

(Un-)Attractiveness of roads from a laymen perspective – results of a crowd-sourced photo collection in Norway

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Roads and streets are one of the most used and therewith one of the most important public spaces of our everyday lives. However, the knowledge about how people perceive their daily environments, and especially roads, is quite limited. In this paper I present a method to study urban everyday roads, which combines elements of participatory visual methods with social media, what I coined “crowd- sourced photo collection”.

Participatory visual methods, like photo-elicitation, have been introduced in environmental perception research to study different aspects of urban and rural environments in the 1970s and have gained interest in the last years. The basic principle of these methods is that participants are asked to take pictures related to a given task, and provide afterwards information about the pictures, either written or in an interview.

Another, more commonly used approach in landscape aesthetic research are perception studies where surrogates of landscapes (e.g. pictures) are chosen by the researcher and then shown to participants. Compared to these methods, the main advantage of participatory visual methods is that the participants are actually experiencing the landscapes to be investigated with all their senses and not only representations of it. Additionally, participants choose themselves the environments of importance to them. This is useful when studying the perception of urban everyday roads, which are here defined as roads and streets, where people move along during their daily lives and which are thus individual to each person.

A general disadvantage of both methods is that the collection of data is time and cost intensive and that it is difficult to reach a more representative sample of the general public. To cope with these difficulties the number of web based surveys, using landscape surrogates and questionnaires has increased. However, compared to other disciplines, the opportunities of modern communication techniques, and especially social media, are not even rudimentary explored by landscape perception research.

The “crowd- sourced photo collection” is an attempt to use social media for research on the perception of our daily surroundings. The central platform for this method is an open blog. Via different channels of social media, are people all over Norway asked to submit photographs from roads in their daily environments, which they either appreciate or not. Participants are also asked to provide background information about the content of the picture and themselves. Additionally, it is possible to comment on already submitted pictures. The pictures and comments are analyzed in a qualitative and quantitative way. As for the quantitative part, statistical analysis, for example contingency tables will be used to identify preference for e.g. combinations of elements.