



# Walking beyond the city? On the importance of recreational mobilities for landscape planning, urban design, and public policy

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## ABSTRACT

Walking engenders many descriptive, normative, and speculative debates. This article reviews work done in the interventionist realms of landscape planning, urban design, and public policy, where attention is increasingly being paid to walking (as a matter of fact) and its often-prescriptive corollary of ‘walkability’ (as a matter of concern). What patterns of critical engagement are seen in work on how, why, and where people walk? I explore how (a) the so-called compact city is seen as the only context where walking and other ‘soft’ modes of everyday mobility meaningfully occurs, and (b) scholarly debates on self-propelled movement seem to focus too narrowly on necessary or utilitarian activity. Recreational mobilities at various temporal and spatial scales thus tend to be overlooked or ignored altogether. Drawing on the interdisciplinary explorations presented in this special issue of *Mobilities*, a provisional agenda for research and practice is presented. Suggestions are made as to how one might approach the dense, compact city (as phenomenon and as normative impulse in spatial planning) in new ways by foregrounding walking as a widespread example of ‘discretionary’ mobility, i.e., as optional movement in space.

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Mobility studies are of great importance to the interdisciplinary professional work of organising space through urban design and landscape planning (henceforth abbreviated to UDLP). Much energy is devoted in scholarship and practice to investigate how and why people, goods, information, and ideas move around (or not, as the case may be). In many cases, researchers explore ontological and descriptive questions, but work is often also done to inform interventions (drawing conclusions ‘in order to ...’ vis-à-vis policy and design). This article reviews where ‘applied’ research in UDLP has focused on walking as a widespread if not universal mode of ‘soft’ or ‘active’ transport in everyday life, acknowledging that the ‘everyday’ takes place in metropolitan landscapes—which enfold a mix of urban, (post)suburban, and periurban settings—for the simple reason that these settings are where a great proportion of people now live, work, learn, and play, at least in most OECD countries (Moreno-Monroy, Schiavina, and Veneri 2021; OECD/EC 2020; Phelps 2015).<sup>1</sup>

The special issue of which this agenda-setting piece is part centres on a pot-stirring question: What do we overlook in the present push in UDLP for compact urban form, specifically in terms

of everyday mobilities that are not strictly functional or ‘necessary’? This review article explores several shared preoccupations, as presented in the introduction (Qviström, Normark, and Luka 2023) and in the other featured articles in this special issue. It grapples with what we know about where, why, and when people walk, asking a provocative question: Might we be stuck in the city when it comes to studies of walking in UDLP?

My central claim is that many studies of walking (as a matter of fact) come up short, especially where they veer into the often-prescriptive corollary of ‘walkability’ (as a matter of concern). Empirical and normative studies seeking to rigorously document and/or encourage walking behaviour tend to focus on ‘traditional’ city settings. This gives short shrift to the diversity of where people actually engage in daily routines on foot. In other words, a disproportionate emphasis seems to be placed in UDLP scholarship—and perhaps in practice—on walking that takes place in settings that are city-like (understood as specific configurations and materialities of the physical environment that were typical before the mid-20th century). This normalised ‘city’ condition that gets associated with both walking and walkability has often been described as compact urban form (Eldér 2020; Giuliano and Narayan 2003; Talen and Koschinsky 2014) or as the pedestrian and transit city (Muller 2004; Newman and Kenworthy 1996), as differentiated from the ‘dispersed’ metropolis or ‘Zwischenstadt’ that arose after the Second World War (Filion 2015; Sieverts 2003). Stated more formally, walking studies in UDLP seem to suffer from a bad case of what Angelo and Wachsmuth (2015) and Millington (2016) have respectively called methodological and cultural cityism. It is almost as if all the knowledge that matters was determined through contributions made by a handful of Anglo-American researchers looking at cities from the 1950s to the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> I argue that much stands to be gained from an infusion of ontological, methodological, and epistemological goodness from other work, notably various contributions to *Mobilities*.

Decades ago, Michel de Certeau famously drew our attention to walking *in* the city.<sup>3</sup> I now urge researchers and practitioners in UDLP to also consider walking *beyond* the city. This is not merely an empirical problem (how well we know what apparently exists in the world), but also one stymying discussions about future possibilities for how we deploy ourselves in the world, including how we decide about continuity and change in human settlements, with the consequent allocation of resources for infrastructure provision and so on. This compound problem worsens when we consider recreational mobilities. If methodological-cultural cityism (i.e. a fixation on ‘city’ dynamics) bedevils studies of walking in UDLP, observers also focus too narrowly on ‘trips’ that are done for necessary or utilitarian reasons, such as going from home to work (which is indeed the basis of many major datasets used in transport and infrastructure planning).<sup>4</sup> This hinders well-intentioned explorations in (and for) UDLP of where, why, and when people walk.

