



Some remarks on the features submitted as part of the IVM student journalist competition

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Among the subjects submitted to the jury, we were particularly struck by those that looked at the urban travel solutions introduced by different classes of civil society. These solutions are not presented as formally innovative, and are far from the high-tech or futuristic proposals considered by urban designers. Their developments are described more as make-do responses to institutional failure than as a sustainable alternative.

Of these subjects, there are 2 on Sao Paolo in Brazil that complement each other admirably. One looks at the helicopter as a means of urban travel for the upper classes, business leaders, executives, etc. It describes a virtually unregulated aerial traffic of some 500 helicopters that overfly the city creating a deafening din.

The other story on Sao Paolo, the one we unanimously chose as the winner, is the feature on moped-taxis. It approaches from the bottom of the city and of society a subject that the previous study approaches from the top: the universal need to get about. It describes sections of the population who cannot rely on public transport, either because it does not exist in certain districts or – and primarily – because they can't afford it.

The subject is covered well and the students had conducted a genuine investigation. By interviewing moped-taxi users, drivers, managers of institutions, they look at every facet of their subject and also paint a complex picture of a huge city in its fight with congestion. Their entry was submitted in 2 forms, a video film and a feature story. The video film is formally very interesting. The screen is divided into several windows; one shows a tight succession of personal interviews while the lower windows show 2 similar sequences of the road filmed from a moped.

The written feature is very comprehensive from a text point of view, but is graphically very average and the photos are really unsatisfactory. If this project is to be published, the feature design will need to be changed and it will require a real photo reportage on the moped-taxis with photographs used as intelligently as the text.

This formal critique applies to almost all the work submitted. The layouts often lack clarity and interest. They are either too busy, like the design of “Disability, taming the city”, with illegible headlines, equally illegible text or captions in different colours, sizes, fonts, printed on the photos, mini-photographs stuck together without anything to distinguish them. Or they are copies of existing designs like the Danish features on the harbour ferry or the feature on the walking bus, while most of the others are basic stories with no attempt at layout and design.

The poorest aspect of all these submissions is the photography. At best, photographs are used as simple technical documents, e.g. in: “easy movement” or “taming the city”. More often, they are used simply as illustrations to enliven the text. In none of these submissions does the photography provide its own narrative, its own information. At best, it supports the text and nothing more.

In conclusion, it has been suggested that a newspaper should be put together with the prize-winning features, in particular the story on the moped-taxis, but also articles or extracts from the other submissions, such as: bicycle day in Quito, the helicopters in Sao Paolo, the Higienopolis patio private bus in Sao Paolo, the bicycle school run in Belgium, etc.

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