



Helmut Holzapfel

Urbanism and Transport

Building Blocks for Architects and City and Transport Planners



ROUTLEDGE

URBANISM AND TRANSPORT

Helmut Holzapfel's *Urbanism and Transport*, a bestseller in its own country and now available in English, examines the history and future of urban design for transport in major European cities. This book shows how the automobile has come to dominate the urban landscape of cities throughout the world, providing thought-provoking analysis of the societal and ideological precursors that have given rise to these developments. It describes the transformation that occurred in urban life through the ongoing separation of social functions that began in the 1920s and has continued to produce today's phenomenon of fractured urban experience—a sort of island urbanism.

Professor Holzapfel examines the vital relation between the house and the street in the urban environment and explains the importance of small-scale, mixed-use urban development for humane city living, contrasting such developments with the overpowering role the automobile typically plays in today's cities. Taking insights gained from its historical analysis with a special focus on Germany and the rise of fascism, the book provides recommendations for architects and engineers on how urban spaces, streets, structures, and transport networks can be more successfully integrated in the present day.

Urbanism and Transport is a key resource for architects, transport engineers, urban and spatial planners, and students, providing essential basic knowledge about the urban situation and the challenges of reclaiming cities to serve the basic needs of people rather than the imperatives of automobile transport.

Helmut Holzapfel studied civil engineering, first working in leading positions from 1980–1993 as a transport scientist in research groups and later as an official at the Transport Ministry of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. Since 1993 he has been a professor at the Faculty of Architecture, Urban and Landscape Planning at the University of Kassel, Germany, and since 2009 has led the research project “Sintropher” in close collaboration with Sir Peter Hall. *Urbanism and Transport* was first published in German as *Urbanismus und Verkehr* and went on to become a bestselling book on urban and transport planning.

“A much-needed exposition of the appropriation of the street for the automobile—and an argument for the redesign of the inner connectivity of cities, with the person as the active agent.”

—Robin Hickman, Senior Lecturer,
Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, UK

“Holzapfel offers a seasoned argument for a transportation policy oriented no longer toward a fossil-fueled mobility that increases speed and distance, but aimed at livable, vibrant urban structures. He offers a clear-eyed critique of conventional policies that have not only shaped cities but contributed to the problem of climate change.”

—Michael Renner, Senior Researcher, Worldwatch Institute

“This is a fascinating book which provides refreshing new insights for English-speaking readers into the development of European urban transport and land-use planning and the role of the car over the last 100 years, from a German policy perspective.”

— Peter Jones, Professor of Transport and
Sustainable Development, University College London, UK

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FOREWORD

Helmut Holzapfel's latest book has taken the debate around sustainable transport, urbanism, climate change, and the environment to an entirely new level: one that is long awaited and much needed. The last two to three decades have seen dozens of books about the illogicality and waywardness of transport trends. The trend for motorised transport can be summarised as a line on a graph starting in the bottom left-hand corner and going to the top right-hand corner, showing that we have more cars, drive more miles, have more trucks, and move freight over longer distances. This trend has been in evidence for many years and justified on a completely flawed understanding and analysis of transport based on equally flawed assertions about links between transport infrastructure and economic growth.

Holzapfel very ably and with great clarity demonstrates that an emphasis on mobility—as if more miles driven and more tonnes of freight moved around was intrinsically a good thing – is fundamentally flawed. He highlights the damaging consequences associated with the promotion of longer trips and shows that careful attention to urban form and structure and social interaction within a supportive legal and planning framework actually produces excellent places in which to live and work. He points to Tübingen and Freiburg as best-practice examples of the successes associated with modest, people-centred planning.

Holzapfel's book has emerged from a very clear scientific and philosophical German tradition. Germany has been at the vanguard of “automobility” for well over a century and its high rates of car ownership, miles of motorway, and rejection of speed limits on motorways show that Germany has grasped the Faustian bargain of more mobility with alacrity and enthusiasm. At the same time, Holzapfel is a leading representative of an impressive group of German transport and mobility critics who have shown that streets are for people, that “Tempo 30” (20 mph speed limits) create very fine living environments, and that high-quality places can be created. In spite of a century of automobility, Germany has nurtured a

high-quality public transport system and more importantly has promoted the rather radical concept, unloved in the UK and USA, that urban planning, street design, and sustainability are all facets of the same thing, and civilised life prospers very successfully with low levels of car use and high levels of walking, cycling, and public transport use.

