



Ministerie van Infrastructuur
en Waterstaat

Reduced accessibility

Personal experiences with
accessibility problems



Netherlands Institute for Transport Policy Analysis | KiM

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Summary


The barriers experienced by people in reaching work, facilities and social contacts are diverse and often overlap. Travel times and travel costs are sometimes not the only barrier to travel, but also, for example, the fear of rush hour traffic or the inability to ride a bicycle. Nevertheless, people with accessibility problems often find ways to participate in many of these activities, albeit sometimes with considerable effort. This makes it seem that the immediate consequences of these accessibility problems for their participation in society are only minor, but given the limited travel options available to them, they have fewer choices in the activities in which they can participate, and are vulnerable to changes. This situation is reflected in the 30 interviews we held for this study, with people who experience accessibility problems.

The boundary between acceptable accessibility problems and undesirable accessibility poverty is unclear, in the absence of specific accessibility standards or aims. Moreover, the barriers and their consequences are also relevant to other policy areas besides infrastructure and mobility. On its own, mobility policy is insufficient to ensure access for all.

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Part one of this brochure provides a summary of the study's findings. The focus is on the accessibility barriers experienced by people and the consequences of those barriers for their participation in society.




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 Dealing with accessibility problems



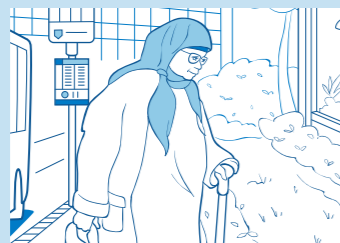
 The consequences of limited accessibility



 Access for all?

Personal stories

Part two consists of the personal stories of individuals who experience difficulty in reaching the activities in which they wish to take part. Each of these personal life-experience stories is compiled on the basis of multiple interviews.



Khadiya



Jade and Remco



Jelle



Leo



Fenna



Tjeerd



Thijs

Responsibility

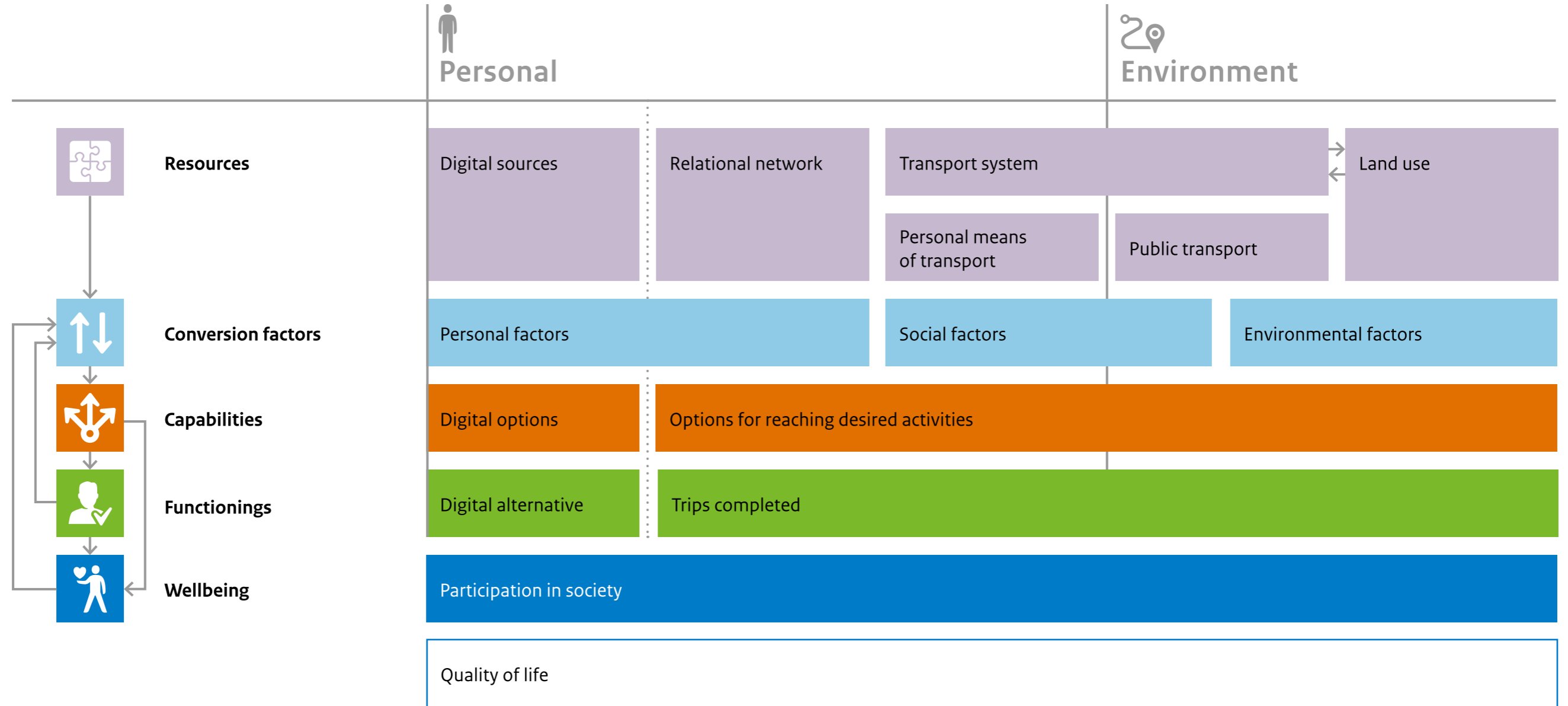


Study framework

The ability to reach work, facilities and social contacts is an essential precondition for people's participation in society. There is increased attention for accessibility problems and their consequences, leading to accessibility poverty.

What barriers do people experience in reaching activities they consider important, how do they deal with these problems and what are the consequences of their restricted ability to travel? These questions were the core of the 30 interviews held by the Netherlands Institute for Transport Policy Analysis (KiM) with people who have shared their personal experience of accessibility problems.

Our aim with this study is to gain a greater insight into the phenomenon of accessibility poverty. The interviewees live in and around villages in Friesland and in the urban district Kanaleneiland in Utrecht. During the interviews, they were not only asked about their travel movements and the difficulties they experience, but also the available resources, the capacity to convert those resources into travel options and general participation in society. We then compared the insights thus gathered with literature.

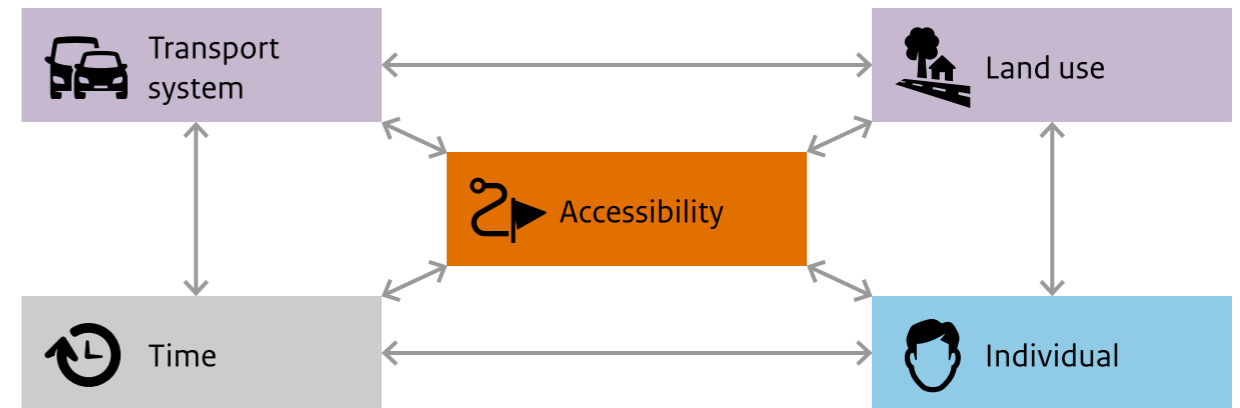


Accessibility is not simply a question of actual travel behaviour. In studying wellbeing, specific attention should also be focused on options. The conceptual framework for this study is therefore inspired by the *capability approach*. Another element essential to creating choices is conversion factors. People must have access both to resources and means of transport, and the personal capacity to convert those resources into (travel) options.



A Experienced barriers

The barriers to reaching activities are diverse and often overlap. The interviews also reveal that barriers always come in combinations.



Firstly there are barriers relating to the *transport system* itself. This includes the lack of available and suitable transport options. This relates not only to personal means of transport, the lack of public transport in the vicinity or the absence of public transport links to the desired destination. It also relates to the fact that public transport stops are not easily accessible everywhere and the infrastructure is not always safe. Another barrier is the limited information provided about routes and journey times.



Sometimes you only have 5 minutes to switch trains. And with children that can be a real problem. You can't make the children run with you to catch a train.

Until five years ago, there was no cycle path here. As cyclists we were forced to share the main road with car drivers. In particular when having to share the same road to take young children to school, the situation was always perilous.





