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Introduction to Everyday Streets

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Introduction

Agustina Martire, Birgit Hausleitner and
Jane Clossick

Everyday streets are both the most used and the most undervalued of cities' public spaces. They constitute the inclusive backbone of urban life – the chief civic amenity – though they are challenged by optimisation processes. Everyday streets are as profuse, rich and complex as the people who use them; they are places of social aggregation, bringing together those belonging to different classes, genders, ages, ethnicities and nationalities. They comprise not just the familiar outdoor spaces that we use to move and interact and the facades that are commonly viewed as their primary component but also urban blocks, interiors, depths and hinterlands, which are integral to their nature and contribute to their vitality. Everyday streets are physically and socially shaped by the lives of the people and things that inhabit them through a reciprocal dance with multiple overlapping temporalities. This book offers an analysis of many aspects of everyday streets. It examines examples from all over the globe using a range of methodological approaches. It is a palimpsest of overlapping examples, methods and perspectives that provides a solid understanding of everyday streets and their degree of inclusiveness. This book comes at a critical moment, as the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of streets as the linear centre of urban life, pushing people out of enclosed spaces and into the public realm.

The primary focus of this book is an inclusive approach to understanding and designing everyday streets. 'Inclusive' means accessible to everybody, with 'accessibility' covering social and economic factors in addition to physical factors. Inclusiveness is not always prioritised in street design. In fact, everyday streets have often been the focus of vehicle-focused 'optimisation' processes. Of course, optimisation for

cars reduces inclusiveness for pedestrians. Julianne Hanson (2004) describes inclusive design as ‘creating environments and products that are usable by all, without the need for specialist adaptation or design’. Tihomir Viderman and Sabine Knierbein (2019) go a step further, suggesting an ‘inclusive design praxis’ that includes a ‘collective capacity to negotiate belonging, to appropriate space and to contest structural constraints through practices of improvising and inventing that are part of everyday life’. The central question framing this book’s descriptions of everyday streets is as follows: *What qualities and processes make everyday streets inclusive places?*

The everyday streets covered in this book were all planned to some degree, whether by engineers, urban planners or the military. We do not discuss informal development processes – that would be far beyond the scope of this book – though it is important to note that everydayness also emerges in informal and peri-urban areas. From the regular rectilinear urban blocks of Montreal to the military-regulated narrow alleyways of Naples; from the resilient market streets of London to the crammed commercial streets of Chennai, the streets in this book were all conceived with a certain level of control. This universal fact enables us to, at the end of the book, make recommendations on the planning and design of everyday streets aimed at increasing their inclusiveness.

What is an everyday street?

Everyday streets constitute the backbone of all urban settlements. They are not merely routes from one place to another; they are linear centres of civic activity where much of everyday life takes place. As expressed by Allan B. Jacobs, ‘Streets are more than public utilities, more than the equivalent of water lines and sewers and electrical cables; more than linear physical spaces that permit people and goods to get from here to there’ (1995, 3). The kinds of streets that we explore in this book are never purely residential or monofunctional; they bring together most of the activities carried out in people’s everyday life. They have precise technical functions for the movement of people and traffic. They host services, sewers and a wide mix of both commercial and civic uses. They have depth and hinterlands, which themselves serve a wide range of functions – including residential functions – contributing to their ‘everydayness’. However, they also have a diverse set of forms and meanings that extend beyond physical functionality

into the economic, social, historical and political realms. Our interpretation of these streets' significance is based on the idea of the everyday (Lefebvre 1991; Lefebvre 1947; De Certeau 1984; De Certeau 1980; Highmore 2012), as a palimpsest of the ordinary and extraordinary in constant flux.

