

A HUMAN SOCIETY NEEDS HUMAN PLACES

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the presentation and this paper is that there is friction between keeping up technology as a way of influencing behaviour and the way almost every human being wants to make it's own decision. The speedhump works only on the hump itself, speed camera's work as long there is a warning for it and maintenance of speeding. Pedestrians cross the street in spite of the color of the crossing light. They calculate their risks. The audience could learn of this presentation that problems in public space are not always solved by technology. Sometimes it's better to use the surrounding to influence behaviour, to nudge, to use trust instead of distrust.

Places are for people. Cognition or understanding it is only possible with perception. We see people who perceive places as their "own" when the feeling they undergo is a sort of home feeling. Such places have an identity that's related to the history of the place. The functions that are available at the place. Also the design with attention for human scale and the perceived safety will support ownership. The place becomes "their" place in "their" neighbourhood, village or city. An important condition to meet these characteristics is the involvement of the users of the place. Technology can be profitable if it is supporting these conditions and not used as a means of control and forced guidance. Technology can be of help for users with i.e. visual impairments, handicaps or other physical challenges. These groups can get help in guiding and wayfinding. Developments in individual technical help and in street design are already in use. Still we need to have extra attention for these aspects to make and remain public space an inclusive realm. To quote Charles Montgomery in *Happy City* (2013, p. 217): "So if we really care about freedom for everyone, we need to design for everyone – not just the brave." Shared Space started as an idea to overcome some of the modern problems in public space. Streets are cluttered with signs, even those meant for car drivers are placed on sidewalks. Lampposts, garbage bins, posts for traffic lights, they all take up space and block people walking. After over 25 years of experience with shared spaces, we now can add safety as one of the advantages of human places, that share the space on basic equal rights.

KEYWORDS *_ Human society, Visual impairments, Identity, Shared Space*

INTRODUCTION

Places are everywhere in cities and neighbourhoods, in villages and in rural areas. Places are for people, but not all places are accessible in the same way, depending on the people, young, old, disabled. From a psychological point of view and from the vision of a designer or engineer, people's behaviour is interesting: the feeling of safety or connecting with others. It depends for a great part on the design, the history and the possibilities the place offers.

In this paper places can be divided in:

Public places. Squares in cities, parks and infrastructure. These places have most times restrictions for the mode of traffic, the speeds and the possible impairments people can have. These places are "owned" by the government, designed and maintained.

Private public places are not exclusively governmental domains. Accessible for the public, but access can be restricted, for those who have a license or paid for a toll. Examples are e.g. railway stations, shopping malls, schoolyards etc.

Private places are houses, gardens, work spaces, offices, shops, interior places and can be kept closed by the owner.

For this paper we refer mostly to the public and private public places.

It was Le Corbusier (1987) who presented his ideas in *The city of Tomorrow and its Planning*, in which he envisioned his Radiant Cities, with skyscrapers, easy automobile access and grassy places to keep pedestrians off the streets. Jane Jacobs (1961) criticized the ideas, because there was a great lack of attention for people and their needs.

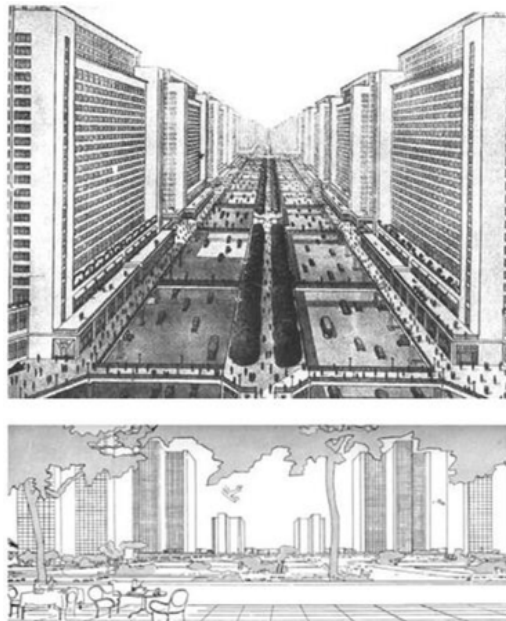


Figure 1: Cities. Vision by Le Corbusier

Times are changing. Nowadays, public space is a place for everyone, independent of their mode of transport or who they are. A public space is a place to be, to interact with others, to stay, to shop, just to linger and to go through. Where communication with each other is important and possible, instead of communicating with the traffic system.

