Is Your City Made for You?

By Aimée Gauthier, ITDP Global

Cities are designed for the male commuter. Transit is oriented to peak-time commutes. Buses are cumbersome for those carrying packages, travelling with children, or with limited mobility. Activities are separated, making it harder to do multiple errands in one trip. Sidewalks are obstructed, buckled, pockmarked, or even non-existent, making walking treacherous.

Kalpana Viswanath of Safetipin asserted this at Habitat III, the United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development in October in Quito, Ecuador. Much of the talk at the conference was about the goal of creating inclusive cities. ITDP assembled a group of key organizations representing women, youth and children, older people, the urban poor, and people with disabilities. One after another, they spoke about how their city isn't designed for them. They reported increased social isolation, insecurity, and spatial marginalization, as inequality gets hard-wired into the physical structure of the city.

Since women often retain the primary caretaker role, in addition to getting to work, they have to get kids to school or childcare, pick up groceries, care for older relatives, and take care of the house. For this reason, women tend to make more, shorter trips or more complex trips with multiple purposes, known as trip chaining. (See also Beyond the Women-only Train Car, page 22.)

More and more, lower income people (in which women, children, and the elderly are also disproportionately represented) are pushed to the periphery of the city in their search for affordable housing. When affordable housing exists in downtowns, it is often in informal settlements that may be threatened with eviction and displacement. Destruction of informal housing destroys communities and jeopardizes social safety nets. "One of the main challenges faced by shack dwellers is being evicted. With eviction comes displacement, often 40 to 50 kilometers away. And it is not just the loss of a home; it is the loss of your job, your schools, your community," says Sekai Chiremba from Shackdwellers International's Zimbabwe affiliate.

As Dr. Viswanath explains, though, it is not about transportation systems, but equal access to the city – the public spaces and its streets. The pandemic of violence against women is a global problem, and the fear of violence limits women's movement through the city. Sion Jones from HelpAge International mentions older people also curtail their movement because of feelings of insecurity, too. Car traffic and poor sidewalks also limits access to the city for older population. Their report, Ageing and the City: Making urban spaces work for older people, goes into further detail. "Broken and uneven pavements mean we risk falling and injuring ourselves," says an older Mexican woman in the report.

If too much car activity makes people feel unsafe, so does too few people on the sidewalk. When a street does not have an active life of stores, restaurants, entrances for both residents and workers to use, the street feels empty and abandoned. The trend towards gated communities exacerbates this. "Gated communities protect property, not

Stepping up into buses can be difficult for women and older people who may be shorter, carrying packages, or travelling with children, like in Trichy, India.

people," Dr. Viswanath notes. Moreover, this segregation, according to Hirotaka Koike from UN Major Group for Children and Youth, statistically provides worse educational outcomes by creating divisions within society and making the situation where community cannot be formed in shared, public space.

Arina Hayati, from the Institute Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember (ITS)'s Department of Architecture who advocates for people with disabilities, describes testing new ramps to bus stations the government in Surabaya, Indonesia, recently built to make them universally accessible. She wheeled up the ramp with difficulty, because it was steep, but she persevered, only to arrive at the top to find the doorway was too narrow for her chair.Ms. Hayati says these half-hearted solutions inadvertently create more barriers, and cities around the world are filled with these imperfect examples of solutions. She advocates for designing from empathy, not sympathy. Participatory design allows the disabled to be actively

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Left: For older people and those with limited mobility, having places to sit helps them be able to walk around the city, like here in Quito, Ecuador. Right: Having space on buses for wheelchairs, as well as level boarding with no gap between bus and station and ramps into the station, is critical to giving freedom of mobility to many people with disabilities.

Without paved sidewalks, walking becomes harder, especially if it rains. But providing adequate space and good paving makes it easier for all to walk from school children to older people.

incorporated into the planning and design process.

Different users exist with different needs, but many users have similar concerns. As Soon-Young Yoon from the Women's Environment and Development Organization said, there is a high overlap between these groups. Most old people are women, and many are disabled. Women make up 51 percent of the population, and older people are the fastest growing cohort of urban populations. People with disabilities are 13 percent of the urban population, a number that will rise as populations age.

With the world about to add 2.5 billion more people to cities, we have an opportunity to re-imagine cities for all. As cities grow, we must fight the patterns of urban development that embody and perpetuate social exclusion and segregation. Cities must expand and redevelop in a compact manner, while achieving more equitable,

environmentally sustainable patterns. The building block for this is inclusive, transit-oriented development (TOD).

In 2014, ITDP published the TOD Standard to define best practices in transit-oriented development. The Standard is built upon eight principles: walk, cycle, connect, transit, mix, compact, dense, shift. From those, ITDP developed performance objectives and indicators to measure how well a particular project or neighborhood achieved those objectives. TOD is inherently pro social equity, as well as pro environmental sustainability, by prioritizing no to low-cost modes of transport with the goal of

increasing accessibility by all people by foot, wheelchair, bike, or transit.

ITDP is now updating the TOD Standard to more strongly incorporate inclusivity goals. The Standard now measures the mix of incomes and not just affordable housing. Building standards and planning regulations should not lead to the displacement of existing settlements. This affects households and businesses, disrupts communities, destroys social safety nets, and tends to move people further out, Ms. Chiremba points out. Finally, the Standard includes access to green or open space.

With these changes, the TOD Standard seeks to define the building block of the inclusive city. That mission is more urgent than ever, and not just resigned to the scale of urbanization the world is about to experience. As global political developments are showing us, our world is becoming more divisive, with a global populist movement grounded in desires for separation and segregation. And cities matter, as they are often places that help create more inclusive societies. Recognizing the multiple identities that form the city is crucial for making stronger and more resilient places. We have more similarities than differences, and our cities and our transportation need to build on that. Our cities need to facilitate interaction and inclusion, our public spaces need to help build civic respect and civility, and our public services need to bring people together. The need for urban spaces that create inclusive places is more important than ever. And they can when they recognize, respect, and design, with empathy, for all its inhabitants.

For more information on Transit-Oriented Development, visit **todstandard.org**.

Images: Aimée Gauthier & Chris Kost