

# include 2001

◀ ————— ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART, LONDON, UK ————— ▶



## Breaking boundaries

**Bruce Nussbaum, Editorial Page Editor, Business Week, USA, highlights key themes in moving beyond stereotypes and beyond legislation at the conference**

Breaking boundaries appeared to be the single most powerful theme to this exciting, energetic conference. In presentations, discussions and hallway chats, the dialogue invariably resulted in the conclusion that we must move beyond currently-held views and cross over to new territory. Frustrations expressed at the slow pace of change gave way to a realisation that there are new ways of viewing the issues and new paths to solving them. There were at least two breakthroughs.

Beyond stereotypes is perhaps the most significant. Many came to the conference with the goal of finding better ways to integrate the disabled and the elderly into the socio-economic fabric of Britain and other countries. Yet in discussions, it became clear that the disabled and elderly fall within a much wider continuum of differently abled people.

Products and services that were better designed to function in general helped all



consumers. Of course, there are exceptions. The retrofitting of Fiat cars, for example, to allow disabled people to drive, shows what can be done in these circumstances. But, by and large, universally designed products are not only better for older persons with arthritis, but just about everyone else as well. Curb cuts not only allow mobility for people sitting in wheelchairs, but moms wheeling their babies around in carriages, teenagers riding about on bicycles and 11-year olds bombing around on skate boards or scooters.

There was major progress in moving beyond the stereotype of specific groups needing special care to a diversity of groups needing better, common care in terms of improved design of everyday things.

Beyond legislation is perhaps the second most important breakthrough. Many people realised that the marketplace is an essential ingredient in integrating all groups, including the disabled and the elderly, into the socio-economic stew that is society.

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## Breaking boundaries

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Legislation can play a significant role in putting pressure on corporations to increase accessibility and end discrimination. The terrible frustration felt by many people at the conference at the continued failure of the commercial world to meet the needs of the disabled and elderly reflected the reality that a legal stick is not sufficient.

There was a great deal of anger displayed against 'bad' corporations and a 'bad', uncaring marketplace. Yet it was also pointed out that the corporation as an institution and the marketplace as a whole are neither "good"

is one of the strongest messages of the conference.

One final thought. In the US, rapid economic growth and a very tight labour market in recent years provided powerful incentives to companies to open their doors to those who were previously seen as too expensive or difficult to employ. People who had been 'out' were welcomed inside because they were desperately needed. New technologies made integration that much easier.

In addition, the shift to an information-based economy has raised the value of mind-power. Managing information



nor "bad" per se. They are motivated by profit, not morality. Thus, the most efficacious way of including all differently abled people is to persuade corporations to design their products and services so that much larger numbers of people can use them, thereby increasing their profits. This

or creating new products has become all-important. The only body part that companies really want these days is the mind. This can be satisfied in large part by people working in the office, at home or virtually anywhere.

Breakthrough concepts for a breakthrough conference.

## Include 2001 Award for Fiat's Coda

The 2001 conference presented the Include 2001 Award to Alessandro Coda, Co-ordinator of the Fiat Autonomy Project, Fiat Group.



The Award was presented by the Include 2001 Review Panel and Scientific Committee in appreciation and recognition of Coda's ground-breaking work in championing inclusive design right to the foundation of a global company.

Alessandro Coda presented the Fiat Group concept vehicle in usability design, called the Lancia Nea, to the conference. The Nea incorporates all user-centred design principles, which focus primarily on telemetry, human machine interface and virtual safety.

The Fiat Group has taken the initiative to manufacture a Nea prototype - and this has been presented to the world at the Paris Autoshow 2000 and ITS 2000. Thus, the Fiat Group has taken the computer-generated Nea to the forefront of usable designed vehicles.

Report by Dr Lee-Anne Harrison  
University of Cambridge,  
Engineering Design Centre

## Conference Chairmen's View



### **A positive message but no room for complacency**

Professor Bill Green, University of Canberra

This has been a very positive conference. The papers were of a varied nature and the presenters from diverse backgrounds. But what really struck me was the coherence of the message about inclusive design and communications. The very first session on Wednesday morning set the tone with a series of ambitions: to build better bridges between ergonomists and designers; to develop better

educational strategies to prevent prejudice in society against disability; and to explore more effective leadership styles and strategies capable of introducing greater inclusivity in business.

The RCA has been good venue for Include 2001 and Roger Coleman an excellent host. Important networks have been formed and contacts made. The business sessions generated important visions of

the future while the user participation workshops were generally of a high standard.

But while there is a strong and positive message to take out of the conference, there is no room for complacency. Despite significant progress in recent years, much has still to be done to ensure that more informed, intelligent, user-centred design is adopted in business and society.

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## **Research must influence design and strategy**

Professor Alastair Macdonald, Glasgow School of Art



At a practical level, there have been several suggestions about what designers should do. As an educator of young designers, I am acutely aware of how designers work and their needs. While the nature of how and what designers learn can and should evolve, one crucial issue will be how this research we've seen at Include 2001 will find its way to designers.

Here researchers will have to learn to understand designers' needs and how research can be presented

in a designer-friendly format. Pirkil's demographic charts are an excellent example of how knowledge from the fields of physiology and gerontology can be presented in the form of guidelines and strategies for designers.

Designers' timescales are often very pressured, due to commercial pressures, so if research knowledge is not presented in usable format, it will be discarded or ignored. I've been inspired by the work of the Helen Hamlyn Research Associates at the RCA who

have access to much of this type of research.

At a strategic level, we've seen excellent keynote guest speakers. The question is: how do we take all this knowledge, information and commitment forward out of the conference onto the political agenda? We have seen case studies of how businesses have found economic opportunity in not excluding sectors of the population. How do we get business to help us in this lobbying process?



## Looking Ahead

# Let's implement what we've learnt

Dr Patrick Jordan of the Contemporary Trends Institute, co-organiser of Include 2001, reflects on three days that proposed a more socially inclusive future

One of the major themes that emerged from Include 2001 was the need to take inclusive design beyond usability to look more holistically at the benefits that people wish to gain from products and services. The aim should be to give people of all ages and abilities products that are a positive joy to own and use. This means that we as design professionals need to understand people's lifestyles, their hopes, their aspirations and their dreams in order to create products that affirm these lifestyles and attitudes.

Another major theme to emerge was that the enabling of inclusive design can be both 'top down' and 'bottom up'. Top down approaches involve raising awareness and using legislation as a means of generating leverage for inclusive approaches. The right of people to be included in society and to express themselves through their activities, lifestyles and product choices is a moral imperative in any decent and democratic society. Bottom up approaches involve design professionals developing an awareness of inclusive issues and gaining access to the methodologies and tools



needed to implement them. Include 2001 was full of great examples of how this has been done and how it can continue to be done well in the future.

Right at the start of Include 2001, there was a plea for inclusive design not just to dwell on 'demographic push' (ageing population and so on) but on 'technology pull' (the new patterns of living and working we are beginning to develop). The conference has explored this fusion of demographic and technological change. As lifestyles change and the pace of technological innovation continues to accelerate, the future holds great opportunities.

I look forward to implementing what I have learned. I hope that you have found Include 2001 a rewarding and inspiring experience in terms of learning, sharing and building the networks that can shape the future of our profession. I hope to share with you again at Include 2003, scheduled for the Royal College of Art, London, in two years' time, as we move forward in our quest to build a decent, exciting and inclusive world.

**Keep in touch for  
Include 2003 at the  
Royal College of Art,  
London, UK**  
[www.hrc.rca.ac.uk/include](http://www.hrc.rca.ac.uk/include)