Building the Inclusive City

Victor Santiago Pineda

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Governance, Access, and the Urban Transformation of Dubai

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For love,
The oasis of bliss, peace, meaning, and laughter
For my family,
Mother and father, a force of will and a gentle smile
Grandmother, unconditional acceptance
Brothers, a bond of strength
For mentors, visionaries and leaders,
Judy Heumann, the godmother for our movement
and others who show the way through public service
For teachers and students,
That clear the road toward knowledge
For the parents and advocates,
That battle for justice and dignity
For the future,
That engenders dignity
and
For the restless and generous people of the United Arab Emirates

Preface

As planners, our theories, concepts, and teachings define the ways in which an architect designs a home, a transportation engineer understands streets, a social worker provides community services, and politicians shape policies and laws. In my course "Building the Inclusive City" I like to remind my impressionable students that cities are not fixed; they are evolving systems of systems. These systems transform over time. They shape and are shaped by our values. The ideas shared in this book shape the way cities, nations, and regional institutions work.

In the coming pages, we will explore equity, justice, and access as fundamental values and as catalysts for innovations in sustainable urban development. The rapidly urbanizing city-state of Dubai is the stage where our story unfolds. The story of Dubai, as with any living city, continues to be written day by day. The book covers a range of events that shape the story of disability in Dubai, starting with the founding of the first specialized school for children with disabilities in the 1980s through 2013, when the city's legal, institutional, physical, and social reforms led to the passage of Dubai Law No. 2 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Now more than ever, cities around the world need to focus on access and inclusion. Poor planning excludes and devalues large swathes of people. Ineffective plans limit economic productivity. The estimated 1 billion people who live with disabilities throughout the world deserve better.

My lived experience as a person with a disability drew me to equity-based planning research and equips me with a perspective that uncovers gaps in current research methodologies. This perspective helps me identify fresh approaches to building more equitable and sustainable cities.

Although this book focuses on Dubai, a wealthy city-state in the United Arab Emirates, it is not simply about this specific city. This book is about institutions and the role of access and equity in responding to the forces of globalization and urbanization. By studying the urban experience of disability outside the US, Europe, or Australia, this manuscript contributes a more nuanced perspective on the global discourse on the right to the city.

Three insights inform my approach herein. First, disability research, much like other urban or social issues, must be situated in a particular time and place. Second, access and inclusion form part of both local and global planning issues. Third, a twenty-first-century planning education should take access and inclusion into consideration by applying a disability lens to the empirical, methodological, and theoretical advances in the field. This book should be read as part of a larger struggle to define and assert access; it's a story of how equity and justice are central themes in building the cities of the future and of today.

I provide a contemporary history of disability in city planning from a non-Western perspective and provide cultural context for its positioning. This book is an anthropological and urban study of the Emirate of Dubai, its institutions and their revolution, their successes and its failures. I hope this research can help inspire other cities to do more. I am pleased that this book will be available as open access and will help scholars and practitioners reconceptualize disability as a capability deprivation, not simply a medical condition.

By framing disability as a capability deprivation we can build more inclusive and accessible cities. I hope readers like you will use this book to inform their work on metropolitan planning, comparative social development, and urban equity. By bridging theory and practice, I hope to take you on a journey of hopes, dreams, and mostly untapped human potential of persons with disabilities, older persons, children, women, migrants, and anyone else who can benefit from and contribute to the building of an inclusive, innovative, rights-based, barrier-free city.

Berkeley, CA, USA Victor Santiago Pineda

Acknowledgments

This book was a journey, and the journey continues. From my first visit to my last, I continue to be amazed by the generous people and the innovative spirit that characterizes the United Arab Emirates. This book would not have been possible without the support of hundreds of people who have touched these pages and helped give birth to a set of new ideas. These ideas were shaped and continue to shape a global dialogue on human rights and the manner in which dignity and fundamental freedoms are to be guaranteed to persons like me, and many of my most esteemed colleagues, who live with disabilities.

I would first like to extend my sincere gratitude to those that supported me on the journey. My wife and family who patiently and silently waited while I wrote during long hours, sitting by the computer. I also could not have developed this manuscript without the support and constructive criticism of my doctoral committee at the University of California, Los Angeles, that included Vinit Mukhija, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, and Leobardo Estrada. Intellectual influences also include Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, Peter Evans, Kozue Kay Nagata, and Manuel Castells. The basis of this research was born during my time at the University of California, Berkeley and matured further at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Additional scholars that inspire me include Ingrid Robeyns, Marion Iris Young, Edward Soja, John Rawls. This research would not have been possible without the generous support of the US Department of Education's Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship and

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The Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government (formerly the Dubai School of Government) and particularly Dr Tarik Yousef provided me an institutional and intellectual home. Local disability rights scholars like Dr Eman Gaad, and advocates like Nada Bustami and Majid Osaimi, among others, assisted in facilitating a focus group and recruiting sign language interpretation services.

