



An examination of the intersection environment associated with perceived crash risk among school-aged children: using street-level imagery and computer vision

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A B S T R A C T

While computer vision techniques and big data of street-level imagery are getting increasing attention, a “black-box” model of deep learning hinders the active application of these techniques to the field of traffic safety research. To address this issue, we presented a semantic scene labeling approach that leverages wide-coverage street-level imagery for the purpose of exploring the association between built environment characteristics and perceived crash risk at 533 intersections. The environmental attributes were measured at eye-level using scene segmentation and object detection algorithms, and they were classified as one of four intersection typologies using the k-means clustering method. Data on perceived crash risk were collected from a questionnaire conducted on 799 children 10 to 12 years old. Our results showed that environmental features derived from deep learning algorithms were significantly associated with perceived crash risk among school-aged children. The results have revealed that some of the intersection characteristics including the proportional area of sky and roadway were significantly associated with the perceived crash risk among school-aged children. In particular, road width had dominant influence on risk perception. The findings provide information useful to providing appropriate and proactive interventions that may reduce the risk of crashes at intersections.

1. Introduction

Computer vision is a field of study in which researchers develop techniques to help computers understand the content of digital images such as photographs and videos (Brownlee, 2019). Computer vision algorithms and applications have been adopted in various fields, such as image recognition (Farabet et al., 2012; Tompson et al., 2014) and object detection (Girshick et al., 2014; Sermanet et al., 2013). One of the elements essential to developing autonomous driving, for instance, is computer vision (Pohlen et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, several studies have applied computer vision techniques to an examination of traffic safety. Dubey et al. (2016) and Ordonez and Berg (2014) predicted the perceived safety of streetscapes using convolution neural network (CNN) and support vector machine (SVM) classifier trained on street-level imagery in order to visualize the spatial distribution of perceived safety at a city scale. Yet, the use of current computer vision methods has a clear limitation to investigating the complicated relationship between the built environment and perceived safety (Dubey et al., 2016). This is largely because the computer vision model makes it difficult to find the safety determinants of the built environment's characteristics. The reliance upon “black-box models,” in which the rationale for the generated outputs is inscrutable (Cabrita et al. 2017), is another factor that reduces researchers' ability

to understand the relationship between the characteristics of the built environment and perceptual outcomes. Opaque models like CNN, therefore, cannot serve as a theoretical tool for understanding why a neural network operates effectively (Alemi et al. 2016). Therefore, the black-box nature of neural networks is a barrier to their adoption in research applications where interpretability is paramount, like traffic safety (Shrikumar et al. 2017).

One of the ways to overcome the limitations of current computer vision methods is to use a semantic scene labeling method. Recently, there has been growing interest in using semantic scene labeling approach in the computer's vision (L.-C. Chen et al., 2014; Long et al., 2015; Noh et al., 2015; Shrikumar et al., 2017). In contrast to the conventional scene recognition approach, which aims to determine the overall scene category by placing emphasis on understanding its global properties (Zhou et al. 2014), the scene labeling approach seeks to identify the individual components of a whole scene as well as the complex relationships among the semantic entities usually found in street scenes, such as pedestrians, cars, road, or sidewalks (Cordts et al., 2016).

Furthermore, applying the scene labeling approach to street-level imagery allows for an analysis of the built environment characteristics measured at the eye-level. Eye-level measurements may more accurately reflect a person's actual perception of the attributes of a

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particular built environment (Jiang et al., 2015). Given the difficulty of scalably measuring the built environment at the street level, however, few studies on perceived safety have accounted for eye-level urban characteristics. Combining street-level imagery and the scene labeling approach may overcome this limitation by acquiring data on what people typically experience and perceive at the eye-level on the ground (Li et al., 2015).

The ability of scene labeling methods to analyze the urban built environment at the eye-level also provides the advantage of measuring the visibility of pedestrians and drivers, which is one of the important factors in urban traffic safety (Dadashova et al., 2016; Hills, 1980; Retting et al., 2003; Schofer et al., 1995). For instance, Meir et al. (2013) suggested that pedestrians' traffic crashes tend to take place at intersections or curves where visibility is obstructed by the road's curvature, fixed objects, parked vehicles, darkness, or other visibility limitations because these visibility obstructions interfere with the pedestrian's ability to detect oncoming vehicles while also obstructing the motor vehicle drivers' vision, preventing drivers from noticing pedestrians, who may be masked by obstructions (Aoki & Moore, 1996; Petch & Henson, 2000). Thus, improving pedestrian and driver visibility at intersections is essential both for enhancing perceptions of safety and reducing potential crash risks (Lee et al., 2016).

The present study examined the association between urban environmental attributes derived from scene labeling methods (i.e., scene segmentation and object detection algorithms) and school-aged children's perceptions of safety, the latter of which provides information on the potential risks of pedestrian crashes (Lee et al., 2016; Meir et al., 2015). First, we sought to overcome the technical limitations of current computer vision methods by applying the scene labeling approach, which allows us to analyze complex relationships among the urban characteristics of built environments. A second aim of this study was to inform public policy for reducing the crash risk of children in school zones through the use of this novel method for deriving accurate measures of intersection characteristics at the eye-level, which offers a more precise understanding of perceived safety.

2. Related works

2.1. Measuring urban attributes from street-view imagery

Audit instruments are commonly used to collect data on the built environment characteristics, including sidewalks conditions, bicycling facilities, building characteristics, and traffic conditions (Boarnet et al., 2006; Brownson et al., 2004; Cunningham et al., 2005; Pikora et al., 2003; Suminski et al., 2008). Since collecting data using audit tools typically requires in-person observations (Ewing, R et al., 2006), it is labor intensive and time consuming compared to using other types of GIS, aerial photos, or videotape data (Brownson et al., 2009). Therefore, in-person field audits can be logistically challenging when the study covers large or geographically dispersed areas or when data collection at multiple time points is necessary to supporting a longitudinal comparison (Wilson et al., 2012).

New technologies using omnidirectional imagery, such as GSV, offer a viable alternative to field audits since they expand the geographic and temporal scope of vision (Kelly et al., 2012). Street-view imagery can reduce the resources required for conducting audits because they are collected by virtually "driving" through a community. Most of this collected imagery is freely accessible in more than 20 countries (e.g., in Australia, Asia, Europe, North America, and Central America; Anguelov et al., 2010). Given these advantages, many urban studies researchers have used street-view imagery to audit such environmental attributes as public open space (Edwards et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2011), neighborhood environment (Griew et al., 2013; Li et al., 2015; Odgers et al., 2012), and built environment (Kelly et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2012).

Several studies have consistently reported high levels of agreement between street-view imagery and in-person measures (Badland et al.,

2010; Clarke et al., 2010; Rundle et al., 2011). Kelly et al. (2012) suggested that street-view imagery audits have high inter-rater reliability for most items, including land use, public transportation, and street characteristics, but that characteristics with relatively lower reliability (e.g., on-street parking, tree shade on streets, sidewalk width, and curb cuts) should be included in datasets with caution. Several other studies have shown that audits using street-view images were effective and reliable in the place of field audits (Griew et al., 2013; Li et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2012).

