

# Being Young in the City Lifestyle, Implications on Mobility Needs and Traffic Safety

**Christine Chaloupka-Risser, Ralf Risser**

FACTUM OHG

Danhausergasse 6/4, 1040 Vienna, Austria

christine.chaloupka@factum.at, ralf.risser@factum.at

## **Abstract**

Young citizens, grown up in urban areas have gone through a special socialisation, regarding traffic as well. Quickly changing lifestyle on one side and „normal“ social needs because of human evolution on the other side have their implications also for traffic and infrastructure.

A comparison between personal general needs of young urban citizens and existing transport and traffic conditions which support or hinder youngsters will be made. Already existing possible solutions also with regard to a reduction of motorised individual traffic will be presented, and their implications for traffic safety will be discussed.

## **1. Implications of cities in general**

Consideration of youngster´s mobility in urban areas needs reflection of the special conditions in cities and towns as they besides possibilities to move around reflect atmosphere and so called “traffic climate” different from rural areas.

What is a “City”? According to different definitions cities are large settlements, bigger than a town. In Europe a city is often a place that in former times has succeeded in obtaining the right to build a city wall, a belfort, etc., from the nobility.

Close proximity in cities greatly facilitates interaction between people and firms, benefiting both parties in the process. „Cities, ..., economise on protection, and so protection against marauding barbarian armies is one reason why people have come together to live in cities...” (O’Flaherty, 2005)

A city nowadays is defined as a large urban centre functioning as a central place which can provide very specialised goods and services. A city may be an economic community, or the motor of urbanised capital accumulation. According to P. Hall (1998) a city may be a creative field, where new movements are spreading: e.g. in the arts (1880s Paris) and in technology (Silicon Valley). A city may be a multilingual and multi-ethnic community, a site of practical citizenship and cultural innovation, expressed through its municipal infrastructure, public spaces, and festivals.

## 2. Youth / subculture & developmental tasks

But what do we know about youth and the special developmental tasks during this special phase of life? According to Webster's New World Dictionary, youth is:

"The time of life when one is young; especially:

- the period between childhood and maturity
- the early period of existence, growth, or development."

Moreover in further characterisation youth is a state of being young or immature or inexperienced where individuals have to run through a period of psychosexual development, so called „adolescence“. Young people are also characterised by freshness and vitality. In „Youth“ we include youngsters from the age about 12 to less than 25/26.

15/16 year old boys and girls have to master a kind of balance between already well known and experienced situations, e.g. in their family and the handling of new ones, i.e. relationships and activities outside the family (Chaloupka et al. 1998). There is growing awareness of one's own physical strength. Especially changes in hormonal status lead to high interest in experimentation with the own body as well as with the environment which sometimes results in strong interest in all kinds of things and substances that provide sensation and that "widen the mind". Focus lies on getting distance from norms and habits of parents whilst peer group orientation intensifies.

### Peer-group

During adolescence peer-groups replace parents. Parents mediate basic norms (and are still important – but not overtly) whilst peers provide behaviour patterns for daily practice. Young people have a special kind of communication. They have their own "language" which has mainly two different functions: a) it is one possibility to distinguish themselves from the world of the adults and b) it helps to distinguish one's lifestyle-group from the others. Communication-signals can be found in the different kinds of how to dress, music, tattoos etc.

Each group creates special rules and tries to be discernible from the others. Subgroups show differences concerning the following signals of membership: norms, clothing, hairstyles, footwear, interests, slang, gathering places, music, etc.

Their response to the dominant system they want to set themselves apart from is sometimes a kind of „tribal“ mentality. The french sociologist Michel Maffesoli (1985) talks about „urban tribes“ with social interactions of mainly emotional characteristics. According to OECD there exist about 60 subcultures in OECD cities with lots of further subgroups.

Generally, whenever one tries to influence youngsters one has to be aware of the importance of the peer-group. Talking about young people of this special age is not so much talking about individuals but much more talking about members of different subgroups. All these subgroups function according to special group-rules which can differ from each others. Knowing and understanding not only the different individuals of a group but also the group rules makes it easier to get in contact with the young people.

### Tasks of development

Of great importance for young people is being appreciated by friends. While dissociating from parents and longing for autonomy and independency they are on the other hand searching for relationships. Questions about occupational future start to become important at the age of 15 (Oerter & Montada 2002).

### Leisure time activities

Information about leisure time activities is an important starting point for all kinds of communication as well as modification of mobility patterns. When comparing the leisure time behaviour of boys and girls and of different subgroups one can find a lot of differences which have to be taken into consideration in the frame of the communication process.

