

Promoting Walking in Ageing Societies – the AENEAS project

Dorthe Gyldenlund Råby

Odense Kommune, By- og Kulturforvaltningen, Natur, Miljø og Trafik

Nørregade 36-38, 5100 Odense C, Denmark

E-Mail: DGyr@odense.dk

Matthias Fiedler

Rupprecht Consult Forschung und Beratung GmbH

Hatzfeldstrasse 6, 51069 Cologne, Germany

E-Mail: m.fiedler@rupprecht-consult.eu

Abstract

It is increasingly recognised that demographic change has a strong mobility dimension. But what about walking and older people? Isn't this the "niche inside the niche"? Not at all: Walking is not only one of the first things we learn and one of the last things we are giving up – it is the key to mobility. Hence being able to walk means social contacts, living independently and participating in society to older people. And walking itself is healthy and contributes to prolong the healthy and active period in life.

However, walking is on the retreat among older people, for various reasons: A car generation is growing old – predominantly in suburbia. While the last shop in walking distance is closing, walking conditions are not high on the agenda of municipalities, particularly in times of cuts in public spending.

So is there no way out of this vicious circle? Yes, there is! The European project AENEAS aims at promoting behavioural change and coping strategies to older people. The present paper focuses on the walking dimension of AENEAS, while the project also promotes Public Transport and cycling among older people.

AENEAS informs older people on alternatives to the private car, convinces them of their benefits and enables seniors to use these alternatives – despite the obstacles and challenges a "non-perfect world" is posing.

Successful approaches of three AENEAS cities are presented:

The City of Donostia – San Sebastián (Spain) offers organised walks to older people. This activity combines social aspects with active mobility and is very much appreciated among older Donostiaras. In addition, traffic safety training courses are offered in order to prevent accidents. The city administration further improves the walking infrastructure and removes black spots at selected places in the city.

In Munich, Germany a walking scheme has been developed as a cooperation of a local NGO, the city administration and the local police. Neighbourhood walking maps are produced with the participation of older people, while the police provide them with safety advice.

In the Danish City of Odense, there are two schemes running: A walking campaign promotes walking and active ageing among older people, while two accessible walking routes are implemented in the city centre with strong involvement of older citizens in the planning phase.

Dorthe Gyldenlund Råby is a civil engineer in urban planning, University of Aalborg (Denmark). She works with promoting sustainable mobility – walking, cycling and public transport. In AENEAS, she is working with the local activities in Odense and coordinating WP4 “Application of energy-efficient concepts”.

Matthias Fiedler is a Human Geographer, Universities of Munich (Germany) and Sevilla (Spain). He is specialised in integrated mobility strategies, non-motorised modes and citizen participation. His work experience includes research and planning in urban transport (including walking and cycling) and Transport / Mobility in Ageing Societies among others.

Currently, he is leading the AENEAS project on older people’s mobility in the STEER Programme

Promoting Walking in Ageing Societies – the AENEAS project

By Dorthe Gyldenlund Råby, City of Odense, Denmark and Matthias Fiedler, Rupprecht Consult, Cologne, Germany

What is AENEAS about?

Europe is facing tremendous demographic shifts. As the "car generation" is growing old, older people (50 and above) are increasingly using the private car instead of environmentally sustainable modes of urban transport – with massive impacts on energy efficiency.

AENEAS is a European project in the framework of the Intelligent Energy Europe (IEE) programme. Its acronym stands for "Attaining Energy-Efficient Mobility in an Ageing Society." The project's objective is to promote sustainable mobility among the generation 50+ in Europe. This Mobility Management approach for ageing societies includes enabling and encouraging elements, taking into account the specific requirements of the target group

Bringing together leading European players in the field of older people's mobility, AENEAS will improve the attractiveness of sustainable transport and will contribute to modal shifts towards energy-efficient modes of transport among older people. There will be two main activities:

- Exchanging good practices among European cities on energy-efficient mobility in ageing societies via a "Good Practice Exchange Ring" involving 50 cities and organisations and using tools like training workshops and implementation handbooks;
- Enabling and encouraging older people to use energy-efficient mobility in five European cities through concrete measures in the areas of mobility management, training, awareness raising and communication.

In AENEAS, the cities of Donostia-San Sebastián, Kraków, Munich, Odense, Salzburg and their supporting organisations pursue the following aims:

- Raise awareness about the challenge of energy-efficient urban mobility in an ageing society among stakeholders in European cities;
- Enable key actors to address these issues by applying successful, non-technological concepts;
- Raise awareness on energy-efficient travel options (walking, public transport, cycling, car sharing and public bicycles) and promote them as alternatives to the private car;
- Train older people on how to use sustainable transport according to their needs and expectations; and
- Improve the attractiveness and safety of energy-efficient modes by small-scale, innovative interventions.

Why walking at older ages?

The benefits of walking to older people are basically the same as for all age groups:

Walking is...