Local government agencies such as the Dubai Executive Council and Dubai's Community Development Authority actively engaged in discussions. Local special needs centers also welcomed me and provided me with tours of their facilities. In total, over 100 experts or knowledgeable individuals in the field of disability were interviewed and 3 special needs centers were visited. Lola Lopez from Volunteer Dubai provided logistical and administrative support in recruiting and executing the attitudes survey and provided contacts for permission to distribute the instrument at the Dubai Festival City Mall. Marlon Weir and Miriam Rahali provided research and administrative support during the fieldwork phase. Scott Belkin, Sandra Willis, Serida Catalano, Dagnachew Wakene, John Paul Cruz, and most notably Sylvan Doyle patiently edited and revised various versions of the manuscript. I would like to thank my family including, Dr. Sandra Willis, Lizandra Montes, Nada Purkarevic, Maria Pineda, Francisco Pineda, Patrick Pineda, Zachary Kerschberg, and Luis Miguel Gonzalez, among others who patiently spent long hours and late nights supporting and carrying me each step of the way. I would also like to thank my personal heroes Judith Heumann, Ed Roberts, and Dr. Larry Lopez, who eliminated insurmountable barriers and showed me that anything is possible.

There is much that I wish I could have added, and much of this important story still has to be told. Specifically, the story of the rapid progress that had taken place since the launch of the Dubai Disability Strategy in 2015. The past five years have seen tremendous progress, thanks to effective leadership of Aisha Miran at the Executive Council and her capacity to turn a vision into effective and coordinated governance. This is only the beginning of a long journey, and a journey that deserves to be documented, and shared with the broader world. I am excited to see its unfolding in the years ahead as the Dubai Future Foundation, the Centre for the

Fourth Industrial Revolution, and the Dubai Expo 2020 prepare to adopt new paradigms for inclusive urban innovation, and help shape the future of cities.

As a wise colleague told me, "this book is not your last word on a subject but your first." What seemed like a leap of faith turned out to be a twelve-year odyssey. Dubai is and will continue to be a laboratory where the limits of physical infrastructure and social progress are tested. Concepts I developed through this research have already shaped global institutions and helped set targets for the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I intend to support the social development efforts of cities around the world through the Global Compact and Campaign on Inclusive and Accessible Cities (www.cities4all.org), and hope to see the work of the United Arab Emirates offer a path from which social inclusion can be studied not only in the pages of a manuscript but through the realization of a vision for a more equitable and inclusive urban future for all.

Contents

1 Introduction 1
Why Study Dubai? Seeds in the Desert 2
References 18

2 Understanding Disability in Theory, Justice, and Planning 23
Introduction 24
Conclusion 41
References 42

3 What Makes a City Accessible and Inclusive? 47
Salience in an Inclusive and Culturally Sensitive Development Framework 48
The Need for an Integrated Model of Disability 52
Evaluating the Utility of the Capability Model of Disability 55
Conclusion 61
References 62

4 The Evolving Transformations of Disability in Dubai Between 1980 and 2012 65
Introduction 66
Historical and Cultural Dimensions of Disability in Dubai from 1980 to 2012 71
References 79

5 Exploring Functionings and Freedoms in Dubai 83
Dubai Forms a Foundation for Access and Inclusion 84
Benchmarking Basic Functionings in Dubai 84
Benchmarking Basic Freedoms in Dubai 93
Conclusion on Basic Functioning and Freedoms 111
References 112

6 Laws, Rights, and Norms 115
Introduction: From Theory to Global Framing 116
Legalities and Access to Justice 116
The Lived Experience of Disability in the Context of Basic Functionings 119
The Lived Experience of Disability in the Context of Basic Freedoms 123
Conclusion 128
References 129

7 Laws Are Not Enough: Unlocking Capabilities Through Innovations in Governance 131
Why Laws Are Not Enough 132
Leadership, Modernization, Social Protection, and Human Rights 137
Institutional Capabilities in the Context of Basic Functionings 139
Institutional Capability in the Context of Basic Freedoms 145
Conclusion 152
References 154

8 Charting Access and Inclusion in Future Cities 157
Smart City Dubai 158
Conclusion 162

Index 167

List of Figures

Fig. 3.1 A holistic and integrated approach to disability policy requires a coordinated and concerted effort by various agencies and institutions. Identifying and resolving inequality and gaps in outcomes is key to improving the lived experience of persons with disabilities. (Modified figure. Source: Navtej Dhillon and Tarik Yousef. Inclusion: Meeting the 100 Million Youth Challenge, p. 24) 54

Fig. 3.2 "Iceberg of Inequality" features basic functionings and basic freedoms as organizing domains and as policy areas of interest 60

Fig. 4.1 Sheikh Mohammed during a 2009 Ramadan prayer in his majlis with young persons with disabilities as his guests 75

Fig. 5.1 Proposed changes as stipulated in the RTA's comprehensive Strategy for People of determination; examples from Jumeirah Beach Road, Dubai 106

Fig. 5.2 Proposed changes as stipulated in RTA's comprehensive Strategy for People of Determination; examples show improved markings and delineations 107

Fig. 5.3 Proposed changes as stipulated in RTA's comprehensive Strategy for People of Determination; examples of wider air-conditioned bus stops 108

Fig. 5.4 Two of the five accessible vehicles owned and operated by the RTA 109

Fig. 6.1 Diagram showing duty bearers fulfilling responsibilities to rights holders through regulatory policy, knowledge and awareness, program interventions, and dialogue. Through these steps rights holders can claim their rights 118

List of Tables

Table 1.1 Common misconceptions in the area of disability rights and policy 8

Table 3.1 Contrasting beliefs, values, and practices developed by the US Department of Agriculture and the US Department of Health and Human Services (as cited in Hanson et al. 1998) 51

Table 3.2 Comparison of Sen's, Nagata's, and Pineda's approaches to the key evaluative aspects 58

Table 7.1 Key objectives of Dubai Law No. 2 of 2014 show a rights-based framework taking place in the Emirate of Dubai; this indicates a shift from a medical to social model of disability framing policy 149