudice and funding.

2- ACCESSIBILITY HELP & ADVICE (AHA!), MAPATHON OF ACCESSIBLE PLACES AND INCLUSIVE CUSTOMER SERVICE WORKSHOPS (CANADA)

By planning mapathons across Ontario, Canada, a group of students took the initiative to carry out this project to inform participants about accessibility and inclusion. One method that makes use of the AXS Map app is called a "mapathon." Community members are invited to share their opinions about

how accessible establishments and locations are using this mobile mapping database technology. Initiating the process of fostering an accessible environment necessitates an elevation of consciousness regarding the principles of accessibility and inclusive design. AHA is offering comprehensive training and resources for businesses to achieve accessibility. Community events are planned to collect information and enhance awareness regarding the identification of accessibility challenges in urban environments. These events signify a cultural shift by both mapping accessibility and offering incentives to businesses that enhance their properties. Despite the existence of accessibility-related building codes and laws, Aha has found that there is a general resistance to accessibility agreements. A further lesson derived from the program is that schoolchildren serve as exemplary advocates for inclusive design. They are highly persuasive in engaging with businesses and are astute educators.

TECHNOLOGY CASE STUDIES

To ensure accessibility, it is essential to design with the needs of all citizens, particularly those with disabilities. Historically, the services associated with Smart Cities have not been adequately integrated with the needs of the disabled community, leading to a sense of isolation. Today, however, electronic devices such as smartphones and tablets play an important role in promoting inclusive Smart Cities. Technological inclusion for individuals with disabilities must be a paramount concern, as they constitute one in seven of the global population. Numerous Smart Cities are establishing trends that prioritise accessibility and inclusion. The subsequent examples are derived from the recent research conducted by Darren Bates, Global Accessibility and Inclusion Strategic Consultant, 2017.

In Seattle, wheelchair users can travel freely throughout the network thanks to the well-designed buses and light rail lines. In Portland, the "Lift Paratransit Service" provides a shared-ride public transportation option for individuals with restricted mobility. Taxis are enhancing their accessible services. The city of Chicago aims to increase the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis twofold by the year 2018. In New York City, the "Taxi of Tomorrow" is designed to be wheelchair-accessible

and features induction loop technology to assist those with hearing impairments. This technology facilitates the magnetic transmission of sound to hearing aids and cochlear implants.

Smart Cities are working to enhance the navigability of sidewalks and other communal areas by removing physical obstacles. In Sydney, a program is underway to establish a network of Braille Street signs, supplemented through data structures and technological advancements to facilitate navigation for residents who are visually impaired. In a similar vein, the "StopGap Foundation" in Toronto is advocating for a "Community Ramp Project" to make establishments accessible to residents with disabilities who have limited mobility. These ramps are vividly painted to ensure visibility for the visually impaired as well. The Twin Cities are significantly advancing in enhancing playground accessibility. The Madison's Place Universal Access Playground features adaptive swings, ramps, and sensory play equipment across a 16,000 square foot area.

Frankfurt employs an innovative strategy for accessible tourism in Smart Cities. The city provides guided tours for disabled tourists and features unique landmarks such as the "Frankfurt Sensory Garden," which emphasizes scent and touch.

Technology is undoubtedly making a significant contribution to the accessibility of the disabled in numerous ways. Hundreds of locations in cities worldwide are mapped using online tools like "Wheelmap" and "Jaccede," which grade them according to wheelchair accessibility. For people with disabilities, apps such as Assist-Mi provide real-time assistance with city navigation, last-minute taxi reservations, and other support. Bates (2017). All these examples illustrate the significant role that technology is playing in facilitating accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

This study adopts a combined methodology to evaluate the best practices of inclusive design around the world. After selecting the relevant design case studies, policy planning initiatives and technology advancements, the study evaluates and assesses them to provide an insight to the spectrum of inclusive design. Both the design case studies have offered insights into practical solutions for creating an inclusive and adaptable environment.

In policy studies two distinct programs are examined where the real world has successfully implemented an inclusive approach to address accessibility in design and staff training, yielding positive outcomes. In technology, numerous examples are evaluated regarding its capacity to surmount obstacles. In summary, this article examines the most effective approach for developing an inclusive environment for individuals with disabilities. This approach can be succinctly characterised as policy-driven, design and program-oriented, and enhanced by technology to address the various barriers encountered by the disabled community. Ultimately, these insights contribute to a growing framework for inclusive design, guiding future efforts toward more equitable, adaptable, and universally accessible spaces.

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