My aim in this paper is twofold: to duly present this knot of issues—the *problématique*—and thence to sketch out a provisional agenda for the interventionist realms of landscape planning, urban design, and public policy, whereby we think carefully about walking in metropolitan space as something that spans more ‘discretionary’ and ‘obligatory’ realms of activity. In so doing, I hope to respond usefully to core questions defining this special issue of *Mobilities*: What happens if one takes recreational mobilities as a point of departure for understanding urban(ising) landscapes? What kinds of cities and metropolitan regions would emerge, both in terms of future possibilities for planning and design and the more immediate empirical matter of how to define a ‘functional urban area’?<sup>5</sup> Using recreational mobilities as a lens for examining physical space and what it may afford, I challenge the dominance of functionalist views on walking as a matter of concern in UDLP and related fields, such as public health and urban studies, while helping to make sense of where and why people walk. Suggestions are thus made as to how one might approach the compact city (as phenomenon and as normative impulse in spatial planning) in new ways. Following a brief review of current debates, the article presents three claims (where and when walking happens; what matters for walking in terms of the supportiveness of everyday

settings; and why people walk). This culminates in a provisional five-point agenda for walking beyond the city.

### The state of the debate: five premises

The review presented here is based on a scan of scholarly publications—an exercise that was neither exhaustive nor deliberately selective, for it primarily focused on the interventionist realms of urban design, landscape planning, and public policy. Five premises undergird the arguments presented. First, among works published over the last 20 years, it is striking how self-propelled movement has become a major preoccupation, especially in UDLP—but also in cognate fields such as health studies. Attention has increasingly focused on how to encourage ‘active transport’ (walking and cycling) in OECD countries as part of a broad aspirational shift to ways of life that are less energy- and infrastructure-intensive. Noteworthy examples of the general push for reform include advocacy pieces by Deehr and Shumann (2009), a research agenda laid out by Koohsari et al. (2015), and a comprehensive guide to recommended ‘context-sensitive’ practices in civil engineering prepared by the Institute of Transportation Engineers in collaboration with the Congress for the New Urbanism (2010). Studies typically ask how easily, how much, and how comfortably individuals can or do walk in everyday settings. For instance, Koschinsky and Talen (2015) present a detailed inventory of 359 metropolitan areas across the U.S. and conclude that the vast majority of the neighbourhoods found within them do not offer ‘walkable access to amenities’—work pursued in detailed studies done by Carlson et al. (2015), Conderino et al. (2021), and Elldér (2020), among many others. Such findings are used as evidence of how and why efforts must be made to change social practice and business-as-usual approaches in UDLP.

My second premise is that these scholarly and professional interests already find widespread expression in practice. Evidence of this operationalisation includes countless reports on strategies, tactics, and lessons learned. Much is made of the so-called ‘15-minute neighbourhood’ and the need to curate ‘walkable’ landscapes; these amplify normative statements about improved outcomes in terms of public health and sustainability, assuming that motoring can be reduced so long as the conditions for walking are improved—both in material (landscape) terms and to a lesser extent in immaterial changes to social practice (what transport planners often call ‘demand-side’ strategies). In broad terms, these reforms are presumed to reduce point-source emissions from vehicles and consequent economies in energy needs as well as infrastructure requirements (Calthorpe 1989; Cervero 2009; Hendrigan and Newman 2017; Jeffrey et al. 2019; Newman and Kenworthy 1996). The aspirational shift regularly calls for carefully renovating the public infrastructure of streets and roads to make them less hostile to walking and cycling, whether to simply provide dedicated spaces for active transport or to create what are known as ‘complete streets’, ‘home zones’, or ‘encounter zones’ (Biddulph 2012; Gregg and Hess 2019; Loukaitou-Sideris 2006; Mehta 2014; Naef 2017). Important and influential work was done by Cervero and Kockelman (1997) identifying density, diversity of activities, and design quality as key factors enabling the differentiation of contexts vis-à-vis behaviour patterns and travel demand—work that has since been further developed to include distance to public transport and destination accessibility (Ewing and Cervero 2001, 2010) and local amenities (Elldér 2020).

