

Cities in Motion: Planning, Everyday Life and Change

Consider a street. Decisions about its design may shape how people move around a city for decades. People, however, use it in ways that sometimes follow the intentions of planning, sometimes challenge them. In this sense, the city is both durable and always changing. Earlier ideas, values and decisions endure in material form, while everyday use continually reshapes the functions and meaning of places.

Much of my research has explored this relationship, bringing historical and social-science perspectives into dialogue with planning. It has focused on how people use streets and other infrastructures, and how planning seeks to organise that use. My early work examined what happened to cycling as post-war cities were rebuilt around the car. Planning ideals and political decisions became embedded in streets and traffic systems that remained long after priorities began to shift towards more sustainable forms of mobility. Histories like this help explain why changing direction can be difficult: because new ambitions must overcome the resistance of environments shaped by earlier ambitions. Yet history can also make the present less self-evident by showing that alternatives existed and that arrangements that now seem natural were once contested.

Meanwhile, studies of everyday practices reveal that people do not always behave the way planners expect. For example, pedestrians may disregard sidewalks, pedestrian crossings and signals when they find alternatives to be quicker, safer or more comfortable. Historically, I have traced such practices through photographs, newspaper letters and accident reports, sources that can help capture forms of everyday use that otherwise leave few traces. Walking also spotlights the duality of streets as spaces for both traffic *and* sociality. Pedestrians are road users, but while walking they also participate in urban social life; they mingle, linger and sometimes carry out trade in the street. Physical design and formal rules structure these activities, as do social norms about who belongs in a street and what they should be allowed to do. Yet street order is also produced in the moment as people adjust their actions to others. Streets and other public spaces are thus shaped through the interplay between planned environments, social norms and everyday practices.

The tension between persistence and change also runs through my research on contemporary cities. Grassroots initiatives and urban experiments can challenge established ways of organising and using space. When parking spaces are turned into places to sit, for example, more than a physical solution is on trial. People can use the place differently; also, assumptions about what a street is for may begin to shift. In this sense, experiments can be performative: they do not just represent possible futures but are part of their making. They may also change how municipalities work with streets and how planning itself is done. This raises a wider question: what happens when temporary, local interventions meet the longer time horizons and larger scales of planning?

I envision that my future research will build on and further these lines of inquiry, while broadening the empirical scope. One avenue concerns experiments and grassroots initiatives. How can these contribute to real and lasting change? How can planning engage with them without cancelling out the qualities that made them valuable in the first place? Another is to extend beyond mobility and familiar urban settings, exploring how different environments enable or constrain what people can do and experience, and whose uses and experiences they accommodate.

History and experimentation offer different ways of approaching these questions. While history can reveal how seemingly natural arrangements came about and why they endure, experiments can make alternatives tangible in the present. Neither tells us what the future *should* look like, but together they can help make the consequences of present arrangements more visible and open up questions about what more sustainable and just futures might be possible and look like.