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Perspectives on accessibility: elaborating on methods and approaches with the aim to improve local living conditions

Accessibility to important functions and urban resources influences living conditions in cities and communities. Many cities are characterized by an unequal distribution of important resources and many citizens are disfavoured because of poor access to opportunities and services. Being excluded from access to important societal facilities has a negative effect on the citizens' quality of life and reproduces social inequalities. This relates very directly to problems such as urban segregation and increasing social polarization, highly prioritised in city policies as well as highlighted in the UN Urban Development Goals, Agenda 2030. More specifically, this pilot study addresses primarily two of the Urban Development Goals: "Reduce Inequality within and between countries" and "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". The initiative is exploring how access may be understood and not least, improved, that is important when aiming for a more *Just City*.

In the city of Gothenburg, inequalities in health among residents who live in different parts of the city is documented in the reports *Inequalities in living conditions and health* (2014 and 2017). Inequalities in terms of access to important services and opportunities in different neighbourhoods is documented in the research project Shared City (Legeby et al. 2015). Large differences were found as accessibility to important urban functions and amenities was mapped and neighbourhoods compared, e.g. access to basic services, job opportunities, recreation, culture and education. Equal access to basic societal resources and services for the citizens is an important prerequisite in order to

be able to strengthen equality and is important for well-being that in a long-term perspective will have an effect upon urban segregation (Legeby et al. 2015). A study on the role of trust in area development further shows how accessibility is shaped by people's trust in public institutions as well as the trust public officials have in the population, which makes it important to take into account local narratives and experiences of exclusion and inclusion (Hansson, 2018).

The project *Accessible Cities: Promoting efficient and equitable access to urban qualities, opportunities and services* is part of an ongoing collaboration between the city of Gothenburg and Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality within the ICLD-financed partnership (2017-2019). A sub-project within this framework, *Perspectives on Accessibility*, is exploring and further developing approaches from on the one hand the 'Shared City' project (Legeby et al. 2015), and on the other hand a research project about the role of trust in area development (Hansson 2018). The intention has been to disseminate the approaches and findings and elaborate to what extent these two approaches may be integrated; combining spatial, social and notional aspects. This report presents an overview of the initiative and a workshop held in Brunnsbo on the 5th of March 2019 with participants from the city of Gothenburg and the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality.

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Introduction

In an ongoing collaboration between the city of Gothenburg and Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality participants are exploring how living conditions in Gothenburg and Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality and Port Elizabeth may be improved through urban planning and urban development. Focus for the ongoing work is upon accessibility and more specifically, accessibility to important urban amenities, opportunities and services relevant for creating equal living conditions and strengthening social sustainability in the municipalities.

One initiative within the overarching project Accessible Cities is to investigate what possible synergies could be developed when integrating different perspectives on accessibility and trying to nuance the understanding. This specific initiative combines two approaches. On the one hand, an approach developed at KTH with the aim to capture the impact of urban design and architecture on accessibility and relate it to segregation (Shared City, Legeby et al. 2015), and on the other hand, an approach developed at Gothenburg University specifically focusing upon how trust influences accessibility (Hammarkullesatsningen, Hansson 2018). The main aim is to test what such an integrated approach may contribute to the understanding of accessibility to important societal resources and how this relate to overarching goals about how to achieve more equal living conditions and decrease urban segregation. This initiative also addresses one of the objectives of the overarching project, Accessible Cities, namely to identify opportunities for future research and formulating new research projects with similar focus.

Another aim of the initiative Perspectives on Accessibility is to demonstrate a method and approach of how participants representing different actors – including for example officials from different departments, locally engaged people, public housing companies – may come together and elaborate on different views of accessibility. This combination of methods was tested that allows the participants to share their interpretations but also become aware of the other actors' views in order to arrive at a more nuanced and broader understanding of accessibility. We argue that such understanding is of utmost importance when trying to create equal living conditions in a longer perspective.

The approach was described and tested during a workshop in Brunnsbo in Gothenburg on the 5th of March, 2019. Fifteen participants joined the workshop from Gothenburg and from Port Elizabeth. The day was set up with an introduction of the perspectives and the method of walk-analysis was explained. The participants were divided into four groups with a special focus upon four selected key functions in the neighbourhood, namely schools,

community house, square-centre, and parks. The groups did an analytic-walk together and then continued to discuss according to questions about various aspects presented in a matrix. The exercise finished with a presentation from the four groups.

