

The aggregated approach in transport research: a morphological discourse on transports and cities

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Abstract

The cities throughout the history relied on transports to sustain their urban life. The different transport technologies and the need for undisturbed flows of goods and people shaped the cities. The interaction between transports and cities has been focus on many disciplines. In my research I focus on urban form at neighbourhood scale exploring the physical and social aspects of the neighbourhoods and their effect on transports. I contribute to this vast interdisciplinary body of knowledge by linking transport research with a morphological tradition established by Kevin Lynch.

The urban life today is a sequence of temporally inhabited and interconnected spaces, movable or fixed. The connections between spaces inspire or inhibit contacts and interactions between people. They bend times and continuously shape and reshape spaces, sociabilities and situations. I look at the cities as urban mosaics of neighbourhoods and transport infrastructures. The transport infrastructures are urban elements consisted of 'paths' and 'nodes'. They disperse distinctive attractiveness pattern of 'desirability cores' and shape the neighbourhoods as 'districts'. The neighbourhoods are blocks with dynamic relations or connections that define and redefine territories. They are designed in certain point in the history by policies, social conditions and preferences not only towards ways of living, but also towards architectural styles, building types and transport modes. The policies like number of parking places per building or distance from a public transport stop to a dwelling are examples of design guidelines that shape neighbourhoods towards the private car or public transports.

The link between public transports and neighbourhoods as well as neighbourhoods and their particular character are focuses of my research. The neighbourhoods are complex social and physical phenomena. They are agglomerations of individuals and buildings, but they are also complex individuals themselves with own life, countenance and history. Each neighbourhood reflects the planning paradigms and architectural styles of the age of its development or renewal. Its physical character is socially judged and reconsidered. It is compared with other neighbourhoods and its reputation varies when other neighbourhoods emerge or are renewed, when new transport technologies emerge, when architectural styles change. Some neighbourhoods are outdated, while others regain popularity. The physical character of neighbourhoods links them to different transport modes too. That is seldom discussed in Sweden and it is very important to be discussed in the debate about urban transformation of neighbourhoods and adapting them to public transports. Some neighbourhoods emerged or renewed in periods of flâneurs, coaches and carts, some in the motor ages of public buses, trams and trains and private cars. In their existence some neighbourhoods have stubbornly hold onto their distinctive character that shapes the sociabilities and mobilities of their communities, while others embraced new technologies. Some neighbourhoods are oriented towards specific transport modes, whereas others are multimodal by continuous adaptations to other transport modes. Can we use the historical regularities in physical form and social perceptions on neighbourhoods to enrich the aggregated approach in transport research? Can we apply the conceptualizations and empirical findings in urban morphology to refine the research approach and methodology on the interaction between transports and cities?