In Corona-times wearing a face mask was a sign of communication. People told others that they took the pandemic seriously which meant keeping distance was required

In the middle ages people suffering from the pest used a rattle to warn others. Also a form of communication.



Figure 2: Pest rattle

This phenomenon, nonverbal communication, brought Hans Monderman (1945-2008) to the idea that people communicate in everyday life to move through public space. It's one of the most important ways how people relate to each other.

In this paper we try to use the concept of Shared Space for making public places also human places. In last century public places became more and more places for – just – infrastructure.

Although emerged in the world of traffic engineering, it's not just a concept. It's much more than that. It's about people, equality of people, road users, and living. It can have positive impact on how people interact and feel responsible for their places. Or as Charles Montgomery says: "So, if we really care about freedom for everyone, we need to design for everyone – not just the brave."

It also about trust and respect instead of rules and regulation. Stemming from ideas about engineering it's about philosophy and psychology about human social attitudes, dispositioned to be good, to trust others. See for instance the worldwide assent with the ideas of Rutger Bregman in his book *De Meeste Mensen Deugen (2019)* (Translated: *Most People are Good*). In Shared Space it's not distrust, but trust as the ruling mechanism for public space.

An illustration as observed by the author can make clear how the world of social life, where people have contact and interact with others, differs from the world of traffic and regulated public space.

When I'm in the supermarket, I walk with my cart and do my shopping. Moving through the most narrow "streets" is a bit like in real traffic, I stay to the right, ask if I can pass or wait for someone till I can reach for a product. These are no traffic rules, these are human rules. As long as I make contact, I'm friendly and I even don't show that I'm in a hurry. Outside the shop, we put our goods in the car. We start driving and start to be drivers, road users, no longer interacting with others, individuals only reacting on road signs, traffic lights etc. The communication is directed one way to me, part of the traffic system, no longer a human world.

When I was in Shanghai some years ago I observed in the city center how people in a shopping area crossed a street. Traffic lights and policemen were ignored. In the chaos there was a steady flow of pedestrians motor bikes and cars. All on almost the same speed. See YouTube for my footage. (Pieter de Haan Shanghai 2018)

This illustration shows that behaviour is strongly influenced by the situation. The tinted car windows prevent two way interaction and stimulate the dominant communication with the system. The traffic system and not the social system. It's like living in the world of traffic instead of living in a human world

The Shared Space concept has a long history. Looking back there was no name for it. In cities in earlier centuries, where regulation of traffic was absent it was the normal situation. In modern times we see the change of public space in last century from human space to technology oriented traffic spaces.



Figure 3: Tinted car windows

In the next chapter we see how an idea without a name, evolved to a concept, something to try and to experiment and how it became even a tool for urban designers to make the public realm livable places. Also we see this development with local and cultural influences because the concept is not defined in a clear way. The way it looks is depending on the local situation. The process with the road users as more or less the "owners" of the space and the conditions to apply to this design simply became a need for go or no go. We saw also that special care was needed for road users visually impaired or with physical challenges. A variety of design ideas came up and were researched.

After the experiments in the early phase of Shared Space a need for more fundament and theoretical substantiation of the concept was needed. So research and evaluations were undertaken. Also which psychological and sociological theories could explain the observed behaviour in the Shared Space situations. Even the financial and economic effects of the conceptual vision of Shared Space needs further research. But the first effects look very promising.

At the time of writing this paper, university students are investigating the awareness of the road users about being and behaving in a shared space.

Another aspect being discussed is the accessibility of places designed as shared spaces for people with a physical or visual disability or for elderly and children.

Still there is discussion between the supporters of Shared Space and the engineers that prefer to separate all the different types of road use.

Those who prefer Shared Space say that respect instead of rules make public space more a human space with responsibility for all people sharing the public space on a base of equality whatever their mode of transport may be. Those engineers who look at public space in a traditional way, propagate the idea that first of all traffic should be safe and rules, signs etc. help ensure this.