All this brings us to consider how my second premise encompasses acknowledgement of the total environments in which walking-supportive infrastructure gets situated. A broad coalition has formed in favour of compact urban form, often linked to the U.S.-based movement called ‘New Urbanism’ that came to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s. While its origins were in many ways empirical—anchored in case studies of travel behaviour in prewar settlement patterns (see e.g. Iravani and Rao 2020; Jacobs 1994; Newman and Kenworthy 1996)—much of the work done in its name now veers toward weakly-substantiated prescriptive treatises vis-à-vis compact neighbourhoods and reduced automobile dependency (ITE/CNU 2010; Schuetz 2015).

Some studies consider conventional suburban settings and new neighbourhoods built according to the principles of New Urbanism, but rarely have they found evidence of the hoped-for increases in trips made using active transport (Baran et al. 2008; Hendrigan and Newman 2017; Hess 2008; Schneider 2015; Schuetz 2015). Several nuanced studies of 'walkable' neighbourhoods instead conclude that self-selection occurs, whereby people who enjoy walking choose to reside in contexts that readily support walking for daily activities (Ewing and Cervero 2010; Kamruzzaman et al. 2013; Manaugh and El-Geneidy 2011). New empirical work by Birkenfeld et al. (2023) furthermore shows that the so-called '15-minute city' is a far-fetched normative aspiration, and one which seems likely to thwart context-appropriate strategies that can reduce motoring (strategies which need to be thoughtfully situated vis-à-vis social practice, lived experiences, and household realities). Other useful contributions include a recent Canadian study which found evidence of increased walking behaviour for both necessary and recreational purposes where the physical environment was more permeable, even after adjusting for residential self-selection, neighbourhood tenure, and sociodemographic characteristics (McCormack et al. 2021, 3). In any case, two points bear noting: (a) there is great scholarly and professional interest in improving the possibilities for people to use active modes of transport for everyday activity, and this has successfully been embedded in public policy in a great many contexts, yet (b) legitimate concerns have been raised about the apparent physical determinism of normative work on compact urban form.

My third premise concerns the surge in work on walking that has been done by and/or for specialists in public health and wellness in recent decades. Until about the 1990s, UDLP was not always closely linked with cognate work in other domains of public policy. Since then, however, interdisciplinary studies into the social and environmental determinants of health have considered how healthful activity (notably regular physical exercise) might be encouraged and/or constrained by the configurations of everyday built environments, especially where car-dependent urban form stymies individuals from regularly walking and cycling (e.g. Saelens, Sallis, and Frank 2003). This is obviously important to State healthcare providers (because of the reduced incidence of incapacitating chronic diseases such as diabetes, which require costly care regimens) and to wellness specialists (because of the overall benefits for human happiness stemming from prevention). Current debates continue to recognise the intuitive value and importance of walking as a low-impact (perhaps even sweat-free) form of everyday exercise for healthy lifestyles (see e.g. Carlson et al. 2015; Frank et al. 2010; Iravani and Rao 2020; Lachapelle and Cloutier 2017; Nordh et al. 2017; Saelens, Sallis, and Frank 2003).

We should return to the distinction between discretionary and non-discretionary travel behaviour to consider the fourth major premise supporting my proposed agenda. Normative mobility studies (i.e., proto-instrumental work that is done with a view to eventually changing the scale and nature of everyday trips through policy and/or physical interventions in the built environment) largely focus on the reduction of daily motoring in metropolitan areas—technically described as rebalancing the modal split in favour of walking, cycling, and public transport. This work is done in good faith to reduce overall energy demand and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, to control how many vehicles are 'on the road', and to consequently moderate the need for infrastructure dedicated to motoring (as both automobiles and road networks represent forms of embedded/em-bodied energy). Improvements also are possible in terms of reducing landscape fragmentation for both human and non-human actors, limiting injuries and deaths due to accidents, and a range of other positive co-benefits (Lister, Brocki, and Ament 2015). The issue, however, is that research and practice tend to concentrate on 'non-discretionary' (obligatory) trips, perhaps because we often have reliable time-series data on this sort of movement. In the literature on transit-oriented development (TOD), for instance, one finds ample work on walking to and from the train station for work trips or how people access shops and services (e.g. Boschmann and Brady 2013; Jeffrey et al. 2019; Schuetz 2015)—yet studies of leisure in relation to modal split are few and far between (Engström and Qviström 2022). Even where studies have included trips

other than those taken between home and work, they still examine non-discretionary activity such as regular and necessary outings for shopping (e.g. Handy 1996). This may mirror the marginalisation of leisure and recreation mobilities, which are perceived as 'lesser' preoccupations in scholarship as well as practice (see Ritchie et al. 2008).

