





Dancers rehearse at the Simon Bolivar Park, the biggest in Bogota. The park is a special place to spend time with family and friends.

streets. They do not use public transport, public schools, public libraries, public parks. They perceive the city as a threatening or at least uncomfortable space they traverse while going from one private space to another. Therefore what they want from their city are well paved, high velocity, traffic-free roads and streets. It is a challenge to get them to go out and enjoy their city and not to let public investment decisions be determined solely by them,

#### **BRIDGE THE CLASS DIVIDE**

After the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and China, many assumed that equality as a

social ideal was a thing of the past. Yet it is the principle on which much of civilisation was built, from the Greeks, Romans to Judeo-Christian ethics. Over the last 300 years the yearning for equality has been the cause for most revolutions and social conflicts.

Many Asian societies have been among the most willing to make sacrifices to achieve social justice. Once we adopt a market economy we cannot have income equality. But there are at least two types of equality we can still strive for: quality of life equality and the implementation of that basic democratic principle which says that public good prevails over private interest. This is not just a poetic wish.

For example if we accept these objectives of equality, then waterfronts should never be private and exclusive and road space should be allocated first to public transport and only if there is enough space left, to private cars.

The equality that matters most is that which matters to children: access to green spaces without having to be members of a country club: sports facilities, quality schools, music lessons, public waterfronts. It is difficult to get citizens to accept a social order and obey laws if social organisation does not have legitimacy. And for legitimacy to exist there must be a significant degree of equality.

The way we build cities and organise city life has profound impact on a society's equity and social integration. A city in which rich and poor meet as equals in public spaces and in public transport is a socially advanced city.

#### SPACES FOR CHILDREN

Today children all over the urban world jump in fright when told: "Watch out, a car!" And they have good reasons to fear cars: hundreds of thousands of children the world over are killed by cars every year. Why not conceive of a city where children can walk out of their houses into pedestrian streets? In the DNA of Asian cities and Asian life there is a pedestrian life which still lingers. Until recently and often even today Asian cities had a pedestrians-only street network hundreds of kilometres long where human life and community relations thrived. Neighbours met, the elderly talked or played cards, children played, others shopped for vegetables.

For 5,000 years cities have existed and until just 100 years ago all streets were pedestrian. People shared them with horses and carriages without risk. A child could safely go on an errand several blocks away from home. Until the beginning of the 20th Century this was the case even in the world's largest cities, like New York, Tokyo, or Paris. Then motorcars appeared in growing numbers and pushed pedestrians out of streets to the sidewalks. But in many class conscious cities without quality sidewalks, motor vehicles pushed people progressively away from public space.

When cars appeared, a parallel road network should have been created: one for cars and the other exclusively for pedestrians. Towards the end of the 20th Century it was finally realised that a severe error had been made. An effort was made to revive cities for people. Cars were then removed from the pavements they had taken over and many central areas were turned into exclusively pedestrian spaces. There are more than 1,000 urban localities in Europe that have created pedestrians-only networks in their historic city centres and many Asian cities have done likewise with a few streets. But growing Asian cities could do something much more radical in cities yet to be built. Magnificent networks of tree lined promenades exclusively for pedestrians and cyclists could change the nature of cities and city living.

Among our happiness needs are walking, being with people and not feeling inferior. Public spaces attend to these three needs. We humans are pedestrians, walking animals. Just as fish need to swim, birds to fly, zebras to run, we need to walk. We do not need to walk in order to survive, but in order to be happy. We also like to see people, to be with people. It has been found that people prefer park benches where more people walk by and not the most beautiful spot in the park. When people walk they are with people in public spaces. And in public spaces people meet as equals, regardless of wealth or position. High quality public pedestrian space is not a luxury or a frivolity in developing country cities. It demonstrates respect for human dignity. It is important for the quality of life. And it constructs social justice.

It is during leisure time that income differences are felt acutely. During working hours, high and low income citizens are equally satisfied or dissatisfied. Once they leave work, higher income people have access to large homes, gardens, country houses, clubs, restaurants, vacation trips. Lower income



A cycle rally in Bogota

citizens and their children live in very small homes and their only leisure facility, apart from television, is public pedestrian space. The least a democracy can offer its citizens are good pavements and parks. Parks, plazas and sports fields are as important to a city as hospitals and schools.