2.2. Applying computer vision algorithms to urban images

When the street-view imagery is combined with computer vision techniques, a large-scale automatic evaluation of various urban environment is possible (Liu et al., 2017). Li et al. (2017a,b) noted that machine learning techniques make it possible to extract additional geospatial information and more complex metrics from big image datasets. Previous studies on the automatic classification of architectural styles have demonstrated the possibility of using street-view images and computer vision algorithms to capture the urban characteristic of built environments. For instance, Doersch et al. (2013), Doersch et al. (2012) and Doersch et al. (2015) discovered geographically distinguishable patches between different cities from GSV images by employing a discriminative clustering algorithm. That method requires representing the patches by using a HOG + color descriptor (Dalal & Triggs, 2005) and an iterative training linear support vector machine (SVM) detector (Singh et al., 2012). Other work has parsed scene images into constituent objects such as windows, domes, doors, walls, roofs, arches, and balconies (Berg et al., 2007; Goel et al., 2012; Shalunts et al., 2011; Simon et al., 2012; Weissenberg et al., 2013).

The relevant research to the present study are those that focus on understanding how humans perceive urban scenes (Dubey et al., 2016; Naik et al., 2014; Ordóñez & Berg, 2014; Porzi et al., 2015). Most of these studies have aimed to provide reliable methods for completing technical tasks like automatic scene classification and recognition, which are usually analyzed using street-view images and crowd-sourced data collected from volunteer participants. For instance, previous studies have employed such methods as SVM and CNN trained using street-view images and crowd-sourced safety perception scores of urban images such as Place Pulse 1.0 (Salettes et al., 2013). The algorithms employed in that research can accurately predict the safety score of streetcapes for which no evaluative data are available. Naik et al. (2014) and Ordóñez and Berg (2014) validated such a prediction model by computing the correlations between predicted safety scores and local income and crime statistics. Their study proposed a tentative boundary for the validity of their predictors.

2.3. Risk perception

In the field of traffic safety, risk perception has been used to examine associations between the behaviors of road users and perceptions of safety (Diógenes et al., 2010). The major advantage of relating risk perception to traffic safety is that doing so provides information on potentially hazardous situations, which makes it possible to assess road safety even when no crashes have yet occurred (Diógenes et al., 2010; Meir et al., 2015). Studies on pedestrian crash risk using only recorded crash data commonly have difficulty assessing road safety because reliable data on pedestrian crashes are relatively scarce. In such cases, perception information can be used as an indicator of potential crash risks at locations where actual crashes have not occurred (Schneider et al., 2004). Cho et al. (2009), meanwhile, argued that while police reported crash risk data do not provide complete information on traffic safety, individuals' perceptions of crash risk provide additional information useful for proactively identifying potential risk locations or risk factors.

Understanding the ways that pedestrians perceive crash risk could

also provide information about pedestrian behavior that could be used to guide the development of proactive countermeasures to reduce the number and severity of road crashes (Diógenes et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2016; Oltedal et al., 2004). Individuals adapt their behavior and make decisions that help them to avoid unwanted outcomes based on their perceptions of risk (Sjöberg et al., 2004). In traffic safety situations, people are more likely to change their attitudes and behaviors to avoid exposure to areas with a high potential risk when they perceive themselves as vulnerable to a crash risk (Rundmo, 1999; Ulleberg & Rundmo, 2003). Therefore, precautions or proactive countermeasures to prevent future pedestrian crashes are desirable when the perception of a crash risk is high (Lee et al., 2016; Schneider et al., 2004).

Critiques of using risk perception techniques to measure traffic safety are related to the fact that people can both underestimate and overestimate traffic dangers since risk perception is a subjective assessment of the probability of an unwanted event occurring (Sjöberg et al., 2004). In response to these criticisms of risk perception, the literature examining the extent to which the public perceives traffic risk correctly has shown a positive correlation between statistically estimated risk and perceived risk with different modes of transport, finding that the public's risk perception is broadly correct (Elvik & Bjørnskau, 2005). Rafaely et al. (2006) examined differences in the perception of traffic risk between older and younger adults and found that individual younger and older adults provided relatively accurate average risk estimates for their respective groups.

Used perceived crash risk among school-aged children as an indicator of potential crash risk, we hypothesized that perceived crash risk can be used to inform proactive interventions that are likely to improve road safety.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study area

The study site for this research was the city of Ulsan, one of the largest industrial complexes in Korea. We chose eight elementary school zones in the Dong district, where the number of police-reported pedestrian crashes between 2010 and 2014 was 792 (the highest level of crash occurrences in Ulsan; Fig. 1). The land use within the selected study sites was mainly residential, but mixed commercial and industrial areas are included. The number of enrolled students during the 2015 survey period was 4,130 (Lee et al., 2016).

3.2. Outcome: perceived safety

To measure perceived safety within the school zone areas, we conducted a risk-perception survey in July of 2015. The participants in the survey were 10-to-12 year-old students enrolled in eight elementary schools. The number of respondents was originally 1,263. The survey questionnaire gathered data on demographic features, the mode of travel to school, and the children's perceived crash risk along their walking routes to school. Among 1,263 students, 1,042 students completed all of the response on the questionnaire. Excluding the 243 respondents who used motorized travel for commuting, 799 students who commuted to school by walking were included as the final participants.

The survey participants reported perceiving 2,621 locations in the study area as having a high crash risk. Since our research was focused on intersections, the reported locations needed to be spatially matched to a corresponding intersection. A road intersection was defined as having a 15 m (50 ft) buffer zone from the crossing point of two road centerlines (Schneider et al., 2010). The number of risk points located at the 546 locations that were intersections was used as the crash risk score for each intersection (for more information about data collection, see Lee et al., 2016).



Fig. 1. The selected study sites in Ulsan, Korea

3.3. Control variable: risk exposure

Risk exposure is one of the most important factors to consider when determining the number of pedestrian crashes, thus it needs to be accurately accounted for when analyzing risk factors to pedestrian safety. In particular, elementary school students are likely to evaluate a specific intersection along their regular walking routes to school as places of high crash risk. Although it is desirable to use pedestrian counts for each intersection to create a measure of risk exposure (Clifton & Kremer-Fults, 2007), count data for the study areas were not available, and taking manual counts at each intersection was not feasible given the number of intersections included. Consistent with the methodology used in a previous study (Lee et al., 2016), the present work used a proxy measure to represent risk exposure, and the number of students crossing at each intersection was derived from the survey data. Participants were asked to represent their regular walking routes to school on a local map. Based on that information, we counted the number of individual crossings at each intersection chosen for the route and used that number as one of the exposure variables. To calculate population and street density, population and street centerlines in the GIS from the Ulsan Statistical Information Service (2010) and Statistical Geographic Information Service (SGIS) in Korea were used.

3.4. Independent variables

3.4.1. Environmental attributes

Environmental attributes were derived from street-view imagery (map.naver.com) of each intersection using scene labeling algorithms that included scene segmentations and object detection. Fig. 2 shows exemplary images of the two algorithms. We used a pre-trained scene segmentation model (Xiao et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2016, 2017) and object detection model (Redmon et al., 2016; Redmon & Farhadi, 2017). The variables derived from the scene segmentation model included area proportions of the sky, green space, road, and sidewalk. The area proportion of each environmental element in the image was calculated by counting the number of pixels in the segmentation mask (Wang et al., 2019; Yao et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2018), a variable that Zhang et al. (2018) showed is significantly associated with various perceived qualities of urban environments. The variables measured by the object detection model were number of pedestrians, and number of vehicles.

