PEOPLE
CENTRIC
PLANNING

'What is a city?' asked William Shakespeare via Coriolanus. His answer: 'the people'. He was right. Cities and towns are not ends in themselves or a convenient way to socially organise populations, but an expression of the particular people who live in them, their needs and desires and ways of life.

That doesn't sound like such a radical idea today, in fact it is almost a platitude among urbanists, but a glance at the history of urban planning, especially the heroic errors of the 20th century, makes it obvious that it is an idea that is not always well understood.

Urban designer Marta Liut from SYSTRA's Movement and Place team unveils that a 20-minute community is not a limit on choice but an expansion of it

SYSTRA

SYSTRA

For more information or to discuss people centric planning:

MARTA LUIT
e: mluit@systra.com

Creating a visual matrix

Not that technical challenges don't matter. Of course they do, and we need better tools to solve them. Planning projections that map distance between points of departure and services in an area are widely used in various forms but can be insensitive to the significant difference between 'crow flies' approximations of journey length and real on-the-ground route formations.

> SYSTRA's approach is to respond more directly to the urban fabric and quality, using real journey data, and to represent that information not just as a series of scores but as a visual matrix, a map of interconnectivity by time. This is a far more intuitive approach than just another 'data-in-data out' black box. Using the matrix map, all stakeholders can more easily envisage where facilities might need to be enhanced, a street pattern altered, or a constraint such as a railway line overcome.

It situates transport as part of the fabric of a place rather than just another structure within it. It is a way of thinking about places, not simply a tool for ordering priorities. Tools like these can help address thorny problems such as how to masterplan for 20-minute communities in developments that have to scale up in stages, sometimes from an initial development of tens of dwellings to a final development of thousands. They situate the process in a framework that is always focussed on place-building no matter how powerful the counter currents of other commercial incentives might be at any stage of the project. It is only by keeping that idea of place alive at all times that we can avoid the mistakes of the past, mistakes that will be paid for the negative impact of climate change.

Jane Jacobs, the journalist, activist and campaigner credited with saving New York's Greenwich village from the highway-centred developers of the 70s, described cities as 'immense laboratories of trial and error, failure and success'. Less pithy than Shakespeare, perhaps, but driving at the same thing. Successful cities and towns are formed over time in response to the needs of their populations and that is where they get their energy and life. Not everything works and that is OK if there is space to respond and to change and learn from the mistakes of the past. The 20-minute community builds in that space if we do it right. We all live in our own separate geographies and these are layered and overlapping. The 20-minute community doesn't lock anyone into a single mode of life but adds layers to the fabric.

The car loses its dominance but doesn't disappear

The car loses its dominance but doesn't disappear. In fact, even drivers gain when more people choose to cycle and walk as congestion decreases along with all its stress. Some people will always rely on their car, of course. Yet, how we use cars will change over time, car ownership may reduce outside of cities too as we begin to hire or share cars more, as proven in our larger cities. Electric vehicles and how we charge them will be part of the future transport mix. But if we can build places that tempt people out of their cars instead of only coercing them, we can turn the energies that are currently being wasted on campaigning against LTNs and temporary bike lanes into something positive, open the door to the discovery of advantages that go far beyond the gains in health that a more active and less polluted life brings. Deeper social and emotional connection with home. The pleasures and excitement of chance meetings and discoveries. More life.