- Healthy
- Enjoyment
- Increases social contacts
- Helps to keep older people independent
- Cheap
- Environmental friendly
- Doesn't need much room and revitalises public spaces
- One of the first things we learn and one of the last things we give up

Though for older people, walking has a special importance: The day that walking becomes more difficult or impossible, they will have to reduce all kinds of outdoor mobility – be it driving a car, riding a bus or a bicycle. On the other hand, regular walking contributes to keep these abilities as long as possible. Physical activity – such as walking – contributes to maintain a certain level of musculoskeletal fitness which is necessary to ensure independent living. Furthermore, physical activity contributes to prevent cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer and osteoporosis¹.

In general, mobility of older people experiences a proximity orientation over the years: Trips become shorter and the direct environment of the own house or flat becomes more important. This proximity orientation goes hand in hand with a shift towards walking. This is still valid for today's car generation, however to a lesser extent. Being around in the neighbourhood means social contacts, being active and independent.

Finally, it doesn't cost that much time: When walking only 30 minutes a day, an older person can improve its health and prevent chronic diseases and dependence.

Challenges

When talking about walking at older ages, the first observation is that not much is known about this topic. Transport statistics have a focus on motorised modes, so it is rather difficult to assess how the role of walking developed over the past decades. Beyond this, modal split surveys are usually not very meaningful when it comes to walking.

¹ Warburton, Nicol and Bredin, 2006

However, it can be observed that walking is on the retreat among older people. This has various reasons. First of all, motorisation is increasing dramatically. Secondly, urban patterns are changing: While shops and services used to be in walking distance, they move out of the city centres and local high streets to larger shopping areas. At the same time, older people increasingly live in suburban houses rather than in city centre flats.

Beyond this macro level, there are further challenges that need to be addressed: Walking infrastructure is not adapted to the needs of older people regarding accessibility, safety and comfort. Though it is evident that there is a correlation between the attractiveness of the outdoor environment and walking: Older people living in neighbourhoods with supportive environment walk more than people living in areas that are less suitable and attractive. This is also valid for people with mobility impairments².

The most important challenge however are older people themselves: They are not used to walk that much anymore and don't consider walking as a "serious" transport / mobility mode. Walking is considered as pastime, while it is neglected that it can be easily combined with shopping, running an errand or simply mingling with people.

AENEAS, as a project focusing on soft measures, developed a couple of activities in order to enable and encourage walking among older people, following these guiding questions:

- How can we make walking safer and more comfortable?
- How to involve older people in planning processes?
- What kind of information do older people need when walking?
- How to raise awareness on the benefits of active mobility?
- How to promote walking as a pleasant way of being around?

Practical Examples from AENEAS cities

Donostia – San Sebastián, Spain: Promote Walking Among Older People

Background

The City of Donostia – San Sebastián has a certain tradition of walking promotion. However, it was noticed that particularly older people only walk in the areas they know, while using motorised transport in other areas or even avoiding to go there. A walking promotion scheme therefore was established in Donostia, consisting of organised walks to less known areas in the city and its closer surroundings. The aims are to establish these "hidden gems" in walking distance as alternatives to excursions by car, and further promote walking as a healthy, enjoyable and sustainable means of transport. In addition, these organised trips are social events where one can meet peers and have a nice day out. Thus the walks are very popular among older people in the city and beyond.

² Ward-Thompson, 2009

Walking with AENEAS in Donostia - San Sebastián

The municipality of Donostia San Sebastián has organised 20 walking trips, motivating older people to move actively. To organise these excursions, routes have been selected that are different from the paths and places people already know. This was done in cooperation with Club Vasco de Camping who was in charge of marking the paths and controlling times and slopes. There is also one instructor who goes with the group in order to keep the group compact and to attend every necessity.

So far, twenty walks have been organised, with about sixty participants each. People up to 85 years old are joined in the excursions and the atmosphere is really enjoyable. Although there is a stable group of people attending almost all the program, in each excursion new persons join the activity. People from other cities of Gipuzkoa county such as Eibar (fifty kilometres from Donostia-San Sebastián) attended some of the excursions, travelling from their hometown by public transport.

Lessons learnt

It can be observed that people that participate in the scheme already are moving very sustainably, with public transport and walking being their main travel modes. Thus the scheme rather contributes to support sustainable mobility styles among older people than creating modal shifts from the private car to walking. Furthermore, mainly people above the age of 65 joined the scheme, this is probably because the 50 to 65 year old are still working and don't have the time on weekdays (when most walks took place).

Another important lesson is that the scheme was more successful than initially planned. Older people in San Sebastián would appreciate if these walks could be established permanently, beyond the lifetime of the AENEAS project.

Munich, Germany: Back on the streets – older people walking scheme

Background

When getting older, it can become difficult to get around, even in the own neighbourhood. Thus, some information can be helpful, e.g. where to find benches to take a rest or the next mailbox. Therefore, the City of Munich decided to offer free senior citizens city map for three districts in Munich. These maps have been developed in close cooperation with senior citizens in the relevant areas.