The phenomenon that we term an 'everyday street' has many names. It is also referred to as 'mixed-use street', 'high street' (Carmona 2015; Jones et al. 2007) and, more recently in the UK, 'ordinary street' (Hall 2012). It is also called 'hoogstraat' (street on top of a dijk) (Dings 2017) and 'voorstraat' (front street) in the Netherlands (Meyer 2005), 'main street' in the US (Jacobs 1993; Mehta 2010) and 'Hauptstrasse' (main street) in German-speaking countries. In other languages, cultural, historical and typological contexts determine how these streets are named. Swahili, for example, uses 'mtaa Mkuu' (general street), while Vietnamese uses 'đường lớn' (big street). Generic words such as 'calle' (Spanish), 'rue' (French) and 'Ōdōri' (Japanese) indicate that most streets in these places have 'everyday' qualities. We employ Anna Skoura's term 'everyday streets' (this volume) because it captures the vast range of forms that these streets can take.

Each everyday street has a life of its own, shaped by the histories and cultures of the people who have resided on or passed through it. The term 'everyday' effectively captures the variety inherent in these streets; it is inclusive of all types of civic and social life. As Jan Gehl said, 'The street is the largest stage in the city, and the most used'. Spiro Kostof called the street 'a complex civic institution, culture specific and capable of dazzling formal variation and calculated nuance' (1992, 220). Joseph Rykwert defined streets as 'human movement institutionalised' (1978, 15). Everyday streets act as a space that hosts the performance of everyday life – whatever form it takes. They are rich, layered and multifaceted; they contain more intriguing elements than a single book, or even a whole library, could ever hope to capture.

Despite long being the backbone of urban settlements, everyday streets have only recently come to be considered a significant element of a city's heritage. Introduced in the 1960s, the concept of urban heritage long favoured the aesthetic qualities of buildings and monuments rather than their everyday uses. However, since the advent of the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach (Rodwell 2010, 100), the culture of giving value to urban areas has become embedded in heritage scholarship. This approach goes beyond considering the beauty and age of streets' built fabric; it values the continuity of use types within buildings, the local roots of shops, communal senses of ownership, their

function as a cultural route linking different parts of the city, and the small everyday practices adopted by users. For our authors, the cultural heritage of spatial and material practices is equally as significant as the physical heritage of monuments and museums.

Everyday streets, in both their heritage and contemporary uses, are the product of their local neighbourhood; they are never generic, and they are most significant for those who do not have the financial means to go elsewhere. Streets have been described as ‘rooms’ by Louis Kahn (1973) – significant urban spaces that are highly local and domestic in nature. However, they are simultaneously a manifestation of global forces, linking people and economic activity to a locality (Hall 2012). The capacity of everyday streets to host social and demographic diversity is boundless; they tend to host various classes, genders, races and religions, which often results in negotiation and conflict between groups. Sam Griffiths and Phil Hubbard have commented on local culture and class on streets, concluding that everyday streets appear as key sites for the ‘realisation and perpetuation of locality’ (Griffiths 2015, 32), playing ‘an important economic and social role in the lives of working class populations’ (Hubbard 2017, 8). Sharon Zukin and colleagues also highlighted the ordinary nature of streets and links between the local and global (2015). Therefore, everyday streets also play an important role in the creation of sustainable neighbourhoods (UN Habitat 2014) by serving as places of mutual support and social integration. From Melbourne to Montreal, from village to metropolis, everyday streets are everywhere; understanding their variations and nuances is crucial to grasping the role that they play in society.

A brief history of everyday streets: inclusion, optimisation and value

In the design of everyday streets, there is constant conflict between inclusion and optimisation. We propose that everyday streets have value beyond profit optimisation. They are capable of fostering the inclusion of different age groups, cultures, ethnicities and genders, yet optimisation generally prioritises aspects that result in the exclusion of certain groups by neglecting particular aspects of streets’ value. The everyday street is a multi-layered and complex system that operates at many scales, so it is impossible to predict what may be lost through optimisation. Optimisation at one scale, such as increasing traffic

speeds, can hinder important elements at other scales, such as people's ability to have a quiet conversation.

