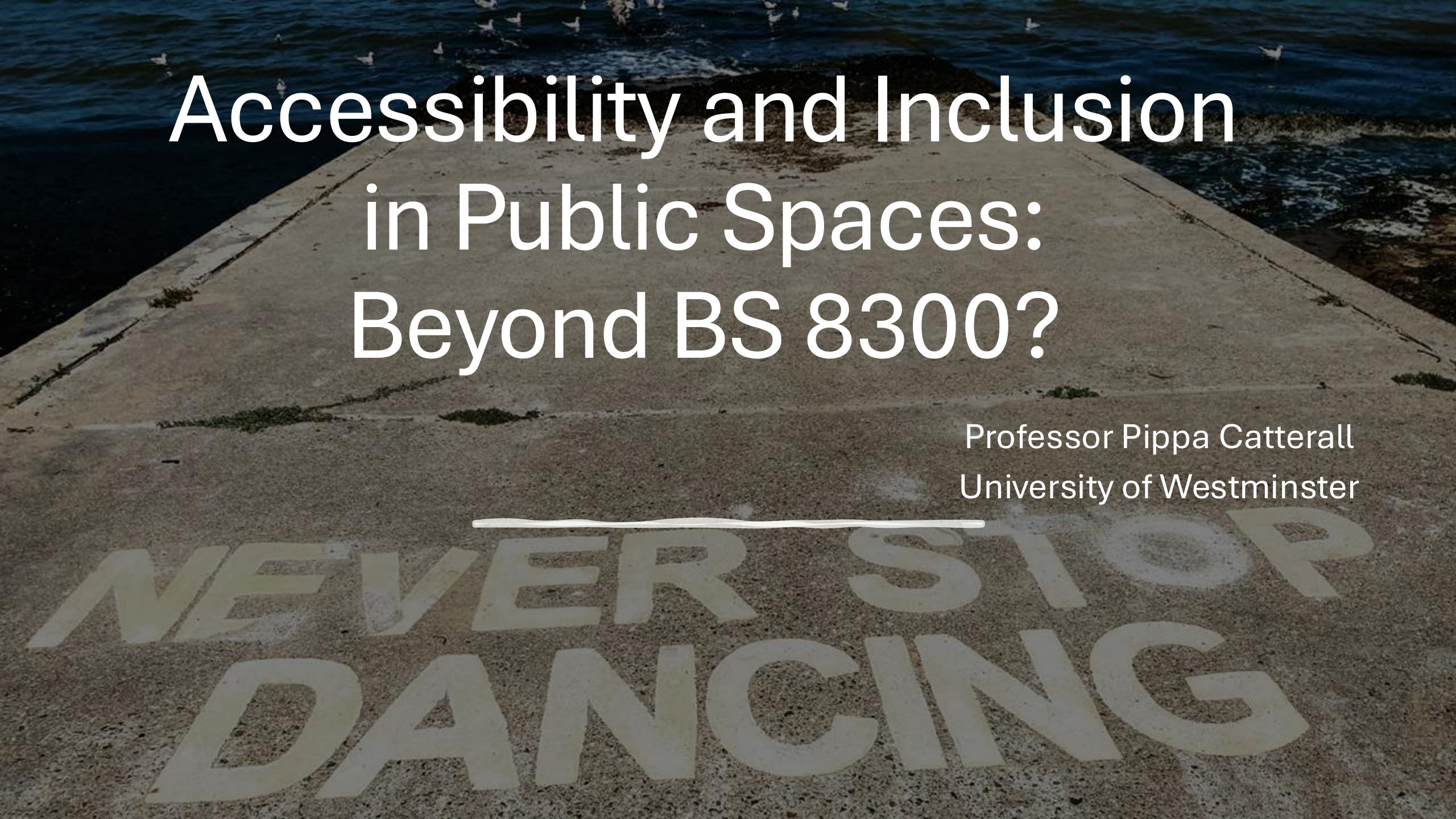


Accessibility and Inclusion in Public Spaces: Beyond BS 8300?

Professor Pippa Catterall
University of Westminster



Public Space for All!

