

MANAGEMENT FOR PEDESTRIANS and COMPLEXITY OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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There is an overall consensus when dealing with objectives such as improving safety for pedestrians, protecting children on their way to and from school, giving everyone an opportunity to walk around at leisure and the enhancement of pedestrian precincts. Difficulties only arise when technical decisions have to be made and in cases where aspects other than providing areas for pedestrians are given precedence.

The reactions encountered when dealing with this problem, are often based on matters of principle as to what an urban environment should be. Such a radical position is, of course, fully justified in that those who have no protection must be defended and, as a mass, cannot be managed in the same way as the car.

Care must however be taken to prevent the moral or ideological aspects from taking precedence over a stringent analysis of the problem. Thus, over-protecting users at risk and the quality of urban environment, may result in not seeing the complexity of the problems and their contradictions. Some projects have made use of solutions based on principles involving mode segregation and have sometimes, from a safety standpoint, proved more harmful than the problems they were intended to solve.

We should also be wary of a mechanically causal rationality based on risk measurement in decision-making. Locating housing in industrial areas reduces exposure to road risks by shortening commuter journeys and allowing people to walk to work; but may have other disadvantages. A particular example of this was seen in the 19th century, when housing was located near industrial complexes with the aim of exerting social control over the workers.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that those responsible for traffic and roads in a specific locality have to face considerable pressure when users feel highly insecure. However, many places thought to be hazardous are in fact extremely safe in accident terms, even though this may have been achieved at the expense of the well-being of the individual. To understand safety problems therefore requires the analysis to be as objective as possible, thus ensuring that the malfunctions that lead to accidents are correctly understood. This type of diagnostic is essential before any action can be undertaken.

Up until the 19th century, urban areas developed very slowly. Urban outlines are therefore the result of a slow historical process involving generally private bodies who acted according to their individual interests, and sometimes urban planners who wanted to leave their mark on the town, if only to set up new towns in areas that were for the most part of strategic importance.

Different modes of transport evolved from the second half of the 19th century onwards. They consisted of public transport using first, horse-drawn and subsequently motor-powered vehicles, the bicycle and then private cars and revolutionized urban structures with regard to both the spatial distribution of activities and the layout of the various districts. These modes of transport

gradually became available to everyone (or almost everyone). Public transport first became widely available as a result of an increase in average income towards the end of the 19th century. This was followed, in the second half of this century, by widespread car ownership, at least in industrialised Western countries.

This accelerated the historical process in urban areas, the extending of these areas (to a greater or lesser extent depending on the country) and the influence of cars on urban layout that seems to have become increasingly permanent. There is no need to emphasise the adverse secondary effects of the motor car, one of the most obvious being unsafety.

In New York in 1901, a small number of cars could be seen on the streets. The chauffeur of a car owned by HR. Root and S.H. Stern was driving along a street in the Lower East Side when he knocked down young Louis Camille, son of an Italian immigrant. As the child was playing in the street, the chauffeur was taken by surprise and was unable to avoid the accident. He was therefore not found guilty when he came before the Court. The local residents did not, however, agree. Children had been able to play in this street since time immemorial. The car was therefore an intruder. For the next five years cars were stoned and one driver killed.

But inevitably, the car became an increasingly important factor in public areas. Safety had to be improved, first by improving car design and then by organising and managing these public areas.

Working on public areas involves the use of systems that are, in fact, relatively long-established. Most are based on principles formulated at the end of the last or early in this century. However, the overall design of public space is still open to discussion and debate. The basis of this design is to take into account the various aspects of this space used by different modes of transport, for different purposes and regarded differently by those involved.

The initial response of planners to traffic problems was to segregate modes and uses. Pedestrians were given preference and provided with pavements, even though these existed well before the advent of the motor car. This segregated planning of space gradually became more widespread as the number of cars increased. Urban planners such as Le Corbusier were therefore able to advocate in the Athens Charter a strict functional classification of public highways: „Public highways should be classified according to type and built in relation to type of vehicle and traffic speed... The first practical measure would be to enforce, in congested streets, a strict separation of pedestrians and mechanical vehicles. The second would be to provide heavy goods vehicles with their own traffic lanes. The third would be to provide, in heavy traffic conditions, throughways that are separate from the normal roads used by local traffic” (Le Corbusier 1957, article 60).

In most urban models, little consideration is given to safety, although it may be referred to as one objective amongst many. Some models, however, have been developed with explicit safety considerations in mind. The SCAFT principles (drawn up in Göteborg/Sweden), illustrate an attempt to enhance safety by „ separating traffic, pedestrian and bicycle flows to prevent conflict”. Segregation is usually recognised as a principle that provides access to all parts of the urban area, whatever mode is employed, by using, of course, the shortest possible terminal route.

This type of planning can only, in fact, be applied to more recent urban areas. It cannot be used for older towns. Up until the 19th century, urban planning was termed the „pedestrian city”. It is essentially in these older districts that the invasion of the private car is felt to be unacceptable. One reaction, faced with the unacceptable, was to simply ban vehicles in pedestrian precincts, a concept with limited spatial applications.

Experience has shown that planning such segregated areas is effective under certain conditions, but can only be used in limited areas. The alternative response, once these limits of segregation have been reached, is the integration of modes and functions: Woonerf in Holland with total integration, then tempo 30 - zone 30 - 30 km/h area that regulates integration by maintaining a „comfortable” environment for pedestrians. The experiment was then extended to the whole network by more „friendly” management taking into account the various uses and diversity of space. In this way, management can be extended to main streets, entries to built-up areas, roads running through villages.

The technical difficulties of this work are found not only in planning, but essentially in the conceptual analysis of space in terms of use, age, itineraries, appropriation, conflict, encounters... Unable to limit them, managing these factors has to be integrated into the complexity of an urban area, together with all its physical and social aspects. We then encounter the question of technical ability, the possibility of modelling such a system and the theoretical approach to questions regarding the graded levels of understanding.

The decision-making process is therefore obviously questionable. The various individual interests must be represented in such a process. Thus, those who defend walking are defending their own specific interests. Every individual interest cannot, however, replace an overall conception, as a system cannot be restricted to the juxtaposition of its various components.

Decision-making is a process which involves constant revision and the consequent re-evaluations. The planning of public areas is a never-ending task, as it must always evolve in relation to the numerous demands made upon it. It is no longer simply a question of reserving urban areas for pedestrians alone or designing them solely for motor vehicles. It therefore requires accommodating acceptable conflicting interests, making visible the movements of others and rendering tolerable the cohabitation of these various modes.