John Whitelegg, Stockholm Environment Institute,
University of York, UK

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INTRODUCTION

Streets and Transport: Separation or Connection?

A book about urbanism and transport must take a new look at what separates and what connects in this field to deal with the relation between these two essential factors appropriately. At the very outset, it is important to note that this endeavour to shed new light on separation and connection has been written by a German in Germany. This fact of national origin shapes not only the content of the work but also its method. It thus provides the English-speaking reader with a perhaps unfamiliar view of a characteristically European manner of analysis, as well as examining the relation between the city and the automobile in the country where motorised vehicles were first invented: a country that continues to play a decisive role in their further development.

Separation has always been a feature of the city. Ghettos, streets for particular trades, quarters with mansions for the rich—much of this already existed in ancient Roman settlements and even before these times. Typically, the argument is made that the transport system should connect such disparate elements. Certainly, transport has played and continues to play this role. But, as the following will show, the manner in which this role is fulfilled varies depending on the type, speed, and extent of the transport provided. The separating function of a transport system has not been sufficiently analysed.

In this regard, one may only make reference to the classic works of Dieter Apel (prepared at the Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik, the German Institute for Urbanism, and unfortunately only familiar to the German public), in which this subject is extensively examined. A clear identification of these connecting and separating factors is, however, a necessary basis for establishing a relation between

2 Introduction

transport and urbanism. It is also the basis for integrating transport in a social consideration of the urban space, as undertaken for example by Henry Lefebvre. His writings and the ideas found in the current works of Karl Schlögel¹ and Dieter Läßle² in Germany are scarcely to be found in academic works devoted to transport planning. But a spatial analysis of transport is essential if it is to be considered in terms of urbanism. At the same time, a consideration of transport planning is lacking just as much in the recent analyses of urbanism mentioned here. The present work aims to overcome these deficits and provide just such a synthetic view of the subject.

Also necessary for this undertaking is a short reappraisal of the various misunderstandings regarding the role of transport in history. One cause of these misunderstandings is the fact that many classic works about the development of the city were written in the phase of industrialism/Fordism, and the then new phenomenon of long-distance transport with its benefits for various parties was projected into the past (see [Figure 1.1](#)). In addition, an erroneous representation of the role of transport has often been made in recent years, with the debate very strongly orientated to the modern growth of long-distance transport. This book shall show that both of these influences have resulted in an overestimation of the relevance of long-distance transport to urban development. Clarification of the state of knowledge regarding the relation between space and transport is first necessary if we are to have any chance of making a realistic assessment of the current developments in this area.

The goal of this work is not only to overcome widespread prejudices regarding the role of transport and its effect on urbanism and the space of the city, but also to provide strategies for dealing with the current questions of urbanism that confront us today. In the contemporary discussion about “global” spaces, transport has indeed acquired a fully new function. In this connection, the thesis has been formulated that distance no longer plays a significant role in spatial relations because, for example, an e-mail sent from one point on the globe to any other point takes the same amount of time. On the other hand, space and distance do continue to exist, particularly in the everyday lives of just about all of us, where they persist in playing an important role. In current developments, however, this space has “shifted” in its accessibility and overall configuration in a manner that is unprecedented. In this regard, it is one of the consequences of modern forms of neo-liberal capitalism that new images of this space, various “maps”, are continually being generated and overlaid on one another. This leads (often temporarily) to the creation of new centres as well as depopulation or demolition (e.g. abandoned industrial facilities or remote locations).

Most striking, however, and this will be the subject of remarks to follow, is the creation of what Karl Schlögel in a debate with Rem Koolhaas has called archipelagos.³ These can be understood as spatial islands that are connected with one another by networks. Such spaces—self-contained residential areas, enclosed holiday resorts for the rich, secured communities as found for example in South Africa—are increasingly becoming the norm, in Europe and in many cities. The