

Walk21-V: Cities for People

The Fifth International Conference on Walking in the 21st Century: Copenhagen, Denmark, June 9th-11th 2004

Conference Conclusions

Achieving the vision

What are the political structures that need to be in place, and the economic arguments that need to be won, in order to create cities for people – i.e. cities in which walking is successfully integrated into overall strategies?

1. Cities don't just happen: they are an expression of our mental and social topography, reflecting a community's values, sense of place and of belonging. Leaders with visions for liveable cities put people first, aiming for equity and community in order to bring about a civilised, dignified and compassionate place.

2. The scale and speed of implementing a vision is heavily influenced by the levels of trust and confidence that exist between the community, professionals and elected members. The practitioner's role is to inspire a vision in politicians by showing them how to make a difference; and to inspire a vision in the community by letting people know what to ask for, how to ask for it, and that it is not unreasonable to ask for cities that work.

3. In Cities for People there is more to walking than walking: staying, playing, watching, talking, smiling ... We must stop just thinking about how fast our feet are moving and start listening to our hearts and studying the faces of our cities to see if they are alive and well.

Urban quality of life

How can we consult and involve people in the development of healthy, safe, inclusive and life-affirming urban environments?

4. Streets are public spaces, not just transport corridors and can account for as much as 80% of space in the city. Creative and imaginative use of that space is needed to make it work, by giving priority first to 'life' and then to 'spaces' and finally to 'buildings'.

5. Giving priority to 'life' means rejecting the 60 km/h landscapes that are threatening and desolate for pedestrians, and instead creating the 5 km/h landscapes that encourage us to explore the city on foot. The health recommendation that we should walk for half an hour per day requires supportive environments for physical activity, which make it attractive for us to open our front doors and step out into our neighbourhoods.

6. In cities throughout the world, socially disadvantaged people depend disproportionately on the provision of public space for leisure and recreation opportunities. Planning for high quality public space is a way of tackling social inequality and environmental injustice, giving people dignity through design.

7. Many of the places recognised as being Cities for People have done so through the mechanism of an office for public space or urban design. These departments combine or oversee the traditional disciplines of 'roads' and 'parks', enabling them to co-ordinate activities, facilitate networks and information flow, provide funds for implementation and collect data to measure progress. A vital element of this is a commitment to meaningful dialogue and partnership with the community.

Architecture and design

What are the strategies and techniques that can be applied to create and maintain liveable spaces and places, and how can we learn from international examples of best practice?

8. Cities for people have a clear structure and character; they are compact, diverse, connected, sustainable and animated – and thereby engage the senses and are equitable.

9. The Development of low density, car-based suburbs is expensive, inefficient and inconvenient and does not develop any sense of identity or community. Showcasing city centre pedestrian precincts is valuable, but it is important also to look at neighbourhoods on the fringes of cities, where walking is so often hampered by excessive distances and unforgiving design.

10. There are many tools that can be used to create and maintain liveable spaces and places, such as planning for accessibility and connectivity; and focusing on people's needs in the provision of lighting, seating, signage, water, art and events. Other tools used to 'let the people know what it could be like' include closing main streets on certain days, or even laying red carpet down pedestrian streets to show their importance. The aim is not to change the world but make it a little better everyday.

Issues for the future

1. To use delegate expertise at Walk21 conferences to act as a catalyst for ideas and change in a community.
2. To learn more about how to read and interpret the mental and social topography of a city by looking at its form, in order to understand better how to produce a welcoming and inviting experience that people can enjoy.
3. To encourage practitioners, community representatives and politicians not only to showcase their projects, but also to share their personal testaments of how they have brought about change.
4. An international platform is needed to case study best practice and exchange ideas.

Rodney Tolley, Director, Walk21
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Walk21 Copenhagen

Feedback Evaluation

Attendance

48% of delegates had **heard about the conference direct from Walk21**. (18% direct email, 12% from Walk21 web site, 9% from direct flyer, 9% from announcement at a previous Walk21 conference).

30% of delegates had heard about the conference by word of mouth and 8% from other emails, list serves or web sites.

31% of delegates had **attended a previous Walk21 conference**.

97% of delegates said that they **would attend a future Walk21 conference**.

All of the delegates who had been to a previous Walk21 conference said that they would come again to another.

96% of those who had not been to a Walk21 event said that they would come to another.

Conference Themes

74% considered the conference theme **Achieving the Vision** to be either Excellent or Good.

90% considered the conference theme **Urban Quality of Life** to be either Excellent or Good.

90% considered the conference theme **Architecture and Design** to be either Excellent or Good.

Key Note, Plenary and Breakout Sessions

96% considered the **content** of the sessions to be either Excellent or Good.

92% considered the **quality of presentations** to be either Excellent or Good.

80% considered the **balance of different topic areas** to be either Excellent or Good.

85% considered the **international representation** to be either Excellent or Good.

92% considered the **catering** to be either Excellent or good.

97% considered the **refreshment breaks** to be either Excellent or good.

93% considered the **venue** to be either Excellent or good.