Perceptions of walkability from vulnerable groups – Results from the qualitative methods

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Method: Walk Alongs, a multi-perspective method

Grounded within empirical social and geographical research:

- Investigation of socio-spatial perceptions (Kusenbach 2003; Sommer & Töppel 2021)

- Focus on the concrete experience of space in movement, during the interview

- Possibility for personal exchange about experiences, impressions, emotions, and perceptions in situ (Stals et. al 2014)

- Valid and practical tool to generate rich, detailed and multisensory data (King & Woodroffe 2017)

- Increasingly common method within urbanism, geography and mobility studies

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Method: Objectives

To analyse how members of different target groups experience their local worlds and how these experiences affect their walking perceptions and their walking behaviour

- What are the push and pull factors for walking?

- What stimulates people to walk?

- What kind of barriers can be identified?

- What constitutes a walkable area?

- Emotions, experience, memories

- How do they perceive their local area?

Method: Why focus on vulnerable groups?

- The average person is not 'vulnerable'

- Needs of the vulnerable are special

- Have to walk

- Everyone has been or will be vulnerable at some point

- Universal design

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Vulnerable groups

Genoa

- School children
- People with disabilities

Dortmund

- School children
- Older people

Gothenburg

- School children
- Commuters

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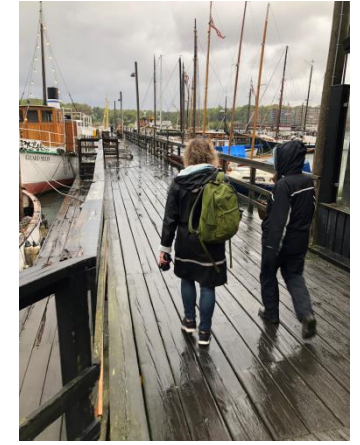
General Results: People with disabilities

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Important topics

- Greenery / Parks

- Road crossing equipped with a traffic light with sound for blind

- Barrier-free environment

- Parking on tactile landmarks

- Width of the sidewalk

- Lack of crossing options

- Presence of bollards

- Missing landmarks

- Architectural barriers

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(all photos by Otsuka, van der Vlugt, Welsch 2022)

General Results: Older people

Important topics

- Green spaces / Parks

- Anxiety to fall

- Traffic safety (traffic light phases)

- Barriers (e.g. parked cars)

- Pavement covering

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(all photos by Otsuka, van der Vlugt, Welsch 2022)
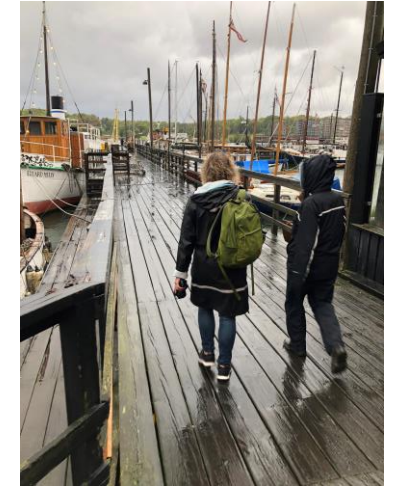
General Results: Older people & commuters

Important topics

- Green spaces / Parks

- Anxiety to fall

- Traffic safety (traffic light phases)

- Barriers (e.g. parked cars)

- Pavement covering

- Adapting to circumstances

- Health

- Safety

- Attractiveness of area

- Public transport is "too good"

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School children results: Dortmund

Nature				Cleanliness	
Trees	Animals	Birds	Flowers	Rubbish	Dog waste

Safety

Transport infrastructure			Traffic speed	Forced detours	Autonomy
Crossings	Traffic lights	Street width	Fast cars	Pavement parking	Prohibition to walk alone

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School children results: Genoa

Green infrastructure		Safety			Noise	Cleanliness
Flowers	Trees	Transport infrastructure		Traffic speed	Noise pollution	Rubbish
		Crossings	Damage of the pavement	Fast cars		

School children results: Gothenburg

Adaptation		Safety		
To weather	To family situations	From people	From traffic	From crime

Clarity		Attractiveness		Taking others perspectives
Ability to navigate spaces	Unclear traffic situations	Greenery	Built environment	Empathy with vulnerable road users

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School children quotes: Combined

Attractiveness
- Greenery
- Cleanliness
- Built environment

"There were many more trees, which I found beautiful."

"But busy streets, like the one we walked along. There were almost no trees at all. You should just plant more trees"

"it's a very beautiful area… on certain streets it feels like you're in the 'olden days'…it's very cosy."

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School children quotes: Combined

WALK URBAN

Safety

- Traffic infrastructure and speed
- Dogs!

"…we're always scared there…the cars are sometimes really fast. [it is a] very wide, big street."

"Then we run across it…And when we were at the other end, we celebrated that we had made it."

"The only thing that is unsafe…is that crossing there. There's no lights. Cars don't need to stop. So you have to wait until there's no cars…and then they come from different directions."

"there are sometimes dogs at the corner… they annoy me because I'm afraid of dogs."

"it's a pretty safe route to school…I go over one road but not many cars come there, so I'm not so worried."

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School children quotes: Gothenburg

Clarity

- Reading spaces
- Other people being able to understand where to go

Taking others perspectives

"it's always so unclear, because we've lived here so long we know…but tourists and those who are newly moved in?"

"…for people who are blind or have trouble seeing, there's no traffic light that beeps when you can cross?"

School children results: Dortmund and Genoa

Safety
- Forced detours
- Autonomy

Nature

"so many parked cars, you can't even get past them."

"we have such a big street…it's annoying…otherwise I'd be allowed to go to school alone - just because of this one street!"

"there are so many animals are here too, birds and stuff."

"And there should also grow plants and trees"

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Conclusion

- The inclusion of perceptions is important to gain a holistic picture of accessibility and walkability

- By using a micro-scale and street level assessment we are able to understand how people perceive the built environment and what factors actually stimulate them to walk

- The findings of the project indicate that an inclusive design for walking is especially important for vulnerable groups with special mobility needs

- We recommend that planning practice should use mixed method approaches to gain a holistic picture of citizens actual walkability

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