

## **Erfurt Tagung**

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### **Future mobility and the city**

This short contribution to a very long and important debate suggests the total abandonment of the mobility paradigm and its replacement by something more intelligent, ethical, healthy, fiscally responsible and people centred. The mobility paradigm is a global phenomenon. We could argue that it started in Germany or the UK but that does not matter. It is the unquestioned assumption that travelling further and faster and becoming locked into various forms of energy dense movement is a good thing, good for the economy and good for human progress. This is wrong.

I want to promote the abandonment of the mobility paradigm and its replacement by something that maximises benefits to all sections of society locally and globally and minimises disbenefits. For convenience this is referred to as the accessibility paradigm.

The developed world has adopted the mobility paradigm as a core component of what a modern nation state must do. It is hard-wired into most aspects of public decision-taking, budgets and public opinion. Every country has its own wish list of projects and investments that are intended to increase mobility. This includes more road space, more airports, more high speed rail and strong financial incentives through investment and subsidy to support the fundamental objective of more mobility. Mobility has captured the ideological high ground. More mobility just sounds "good". Its list of associations is very impressive indeed; we can all have more freedom, more destinations to visit, more flexibility to live and work in widely separated locations and greater choice over schools and hospitals and where we live, regardless of the distances involved.

Challenging more mobility will never be easy but we can start by identifying the extremely serious negative consequences that flow from more mobility and the degree to which the growth of mobility is supported by huge public spending and a total disregard for social justice or spending that is in some way mediated by reference to fairness. For many in all societies (the poor, the old, the young,

the disabled) spending is inadequate to meet basic needs. Spending is heavily skewed towards those who use cars a lot, those who want to travel very fast and very expensively by high speed rail lines and those who fly a lot. This bias excludes those who would like to walk or cycle to a local destination or those who want to live in circumstances not polluted by poor air quality, noise and the risk of death and serious injury.

There are many alternatives to the high mobility world currently on offer. My main task is to identify accessibility as a complete replacement for mobility but the alternatives have been captured through other perspectives including architecture (Gehl, 2010), social commentary and analysis (Illich, 1974 and Honore, 2005) and in politics (Sachs, 1993). Holzapfel (2011) has explored in detail the links between urban planning and transport and through an historical and cultural analysis shown why things went “wrong” and how cities can be redesigned to create high quality living environments. The alternatives to mobility do not simply reduce or eliminate the negative consequences of year-on-year increases in mobility. They change the whole political, economic and social system so that it is kinder, more supportive of community life and values people far more than it values the ability to move around a lot in a vehicle. The essence of this fundamental shift in societal perspective has been concentrated by Sachs (1993) into “the 4 Lessens”, described as a “new pathway for good living”

- In time: less speed, meaning more slowly and more reliably
- In space: less distance, meaning closer and clearer
- In the material world: less clutter meaning simpler and fewer
- In the economy: less market, meaning providing and making for oneself

This is the essence of the much needed and now overdue paradigm shift.

The mobility paradigm should be deleted and replaced by an accessibility paradigm that guarantees high quality walking, cycling, public transport and public health for all income groups, social groups and geographies. The accessibility paradigm requires a shift in thinking and willing, a shift in budgets and a strong social justice impulse that is lacking in most countries. It would produce more destinations that can be easily accessed by more people than a mobility paradigm. It recognises that distance is not a consumer commodity that we should set about increasing year-on-year and that the amount of distance we consume has no bearing on quality of life, satisfaction, happiness, community viability or health. We can all live much more satisfying and productive lives in supportive communities at lower levels of distances consumed and this is the objective of deleting mobility (i.e. more distance travelled) and replacing it with accessibility (many more things can be reached at a lower time, financial and environmental cost).

This transformation will require a new way of looking at things and expressing a view of the kind of world we want to shape. I suggest as a starting point, there minima and three maxima:

## **The minima**

Zero air pollution in cities

Zero greenhouse gas emissions from transport

Zero deaths and serious injuries

## **The maxima**

We will maximise the proportion of all trips made by pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users

We will maximise the potential for children and older people to move around in a calm, safe and pleasant street environment

## References

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