



## EDITORIAL GETTING AROUND

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*RUANG* dealing with space, seldom receives articles on transportation. Why is this? Given that urban transport functions occupy up to 30% of all urban space, surely this must represent a critical dimension of urban planning? I also stress transport *planning* here as opposed to transport *engineering*. In a democratic state, transport planning has huge political and economic implications that engineering as a technology does not encompass (and perhaps should not). Transport planning is usually the policy forming arm of the state when it comes to urban development, but receives insufficient attention in our concern for the environment. It also involves the environmental professions as a whole. But so far in the 100 or so articles submitted to *Ruang*, there has been no comment for example, on bicycle use in cities which has enormous social, economic, and health benefits (Behrendt 2019). Sustainable transport seems to be impossible to address and is ritually omitted.

Here there are at least two fundamental processes, those of nature and those of man. In nature transport occurs as a basic life process – the movement of air, water, the pollination of plants, of migrations of birds, animals and marine life, etc. In this regard, we are rapidly destroying every living thing including ourselves (Eder 1996). This is rapidly hastened by human transport (which is not ‘natural’ and ‘sustainable’ other than walking, sailing or cycling). Transport occurs in cities in three major dimensions– the transport of commodities, individuals, and information. These exist in hierarchies and often overlap since a diversity of functions exist within each category – transporting people for example can occur by plane, ship, motor vehicle, light rail, metro, walking, etc, and are frequently used in sequence – airport to rail system, to taxi to walking, using the internet through cell phones in many cases to facilitate the journey. Overall the system is so complex we can assume that every function in some way affects every other, across the entire spectrum of nature- human interaction. I believe like Antonio Gaudi that to be original we must return to the origins. So the question is what is transport? How can we at least begin to make some sense out of the idea?

In a return to origins we cannot simply look at the *means* of transport, (engineering) but its place in the wider socio-economic context. That context is global capitalism. How does transport devolve from the needs of the system, indeed what is the system? (Sklair 2002). The second question cannot be answered here but some fundamentals are notable. Capitalism is one of many political choices (ideologies). It is based on the private ownership of capital and hence the division of society into two classes – those who own capital and those who do not. Capital makes profit from land rent, from interest on investment and on human labour. The latter is called surplus-value and is based on two principles. First, people will necessarily

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produce more than they consume. Second, the excess wealth that produced is privately appropriated. The existence of the entire system is dependent on the production of commodities. The faster and more efficiently commodities can be created, circulated and sold, the more capital can be generated for those who own capital. Hence space and time are essential enemies of capital – they always limit the accumulation of wealth. So overcoming space with time is a fundamental aim of capitalism, with transport the basic means of doing this.

Apart from a legal system (ideology) that enduringly supports capital accumulation, why does movement occur at all? What is the necessary framework that supports this system? Here we can identify four functions – production, consumption, exchange, and administration. First, production is the core process by which nature is turned into commodities. The manufacture of commodities demands that the efficient transport of raw materials and human labour get to work in order to produce them. Baron Hausman did not produce a plan to ‘beautify’ Paris as is frequently yet mistakenly assumed. The Parisian economy was being undermined by a medieval system of transport. Due to the great fire of 1666, London led trade since its own medieval urban form had been gutted in the process (1). Second, production does not take place without consumption, both individual and collective. The balance between production and consumption is revealed in what the great philosopher Adam Smith called ‘the invisible hand of the market’. Third, exchange is a vital component whereby products are sold in order to create profit. Fourth, a system of administration is required in order to organize activities that private capital does not want to undertake (the state). But as private capital increasingly sees state functions as a potential source of private capital, the role of the state shrinks. Culture can also be included in this process as a vast new field of profit-making, anticipated many years ago by Theodore Adorno in his Classic text *the Culture Industry- Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) see also Scott (2000)). In addition to these four functions, Manuel Castells has also suggested a category called the ‘urban symbolic’ which overlays a symbolic system that endows urban life with meaning (Castells 1977:240). This ‘meaning’ is increasingly generated by the overarching needs of capital to engender support for its activities, hence urban environments enduringly reflect the commodification of life – space, products, property, and human relationships.

Urban transport assists in the efficient working of these relationships, getting products to markets, people to work, etc. Problematically the more efficient the system becomes, and the more rapidly products are manufactured and circulated, the faster the resources of the planet are consumed, and as we can see, the gulf between the rich and the poor accelerates. Since capitalism is a largely cannibalistic system base in firms and corporations that devour each other as well as urban space, there is no company that will volunteer to lose money. May as well go bankrupt. No company elects to lose market share or projects a need to reduce profits. This attitude seriously affects elected politicians in their attempt to create a sustainable world. As Jean-Claude Juncker of the European Union said "We all know what to do, we just don't know how to get re-elected after we've done it"

The answer also lies with us. If we continue to see capital as the enemy and to view ourselves as victims, nothing will ever be accomplished. Every decision we make every day affects

how the system works. The same is true in transport, and in Bali a revolution is required in the way business is conducted. In the Netherlands there are 7 million cars and 22 million bicycles. Roughly three bicycles for every car on the road. Why not here? That at least would be a start to sustainable transport, a thought every planner should not only accept but practice as well – buy a bike.

## References

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- (1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=0ed6lNI453E>