Similar to GSV imagery, the street-view imagery we used, taken

since 2007, provided real street images (Park et al., 2012). The street view imagery used in the present paper was taken in October 2017, which was the latest version of imagery we could download in July 2018. To download the targeted street-view imagery, we computed the latitudes and longitudes of the 546 intersections examined using ArcGIS 10.4. Based on the GPS coordinates of each intersection, we captured the 2,184 street-view images in four directions at 546 intersections. The pitch parameter (i.e., the up and down angle of the camera) and the FOV parameter (horizontal field view of the image) were set to 0 and 100. Among the 2,184 images, we manually excluded indoor images. Finally, 2,132 images at 533 intersections were used for the next step of the analysis.

The engineering modifications used to reduce pedestrian-vehicle crashes can be classified into three approaches: improvement to visibility, managing vehicle speed, and the separation of pedestrians from vehicles (Retting et al., 2003). Similarly, three types of environmental attributes were defined: 1) visibility of pedestrian/drivers; 2) traffic flow; and 3) separation of pedestrians from vehicles.

The visibility of pedestrians and drivers was measured using the proportional area of sky and green. A higher proportion of sky indicates an increase in the FOV of pedestrians and drivers, while a higher proportion of green tends to decrease FOV (Fig. 2). From the street-view perspective, a small proportion of sky and a large proportion of green frequently limits the sight distance of drivers and pedestrians. To quantify the traffic flow at the intersections, we used the proportional area of the road derived from the scene segmentation model and the number of pedestrians and vehicles identified from the object detection model. The previous literature reported that the width of lanes (Noland & Oh, 2004; Ukkusuri et al., 2012) and higher traffic volumes (Chen et al., 2009; Harwood et al., 2008; Ma et al., 2010) are associated with a greater crash risk. Conversely, the separation of pedestrians from vehicles (Berhanu, 2004) can reduce vehicle-pedestrian crash rates. The separation of pedestrians from vehicles was represented using the proportional area of sidewalks, which were derived from the scene segmentation model.

3.4.2. Intersection Typology

Measurement of the built environment can produce various indicators, each representing independent characteristics of the built environment. In reality, however, these characteristics are not actually independent but are strongly associated each other. For instance, an intersection with more openness or a higher proportion of sky is likely to have a lower building density, and average building height is generally higher where roads are wider. Because of the strong correlation between various the dimensions of built environment, many urban spaces can be classified as a specific type of urban forms based on their

similarities (Song & Knaap, 2007). In addition, we assumed that human perception of built environments tends to be more comprehensive or holistic than analytical. In other words, a typical street view can be classified into several groups, and children's perceptions of unique road environments may have typological patterns related to the environments' features.

To understand distinguishable variations in the built environment between groups, we used an empirical cluster analysis, which is a method of combining observations into groups based on their similarities within a set of predetermined characteristics (Song & Knaap, 2007; Wilks, 2011). In our study, a K-means cluster analysis was used to classify all 533 intersections into different types on the basis of their similarities in the values of the five factors derived from our scene segmentation algorithm: the proportional area of 1) building, 2) sky, 3) green space, 4) road, and 5) sidewalk. We used a scree plot by searching for a kink in the curve generated from the within sum of squares (WSS) and its logarithm [$\log(WSS)$], and a η^2 coefficient, which is similar to R^2 , and a proportional reduction of the err (PRE) coefficient to choose the optimal number of clusters for the final model (Schwarz, 2008). The best clustering solution, based on the interpretability of the results and associated cluster statistics, was found to be a four-cluster solution. STATA software (version 13.0) was used for the cluster analysis. (Fig. 3)

The values of the cluster centroids for each of the four intersection types are presented in Fig. 4 and Table 1.. The centroid of a cluster are representative of a typical set of intersection features (Song & Knaap, 2007), indicating the characteristics of each intersection type. Using the centroid values, each cluster was defined as four types of intersections: wide road with the presence of sidewalks (type 1), wide road with roadside trees (type 2), wide road with clear visibility (type 3), and narrow alley with dense buildings (type 4).

3.5. Statistical analysis

Two negative binomial (NB) regression analyses were conducted to examine the effects of environment attributes and their composition on perceived safety. The standard NB model, as compared to the Poisson regression model, is the most widely applied in traffic safety studies because it can account for the over-dispersion and between-location heterogeneity of crash variations (Bowman et al., 1995; Ukkusuri et al., 2012). The standard NB models have the following probabilistic structure: perceived crash risk Y_i , at an intersection i , when conditional on its mean θ_i is Poisson distributed and independent over all intersections.

$$Y_i | \theta_i \sim \text{Poisson}(\theta_i)$$

The mean of the Poisson is represented as,

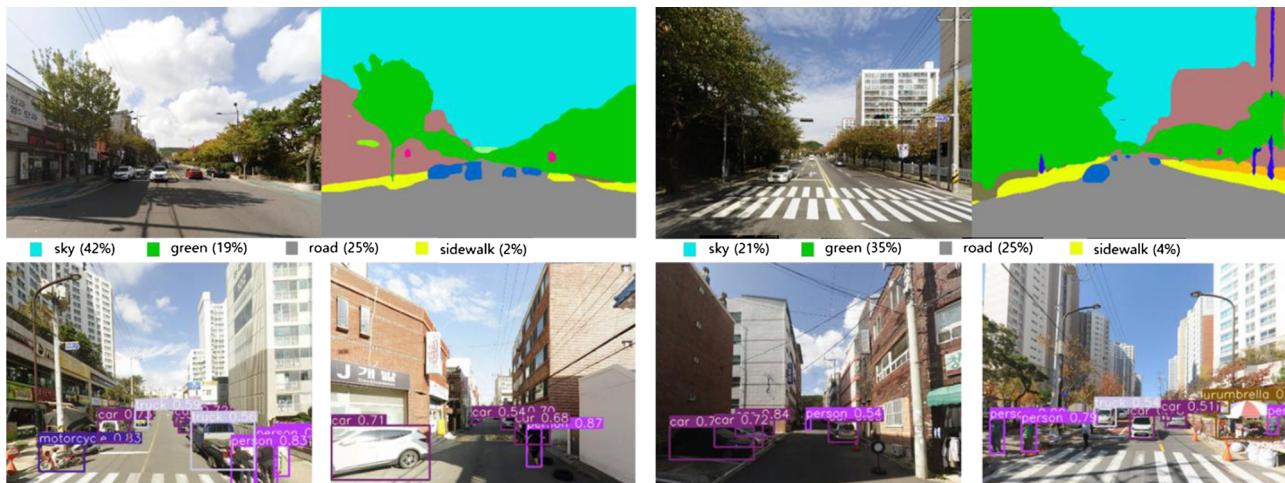


Fig. 2. Examples of scene segmentation algorithm (top), and object detection (bottom)

$$\theta_i = f(X_i; \beta)\exp(\varepsilon_i)$$

where the $\exp(\varepsilon_i)$ is the multiplicative random effect of the model, following a Gamma distribution, $f(X_i; \beta)$ is a function of the covariates, X_i is a vector of the environmental attributes, and β is the vector of unknown coefficients (Zou et al., 2015). We created two models for defining the environmental attributes. The first investigated associations between independent built environment features and perceived crash risk; the second focused on associations between intersection typology and perceived crash risk. STATA software (version 13.0) was used to estimate the NB regression models.