Most goods and services the government provides are a means to well being. Police are a means to security, roads are a means to productivity and hospitals are a means to cure illnesses. Public space is a peculiar good because it is an end by itself. It provides joy. Unlike joy derived from a product we

buy at a store which fades after some time, the joy provided by a quality pedestrian promenade, park or plaza never diminishes, month after month, year after year, century after century.

#### YOUR FOOTPRINT MATTERS

There is a conflict between a city friendly to cars and a city friendly to people. As a city becomes friendlier to motor vehicles, with bigger, faster roads, it inevitably becomes less humane. High velocity roads are like fences in a cow pasture. They enclose us. Moreover, they are noisy. If the

road is elevated, it darkens public space, usually lowers the value of buildings around it and often creates problems of crime. The slower traffic is and the wider a pavement, the better for human life. And a pedestrians-only street is the most human friendly scheme.

Cars parked on pavements or parking bays where there should be pavements symbolise a lack of respect for human dignity. This also reflects lack of democracy in unequal societies where higher income car-owning citizens are more important than poorer ones who walk or ride bicycles. The width and quality of pavements is a good indicator of how advanced and democratic a society really is. Higher income citizens in developing country cities argue that there is enough space on pavements to carve out parking bays as well as for people to walk by. There is a flaw in that argument. Pavements are not relatives of streets. They are not for getting from one place to another. They are relatives of parks. Pavements are for walking aimlessly, playing, talking, kissing and enjoying the city. To say that a pavement has enough space to carve out parking bays and to walk, is equivalent to saying that the main park or plaza of a city can be turned into an open air parking lot, just as long as enough space is left between the cars for people to walk by.

What gives character to and is memorable about a city is its pedestrian space. Nobody returns from Paris talking about French highways. Childhood memories of a city are usually about a public pedestrian space.

Tourism is an increasingly important source of employment and economic growth. And tourism is a pedestrian activity. When someone arrives in a city for the first time, he or she will very likely ask the concierge at the hotel for a nice place to go to, meaning a place to walk and see people. Tourists like to walk, preferably with few cars around. They crowd the pedestrian streets of world cities.

Even Disneyworld in the nation of cars, is basically a pedestrian city where people walk. If a child let's go of his or her mother's hand there is no danger from cars. Duany Plater-Zyberk and Speck in their book *Suburban Nation*<sup>2</sup> mention that the average visitor to Disney World only spends three per cent of his or her time on rides and shows. The rest of the time is spent simply enjoying a pedestrians-only environment.

If the concierge in a hotel recommends a shopping mall to a visitor, he or she will prefer not to return to that city. Inside, all malls are the same regardless of which city in the world they are located. Globalisation has led to stores in malls being the same everywhere. Even the temperature is the same. Inside the mall one cannot see mountains, water, trees, birds or the architecture. The foremost ingredient of a flourishing tourist industry are wide, quality pavements and hopefully an extensive pedestrians-and-bicycles-only promenade network.

From Delhi to Accra roads have more pedestrians and bicyclists than cars. But the roads have neither pavements nor a bicycle path. Such disregard reflects a society's inequality. Today environmental impact studies are required for most infrastructure projects to minimise or eliminate negative impacts upon plants or animals. But human impact studies should be required as well. How do we make all infrastructure projects more child-friendly? A drainage canal or a road should have pedestrian spaces alongside. We can create a city for children's happiness rather than for car mobility.

Although most land on Earth has become private, some unique God-given soil must remain public for every child's enjoyment. To do otherwise would be practically immoral and public good would not prevail over private interest. This is the case with waterfronts. Waterfronts have been crucial to the charm of many cities throughout history. Over the last 25 years the revival of many cities has centred on its waterfronts. Barcelona, Capetown, Shanghai, London, New York, Paris, Buenos Aires, Chicago, Boston, Copenhagen are only some of the cities that have made good use of their waterfronts and have been improving them recently.

