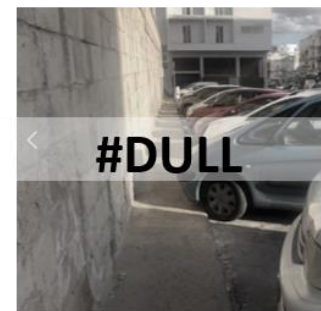# ACTIVE TRAVEL WORKSHOP REPORT

Findings and recommendations from the symposium on Active Travel and Technology
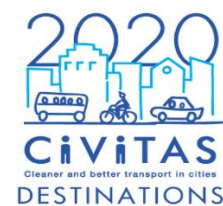
#SAFE #COMFORTABLE #PLEASANT #VIBRANT

#UNSAFE #UNCOMFORTABLE #UNPLEASANT #DULL

April 2020

Institute for Climate Change and Sustainable Development - University of Malta

http://um.edu.mt/activetravel

Introduction

The Institute for Climate Change and Sustainable Development (ICCSD) of the University of Malta (UM) conducted an Active Travel workshop as part of the symposium on Active Travel and Technology on 30 October 2019. The symposium addressed both walking and cycling mobility, as well as other topics related to sustainable urban mobility.

The aims of the Active Travel workshop were threefold, focusing on community, research and policy aspects. Firstly, it was part of a series of activities to enhance a proactive **active travel community**, where people can share their local knowledge and raise awareness about their needs and concerns as pedestrians and cyclists in Malta. Secondly, it acted as a trial to test out a participatory method to **assess perceived walkability** as part of an ongoing doctoral research. And thirdly, it served as a basis for better understanding and identifying **barriers and opportunities for pedestrian and cyclist mobility** around the University of Malta (UM) Campus.

The intention of this report is to collect and share the main findings and recommendations from the workshop with the administration of the University and neighbouring Local Councils, relevant national authorities (Transport Malta, Infrastructure Malta), as well as to inform the Green Travel Plan (GTP) Committee of the University and the actions of other actors such as KSU, the University's Student Council.

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Institute for Climate Change and Sustainable Development - University of Malta

Workshop design

Participants signed up to one of four groups and went for a guided walk or cycle following different predefined routes around UM Campus as part of the active travel workshop, in order to experience for themselves the different aspects of the infrastructure and the environment. The routes are mapped in Figure 1.

During the active travel workshop participants collected data about the environment and their experience through pictures and text. When they came back to the venue, there was a group discussion. A representative of each group gave a brief description of their walk or cycle, indicating their route on a large map. Another member of the same group marked positive or negative experiences on the map. Thereafter, the pictures taken by the participants during their walks were presented and all the participants discussed the positive or negative impacts for pedestrian and cyclist mobility and their experience of the elements shown on each picture. Finally, the group of participants listed a series of suggestions to tackle the issues and enhance the positive aspects that were raised during the discussion.
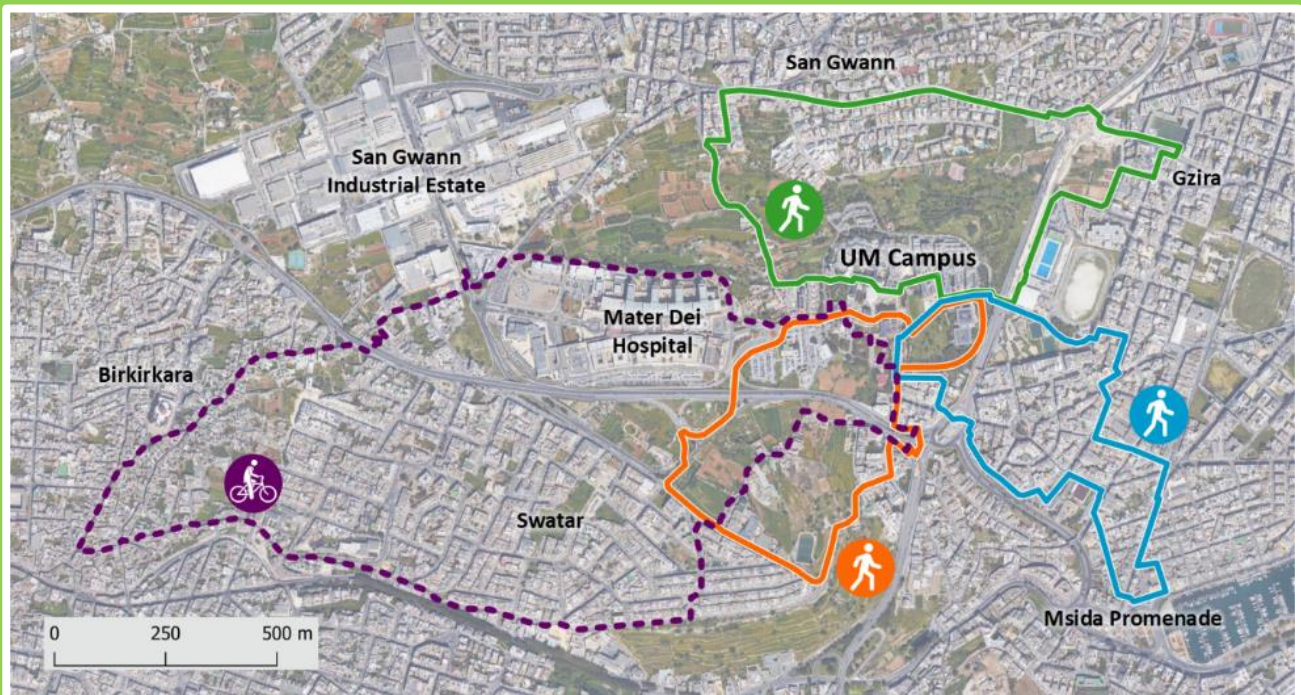

