

NEW CONCEPTS IN THE GLOBAL PLANNING AND ROAD CORRIDORS: RECLAIMING EXTRATERRITORIAL SPACE

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It is a pleasure to be here today. My partner Stefanie Bremer prepared our presentation, while I have the duty to present it to you. Both of us are urban planner in the Ruhr area and we are dealing for now several years with the topic of mobility within modern urban landscape. Today we want to give an insight on the German debate on 'reclaiming the exterritorial space of urban highways, and new planning concepts for road corridors that are evolving right now.

So: why are we talking of 'reclaiming'?

Traditionally roads and streets are a unit. Roads serve as a social place, a traffic place and a place of identity at the same time. The relation is so close, that if we talk about cities, we immediately think of streets:

NY – Broadway

Berlin – Kurfürstendamm

Paris – Champs Elysées

In contrast highways are much more simple and don't serve the city in such a broad and fundamental way as it does the classical street. Up to now, they are not utilized as a social space or a space of identity. They are pure traffic and need to be reclaimed as an integral urban part of modern city landscape.

The concept of the highway is based on the modernistic attempt to separate functions. As a nonfunctional street it only served speed and safety. Therefore all connections to its surrounding had to be eliminated.

Within the urban fabric the highway as a 'line in the landscape' becomes an exterritorial space. The noise barrier is up to now the key element that makes at least a co existing possible. Tunneling was for a long time regarded as the ultimate solution on 'integrating' (if we may call it like that) of highways into the urban fabric.

This situation has two reasons:

-First: the structure of the German highway planning system.

There is a strict separation of urban planning, mainly within the responsibility of municipalities and highway planning within the responsibilities of federal authorities.

Federal Authorities:

- Are defining routing and financing
- They are Conducting the legal implementation in which municipalities are involved only at a late stage where detail question can be handled
- And the Physical implementation is a task of federal state agencies.

So local municipalities are not involved in the design and the layout of the highway. They can only react, but cannot act.

-Second reason:

The second reason lies within the legislation of highway design. The federal highway act is quite clear in defining the relation of urban space and street. It says:

No buildings in a corridor of 40 to 100 meters

No advertisement in a corridor of 40 to 100 meters

If there are buildings noise barriers are needed. According to EU legislation, the next generation will grow to 6 meters height.

In terms of noise protection, pollution, safety and efficiency this is a rational approach

In terms of urban development, that is always linked to its traffic infrastructure, this is a total irrational approach.

Let's take a closer look on the urban development of the Ruhr area. The Ruhr area consists of several cities forming a classical fragmented urban landscape without a dominant core. But if you take a closer look at the A40, the central highway crossing the Ruhr area from east to west, you will find a not at all fragmented structure, a kind of meta city, a 75 kilometer linear structure that evolved, as more and more functions / people are moving to the highway as a place of high accessibility.

Here you can find:

Beispiele...

Here we have all ingredients for a vivid urban space, but what is a dense urban structure on the plan gives in reality a rather disappointing impression: if you drive along the highway, all you can see is greenery.

While in fact you are just passing the University of Dortmund and its techno center. The structural change in the former coal mining heart of Germany was quite successful. The Ruhr area has one of the densest net of universities in Europe and quite important high tech cluster. But only few people know about this, as this new structures are totally invisible from the highway.

Sometimes you have some old fashioned signs. Like this one from the Ruhr park, the biggest German shopping center on green fields which itself again is invisible. What might be a vibrant urban landscape is in fact a hidden metropolis. The A40 crosses the heart of Germany biggest agglomeration with nearly 6 million inhabitants and all you can see of it is a green verge.

But this green verge is not only leftover land. This verge has a value. And experts on land values are confirming that there is a tendency in increasing prices. Especially near intersections, but also on integrated locations along the track where you have visual and physical connections this tendency is obvious. Appropriate urban design schemes will support this tendency. Imagine noise barriers along the Champs-Élysées. What would this street be? Or what would Paris be?

To make use of this long time neglected urban development zone there is a need to reclaim the extraterritorial space along urban highways. Only by doing so they may become something like a Champs-Élysées of modern urban landscape.

We need new concepts of urban design creating a connection between different speeds, a connection between 160 Kilometer per hour of a car and 5 Kilometer per hour of a pedestrian.

We need new planning procedures that make it possible to actually build this urban design schemes.

Four examples illustrate the German debate: with regard to urban design a lot was going on in the last years. We organized together with the urban design chairs of the universities in Aachen and Wuppertal the Herbstakademie City Space B1 in 2001, an international urban design workshop on the A40. A group of experts, participants from the municipal authorities and students of architecture developed a wide range of design visions.

In 2003 we took part in developing the German contribution for last years biennale in rotterdam. Its topic was the northern counterpart of the A40, which is more landscape-oriented highway.

All this design experiments show that an integration of highways into the urban fabric is possible. There is actually a huge typology already formulated: Visual linkages, physical linkages, buildings that are covering the highway or crossing it underneath can create a connection between the different speeds of 160 and 5 kilometers per hour.

What now is missing is a planning procedure that makes it possible to actually build those different kinds of visions!

Not on a basis of single projects that serve as a model, or 'White elephant projects'. Only if the exception becomes normal step by step the highway on its whole lengths will become part of modern urban landscape.

On a local level, the awareness for this need for new planning procedures is increasing. I want to present two examples: The development concept for northern Leipzig and the Master plan B1 of the city of Dortmund.

The City of Leipzig for the first time came up with a development concept for the corridor along the highway A14. Big scale industrial investments of companies like BMW and Porsche are situated here and will be visually linked to the highway.

A sequence-model is structuring the area making it comprehensible and readable for the driver. The concept has been developed within a broad local discussion among city authorities and private bodies.

The industrial site will become a kind of shop window of the successful structural changes after reunification.

In the City of Dortmund, the corridor of the B1 is the main developing zone for new office buildings. As the highway will be extended the urban planning department was forced to develop a master plan structuring the ongoing urban development in this area. Again within a broad local discussion among city authorities and private bodies a concept was found that is focusing the development on the highway in order to establish areas with different characteristics, making the street a kind of a shop window of the city.

These examples show, that an interdisciplinary approach towards the integration of highways into the urban fabric are possible. Design Workshops and Master plans with an informal, non-legislative character are tools to in 'managing the city with flows'. They enable people to cooperate and to formulate common visions besides any disciplinary boundaries.

But up to now, this is only working on a local level and simply adapts to existing highway planning. The design and layout of the highway itself remains untouched.

This is the fundamental shortcoming of the current German situation. What we need is a next step in interdisciplinary cooperation that not only involves the local level, but also the federal level. And the presented activities are leading to such a debate.

This debate will cover such topics as:

-The cooperation between urban planning and traffic engineering in terms of evaluating design schemes in relation to aspects of efficiency and safety.

-It will cover the legislative framework for the cooperation of local / federal authorities in terms of an early interdisciplinary design and layout of a highway as a basis for future urban developments.

-It will cover the legislative framework for highway design, leading to a definition of a new type of 'urban highway'.

And it will cover the financial framework for integrated urban design solutions in order to be more flexible and to be able to financing not only noise barriers as the ultimate ratio but architectural integrated solutions.

In Germany we are still facing fundamental problems in managing the city with flows. We just started to regard the highway as an integral part of the city, making it a new kind of Champs Elysées of modern agglomerations.

Therefore I have to finish our presentation with an outlook:

To support the debate and to get a step ahead we are preparing a conference in cooperation with the cities of the Ruhr area and the European house of city culture and others at the end of this year. We want to discuss the fundamental questions I've just mentioned and hope that we can soon report of any progress in the German case.