E.g., girls still do not have as much spare time as boys because of more household activities. Girls read more and stay at home more than boys. Girls satisfy their need for motion by dancing or swimming within closed halls, whereas boys can be found at places where they can show to a „broader public“ their strength and power. Moreover, they are regularly looking for feedback concerning their own personal physical limits.

Young people should get the opportunity:

- to create and to test their own ideas under real-life conditions
- to connect their activities to experiences of success and community
- to experience fun and amusement

### Alcohol/drugs

Grown ups tend especially to use clichés for the interpretation of the behaviour of young people, like „lack of responsibility“ or „unsteadiness“. Results of interviews with young people show three main causes for substance use (ranked according to the importance):

- to express oneself
- to calm down, or to improve ones own mood
- to communicate with peers

With respect to alcohol and drugs, experts very often either misinterpret the reasons for consumption or the importance/priority of the different reasons. They impute lack of considerateness as the main „reason“, while in reality youngsters use alcohol and drugs as aids to reach the above listed goals.

## 3. Factors influencing mobility

Changes in life can influence mobility, like e.g. removal or changing home, establishing new relationships and having new jobs. As all of these are more probable when being young and in connection with these mobility is therefore much higher than in later years.

### Mobility in subcultures

As mobility especially for young people is an important issue it seems interesting to know which kind of locomotion they prefer. Some groups commit themselves to special vehicles: cars, motorcycles, scooters, skateboards, surf boards.

### *Mods* and scooters



Fotos: Wikipedia

### *Rockers* and motorcycles



Why is motorised traffic in the frame of personal development important? And why is this knowledge of importance for traffic safety?

As we have seen, vehicles of different types can act as symbols for affiliation with special groups. They can add a „grown-up status“ and help to solve the above mentioned tasks of development like, e.g., independency, appreciation by friends etc. At the same time one may assume that if traffic becomes the „playground“ for the tasks of development (see Keskinen 1996), maladjustment in traffic might be a consequence.

### **Hierarchical model of driver behaviour (Keskinen, 1996)**

Keskinen has created a hierarchical model of driver behaviour (see below) which gives an overview about the different relevant aspects which drivers could have to master. According to his model skills for vehicle manoeuvring and mastery of traffic situations are basically necessary to operate successfully in traffic. The related items should be taught in driving schools. All these skills are used under guidance of higher level goals and motives. The style of vehicle manoeuvring and the driving strategy in certain driving situations are – according to this model - led by these goals.

### Goals for life and skills for living

- Importance of cars and driving for personal development
- Skills for self-control

### Goals and context of driving

- Purpose, environment, social context, company

### Mastering traffic situations

- Adapting to the demands of the present situation

### Vehicle manoeuvring

- Controlling speed, direction and position

For instance, according to Hattaka (2000, DAN), a young male driver, who is very enthusiastic about cars and driving, and focused on these interests as a central way for building up his identity, will also select his driving context according to this motivational orientation. This will have an effect on the second level as certain qualitative properties of exposure such as night-time driving with friends where the driver is looking for opportunities to show off.

## 4. Starting points for improvement of mobility conditions of young people in cities - Results of 4 studies

Knowledge about developmental tasks and motives related to driving demand creative ideas about how to address young people viz. to involve them in tackling the problems of mobility and safety. To get some impressions about possibilities in this regard some results of four studies are presented:

### Study 1, Vienna

1998 Chaloupka et al interrogated about 300 young people between 15 and 16 years about their targets in life, life style, mobility needs, attitude to traffic safety and safety in general. One main finding was, that duty and fun for youth seemed to be no contradictions. They liked to be engaged in environmental projects, wanted to do things which are useful as well as amusing. They also wanted to apply own ideas and feel a sense of community as well. Important for them was to experience success and to be taken seriously (Chaloupka et al 1998).

### Study 2, Vienna

2007 the Austrian Road Safety Board tried to find out more about 16-25 year old Viennese and their mobility needs as well. There the findings were that it was very important for the young people to be independent from parents and public transport, have a feeling of freedom and therefore use individual transport modes more. Cars also serve as status symbols (esp. for youngsters with migration background).

## Some findings about pros and cons of cars and public means

### Cars

#### Pros

- cosiness
- comfort
- independency

#### Cons

- short headways by others
- ruthless cardrivers
- speeding cardrivers
- animals on the road
- financial costs

### Public Means

#### Pros

- in Vienna very good infrastructure

#### Cons

- (imagined) dependency
- insufficient connections to rural area around
- criminal potential in some passengers
- lacking cleanliness

Cars were preferred to public means esp. by young people in rural environment.