Finally, and most importantly in terms of the premises for this article, we see great convergence since the 1990s on strategies for 'walkability'—a normative performance quality that is seen as both objectively real and desirable—with concerted efforts focusing on how to 'improve' this quality through strategic actions expressed both materially and immaterially according to indices or heuristics (e.g. Adkins et al. 2012; Clifton, Smith, and Rodriguez 2007; Dovey and Pafka 2020; Ewing and Handy 2009; Forsyth et al. 2008, 2015; Harvey et al. 2015; Jacobs 1994; Larco 2015; Macdonald et al. 2018; Mehta 2014; Pafka and Dovey 2017; Talen 2002). Prescriptive work acknowledges that improved 'walkability' will presumably nudge humankind toward a 'sustainable' self-propelled normal condition. This includes many contributions, both empirical and normative, to literatures on active transport (in general) and walking (in particular). Compact neighbourhoods often curry favour, if only because increased population and job densities are 'a surrogate for greater transit availability, more walkable environments, mixed use and high accessibility', as noted in an early review paper by Giuliano and Narayan (2003, 2300)—at least for studies conducted in the continental United States. Careful work has also been done on how circulation patterns relate to the network of public and private domains, literally mapping the morphology of specific places and the extent to which people can move through them on foot—often described as the 'permeability' of landscapes (Jacobs 1994; Macdonald et al. 2018; Pafka and Dovey 2017). To this mix must be added examples mentioned earlier on complete streets and similar initiatives. Some critical pieces attempt to synthesise and cross-test the various toolkits and frameworks that purport to tell us about what constitutes a walkable place (e.g. Purciel et al. 2009; Shashank and Schuurman 2019). Finally, it is important to note that there are many 'allies' beyond the fields of UDLP whose work focuses on the experiential and context-specific qualities that seem so scarce in intervention-oriented bodies of knowledge (Brown 2017; Gehl 2006; Kärrholm et al. 2017; Lavadinho 2011; Middleton 2009; Österlund-Pötzsch 2010; Wunderlich 2008). We will return to both of these latter points in a moment.

### Digging into walk(ability) studies: three critical claims

The prospect of defining walkability is compelling, seductive, and perhaps even guileless. In scholarship, however, as noted by Shashank and Schuurman (2019), this work also tends to be reductive and opaque. Much of it focuses on 'functional' walking, downplaying or simply ignoring the more 'ludic' or leisure-driven practices examined from the 'new mobilities' perspective (such as Lavadinho 2011, 2014; Middleton 2009, 2010; Österlund-Pötzsch 2010, 2014). The three critical claims presented here fully acknowledge the undeniable intuitive appeal of walking—in terms of public health, social justice, and efficient use of scarce resources, especially as we collectively grapple with the devastating impacts of climate change—which accounts for public policy drawn up with noble intentions. Yet there is a tendency (perhaps a compulsion) toward an ideological 'package deal' in which walking is indissociable from the compact city. Walkability then ends up being defined based on information about walking behaviour as observed in certain contexts (chiefly urban) and done for particular reasons (chiefly non-discretionary). If my argument in favour of talking about walking 'beyond the city' is cheerfully skeptical, however, it has a grim rationale. Walkability cannot be dissociated from analogous 'medicalised' narratives in everyday life—as compellingly revealed by Crawford (1980)—and issues identified vis-à-vis other attempts to develop normalised evidence-based protocols. Parallels can be drawn here with what Holmes et al. (2006, 181) noted about how work done in good faith can nevertheless entail 'a strange process of eliminating some ways of knowing' through a Foucauldian 'regime of

truth’—i.e., a regimented and institutionalised narrative that precludes knowledge derived by methods that were not congruent with normalised ways of ascertaining ‘truth’.

