

How has COVID-19 influenced engagement with and attitudes towards the pedestrian environment?

Leadership in Action

Context:

A high degree of fragility within the urban system was exposed by the pandemic (Zecca et al., 2020); increased experimentation with space was permitted (Florida et al., 2021) and continuing impacts may require a repositioning of the high street (Nanda et al., 2021). Concomitantly, active transport was propelled into a social and political sphere that it previously had not reached (Budd and Ison, 2020). Simultaneously, the pandemic can be said to have increased problems for the older generation (Brennan et al., 2020). Coronavirus physical distancing measures are likely to have had a negative influence on older people's mental and physical health (Aubertin-Leheudre and Rolland, 2020); the triple-pronged issue of isolation, anxiety and depression presented in this age group (Brennan et al., 2020).

Methodologies:

A survey was populated online that was applicable for all age groups, with environment and community groups in the project area helping to disseminate the link. Focus groups were run in conjunction with a community group, with respondents being from the older age group only. The aims of the study are summarised as:

- Gain an understanding of behaviours and attitudes within the pedestrian context due to the initial lockdown & emergency measures
- Investigate how the older population was impacted within a pedestrian frame by COVID-19
- The wants and needs of the future within the pedestrian environment

Leadership in Action Outcomes: Confidence on skills pre, during and post LIA



As shown by the chart to the left, confidence on the key skills of the LIA all improved, most notably those of communication and influencing due to me moving beyond my comfort zone and talking to a wide variety of people and organisations.

Research Outcomes:

Behaviours and Attitudes during initial lockdown & emergency measures

- Walking and wheeling were reported to be more common during the initial lockdown
- Walking became a form of escapism
- Instances of conflict over personal space in the pedestrian environment
- COVID-19 emergency measures had a favourable effect on perceived safety, both within the coronavirus context and from traffic
- Fair weather a key factor in behaviours and attitudes to being outside
- High levels of stress were reported by some of the older population during this time in relation to being outdoors and COVID-19 risk
- Older people felt attitudes of the younger public towards them changed: "they did use to make way once they saw you had grey hair"

How the older population was impacted within a pedestrian frame by COVID-19

- Continuing sense of fear and apprehension in urban and crowded space for some: "there were lots of people about and I fled"
- Visitation frequency to urban spaces reduced for some
- Change of attitudes of other members of the public

Wants and Needs of the Future

- 88.4% of survey respondents stated that the idea of a 20-minute neighbourhood appeals to them to some extent
- Those who identified as living in rural areas or villages did not see 20-minute neighbourhoods as viable or realistic
- Some older people not reporting a want or need to go back to urban spaces, other activities have subsided
- Reliance on car and desire for free parking persisting

Further Research Areas of Interest

- Tracking of experiences of older people in busy pedestrian spaces as a 'post-covid' mentality sets in, or not
- 20-minute neighbourhood design actualities
- Mental vs. physical wellbeing benefits marketed in pedestrian environment

References

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