After working with the ideas of Shared Space it became clear that ways for not just regulating traffic are being exhausted, but in other domains as well, where rules, protocols and handbooks have taken over thinking and communication between people about how to decide what to do, think and find.

HOW AND WHERE IT ALL STARTED

Shared Space: Looking back in history and looking forward to the future

In Shared Space it is not possible to cross the street? This looks strange, but it suggests clearly that the street is something else than the place for pedestrians. Cars are on the street and pedestrians walk on the sidewalks. If the public space is a shared space, there is no difference between the places for different road users. In the beginning of the last century a need emerged to differentiate between walking, cycling and the first cars. They were seen as dangerous, fast and certainly noisy.



Figure 4: Spanish Medieval traffic signs.

Signs became also necessary as a means to regulate traffic flow. These signs were captured by the author in a Spanish town. Probably much older than some centuries. And in spite of that, cars became dominant, less noisy, still dangerous, but more for pedestrians and cyclists and not for the car drivers. A traffic system became imminent and car use of urban space was the leading inspiration for planners of cities and infrastructure.

Every year the lives of approximately 1.3 million people are cut short as a result of a road traffic crash. Between 20 and 50 million more people suffer non-fatal injuries, with many incurring a disability as a result of their injury.

Road traffic injuries cause considerable economic losses to individuals, their families, and to nations as a whole. These losses arise from the cost of treatment as well as lost productivity for those killed or disabled by their injuries, and for family members who need to take time off work or school to care for the injured. Road traffic crashes cost most countries 3% of their gross domestic product. Road traffic injuries (who.int)

World Health Organization (2022)

The forgotten history of how automakers invented the crime of "jaywalking". This article explains how in the 1920s, auto groups redefined who owned the city street.

Jaywalking became a crime, the street was made for cars. Pedestrians could only cross at pre-defined crosswalks. And traffic lights told them that only at a green light it was possible to cross. So everyone not in a car was confined to sidewalks. It was only some hundred years ago when a traffic system – car dominated – was born.

*"In the early days of the automobile, it was drivers' job to avoid you, not your job to avoid them," says Peter Norton, (2007) a historian at the University of Virginia and author of **Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City**. "But under the new model, streets became a place for cars – and as a pedestrian, it's your fault if you get hit.*

THE BEGINNING OF SHARED SPACE

The conceptualization of a concept



Figure 5: New Asheville signs

The London architect, Ben Hamilton Baillie and Hans Monderman were thinking about traffic safety and their question was where engineering should end. Is there a limit to putting up more and more signs, traffic lights and separation of all modes of traffic in public space? Hans Monderman and his colleagues didn't believe the behavioural effects of traffic signs to be a proper method to regulate the movements in the city. Later we came to the conclusion that traffic signs have less of a regulating function but more one of helping to assess the responsibility when it comes to an accident. Traffic signs also are subject to habituation, so, certainly in rather stressful situations, they can be overseen or neglected. The effect of the sign is fading.



Figure 6: Drachten NL. pictured by Knowledge Centre Shared Space

Some politicians could be convinced in some pilots to start reducing traffic measures rather than adding more. Slowly – it took years – the idea of Shared Space became in the world of traffic engineers and urban designers a rather familiar concept.

Public space is really space for the public. It's used by the public, but owned and maintained by governing bodies. The municipality is most times the formal owner and maintains the public space. But within the Shared Space concept, the users are the owners. They should be the designers and should take care of it. The municipality facilitates this.

The Dutch regulation on traffic is more advisory than compulsory, although in court and in assurances the rules formulated in the guidelines are always leading when an accident leads to a formal complaint. The legal situation is clear but not so extensive as in a lot of other countries. Yes, there are a lot of rules, but the most important ones are the following three:

- Be careful
- Stay to the right
- Give way to traffic from the right¹

Just these three are sufficient for Shared Space. Another very important rule is that in the case of an accident, the stronger road user is always liable in regards to the weaker one.

Pilots were introduced almost unnoticed. First in Oude Haske in Fryslân and later on at a busy junction in Drachten. No legal rules were infringed and the traffic situation still seemed familiar, except for the absence of the “normal” signs. People had to judge for themselves. But this idea was – strangely enough - revolutionary yet applicable in many more places.

