

'The OECD proposals for governments on Walking, Urban Space and Health'

Prof. Thanos Vlastos,
chair of the OECD Working Group on
'Walking, Urban Space and Health'

Abstract

The OECD / International Transport Forum's next publication in 2011 will concern 'Walking, Urban Space and Health'. It belongs to a series of three publications of OECD/ITF very related to safety conditions which are very important for Walking:

- 2006 'Speed Management',
- 2008 'Towards Zero Accidents' and
- 2011 'Walking, Urban Space and Health'.

The International Transport Forum (ITF) was created in 2007 as a global platform and meeting place, incorporating the former European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) and including all OECD Member countries. In this particular group participate experts from 17 OECD countries, geographers, urban planners, transport planners, psychologists, and economists. The aim of the group is to provide national governments policy recommendations, based on research evidence, for the implementation of innovative policies which are essential in order to deal with the problems facing walking today.

For the very first moment of the works of the group it was decided not to adopt a problem responsive approach but to be proactive, generative and oriented by a vision for the humane city of tomorrow where a new mobility and urban culture will be established, as outlined by the European Commission's Green Book "Towards a new culture for urban mobility".

Walking is associated with the quality of urban space. It stands for a different picture of tomorrow's sustainable city – a place imagined to be livelier, prettier, friendlier, healthier, more humane and with residents characterized by more collective and responsible behaviors. City's aesthetics is a very important issue for walking, of course also for cycling. The aim for the sustainable city of tomorrow is to fill the streets with

children, the elderly, people with difficulties in mobility, pedestrians, cyclists, and to transform these streets into livable and safe spaces, where will be a pleasure to walk.

The group focused on the functioning of public administration, governments and local authorities because walking is very often overlooked. The scope of the publication we prepare is to help policy makers to fill the gaps in all administrative procedures, urban and transport planning mentality and policies.

Some Key Messages from the OECD/ITF working group:

WALKING AND SOJOURNING FORM THE HEART OF URBAN LIFE AND OF TRANSPORT SYSTEMS

- Walking is the most important mode of transport in terms of the number of trips.
- Cities are a place to leave, to sojourn, for social life, to connect with people. Walking is unconditional; there should be not limitation to walking.
- Over the past century, the place given to pedestrians in urban and transport policy, has lost importance and the priority was given to cars. The pedestrians felt constraint to be exposed to accident risk, to high levels of pollutant emissions and noise.
- The development of the motorized traffic and speed has led to urban sprawl and low densities, which is not favorable to walking – as many activities become not accessible by foot.
- Environmental and quality of life concerns have led to a new interest in walking and cycling. It is expected that both will meet a new growth in the coming decades.
- Public authorities have the duty to facilitate and plan for the needs of pedestrians.
- The ageing of the population is a crucial point of the discussion on walking.
- The whole street network and urban space should be designed according to the pedestrian's requirements.
- Walking is a natural movement but walking in the street must be taught.

- Walking is usually a modal component of a trip. Public transport is directly connected with walking. Promoting public transport requires paying particular attention to the accessibility of the stations by passengers.
- Walking also means sojourning in the public space. It is needed to create more and more areas with moderated speed and improved aesthetics.

WALKING OFFERS MANY LIFE-BENEFITS

- Walking has an essential role in the livability of the cities, sociability, learning autonomy and constructing one's own identity.
- Benefits of walking on health are huge. It contributes to limit a lot of diseases.
- The presence of pedestrians has a direct impact on the economic and social vitality of cities.

WALKING IS UNDER-ESTIMATED IN MOBILITY SURVEYS

- Public authorities have little data and studies on trips by foot and on pedestrians.
- An important share of pedestrian accidents is due to fallings on the public space which is inadequately maintained.

WALKING IS OFTEN OVERLOOKED IN PUBLIC POLICY

- Pedestrians are not well represented in national, regional or local authorities and it is very difficult to make their needs known.
- Traffic rules have been designed almost exclusively to ensure the fluidity of motorized traffic.
- Pedestrians while they are exposed to safety risks they do not represent a risk for the other road users. Often aggressive behaviors by drivers are tolerated.
- Visibility issues often due to illegal parking are a main pedestrian's accident factor.
- Managing speed in urban areas is a priority. 30 km/h should be the maximum speed in residential areas.

WALKING INVOLVES SOCIETY'S MOST VULNERABLE MEMBERS.

- Around 30% of the pedestrians has a reduced mobility. Urban design and transport policies should be developed taking into account the need of the weakest.
- Insecurity, whether true or just felt, has an impact on the choice to walk or not.
- A good health is a prerequisite to walk and also a positive consequence of walking.

IMPROVING INJURY DATA

- There is a need for more accurate information on pedestrian's injuries (including falls).