

INTRODUCTORY REPORT WORKSHOP 2: Public Transport, Road Pricing, Congestion Management and urban Land Use Development – Well-known basic facts and innovative concepts in practice

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“To conquer distances – virtually or physically – is a lifelong dream of humanity, which reflects in many symbols, such as the seven league boots, the first step of man on the moon or the internet. At first glance, all of these symbols imply a liberation from natural chains – but the more we get used to them or when looking more closely, we usually also discover a certain ambivalence, which may take years or even decades to become apparent.”

Thus starts Dirk Zumkeller’s valuable contribution to Workshop 2. It might also serve as setting the scene for the whole Workshop. It implies the tyranny of distance in terms of human settlement, the opening up of possibilities through technology, and yet – in the end – the new tyranny of the technology.

Throughout history human settlement was constrained by limits of movement. Just as the absence of the elevator limited the height of buildings, giving a Hausmanian coherence to city form, so the absence of effective mechanical transport necessitated compact, often terrifyingly dense, cities. This was as true for 3rd century Rome as for 19th century Manchester. Whilst the rich could commute by horse from outlying villas and settlements to oversee their factories or their counting houses, for the masses there was no relief from plague or pressure: no Broadacre City was possible for them. That is, until transport technology advanced.

First came the railways. Their role in regional economic development remains valid to this day, and is well known. Equally the possibility of suburban development opened up: the map of North London suburbs is a map of railway lines. We are not yet talking about sprawl, as each suburb was tethered to its station, and each station was an economical and technologically determined distance from its neighbour. We are however talking about the first breath of freedom, as well as the healthy breath of country air.

We are also talking about a new realisation of an old dynamic: the relationship between transport nodes and land values. In this case the railway companies quickly realised that they could gain more from the sale of station-favoured land than they could from the sale of day returns. They became more land speculators than transport providers. As competition between railway companies increased they started to subsidise the tickets in

order to benefit more from the sale of housing plots. Urban transport systems, once separated from the land developers, became dependant on government funders, and tax payers across the developed world still pay for this initiative. Fernanda Magalhães and Eduardo Rojas remind us of the intersection of such financial consequences, especially in a world where decentralisation is becoming a major factor: “Growing decentralization of government responsibilities gives municipalities a larger role in the provision of services to the population and enterprises. The institutional mechanisms they use to identify, design, and execute investment projects, are one of the key determinants of their capacity to provide these services.”

The Garden Cities, and their degenerate cousin the garden suburb, arose as an attempt to bring dignity, and in some cases saleability, to this spawning urban form. Ironically they arrived just in time to provide garage space for motor cars, and hence as the model for Motopia. The suburb was free of the railway station, and almost free of the city.

But freedom will not be exercised if that which can be obtained by freedom is not wanted. The private car made possible, it did not oblige.

Leafy suburban villa development, served either by railway systems or more usually now by the private motor car, appears to be an object of desire for many, if not most, aspiring middle classes across the world. From Nigeria Abimbola Tofowomo reminds us clearly of this: “Urbanization is now a rising trend seen all over the world, especially in an alarming rate in developing countries. This makes cities grow both in number and in physical size. In quite a lot of instances, the percentage increase in population is accompanied by more than proportional percentage increase of an urbanized area. This is an indication that the two growth rates differ and urban area grows in a more rapid pace.” From a Chinese perspective Qi Lei and Lu Bin put it in a similar way: “Just like urban sprawl in cities of U.S., the impervious area of cities grows much faster than the population, and the population density becomes lower and lower in the past few years.”

But not all; there are many who seek the intense urban experience, and who require no more than the elevator and the bicycle to meet their transport needs. For them the pedestrian street, and its concomitant advantages – so well covered by Nasim Iranmanesh for this Workshop – is the height of urban living desirability.

We are a perplexing species, we want community and we want privacy, we want quiet and we want excitement. We want engagement, and – literally – we want distance. Often what we say does not match well what we do, and we need governments to tell us what we need to do, as Frediani, Giacobbe, Ravella, and Pistola, remind us: “environment sustainability depends on the appropriate decisions taken in the political administrative sphere. But Awais Piracha is perhaps more realistic: “If they really were serious about sustainable transport, the governments, and public and private organizations and individuals would make sure that their policies and choices result in a reduction in cars use.”

So, in the world as it actually is, we must deal with a complex situation driven by complex human needs and desires. Fortunately for this workshop we have two papers which track such thinking from the past into the future in one country. Jos Gadet and Koos van

Zanan remind us that “The Netherlands have been seriously challenging urban sprawl for almost half a century”, and give us the detail of how that has been enacted, as well as a rigorous analysis, and some pointers for the future. Yvonne van Remmen and Arjen.J. van der Burg, within the same framework, remind us of the advantages of “planning spatial developments along public transports hubs so that the lines are used efficiently. We have ample evidence of successful local developments of such kind (e.g. development around large train stations)”, returning us figuratively to North London.

The Workshop is fortunate too to be able to call upon recent experience in Bursa – Istanbul, through the work of S.S Eryilmaz, H. Cengiz, and Y.Eryilmaz, and in Belgrade, thanks to contributor Vladimir Savcic. Harry Storch, writing about Ho Chi Minh City, is right to remind us that “vulnerabilities of lives and livelihood to climate-related environmental processes are primarily the result of inadequate and unsustainable urban planning practices, associated with complex natural settings and societal structures.”

New tools are also available to us, both at the Macro scale through the work of Ying Long, Zhenjiang Shen, and Liqun Du, providing us with an introduction to a long-term urban form prediction for the Beijing metropolitan area, and at the micro level through Yuan Li and Zizhang He. This latter work posits a method for the internal navigation of complex buildings; a recognition that the nature of place is changing dramatically, which is taken further by Kaveh Fattahi and Hidetsugu Kobayashi, as indeed it is in Dirk Zumkeller’s paper referred to at the beginning of this note.

Some papers were added to this workshop: There are two modelling-type studies, an assessment of the future of the famous Dutch Randstad model (by VROM), and a comparative assessment in the form of “eleven studios on eleven cities” (by McCormick). In addition, three interesting cases from cities as far apart as Vienna (Fleischmann), Shiraz (Mohaved), and Cancun (Jasso Ortiz) were shifted into this workshop. All of the additional papers contribute interesting analytical views to the specific theme of the workshop.

So we are left with profound questions. Advances in transport technology liberate spatial dreams; the dreams sometimes become nightmares. Have we reached a point at which new dreams are beginning, before we have woken from the last nightmare?