To get beyond the cognitive and ideological traps I have identified, I present three claims. The first concerns what we apparently know about where and when walking takes place; the second concerns what seems to matter for ‘walkability’, and the tendency for (normative) walking studies to get ‘stuck’ in the city; the third offers a resolution by noting the scant attention paid to recreational mobilities in UDLP. By way of disclaimer for the paragraphs to follow, I do concentrate on the materially-wealthy countries of the Global North—particularly in North America, the U.K., Scandinavia, and continental Europe. This ‘OECD’ focus is used to reduce over-generalisation, since walking behaviour is often culturally contingent (not due to geography, but in terms of social norms and what Bourdieu [1979] theorised as ‘habitus’). Indeed, walking studies sometimes disregard (or at least fail to acknowledge) variations that might be linked to social practice, the relative costs of different forms of mobility, and/or aspects of topography and climate. That said, however, much of what we know about walking happens stems disproportionately (almost exclusively) from empirical work done in the Global North.<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Where walking happens

Discussions of where and why people walk often get scumbled with normative discussions of ‘walkability’. There *also* seems to be an ongoing (if not deliberate) ambivalence in both research and practice toward examining widespread patterns of walking behaviour that can be observed in suburban and/or periurban landscapes—i.e., any settings found ‘beyond the city’. Perhaps spaces that are ‘urban’ (whether built before motoring was widespread or deliberately made in recent decades to emulate the material-functional qualities of older places) simply get conflated with more automobile-oriented ‘suburban’ landscapes built since the 1940s in most OECD countries. Still, we seem to know less in UDLP about *how*, *why*, and *to what extent* people walk in places that are not ‘city-like’. Little work has been done, for instance, on what’s afoot in periurban contexts—including smaller towns and villages throughout the rural-urban fringe, as well as amenity landscapes to which people travel in great numbers for leisure activities. Consequently, a sort of environmental determinism has crept into debates—one that ignores or perhaps even denies the possibilities and the realities of walking in suburban and periurban space. Instead, a great deal of empirical and theoretical work has concentrated on dense, finely-grained urban contexts as privileged spaces for walking. The interventionist work of planning, design, and policy is thus constrained in ways akin to how Angelo and Wachsmuth (2015, 16, 20) have argued that ‘methodological cityism’ permeates studies of urban political ecology—including the following key issues:

*... an overwhelming analytical and empirical focus on the traditional city to the exclusion of other aspects of contemporary urbanization processes ... an analytical privileging, isolation and perhaps naturalization of the city in studies of urban processes where the non-city may also be significant.*

Bringing this to bear on discussions of where walking is likely to happen—including but not limited to the medicalised discourse of ‘walkability’—means that we should question an urban bias that manifests itself time and again in the normative (prescriptive) work of UDLP. Consider the convergence of walkability as something ‘knowable’ with discourses on compact urban form. Jensen et al. (2017) have suggested that males and females seem to react differently to deliberate ‘improvements’ in compact neighbourhoods, while Knight, Weaver, and Jones (2018, 10) show that walkability may somehow be biased against lower-income residents and racialised individuals through de-facto feedback loops, whereby ‘investments into walkable spaces strengthen demand for housing in those locations, thereby driving up both the costs of entry and the costs of living in walkable urban environments’. This is a rare attempt to differentiate ‘walkability’ by asking ‘for whom’—and yet attempts to derive ‘walkability’ frameworks (e.g.

Dovey and Pafka 2020, Ewing and Handy 2009, Talen and Koschinsky 2014) tend to be based on how undifferentiated studies of how the ‘average person’ might behave on a city street.<sup>7</sup>

Where does walking happen, then? Much of the scholarship in UDLP suggests that compact urban form is the privileged and perhaps only space in which walking and other ‘soft’ modes of mobility are practicable, as if self-propelled movement is a simple function of the degree of density, activity mix, and de-facto ‘urbanity’ seen in the city neighbourhoods lauded by Jane Jacobs (1961) over a half-century ago. This can become ideological—just as Millington (2016, 720) has lamented a tendency to generate propaganda that he terms ‘cultural cityism’—i.e. ‘nostalgia and/or longing for the city and urban life that is expressed, in broad terms, through a fascination with and fetish for commodified images of the twentieth-century Western metropolis’. A recent bibliometric analysis of over 100 peer-reviewed publications on walkability (Wang and Yang 2019) reveals the preponderance of ‘city’ and ‘urban’ studies, also noting the paucity of work on rural contexts. It thus appears that there is a clustering or a knowledge structure that links physical affordances supportive of walking—and the case for improving them (e.g. complete streets)—with dense, finely-mixed, ‘traditional’ or prewar city contexts. These links are not necessarily causal, but they are associative in ways that approach what Theodor Adorno termed *Verblendungszusammenhang*—the delusion that the world is as we perceive it to be.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. What matters (supportiveness)

