

Older Women and Men in Public Transport: Active Actors in Creating their own Mobility?

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In recent years there has been an increase of older people in the western world. In Sweden the amount of elderly in the population almost doubled since 1940. In year 2000, 17 percent of the population were 65 years or older, five percent were 80 or older. This can be compared to 1940 when only nine percent were older than 65. With a greater amount of elderly in the population we must be prepared to meet new possibilities and problems in relation to planning and development of our future transport system. The need of mobility is not decreasing as we get older. Seniors today have more or less the same needs for social relations, recreational activities and services as younger people, both in the local community and at home. The primary mode of transport for these activities is the car. At age 65-84 nearly 60 percent of the trips are made by car and only eight percent by public transport. On the other hand, the situation for people over 85 years is much different since many are not able to drive a car anymore, if they at all have a driver's license. To be able to stay active with good quality of life, great demands are placed on future accessibility and a safe transport system. If not, there will be a great number of people who will risk not getting out of their homes. The aim of this project is to study older women's and men's experiences, perspectives and ideas about public transport as a resource for creation of their everyday mobility. What power and influence do older women and men have over their mobility, during various stages of the life course, and at various places? The study is based on field work within two Swedish regions (Östergötland and Jönköping) and contains in depth interviews with 18 women and 12 men at age 58-93 years, living in town, urban area or on the countryside. The study also contains travel diaries and focus groups. The results show that the informants, even the very old, are travelling a lot: one or two trips a day are not unusual. According to the informants' own stories, the primary needs are short walking distances, extended traffic, no calls for reservation, spontaneous trips but also outdoor activities such as walking and bicycling and not at least - time for recovery. Older people want to be responsible for their own agenda, i.e. their planning of every day activities and

their everyday mobility. According to these results, measures that need to be considered are attractive alternatives to car use, more positive experiences of public transport, changing minds and behaviors among older people and providing public transport for impaired people. In the whole, the public transport should be more convenient. If the buses are late or uncomfortable or if the trips are complicated, older people choose not to go by bus.