

People want to walk



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in urban history

As mayor of Bogotá, Enrique Peñalosa demonstrated that it is possible to make cities livable for everyone. Pedestrians and cyclists must be given priority over cars, he believes. “Good public spaces also help to reduce crime and enhance the quality of life.”

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“I don’t hate cars!” exclaims Enrique Peñalosa, a man who travels around the world lobbying for better cities. Still, Peñalosa considers the car largely responsible for the fact that “the 20th century will be remembered as a disastrous one in urban history.” We seem to have forgotten that cities should serve people, not cars.

Cities must fulfill three needs

What kind of cities do we need? Peñalosa’s answer is as simple as it is inspiring: “A city in which children, old people and handicapped people can feel comfortable is what most people would probably call a good city. Today automobiles are to children what wolves were in the Middle Ages. Is this really all we have to offer after 5,000 years of urbanization?” asks Peñalosa rhetorically. “Cities today must fulfill three needs in order to offer citizens genuine quality of life: the need to move about by foot, the need for interaction with other people, and the need to feel equal to others.”

In a good city, nobody wants to go home

The most vital urban spaces are those that are free from cars – pedestrian zones. “The things that most strongly influence the quality of life in cities are usually related to the car,” claims Peñalosa. “And the part of the city that offers the most enjoyment is the pedestrian zone.” People love to stroll from store to store, sit down and enjoy a cup of coffee somewhere, and watch other people walking by. “A good city is one in which people want to be outside of their homes,” to quote Danish urban planner Jan Geh. “In a good city, nobody wants to go home. For centuries, streets have been the meeting place, the platform for social exchange. Even today, no



People must make way for cars – an inhumane situation.



Democratic urban development: a street in Bogotá that was redesigned so pedestrians and cyclists would no longer feel like second-class citizens.

tourist thinks of driving through a historic city center in a car. People want to feel the atmosphere.”

The potential of Asian cities

The automobile is what forced people to the side of the street – or indoors. Peñalosa sees shopping malls as symptomatic of “a sick city in which people have been driven out of the public domain.” Cities must respect human dignity, which was threatened when public space became choked with cars and people were forced to walk along the walls of buildings. “Imagine how wonderful it would be to have at your front door a pedestrian zone with a network of over a hundred kilometers!” In the booming Asian cities, where whole districts spring up virtually overnight, we have the chance to develop completely new concepts. “In the next 50 years, Asian cities will double in developed area,” notes Peñalosa. “The question remains: Will we simply see more of the same? If new cities were to be built from scratch, they would certainly be different than our cities today.”

More roads create more traffic

While the crucial issue in affluent countries is how to reduce automobile use, “in developing countries and cities, people are seeking ways to facilitate automobile use,” and building more and more urban freeways. “That’s no solution,” Enrique Peñalosa is convinced. “More roads create more traffic.” In spite of building giant highways, Atlanta has more traffic jams than ever. Montréal has been continuously expanding its highway infrastructure, yet the drive into the city center now takes longer than ever. “It is a flat-out lie that more streets ease traffic,” concludes

Waterfront areas should never fall into private hands; using the example of Seoul, Peñalosa argues for giving waterfront space back to pedestrians.



Peñalosa. Building more and more streets is merely a service to the affluent: “They hardly use the city, driving from their private garages to work and then to the parking lot of their country club. The only wish of the rich is: no crime and no traffic jams!”

It pays to invest in quality of life

During his tenure as mayor of Bogotá, Peñalosa invested in creating more space for pedestrians and cyclists. “We should always build two parallel street systems: one for pedestrians and one for cars,” he believes. Peñalosa is convinced that this investment pays off in every regard: “Cities that give less room to cars are the winners in international location marketing. Highly qualified people no longer move to where the companies are; the companies must go where the people want to live, where the quality of life is especially high.” No one has promoted building highways through cities such as Paris, London, New York, or Zurich. “People in these cities use public transportation, not for environmental reasons, but because it’s the only way to move efficiently through the city. If there were more streets in Paris, there would also be more traffic. But at some point these cities decided not to build more streets – fortunately!”



Mayor of Bogotá, Columbia, from 1998 to 2001, Enrique Peñalosa led massive efforts related to transportation, land use, housing for the poor, pollution abatement, and the creation of more public space. He implemented improvements to Bogotá’s marginal neighborhoods through citizen participation; planted more than 100,000 trees; created a new, highly successful bus-based transit system; and turned a deteriorated downtown avenue into a dynamic public space for pedestrians. Peñalosa is currently researching and writing a book on a new urban-development model for the Third World.