1. Whose space is it anyway?
2. Why change it?
3. Traversing space
4. Entering space
5. Interior space
6. Ambience and access
7. Queering public space

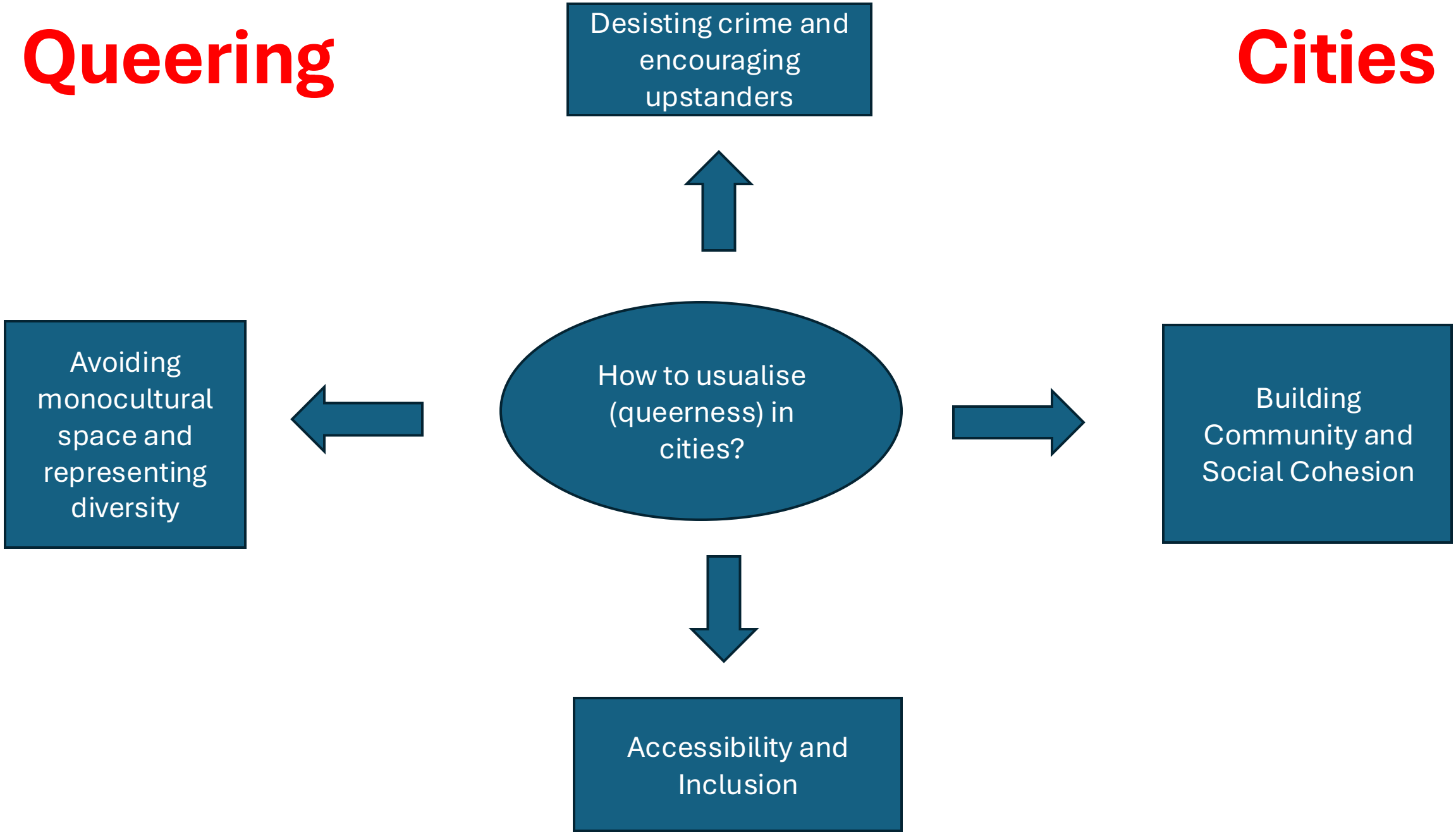
Authorised Public Space



- **Authorised Public Space Discourse**
- Land ownership
- Policing
- What is allowed to be visible
- Lighting, Streets and Street Furniture
- Licensing of activities and premises
- Housing and Homelessness
- Taxation and Valuation
- Planning and Design
- Commemoration/Heritage in Public Space