Testing in real life conditions

To make sure that the city map is helpful in daily life of older people, it was decided to involve older people in the preparation phase. The workshops were held in the so called "Older Citizen's Service Centre" which can be found in each district. These workshops were divided into two days.

At the first workshop day, the participants learned about road safety from the Munich police. After this introduction, the draft neighbourhood map was presented and explained. In the next step, a short city visit was carried out, exploring the area around the workshop venue. This gave the senior citizens the possibility to point out places that are of interesting, but also dangerous or annoying spots. In addition, first comments on the map were provided. At the end of the first workshop, the participants were asked to test the maps during the next week and to note their comments to bring them to the next meeting.

At the second meeting the people gave their feedback to the maps. Different aspects of the maps were discussed, for example if the people liked the overall layout, the font size, the used kind of pictograms and so on. It became apparent that the citizens preferred to discuss open rather than to write down their comments. This spoken format is more challenging, since complaints on the general traffic situation mixed with recommendations on what should be improved on the maps. On the other hand, it was very important to give room for people's opinions.

After integrating the older people's feedback, the maps will be printed out in December 2010 and will be available for free at the senior city service centres.

Lessons learnt

Local stakeholders such as the "Older Citizen's Service Centres" can help you reaching the target group and provide a good setting for the workshops. It proved to be a good idea to work in small groups to ensure that everybody contributes. A good moderation is necessary, so the ideas and opinions of the participants can help to improve the map. However, you should reserve some time for open discussion and complaints.

Odense, Denmark: Walking campaign

Background

It is important to be able to walk no matter how you want to move. Every time you take a trip, you begin and end with walking to get to or from your bicycle, bus or car. And a little walking will get you a long way, also when it comes to your health.

Therefore the City of Odense wanted to remind its senior citizens about the delights in walking, getting exercise in an easy way, experiencing the city, being with others, having fun, enjoying nature etc. The aim of the campaign was to encourage older people to start to walk more and thereby create a healthy habit of walking for them in general.

Second Walking Campaign in Odense

Taking advantage of the spring, the second walking campaign was launched in a week with fair weather. To reach a large senior audience the Department of Culture and Urban Development cooperated with the Department of the Elderly and Disabled. Local associations and clubs with interests in the elderly also made a great contribution to the campaign programme.

As a result the senior citizens could participate in guided tours, exhibitions, training activities, games and sports related to walking. More than 100 activities showed how enjoyable walking can be in its many aspects. Especially the social aspect of walking with others was appreciated by the participants.

To keep the seniors encouraged to walk further, pedometers were handed out and the forming of walking clubs was suggested. By the end of the week at least 2500 seniors had participated in a walking activity, and many more had been made aware of the benefits of walking.

Lessons learnt

Walking activities are very popular in Odense especially when it comes to guided tours. The participants were very pleased, and a lot of them asked for more guided walking activities in the future. After the campaign several new walking clubs emerged to carry on walking training, so help with starting new

walking groups seem a great way to encourage more walking training carried out by the citizens themselves.

Working together with the Department of the Elderly and Disabled turned out very successful. The Department contributed with a lot of activities and the employees' daily contact motivated the elderly citizens to take part in the walking campaign.

By enjoying the activities a lot of the participants discovered that their ability to walk exceeded even their own expectations. Thus, the programme encouraged them to walk further the next time and ultimately incorporate more walking as a way of mobility in daily life.

The participants had very different conditions for engaging in these walking activities. Some would walk effortlessly several kilometres, while others felt challenged to do even very short walks. Therefore, the activities varied in difficulty.

As the earlier campaign targeted experienced walkers, this time the focus was on increasing the mobility of weaker walkers. A lot of the activities therefore were supported by walking assistants who would support slow walkers, push wheelchairs or accompany participants using walking frames. Some of the walking assistants were part of an integration project with foreigners who will work with the elderly and healthcare. Particularly some of the foreign seniors benefited from this action.

After the campaign several new local walking clubs emerged to carry on the walking training.

Overall lessons learnt

From the AENEAS perspective, the following preliminary conclusions are essential:

- Older people are not a homogeneous group. The population 50+ has very heterogeneous abilities, mobility behaviours, cultural backgrounds and expectations. This needs to be taken into account when designing activities targeting "seniors".
- It is recommended to cooperate with organisations that represent older people or have many members 50+. These organisations often know better on the requirements of the target group, and they can help you to reach older people.
- Put a lot of emphasis on communication. Using the right channels and wording is essential. Multipliers as mentioned above, "word of mouth" and local newspapers will help you to spread the word.
- Older people don't want to be considered as old. This has strong impacts on the way you deal with them. In the end, you might need to avoid the word "old", even though your campaign exclusively addresses senior citizens.
- Don't forget the social aspect of meetings and event. Older people in general like these events very much, they also value when their voice is being heard. Take your time to listen to them and provide some coffee or food and the participants will remember the event.