Waterfronts should have public pedestrian spaces alongside, preferably isolated from road traffic by buildings or parks. Asia has potentially very beautiful waterfronts. Shanghai's Bund is famous. Tokyo has begun to create some quality pedestrian waterfronts. Singapore has marvellous parks next to a waterfront and is creating a whole new urban development around its river waterfront. Bangkok's Chao Phraya river has marvellous temples but could become much more pedestrian friendly. Hanoi's Red River could become one of the most charming waterfronts in the world.

At any rate, waterfronts should always be public and have abundant comfortable public access. Roads for motor vehicles should be avoided next to waterfronts. It is always tempting to place them there as there are no intersections except where there are bridges. But advanced western cities that have done so regret it today. Boston, Seoul and Madrid invested billions to demolish highways next to their waterfronts and replace them with underground roads. Paris is closing the highway next to the Seine River increasingly often, even turning it into a 'beach' every summer.

#### **HOMES FOR EVERYONE**

Slums, 'tugurios', 'bidonvilles', 'favelas' are found in most developing country cities. Millions of children grow up without clean water or parks, in landslide prone or flood prone areas or high up in the mountains surrounding cities, where it will always be energy intensive and costly to bring water or transport and bicycle use will be difficult.

Slums are so common throughout cities in the developing world that their presence cannot be attributed to the failure of any particular government. It is a systemic failure. Clearly the present system based on private ownership of land around cities is not working. The market economy works when price increases bring about supply increases which result in lower prices. If tomato prices increase, tomato supply increases and prices go down. Such is not the case with land around cities. Prices can increase indefinitely but the supply of land accessible to water supply, transportation, education, jobs will stay fixed. In other words, private property and the market do not work well in the case of land around fast growing cities, particularly if our goal is to have compact, energy-efficient cities. Housing subsidies, lower interest rates, or even higher wages, would only increase land prices even more and keep land inaccessible to the poor. If slums are one face of a coin, the other face is the unearned enrichment of a few landowners.

Improving existing slums comes first. Some Indian cities are demolishing slum buildings and replacing them with condominiums around six stories high with mixed success. In Latin America improving slums has been the preferred option.

Beyond basic infrastructure like water and sewage, great iconic infrastructure can be built in the middle of slums - great schools, libraries, nurseries, quality public spaces like streets with ample sidewalks, protected bicycle-ways, parks, plazas and sports facilities. Private homes will be improved by their occupants around such public spaces.

The objective, however, is not only to improve existing slums, but to avoid future ones. Diverse tax systems and other regulatory mechanisms to solve the problem are always blocked or dodged by landowners. Urban land reform is more important than rural land reform ever was. Once the land issue is solved there are many ways of solving housing needs, from corporate to self-built solutions.

Governments should acquire, through voluntary sales or the use of eminent domain, large tracts of land adjacent to existing urban areas to provide housing solutions for the poor in high quality urban environments. Ideally, low income housing should be centrally located. But high quality developments located in the borders of the city can work well if linked by low cost, quality public transport.

Land should also be acquired for large parks in the borders of cities which in the near future will be in the midst of urban areas. Access to green may become the main source of exclusion and inequality. The poor will in time acquire most consumer goods and gadgets which today are only accessible to higher income citizens. The same will not happen with access to large green spaces unless governments act today. Parks are not a frivolity. They are necessary for a physically and emotionally healthy life. In cities in the developing world today, much more land is devoted to golf country clubs than to parks.

Every day that goes by without radical government intervention in urban and suburban land, only increases slums. An opportunity to create a wonderful city for many generations of happy children is lost. When slums grow it is not because of lack of government funds or insufficient technology. It is due to lack of political clarity and will.

#### **BEATING BACK THE TRAFFIC**

It does not matter what is done, traffic jams will become worse unless a radically new model is adopted. Transport is different from other challenges like health or education because it does not improve with economic development. On the contrary, traffic and transport problems tend to worsen as per capita income increases. The solution is public transport and restrictions on private automobile use. But this requires a different vision of the city. It is an ideological and political issue, rather than an engineering one.

