

Walking for a better world

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Due to growing concerns regarding the negative impacts of climate change on environmental integrity and individual health, research on sustainable development has been intensified throughout the last years. Within this field, sustainable mobility is of special interest due to the fundamental contribution of motorized individual traffic to climate change.

Creating awareness and thus changing individuals' choices regarding methods of transport, reducing usage of cars while moving toward ecomobility is of great importance.

Within research on sustainable types of transportation, walking plays an important role.

Besides the positive impact on the environment, it also contributes to individual health as a form of physical activity.

This study focuses on walking as an active transportation mode in everyday life. Walking behavior is determined by a multitude of factors including the neighborhood and individual variables like traffic mode choice, sociodemographic characteristics, motives and attitudes. Data regarding these variables was collected by means of an online-survey, filled out by 324 participants. Hypothesized associations with walking behavior were then clarified in a statistical analysis.

Neither for walking for transportation purposes, nor for recreational walking, impacts of environmental characteristics on walking behavior could be replicated.

Walking for transportation was positively associated with public transport use. No significant correlations between walking and age, gender and education could be reported. Participants living with children showed significantly less affinity for leisurely walking and reported a higher car use. The location of the working place also greatly influences mobility choices to the effect that people working in the outlying districts of Vienna reported less walking as a means of transport.

Participants generally showed a very positive attitude towards walking, but no statistically significant association between attitudes and walking could be found. The most important motives for walking were the fun-factor and stress relief. "High-Walking" participants showed more health-related motives. Gender and age effects concerning both attitudes and motives could be found.

To develop successful intervention strategies, future research on determinants of walking behavior is needed. Due to the complexity of the topic, a multi-method approach seems appropriate. Mainly a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is essential. Fostering sustainable transport modes like walking also implies transdisciplinarity in science and practice including social sciences as well as architecture and urban and regional planning.