A second category of barriers relates to *land use*. A more obvious barrier referred to by respondents is the absence or shortage of desirable activities in the immediate surroundings. They also refer to their housing location itself as a barrier, if they would prefer to live in a more easily accessible, but for them unaffordable location.



When we moved to this village, we expected me to be able to travel to Leeuwarden by bicycle, and to start with that was indeed the case. But now with the winter months approaching (...) I think that if the opportunity for me to move back arose then I would certainly take it.

The women's fitness studio in Overvecht is open 24 hours a day. This is ideal for me because I am away so often (...) but right now I am unable to attend sport at all, because the distance to the sport location is simply too great.



A third category relates to the *time component* of travel movements. For example long or unreliable journey times, the low frequency of (public) transport options and overcrowded public transport during peak hours.



We call it the 'sardine tin bus'. It is not unusual for the bus to be so packed full that at a certain point, it simply drives off. A whole group of people are stood waiting at the bus stop, but the doors close in your face, and you are simply left standing there.

Sometimes even if I do arrange a taxi, it arrives too late. Say I have an appointment at the hospital and I order the taxi 30 minutes too early. (...) even so, it sometimes is more than an hour before the taxi arrives.



I do not have the money to buy an expensive bike. The area is regularly strewn with rubbish, and broken glass. And that often leaves me with a flat tyre, which is quite a struggle to fix.

If my children have topped up my travel pass, then I can make the journey successfully. Otherwise I simply stay at home.



Finally, we identify a cultural barrier that means that people are less likely to use the bicycle as a transport option. Weather conditions can limit the mobility of people with unprotected means of transport.



The barriers in the fourth category are linked to the *individual*. Limited financial means often prevent people from making a journey or developing skills such as passing their driving test or buying or repairing a means of transport. Health problems and anxiety also form clear barriers. Take for example anxiety about travelling during the rush hour, fear of accidents or concerns about bicycle theft. Limited digital and language skills also form an obstacle.



My husband is often away for a whole week at a time for his work. And he takes the car with him. We have decided not to have a second car because the money it would cost would limit us in the other things we can do. That is the consideration.

I have no driving licence because as a young person I experienced a number of serious accidents.





Dealing with accessibility problems

When people experience barriers to travel, this does not automatically mean that they are unable to take part in the desired activity. They may have different ways of dealing with the accessibility problems.

In certain cases these *coping mechanisms* can mean that people do eventually take part in the activities, but in an adapted form or with assistance. In other cases, they will not participate in the activity, at all.

Taking part in an activity

The most commonly mentioned means of dealing with an accessibility problem is calling in the assistance of family, friends and official organisations. As a result of this support, many people are still able to participate in the desired activity, although many express a degree of reticence in accepting help. Although this a commonly referred to mechanism, it is not available to everyone. After all, it requires a social network with people who do have and are able to use particular resources or means of transport.

A digital alternative is a second way of dealing with the accessibility problems. Digital alternatives enable people to still participate in activities (for example employment) despite their accessibility problems. Nevertheless, alternatives of this kind are not always considered fully equivalent, certainly when it comes to social activities.



A third way in which people overcome accessibility barriers is by adapting and doing what is available to them. Many of the interviewees spend a great deal of time, effort or money on their journey in order to allow them to participate, despite the barriers. This mechanism includes the smart (combined) planning of multiple activities and for example fare evasion.

Opting to not participate

A final mechanism we have also identified is downgrading the wish to travel. In other words, people opt to either not travel at all, or to travel less often or less far. Whereas some people express their dissatisfaction with their reduced capabilities, others accept their fate. Another group of people appear to justify their decision for example by saying that it is good for the climate to travel less often by car.



I do not want to ask my children to take me everywhere. It's just not possible. So I find myself stuck at home.





The consequences of limited accessibility

Many of the interviewees are sometimes able to attend the activities in which they wish to participate by overcoming the barriers. Nevertheless, they do experience the consequences of their inability to travel as often as they would like: fewer social contacts, restrictions on employability and study and limited access to (health)care. It is also true that people are sometimes not aware of activities they have missed due to their limited options.

The most commonly referred to consequence of less travel for participation in society is that the interviewees see their family and friends less often. The degree to which this is perceived as a serious difficulty varies widely: while some people experience a sense of exclusion and loneliness, others consider it to be at most 'unfortunate'.

Secondly, accessibility problems have consequences for employment and study. This is the most commonly studied consequence, in literature, although empirical evidence in the Netherlands is still limited. American studies reveal that car ownership significantly increases the chance of finding employment, but to what extent this also applies to the Netherlands is less certain. After all, in the Netherlands, as a rule there are more alternatives available for the car. Respondents did refer to examples of barriers to accessibility that have reduced their choice of work or forced them to resign.



Limited accessibility rarely causes interviewees to miss (health) care appointments. For respondents, reaching care facilities is seen as essential, and most succeed in reaching their destination – albeit sometimes with considerable assistance, at high cost or with much effort.

Finally, in the interviews, the respondents also suggest that accessibility problems reduce the freedom of young children to behave and perform as they would like. For example because the travel distance or the traffic situation prevents them from cycling to an activity, unaccompanied.





Access for all?

Although policymakers are keen to acquire a clear picture of people facing accessibility poverty in order to get a better grasp of the scale of the problem, as this study suggests, it is a complex issue.

We often refer to accessibility poverty if people are unable to successfully participate in society *as a consequence of* accessibility problems, which mean that they are limited or experience difficulty in reaching essential activities such as work, healthcare and social contacts. In practice, however, cause and effect relationships of accessibility problems are not easy to distinguish between. Low income, for example, goes hand in hand with lower rates of car ownership, which makes it difficult to find suitable employment – which in turn results in low income.

Accessibility poverty is not only dependent on the environment and personal traits, but also relates strongly to how people deal with their accessibility problems. It is notable that those people who do experience accessibility barriers often find their own solutions that enable them to reach their destination. Sometimes with a great deal of money, effort and time. Moreover, these individuals have fewer choices and fallback options. Not only does this make them more vulnerable to changes; having a limited set of options also has negative consequences for quality of life. If a household opts to provide sufficient accessibility, this can have negative consequences in other areas. For example: if a household is dependent on a car in order to meet its accessibility needs ('forced car ownership'), this may be at the expense of good diet or a warm home. This example shows how accessibility poverty is often closely related to other types of poverty, such as energy poverty.



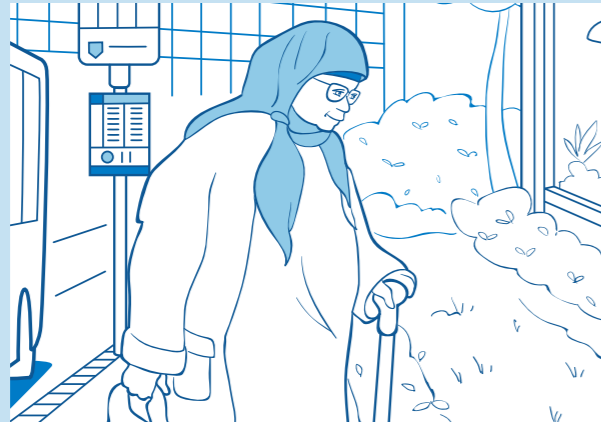
Because identifying accessibility poverty is a complex issue, quantifying the scale of the problem is at the very least challenging. Moreover, there are no clear policy objectives in the field of accessibility, and as such there are no policy objectives aimed at tackling accessibility poverty. And that makes it difficult to identify concrete and effective measures.

Finally, we would emphasise that the causes, the consequences and the coping mechanisms interact strongly with such policy areas as healthcare, education and housing. After all, problems in reaching a school can be improved by improving transport and the infrastructure around that school, but also by interventions in the spatial planning (of activities and housing) and education policy (for example by making choices in school sizes). Cooperation with other government departments and other levels of government is therefore essential. At the end of the day, access for all cannot be achieved through mobility policy alone.