The desire to develop evidence-based arguments is not unusual. It is appealing to think that we can ‘figure out’ what matters and thence manipulate the material and/or experiential qualities that support walking for various purposes. Among the many conceptual tools available, ‘affordances’ are especially salient (Aradi, Halvorsen Thorén, and Fjørtoft 2016; Kyttä 2008) as well as related notions such as the ‘supportiveness’ of space (Benediktsson 2017; Brookfield, Ward Thompson, and Scott 2017; Brown 2017; Dovey and Pafka 2020; Frick 2007; Gehl 2006; Lavadinho 2011; Mehta 2014; Wunderlich 2008). We must nevertheless think carefully about how explanation matters in the interventionist work of UDLP. To what extent, for instance, should we credit empirical studies suggesting that people walk not so much because of how well the context ‘fits’ with needs and desires—as suggested by the work of Kevin Lynch (1981) and Kat Holmes (2018)—but because of an individual’s lack of access to a motor vehicle? How do we meaningfully account for self-conscious decisions made to situate oneself strategically in space (in terms of dwelling location vis-à-vis places of work, schooling, etc.), moral or altruistic rationales, and/or the inherent ‘supportiveness’ (or positive affordances) of certain material settings?

Two pieces stand out in recent scholarship for raising questions about the pitfalls of developing reductionist design frameworks in support of walkability. The first is by Marnie Purciel and colleagues (2009), who developed an observational protocol which was applied to a stratified sample of 588 blocks in New York City, developing what they describe as ‘objective and scaleable measures of urban design’. This work was prompted by a methodological conundrum: ‘the unfeasibility of conducting field observations across large areas and the lack of validated objective measures’ (Purciel et al. 2009, 457), given the labour-intensive nature of the fieldwork required to document various settings and to generate empirical data from the experiences of nonspecialist users (typically through face-to-face surveys or similarly more-or-less ethnographic exercises). Promising though their efforts might seem, the conundrum remains, as made more explicit in a second noteworthy study by Aateka Shashank and Nadine Schuurman (2019). Their methodology involved reviewing and deconstructing various published indices to consider (i) definitions, (ii) the key variables that are identified (and associated ontologies), and (iii) the results produced by different approaches to ‘understanding’ walkability. Through empirical demonstrations based on 22 neighbourhoods in the Canadian metropolis of Vancouver, they reveal that three widely-used indices of walkability yield strikingly different ‘walkability scores’,

concluding quite reasonably that ‘walkability indices cannot be replicated wholesale across different contexts’ (Shashank and Schuurman 2019, 153).

My second claim, then, is not one that simply falls into the ‘nice-to-know’ basket that nourishes empirical work in every field. We need to have fuller cross-disciplinary conversations about how and why people walk in settings that are not city-like with reference to the configurations of the built environment. This responds to my first claim, i.e., the need to know more about walking behaviour that takes place in suburban, periurban, and other contexts that cannot be described as ‘city’ settings. Excellent and promising work is thus found in the relational typology of ‘interseriality’ as developed by Kärrholm et al. (2017), and in the empirical work of scholars such as Brown (2017), Lilja (2022), Middleton (2009, 2010), and Quellet (2019). Much of this is, however, still only exploratory or rather speculative in nature (e.g. Chan et al. 2021; Lavadinho 2011, 2014; Österlund-Pötzsch 2010, 2014; Quellet 2019; Wunderlich 2008). Fortunately, within UDLP, sympathetic contributions can readily be found, such as Hess (2019), Kashef (2011), and Li, Chi, and Jackson (2015). It must also be acknowledged that some work has also been done ‘elsewhere’ (e.g. Bleic et al. 2017; Li, Chi, and Jackson 2015; Stewart et al. 2016)—albeit focusing on strictly ‘recreational’ mobilities in tourism destinations. In sum, greater convergence is needed among researchers working in the ‘new mobilities’ framework and the many others who do not (yet) do so.

