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'Create, Design and Maintain' Healthy Urban Design for Walking

ABSTRACT

Viewed through the perspectives of environmental, social and economic sustainability, climate, and health, walking emerges as a central element of accessibility and as a mode of transportation. It has an explicit role in daily travel, involving aspects of safety, physical and mental well-being, and environmental sustainability. The configuration of the built environment—its creation, design, and maintenance—plays a crucial role as either a facilitator or obstacle to urban outdoor activities like walking. Notably, walking bears benefits for individuals across diverse environments, fostering improved health and active ageing and averting a range of negative health-related outcomes. However, different demographic groups present distinct needs, demands, requirements, and motivational factors related to walking. Moreover, various built environments, influenced by climate-related factors, societal demands, and distinct mobility cultures, may align more or less with the demands of specific groups.

The PhD research focus is on the 'social and spatial planning' dimensions of walking as a mode of transport aiming to reflect on how to 'Create, Design and Maintain' long-term healthy urban environments from the perspective of the needs and demands of specific groups of pedestrians. Walking is an important mode of transport for societal research, planning and design and can contribute to increased social sustainability, urban development, and reduce land use for transport, as well as getting closer to global sustainability goals, the Paris Agreement, Agenda 2030 and the Vision Zero within the transport sector. Given the importance of pedestrian travel to achieve overall national and international goals as well as the central and clear role and function in daily travel that travelling by foot entails, trans- and multidisciplinary work with a focus on the pedestrian is highly important.

By combining knowledge from health, architecture, societal planning, and technology, as well as different methodologies, the research project has the overarching long-term societal goal of improving injury prevention as well as improving health promotion. The initial, and current, phase of the PhD research encompasses developing a scientific literature review compiling the current state of knowledge of the most poignant problems and priorities in the broad field of walking as a mode of transport in the 15-minute compact city, a concept that gained popularity as a solution during the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal is to establish a chronological overview of relevant articles and provide a starting point for future research.

Subsequently, a mixed-methods approach will be employed by combining quantitative data from a survey alongside qualitative data from focus group interviews/workshops. Survey with residents to investigate how they perceive various aspects of urban mobility, including safety, security, aesthetics, logistics, etc. Workshops with local policymakers will aim for local policymakers to address and connect problems to solutions. Finally, current documents and indicators related to built-up areas/public spaces of relevance and services (planning, health, & environment) will be reviewed and analysed. The compiled results of all collected data will result in collective outputs for recommendations or public service 'toolkits' focusing on population mobility.

Key Words: Walking as a Mode of Transport; Pedestrians Needs; Health; Urban Planning.