4. Results

4.1. Model performance

To test the validity of the applied computer vision algorithms, we estimated model performance using a random sample of 20% of the street-view imagery (434/2132) as our validation set. For a quantitative evaluation of the algorithm, we compared the ground truth with the results obtained from the scene segmentation algorithm and then calculated the resulting score. The model performance was evaluated using the following equations,

$$\text{Accuracy} = \frac{TP + TN}{TP + TN + FP + FN},$$

$$\text{Precision} = \frac{TP}{TP + FP},$$

$$\text{Recall} = \frac{TP}{TP + FN},$$

Where TP, TN, FP and FN stand for the number of true positive, true

negative, false positive and false negative pixels in a confusion matrix. Precision indicates the probability that a selected positive pixel is correct, and recall refers to the percentage of relevant pixel that were selected. These two measures for information retrieval effectiveness are most frequent and basic approaches (Manning et al., 2010). To test the validity of our object detection model, we compared the ground truth and environmental attributes detected by the object detection algorithm and then calculated the average precision (AP) and mean average precision (mAP), for a quantitative evaluation of the algorithm. The AP and mAP for a object class can be obtained based on precision and recall domains, defined as follows,

$$AP = \frac{1}{11} \sum_{p \in MP} (P),$$

$$mAP = \frac{\sum_{c \in S} AP_c}{|S|},$$

where MP is the maximum precision value from 0 to 1 step by 0.1 in the recall domain, and AP is the means of MaxPrecision in the 11 points. The mAP denotes the means of all object classes' AP, where S is a class set. In addition, 11-point metric and $\text{IoU} >= 0.5$ are applied in object detection algorithm based on the standard VOC2007 (Everingham et al., 2010). The ground truth was manually annotated using Labelme (github.com/wkentaro/labelme), a polygonal image annotation tool written in Python. Fig. 5 shows an example of a ground truth image generated by the Labelme software.

Table 2 shows the estimated performance of the two algorithms. The results indicate that the scene segmentation model performed well for classifying variables that occupy a large proportion of area in the street-view imagery [e.g., road (precision = 86.26%, recall = 97.14%), and sky (precision = 96.19%, recall = 98.25%)], but that it tends to

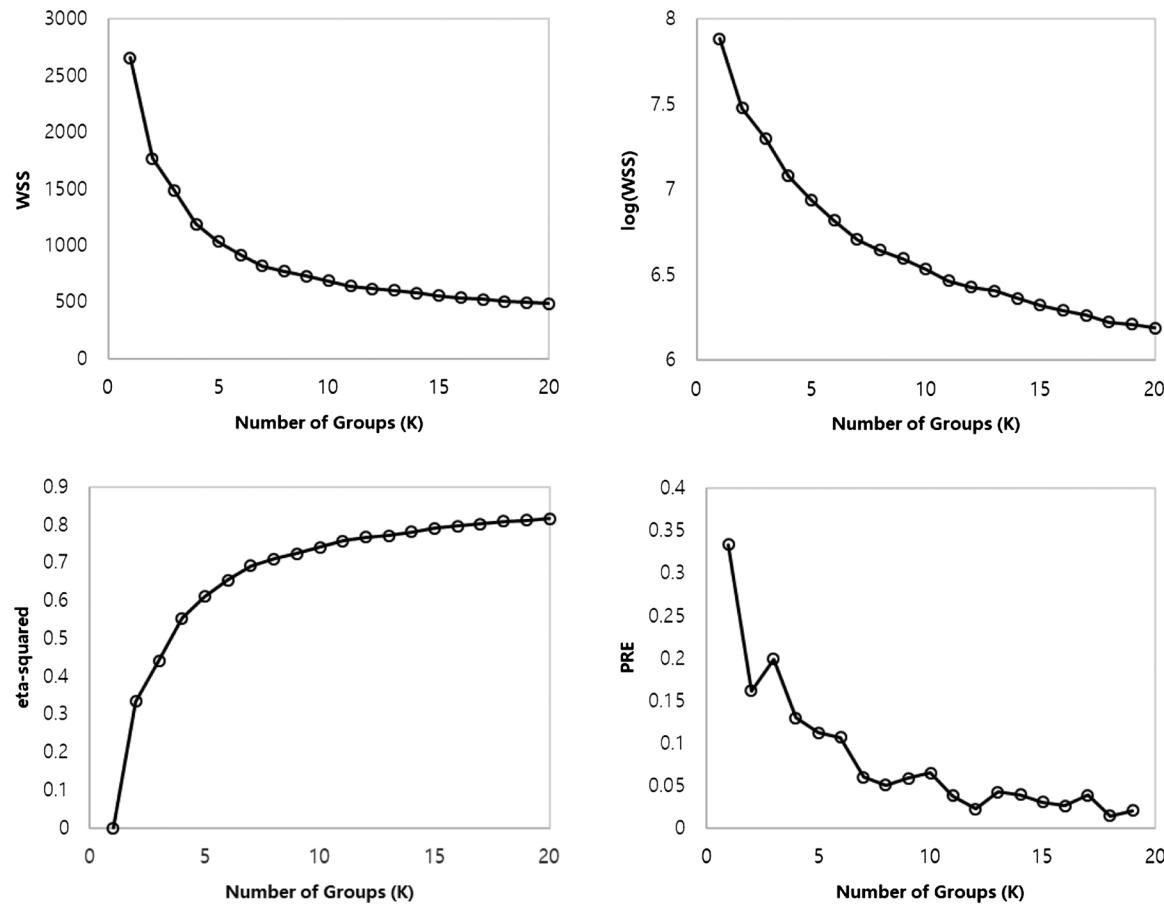


Fig. 3. The criterions for detecting the optimal number of clusters

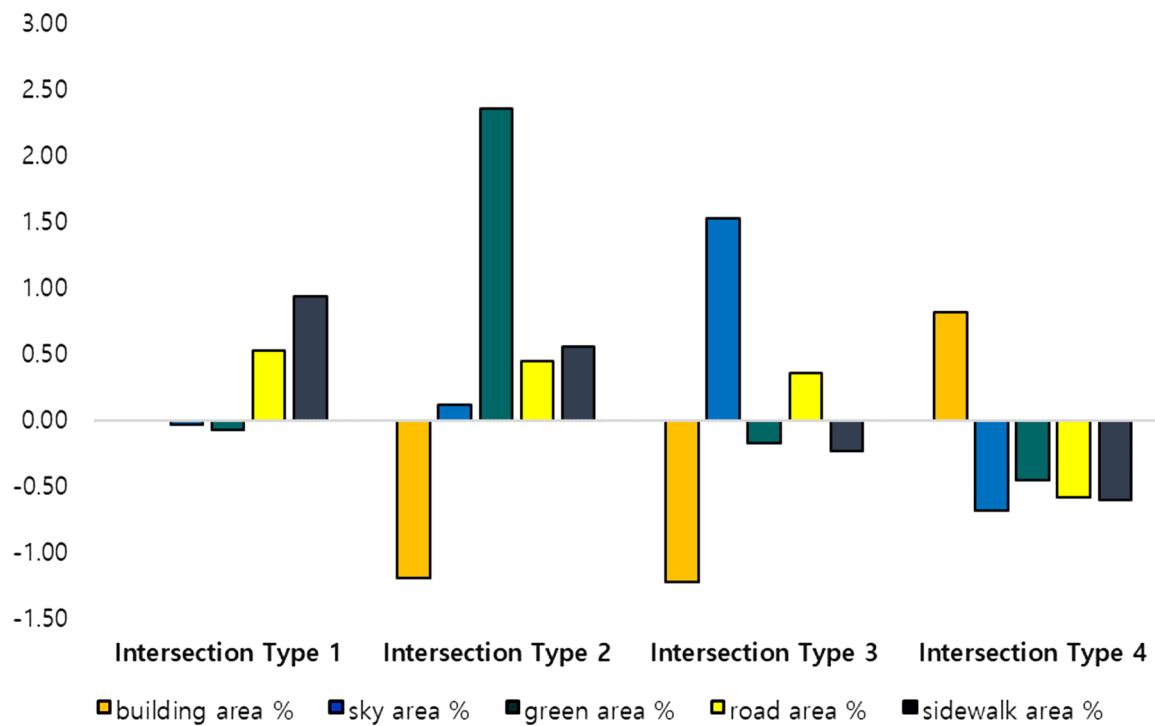


Fig. 4. Cluster centroid values for each of the intersection type

Table 1
Comparing intersections in five dimensions based on cluster centroid values.