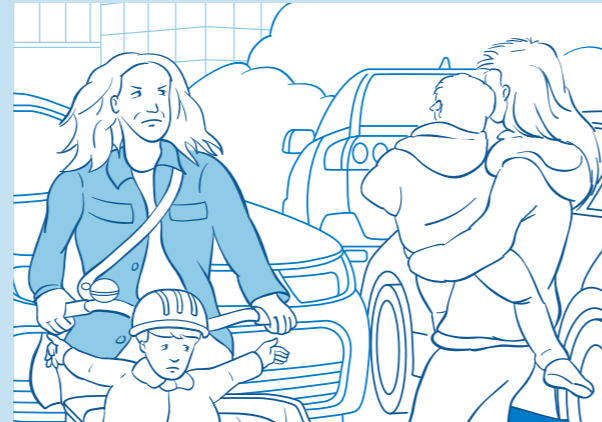




Personal stories



Khadiya



Jade and Remco



Jelle



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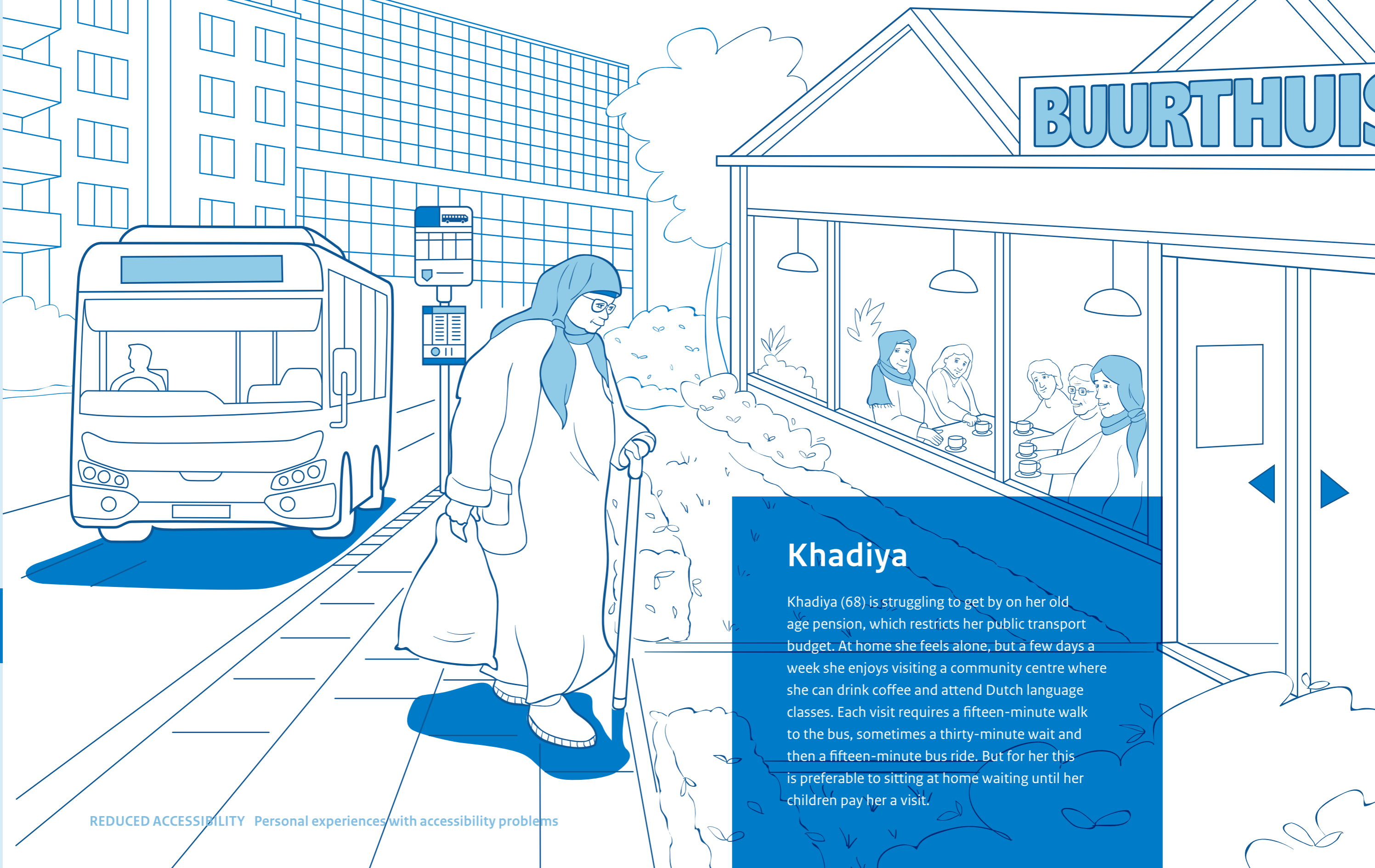


Tjeerd



Thijs

Each of the personal stories is compiled on the basis of various interviews. The names are fictitious.




Khadiya

Khadiya (68) is struggling to get by on her old age pension, which restricts her public transport budget. At home she feels alone, but a few days a week she enjoys visiting a community centre where she can drink coffee and attend Dutch language classes. Each visit requires a fifteen-minute walk to the bus, sometimes a thirty-minute wait and then a fifteen-minute bus ride. But for her this is preferable to sitting at home waiting until her children pay her a visit.




A quick trip out


Although she used to cycle, Khadiya can no longer ride her bicycle. In her mind, cycling in the busy city of Utrecht is dangerous for the elderly. When her husband was still alive, he owned a car. Now she can no longer afford it.



So she often takes the bus to visit the community centre. With her rheumatism, the fifteen-minute walk to the bus stop is a struggle. However, regular visits to the centre are very important for her, as a means of tackling loneliness: 'I get up in the morning and have something to do until around 4 in the afternoon.' Khadiya's loneliness is in part caused by the fact that she came to the Netherlands as a migrant. 'I am now all alone here with my children. I have no other family here; everyone is in Morocco.' In the past, she was surrounded by her children at home, a source of comfort and activity.



'My bus card quickly runs out. With no balance on the pass, I am unable to travel to the foundation by bus. My children top up my public transport travel pass whenever there is enough money on my account. I am unable to do it myself.'



She recognises that the bus is expensive. 'Even when my children have topped up by my public transport travel pass, it runs out very quickly. If there is enough money on my bank account, they top up my pass with 20 euros and otherwise 10 euros. I am unable to do it myself.' If there is not enough balance on her pass, she visits the community centre less often.

Waiting for the regional taxi

The hostess at the community centre sometimes arranges a regional taxi for her. Her own Dutch is too limited to make the necessary phone calls. 'The only problem is it sometimes comes too late', explained Khadiya. 'Once I waited for two hours. The driver had forgotten me.' The taxi has to stop everywhere, and the journey sometimes takes half an hour, sometimes 40 minutes. The regional taxi also has its limits, she has discovered. 'I am allowed to travel 500 kilometres a year by taxi. In the past it was 2,000 kilometres. I have to think carefully about whether the journey is worth the effort.' She generally uses the regional taxi for her hospital visits. 'To make sure I arrive on time, I book the taxi early. But that means long waiting times at hospital.'

She is unable to make train journeys to further-away destinations due to her health. 'I sometimes fall because of my knee, and that makes me scared of travelling by train.' If someone travels with her, she says, she is less anxious. 'Once I am on the train and on a seat, it is no problem. The difficulty comes with stepping down from the train, on the stairs, the escalators and finding the right platform. That makes the bus a better option for me.'

Travelling to visit her son in Belgium is very expensive, and takes a long time by public transport. And she has to make sure to take exactly the right trains. For Khadiya a real challenge. 'My Dutch is not good and I also find it very difficult to read the signs. If I can take the Flixbus to Antwerp, with no changes on the route, I can make the journey in one go. All I have to do is get on the right bus. My son then picks me up at the bus station.'

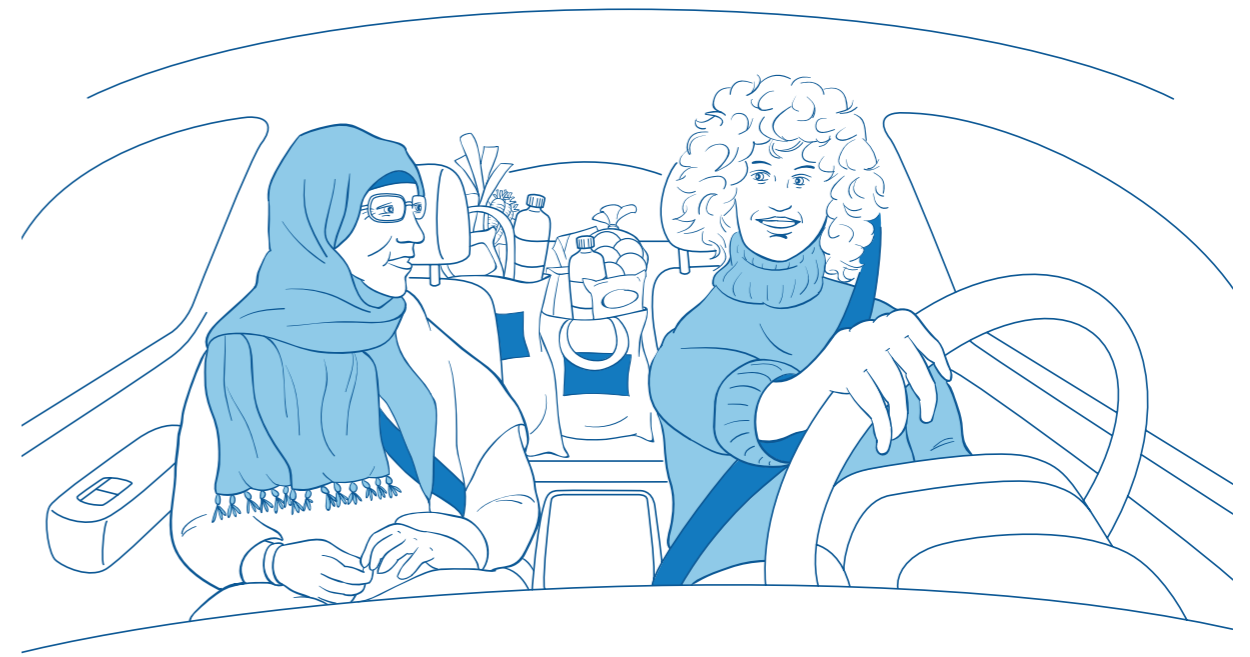
Dependent on her children

Her children visit her occasionally or pick her up for a trip into town or to their home. 'My daughter comes once every two weeks to take me to the Lidl supermarket in the car. I then stock up on my shopping.'