Figure 1. Walking and cycling routes around the UM Campus

The methodology to collect data is based on citizen science principles and follows a theoretical framework developed as part of the Walking Malta project, a doctoral research project at the ICCSD. While the research focuses specifically on the pedestrian experience, the workshop also included cycling, in order to incorporate both aspects of active travel. Participants were asked to collect data on their smartphones using different social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp. They followed a simple step-by-step data collection protocol presented in Figure 2.
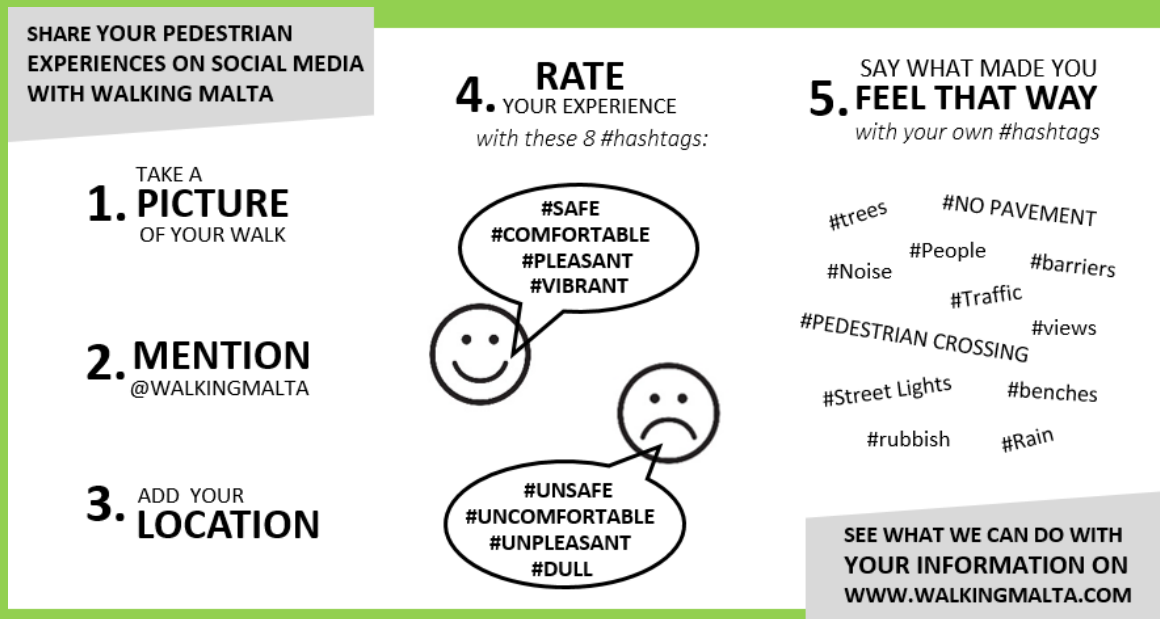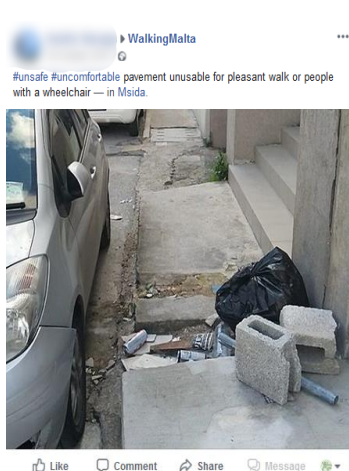

Figure 2. The 5 steps to collect data on pedestrian experiences and the walkable environment
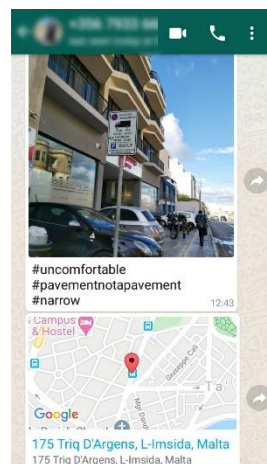
Examples of participants' observations on Walking Malta from different sources:

Facebook

Instagram

WhatsApp

Twitter

Active travel experiences from the active workshop

Along the pedestrian and cyclist journeys, participants collected a total of 105 observations of the urban public space. Figure 3 presents the observations organised by type of experience. Safety was the main concern with over 30% of all observations, which had a remarkable unbalance between unsafe (82.4%) and safe (17.6%) experiences. Similarly, uncomfortable pedestrian experiences (90.9%) clearly outweighed comfortable ones (9.1%). Pedestrian experiences related to pleasantness were the second most cited concerns (29% of all observations) and they had a more balanced share between positive pleasant (43.3%) and negative unpleasant (56.7%) observations. Experiences related to urban vibrancy showed less reported cases (7% of all observations) with a rather even balance between vibrant (57.1%) and dull (42.9%) places. Although participants were asked to use predefined variables to rate their experiences, 11% of all observations either included different variables (i.e. not welcome, unattractive, problematic, and unhealthy) or the observations only included a picture or some text without any indication on the experience. These observations have been included as 'others'.
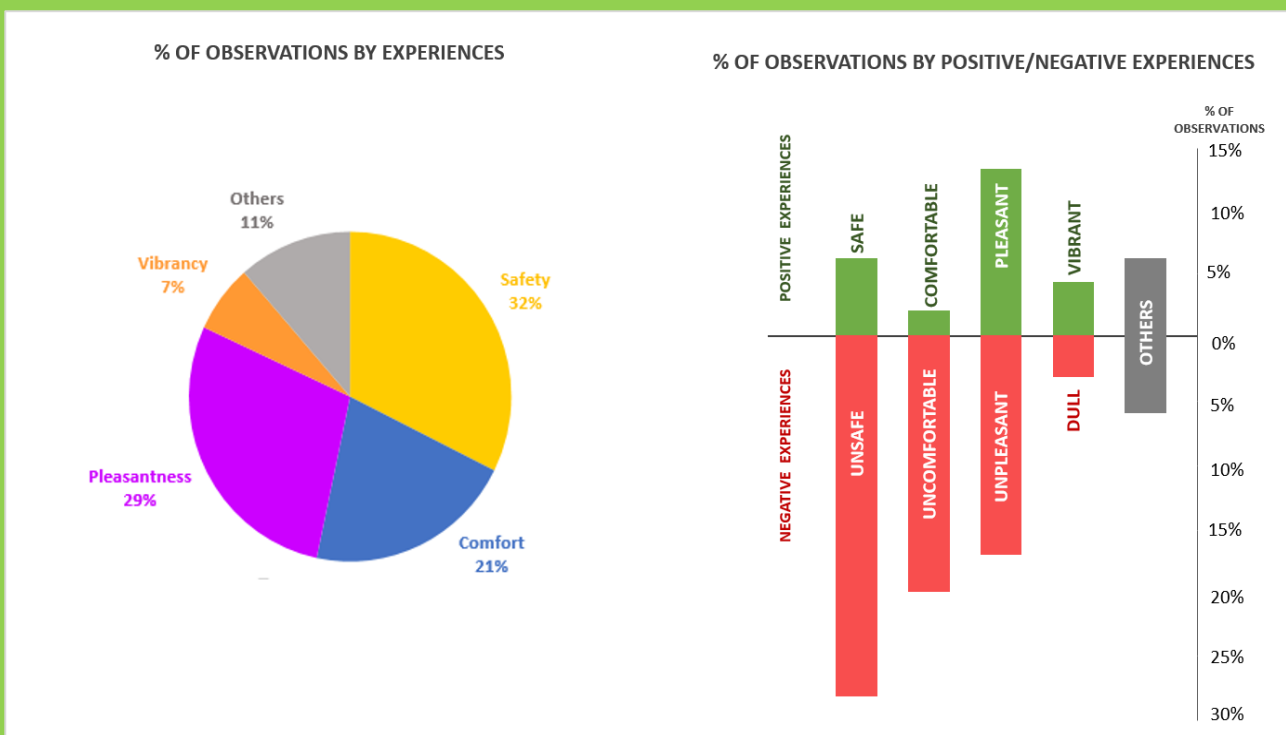

Figure 3. Distribution of all observations (n=105) by type of experience

After participants finished their walking and cycling journeys, each group presented their experiences to the rest of participants using a more qualitative approach. Participants used a printed map of their route to explain their journey and marked specific locations with relevant insights. Once each group had presented their experiences, some of the pictures taken during the journeys were displayed to all participants and the participants engaged in a group discussion about the environmental elements in the pictures and how they affected their pedestrian and cyclist experiences. Figure 4 presents the most cited elements of the public space linked to each experience.