### 3. *Why people walk*

Walking is of course not merely a functional activity. It is also performative (expressing status-affirming impulses and expectations, such as the conspicuous demonstration of leisure time), personal (in terms of wellbeing, joy, or sensory richness), and sometimes even political (such as Syrian refugees who literally had to walk to freedom in recent years). Knowledge about why people walk is somewhat uneven, however. Perhaps this is due to the overwhelming empirical focus in UDLP on obligatory ‘home-to-work’ trips that dominate empirical studies of everyday mobilities. This may also be attributed to the politics of data collection: we measure and count phenomena that are perceived to count in terms of economic multipliers or easy-to-implement improvements that satisfy planning goals. Good work has been done on different kinds of walking and walking needs (e.g. Alfonso 2005; Careri 2002; Gatersleben and Andrews 2013; Quellet 2019; Victor and Klein 2015), but intervention-oriented work still focuses on necessary or non-discretionary behaviour, such as walking to the train station as part of the trip from home to work, while disregarding walking that takes place for what Gehl (1996 [1971]) helpfully characterised as ‘optional’ and/or ‘social’ reasons. Again, we stand to benefit from cross-pollination with rich-picture contributions. Examples include Johnston (2008), Kytä (2008), Mitra and Manaugh (2020), and Torres et al. (2020) on the experiences of youth and teenagers, studies of recreation within metropolitan regions and at the rural-urban fringe (e.g. Curry 1994; Lindsey et al. 2008; Nordh et al. 2017), and work on the haptic or sensory qualities that one may experience while moving through the landscape on foot (Brown 2017; Careri 2002; Feld 2005; Gatersleben and Andrews 2013; Middleton 2009, 2010; Wunderlich 2008).

Perhaps UDLP studies should simply also borrow from an established disciplinary norm concerning who uses public transport (and why). It is considered a matter of fact in transport planning that some trips are taken by so-called ‘choice riders’ while others are taken by individuals who are ‘captive’—in the sense of having no option but to take the bus, even if it only comes once every so often, and the trip will therefore be longer, less convenient, and more frustrating. The importance of ‘discretionary’ behaviour as part of an activity continuum is widely recognised in studies of public transport and automobile use, such as the U.S. National Household Travel Survey (<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/nhts.cfm>), which has been conducted occasionally since 1969. It is also central to analyses of how people move through public space, such

as the now-classic work of Jan Gehl (1996 [1971]), suggesting that ‘life between buildings’ includes necessary, optional, and social activities, as noted above—an argument since elaborated as a normative call for ‘life, space, and buildings’, in that order of emphasis (Gehl 2006). Useful insights stand to be gained if we focus with renewed energy on discretionary walking, which should be understood as a subset of recreational mobilities, even if a great deal of walking has nothing to do with tourism and leisure. As has been done in studies of public transport, however, this work entails thinking about what we mean by discretionary walking—and for whom!

To recapitulate this third claim, tensions arise in normative debates on ‘walkability’ as both ontology and interpretative concept when we consider the nexus of (a) how studies of walking done in and for UDLP often over-examine ‘necessary’ (non-discretionary) mobilities, (b) how UDLP studies of ‘walkability’ concentrate too narrowly on ‘city’ contexts (or selectively identify ‘urban’ characteristics when describing how places support and afford walking), and (c) recreational mobilities as matters of fact in all sorts of contexts. To the extent that our ersatz knowledge of ‘walkability’ in UDLP has largely been derived from studies of walking behaviour in city contexts, with an emphasis on non-discretionary mobilities (notably home-to-work trips), information about walking that takes place in non-urban contexts and/or for discretionary purposes might challenge and even destabilise what we believe we know about ‘walkability’.

### A five-point agenda for getting beyond methodological cityism

This review has identified preoccupations, concepts, and methods that hold promise for critical engagement with recreational mobilities in UDLP, which are somewhat at odds with the current policy thrust toward densification, compact urban form, and so-called ‘15-minute’ neighbourhoods. This is cause for concern, as some evidence suggests that households may ‘compensate’ when living in dense(r) contexts by regularly travelling to other more spacious contexts, whether for holidays or by keeping a second home (see *e.g.* Große, Fertner, and Carstensen 2019; Luka 2008; Qviström, Bengtsson, and Vicenzotti 2016; Strandell and Hall 2015). Indeed, discussions of the compact city cannot ignore patterns of movement on various temporal scales to the rural-urban fringe (*i.e.* amenity settings). This serves to reinforce my call for attending to the diversity of physical places in which people walk (*i.e.* materialities and associated experiential qualities) as well as the diversity of recreational/discretionary practices in which people engage, and the possibilities for planning, policy, and design that may arise. To close, I present a provisional five-point agenda of promising directions for fundamental and applied research in UDLP and related fields.

