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SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE FOR 'PEDESTRIANS FIRST'

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This publication brings the emancipation of the pedestrian one step further. A must for all decision makers and those involved in traffic and transportation.

Rob Methorst writes a monumental work full of discoveries. He presents new data and recalculated findings already known in smaller circles. For example, we walk 40 percent more often and for longer than according to current Dutch statistics. Four times as many pedestrian accidents are related to falls than to traffic accidents.

His doctoral dissertation, "Exploring the Pedestrian Realm" ("Exploring the Pedestrians Realm"), is a scientific test of the experience he has accumulated, which spans thirty years. His promotor was Bert van Wee, Technical University Delft.

For the first time, someone is systematically investigating what pedestrians need, what their situation is and what improvements are possible. Methorst builds on the project 'Pedestrians Quality Needs' of the European partnership COST. He was lead author of the 2010 final report.

His now completed PhD research involves many areas of science that affect walking and sojourning in public space in one way or another. Being able to walk turns out to be an important source of wealth and well-being, with governments as essential players in this.

Urgency demonstrated

Knowledge gaps have been filled or mapped because all available data are now in a row. In the process, figures had to be estimated regularly, after careful analysis and interpretation.

The fact that movements in public space are now more sharply defined has two effects. On the one hand, walking turns out to be a much larger phenomenon than the dominant policy and research community had previously thought, and this was already in play long before the Covid-19 pandemic struck that got more people to walk more consciously. On the other hand, pedestrian problems appear to be more extensive than many people think. For example, over 20 percent of the population experiences limitations that contribute to them avoiding walking and going outside. For more than 10 percent, it is even true that their participation in social life is (severely) limited.

Disconcerting

Some observations are downright disconcerting. While methods of influencing behaviour are being monitored and researched everywhere in the world of traffic and transportation, there is no study whatsoever on walking. The success of measures that reward "desirable" behavior (walk!) and discourage "undesirable" behavior (sit less, on the couch or in your car) have never been studied. No scientific research measures the results of communication projects aimed at facilitating walking.

Dichotomy

The sum of the data leads Methorst to this firm statement: "Without more serious attention to pedestrians, I foresee an increasing division in society. With strong traffic participants on the

one hand, and more vulnerable people on the street on the other. An undesirable, unsafe combination."

Potentially influential

The effect of this publication? Methorst himself says that far too little of the knowledge that has been available for some time already, has found its way to the right places and into the right heads. For municipalities, in particular, it would be good if knowledge transfer and the exchange of experience gained wings. Strengthen therefore leadership on this point and make mutual learning an inviting, attractive urgency.

Making this study accessible requires attention. The voluminous publication is a purely scientific exercise for researchers at home and abroad. But this new knowledge is not sufficiently on a platter for those who want to improve walking conditions. Practical application requires new collaboration from those involved.

Put pedestrians first

The research results are grist to the mill for the growing group of stakeholders who put walkers at number one. Pedestrians are their priority, followed by cyclists, public transport users and car drivers. According to this publication, they can turn five types of organizational knobs: conduct fact-finding, strengthen professionalism, ensure tight management and distribution of resources plus manpower, realize optimal communication, improve implementation organization.

Covid-19

In the midst of the hurricane of the Covid-19 pandemic, in early 2021, predicting what the world will look like in the coming years is impossible. Yet for the short term, there are extremely rewarding activities that can be done. Solving current bottlenecks for walkers and building expertise on improvements to their conditions. Who knows, crucial for the longer term.