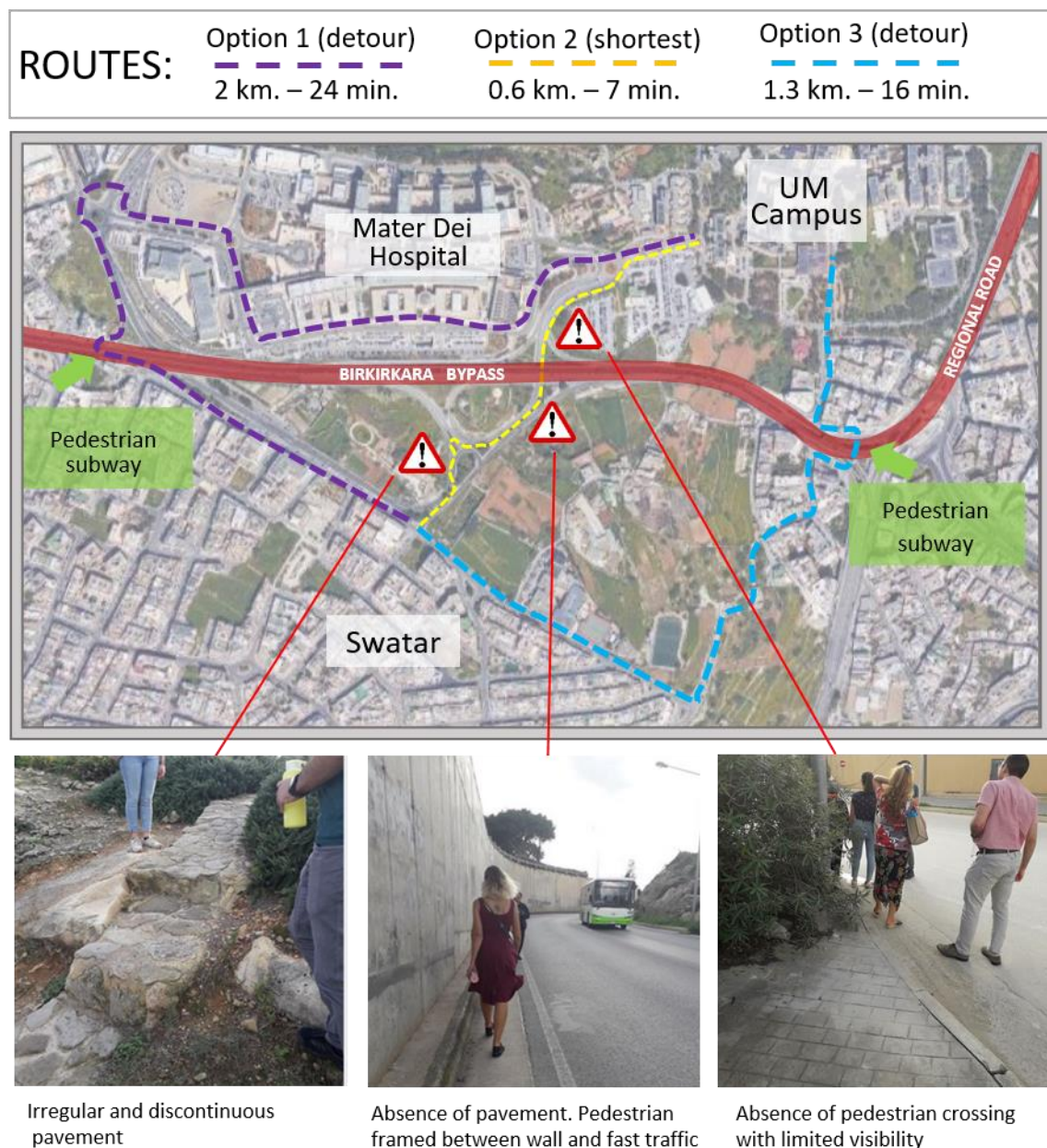|		
SAFETY	**SAFE** Wide pavement. No traffic. Well lit.	**UNSAFE** Absence or issues related to the pavement (i.e. too narrow, irregular surface). Barriers and obstacles on the pavement. Heavy and fast traffic flow. Absence of pedestrian crossings. Absence of street lights and poor visibility. Air pollution.
COMFORT	**COMFORTABLE** Wide pavement. Sitting areas.	**UNCOMFORTABLE** Absence or issues related to the pavement. Heavy traffic. Cars parked on the pavement. Poor maintenance of infrastructure. Steep hills.
PLEASANTNESS	**PLEASANT** Trees and green urban areas. Open spaces and open views. Street art. Absence of traffic. Picturesque streets. Lack of air and noise pollution.	**UNPLEASANT** Cars invading pedestrian areas and other public spaces. Rubbish and dog droppings. Barriers and obstacles. Bad pavement condition. Heavy traffic.
VIBRANCY	**VIBRANT** Cafés and terraces. Open space for communities. Street art. Recreational areas.	**DULL** Blank streetscape (i.e. long walls, no windows). Large car parks. Lack of trees.

Figure 4. Most cited elements of the public space and their influence in walking-cycling experience.