Combining approaches

The idea with the initiative Perspectives on Accessibility is to explore possible synergies when combining different approaches and study to what extent these two approaches are possible to integrate. As a result of the limited size of the project and that it should be tested somehow in the collaboration group, we arrived at conducting it more or less as an experimental workshop. Here different perspectives on accessibility were highlighted and the workshop gave the participants a chance to become familiar with this specific method.

A socio-spatial approach: The Shared City project

The Shared City project was carried out 2013-2015 by researchers at KTH in collaboration with the City of Gothenburg through Mistra Urban Futures and was financed by the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (Boverket). The aim of the project was to explore the relation between urban segregation and equal living conditions and architecture and urban design. Segregation is partly about residential/housing segregation but also about to what extent we share the city in our everyday life using the city. In addition, what living conditions are created in different parts of the city, as a result of planning and architecture practice, are of utmost importance in relation to segregation. Accessibility to urban resources and urban amenities has great impact on life chances and this is to a large degree influenced by urban planning and design as well as by architecture.

An important contribution of the project was to further develop methods and approaches how to analyse, map and compare neighbourhoods in Gothenburg city in terms of access to societal resources relevant for segregation. The project resulted in a comprehensive mapping on a very detailed level both of aspects in the built environment but also aspects related to the population living and/or working there. Moreover, the methods allowed for comparison between neighbourhoods, important for the design and planning process and decisions about distributing resources and improving living conditions locally.

The Shared City project provides approaches, tools and evaluation methods to better understand the implications of architecture and the built structure for people's living conditions. It allows for an analysis of access to various resources where amenities in the built environment is possible to analyse integrated with the residential and working population

and also take into account social data related to the residents such as employment and income.

Cities characterised by unequal living conditions are likely to reproduce patterns of social segregation. Such cities can hardly be described as socially sustainable or 'just' cities. A recommendation is to prioritise those neighbourhoods that both have poor access to amenities and opportunities and a population with fewer resources. In this initiative, the Shared City approach contributes with knowledge about access to various resources and also make comparisons across the city. Such knowledge and insights that can support more precise and efficient urban design interventions as well as strategies and guidelines for urban design and urban planning. Not least is this important in the strive to counteract urban segregation and realise a more 'just city'.

Trust approach: Study of trust in the Hammarkullen Initiative

The initiative in Hammarkullen was launched in 2016 where several municipal actors collaborated with the aim to improve and strengthen the neighbourhood. In relation to this, a study of trust between on the one hand the residents in the area, and on the other hand the public district administration was conducted between 2016 and 2017, funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond Flexit (Hansson 2018). The aim of the study was to better understand possibilities of participation and inclusion as tools for social equity and cohesion. Lack of trust in the relationship between residents and institutions and public officials may prevent people's access to services and rights, both as people refrain from engaging with public institutions and services, including democratic elections and participatory processes, and as institutions and public officials exclude certain people from access to services on equal conditions.

The study includes a discussion of trust seen as "the willingness to be vulnerable based on positive expectations of the intentions and actions of others" (Rousseau et al. 1998) and investigates local expectations, among both residents and public officials, and how those expectations shape how local area development plays out.

Two important conclusions from the study show how trust and accessibility are related. First, local narratives of abandonment, distance, top-down planning and dialogues and unfulfilled promises shape trust and participation in socio-economically marginalised areas, particularly as a result of how those narratives are related to perceptions of difference in areas dominated by visible minorities. Second, the distance between public officials and local residents and how it shapes public officials' perceptions of the local community, as well as their perceptions of other administrative bodies with

which they collaborate, have significant effects on the possibility for inclusive development processes.

In particular, the study shows how lack of knowledge of how the system works, and lack of resources to navigate it, or possibilities to opt out. It is therefore recommended to make better use of personal relations that are crucial for building the trust necessary for people to be willing to take the risk to engage with public institutions, and for public institutions to access relevant local knowledge and experiences to improve planning to safeguard accessibility for all.

Furthermore, the possibility of making use of local knowledge and experiences depends on the organization of the administration and planning. It is recommended that administration and planning is sufficiently open and flexible to trust residents and first line public servants and shape planning accordingly. In this initiative the Hammarkullen study can contribute insights on how to include notional aspects of accessibility in planning at an early stage in order to make urban amenities and services not just available but also accessible.

Four perspectives on accessibility

During the discussions of how to integrate the two approaches described above, we identified and formulated four perspectives on accessibility with the intention to use them as lenses when analysing neighbourhoods and districts.

Why different perspectives?

