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# A conceptual framework to assess the unmet travel needs in later life

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## ABSTRACT

This study proposes a conceptual framework for improving the evaluation of unmet travel needs amongst the older population. Unmet travel needs can be defined as mobility needs that remain unfulfilled due to the inability of accomplishing needed or wished trips and activities. Gerontological and transport research are putting increasing focus on the role that mobility plays in later life. Analyses of studies investigating the relationship between ageing and mobility reveal that these are generally characterised by relying only on realised journeys and activities. However, very little has been investigated so far in terms of unrealised mobility and often where it has been investigated, with different approaches and results. This article, by means of a methodological assessment of approaches used in the literature, develops a conceptual framework that can be used to investigate which mobility needs remain unfulfilled in later life. Firstly, the concept of mobility needs in later life is addressed. This concept is then used to evaluate the most appropriate method(s) to investigate factors which influence unmet travel needs. Five main domains are identified as necessary to be considered with regard to mobility during later life: transportation; health and wellbeing; built environment; type and importance of activities and demographic background characteristics. The study concludes that an inclusive approach which considers all of the domains is needed to better define the full dimension of mobility needs among the older population.

## 1. Introduction

Gerontological and transport research are putting increasing focus on the role that mobility plays for the older population. Studies investigating the relationship between ageing and out-of-home mobility are generally characterised by being generally focused on realised journeys and activities. However, very little has been investigated so far in terms of unfulfilled mobility and often where it has been investigated, with different approaches and results. Therefore, this paper proposes a conceptual framework for improving the evaluation of unmet travel needs amongst the older population.

### 1.1. Mobility and wellbeing

Out-of-home mobility is considered a fundamental contributor to the wellbeing of the older population. The ability to be mobile and use transport modes has been recognised as crucial for independence and for ageing well (Farquhar, 1995; Gabriel and Bowling, 2004). It allows older people to access services and facilities they need and places and people they desire (Metz, 2000). Moreover, it

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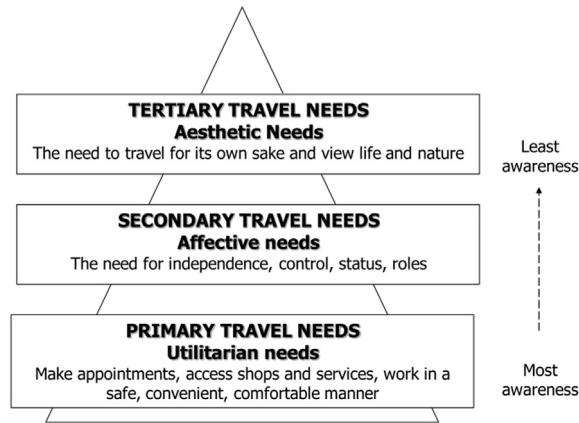


Fig. 1. The three levels of mobility needs by self-awareness of the need (Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010).

provides the potential psychological and physical benefits of movement (Metz, 2000), fulfils social and leisure needs and generates a sense of being in control of one's life (Hjorthol, 2013; Knight et al., 2007; Mollenkopf et al., 2011; Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010; Nordbakke and Schwanen, 2014a). The key role played by out-of-home mobility in later life is also accentuated by expected demographic shifts towards an ageing population which is forecast for the next decades. The increase of life expectancy trends together with the decline in birth rates are producing a demographic change characterised by a steady ageing in both developed and developing countries (Lanzieri, 2011; OECD, 2001).

Several studies on mobility and wellbeing relate to the extent to which mobility needs are satisfied. Much research in this area originates from the motivational hierarchy of human needs developed by Maslow (1968). In this theory, Maslow points out that people satisfy certain needs over others and that once basic needs related to biology and survival are met, the necessity of satisfying psychological and self-fulfilment needs emerge. A common categorisation of mobility needs that follows this approach is to classify them into utilitarian/serious and discretionary ones (Ahern and Hine, 2012; Davey, 2007; Siren et al., 2015). In this sense, utilitarian/serious needs are identified as travel necessary to achieve access to basic needs such as medical appointments and emergencies, shopping or financial services. On the other hand, discretionary needs are associated with travel related to the social, leisure and cultural realm, such as visiting other people, desired places and more generally as a means of achieving pleasure. A more elaborated hierarchy of needs based on Maslow's theory is the one proposed by Musselwhite and Haddad (2010) (Fig. 1). They developed a three-tier hierarchical framework based on utilitarian, affective and aesthetic needs to define motivation for mobility and travel amongst the older population. The primary level of the framework is characterised by travelling in order to fulfil practical and utilitarian needs such as access to services and shopping facilities, medical appointments and visiting other people. Once practical needs are met, psychological needs follow. At this secondary level, older people are motivated by the need to find their identity, independence and sense of control over their life. Finally, aesthetic needs are associated with the feelings obtained by the experience of the travel itself.

Another perspective in terms of needs satisfaction, used particularly in Scandinavian research, is connected to the integral needs approach developed by Allardt (1993). This approach identifies wellbeing not only as a matter of fulfilling basic needs, but also highlights the importance of non-material aspects of life that allow individuals to flourish (Nordbakke and Schwanen, 2014a). Moreover, individuals are not considered merely as receptacles for resource inputs but play an active role in controlling and managing their resources. In this theory, wellbeing is considered in terms of needs satisfaction in the context of three different conditions of life:

- *having* - income, household, employment, health and education
- *loving* - relations with family, friends and other social relationships
- *being* - self-esteem, leisure activities, social reputation and political resources

An example of the adjustment of the integral needs approach to explain the relationship between mobility and wellbeing of older people can be found in Hjorthol (2013) and Nordbakke and Schwanen (2014a). In their studies, journeys for shopping, health, services and commuting can be associated with the *having* aspects of life; social activities, such as trips to visit other people, and chauffeuring with *loving*; and journeys related to leisure activities with the *being* condition. However, an important element of this approach is that, contrary to Maslow's theory, activities do not belong to pre-fixed categories. Therefore, some activities can help to fulfil needs in more than one aspect of life (e.g. shopping as a primary need as well as a social or leisure need).

The active role of individuals in terms of how to manage resources is also central in the capability approach developed by Sen (1993). According to Sen, focusing only on resources is not enough to describe wellbeing, since the ability to manage resources differ according to individuals and social, temporal and spatial contexts (Nordbakke and Schwanen, 2014b). Therefore, wellbeing is identified as the freedom of choosing what type of life individuals want to live and how they use personal resources. This theory hinges upon the concepts of functionings and capabilities, where the first are the states of being and doing and the latter the

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