

Shared space study

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Shared space schemes for integrated street design – where segregation between cars, pedestrians and other road users are reduced or removed – have little benefit for street users, finds research led by Professor Rob Imrie from King's College London. The report, released by the Thomas Pocklington Trust, also finds that local authorities are failing to engage with people who may be disadvantaged by the schemes, such as those with sight loss and other disabilities.

"There is no clear evidence about how shared space schemes will work or what effect they will have on people's behavior," says Professor Imrie. "Yet local authorities assume their benefits, and schemes have been going ahead with the concerns of people with sight loss barely heard."

The study, 'Shared space and sight loss: policies and practices in English local authorities' interviewed policy officers, and others, in ten local authorities and followed three case studies in London boroughs. It looked at why local authorities adopt the schemes and whether evidence from sight loss groups is used to inform the process.

The study reveals that there is insufficient evidence to back up claims for the benefits of shared space, and there was a 'believability gap' among access officers and people with sight loss, meaning that some of the most vulnerable street users may end up avoiding the area. The report also found that public consultation usually took place after the decision to implement the schemes had been taken, with little or no involvement of people with sight loss, or other disabilities, before the decision was made.

"Imagine walking through an area full of cars when you can't see where they are or negotiate with drivers through eye contact," said Dr Angela McCullagh, Research and Development Director, at the Thomas Pocklington Trust. "Traditional street design is vital for navigation for anyone with impaired sight, yet local authorities have been going ahead with shared space schemes before they even know if they can work for people with sight loss."

The report urges local authorities to act on the needs of people with sight loss and to involve the public earlier and throughout the design and implementation of the schemes. It calls for local authorities to be given more detailed guidance on how to develop and implement the schemes and, in particular, for robust research which could properly test claims and assumptions. This could help to ease the 'believability gap' that is so unsettling for people with all disabilities.

Carol Thomas, Access and Inclusion Manager, Guide Dogs, welcomes the study, saying: "This study confirms that the failure to consult early with blind and partially sighted and other disabled people and take on board their requirements affects their confidence to use our streets and public spaces. Early consultation and robust research are essential if they are not to be excluded from our towns and cities."

More information: Download a copy of [the study](#)

Provided by King's College London

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