1. With reference to the normative agenda-setting that drives UDLP, if we want people to walk *more*, it is not enough to merely provide positive affordances (*i.e.* by fitting out everyday spaces in supportive ways); new insights and strategies are needed.
2. Getting beyond methodological cityism requires that we get out of ‘city’ contexts. Even if the notion of ‘the city’ is understood to include suburban spaces that were built up after the middle of the 20th century, more cross-disciplinary work is needed on where and why people walk.
3. In methodological terms, and to help resolve the first and second points, the conventional work done in UDLP must be infused with rich-picture approaches, including ethnography, crowdsourcing, and ‘walking the land’ (see *e.g.* Brown 2017; Feld 2005; Chan et al. 2021; Ingold 2011; Middleton 2009, 2010); moreover, researchers need to talk to experienced practitioners and policy-makers in diverse contexts—not just big cities!
4. Cross-pollinating work is needed on questions of health and justice as well as wellbeing, including physical safety, concerns about risk and crime, and the uneven access that diverse publics have to opportunities to walk. If the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects initially

seemed to offer fresh opportunities to address questions of spatial justice, only a few forays have been made into continuity and change since 2019. We should deepen knowledge about popular uses and expectations of the everyday ‘milieu de vie’, such as how recreational mobilities intersect with residential mobilities (what might be called ‘neighbourhood’ impacts). In broader terms, we must be explicitly mindful about avoiding the temptations of overly ‘medicalising’ walking behaviour, where work on ‘walkability’ may lead us, given similar issues that arose in healthcare studies in the 1990s with so-called ‘evidence-based design’ (e.g. Holmes et al. 2006). All of this should be framed by enduring questions of social justice: for whom certain places are ‘walkable’, under what conditions, and with what sorts of relations to cultural norms and social practice—not least because the paucity of empirical work on walking in the global South, as noted above, and given the growing interest in studies of how to decolonise infrastructure, transportation, and mobility (see e.g. Herrmann-Lunecke, Mora, and Sagaris 2020; Johnston 2008; Knight, Weaver, and Jones 2018; LaDuke and Cowen 2020; Sheller 2018).

5. Finally, we must remember that, as in all cross-disciplinary endeavours, we must anticipate and constructively address the tendency for mobility studies to find expression through the established ‘silos’ of knowledge production. To the extent that the discussions that matter fall into more ‘self-contained’ spaces, interfacing less than they should with other disciplinary-epistemological-methodological currents, we should explore how walking beyond the city can engender action-research and research-creation work.

This agenda ultimately seeks to engage recreational mobilities through my claim that debates on self-propelled movement in cities and suburbs has tended to focus too narrowly on necessary or utilitarian (thus non-discretionary) activity revealing how both the materialities and indissociable experiential qualities of recreational mobilities are matters of concern for landscape studies, urban policy, public health, and related fields of professional intervention that are (or should be) linked to critical work on mobilities. Walking engenders many descriptive, normative, and speculative debates. We might thereby approach the dense, compact city (as phenomenon and as normative impulse in spatial planning) in new ways, by getting beyond the city in our own scholarship and practice.

## Notes

1. See OECD/EC (2020), Figure 4.1 (113), which notes that by 2015, over half of the total population for countries in the World Bank’s country-income categories of ‘lower-middle’, ‘middle’, and ‘high’ was already living in metropolitan areas, with these proportions tending to increase. Similarly, UN-Habitat estimates that approximately one-third of the total global population was urban in 2020, with at least 2.59 billion people living in metropolitan areas with more than 300 000 inhabitants (UNHSP 2020).
2. See Appleyard, Gerson, and Lintell (1981), Cullen (1961), Jacobs (1961), and Whyte (1982).
3. See the delightful and well-travelled chapter originally entitled ‘Marcher dans la ville’ in the first volume of *L’invention du quotidien* (de Certeau 1994 [1980]).
4. To be sure, many UDLP studies of people moving through space explicitly consider motivation or purpose (e.g. Ewing and Cervero 2001, 2010; Frank et al. 2010; Mitra and Manaugh 2020; Saelens, Sallis, and Frank 2003)—albeit sometimes only after the fact as recognition of study limitations (e.g. Piatkowski et al. 2019, 57)—and acknowledge the importance of leisure and recreation, particularly for walking.
5. See for instance Boschmann and Brady (2013), Curry (1994), Moreno-Monroy, Schiavina, and Veneri (2021), and Sieverts (2003).
6. Wang and Yang (2019) noted in their detailed review that most published studies on walking and walkability are limited to only certain contexts in Europe and North America, with surprisingly little on developing countries and the Global South more generally; similar findings were reported by Herrmann-Lunecke, Mora, and Sagaris (2020) and Wood (2022), although both of these latter pieces are notable exceptions.
7. See the empirically-grounded critique articulated by Shashank and Schuurman (2019).
8. See e.g. Heynen (1999).

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