Editorial Introduction

Disabled people continue to experience exclusion by design in our everyday spaces, infrastructure and services, which has been magnified through the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, more than ever, there is an opportunity for urban and regional planning practitioners, researchers and disabled people to come together to advocate for and create inclusive, sustainable communities for all. However, to make this transformative, we must first critically question how well do we really consider human diversity in planning cities, towns and regions? This question is examined in this briefing paper by contesting entrenched challenges like 'ableism' before providing fundamental starting points for planners in planning more inclusive and just communities for all.

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Planning Inclusively: Disrupting 'Ableism' to Make Communities Just for All

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Urban and regional planners often speak of values and principles about making communities just and liveable by addressing social–spatial inequalities. Yet, in relation to disabled people, what does spatial justice look like in policy and planning practice as there is growing exclusion, which has only been magnified through the COVID-19 pandemic. The language of 'disabled people' is used here in line with social and critical models of disability that recognise that people with impairments are disabled by society through the effects of ableist attitudes, systems and infrastructure, rather than the functioning of people's minds, bodies and senses.

Every day, disabled people experience spatial and social injustices within our housing, streets, towns and cities. Taken-for-granted acts like going for a walk, seeing friends and using public transport are, for disabled people, conditional or precluded acts due to exclusion by design. Spatial injustice is not only expressed through denying a disabled person the right to be in everyday spaces; it also operates through hegemonic social and economic systems that deny or constrain the use of socially valued resources, infrastructure and services that are part of the fabric of life, as evident in research and advocacy work overtime (Stafford, 2019). These types and levels of spatial and intersecting social injustices also persist despite the enactment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008, the explicit recognition of disability targets within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2006; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development, n.d) and key Australian policies, such as the National Disability Strategy (Policy 1, 'Inclusive Accessible Communities') and disability discrimination laws and standards since 1992.

Now, more than ever, there is an opportunity for disabled people and urban and regional planning practitioners and researchers across various domains (e.g., strategic planning, infrastructure and transport planning, social planning, participatory planning, open space and urban design) to come together to address and advocate for inclusive, sustainable communities for all. This is vital for achieving the spatial justice that Soja (2009, p. 5) denoted as the 'fair and equal distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunity to use them'. However, to achieve this, we first must critically question how well do we really consider human diversity in planning cities, towns and regions? Significant disruption in how we think about and approach the planning of our cities, towns and regions is required to address this growing social and spatial divide. In this briefing paper, this begins by confronting the entrenched challenges that perpetuate exclusion by design in everyday environments before providing fundamental starting points for planners in planning inclusive and just communities for all.

Why Planning for All Matters

Humans are diverse—we are diverse in our bodies, emotions and thinking. In the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) 2018 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), one in five—or 4.4 million Australians—were reported having a disability, with another 22% identifying having long-term health conditions.

Everyone will have an experience of disability over their lifetime—whether this is oneself, a family member, friend or colleague. Disabled people can be of any age, race, gender or class. Disabilities are visible, but largely invisible. Disability can also be episodic or temporary. Diversity of spatial needs can also be broadened to encompass different points over one's life span; it can include the spatial needs of infants and young children, the temporary spatial needs of expectant mothers and the needs of older people, of whom one in two over the age of 65 years have a disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

When we intentionally consider human diversity and the data, it is very clear that planning for all not only matters— it is demanded. However, planning and design practice has knowingly and unknowingly enacted the marginalisation and oppression of disabled people, due in part to the hidden prejudice of ableism and a 'normative' lens of the human body from which theory and practice operate. This is evident in discourse, service development and in new built environments, such as inaccessible public transport, housing and neighbourhoods, and public open spaces.

Confronting Ableism and the Normative Body Form

Disabled people are a very diverse group with various axes of difference and experience, yet a common oppression shared is ableism. According to Chouinard (1997), one of the earlier writers on ableism and

The 'normal body' form that ableism embodies, and the beliefs, practices and process on which it is centred, is akin to what Garland-Thomson (2017, p.8) described as 'the normate': 'the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings'. The normate is essentially male, white, young, heterosexual and able-bodied, as noted by Goffman in his early work in Stigma (Garland-Thomson, 2017) and as illustrated in Figure 1 (Stafford & Voltz, 2016).