Everyday streets have always been places where multiple uses and users jostle for space. The first-century streets of Rome featured traffic regulations (van Tilburg 2011). Seventeenth-century urbanisation resulted in everyday streets having copious sanitation problems (Rudofsky 1968). Eighteenth-century streets were cluttered with traffic jams and excessive trade (Corfield 1990). In the nineteenth century, rapid urban growth and industrialisation resulted in streets being noisy, loaded with traffic and highly polluted (Cartwright 1973). The urban plans devised to deal with this problem (Burnham and Bennett 1908; Cerda 1859; Hausmann 1850s; Sitte 1889; Stübgen 1907) carefully managed the relationship between different modes of transport. However, the growth of motor vehicle dependence in the twentieth century resulted globally in highly regulated systems of urban segregation that optimised streets and roads for car use.

The conflict between inclusion and optimisation aligned with twentieth-century modernist movements in architecture and urban planning. The demise of the traditional everyday street was made clear by plans for new and existing cities in the 1960s. Le Corbusier, Josep Lluís Sert and Lucio Costa, among others, denied the importance of the street by advocating for the separation of its functions, the prioritisation of motorised traffic and the disruption of the way streets had traditionally been used. In fact Le Corbusier defined the street as 'a traffic machine' (1929, 131), stating: 'Streets are an obsolete notion. There ought not to be such things as streets; we have to create something that will replace them' (1933, 121). Transport policy, such as Buchanan's (1963) *Traffic in Towns* in the UK, slum clearance and urban renewal in the US and other similar approaches around the world, instituted the domination of car-centric planning. Post-war reconstruction in Europe and rapid population growth in the US and the Global South meant that, by the 1960s, most cities across the world were undertaking a systematic and unprecedented investment in car-focused infrastructure (Kingsley and Urry 2009).

Despite the predominance of cars in cities across the world, many streets have survived as inclusive and resilient public spaces that are central to their local civic and economic life. Car-focused modernist urbanism has faced a wave of criticism since it was introduced, with critics denouncing modern land-use and zoning policies in the US and Europe as detached from the lives and experiences of local people (e.g. Alexander 1977; Appleyard 1980; Cullen 1961; Jacobs 1961; Lynch

1960; Rudofsky 1968; Whyte 1980). These critical writers, journalists and architects recognised the flaws of urban schemes that obliterated traditional street systems. Jane Jacobs gave sidewalks a leading role in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), which discussed the importance of ground-floor uses and 'eyes on the street'. Lewis Mumford (1958) argued early on that motorways were not the proper solution for the future growth of cities, while Richard Rogers (1984) highlighted the role of the car in 'undermining the cohesive social structure of the city'. Donald Appleyard (1973) used drawings to highlight the damage done by traffic to neighbourhood streets, and William H. Whyte (1980) emphasised the importance of streets as central to the placemaking process. The late twentieth century saw a return to the town centre as the focus of human life; in fact, Tim Marshall described this return to traditional urban streets as 'one of the most significant reversals in urban design history' (2005, 9).

The 2020s are witnessing another street transformation. The push to minimise the dominance of cars led by Northern European cities since the 1970s has finally begun to influence the rest of the world (Agervig Carstensen and Ebert 2012; Gehl 1989; Gehl 2015; Pucher and Buehler 2008). Latin American cities, such as Bogotá, Medellín and Curitiba, have since the 1970s introduced temporary and permanent 'ciclovías', while also prioritising public transport over private cars. The Covid-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for this change, with cities around the world opening more outdoor public spaces to encourage and facilitate social distancing. Groups in the UK, the US and Europe have been a part of this push to make streets more inclusive and replace cars with multi-modal transport systems. The Project for Public Spaces (Whyte 1975), Create Streets (Boys Smith 2013), Manual for Streets (Hamilton-Bailie 2007), The City at Eye Level (Glaser 2012) and Human Cities (2006) have all advocated for more inclusive streets. Cities like Pontevedra in Spain have completely pedestrianised their main centres, boosting local foot traffic, while the recent removal of urban motorways in Paris, Seoul, San Francisco and Madrid has transformed swathes of land in city centres (Nieuwenuijzen 2021). While the editors and authors of this book consider these efforts to be largely positive, we must remain vigilant to ensure that they do not merely benefit the affluent to the detriment of less privileged groups. This harmful type of optimisation is common, and often subtle and overlooked.