Dimensions	Type1	Type2	Type3	Type4
Proportional area of building	0	-1.191	-1.215	0.8106
Proportional area of sky	-0.032	0.117	1.529	-0.679
Proportional area of green	-0.069	2.355	-0.173	-0.445
Proportional area of roadway	0.528	0.454	0.366	-0.581
Proportional area of sidewalk	0.944	0.563	-0.224	-0.594
Counts	139	56	103	235

produce relatively low performance for classifying sidewalk (precision = 46.96%, recall = 61.15%) and green area (precision = 90.25%, recall = 72.21%). The average proportion of green and sidewalk in the street-view images was 5% and 3%, respectively. The object detection model had a moderate level of performance at detecting pedestrians (AP = 53.8%), vehicles (AP = 65.5%) with 59.6% mAP. Although the overall accuracy is lower than the results of the best exemplary study (Ju et al., 2019), it is an acceptable level of accuracy when we consider relatively low resolution of street view images and different context of study sites from original training dataset (Redmon & Farhadi, 2018; Zhang et al., 2016).

4.2. Descriptive analysis

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics for the variables used in our analysis. On average, the perceived crash risk in an intersection was 3.09 ($SD = 6.35$). As Fig. 6 shows, each type of intersection was evenly distributed in study site. The mean value for daily crossings at the intersection was 4.75 ($SD = 9.08$). The maximum number of student crossing was 66, and 215 intersections were not selected for the routes to school. Not surprisingly, perceived crash risk and the number of crossings at an intersection were strongly correlated ($\rho = 0.836$). The mean values of the proportional area of sky, green, road, and sidewalk at each intersection was 28% ($SD = 11\%$), 5% ($SD = 5\%$), 14% ($SD = 5\%$), and 3% ($SD = 2\%$), respectively. Fig. 7 shows the intersections where the street-view imagery had the mean value of each of the variables at the study sites.

4.3. Intersection characteristics associated with perceived safety

Table 4 presents the parameter estimates and p values of the two NB models for perceived crash risk. The over-dispersion parameter estimation α was significantly higher than zero in both NB model 1 (95% CI (0.88, 1.37)) and NB model 2 (95% CI (0.89, 1.38)). In both models, all variables representing risk exposure had a significantly positive association with perceived crash risk. A higher number of students crossing, a higher population density, and a higher street density were all positively related to a higher perceived crash risk.

In NB model 1, the proportional area of sky significantly decreased perceived crash risk ($p = 0.024$). A higher proportion of sky indicates more visual “openness” on the street and more visible area for drivers and pedestrians. For that reason, the negative relationship between proportion of sky and perceived crash risk implies that the improvement in visibility at an intersection could be one of the factors that reduces perceived crash risk. As Lee et al. (2016) found, although the direct relationship between lower visibility and actual crash risk remains unclear, improving pedestrian visibility at an intersection apparently enhances feelings of safety and could change pedestrian behavior.

Meanwhile, the results of the NB model 1 showed that the proportional area of road has a significantly positive relationship with perceived crash risk ($p = 0.051$). The literature has consistently reported that the width of lanes and roads is one of the important factors that increases crash risk (Lee et al., 2016; Ukkusuri et al., 2012). Indeed, wider lanes mean higher vehicle speeds, which implies a greater likelihood of crashes involving pedestrians as well as more serious pedestrian injuries (Aarts & Van Schagen, 2006). Number of pedestrians was positively associated with the level of perceived crash risk ($p = 0.014$), perhaps because more pedestrians at the intersections hinders the ability of school-aged children to cross. The number of pedestrian variable may indicate crowdedness at the intersection, but it is worth noting that the number of pedestrians was derived from street-view images taken at a specific time.

The NB model 2 showed influence of street type of perceived crash risk. The students tended to perceive a lower risk at the intersections with wide roads and clear visibility (type 3) than at intersections with

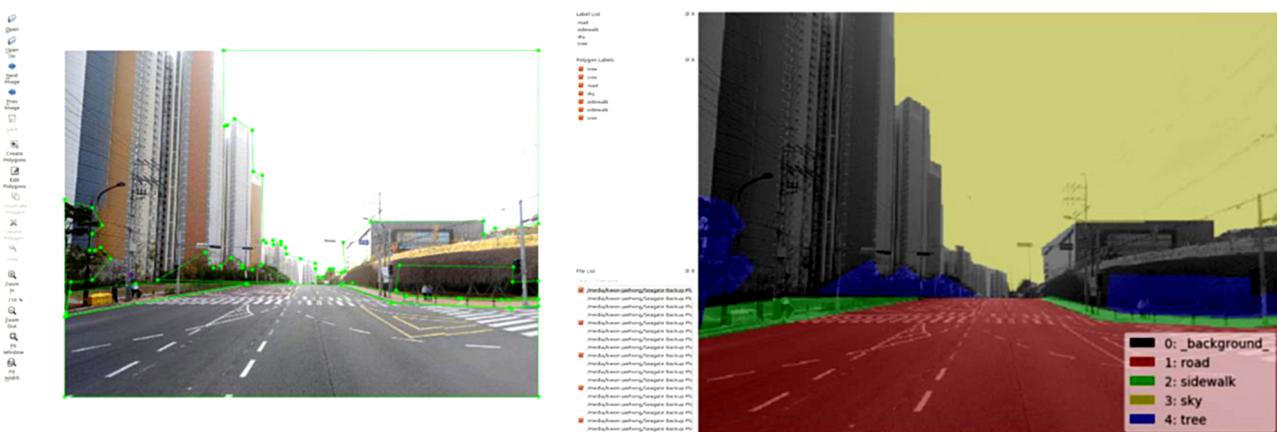


Fig. 5. A ground truth image (right) generated by Labelme software (left)

Table 2
Model performance in scene segmentation and object detection methods

Variables	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	mAP	AP
Overall	98.95%	89.87%	93.84%	-	-
Road	97.48%	86.26%	97.14%	-	-
Sky	98.39%	96.19%	98.25%	-	-
Sidewalk	97.49%	46.96%	61.15%	-	-
Green	98.43%	90.25%	72.21%	-	-
Pedestrian	-			59.64%	53.76%
Vehicle	-				65.53%

