
PRESS RELEASE

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Redefining urban space – placing people first

More than 70 percent of people in European cities breathe dangerous air, according to the European Environment Agency and 1 million deaths occur annually due to physical inactivity in Europe, states the World Health Organisation. The key to a healthier, more productive, greener and less polluted city could be a new planning and design strategy based on the idea of shared speed in urban space.

The pandemic has given us new perspectives and revealed the flaws in street space distribution and public space as it disrupted people's travel behaviour, compelling us to work from home, move shorter distances, and explore the city on a more local scale.

At the same time, about 70 percent of the global population – an astonishing 7 billion people – are expected to live in cities by 2050. With air pollution causing damage to human health and ecosystems, large parts of the population will not live in a healthy environment.

In a new report, Sweco envisions proximity, density, and shared speed as paths for transforming streets into incubators for health and well-being.

"A core strategy of streets as health incubators entails treating the city's various modes of transportation, from driving to walking, as more equal, a planning and design strategy that we call shared speed," says David Lindelöw, transport planner at Sweco in Gothenburg, Sweden, and one of the report's authors.

The report promotes proximity of urban amenities and services together with a mobility concept which facilitates a variation of modes to reach a destination within the same amount of time. One example is the concept of the "15-minute city" based on the idea that citizens should be able to go to school, enjoy leisure activities, work and shop within walking or biking distance of their homes.

"Which way now? Healthy options for our streets and cities – Sharing speed, street space and liveable futures" is the first in a series of Urban Insight reports from Sweco on the topic of Urban Health and Well-Being, in which experts highlight specific ideas, solutions and scientific findings needed to plan and design safe and resilient future urban environments.

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