



1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Hong Kong is a dynamic and vibrant cosmopolitan city, full of energy and diversity. Many people come from a multiplicity of cultural and social backgrounds. In this progressive society, people expect a built environment that can cater for a wide variety of lifestyles and one that can facilitate user participation.

Universal accessibility is a design approach that is inclusive and allows for diversity and flexibility. It accommodates the needs of the widest spectrum of users in the community regardless of age and ability. It facilitates people to actively participate in the amenities that a community has to offer. It takes in the notions of “Inclusive Design” and “Architecture for All”, that is,

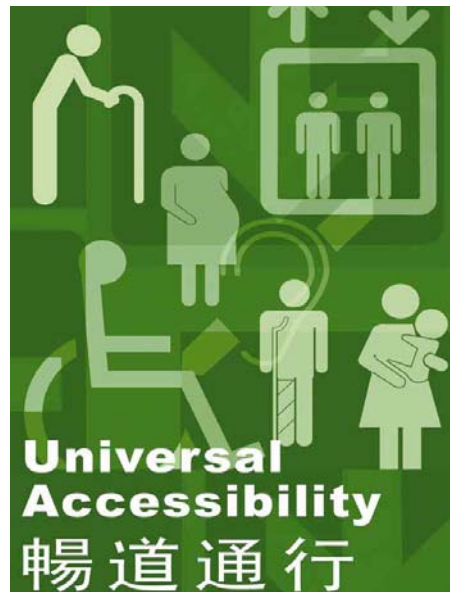
giving equal access to the elderly, the average person, pregnant women, youngsters and people with disabilities. It is a design approach conforming to a universal accessibility standard in which all products, environments and communications can accommodate the needs of diverse user groups. Universal accessibility is not the planning of separate provisions for the elderly, the physically challenged or the visually impaired. It is the solution derived from understanding the needs of people, and drawing ideas from interaction with the potential users. This approach is taking on momentum and is becoming a more important factor in the design and development of the built environment.

1.2 The Development of “Universal Accessibility”

The study on “*Universal Accessibility-Best Practices and Guidelines*” was completed in 2004 by the Architectural Services Department of the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The study report has been widely distributed to government bureaux and departments, professional institutions, non-governmental organisations and universities. The full report is posted on the webpage of the Architectural Services Department. Seminars and talks have been conducted to staff of the Architectural Services Department and Planning Department, as well as related parties in the industry such as the Hong Kong Institute of Architects, Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects, the Housing Society and Singapore Housing

Development Board to promote awareness and application of the universal accessibility approach.

Further to the study, the Architectural Services Department has continued to develop Universal Accessibility with respect to external areas. This study, “*Universal Accessibility for External Areas, Open Spaces and Green Spaces*” explores holistic and innovative design approaches to improve accessibility in the built environment of Hong Kong. It aims to promote best practices with the goal of enhancing mobility for all sectors of the society and creating a sustainable and harmonious environment.



1.2a Study on Universal Accessibility



1.2b User friendly and accessible open space

1.3 Objectives

The key issues of A.C.C.E.S.S. (Anthropometrics, Continuity, Connectivity, Equality, Safety and Sustainability) have already been covered in the study on “*Universal Accessibility — Best Practices and Guidelines*”. This second stage of the universal accessibility study focuses on promoting best practices and innovative designs in external areas, open spaces and green spaces.

The objectives of the study are:

- To increase awareness of the issues of universal accessibility in the built environment;
- To recommend best practices and design guidelines for the widest spectrum of users to access the external areas, open spaces and green spaces.

Universal Accessibility

Anthropometrics

Continuity

Connectivity

Equality

Safety

Sustainability



1.3a Key issues of A.C.C.E.S.S.

1.3b Facilities that cater to various needs

1.4 Study Methods and Framework

The study makes use of the following methods to review the existing provisions and aims to provide further insight for readers in their future designs on universal accessibility:

- Exchanges with non-governmental organisations (NGO);
- Idea workshops with a rehabilitation complex;
- User feedback on completed projects;
- Survey reports issued by NGOs from their on-site checking of accessibility in the community;
- Technical and field study of parks, open spaces, urban spaces, gardens, rehabilitation gardens, country parks, recreation spaces, beach facilities, children's playgrounds, sitting-out spaces, linkage between public transport terminus and buildings, linkage in hospitals, tourist attraction spots, barbecue sites, school sensory gardens, promenades, nature reserves;
- Reference to international standards and overseas examples.

The study report includes review of existing provisions, ideas for improvement, design guidelines and best practices. In addition, to illustrate the best practices on universal accessibility, a photo gallery consisting of good local and overseas examples has been incorporated for reference. Case studies of a rehabilitation complex and an external public space have been carried out to examine the existing provisions, lessons learnt and the key issues of forward planning for a barrier free environment.