Despite not being remotely representative, this bodily form has been held up as the prototype for society and space, as evident in works like Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris's (better known as Le Corbusier) 'modular' body of the 20th century and Neufert's Metric Handbook for anthropometric data in the 21st century (Stafford & Voltz, 2016). This bodily form is also the basis around which everyday core social infrastructure, spaces and services are commonly planned and designed (Boys, 2014; Lid, 2016). Power in authority, status and space is afforded to the normate, while non-normative bodies are subjugated and othered (Weiss, 2015; Weissman, 1992), the outcome being sustained social–spatial injustice and exclusion experienced by disabled people today despite the many decades of advocacy. From this standpoint, the exclusion of disabled people is understood to be socially produced.

The other problem with ableism is that it is insidious in everyday life. It goes by largely unchecked (Goodley, 2014, Stafford, 2020), has not been given the same serious attention as other forms of discrimination like sexism and racism (Harpur, 2009), and underpins socially produced spaces, infrastructure and services that exclude or overlook diversity (Gleeson, 2003; Imrie, 2003).

As Harpur (2009, p. 167) notes, 'if the term ableism became widely embraced then perhaps an act of ableist discrimination may eventually attract the negative social stigma currently associated with a racist or sexist act'.

Figure 1
The Others – a representation of ableism playing out in everyday built environment.

Source: Stafford & Voltz, 2016. p2)

The Vanishing of the Social in Planning

Planning socially just spaces is not a concept new to planning (Harvey, 2009); however, over the past decades, the importance of the social aspect of planning has eroded as priorities have shifted to new urbanism, economic growth and technical rational practice (Thompson, 2012; Vavik & Keitsch, 2010). This demise has been evident in the erosion of funding for social and community planning positions and activities over time, and the reduction in the scope of work for technical roles in statutory social impact assessments in development assessment and strategic planning (Gleeson & Steele, 2010). The loss of the social has also meant that there is now a varying positionality and understanding of social inclusion and social justice by (town, social and community) planners (Shevellar & Lyons, 2015) as well as reported differences in how planners see their role in planning for disability inclusion (Vavik & Keitsch, 2010). Adding to this problem is the variation at the local government level in resourcing and knowledge of social and community planning (Stafford & Baldwin, 2018). All of these issues have a profound effect on the intensification of spatial social exclusion.

Social planning is key for driving inclusive communities. It operates from a justice framework and from

participatory planning processes aimed at generating collaborative analyses and solutions at the local level in urban and regional planning contexts (Hope & Timmel, 2014). While there has been renewed focus on the social in planning, particularly hastened through the COVID-19 pandemic experience, there are concerns with implementation, given the eroded knowledge, practices and positions of social community planning over time (Baldwin & Stafford, 2019). Examples such as compliance-based strategic planning—like mandatory inclusion strategies and disability action plans done quickly without disrupting ableism—can serve as nothing more than token exercises that uphold spatial injustices and keep ableism unchecked. Social planning is much more than just putting a ramp to a building or developing a document—it is an attitude.

The Way Forward: Planning for All

Despite everyday spaces and infrastructure being places of exclusion for disabled people, the good news is that because space is socially produced, it can be changed. (Soja, 2008). Planners are in a unique and powerful position where they can be part of social change by adjusting their thinking and approach even in the most hostile technocratic and neoliberal environments. From examples of research and planning practice both locally and globally, there are some key fundamental starting points for planners in making the paradigm shift towards planning for all.

1. Adopt an approach of planning for all.

As the data clearly shows, planners must genuinely see disability as a natural part of humankind and embrace human diversity as the baseline for planning our cities, towns and regions. This means valuing our diversity, as Young (1990, p. 47) noted, 'social justice … requires not the melting away of differences, but institutions that promote reproduction of and respect for group differences without oppression'. Planners can do this by intentionally questioning and disrupting the current ableist 'standardisation' approach to instead using a pragmatic just approach by asking the question, 'who are we planning for—diversity in disability, age, ethnicities, incomes, genders etc.?