Scientific research was made difficult because there was minimal data for the before and after situation. The words of Hans Monderman were most times: “try, just try and you will see it works”(van der Veen, interview 2001) Because of this attitude we had trouble to make proper evaluation studies. There was a need for data: does it work, how and when. We still need to make evaluations to answer these questions.

Together with the province of Fryslân this concept looked promising for use in other places and countries. A proposal for an “EU-Interreg”- project was made and was rewarded for four years of experimenting. Because it was a North Sea-project, Norway, Germany, Denmark and the UK joined to find out if this idea could be a new concept for them as well. Cities were asked to be a partner in the project. The goal was also to promote Shared Space if the outcome was positive. An important remark that was always made was that Shared Space is not primarily a traffic solution and we needed to be very reluctant to claim it as a solution for traffic safety. Not enough data for this was available and researching on the relation between the road situation and accidents was very complicated. Shared Space is in the first place a way of redesigning places from traffic places to human places.

During the project already all partners were convinced that this was a viable and even promising way of designing places. The public space was changed *from a traffic world to a human world*. Roads should tell the story. Self-explaining roads were by far preferable over the strictly regulated roads.

ROADS BECAME STREETS AGAIN

The EU-project ended after four years. The results were very promising, so in a joint venture of the Province Fryslân and Municipality of Smallerland, the Shared Space Institute was set up to continue the work done in this EU-project. There was also a lot of (international) publicity² for it.

¹ These rules apply for the countries where traffic drives on the right side of the road.

Now the Knowledge Center is growing, we have paid projects and are able to do and stimulate research. Shared Space was a concept started with good thinking but working on a trial and error basis. This couldn't last, the concept needed a scientific foundation. Now the amount of research-based evidence is positively backing up the concept. Simulation studies haven't been done till now. The reason for this is that making a prototype for Shared Space is very difficult. In fact, "you can't simulate the unexpected". So all studies are implemented by inquiries and observations in shared spaces and traditional designed places. Within a timeframe and in before and after studies.

The Shared Space idea grew from simple thinking and resistance against the traditional engineering methods to an alternative for a more humane public space. It's no longer car dominated and roads become streets again. Where respect instead of rules is the prevalent way people communicate with each other. No longer just relying on technology.

Recently a book was published with examples of realized projects. Backgrounds, history and experiences are described. These examples can serve as inspiration for all of the stakeholders in public space (Haan and Nota, 2022).

DESIGN THE PUBLIC SPACE FOR EVERYONE

A study done by Havik et.al. (Havik 2015) reveals that in Shared Space visual impaired people (VIP's) sometimes have problems with orientation, but feeling unsafe seems to be a lesser issue:

This study has shown that navigating in an unfamiliar Shared-Space area is more complicated for VIPs than navigating in an unfamiliar, conventionally designed area. This is especially true for those who are blind and for those using a guide dog. Following the results of this study, orientation seems to be the main problem for VIPs in Shared-Space areas. Although personal safety in Shared-Space areas is an important issue that deserves attention, in this study it did not come forward as a major problem. However, potentially dangerous situations of people walking in the middle of the street without being aware of this frequently occurred. These situations are undesirable and should be avoided by implementing adequate street design tailored to the needs of VIPs. Other important findings are that there were also participants who managed well at both location types and that not all Shared-Space locations are equally difficult to navigate independently. In other words, it seems possible to create Shared-Space areas that are accessible for people who are visually impaired. Since Shared-Space areas can be highly complicated to navigate and also potentially dangerous for some VIPs, we have developed a Shared-Space Guide to improve the accessibility of the Shared-Space design for this group.

Although the idea of Hans Monderman that Shared Space works because of visual interaction between road users evoked a lot of opposition by visually impaired people, slowly some confidence arose. In the Netherlands this was because there was cooperation with the focus groups when designing started. Learning from each other is key to a successful design. Now we know that designing the public space is important to do from the point of view of impaired people. Their ideas and abilities should be taken into account in the process.