Queering

Cities



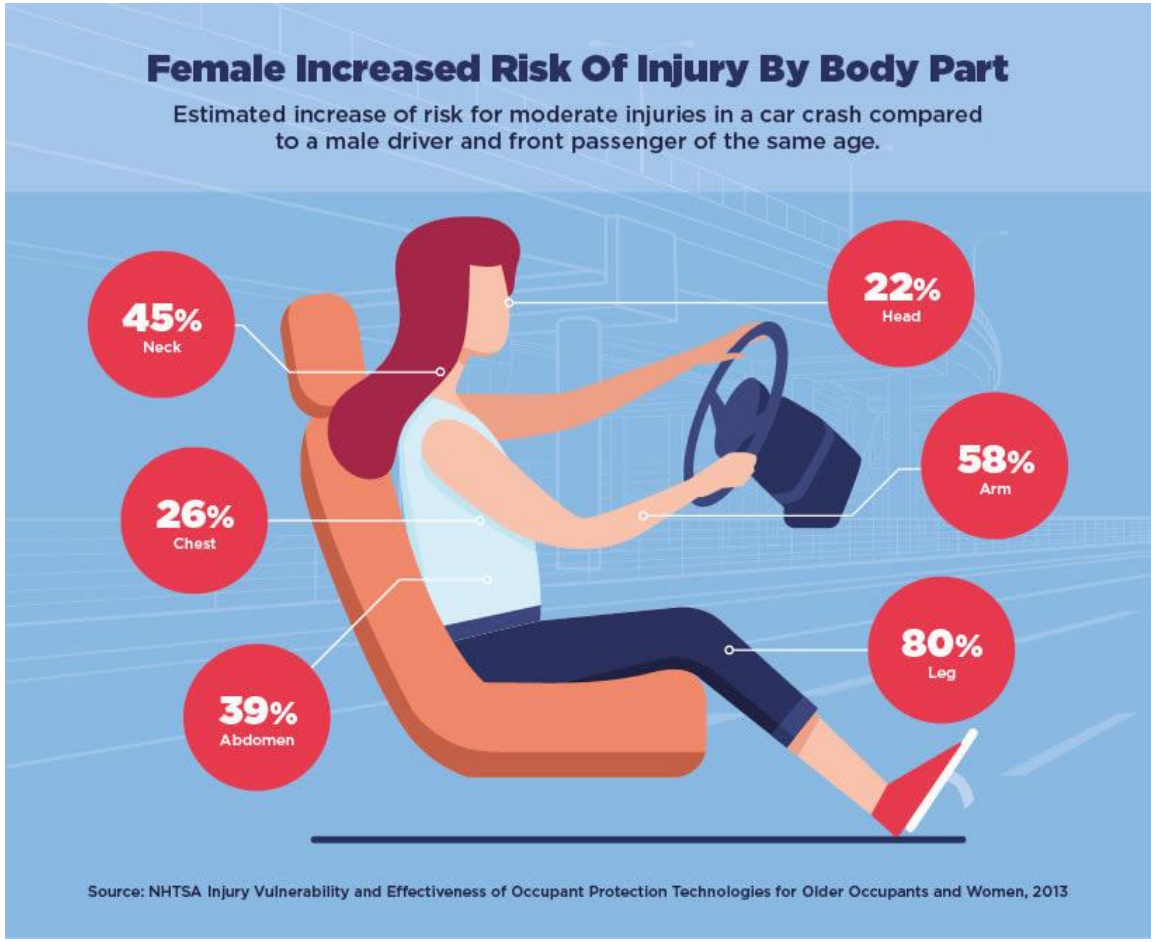




Pinch-Points and Wayfinding

Transport Deserts

- ‘The absence of robust public transport networks and car-centric policy and planning, especially in towns and rural areas, has created ‘transport deserts,’ where driving is the only practical way to travel. However, women, BAME people, disabled people and people with lower incomes are less likely to own a car, which constrains their ability to participate in public life.’
- ‘Perceptions and experiences of safety and accessibility are shaped by identity and influence mobility behaviour. Everyday street harassment impedes safe mobility for women and girls. Police racial profiling and hate crimes can make BAME communities feel unsafe in public and deter them from active travel. Inaccessible public transport and streets make sustainable transport unfeasible for disabled people.’