Use of public transport by higher income citizens is a good measure of how democratic and advanced a city is. A majority of higher income citizens in the best cities in the world use public transport. They do not do so out of love for public transport or the environment, but because they have to. Severe restrictions on car use such as traffic jams, parking scarcity or cost motivate them to use public transport. Generally people use public transport when it gets them to their destination faster than their own cars.

There is no such thing as a 'natural level' of car use in a city. If you invest more and more on new and bigger roads, you will not wake up one morning and find that traffic jams have finally disappeared. How many cars are used in a city is not a technical but a political decision. If there was more

space for cars in New York, there would be more cars in New York. If there was less space for cars, there would be fewer cars in New York. What we have to decide then is how much of our city's extremely scarce public space we want to give to the car. Moreover, how do we want to distribute road space between pedestrians, bicycles, public transport and private cars?

It is difficult for developing country elites to accept that advanced and successful cities like London, New York, Paris or Zurich decided long ago they would not build more roads in response to increasing traffic. They would only create ever better public transport. Today 'transport policy' in any advanced city really translates into seeking ways to reduce car use. In underdeveloped cities it still means exactly the opposite: how to facilitate it.

Traffic jams and travel time are increasing in all American urban areas, despite giant highways. The reason is that traffic stems not only from the number of cars but also from the distances cars travel. For traffic it is the same to have two cars travelling one kilometre each, as it is to have one car travelling two kilometres. Bigger roads stimulate longer trips and thus traffic. No city has ever solved its traffic jams with more or bigger roads.

More than whether trains, tramways, buses, monorails are chosen, public transport success depends upon density. High population density, a relatively high number of inhabitants per hectare, is the most important transport policy. High density makes possible low cost, high frequency public transport. It also facilitates walking, bicycle use and relatively low cost taxis.

A low density suburban structure makes for long and therefore costly trips. And a train or bus through a sparsely populated area cannot make frequent runs because it would go mostly empty. Higher densities are thus necessary in order to have low cost high frequency public transport.

Very high-rise buildings are not necessary for high densities. It is possible to achieve high densities with four storey buildings. Most cities in developing country have relatively high population densities, not as a result of planning but simply due to low motorisation rates and lack of highways. Around 1900 the United States also had rather compact cities and people moved mainly by street car or tramway. Most Asian cities are still dense, citizens move on small motorcycles, bicycles or buses, which are generally not very well organised, but still a form of mass public transport. These cities can and should avoid urban sprawl.

#### STEP OUT OF YOUR CAR

It is not possible to design a transport system unless we know what kind of city we want. But in order to know that, we have to know how we want to live because a city is only a means to a way of life. And that better city we want, which is respectful of human dignity, will require significant decision making in mobility issues, decisions that largely shape and foster a more humane way of life.

There is a conflict of interest between the car owning middle and upper classes and the lower income majorities. It is a conflict for road space and public funds. It is more complex than the class conflict portrayed by Marx between a handful of plutocrats and the labouring masses. It is a conflict between millions of middle and upper class citizens, mostly salaried, and the lower income majorities who do not have cars and are often extremely poor.

Such conflict has not been openly acknowledged, which makes it all the more difficult for the poor to effectively participate in defending their interests.

When resources are taken away from the needs of the poor, such as schools, housing and parks, and poured into urban high velocity roads, they are supposed to understand this is progress and that in time they will benefit from such roads as well. It seems simplistic but car infrastructure is by far the main competitor for funds which could otherwise be invested in solving the needs of the poor.

Although more road infrastructure will not solve traffic problems as it stimulates more and longer trips, upper income citizens demand more and more roads. Bigger, high velocity roads not only use funds which could have been invested elsewhere, they become like fences in a pasture which enclose people. Such roads darken the city when they are built as flyovers or elevated highways and often by demolishing a path through lower income neighbourhoods which are thus severely damaged.

Many cities have demolished their elevated highways as they destroyed quality of life. Denver,

## Great cities are those where it is a pleasure walking in public spaces. Great cities are loving and protective to their most vulnerable citizens like children, the elderly, the poor.