In relation to the overall aim of the main project in the collaboration between Gothenburg and Port Elizabeth, Accessible Cities, we argue that it is important that an approach could contribute in different ways;

- Relevant and nuanced planning material,
- Identify constraints and qualities,
- Identify what to improve and who should be involved,
- Be aware of the need of timing and collaboration, and
- Create feedback loops to aims and goals.

Taken together the aim is to capture and describe the existing situation but most importantly, it needs to be done in a way that gives relevant information and insights in order to move forward.



1. Accessibility to resources and amenities in the city

The accessibility to resources and amenities in the city (or in the neighbourhood) include various services, facilities and amenities of importance for everyday life and for living conditions in general. Using the methods applied in the Shared City project this could be analysed in a very detailed manner, i.e. analysing accessibility to for example shops, bus stops, parks, recreation areas etc. from every building (or address) in a neighbourhood in a way that takes into account urban form and street structure, i.e. including only streets and paths allows for movement (for example available for those walking by foot). There is also ways of how to weigh in other aspects in the built environment that may affect the accessibility, for example if there are steps, a lack of lighting, no entrances that could be perceived as unsafe or if there is heavy traffic and difficult to cross streets etc. (Developed in the project Interactive Platform, Upplands Väsby, 2018-2019).

What amenities are identified as important depends on the question in focus. If it is segregation, the situation for young people or economic prerequisites the analyses may be altered in order to capture relevant aspects.

In the Shared City project, the whole city of Gothenburg was analysed. In addition, the analysis made a comparison between neighbourhoods possible so that new investments in the built environment may be directed in a way that result in increased equality.

2. Accessibility to opportunities and benefits: 'social system services'

Accessibility to opportunities and benefits is also about what opportunities that are made available in an area and what social processes are enabled as a result of this. It could include aspects like the socio-economic profile of an area; education levels among the residents or if there is a library with special activities for children etc. Social system services are seen in analogy with eco system services where it is studied what nature gives man, but here instead it includes what people are giving to people. In a discussion related to the concept of 'Just Cities' and urban segregation this could include how life chances are affected by other people or what opportunities are given to be part of society and participate in the negotiations of public cultures and social relations (Zukin 1995; Young 1996). The constitution and the intensity of the urban life influences social relations and the possibilities for developing various different social networks (Granovetter 1983; Putnam 1993). So in addition to the above perspective where it is described what an area provides for its users (residents and non-res-

idents), this includes both the resources and what other people are made available in that place and how this enable different social processes that shape society and identities (Legeby 2018).

3. Accessibility dependent on institutions, organisations and activities

Accessibility, as mentioned above, depends on the institutions, organisations and activities that provide services. The lessons from the Hammarkullen study makes us aware that the way in which the service is provided, regulated and communicated shapes who perceives her/himself as having access. For example, access for all may in practice exclude certain groups. Who the provider is, and consider itself to be, may also determine people's sense of appropriation and inclusion. Specific regulations and procedures run the risk of excluding certain groups from access as their specific needs are not taken into consideration.

While these aspects are difficult to determine in the planning phase what is important is to closely analyse local narratives and needs in order to formulate sufficiently clear goals, but more importantly to decentralize mandates to provide room for manoeuvre for local actors to allow activities and communication to be adapted to context. Planning and evaluation should also take into consideration that it takes time for activities to be established, for relations to be built, and for adapting to context, and that there is a need to plan for continuity and change.

There is a tendency to do the physical planning first, and then address issues regarding institutions, organisations and activities. In the study of the initiative in Hammarkullen it became evident that this tendency causes gaps and problems that shape accessibility in the short term, but also shape perceptions of inclusion that have effects on accessibility in the long term.

4. Accessibility dependent on the collective and/or individual level

Accessibility dependent on the collective and/or individual level concerns trust as well as perceptions of relevance, but also perceptions of how the individual or collective is provided access compared to other parts of the city or the city as a whole. As indicated above narratives of trust are a result of how residents and visitors perceive local conditions and relations with public institutions and shape perceptions of inclusion and whether individual or collective needs and interests are catered for and hence whether people are willing to partake in participatory activities. Narratives of distrust also seem to hide positive experiences and do not necessarily rely on personal negative experiences. The Hammarkullen study shows that narratives of distrust

depend on feelings of abandonment and exclusion, on level of integration, of promises not kept and of developments that do not respond to local needs. The local narratives are also a result of comparisons with the rest of the city that may exacerbate feelings of exclusion and marginalisation.

