

Capturing the experiences of visually impaired street users

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The accessibility of the built environment we experience is determined by the design decisions of countless individuals. Often these individuals work within a framework of nationally agreed standards, as well as national and local policy priorities, but ultimately it is typically the designer who makes the final call on the specific configuration of a building, public space or piece of transport infrastructure. This configuration will always be the best compromise the designer can create between the different competing technical and economic factors affecting a project. The quality of the compromise is dependent on the designer's understanding of those factors and how design decisions affect them.

In this context an idealised 'standard' accessible configuration abstracted from the experiences of the disabled people who will use the environment may not be sufficient information for the designer to find the optimal compromise. This is particularly true when considering the requirements of people with visual impairments who represent a particularly heterogeneous group with diverse requirements.

This talk will look at ways traditional accessibility guidance can be supplemented by qualitative information on how disabled people experience the built environment. Case studies will be presented relating to people with visual impairments and public space in general as well as on-street construction sites in particular. Methods for capturing, analysing and communicating this qualitative information will be described and ideas for new ones proposed.