Boston, Madrid and Seoul are a few cities which have demolished highways either to get rid of them altogether or to place them underground. Unheeded, many Asian cities, probably under the influence of Tokyo, continue to build elevated highways which damage a city's quality of life and are jammed soon after they are built. Of course, some new roads are needed in cities in a developing country. They should always include exclusive bus lanes, wide pavements and protected bicycle lanes.

What is clear today is that the only urban mobility solution is public transport. Getting those who can afford a car to use public transport requires good public transport and restrictions on car use. Such restrictions can come in many forms: traffic and long trip times, parking limitations, congestion charging. Traffic should not be seen as a problem governments have the obligation to solve. It is a useful tool if our goal is to achieve density and public transport use. Traffic is an indication that a given corridor is ripe for transit.

A bicycle is the only individual form of transport accessible to most people in developing country cities. And bicycle use can save up to 30 per cent of a poor citizen's income. In cities as rich as Utrecht or Copenhagen nearly 40 per cent of the population uses bicycles for their daily mobility. Protected bicycle lanes in every street are not just a nice architectural feature but the right one, unless one believes only those with access to a motorcar have the right to safe mobility. Yet, human rights organisations have never concerned themselves with the right to walk or bicycle safely. Pedestrians and bicyclists hurt by cars on roads and without quality pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure should be

able to sue their governments.

#### BUS VERSUS RAIL

Higher income citizens in developing countries prod their governments to build subways, preferably underground ones. They simply do not want buses taking away road space from their cars. Yet buses are the only possible transport solution in developing country cities.

A few rail lines can be built to please upper income citizens and those directly interested in the sale of such wares. But high investment and operating costs make it impossible to build more than a few lines. Rail systems do not move more than 10 per cent of the population in any developing country city.

Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) systems invented in Curitiba, Brazil, and applied in cities such as Bogota are moving more passengers per kilometre hour than 95 per cent of rail systems, at comparable speeds and at a fraction of the cost. They require, of course, the use of exclusive lanes, a given in a democracy where public good prevails over private interest. But not so obvious in unequal societies in developing countries where often rail systems are chosen disregarding their enormous opportunity costs in terms of solving the needs of the poor. Of course, rail transit systems are wonderful. But why invest 10 times more in a rail system than in a BRT which would be equally effective as a mobility solution?

Taking all other vehicles out of a few lanes, any city's road network can be used to put in place bus based transit with capacities and speeds very similar to those of rail systems at a fraction of the cost. While this is technically and economically viable, it is indeed a political challenge with many conflicting interests. Traditional bus owners and car owners who see their space reduced have to be mollified.

Avoiding, or minimizing conflicts is one reason why many developing country cities prefer to invest in expensive rail systems than put bus based transit in place. Another reason to choose rail is its larger capacity, though BRTs can move more passengers per kilometre than most rail systems.

Asia cannot waste the formidable opportunity it has to create different, better cities than existing ones. Radically different cities can be invented. Great cities are not those with highways and subways, but those where it is a pleasure walking in public spaces. Great cities are loving and protective to their most vulnerable citizens like children, the elderly, the poor, the handicapped.

Why not seek the roots of Asian cities in their DNA, in pedestrian and bicycle networks such as those found in traditional Indian cities? Features which would greatly improve the quality of life and mobility would cost very little if conceived and created from the beginning. They would not only make a city better, but also different, with a different identity and self-esteem. It just needs imagination and political will.

All this would be easily possible if a government had as its priority the needs of the majority rather than the pressures of the higher income groups. What is certain is that urbanisation cannot be left simply to the market. It has to respond to a society's dream of its future. But we must dare to dream as a first step.

*Enrique Penalosa is former Mayor of Bogota.*

#### References:

- 1 The Coming of Post-Industrial Society. Daniel Bell. Basic Books. 1973. 1999.
- 2 Suburban Nation. Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Jeff Speck. North Point Press. 2000.

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<author>Enrique Penalosa</author>  
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<description>The way cities are created determines our quality of life and forges our behaviour, our values

for centuries. If land is saved for a great park it will provide joy to millions for hundreds of years. If park land is not saved but built upon, there will be much less joy in society. Latin American urbanisation is the most recent the world has seen.</description>  
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