The ordinary is extraordinary: understanding and designing everyday streets

Everyday life, epitomised by the street's ubiquity, is sometimes understood as a scene of 'relentless boredom' – ordinary and mundane. Here, we aim to emphasise the opposite view – to show that streets are, in Highmore's words, 'a problem, a contradiction, a paradox: both ordinary and extraordinary, self-evident and opaque, known and unknown, obvious and enigmatic' (Highmore 2002). Rita Felski uses feminist theory to critique the way in which modern literature depicts everyday life and its 'congealed patterns', suggesting that the 'work of theory is to break the spell of the habitual and the everyday' (2000, 90). This is the precise challenge that we have set for ourselves in this book. Its chapters are as revolutionary as Lefebvre (1974) would expect, showing that streets are saturated by the dominance of powerful interests in how they are transformed (De Certeau 1984) while maintaining the humour and serendipity that Walter Benjamin (1935, 1999) often discussed in his accounts of the everyday. We dispel the idea that the everyday is either mundane or extraordinary; instead, the everyday is in a state of constant flux between mundane and extraordinary.

Understanding what a street really is – in all its layering and richness – is complicated. In addition to assessing everyday streets' inclusiveness, our objective is to highlight the importance of learning about streets and never taking them for granted. Everyday streets may be 'ordinary' spaces (Hall 2012), but they are nonetheless multifaceted, layered and rich. They undoubtedly warrant academic attention. Shedding light on what Highmore (2002) calls the 'ordinary and the extraordinary of the everyday' and Solnit (2000) calls the 'errand and the epiphany', the chapters in this book seek to expose the everyday street in all its glory. Framed by the overarching question of what qualities and processes make everyday streets inclusive places, we aim to answer the following three questions: *How do people's social lives interact with everyday streets? What is the relationship between the urban form of everyday streets and the activities that occur there? What methodologies are best suited to capturing the multiplicity and complexity of everyday streets?* This book is divided into three sections, each of which explores one of these three questions.

Part I: The social life of everyday streets. This section examines the social processes taking place on streets across the world. It explores the social and historical institution of streets, evaluates cases of touristification, ritual and displacement, and looks at the role of women, ethnic minorities and working-class people.

Part II: The form and use of everyday streets. This section focuses on the relationship between urban form and everyday street activities. It explores diverse geographies, topographies, morphologies, uses and users, and examines how these factors are interdependent and mutually influential.

Part III: Localography. This section explores the range of methods and approaches that may be employed to assess the nuances of streets. It uses walks, recordings, drawings, occupations, installations and more traditional social science methods to analyse the subtle nuances of everyday streets across a wide variety of locations.

This book, like the StreetSpace project from which it grew, transcends the disciplinary boundaries of architecture and aims to revolutionise the methodological approach to the study of everyday streets. The copious diverse qualities that make up streets must be explored further in a way that avoids institutional and regional silos. This book aims to kickstart that process. StreetSpace has encouraged a new kind of interdisciplinary and democratic understanding of everyday streets. In this book we enrich the existing discussion by presenting perspectives from various authors, places and fields, enabling readers to compare and contrast different ideas while opening up new lines of inquiry for understanding and designing everyday streets. The book's stylistic and methodological diversity offers new perspectives on everyday streets, effectively delineating their urgencies. The knowledge presented in this book can inform the practices of urban planners, architects and designers.

Finally, this book has a political objective: to reclaim street spaces for people. We do not claim to write from a neutral position. This book is a manifesto for streets. It aims to help them resist car-focused and commercial optimisation, which sucks away the socio-spatial characteristics that make streets useful to unprivileged groups. In the spirit of Dennis Crow's philosophical streets, we believe that combining theoretical concepts with empirical research can 'remove barriers to citizen participation on policy making, break down ... stereotypes and

examine the long-term global consequences of uneven development' (1990, 5). This book aims to '[fight] against the pro-gentrification agendas implicit in British retail policy' (Hubbard 2017, 8). It is valuable to support and maintain everyday streets as diverse, significant and slowly evolving public places. We must study streets to ensure that their redevelopment and redesign are inclusive and accessible. Everyday streets must be highlighted – they must be protected.

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