Such narratives tend to be dismissed by high level administrators and central planners as irrational and for not reflecting actual processes and comparisons. Yet, such collective narratives and individual experiences still affect actual accessibility as it prevents people from taking part in, or making use of amenities, opportunities and services. It is important to note though that the narratives are local, and require specific analysis in each locality and cannot be generalized from one context to another.

Four perspectives on accessibility



Accessibility in relation to public space

During the workshop in Brunnsbo the idea was to allow the participants to get familiar with this way of thinking and nuancing the understanding of accessibility and allowing for different perspectives to be present at the same time. We used the four perspectives as lenses for studying what different aspects may be identified. Moreover, the method was designed so that the different views may be discussed in a way that contribute to a wider understanding of the situation and that the participants get a chance to share their views and reflections. Thus, the aim is not to reach consensus or arrive at a specific answer; rather, the method is designed to allow several different views to co-exist. It is important to note that the representation of perspectives was limited in the exercise due to the organisation of the workshop as part of the Accessible Cities project. A real life application of the workshop would require participation of the relevant planning officials as well as local actors and residents.

In Brunnsbo the participants were organised in four groups. Living conditions in neighbourhoods are highly dependent on public resources or opportunities found in public space. Therefore, each group was appointed to study the following public places/facilities: Brunnsbotorget, the local school, the neighbourhood park, and the community house.

The Walkshop method: 'walk through evaluation'

The Walkshop in Brunnsbo was a one day activity. It included an introduction of the initiative, presentation of the four perspectives, a walk in the neighbourhood, discussions that were presented and shared with the others. The walkshop was closed with some reflections from the researchers organizing the walkshop.

The so called walk through evaluation method was developed during the 1980s as a method of evaluating residential areas. In Denmark the method was further developed by Ivor Ambrose and now it has been a commonly used method in Sweden for about twenty years and developed for Swedish conditions by for example Susanne de Laval and Gerd Cruse Sondén. In principle, an interview or a discussion is carried out as two or more people are walking through a building, neighbourhood or a district. It is argued that the method captures important aspects and results in an indicative overview that is more difficult to get using other methods (Preiser et al. 1988). However, often the 'walk through method' is used in combination with other methods such as interviews, observations, spatial and configurative analysis etc.

In this specific case, and in the neighbourhood of Brunnsbo, a matrix was used where the walkshop leaders had prepared questions in relation to the different perspectives of accessibility. The matrix include both questions of how the neighbourhood is perceived today but also a column where the participants could add ideas that the discussions arrives at. Groups were put together so that they would be mixed, either according to institutions or country (South Africa and Sweden). The participants represented the city administrations in Gothenburg and Port Elizabeth, academia, public housing companies, the public district administration among others.

It constituted a challenge to include questions on the two perspectives Accessibility dependent on institutions, organisations and activities, and Accessibility dependent on the collective and/or individual level. This was mainly a result of the need to formulate questions for participants that were external to the context, thus asking for assumptions about certain aspects of accessibility. More direct questions can be posed to local actors and residents on perceptions and actual use of amenities and services in a real life application.



Photo: Ann Legeby



Aerial photo: Eniro

Results from the experimental walk-shop

Representation of perspectives

Initially the participants were asked to list the perspectives represented in each group, identify missing perspectives and reflect on what could be done to include other perspectives. As mentioned, because of the context of the workshop the participants were mainly planners and public officials in various positions, and not actual users or residents in the area nor service providers. Disabled people, elderly, youth and children were also absent. The main aim with this exercise was however to let the participants try the method and in real situations in future, it's possible to include many different groups depending on the situation or do several walks with adequate questions for different actors.

Through the questions posed in the walkshop material the lacunas that emerged because of the absence of these groups became evident since the participants had to guess and were uncomfortable doing so. Hence, highlighting the need for more inclusive processes to understand the place. The groups also identified specific expertise as missing, for example economic, social and transport perspectives as well as interests such as civil society and the business community. Generally, the groups considered it fundamental to have more community data to be able to do a better informed walkshop. Despite the lacunas one of the most significant benefits of the exercised, as perceived by the participants, was the possibility of discussing the questions from different perspectives and drawing on different experiences bringing new dimensions into view. The need for inclusion of other groups is a presupposition for the following results.

General impression, services and amenities, physical access

The method works well to discuss general impressions and identifying services and amenities such as commercial and public services, and to identify what may be missing as well as possible developments. Physical access was also considered to be relatively easy to assess, although the question

would specifically require other perspectives by those who are affected. The questions in the walk-shop material also help identifying what kind of information is missing regarding services and amenities and who they are for, but also regarding rules and regulations.

