

Conference Declaration

Accessible Urban Neighborhoods – International Conference

21–23 October 2026 | Ankara, Türkiye

Dear colleagues, distinguished guests, and participants,

As we come to the end of our three-day conference, I would like to share some reflections on the main issues we have discussed and the messages we would like to take forward.

I would first like to express my sincere thanks to **Gazi University Rectorate, our Faculty of Architecture Dean, and our Department of City and Regional Planning Head** for their valuable support in organizing this international conference.

It has been a great pleasure to bring together different disciplines, perspectives, and experiences here at Gazi University, particularly in the year we celebrate our university's 100th anniversary.

Throughout the conference, we have discussed accessibility from many different perspectives: urban and transport planning, walking and cycling, spatial justice, public participation, climate change, healthy cities, and inclusive neighborhood design.

Although our presentations focused on different cities, methods, and population groups, I believe that several common messages have emerged.

1. Accessibility should be at the center of urban planning, not simply an outcome of transport planning.

For many years, we have focused on how people move from one place to another, how fast they travel, and how transport networks perform. However, the main question should be whether people can reach the places and services they need in their everyday lives.

This means that accessibility is not only about distance or travel time. It is also about safety, affordability, comfort, independence, and equal opportunities.

A neighborhood may appear accessible on a map, but this does not necessarily mean that it is accessible for everyone.

2. 15-minute city should not be considered a fixed model that can be applied in the same way everywhere.

The studies presented at our conference, from Ankara to other European cities and beyond, have shown that each neighborhood has different physical, social, economic, and environmental conditions.

Topography, street networks, land-use patterns, public transport services, climate, and the distribution of daily facilities all influence accessibility.

Therefore, we need to adapt the principles of the 15-minute city to local conditions rather than simply applying a standard 15-minute threshold.

What matters is not only whether a service is located within 15 minutes, but also whether people can reach and use that service safely and comfortably.

3. Walking and cycling must be supported by safe, continuous, and high-quality urban infrastructure.

Many studies have highlighted the importance of sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, cycling networks, street design, and public spaces.

Narrow or obstructed sidewalks, steep slopes, unsafe crossings, poor pavement conditions, and a lack of resting places can turn even a short journey into a difficult experience.

These are not minor design problems. They directly affect people's independence and participation in urban life.

We should give greater priority to pedestrians and cyclists, while also ensuring effective connections with public transportation.

4. Accessibility must be considered from the perspective of different users, particularly those whose needs are often overlooked.

Our discussions on older adults, children, people with disabilities, women with caregiving responsibilities, and families with young children have demonstrated that people experience the same urban environment in very different ways.

For example, a walking route that is comfortable for a healthy adult may be difficult for an older person, a wheelchair user, or a parent with a stroller.

Our AccessCity4All research in Çankaya and Keçiören has also shown how everyday walking experiences can differ between neighborhoods and user groups.

This reminds us that planning for an average pedestrian is not enough. We need to plan for the diversity of people who live in our cities.

5. Public participation should become an essential part of accessibility planning and decision-making.

One of the important contributions of this conference has been the discussion of participatory methods, including Public Participation Geographic Information Systems, walk-along interviews, co-creation activities, and urban living labs.

These methods allow us to understand not only where accessibility problems exist, but also how people experience them in their daily lives.

We have seen that residents' perceptions do not always correspond to the results of conventional spatial accessibility analyses.

For this reason, I believe that scientific data and local knowledge should be considered together.

Participation should not be limited to asking residents about their problems. Residents should also have opportunities to contribute to identifying priorities, developing solutions, and evaluating planning decisions.

Local governments have a particularly important role in making this possible.

6. Accessibility and environmental sustainability should be addressed together.

Climate change, urban heat islands, the loss of green spaces, and increasing environmental risks directly influence people's ability to use public spaces and move around their neighborhoods.

A street may be physically accessible but difficult to walk along during extreme summer temperatures.

Similarly, a green space may be close to residential areas but may not be accessible, safe, or sufficient for local needs.

We therefore need to integrate green infrastructure, urban biodiversity, sustainable water management, shading, and climate-responsive design into neighborhood planning.

Accessible neighborhoods should also be healthy, environmentally responsible, and resilient neighborhoods.

7. We need to strengthen the relationship between research, planning practice, and public policy.

This is perhaps one of the most important messages I would like to emphasize as we close this conference.

We have developed many valuable methods, indicators, maps, and research findings. However, these findings will have limited impact unless they are reflected in actual planning decisions.

Our discussions have highlighted the importance of cooperation between universities, municipalities, professional organizations, the private sector, and local communities.

We need stronger connections between research findings and local planning instruments, investment priorities, street improvement projects, and urban policies.

Accessibility should become a measurable and regularly evaluated objective of urban planning, rather than remaining only a general principle in planning documents.

Based on the research and discussions brought together during this conference, I would like to underline one central message:

An accessible city is not simply a city where people can move easily. It is a city where everyone has a fair opportunity to participate in everyday urban life.

The 15-minute city provides a useful framework for working towards this goal, but its success depends on how we understand local needs, reduce inequalities, involve residents, and translate research into practical action.

As planners and researchers, we have a responsibility not only to identify urban problems, but also to contribute to solutions that can be implemented.

I hope that the discussions we have started here in Ankara will continue through new research collaborations, joint projects, and stronger partnerships with local governments.

I also hope that the results of the AccessCity4All project will contribute to more inclusive and accessible neighborhoods, both in Türkiye and in other European cities.

Finally, I would like to thank our international project partners, scientific and organizing committees, supporting institutions, colleagues, and students who worked hard to make this conference possible.

Thank you all for your participation, your valuable contributions, and the discussions we have shared over these three days.

Let us continue working towards cities that are not only closer and better connected, but also fairer, healthier, and more accessible for everyone.

Thank you very much.