



ARGnote

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The Transport Accessibility Rehabilitation Services Advisory Network

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Overview

Engaging with the public in research projects is a valuable exercise. However, it is often neglected as it can be time consuming and difficult to find the relevant people to consult. The Transport Accessibility Rehabilitation Services Advisory Network (TARSAN) is a platform, both physical and virtual, for people to learn about and discuss transport, accessibility and rehabilitation research. TARSAN was created to ensure researchers could easily find and engage with members of the public to better inform the research. TARSAN also provides an easy method to ensure any solutions are fed back to, and discussed with, the people that need them.

Key Findings

- TARSAN gives users of transportation networks and rehabilitation services, an audible voice in the type and content of research that is carried out for their benefit
- TARSAN wants to ensure that accessibility research involves end users in the entire research process
- Founded at the end of 2013, TARSAN now has over 250 members from across the UK.

Aims & Objectives

This ARGnote explores the creation of TARSAN. It details the reasons for establishing TARSAN, the scope of the network and the role TARSAN members play in the research process.

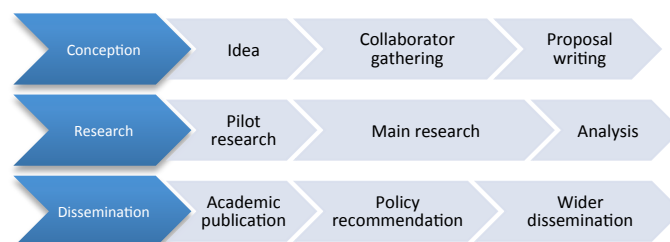
Background

Accessibility research looks for answers to challenges of accessibility within the built environment. Frequently it investigates the difficulty of access due to the mismatch between a person's abilities and what the built environment requires of them. It is at the interface of the medical and transport worlds. With this in mind it is important that the research should incorporate dialogue between researchers and end users of services, and should be driven by and educate the people that use the infrastructure it affects.

The founders of TARSAN were concerned that although researchers generally are aware of the value of engaging with the public, the time and resources involved in achieving this meant that it is often neglected. TARSAN was created in order to rectify this situation within research on accessibility.

Research driven by end users

The research process has many points at which input from end users is valuable.



At the concept stage end users are able, in many cases, to judge whether the proposed research will be valuable, sometimes changing the direction of a project to solve a challenge that researchers were previously unaware of. At the

research stage many researchers have difficulty finding participants who meet the eligibility criteria of a study and an engaged group can help find the right people to participate. Finally at the dissemination stage where end users can help ensure any results and recommendations are shared with the people that can either implement them or can use them to better their own lives.

Dissemination driven by researchers

End users, especially those who face specific barriers to accessibility can be hyperconservative and may demand solutions that may help them at the cost of the accessibility of others. Better dissemination through TARSAN can help to better educate as to what is possible and therefore help stimulate innovation rather than stifle it.

Methods

The aim of TARSAN, quoting from the TARSAN charter, is *“to be a warm, undaunting, vibrant and exciting place where members can engage and participate where they feel their opinions are heard, and their participation is valued.”*

TARSAN Founders

TARSAN was founded by the Department of Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering and the Institute of Orthopaedic and Musculoskeletal Science both at UCL alongside the Aspire Centre and the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital.

TARSAN Researchers

TARSAN researchers come from a variety of settings, academic, clinical and charitable. This ensures that the research carried out under TARSAN has a wide range of tools at its disposal and can impact on a wide range of people.

TARSAN members

TARSAN members range in the levels of interest, participation and experience. Most members have no experience in being involved in research. Some members like to be involved in any research, other members want to be involved where they have experience of a specific disability or accessibility issue, whilst others have professional experience in a related field. The level of engagement of members varies from involvement in online discussions to highly active participation by consulting on research proposals and participation in research experiments.

TARSAN as a “space”

In order to engage with members TARSAN uses multiple methods. It is not just a database of interested people, it is frequently a space. The space, sometimes physical sometimes virtual,

creates more of a sense of dialogue and purpose than a database or solely virtual network can provide. Physical events are frequently held around London on different topics (including walking stick masterclasses, wheelchair training days and airport accessibility focus groups).

It was important that TARSAN should not be an intimidating space for those without a scientific background. Events are held inside and outside the university and discussions take place on social media. Events held outside the university help involve people who are unlikely to engage in an academic setting. For example, in October 2014, TARSAN took part in Transport for London’s, Access All Areas Exhibition at the London Excel Centre. Here, researchers, disseminated research findings on wheelchair technology and walking sticks.



It is crucial that in a group like TARSAN, the members feel they are being listened to by the researchers. Engagement should be a circular process. If members feel the process is only one-way, that their thoughts are not being received or valued, then their engagement will stop. Where feedback is sought by researchers any amendments will be fed back to members. Where research ideas have been proposed by members, researchers must inform those members what has happened as a result of their idea and if it was not developed, why.

Results

TARSAN currently has over 250 members. TARSAN researchers regularly engage with TARSAN members to help shape their research to create better solutions to the challenges that are faced in the real world.

Future Research Areas

TARSAN will continue to encourage dialogue between the general public and its researchers.

www.cege.ucl.ac.uk/tarsan