But she does not want to ask too much of her children. Her daughter, who also lives in Utrecht, often has no time because she works long hours. Khadiya wishes her a life of her own. 'It is unpleasant to have to ask for help all the time. You have to let your children go.' Her son who now lives in Belgium always brings his children with him, when he comes to stay. They then sometimes make an excursion to other places she wants to see.

Rather do her own shopping

Khadiya would like to make more excursions, to visit other cities like Amsterdam, or perhaps a trip to Belgium. She would enjoy a day away with a group of other women. She would even like to make a day trip to the city centre or the fabrics market, but she now sees the bus journey as too much of an obstacle. Khadiya believes that the municipal services could perhaps help her attend more activities. 'I plan to get out and about more and do my own shopping, with a mobility scooter.'

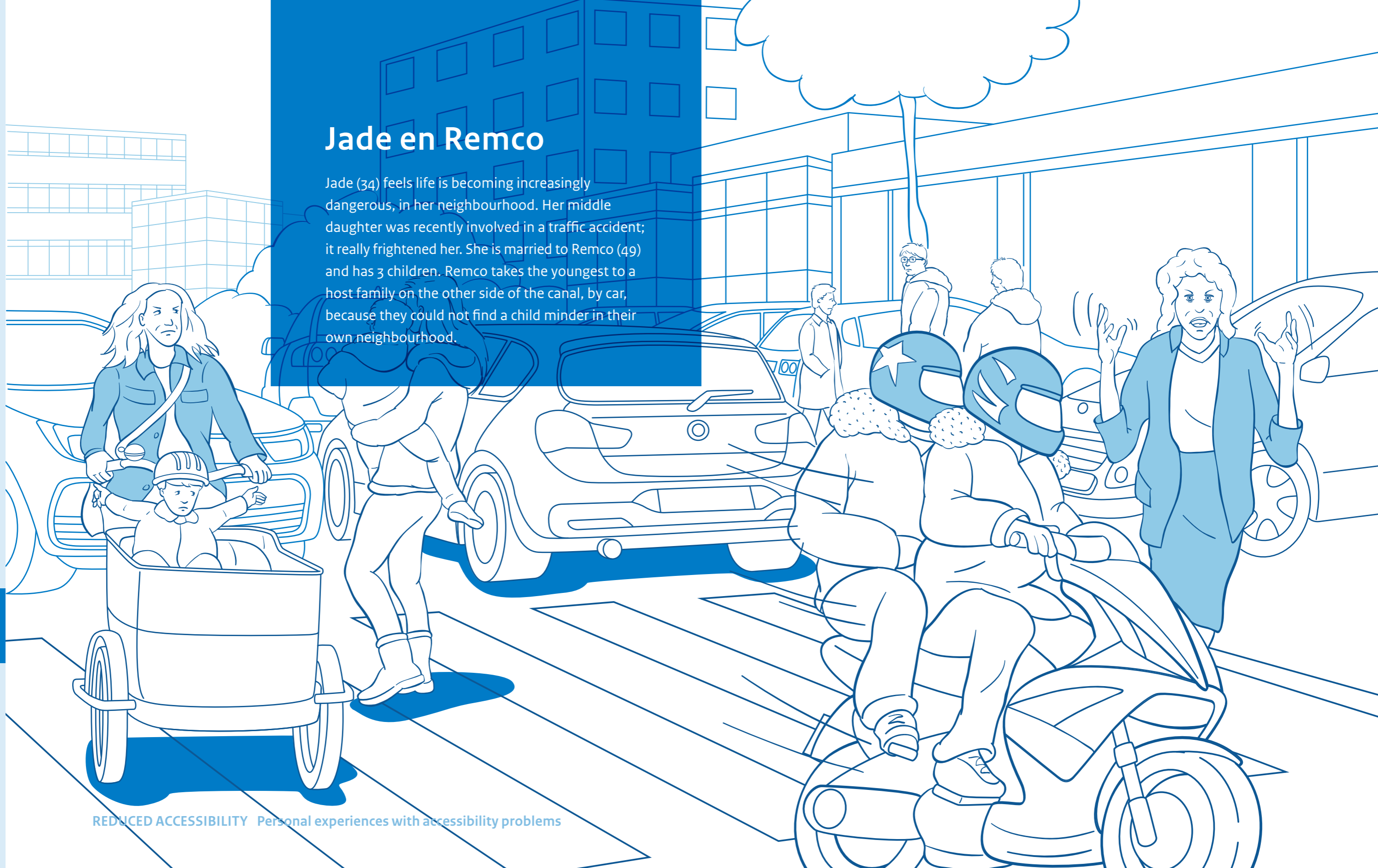


'To make sure I arrive on time for my appointment, I book the regional taxi early. But that means long waiting times at hospital.'



Jade en Remco

Jade (34) feels life is becoming increasingly dangerous, in her neighbourhood. Her middle daughter was recently involved in a traffic accident; it really frightened her. She is married to Remco (49) and has 3 children. Remco takes the youngest to a host family on the other side of the canal, by car, because they could not find a child minder in their own neighbourhood.



Fear of travelling in the rush hour

Jade explains that she no longer cycles to school with her daughter, because of the heavy car traffic and the trucks delivering their loads. 'They never let cyclists go first, and we have no cycle paths. What should we do? Cycle on the pavement? At a quarter past eight in the morning the whole place is chock-a-block. Cyclists cycle willy-nilly and cars everywhere, and often driving too fast.' Jade thinks that introducing a one-way system and painting two red cycle paths would help solve the problem.

Fortunately, all is well with her daughter. 'In the traffic accident she fell but only suffered a few scratches. Nonetheless, it really frightened her. She is now scared whenever she has to cross the road. She squeezes my hand so tightly.' If the youngest children want to go to the playground, Jade always goes with them. 'There are no zebra crossings, you see. Everyone just crosses wherever they want.'

*'Life is very busy in the Kanaleneiland district.
No zebra crossings, everyone crosses wherever they want.
Cyclists and cars all travel way too fast.'*

Travel to work

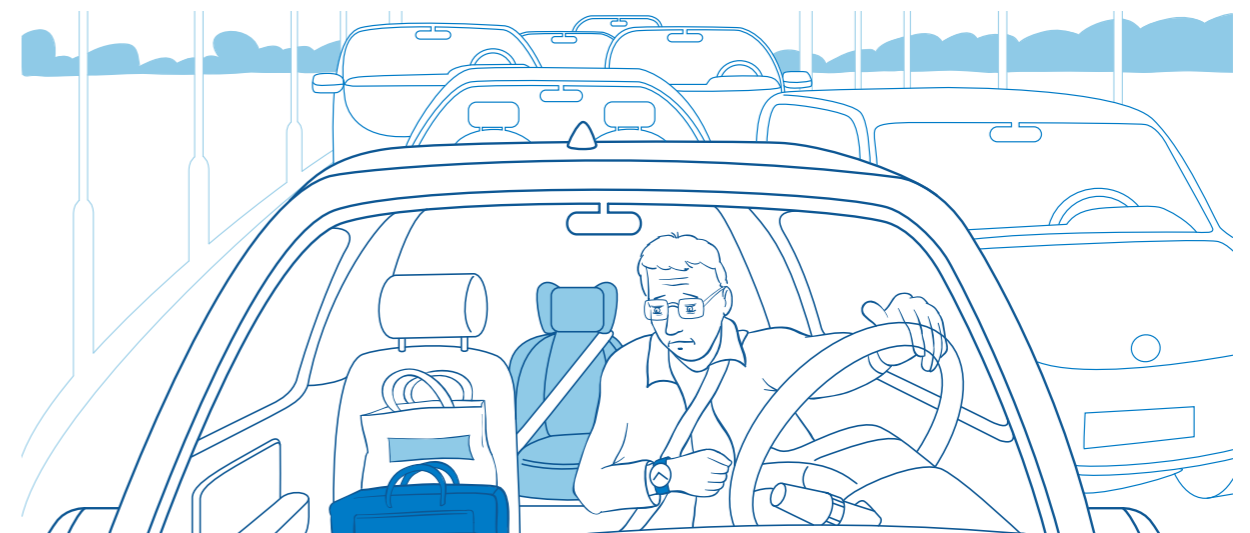
Jade and Remco are happy with their rented home in a quiet street in the neighbourhood. She knows most of the neighbours, and her parents, parents-in-law, shops, a supermarket and her work are all nearby. She has no driving licence which makes her dependent on public transport, or her husband. Travelling by bus with a pram is a real obstacle for her. She plans to take driving lessons, to enable her to move around more easily. However, finding the time is a struggle, with a busy family and long working hours.

