



To: Place Directorate

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Subject: Essential Evidence on a page No. 145: Transport walking and the importance of urban neighbourhoods

Top line: Stressing the importance of the home neighbourhood, the origin of most walking trips, is a way to meet the needs of local populations when planning for walking. Residents may know well their neighbourhood and give it a meaning that makes them particularly relevant users of these spaces. Acknowledging this may contribute to improve walking conditions that better fit all.

Western society has been adopting a more physically inactive lifestyle, partly influenced and sustained by the urban environment. Today, promoting active transport is a primary aim of most European cities for improving the quality of the environment at a local level and with the further aim to increase residents' health and wellbeing. Yet, scientific studies on the pedestrian friendliness of European urban areas are few.

A 2016 study in Malmo, Sweden, stressed the perspective of neighbourhood residents, as they are the main users of these urban spaces.¹ The residential neighbourhood is a place with which people interact on a daily basis, is assumed to be where most walking for transport occurs and is also crucial in the development of building friendship bonds. The primary aim of this study was to explore the relation between perceived neighbourhood qualities and walking (self-reported intentions & behaviours) as a mean of transport, and the importance of emotional aspects in that relation. Participants accessed an online survey. The survey included questions addressing: walking intentions; walking behaviour; individual factors (eg age, gender); perceptions of neighbourhood physical and social qualities; neighbourhood attachment; and the other factors (ie pace of life, stimulation v boring, and relaxing v distressing).

Previous research has shown that perceived physical and social neighbourhood qualities, as well as individual factors, affect walking intentions and behaviours to get to/from destinations. Study outcomes suggest that the above associations are, to some extent, influenced by emotional responses to the residential neighbourhood. Although neighbourhood attachment did not affect directly participants' walking patterns, it seems to induce their appraisal of the neighbourhood as more stimulating and more relaxing which, in turn, encouraged them to spend more time walking.

In this Malmo study, the strong focus of city planning on the city centre and on destinations such as public squares, retail areas and sports facilities seems to result in a pedestrian network adjusted mostly to visitors. Walking to local destinations, such as neighbourhood centres and bus stops, are less explored in these strategies. Urban form characteristics mostly found in semi-peripheral areas such as underpasses, discontinuous walking routes and wide and heavily trafficked roads are mentioned as barriers to walking, but the suggested actions leave these problems unresolved. The focus on emotional components of the relationship toward the residential neighbourhood redirects current research towards a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity behind the daily action of walking to destinations.

¹ Ferreira, I., et al, 2016 Transport walking in urban neighbourhoods – impact of perceived neighbourhood qualities and emotional relationship, *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 150, 60-69.