

Senior citizens as co-researchers to improve urban planning

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Heavy carrier bags and a lurching bus are an equation that is difficult to solve for most people, but for an elderly person getting the shopping home on public transport can be an almost insurmountable task. A newly launched research project at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, is now enlisting the help of the senior citizens themselves to learn about the challenges in everyday logistics, and it is hoped that the results will lead to better urban planning.

The sustainable city of the future should be car-free, pleasant to live in and attractive to tourists. This is difficult to accomplish, especially because planners often forget that consumers rarely move around the city empty-handed. It is not easy to reconcile the transporting of goods with the car-free city, especially for elderly people, who are no longer able to carry heavy items.

"In the Consumer [Logistics](#) project we claim that this form of consumer logistics is a forgotten aspect of [urban planning](#). We consider it a good starting point, for improved consumer logistics for the elderly, to look at how [senior citizens](#) deal with their daily logistics, what kind of problems they face and what ideas they have for improvements," says Helene Brembeck, Professor of Ethnology at the Centre for Consumer Science (CFK) at the University of Gothenburg.

In an ethnographic part of a larger study, a number of senior citizens in Gothenburg will therefore be recruited as co-researchers for a few weeks this autumn. Co-research is a method the Centre for Consumer Science

at the University of Gothenburg has considerable positive experience of.

"We have co-researched with consumers of all ages. Co-research is based on the view that the consumers themselves are experts in their own everyday lives and that research has much to gain from involving people in the research process on equal terms," says Professor Brembeck.

The co-researchers' share in the project consists of four elements. At a first meeting researchers and co-researchers get to know one another and the co-researchers are given a consumer diary in which they are asked to record and comment on their daily shopping for a week. They are also asked to photograph the handbags or carrier bags they use and to answer a number of questions. On the second and third meetings the researchers accompany the co-researchers through their shopping landscape, both in everyday shopping and in making large purchases. Finally all the co-researchers meet in a group session to discuss together and on the basis of the collected material how everyday logistics could be made easier and more sustainable. The co-researchers consequently also contribute to analysis and results.

The study forms part of the Consumer Logistics project, in which researchers from the University of Gothenburg, together with researchers from Toulouse in France and Manchester in the United Kingdom, are studying how people of different ages transport their everyday shopping home in the three cities. People who have an impact on urban development in their work, for example town planners and shopping centre and [public transport](#) managers, are also taking part in the project.

The project began in January this year, and is expected to be completed in the spring of 2013.

"It will be very exciting to analyse all the information our senior citizens

will provide us with. And we hope our results will take us one step further in making it possible to create cities that are sustainable while also working well as places to live, for both young and old."

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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