Remco also works fairly close to home but still travels by car. 'I first take my youngest son to the host family in the next district, before driving on to work and picking him back up at the end of the afternoon.' It is too far to cycle, because of his physical fitness and because he has to take 3 bags with him: his work laptop case, a bag for the day, and a bag for his child. By bicycle, there is no direct route and you have to cross a high bridge. By car, the journey is far easier, unless the traffic gets backed up on 't Goylaan. 'It's crazy, you can be stood still for 20 minutes. My wife does not drive so that means that I always drop off and pick up my son.'

For years, Remco travelled from his home in Bunnik to work in Amsterdam. 'What I did in those days was take the bus or bike to Utrecht Central and from there the train to Amsterdam. When I left Amsterdam, I swore never to commute that sort of distance ever again.'

Few parking facilities

Remco is annoyed by the fact that since the Lidl up the road moved away there are regularly too few parking spaces. 'Visitors to the home improvement mall park in our neighbourhood. Free of charge.' The disappearance of the Lidl down the road means everyone now does their shopping at the local shopping centre, and the carpark is always full to overflowing. 'Even though I am at work I almost have to park my car all the way back home.'





Jelle

Student Jelle (22) still lives with his parents in a village in Friesland but would far rather live in the city, closer to his friends. The journey to school is at least 60 to 90 minutes: first by bike to Drachten, then by bus to Leeuwarden and then on foot to school, from the bus station. He occasionally travels to festivals by train, even as far away as Rotterdam, but only when he can get a discount ticket.



Numerous transfers

Travelling takes up a great deal of Jelle's time. Travelling to school one way can take up to 90 minutes. 'There are several public transport options from my village. You can cycle to the bus stop and then travel by bus to the railway station in Heerenveen, and then take the train to Leeuwarden. Or you can cycle to Drachten and then take the bus (Q-liner) direct to Leeuwarden.' He always walks the last part of the journey in Leeuwarden, because he never feels like waiting for the already overfull bus. 'And stupid as it seems, there is no good connection from the bus station to the secondary vocational school.'

'If given the choice, I take the train. It's cheaper during off-peak hours, thanks to the discount offered to holders of an off-peak season ticket'. On the bus, you have to take out a regional travel ticket and that is much more expensive.'

Unlit cycle path

In daylight hours, cycling to other villages for the nearest bus or train stop is not a problem. However, cycling at night time is a different story. 'One time I was cycling home in the evening and it was already pitch black. There I was on the cycle path separated from the road by a drainage ditch on each side. At some point on the cycle path is a bend and a narrow bridge. Just at that point, a car travelling in the other direction blinded me with its headlights on full beam. I thought I'd reached the bend with the narrow bridge, so I started to make the turn and found myself in the water in the ditch! Frightened half to death, I clambered out of the water. My phone was completely soaked and wouldn't work any more.'

Many of his friends have bought a car. Jelle, however, prefers to spend his money on other hobbies. 'I did start with driving lessons, but I stopped. It was just too expensive. I have to pay for the lessons myself. The driving school refused to drive all the way out to my isolated home, to pick me up, so having to cycle to the driving school takes up even more of my time.'

An overnight stay in town

When he knows he has to return home from Leeuwarden in the evening, he usually chooses to travel by Q-liner in the morning. 'That service runs until 00.30 a.m. To make the journey by train and a different bus, I have to set off far earlier. And although it means a longer cycle ride, the Q-liner offers more flexibility. Sometimes he spends an evening hanging around with his friends in town. If it gets too late and he has nowhere to crash with friends, he sometimes spends the night in a hostel. 'It's a question of not wanting to be dependent on others.'

Jelle sometimes travels to parties and festivals, as far away as the Randstad. 'You have to put up with the 3-hour journey time so it has to be worth the effort. If you buy a standard ticket, it costs you an arm and a leg. I prefer to travel with a group ticket, or hitch a ride with someone in a car.'



'I like attending music festivals, as far away as the Randstad. I am in fact already over age, but instead of paying the full €60 euros for a standard train ticket, I buy a youth ticket for €15 for the return trip.'

Last weekend, when he visited a festival in Rotterdam, he decided to buy a youth ticket which is not actually intended for the over-18s'. 'A youth ticket only costs €7.50. So €15 for the return journey. Fortunately my ticket was not inspected. But otherwise I could never have gone. The return journey costs € 60.' He made a long trip of it. 'I left at around quarter to 7 and the festival went on until 7 in the morning. I then went on to an afterparty in Schiedam before putting my head down for a few hours at some mate's house, in Vlaardingen. I eventually got home at 8 o'clock the next evening.' On long train journeys, he sometimes makes a stop-off to stay with friends, in Zwolle.

More social life

Jelle dislikes living in the village. 'After starting secondary school I would have preferred to live in town, closer to my friends and with more opportunity for evenings out. Living in the village made life very difficult. I felt very lonely during that period, because I had no real ties with other young people in my neighbourhood.'



*'I visit town far less often than I would like to.
I miss the social life there, the clubs and the like.'*

Even today he feels that he is missing out on things. He is unable to 'pop into' town as often as he would like. 'I think living in the city would be better for me. I would like to join some sort of club, and have more of a social life. I see my friends less often than I would like to.' With a driving licence and a car he would perhaps be able to travel more often and even visit other friends who live more remotely, in the evenings. 'But I am put off by the costs of owning a car.'

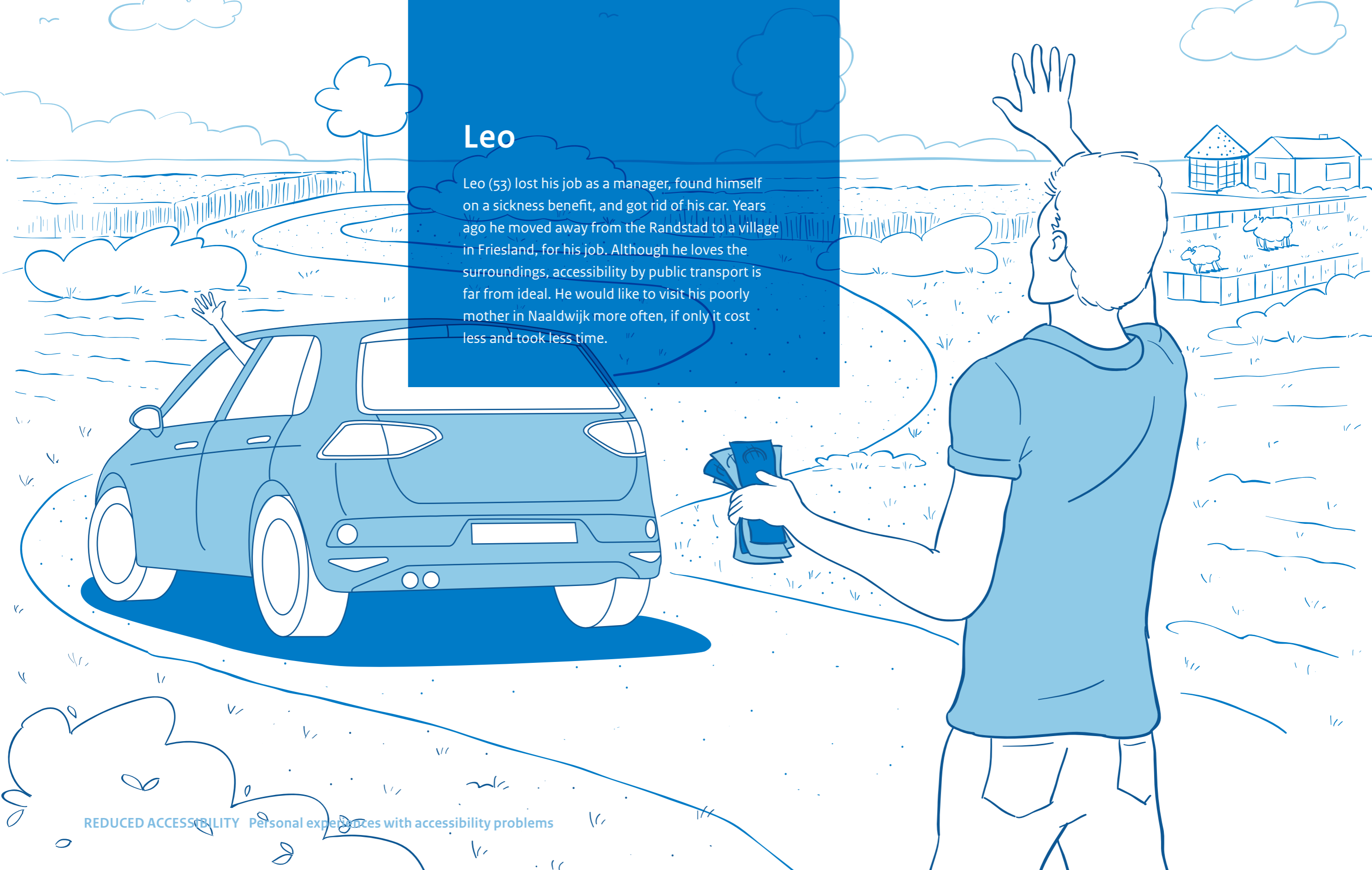
At the end of the day, he manages to travel to everywhere he really has to be. 'My parents do have a car and if necessary they can drop me off or pick me up. If I am really in trouble, I can of course call them any time. And in a real emergency, I am sure I could rely on other people from the neighbourhood.'