* IoU > = 0.5

wide road and sidewalks (type 1; $p = 0.048$). As shown in Fig. 8 and Fig. 10, a clear distinction between the two types of intersections was their relative visual openness (e.g., proportional area of sky) and the presence of sidewalks. It seems manifest that increasing the visibility of pedestrians could reduce perceived crash risk. The risk perception at the reference intersections was not statistically different from that at the intersections with wide roads and large roadside trees. Roadside trees may enhance the aesthetics of the street view (Fig. 9), but they do not alter the level of perceived safety. Indeed, in the traffic safety context, roadside trees are a visual and physical barriers (Budzynski et al., 2016). A comparison between intersection type 1 and 4 (Fig. 11) showed interesting results. School-aged children tended to report lower levels of perceived crash risk in Type 4 intersections(narrow alleys and dense development) than the reference intersections ($p = 0.086$). The

presence of sidewalks and visual openness may reduce perceived crash risk, but the influence of wide roads on perceived crash risk may override the influence of these factors.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, we applied a scene labeling technique for measuring built environment attributes at the eye-level. While investigating associations between urban environmental elements and perceived safety, we attempted to overcome the technical limitations of current computer vision techniques. Despite the success of deep neural networks (DNNs) in the field of computer vision (Krizhevsky et al., 2012; Roth et al., 2016; Szegedy et al., 2015), no comprehensive theoretical understanding of optimization processes or their inner organization (Shwartz-Ziv & Tishby, 2017) has yet been provided. Thus, neural networks are often criticized for being used as mysterious "Black Boxes" (Alain & Bengio, 2016). To address this issue, the current study presented processes for analyzing the relationships between urban environmental elements derived from deep learning algorithms and perceived safety.

Measuring the design characteristics of the built environment at the eye-level provided a better understanding of perceived safety. People rarely experience landscapes from a high altitude (like remotely sensed imagery), but they instead perceive the walking environment at eye-level (like street-view imagery; Jiang et al., 2017). Our analytical approach using street-view images and a scene labeling technique allows

Table 3
Description and descriptive statistics of model variables

Variables	Description		Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Outcome	Perceived Risk	Sum of perceived risk point at the intersection	533	3.09	6.35	0.00	52.00
Risk exposure	Crossing	Estimated number of daily student crossings at the intersection	533	4.75	9.08	0.00	66.00
	Population Density	Population density of 2010	533	18.74	13.57	0.10	100.20
Visibility	Street Density	Street density of census block	533	55.84	27.16	0.38	125.50
	Sky	Proportion of pixels occupied by sky on street-view image at the intersection	533	0.28	0.11	0.01	0.60
Traffic Flow	Green	Proportion of pixels occupied by green on street-view image at the intersection	533	0.05	0.06	0.00	0.41
	Road	Proportion of pixels occupied by road on street-view image at the intersection	533	0.14	0.05	0.04	0.27
Pedestrian	Pedestrian	Number of pedestrians on street-view images at the intersection	533	0.27	0.43	0.00	4.00
	Vehicle	Number of vehicles on street-view images at the intersection	533	2.81	1.44	0.00	8.25
Separation	Sidewalk	Proportion of pixels occupied by sidewalk on street-view image at the intersection	533	0.03	0.02	0.00	0.09
Intersection Type	Intersection Type 1	Wide road with sidewalks	139				
	Intersection Type 2	Wide road with roadside trees	56				
	Intersection Type 3	Wide road with a clear visibility	103				
	Intersection Type 4	Narrow alley with high building density	235				