Specific issues and recommendations for improvement

During the description of the individual group observations and the ensuing group discussion, specific issues emerged that took centre stage in the discussion due to their local relevance. Five specific issues are described here, contextualised and visualised using maps and photos. The recommendations are targeting the relevant Local Council(s), national authorities (Transport Malta, Infrastructure Malta) and where relevant, specific management bodies (University administration, Tal-Qroqq taskforce).

Dangerous path between UM Campus and Swatar

Irregular and discontinuous pavement

Absence of pavement. Pedestrian framed between wall and fast traffic

Absence of pedestrian crossing with limited visibility

One of the walks in the active travel workshop linked the UM campus to Swatar, following a path which is widely used by pedestrians, even though it fails to meet many safety and comfort standards. The residential area of Swatar (where many students live or park their cars) is safely connected to UM through two routes (subway to Mater Dei, Route Option 1 in the map above and subway through Skate Park, Route Option 3). However, these routes require a considerable detour. As a result, pedestrians often choose a much shorter route (Route Option 2), which involves walking on irregular pavement and on the road with no pavement, framed between fast traffic and long and high walls and then crossing the road without pedestrian crossing and very limited visibility. This is an example of how deficient pedestrian network connectivity encourages pedestrians to use dangerous alternatives to save time.

Recommendations

Create pedestrian crossings and a continuous pavement for pedestrians to safely cross from the Università bus stops, under the tunnel and up to Swatar (Route Option 2). Limit traffic speed to 30km/h, include traffic calming infrastructure and place pedestrian bollards along the area where pedestrians walk near the wall to improve the (perception of) safety near and under the tunnel.

Subways at Skate Park and Mater Dei: a missed opportunity

The pedestrian subways allow pedestrians to cross main arterial roads, such as Regional Road and the Birkirkara bypass. While grade-separated infrastructure such as subways can be a good solution, the subways at Skate Park and Mater Dei need improvement and upgrading. Participants indicated that it feels a bit like a "rabbit hole" and gave them mixed feelings: on the one hand it is quiet and away from traffic, but on the other hand they report an unpleasant feeling: "it can be scary to walk here alone, especially in the dark".

Current issues with the subways relate to a lack of maintenance and proper design. Drainage is poor: the drainage facilities are so limited that during and after heavy rain the subway floods to the extent that pedestrians cannot make use of them. There is rubbish and debris lying around and a general lack of upkeep. The Skate Park and Mater Dei subways lack basic clear signage to indicate the appropriate directions and connectivity with the bus stops. The subway design includes a number of blind corners, which create danger and potential conflicts between the different users of the subways: pedestrians, people on skates and skateboards, cyclists and micro-mobility users (such as e-kick scooters). The lighting is substandard and many of the mirrors in the corners are broken, hindering good visibility and safety for users. The ceilings of the subways are low, causing problems for cyclists mounted on their bicycles, as well as adding to a feeling of enclosure, which can make people feel uncomfortable, especially at night.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Green urban area
Street art
Open space
Vibrant community

Accessible, wide and unobstructed ramps

Security bollards
Pedestrian signage
Limited speed
Traffic calming

Mater Dei Hospital

UM Campus

Sport Complex subway

No subway

Skate Park

Msida

Swatar
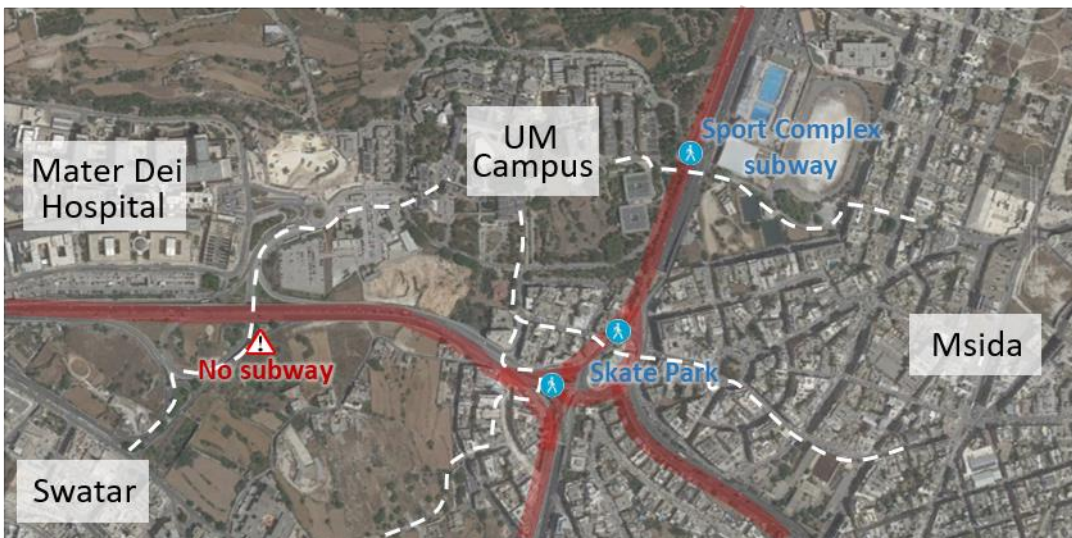
NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

Poor drainage system
Recurring floods

Occasional poor lighting, maintenance or cleanliness

Inaccessible zig-zag entrance for cyclists

Recommendations

Invest in the refurbishment of the subways, paying attention to the identified issues (lighting, visibility, space, drainage, rubbish). Draw up a management plan for regular maintenance by responsible authorities.