Leo

Leo (53) lost his job as a manager, found himself on a sickness benefit, and got rid of his car. Years ago he moved away from the Randstad to a village in Friesland, for his job. Although he loves the surroundings, accessibility by public transport is far from ideal. He would like to visit his poorly mother in Naaldwijk more often, if only it cost less and took less time.



Planning ahead

Leo has been on a sickness benefit for the last two years. Because of his cut in income, Leo decided to get rid of his car but he does still miss it; now he is dependent on his bicycle and public transport. 'During the summer months, cycling is no problem but it's a different story in the winter. Our village is completely without facilities, so even for your everyday shopping you have to travel to Heerenveen or Drachten. Twice a week he travels by bike to do the shopping for himself and his two almost adult sons who live at home.'

He explained that he is gradually getting used to living without a car and his planning skills have started to improve. 'Unless you have to get somewhere urgently. But in that case I can probably borrow the neighbours' car.' He prefers to avoid asking friends and neighbours for help, until it is really necessary. Instead he tries to plan around his needs.'

'Without a car you are dependent on your bike and public transport. Even doing the weekly shopping is quite a trip.'

Wasted journeys

For his work, Leo often travelled huge distances by car. His employers were based in Den Helder, Zwolle and Deventer. 'While I still had a car, I sometimes travelled backwards and forwards to Heerenveen three times in the same day. Some of the journeys were a waste of time, but that didn't stop me getting back in the car. That's not something I do any more. I now spend more time on my bike out in the fresh air. And that's fine, too. And it's good for the environment, at the end of the day.'

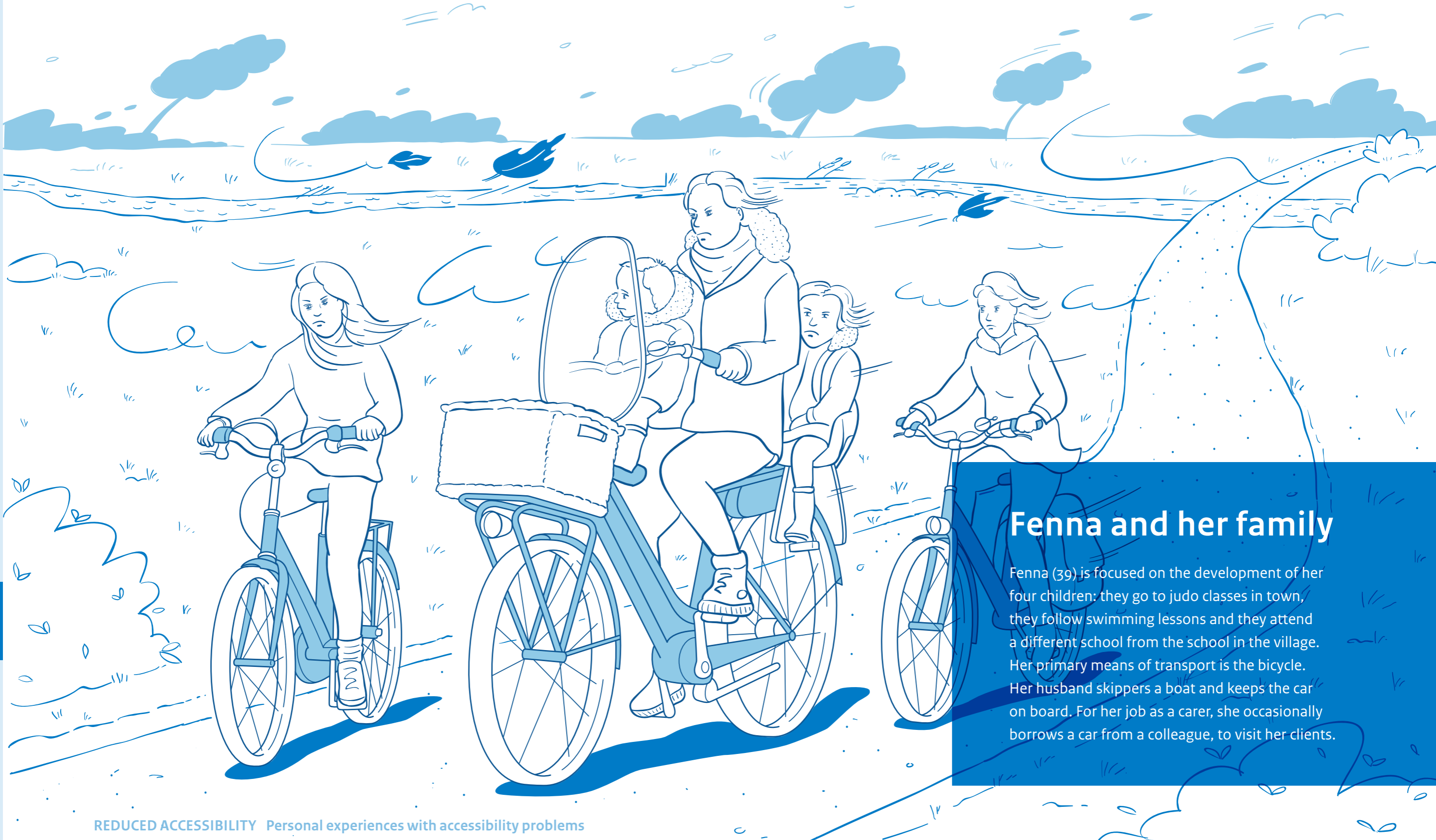
He visits his sick mother in Naaldwijk once every two weeks, and sometimes spends a few days with her. 'She has cancer and things could unexpectedly take a turn for the worst at any time. There is no way of saying when it will be over.' His two eldest daughters live near their grandmother, and they take good care of her. The train journey from Heerenveen to Naaldwijk takes 2.5 hours. 'Sometimes it feels like an age, while on other occasions it's an enjoyable trip, if you have a good book with you.' By car, it would be about 90 minutes. As Leo put it, 'Not such a huge difference.' He would like to visit his mother more often, but is prevented by the cost.

Not as essential

Leo has fewer social contacts than when he was in work. He finds it more difficult now to go out at the weekend for a meal, or to sit down and have a quiet drink. 'In that sense, life is far easier in a city, or in the Randstad. There is more chance of social interaction. Here there are a few music clubs, but that's not really my thing.'

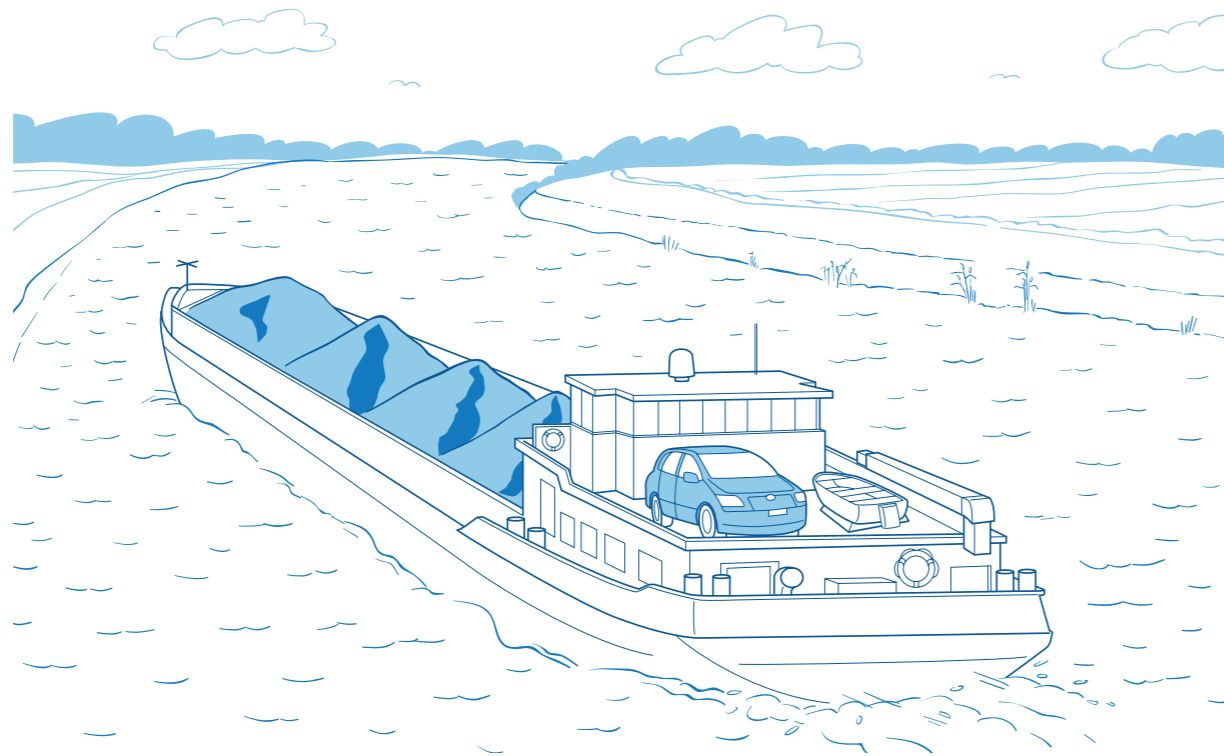
He also misses visiting the football matches in Heerenveen. 'An evening trip to the stadium and a cycle ride back home is just too far and too much effort. I'd rather miss out. With my TV subscription I can follow the match from the comfort of the living room, and it takes up far less time. And of course the football is not as essential as the shopping or a hospital visit.'