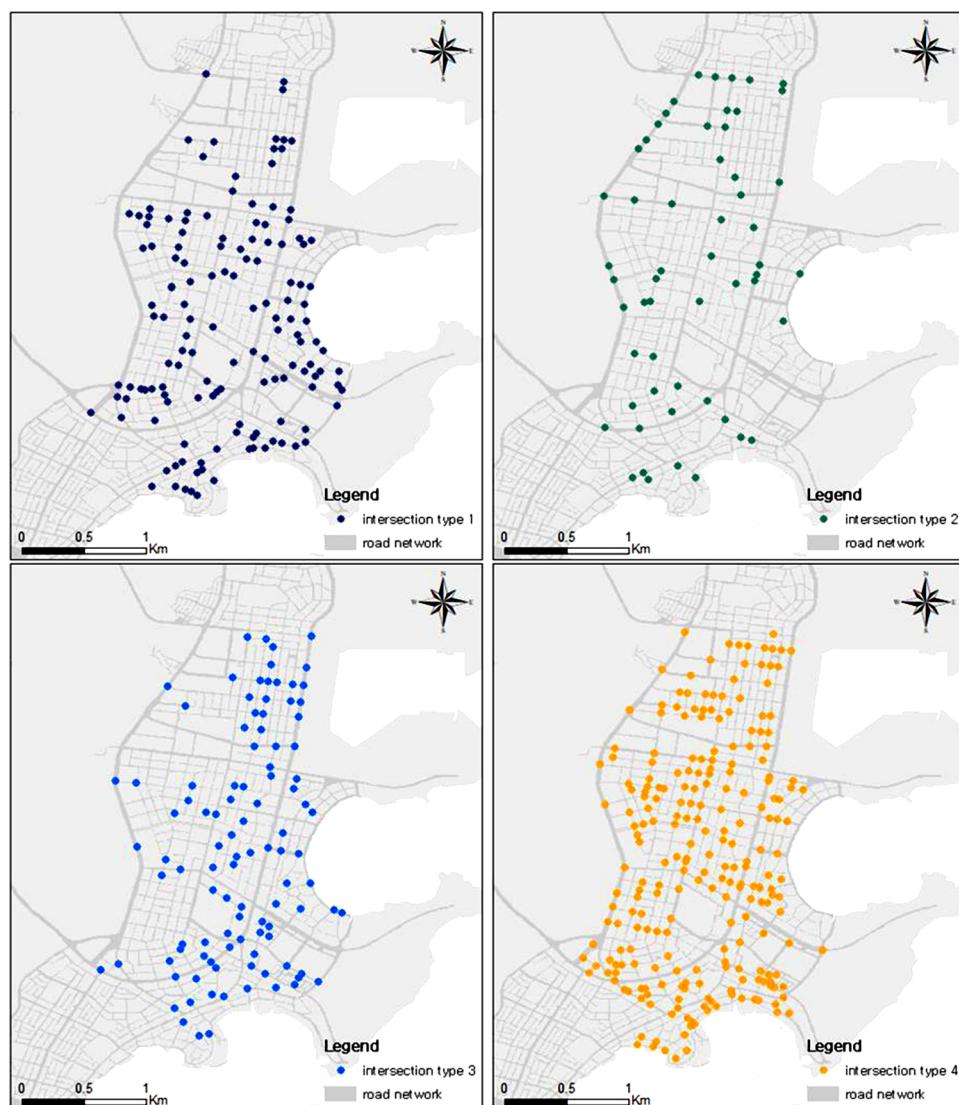


Fig. 6. Spatial distribution of four types of intersections

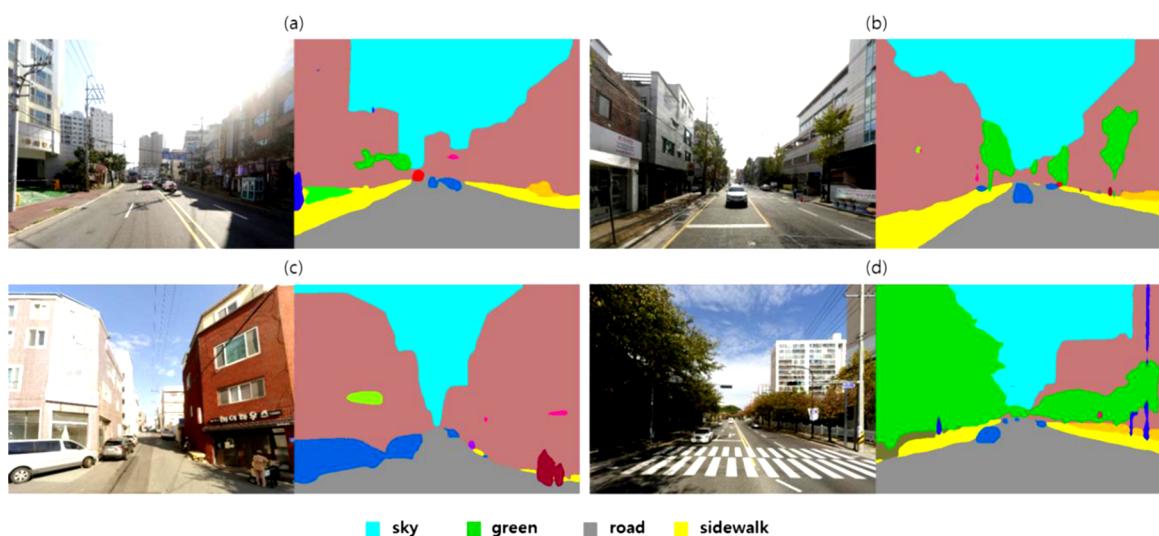


Fig. 7. Intersections where street-view imagery has mean value of proportion of (a) sky, (b) green, (c) road, (d) sidewalk

Table 4

Results of two standard NB models for perceived crash risk at intersections

Variables		Model 1		Model 2	
		Coeff.	P-value	Coeff.	P-value
Visibility	Sky	-1.325	0.038		
	Green	1.280	0.203		
Traffic Flow	Road	2.789	0.051		
	Pedestrian	0.280	0.014	0.309	0.007
Separation of Pedestrian Risk Exposure	Vehicle	0.014	0.764	0.017	0.695
	Sidewalk	0.795	0.803		
Intersection Type	Crossing	0.106	0.000	0.107	0.000
	Population Density	0.009	0.126	0.011	0.069
Number of Observations	Street Density	0.010	0.000	0.010	0.001
	Intersection Type 1			(ref.)	
	Intersection Type 2			0.007	0.975
	Intersection Type 3			-0.356	0.048
Dispersion Parameter	Intersection Type 4			-0.247	0.086
		533		533	
		1.093		1.199	
		1915.147		1916.201	
Log likelihood		-946.573		-948.101	

for the measurement of urban characteristics as perceived at the eye-level in an automated and scalable way.

Our model examining associations between the built environment and perceived safety at intersections presented the crash risk factors at intersections for school-aged children. The main findings of this study are consistent with the body of the literature investigating the environmental correlates of pedestrian crashes. Lower pedestrian visibility, wider roads, a higher number of student crossings, a higher population density, and higher street density were all significant and were all positively associated with a higher perceived crash risk at the intersections studied.

Previous research has shown that perceived crash risk can be an indicator of crash risk and a tool useful for providing guidelines for proactive interventions (Cho et al., 2009; Diógenes et al., 2010; Schneider et al., 2004). Intersections with lower visibility increased perceived crash risk, which implies that taking engineering measures to increase the visibility and conspicuity of pedestrians is necessary. Lee et al. (2016) suggested that imposing a building setback regulation or creating open spaces near intersections might be effective countermeasures that would increase visibility for both pedestrians and drivers and, therefore, reduce potential crash risks for children. In addition, parking restrictions (Agran et al., 1996), diagonal parking as a replacement for parallel parking (Retting et al., 2003), and relocating bus

stops to the far side of intersections (Berger & Knoblauch, 1975) can enhance the visibility of both pedestrians and drivers.

Although narrow alleys and dense buildings reduce levels of visibility, the level of perceived crash risk at this type of intersections (type 4) was slightly lower than the risk at wide roads (type 1). The difficulty of crossing wide roads might be bigger concerns than their ability to visually detect incoming/outgoing traffic at intersections. Empirical studies of pedestrian crashes have commonly reported that increasing the number of lanes and road widths would increase the severity of vehicle-pedestrian crashes as well as crash rates (Ewing & Dumbaugh, 2009; Klaitman et al., 2018; Manuel et al., 2014; Pour et al., 2017; Yanmaz-Tuzel & Ozbay, 2010). We emphasize that more attention needs to be paid to school zones since child pedestrians need more time crossing wider roads (Wann et al., 2011). Thus, installing pedestrian crossing facilities and road medians on wider roads could be an effective means of improving pedestrian safety at wider road crossings (Pour et al., 2017). Other countermeasures for reducing crash risk include speed management, such as lane narrowing, and multi-way stop signs in residential neighborhoods with large numbers of children (Retting et al., 2003).

The technical limitations of this study need to be noted. The performance of the proposed algorithms is relatively accurate, but they less precise with respect to detecting small features such as greenery and



Fig. 8. Intersection Type 1 (wide road and presence of sidewalk)

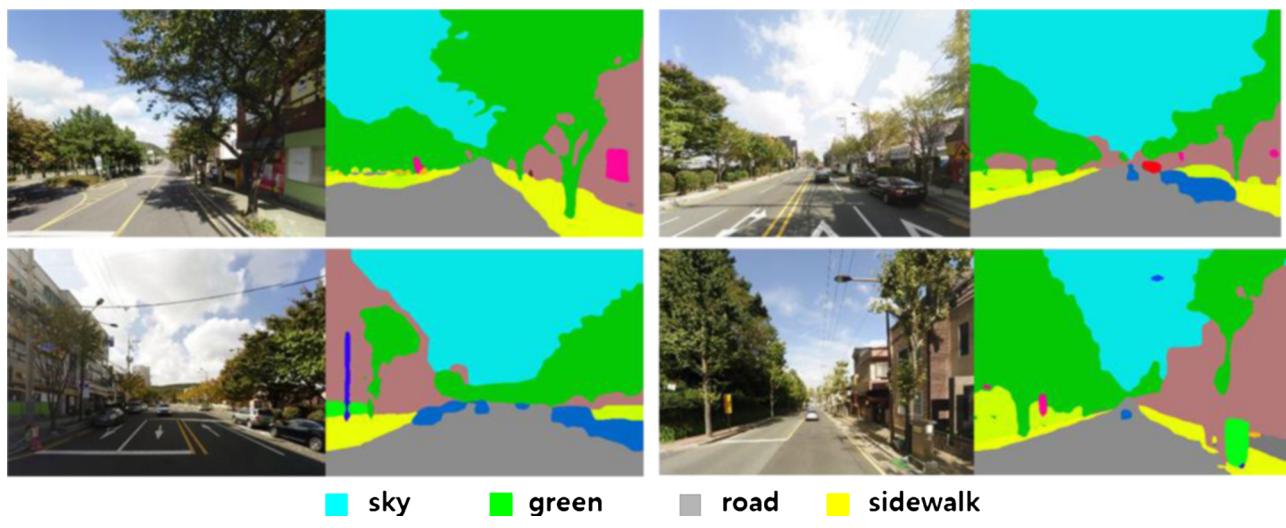


Fig. 9. Intersection Type 2 (wide road and large roadside trees)

