Urban Planning and Architecture Design for Sustainable Development, UPADSD 14- 16 October 2015

Universal Design: an urgent need

Stella Carvalho de Souza[a], Ana Paula Duarte de Oliveira Post[b] *

[a] *Centro Universitario de Lavras - UNILAVRAS, Rua Padre Jose Poggel 506, Lavras 37200000, Brazil*
[b] *Centro Universitario de Lavras - UNILAVRAS, Rua Padre Jose Poggel 506, Lavras 37200000, Brazil*

Abstract

This research analyzed the accessibility and mobility around Hospital Vaz Monteiro in Lavras. As a central area in Lavras, used by a large number of people, it was supposed to offer an excellent accessibility and mobility. It is a very unsafe area due to many problems, such as poor sidewalks, improper parking spaces and inadequate entrances for medical offices that are linked to the hospital. Although Brazilian legislation is very broad, there is not too much effort towards accessibility for all.

The paper analyzed the areas around the Hospital Vaz Monteiro, as well as local clinics and doctor's offices and their structure to provide easy access to everyone.

Keywords: Universal Design; accessibility; planning.

1. Introduction

This research analyzed the accessibility and mobility around Hospital Vaz Monteiro, with its surroundings.

Being an area where all kinds of people move around, it was supposed to offer an easy mobility and complete accessibility. Unfortunately, there is no accomplishment with these issues and as consequence the area is very unsafe for who uses it.

Discrimination is the main issue for permanent or temporary disable people. This happens because all spaces are planned for only one type of people: those who don't have any kind of disability. To change this framework in Brazil, although the legislation is very broad, first of all it is necessary to be aware about accessibility and what it means. If the authorities are aware of that, all the rules and laws will be respected in any public and private project. This is a right stated on the Federal Constitution.

2. **Universal Design**

The main idea of Universal Design concept was based on the inclusion project to adequate urban and private spaces, to be used by everyone, specially those victims of the Second World War. United States, Japan and European nations began to discuss changes on accessibility for those people. Universal Design does not only adjust places to be used by every person, but also contributes to bring people back to the social life, reintegrating them within the society, with a environment more safe and free of barriers. The big issue was to not exclude anybody because everybody has equal rights.

After 1960's, cities all over the world started to adapt themselves towards Universal Design concept. Soares (2007) affirmed that "spaces always have its conception based on accessibility for people with no disability. In our contemporary society, the intention is to have a more broad approach, less segregating". The main purpose of Universal Design is to create spaces, products and services, projects and technologies more accessible to a large number of people, without any need to adaptation or adjustments.

In Brazil, Universal Design is still not used as it should. Although there is a broad legislation, there is no effort to apply them. Some good examples are found spread around in the country. Curitiba, in the south of Brazil, is the best example. It had an urban planning based on the principles of Universal Design. The whole city offers accessibility to anybody. For instance, the bus stops were adequate to allow people to step safe on the buses.(Fig.1).

a   b

Fig. 1. (a) platform to reach the bus; (b) bus stops in Curitiba

The cities are still not totally preparing a global planning towards Universal Design. They are concentrating on the adjustments of small elements, just to comply with the law. Ramps, elevators, tactile floors, handrails are example of elements that are demanded on architectural projects. But in many cases, these elements are built wrong and stay like that. Another consideration is regarding the safety technicians who are in charge of checking the accomplishment with the legislation. Some are not prepared to discuss about correct solutions and others are not aware of what states the law. This creates a divergence between them and the people in general. Sometimes is difficult to get an agreement to benefit everybody.

Due to this, while walking around the cities it is possible to find many examples of barriers, that should not be allowed. Fig.2 shows the entrance of a pharmacy, which is visited by all kinds of people everyday. There is a little step which allows only people with no deficiency to go in. It has a dangerous interpretation also. Small kids and elderly can easily fall there. By law, it is not allowed, but who is in charge to inspect and alert about this? Local governments do not have people to do this work. This is not being an issue for the city management.