

Universal Design Implementation in a Private University; Investment, Decision Making, Perceptions and the Value of Social Capital

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Abstract : It is widely recognized that universal design should be implemented as broadly as possible to benefit as many groups and sub groups of people within a society. In Thailand, public buildings such as public universities are obvious places where the benefits of universal design principles are easily appreciated and applied, but there are other building types such as private universities where the benefits may not be just as obvious. In these buildings, the implementation of universal design is not always achieved. There are many reasons given for this among which is the perceived additional cost of implementation. This paper argues that social capital should be taken into consideration when such decisions are being made. The paper investigates the background, principles and theories pertaining to universal design and using a case study of a private university, investigates the implementation of universal design against the background of current legislation and the perceptions of the private university administrators. The study examines the physical facilities of the case study university in the context of current theories and principles of universal design alongside the legal requirements for same. A survey of building users evaluates knowledge of and attitudes to universal design. The research shows that although administrators perceive the initial cost of investment to be prohibitive in the short term, in the long term, changes in societal values in relation to social inclusiveness are changing and that the social capital of investing in universal design should not be underestimated. The results of this study should provide greater incentive for the enforcement of the legal requirements for universal design in Thailand.

Keywords : public buildings, physical facilities, social capital private university, investment, decision making, value, enforcement, legal requirements

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