

Newsletter Project Inclusive Public Space

December 2022

'Inclusive Public Space', what is it about?

In the project, which started in 2019, we investigate the accessibility of public space and in particular the accessibility of streets, footpaths and roads for pedestrians. We look at whether people with a disability, the elderly and carers of small children use sidewalks and streets. Or that they are excluded from it because of the lack of accessibility. We also look at the problems they experience and how they deal with them. We investigate which laws and regulations exist and whether they are effective in combating the exclusion of public space. The project aims to raise awareness about this form of exclusion and to point citizens and governments to opportunities to do something about it.

The project is led by the University of Leeds (UK) and is being implemented in five countries: the United Kingdom, India, Kenya, the United States and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands we look especially at Almere and Utrecht.

The project is being carried out in the Netherlands under the responsibility of Disability Studies in the Netherlands. Dick Houtzager (project leader) and Edwin Luitzen de Vos (researcher) are involved in the project.

What have we done so far?

Legal research

What laws and regulations apply when a municipality is going to design, maintain and enforce sidewalks and streets? What effect do they have on the accessibility of public space? Those were the questions we explored in the legal research. We looked at the Buildings Decree, at municipal rules in zoning plans and design decrees, and at commonly used guidelines and handbooks. We also looked at the forthcoming Environmental Act. The results will be published in 2023.

Interviews

In 2020 and 2021, we interviewed forty-two people with various disabilities about their experiences in public space. You may have been one of them. Then you have explained what obstacles you have to deal with as a pedestrian.

We also held group discussions with more than thirty policy makers, advocates and lawyers. We talked about measures that municipalities and others are taking to improve accessibility and make public space more inclusive. As an involved professional, you may have spoken to us about this.

These conversations have given us a good picture of the problems people experience when they use public space. And of the impact on their lives.

Obstacles:

On the footpath: posts and fences, rubbish and waste, bicycles and wheelie bins, work, terraces and billboards.

The footpath itself: ramps and thresholds.

Impact on daily life:

Injuries, fear, stress, frustration, more time, loss of dignity and lower self-esteem.

Isolation as a pedestrian, less choice in mobility and dependency.

Film recordings

We are now making videos of situations that participants in Utrecht and Almere experience on the street. This way we can show what the problems with accessibility are.

Upcoming activities

Get feedback

In June 2023 we will organize meetings to discuss the preliminary results of the project. We will invite you by then to give your opinion on the results. We use those conversations to make the results more concrete.

Publications

We have published about the project a few times now.

Edwin Luitzen de Vos and Dick Houtzager gave workshops on accessibility of pedestrian areas on 13 October at the National Pedestrian Congress in Zwolle

<https://www.nationaalvoetgangerscongres.nl/terugblik-2022>. Together with participants, they examined the city center of Zwolle for accessibility.

In an article in the magazine Handicap & Recht <https://www.bjutijdschrift.nl/tijdschrift/henr/2021/2> (login required), Dick Houtzager looks at what the upcoming Environmental Planning Act means for the accessibility of sidewalks and streets.

In the journal The Journal of Public Space

<https://www.journalpublicspace.org/index.php/jps/article/view/1603> (in English), researchers describe different aspects of shared spaces for pedestrians.

And in the fall of 2023, a special edition of the English-language Laws magazine

<https://www.mdpi.com/journal/laws> about the project will be published.

Want to stay informed?

Check :

<https://disabilitystudies.nl/onderzoek/inclusive-public-space>

<https://essl.leeds.ac.uk/dir-record/research-projects/1071/inclusive-public-space-law-universality-and-difference-in-the-accessibility-of-streets>

<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/787258>

<https://disabilitystudies.nl/blog/de-straat-op>

You're welcome to pose questions by email: ips-project@disabilitystudies.nl .

You are receiving this newsletter because you were involved in the 'Inclusive Public Space' project of the University of Leeds and Disability Studies in the Netherlands.

We wish you happy holidays and a happy new year!

Dick Houtzager,
Edwin Luitzen de Vos