2. Apply spatial justice thinking to planning.

Foregrounding the spatial in social justice is important to help improve our knowledge, as well as to help eliminate exclusion encountered by disabled people in everyday environments, through more responsive and transformative practices and actions (Soja, 2010). This includes identifying social, cultural and structural processes and practices, mediated spatially, that create and maintain experiences of exclusion or inclusion (Stafford & Voltz, 2016). Applied locally, a spatial justice perspective can also help to connect threats to justice occurring in place that are often viewed and managed as siloed service systems like housing, health, employment and economic development, and transport. By connecting rights and threats to justice spatially, we can, as Bailey, Lobenstine and Nagel (2012, p.3) noted, 'allow for a more scale-able and organized response'. This can be critically helpful for planners, as one of the problems to date has been little synthesis of initiatives and policies across service areas/divisions, along with difficulties in translating policy into practice (Baldwin & Stafford, 2019; Stafford & Baldwin, 2015).

3. Embed universal design (UD) as a core planning principle and integrate with smart growth strategies.

UD, first conceived by Mace (2019) in 1997, is an approach and attitude to planning and design centred on the equity of spaces, infrastructure and services from the onset without reliance on adaptation of specialised design. Despite its commonsense approach and wide applicability, UD has not been embraced by the Australian planning profession well (Stafford & Baldwin, 2015). UD is mostly non-existent in urban planning and design pedagogy (Harrison et al., 2015; Hockey et al., 2013); there is little evidence of its application in policy- and decision-making processes, including participatory planning and place-making; and it is haphazardly applied in social infrastructure planning, including street design (Heylighen, 2008) and transport (Burdett & Pomeroy, 2011). However, good examples of the benefits of UD in planning exist. UD has been modelled in Norway since 1997 when it was adopted as a planning strategy for local communities, characterised by 'adequate accessibility, equality, participation and free choice for all' (Ministry of the Environment (Norway), 2009, p.8). In 2005, 17 Norwegian municipalities have participated in a project to translate this concept into action (Lid, 2016; Ministry of the Environment (Norway), 2009). UD also works seamlessly with smart growth strategies to achieve more sustainable, liveable towns, regions and cities, as shown in the 2012 American Planning Association's (2011) Multigenerational Planning Strategy. Using UD together with smart growth links the needs of different ages and abilities to 'improve the liveability of homes and neighborhoods, not only for the elderly and the disabled, but for every member of the community' (American Planning Association, 2011, p.11) (emphasis in original).

4. Re-emphasising the social in planning.

Doing inclusive planning has the potential to influence and impact the lives of people and communities as well as, importantly, contribute to social change. Social planning is well positioned to help address factors known to be linked to liveability that are currently points of exclusion, such as access to services, a sense of safety, the cost of living, health, mobility and transport, air quality and social participation (Baldwin & Stafford, 2019; Howely et al., 2009). However, realising its potential requires a strong reinvestment in social planning—this is needed from pedagogy and approaches (e.g., in education, in planning processes and practice) through to on-the-ground jobs.

The Time to Act is Now

There is a significant opportunity to plan inclusively with renewed attention towards social and spatial justice in urban and regional planning globally. This is due to a number of factors, such as the recent events of the COVID-19 pandemic, the mounting evidence that poorly planned communities can have significant impacts on human and multi-species wellbeing, environmental degradation[35,39], along with the growing segregation of marginalised communities, particularly disabled people[2,40,41]. This shift has also been aided by supranational agendas like the United Nations Habitat III, launched in 2016 [42]; SDG's such as Goal 11[4], *Sustainable Cities and Communities*; as well as Australian policies such as the current development of the Beyond 2020 National Disability Strategy. Given the wide endorsement of planning just communities both in Australia and internationally, there is a real opportunity now for planners, researchers and disabled people to work together to transform knowledge and practice to make inclusive cities, regions and communities an everyday reality.

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