Fenna and her family

Fenna (39) is focused on the development of her four children: they go to judo classes in town, they follow swimming lessons and they attend a different school from the school in the village. Her primary means of transport is the bicycle. Her husband skips a boat and keeps the car on board. For her job as a carer, she occasionally borrows a car from a colleague, to visit her clients.



Experiences with mobility

‘When my husband is away with the boat and the car, organising all the activities is a real challenge,’ explained Fenna. ‘My husband will be home tomorrow with the car, which gives us an easy week, until he sets sail one week later.’

And that makes cycling often the best option. ‘And if it rains? Then we put on our raincoats. But when the wind is blowing in your face, it can be hard to motivate the children, so whenever possible, I borrow a car. We do all have bikes with gears.’

For the children’s judo on Wednesday afternoon, Fenna borrows her mother’s car. ‘Because the journey by public transport means two transfers. By car, it’s just fifteen minutes.’ Her mother often plans her activities around Fenna’s needs. Fenna combines this trip with the big weekly shop.

Fenna’s colleague never minds if she borrows the car for home visits. ‘She often has no need of the car on her day off so I can borrow it. I then cycle over to her house the

evening before, and take the car with me, and return it the next afternoon. We message each other about the best timing.’

Conscious choices

Fenna loves living in a large house with a big garden. Occasionally they think about having a house closer to all the facilities. ‘If we were to move, as the children get older, they could attend all their activities by themselves. The oldest is already at secondary school, so in theory she could go to judo on her own. Now it is too far, so I have to take her.’



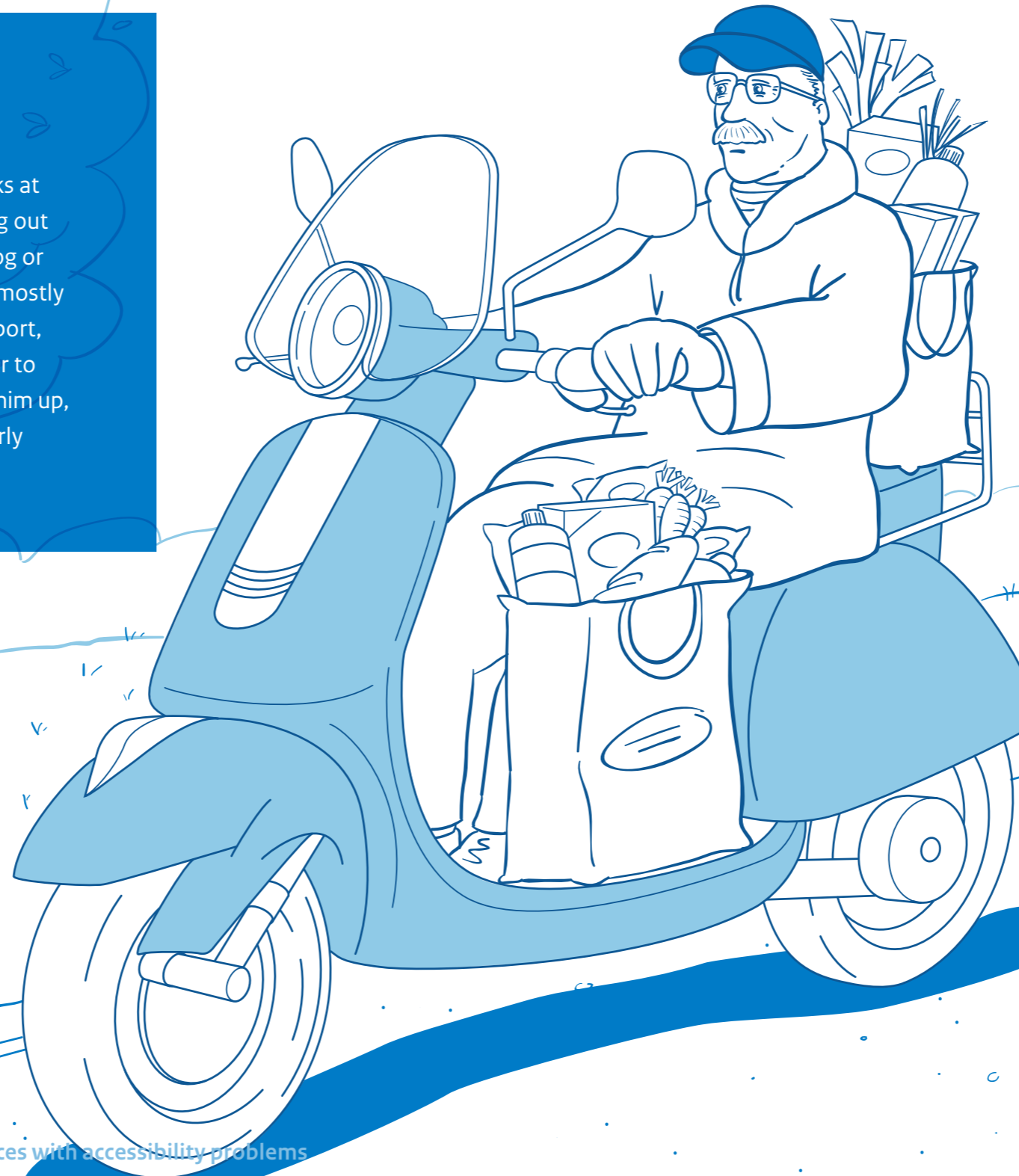
‘You can dress for rainy weather. But when the wind is blowing hard, it is difficult to motivate the children to cycle.’

A second car would make the transport issue a lot simpler. But at the end of the day, the couple has decided against it, because that would mean cutting back on other things. All around them they see families coping perfectly well with just one car. ‘In other areas we are something of an exception; our children attend school in a different village for example, and they have hobbies that are not on offer in the village. Other children simply play football nearby.’

Due to the lack of a car, Fenna doesn’t visit some of her friends as often as she would like. ‘When my husband is home, and the car is available, I can go visiting. An of course, they can come and see me, any time. But occasionally I like to get out of the house, too, and visit friends further from home. For example in Harlingen, Franeker and even Deventer. And those are trips I cannot possibly make by bike.’

Tjeerd

Tjeerd (70) is retired but sometimes still works at his old job, on the side. He also enjoys getting out and about, for example for a walk with his dog or a trip to Groningen, to visit his girlfriend. He mostly relies on his scooter, bicycle and public transport, but it is not easy to transport heavy objects or to travel at night. His colleagues sometimes pick him up, to take him to work. And his girlfriend regularly visits by car, to go out together.






Freedom with the scooter

On a daily basis, he travels by scooter. Without a scooter, he would feel less free to get out and about. 'I am of course not getting any younger; and in bad weather, or strong winds, the scooter is difficult to handle.' He often combines activities without thinking about it. 'I sometimes go out birdwatching, and on the way home I pick up the items I need, at the shops.' In the weekend he does a weekly shop, when his girlfriend visits with her car.

Because she has a car, his girlfriend visits him more regularly than he visits her. 'Public transport connections to the larger towns like Leeuwarden and Groningen are doable. But travelling on the bus with the dog is not so easy.' And by public transport, the journey would take several hours, while it only takes 40 minutes door to door, by car. They sometimes go out together, for example to attend a concert.



'The trip to Groningen would be doable with public transport, but it is not to easy to travel by bus, with the dog. And it takes several hours, while it's just 40 minutes, by car.'