Locations of pedestrian crossings in San Gwann and Gżira

The group walking from the University campus to San Gwann, looping back from Gżira and the National Pool complex, encountered another example of deficient pedestrian network connectivity. In this case pedestrian crossings are placed far from their optimal position (the pedestrians' 'desire line') to promote traffic flow for vehicles. In the words of one of the participations, "this makes pedestrians feel like second class citizens" and does not encourage walking as a mode of transport.

Triq Tas-Sliema in San Gwann

Triq Tas-Sliema in Gzira

| ----- Walking routes | ----- Detour | Pedestrian crossing | NO Pedestrian crossing |
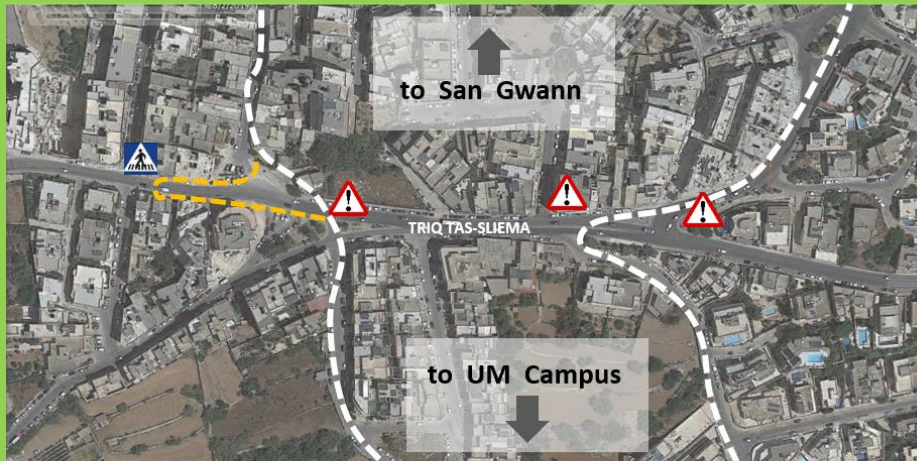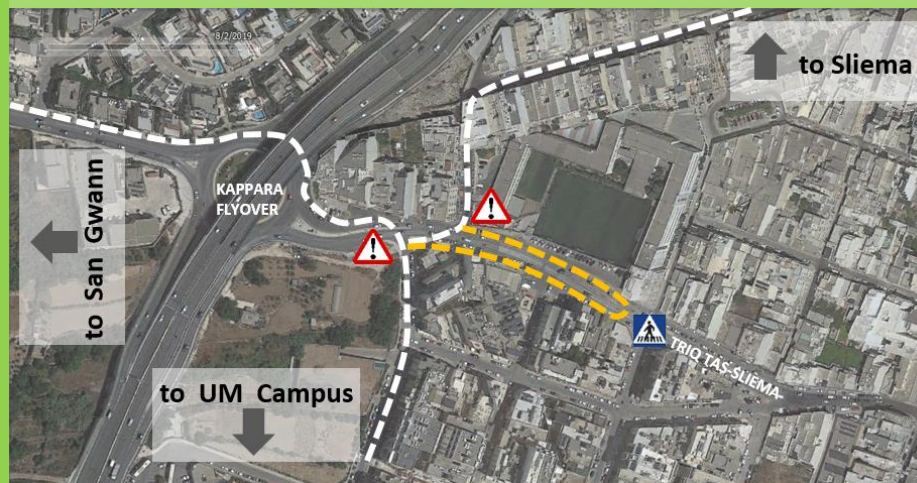
Recommendations

Review road designs and explore possibilities for creating more direct pedestrian connections via the creation of additional (or replaced) zebra crossings at the locations where pedestrians desire to cross (as indicated by the red triangle traffic signs on the above maps).