Pollution and Air Quality

Who Benefits?

- Transport planning and provision is configured around commuting, not the shorter, more local journeys women are more likely to take. Shopping, care-giving and school runs mean women take 3x as many bus journeys as men
- Much less investment in buses than other modes of transport, a situation made worse by 1980s deregulation



Key Issues

- **Economic Dependency**: Many women rely on public transport as their sole travel option but face barriers such as poor service provision
- **Cultural and structural risks**: Public transport environments are often viewed as ‘crime attractors,’ with insufficient oversight or lighting contributing to feelings of insecurity
- **Psychological impacts**: Women frequently normalise harassment or feel responsible for their own safety, highlighting a need for cultural change







Access All Areas!

Intimidating or (More) Intimate









Threshold Fear

Ambience





Queering Office Spaces

- Accessible
- Inclusive
- Welcoming
- Representative
- Transit





Inclusion inside public spaces

‘Many venues still overlook accessibility as an afterthought [and require]

- Step-free access to all spaces, not just the main entrance
- Viewing platforms and preserved dancefloor areas for wheelchair users
- Lowered bar counters or table service options so people in wheelchairs or of shorter stature can order and be served
- Clearly marked walkways for flow of movement, especially important for blind, visually impaired or mobility-restricted guests
- Good lighting to support visibility and navigation
- Clean, accessible toilets in multiple locations
- Clear evacuation plans for people with mobility needs





Tone and Character

- Perceptions of safety and effects on travel, inclusivity and mental health
- Neighbourhood effect
- Bystanders or Upstanders
- Liminal spaces and managing transitions
- Avoiding homogeneity
- Colours and variety
- Breaking-up of space and soundscapes
- Natural features
- Lighting (seeing but not being seen)

