

Mobility and Civility: New Realities

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Qualification of the presenter:

Barbara Knecht, a registered architect, is Director of Design at the Institute for Human Centered Design. She is also co-director of IHP "Cities in the 21st Century," an undergraduate travel study program. Ms. Knecht has worked for the City of New York, consulted for community development agencies and has researched and written dozens of articles on architectural technology and urban issues. Her work in universal design and accessibility dates back thirty years and has informed all her projects with a human centered design perspective. Ms. Knecht holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of California, Berkeley and a Master of Architecture from Columbia University. She was awarded a Kinne Fellowship from Columbia University, a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University, and received a Graham Foundation grant. She serves on the Streetscape committee of the Municipal Art Society.

Proposal:

In a world experiencing demographic change and technological ingenuity, the options for personal mobility are exploding. Cities are growing up and spreading out, drawing people seeking opportunity. Mobility of people and their goods will hum in the 21st Century city that opens up its streets and public spaces to all its citizens and the ways in which they need to move. Cities overwhelmed by motorization have given rise to a powerful impulse to reclaim the streets for pedestrians and bicyclists who have been pushed aside by private automobiles. But is this the appropriate discussion for the 21st Century city? Will it lead to the inclusive, complex and robust mobility network that will serve the people and the economy of the urbanizing, global community? This paper will suggest that a model that situates automobile motorization on one end and pedestrians and bicycles on the other end sets up a polarization that leaves the latter claiming a far smaller share than warranted. Worldwide, vastly more people are neither automobile owners nor drivers. For them, as is evident on streets and sidewalks across the globe, personal mobility combines walking with all manner of devices and modes that deserve a place much more generous than that to which they are relegated. From research as the Director of Design at the Institute for Human Centered Design and as Co-director of IHP "Cities in the 21st Century," the author will offer an alternative view of urban mobility that embraces and designs for the spectrum of human activity and connectivity that mobility serves. From this perspective, people and their mobility needs - not vehicles and modes - are the pivotal design parameters. People walking and using bicycles will be joined by power assisted and human powered devices of unimaginable variety. Already we have electric bicycles, YIKEbikes, U3-Xs, scooters, wheelchairs, Segways, wheelchairs, auto rickshaws, adult tricycles, trailer bikes, roller blades, skateboards, kick scooters, wheelchairs, rolling suitcases, carts, bicycle rickshaws, handcarts... The evidence suggests a more robust discussion about design of the public right of way for different people using multiple modes traveling at a range of speeds is the exciting design challenge before us. Civility suggests that the battle over vehicle space might be replaced by a dialogue about individuals and their potential to share public space safely, communally and cooperatively.