It was highly valued by the participants to be able to walk around the area to see and better understand the context.

Who uses the place, perceptions of inclusion and exclusion

As the walk was conducted a cold and rainy school/work day it was difficult to determine who uses the place. This highlights the need to conduct several observations at various hours, weekdays and in different weather conditions. The question could also be resolved through better representation of residents, visitors and people working in the area. In order to get information about membership requirements and regulations other methods are required.

As regards perceptions of inclusion and exclusion various visible signs could be identified through the walk, such as high fences, absence of benches for the elderly to sit, where benches were placed etc. However, the more notional aspects of sense of inclusion and exclusion are not made available through the walk-shop, but require more in-depth participatory methods including potential users.

Notional aspects of trust

While the first questions pertaining to physical aspects were frequently responded to in the walk-shop material, less notes were taken on the questions regarding notional aspects of access. The reason is obvious, since the people represented at this specific workshop were not from the area there were few results regarding this. A broader representation in the walk-shop groups would make other perspectives available. However, in order to get at for example the narratives of trust in an area, other methods are required to complement the walkshop.



Photo: Ann Legeby

Additional reflections on the method

Although it was considered highly valuable to discuss the different aspects of accessibility with people who have other perspectives and expertise the time available for doing so was considered too short when testing this method. Hence, when doing it in a real situation sufficient time needs to be allocated for the exercise to fill its purpose.

Reflections and conclusions

In a process of improving the living conditions in neighbourhoods as well as in the city in general, it is important to take into account different perspectives on accessibility. The approach and the method that the participants from Gothenburg and Port Elizabeth had a chance to test in Brunnsbo is one possible method for capturing a more nuanced understanding on accessibility to urban resources. The aim of this study was to investigate how to integrate different perspectives on accessibility.

The method has potential to gather and identify information that may be relevant for many different disciplines, both for planners and urban designers, as well as for people responsible for various activities as well as for property owners. However, it is important to emphasise that the method is not replacing other methods and investigations in different disciplines. Rather, we suggest that the method may be used as a complement where different views and perspectives may be integrated and thus supporting development processes. The method has also a potential to invite people to participate in planning processes and encourage engagement. We argue that input from these kinds of investigations do not replace the need of general analyses of the living environment, not least analyses that reveals the situation locally in relation to the city as a whole. Hence, accessibility analyses need to be prepared regarding facilities, conditions and human resources, e.g. investigations of the residents' needs, historical development, social profiling and spatial analysis of living conditions and urban analyses.

The studies that this exercise is based on show that there are significant economic benefits of combining

perspectives and methods in the way we have proposed. It provides, if not a guarantee, at least an increasing likelihood that investments will benefit the local community because they respond to local community needs and to actual use. Such a combined approach reduces the risk of spending resources on developing facilities and services that are not used, or not accessible to specific target groups, and as a result are soon closed down or complemented by parallel structures that actually cater to the needs of the population. Moreover, the potential economic loss of missed opportunities when distrust in public decision making and administration increases should not be underestimated.

Even though this workshop in Brunnsbo was a test and had limited time allocated, it is possible to see that the participants manage to identify many different qualities and disadvantages. Moreover, it was said that it was a good way of being introduced to a new area, which is valuable for people working with many different areas/neighbourhoods/cities. Some also found it to be an appreciated method for learning more about the area from those who had specific knowledge (either about the city as a whole or about the local circumstances) and was part of the group. Hence, the method efficiently facilitated the sharing and exchange of knowledge, perspectives and information.

The approach including an analysis of accessibility from different perspectives is argued to result in a more nuanced understanding of accessibility and how it may vary across the city and vary as a result on local activities and the population. The workshop in itself, including walk-through-analysis and reflective group discussions, is argued to be an efficient way of getting an overview, be aware of different perspectives, learning from other disciplines and in addition, a way of getting to know other people involved in a neighbourhood supporting planning processes and local development. The method allows for doing that in a structured and transparent way where all actors have the possibility to add to the discussions.

Recommendations

- 1. Identify and map accessibility to resources and amenities in the city and compare what is provided in different neighbourhoods.**
- 2. Analyse conditions for social processes; including urban form aspects as well as the socio-economic profile of the population.**
- 3. Analyse local institutional and organizational possibilities and constraints to accessibility.**
- 4. Understand local collective narratives and individual experiences that affects accessibility.**
- 5. A combination of perspectives should be used to provide relevant and nuanced material for planning.**
- 6. A combination of perspectives requires inclusive methods and processes.**

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