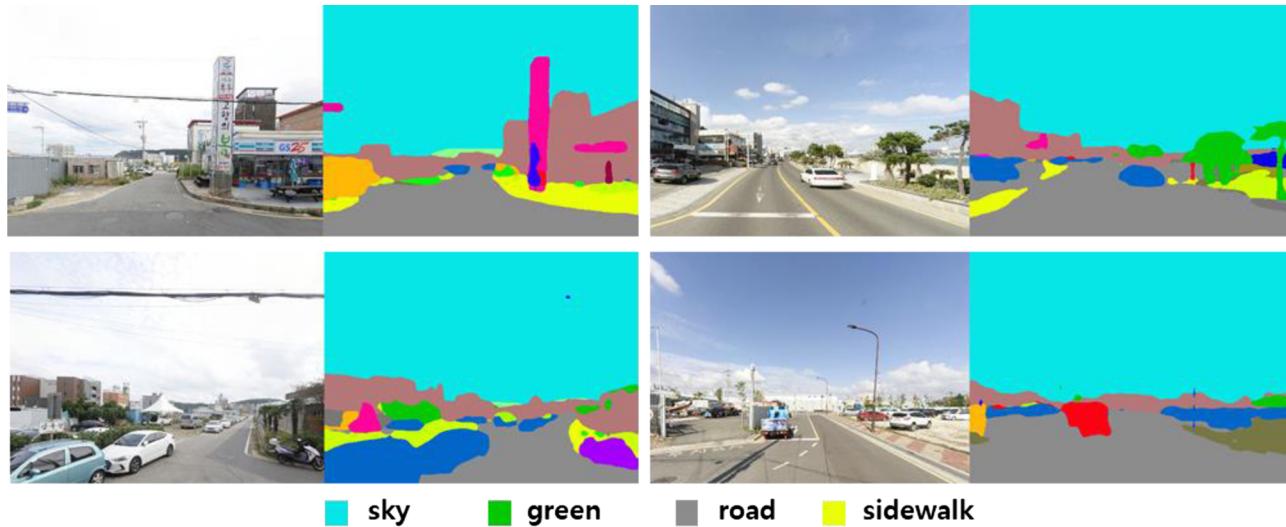


Fig. 10. Intersection Type 3 (wide road with clear visibility)

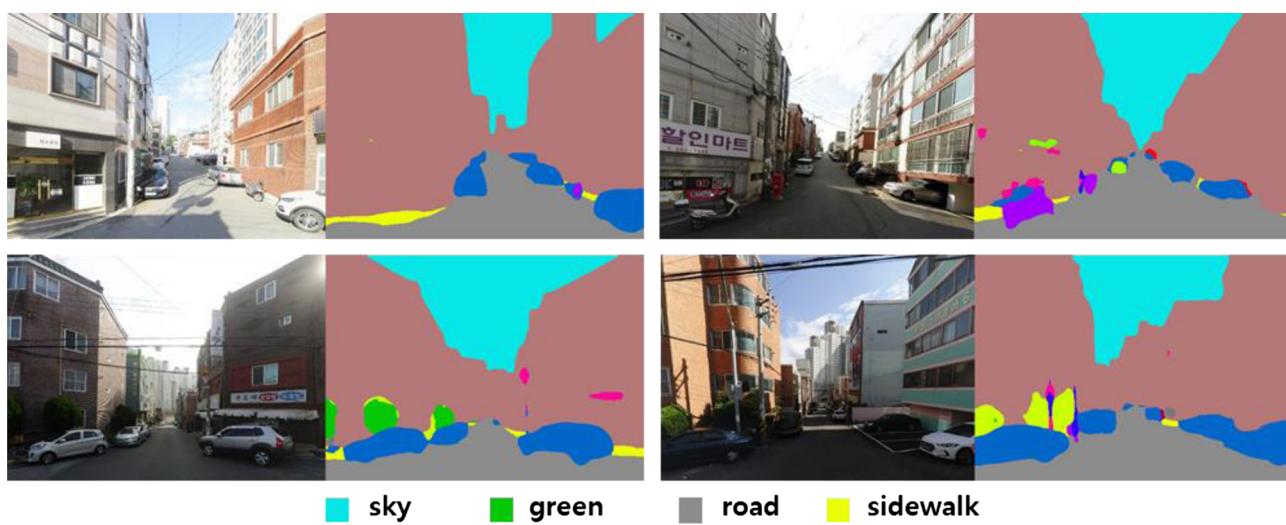


Fig. 11. Intersection Type 4 (narrow alley with dense buildings)

sidewalks. Relatively low precision of sidewalk detection may explain why the proportion of sidewalk was not significantly associated with perceived crash risk. Previous studies have indicated that number of transit stops (Pulugurtha & Sambhara, 2011; Ukkusuri et al., 2012; Yu & Zhu, 2016), lighting design (Peña-García et al., 2015; Siddiqui et al., 2006), and traffic-calming measures (Jones et al., 2005; Rothman et al., 2014) were all associated with an increase in pedestrian crashes. However, these features could not be successfully detected with the algorithm that we used. Future research is needed to uncover the influence of more refined measures of the built environment on perceived crash risk.

One of the common concerns for scene segmentation approach is measurement validity. We measured visual information of three dimensional built environment using the proportion of sky, green and road in street-view images. The present study interpreted that a larger proportion of sky implied visual openness of street canyon (Li & Ratti, 2019) or higher visible area from pedestrian's perspective. (Yin & Wang, 2016). Similarly, the proportion of green was understood as obstruction of street greenery (Li et al., 2017a,b), and the proportion of pixels occupied by road implied width of road (Ye et al. 2019). It is important to note that what we attempted to measure is visually perceived built environment and it may not exactly identical with objective measurement for the built environment. For instance, if a street-view image has higher proportion of pixels occupied by road, pedestrian may perceive the street wider than the objective measurement of width. Since the main outcome of our study is perceived crash risk, we assumed that measurements of visually perceived environment might be more appropriate measures to examine their influence on the outcome.

Although street-view imagery is a promising data source for urban studies, some limitations remain related to its use for cartographic purposes. First, the approximately two-year time gap between street-view imagery and present environment conditions may reduce the accuracy of intersection investigations (Lee et al., 2016). For instance, some neighborhood features are inherently unstable over time, including seasonal or weather-related fluctuations of greenery, number of pedestrians, and parked or moving vehicles. Second, street-view images were not collected for scientific purposes. Therefore, street-view imagery might have geometrical distortions that influence the accuracy of our analysis (Li et al., 2017a,b).

These shortcomings aside, this study demonstrated a method for capturing built environment measurements at the eye-level and their influence on perceived crash risk using street-view imagery and scene labeling techniques. To the best of our knowledge, no other study has measured the attributes of the built environment at the eye-level in an automated and scalable way. The scene labeling method used presented the possibility of opening a black box of deep learning, therefore overcoming the technical limitations of current computer vision. Moreover, this approach provides a better understanding of the appearance of urban variations on the ground and how they are perceived. Ultimately, this approach might provide appropriate and proactive interventions that reduce the potential crash risk at intersections.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Jae-Hong Kwon: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - original draft, Formal analysis, Investigation, Software, Visualization. **Gi-Hyoug Cho:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - review & editing, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition, Resources.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2020.105716>.

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