Fewer buses

The bus from the village to Dokkum departs about 8 times a day. And to visit another village, you more or less have to travel via Dokkum. 'But that can easily mean waiting for an hour, to make the connection.' 25 years ago, he remembers, the situation was very different. 'In those days there was only one bus, and if you told the driver what village you wanted to visit, that was the route he would take. It was the same for everyone.'

He feels very much at home with the community and the surroundings, even though, in his own words, he is not an essential element of the village life. 'Not all villages in this area are prospering. I think there is a lot of hidden poverty, and the bus is too expensive for many people. And that makes life far more difficult, because if the bus is not used, it runs less often, and the price goes up.'

Having retired, he no longer has a fixed employer. 'I now help the volunteers who work at my former employer, or I fill in on days when they are unable to work.' And when the weather is bad, my colleagues who live nearby come along and pick me up.

He is sometimes surprised that everyone arranges their own transport. 'In my mind, people could work together, better. Every morning, 10 cars come past, each with just one mother and one child on board, and then you see them come back again. At 12 o'clock, the process repeats itself. Couldn't they try pooling?'

Happy off the beaten track

'I like living here: I can still take the dog out for a long walk along the dyke.' Tjeerd does recognise that where he lives is off the beaten track. 'I need to be creative to visit the rest of the country, for example a concert in Amsterdam. If I get hold of some good tickets, I then look for a friend who can drive me down.'

Despite living far away, Tjeerd does not miss activities. 'I'm perfectly happy to sit down with a good book. And if there is something I really want, I find a way to organise it. If necessary, a taxi. Financially, I'm not too badly off.'





Thijs

For Thijs (21), the bike journey to the university through the city is quite an undertaking. Despite the back routes to avoid traffic lights, it takes more than half an hour. Broken glass on the street regularly causes him punctured tyres and repairs are a costly affair. It is too busy during rush hour to travel by public transport. For away matches, his hockey team can borrow cars, so they can reach even the outlying locations. And there is room for the huge keeper's bag. Carrying all that gear to a match by bike is too much effort.



Morning rush hour

Depending on the courses on offer, Thijs attends classes at university around 3 times a week. He usually travels the 8 kilometres by bike, but has to ride through the city, with all its traffic lights. 'About 15 sets. Especially during the morning rush hour, the lights seem stuck on red for ages. I takes so much time. And in poor weather or with a flat tyre, I travel to university by bus, instead. It is far less efficient, because you cannot take the back roads like you can on a bike. And it stops all the time.' It is always busy on the bus between 7 and 8.30. 'When it's that busy, it's really uncomfortable. At one time, the bus was so full it just drove past the stop. We couldn't even get on.'

Thijs sometimes opts to follow online lectures. 'The journey in the morning is so busy that I might end up arriving too late. And the bike ride is quite long, as well. Nonetheless, I can concentrate better if I am physically in the class. Here in my room I am surrounded by all my clutter and people keep dropping in...'



Hot and happening

Thijs has been living in Utrecht for 3 years. He moved to the city for his studies. He lives together with more than 20 other students on one storey in Kanaleneiland. 'It's a real community feeling, with one large living room and plenty of showers, toilets and cooking space.' Many of his friends live closer to the campus in De Uithof, in Utrecht Oost. 'We often meet up at one of their flats. For the others, it's just a 10-minute bike ride, but if they were to meet up at my place, everyone would have to travel much further. And they are much closer to the northern part of the city, where everyone likes to go out.'

Thijs doesn't like missing out on student activities and is happy to be living in Utrecht. 'As is still the case today, when I first started studying there was a shortage of rooms. You do not have much choice. You are happy to find anywhere.' Now he lives close enough to join in all the activities, but is still the one who tends to visit his friends, most often.

Big bags

Once or twice a week he trains at the hockey club, which just like the university is also in the eastern part of the city. He sometimes take his big keeper's bag with him to away matches. 'It's often quite a problem, because a number of the other team players are unable to cycle with the big bag. If I have to, I can.' For away matches further from home, they rarely choose to travel by public transport. 'Most sports clubs are located in the back of beyond, and not easily reachable by bus or train. Fortunately, we can always borrow 2 or 3 cars to transport the whole team.'



'I sometimes take the bus to university. It is far less efficient, because you cannot take the back roads like you can on a bike. And it stops all the time. In the rush hour it's so busy that it sometimes drives past, without stopping.'

He often visits his parents in Haarlem and sometimes takes his dirty washing with him. 'Travelling by bus or train with a laundry bag is awkward. Fortunately, on the way home, my parents sometimes drop me off at the station.'

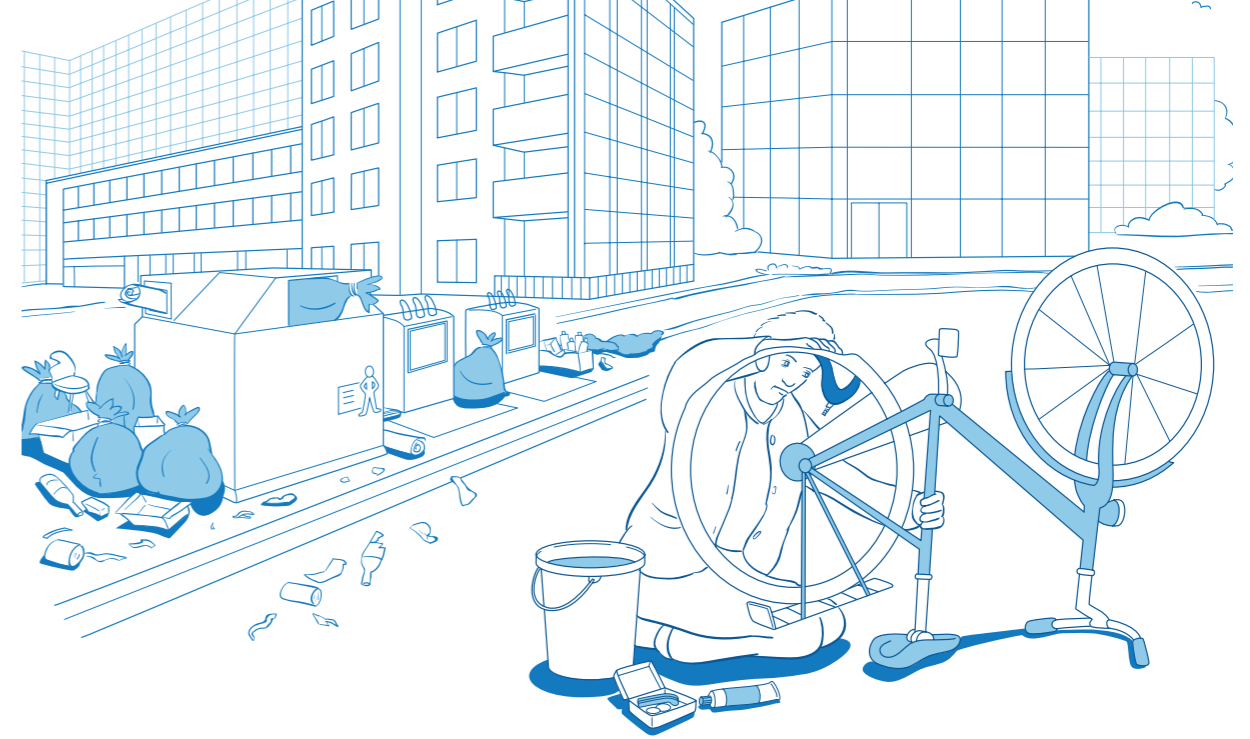
'My father has a business in Amsterdam. I used to work there on occasion, but the industrial estate is always difficult to reach. Travelling from Haarlem together with his father was no problem. 'But I didn't fancy making the journey all the way from Utrecht. So I stopped.'

Flat tyre

‘When I have a flat tyre on my bike I travel to the Central Station by bus, and then switch to a public transport bike, for greater flexibility. Buses are fewer and further between at the weekend. And if I want to travel on somewhere else after sport for example, like into the city centre, a bike is handier.’

Investing in a good quality bike would perhaps be a helpful option. ‘But on the other hand, a good bike is very expensive. And loads of bikes are stolen or smashed up here in the city. Or thrown into the canals.’ He doubts whether it would really be worthwhile.

‘Couldn’t they offer discount bike repairs with your public transport card,’ he suggested. ‘I usually fix my own tyres but sometimes, when the tear is too big, the whole thing has to be replaced. And that’s a €60 repair! I think they overcharged a bit.’






About



Method


For this study, we interviewed a total of 30 people, who themselves reported facing accessibility problems. Half of them live in or near Kanaleneiland in Utrecht. The other half live in smaller villages or in rural Friesland.



The interview guideline was based on the *capability approach*. The background, method, results and conclusions of the study were reported by the KiM in the Dutch report 'Reduced accessibility. A qualitative study into accessibility poverty.' This brochure is based on that report.




Background report




For more information on the method used and the results, consult the Dutch background report that can be downloaded via the website www.kimnet.nl.

Krabbenborg, L. en Uitbeijerse, G.C.M. (2023). *Beperkt Bereikbaar*.



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