DESIGNING

Public spaces are becoming more and more less human places. Road users, especially all those who use a car, bike etc, are guided by signs, lines, lights and separated according to the type of mobility. There is no human contact. Railway stations, buses and trams are accessible with a plastic card, no human interaction is needed. QR-code on the menu in restaurants, order food with an app and payment is already done. Social interaction seems banned in het public space. Efficiency leads the way, resulting in less possibilities to say "sorry" or "thank you".

It was the time of Covid19 that accelerated these “technical” opportunities. Libraries, shops, control centres, most times operated by tech and almost no human contact possible.

With Shared Space in the public realm this human contact is brought back. Of course delicate design together with a delicate process is a must for a successful design.

Customization and five features

Every Shared Space application is by definition tailor-made, but there are a number of the same characteristics.

1. Using the context of the place

The behaviour of people at Shared Space locations is more strongly influenced by the expression of the environment than by the usual instruments of traffic engineering. Instead of traffic signs and shark teeth, spatial elements and the landscape context are used to get people to display the desired behaviour. This approach not only contributes to a more social and safer behaviour and use of the public space, but also to the restoration of the individuality and identity of the place.

2. Human spaces

The design must encourage social behaviour. Social behaviour is encouraged by regulating less with traffic signs and by appealing more to people’s self-regulating capacity. Traffic rules make way for social rules and eye contact. By restoring interaction between people in places where social behaviour is obvious, the number of accidents can be reduced.

3. Shared use of space

Separating the different types of traffic does not fit with Shared Space’s goal of creating residential areas where the human dimension predominates. After all, it is about creating a human space with social rules. Shared Space is shared space.

4. Rather disorderly than falsely safe

What feels safe is not necessarily safe. And vice versa: what feels unsafe can still be safe. Because if a situation feels unsafe, people slow down, they are more alert and fewer serious accidents occur. Better safety with uncertainty than accidents with clarity. Instead of obedience to rules, the space asks users to take their own responsibility.

5. Materials that match the environment

The chosen materials, the colour and type of paving, the street furniture and the lighting all contribute to the spatial quality. Within Shared Space, materials are sought that match the character of a residential environment. These materials are used to steer the desired behaviour of people in the space, but also to restore identity and spatial quality to the place.

These five characteristics do not yet form a standard recipe for creating a Shared Space design. They are not guidelines for a standard design that can be applied everywhere. It is custom work, every location is different, every context is different. It is also important that every road to a solution is different. The process is perhaps more important than the design. When the road users and residents are fully involved in a project, they become “owners”, of the place. It was their problem (parking, speeding, safety) and in working on solution, it becomes their solution. The place has a new identity, is recognizable, fits in the surrounding and is part of the history of that place.

What we learned from Shared Space.

This concept became a viable design idea, more democratic and with respect for the places and history. Although this conclusion is not the result of a calculation of data. It's contrary to ordinary scientific based conclusions, because all situations are different, so calculating and comparing is difficult. We gathered a lot of results of separate places with before and after situations.³ Based on that the conclusion that this concept can under conditions and with regard to the local situation be used. Psychological background now is added as a confidence-inducing argument. Safety is not the biggest issue. Reports of users indicate that the quality of their place has undergone an important and relevant change.

SHARED SPACE AS A METAPHOR FOR OTHER DOMAINS

Rules, rules, rules. The Pavlov reaction, a conditioned response to almost every incident by governments is: "Is there a rule for it? And if not, we make a rule."

Frederique Six wrote in 2018 this:

Governance built on distrust or even suspicion leads to more rules, more enforcement etc.

Trust acts as a lubricant in the social relations of a society. Without mutual trust, society, organizations and democracy come under pressure. A society in which people and organizations interact with each other based on trust has many advantages: it is easier to deal with great uncertainty and complexity; it helps with risk taking; it supports learning, innovation and collaboration and is more efficient. In addition, trust also has an intrinsic value: as part of human relationships, what makes us human and as a quality of life.

Not only traffic, land use, public health, banking, accountancy, education are all full of rules. Sometimes it looks as if rules are in the way of efficient working while trust with social interaction could reach the same result. Shared Space as a way of rethinking can possibly help how we replace mistrust for trust and personal responsibility rather than governmental and technical control of behaviour.

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