Editorial: Disabilities and vulnerable road users in the urban environment

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By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and
mental health conditions

An ageing population will lead to more age-related con-
dition and a higher birth rate in some countries, the cities
of 2050 will include more people at both ends of the age spec-
trum and a capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human
settlement planning and management in all countries.

By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and
accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women
and children, older persons and persons with disabilities’
(United Nations, 2015).

Taking up this challenge, this themed issue on ‘Disabilities
and vulnerable road users in the urban environment’ draws on
insights from European research leaders and campaigners.

By 2050 urbanisation will have intensified, with over 80% of
the populations of Europe, North America, Australia and
New Zealand living in urban areas. Due to rising life expect-
ancy and a higher birth rate in some countries, the cities
of 2050 will include more people at both ends of the age spec-
trum. An ageing population will lead to more age-related con-
ditions – notably, eye disease, dementia, physical disability and
mental health conditions – with implications for urban access,
health, safety and wellbeing. At the same time, more children
in urban areas will create other challenges for the pedestrian
environment: more buggies, child-related road safety issues and
access to childcare facilities and schools.

The growth of urban areas around the world will create par-
ticular pressures for city planners and policymakers. Although
the need to promote social inclusion through planning and
design is becoming more widely recognised, some other trends
are making that goal more difficult to attain. One example,
highlighted by the recent report from Lord Holmes of
Richmond (Holmes, 2016) is shared space, the deliberate
removal of demarcations between vehicles and pedestrians.
Shared space was originally promoted as a means of improving
the pedestrian environment but a growing body of evidence
demonstrates that it can create an environment that is hostile
to vulnerable pedestrians (Moody and Melia, 2014), particu-
larly visually impaired pedestrians (Norgate, 2012).

Improving the urban environment for these vulnerable and
excluded groups will be a key challenge for the planners of the
future. So how can any interested readers reflect this in their
own work? We argue here that the design of urban land use
and public transport access for such heterogeneous populations
demands collaborative multi-professional working between
urban designers, urban planners, users, researchers, campaign
groups, policy-makers and managers.

Reflecting the research angle, within this issue, the perspectives
taken by our authors on will enable readers to consider par-
ticular groups – in particular, blind and partially sighted
(Sochor and Nikitas, 2016; Bates, 2016), disabled cyclists
(Hickman, 2016) and older people (aged 65+ years) (Curl
et al., 2016).

Wherever you practice, we sincerely hope that you will envision
ways to further expand or deepen your multi-professional
partnerships to create new models of urban design.

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