

Accessibility of Shared Space for visually impaired and blind people

Havik, E.M., Melis-Dankers, B.J.M., Steyvers, F.J.J.M.



Shared Space is an alternative concept for the design and use of public spaces, based on the integration of traffic with other forms of human activity. For visually impaired people, the lack of conventional infrastructure in Shared Space can lead to problems with orientation and navigation.

Aim: To assess the characteristics of Shared-Space locations for possible accessibility issues for visually impaired people.

Method: 10 Shared Space locations in the Northern part of the Netherlands have been selected and visited to assess their common characteristics. In co-operation with orientation and mobility experts from Visio and guide-dog instructors, these characteristics have been judged on possible problems for the accessibility and safety for visually impaired people.

Results: While the street design varied on many aspects between the selected area's, common characteristics were the absence of kerbs, traffic signs and of separate space for different traffic modalities. The inventory resulted in a list of possible threats for visually impaired persons.

Conclusion: Independent mobility of visually impaired persons cannot be guaranteed within the present implementation of Shared Spaces.



Possible threats:

- Absence of traffic lights
- Absence of kerbs
- Absence of (recognizable) separation between different parts of the road
- Absence of (recognizable) designated crossings
- Absence of guidance paths
- Insufficient usability of traditional guidance elements
- Obstacles on walking routes and on guidance paths
- Unpredictable and chaotic situations due to unclear parking regulations

Follow-up of the project:

1) Field study: 25 blind and visually impaired participants performing mobility tasks in Shared Space and conventional areas.

2) Recommendations and directives for designers and O&M / guide dog trainers.

Pictures: A: Sneek; B & C: Haren; D & F: Oosterwolde; E: Muntendam