Ring Road at University of Malta campus

The ring road at the University of Malta campus consists of a one-way carriageway and parking bays on both sides. It is exclusively dedicated to cars even though it also serves pedestrians who walk to and from campus. There is no pavement or cycle path for pedestrians or cyclists, nor any signage indicating that this is a shared space. There are signs indicating that the speed limit is 20 km/h, but this is not observed by all drivers. The university ring road is frequently used by pedestrians and cyclists to move around the university, from one building to another. As one participant pointed out, "it is an uninviting welcome to pedestrians and cyclists". Participants explain that cycling against traffic on the ring road is risky, but since there is no infrastructure and in order to avoid having to cycle the full ring road just to go from the New Entrance (at Gateway) to the Old Entrance of University, some cyclists do this anyway.
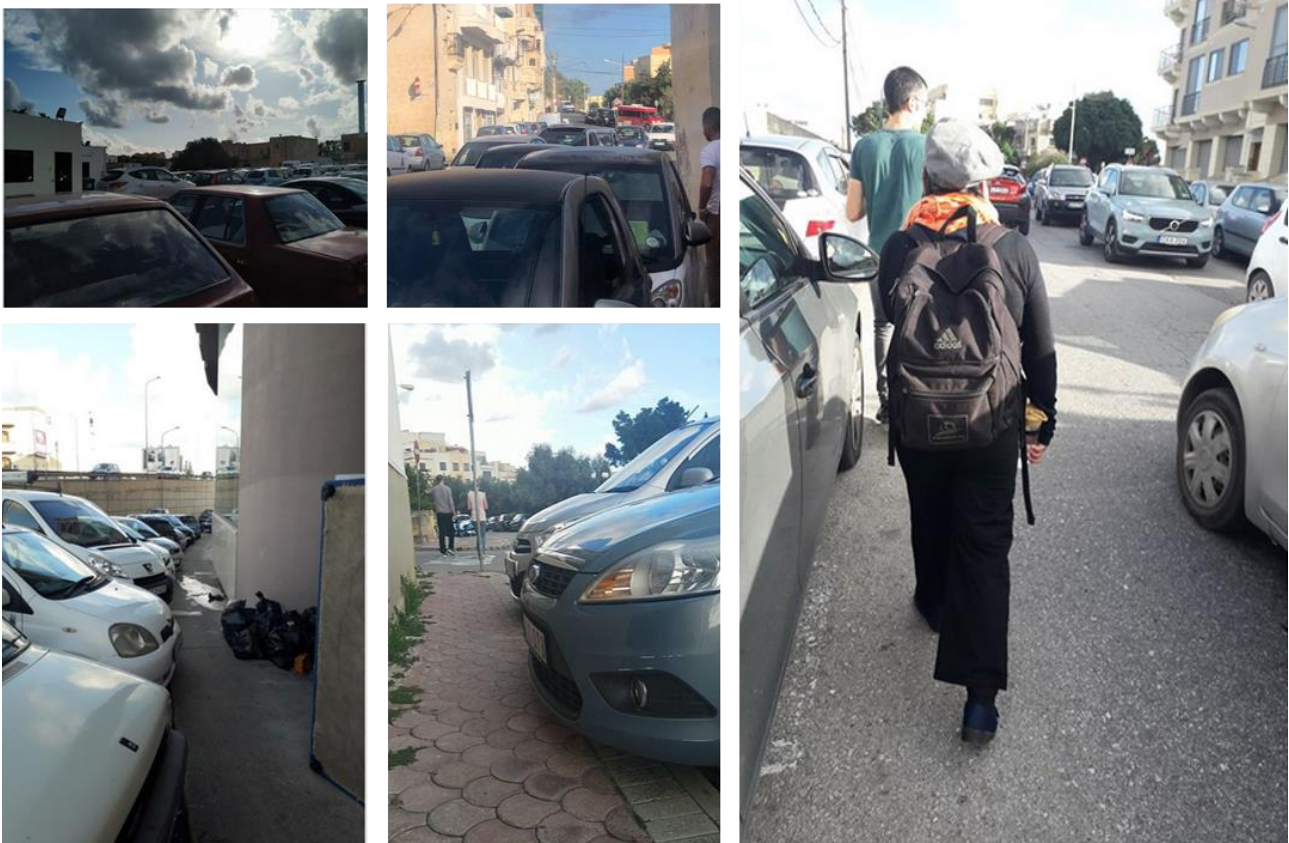

Recommendations

Create safe and continuous pedestrian connections from all entry and exit points of the university. Use traffic calming measures and shared space signage to indicate that the ring road carriageway is for the shared use of all road users (pedestrians, cyclists, car users, etc.). Explore the possibility of

making the ring road a pedestrian priority area. Create a contraflow lane for bicycles and micro-mobility users between the New Entrance (at Gateway) and the Old Entrance to University.

Narrow village streets and public space taken up by cars

Narrow village streets with cars parked on either side make it increasingly difficult to walk or cycle in what could be a pleasant environment. In certain areas the pavement is of such poor quality, or is blocked by rubbish, construction materials or parked cars, that there is no choice but to walk on the road. Participants noted that sometimes it was entirely unclear where they should walk, or who should have the right of way in a conflict situation with a car. People are left feeling vulnerable and unsafe, in the words of a participant: "do we need insurance just to walk around the street?"

Recommendations

Review road designs to reclaim and protect pedestrian space. Actively enforce illegal parking. Introduce traffic calming measures. Explore the possibility of (partial) pedestrianisation of village streets and/or replacing on-street parking to a parking area outside of the village core.