### **Study 3, Vienna:**

In 2008 in the frame of a small qualitative study a group of 36 Viennese consisting of 16 to 24 years young people were asked about their mobility needs as inhabitants of Vienna (Factum 2008). 50% were male and 50% female, 75% were already working, 50% of all were driving a car and 75% have been walking daily. When asked about their spontaneous definition of mobility the focus lay on the two following aspects, which reflect either implications or modes of mobility which came to their minds:

- To reach each locations at any time, flexibility (67%)
- Public means, car, bicycle, own feet (33%)

Feeling safe in city the traffic was another point. In general 80% felt very safe or rather safe, while the strongest feeling of safety was stated by car drivers, with the following arguments:

- Car driver 67%: car can be closed, I drive myself, crush zone
- Public means 42%: because there are a lot of people
- Pedestrian 25%: because I know the streets and am able to choose where to go
- Cyclist 16%: because I know the streets and am able to choose where to go

Talking about pedestrian items like pedestrian zones and potential disturbances by beggars or non-profit organisations who try to come in contact with pedestrians the young people stated the following:

### **Pedestrian zones**

- Good idea 66%
- More of them 8%
- Without use 8%

75 % did not feel disturbed by beggars, non-profit organisations etc. when walking.

When asked about public means and cycling information about bad experiences and thus hindrances to use one of both modes under special conditions or during special day times (e.g. long waiting times, difficult to reach destinations), the following aspects were underlined:

- Troublesome during night ( Vienna „Night line“) 60%
- Hard to reach friends at outskirts 60%

Taking into consideration that 75% of the asked young people were going by bike, 67% stated that they were very satisfied or rather satisfied. Nevertheless they asked for:

- More cycling paths (50%)
- Better surfaces, wider paths (33 %)

#### Study 4

According to a study in Germany (Erke et al 2002) regarding mobility needs of children and (up to 10/12 years) and young people (between 18 and 22), these groups require more space at stations, especially at bus stations so that groups of youngsters would be able to stand, viz. some of them, to sit. Stations should provide protection against wind and rain and also some information about events.

Erke et al. worked together with children and young people and as a result of their discussions and work shops created a checklist for „youngster-friendly“ cities where one could find the following:

- High-quality of pedestrian- and bicycle-paths (enough space and well kept pavements)
- Bicycle-paths independent from motorised traffic
- High quality illumination
- Long(er) phases of green light for pedestrians and cyclists
- Direct paths for pedestrians and cyclists
- Inner cities without cars
- Comfortable bus stations (with much space and possibilities to get informed about events)
- Traffic safety regarding also social security
- Public spaces not yet allocated (e.g. green areas)

Co-operation with youngsters regarding creation of possibilities to be mobile has been a tool already in some countries, especially in Germany (<http://www.stadt-kinder.de/>) and seems to be successful.

In other studies about criteria for the quality of housing and living especially in cities the following aspects came up as being relevant:

- being able & allowed to be creative (e.g. in front of the house in the street)
- getting a feeling of identification with the area: e.g. small cultural events during the year in a street give a feeling of identification
- being involved in discussions

## 5. Discussion

What mobility conditions should a city provide? In accordance to a) the introductory mentioned main targets of a city, evolved during hundreds of years of cities' histories, namely: giving shelter, facilitating interaction between people, providing possibilities to be creative in a multi-ethnic society and b) results of different studies about mobility needs of youngsters which both show some kind of analogy, we could give the following recommendations, especially for authorities:

Public spaces should facilitate mobility for young people (but others would benefit as well) in a manner which

- Satisfies needs related to developmental tasks
- Improves housing and environmental conditions which make meeting of residents easier
- Provides places for developmental tasks in the vicinity including
  - places to meet indoors (e.g. meeting rooms to be arranged by youngsters, taken care of by youngsters) and outdoors (e.g. benches & other seating and meeting facilities)
- Provides security
- Improves infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists
- Improves public means, among other things by providing time-tables at night and for the area of city outskirts

Co-operation with young people regarding these above mentioned items would allow them to better express themselves and live their life according to their lifestyles, which in a further run would improve their involvement in environmental development of the vicinity, enhancing a feeling of responsibility on the youngsters' side. The city becomes more "their own city". Safety in traffic would be an additional benefit, almost of its own.



Foto: Bast 2002, Erke et al.



Foto: Sarah Chaloupka, 2008



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