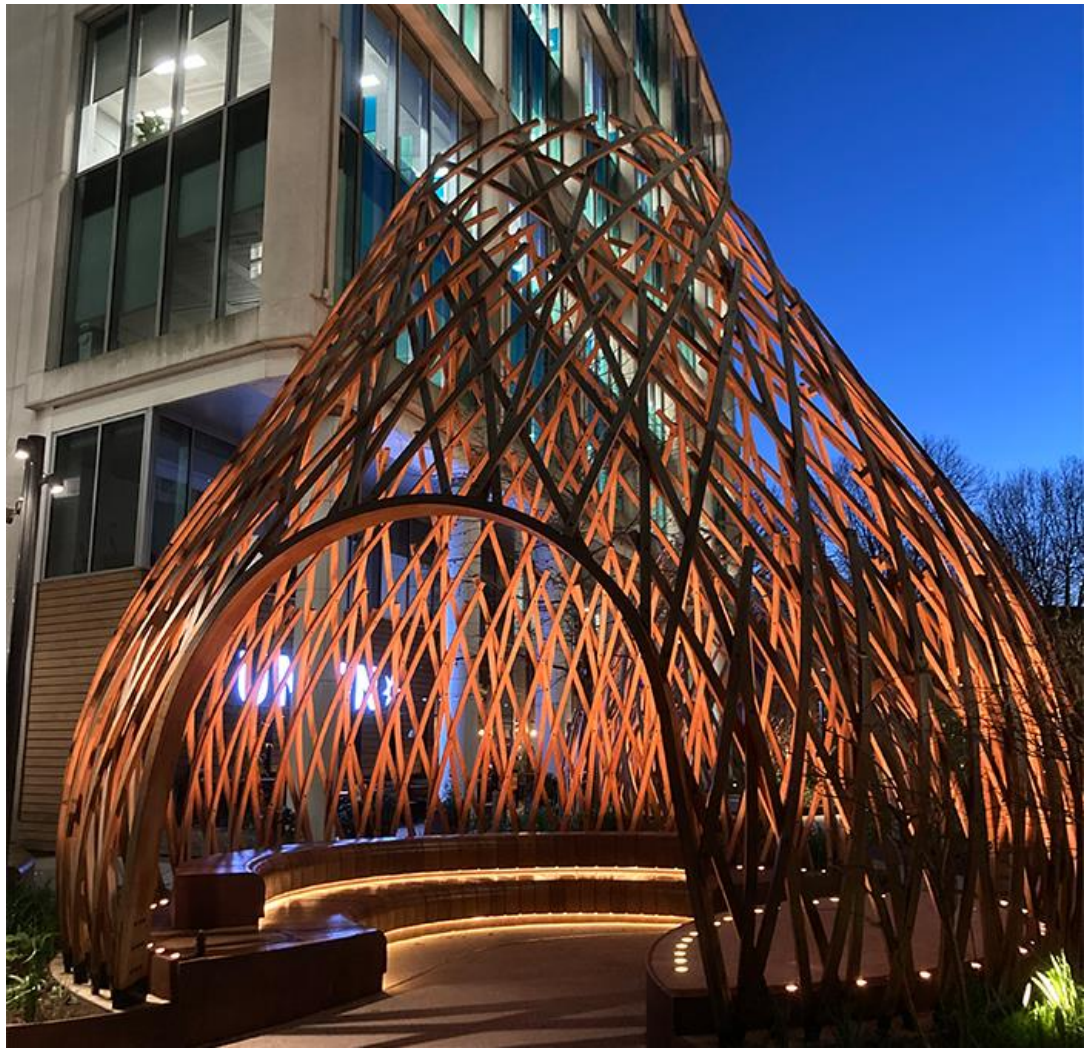
Queering Design

- Lighting quality
- Furniture to sit and relax on
- Varied use, gloomth and colour palettes (while ensuring compatibility with neurodivergent people's requirements)
- Seeing without being seen
- Passive rather than active surveillance
- Sensory ambience
- The security paradox
- Representation
- Retrofitting hostile designs



The Security Paradox

- Our recent report ‘indicated a security paradox: respondents were slightly more inclined to see traditional security features as making a space less safe than feel reassured by them. Respondents commented that "CCTV and hostile architecture… make these spaces feel uncomfortable". Clearly, what matters is the sense of what is being protected and who is being policed.
- ‘Another key finding was the need to balance visibility and privacy. Seeing without being seen was a common theme. One respondent noted, there is a need for "somewhere I can see the whole room and the exits, but I myself can’t be immediately and obviously viewed". Others suggested design features to address this. Suggestions included street furniture behind low walls or screened by greenery, providing cosy corners without feeling surveilled.

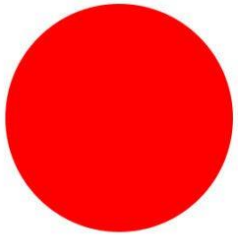




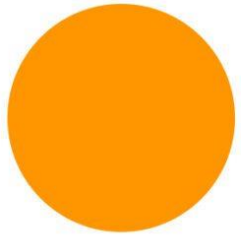
Design at a Human Scale

- Long, blank walls reinforce the message that ‘hospitals, as one respondent put it, "are about procedures, not people". The lack of good signage was disorienting, and the few benches were of hostile design. These sites need more and better-quality seating, landscaping and orientation in the approach, inclusive and welcoming messaging, plus enlivening with art and colour.’

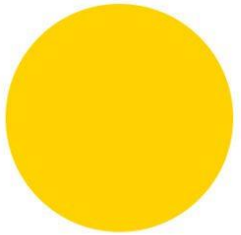
Colour



Best used in spaces for physical activity



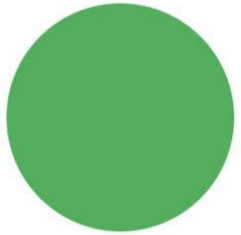
Inspires energy and endurance



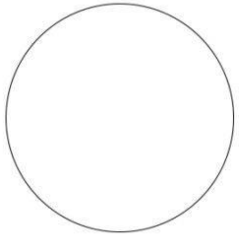
Best used in creative, active environments



Boosts brainstorming



To boost creativity



Promotes spaciousness

Inclusive and responsive cities

To get beyond BS8300 issues include:

- Access
- Characteristics: Embodied experience and the architecture of the senses (including soundscapes)
- Planning and Design Presumptions
- Differential usage and space
- Representation, memory and heritage
- Acceptance of Diversity (Usualising)
- Desistance of Hate Crimes and Incidents
- Avoiding Hostile Design
- Inclusion or enclaves (such as gayborhoods)?