General recommendations for improvement

In addition to the specific issues described above, there were also a number of recurring and cross-cutting issues related to the active travel environment that were observed and experienced by the different groups. Potential solutions to these issues are classified into "hard" measures (infrastructure and design) and "soft" measures (incentives and enforcement).

ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE WORKSHOP		RECOMMENDED MEASURES & INTERVENTIONS	
		INFRASTRUCTURE & DESIGN	INCENTIVES & ENFORCEMENT
PAVEMENTS AND CYCLING PATHS	Total absence or discontinuity of pavements and cycling paths	• Implement and maintain pavement width and surfaces according to design standards. • Draw up design standards for cycling infrastructure. • Ensure pedestrian network continuity within urban areas. • Design direct and connected cycling network. • Reclaim urban public space currently used by vehicular traffic (i.e. reduce carriageways, parking spaces) when and where necessary.	• Auditing and enforcement of standard pavement widths and surfaces. • Active enforcement of illegal parking and encroachment on public space. • Creation of pedestrian priority area and pedestrianisation of streets / squares. • Prioritise pedestrian movement when planning urban public space distribution in narrow streets.
	Deficient physical characteristics of pavements and cycling paths (i.e. width, surface)		
PEDESTRIAN AND CYCLIST CROSSINGS	Absence of pedestrian crossings	• Include well signed and visible crossings at intersections with significant pedestrian / cyclist activity. • Adapt pedestrian crossings with kerb ramps. • Install traffic lights for pedestrians and cyclists (with fair timing) in streets with high traffic speed. • Install raised crossing in streets with low traffic speed. • Create pedestrian refuges (protected medians) for crossing several road lanes. • Create advance stop lines for cyclists at junctions.	• Active enforcement of speed limits and dangerous driving. • Active enforcement of pedestrian priority areas. • Plan urban transport system based on accessibility and safety of all road users instead of prioritising traffic flow capacity and speed.
	Poor accessibility of crossings, no kerb ramps		
	Poor crossing signage: no zebra crossing, vertical signals or traffic lights		
	Exposure to traffic at the crossing		
STREET FURNITURE & INFASTRUCTURE	Lack of adequate street furniture	• Ensure pedestrian and cycling infrastructure is adequately lit using appropriate street lighting. • Include green infrastructure (trees, shrubs and greenery) and street furniture (seating, shade and shelter) in the design of public spaces. • Include drainage and sustainable urban drainage systems in urban public spaces and road designs.	• Ensure that national and local budgets allocate enough resources for the installation and maintenance of urban street furniture.
	Poorly maintained or inefficient urban infrastructure		

ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE WORKSHOP		RECOMMENDED MEASURES & INTERVENTIONS	
		INFRASTRUCTURE & DESIGN	INCENTIVES & ENFORCEMENT
BARRIERS	Permanent obstacles (stairs, steps and ramps, misplaced urban furniture)	• Implement and maintain pavement width and surfaces according to design standards. • Implement alternative safe provisions for pedestrians and cyclists during road and building works.	• Auditing and enforcement of standard pavement widths and surfaces. • Active enforcement of alternative safe provisions for pedestrians and cyclists during road and building works. • Active enforcement of illegal parking and encroachment on public space. • Improve and enforce waste collection practices.
EXPOSURE TO TRAFFIC FROM THE PAVEMENT	Excessive speed and volume in urban traffic flow	• Introduce traffic calming measures. • Limits speeds to 50km/h in urban areas and maximum 30km/h in streets with narrow or no pavements, around schools, health centres and community places. • Use bollards, green buffers or other physical separation between pedestrians / cyclists and fast/heavy traffic.	• Active enforcement of speed limits and dangerous driving. • Road safety education. • Plan urban transport system based on accessibility and safety of all road users instead of prioritising traffic flow capacity and speed.
	Imprudent driving behaviour		
	Lack of safety buffers between pavement and road		
POLLUTION	Littering	• Install more (separated) waste bins • Plant trees and greenery to reduce air and noise pollution.	• Improve and enforce waste collection practices. • Active enforcement of littering. • Introduce transport demand management tools (e.g. Low Emission Zones, extension and revision of CVA). • Enforcement on car honking.
	Air pollution		
	Noise pollution		
STREETSCAPE	Lack of urban greenery and open spaces	• Include green infrastructure (trees, shrubs and greenery) and street furniture (seating, shade and shelter) in the design of public spaces. • Review urban design guidelines with a view to promote more inviting and attractive public spaces, and promote active frontages and socio-economic activities.	• Plan urban transport system based on accessibility and safety of all road users instead of prioritising traffic flow capacity and speed.
	Poor urban enclosure (street width/building height)		
	Lack of urban transparency (long walls, no windows, first floors primarily dedicated to garage entrances)		
	Unattractive and uninviting streetscape (abandoned, poorly maintained buildings, poor design)		
	Dull streetscape (lack of shops and other socio-economic street activities)		