

Street mobility in Barcelona

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For the last three years, I have been working in the *Street Mobility* project at University College London (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/street-mobility>). We are trying to understand and measure the impacts of road traffic on pedestrians. What happens when people live busy roads? Do they walk less, go to fewer local places, or feel unhappier comparing with people living in quiet roads? A team of researchers is looking at these questions from the perspective of different disciplines, such as transport planning, architecture, geography, public health, and participatory mapping.

The Barcelona Training School on Inter and Transdisciplinary Urban Research (INTREPID) provided me with opportunities to discuss this project with other researchers studying other challenges faced by cities. The advantage of bringing together people working on different interdisciplinary projects was that each participant was not representing a specific discipline, but an interdisciplinary view on a specific topic. At start, some topics seemed very different from mine, but after the discussions it became evident that there are many relationships between them. For example, transport and mobility are related to housing, environment, and social policy. A holistic view is required in order to create strategies to plan for an efficient, just, and sustainable city.

The INTREPID trainers suggested taking a broad view of the potential impacts of interventions to solve urban problems. The range of relevant stakeholders is probably wider than I and other participants thought before attending the event. For example, in the case of my project, the improvement of conditions for pedestrians in a neighbourhood does not benefit only the local residents. If people shift from driving to walking following the

improvement, this will lead to a reduction of air pollution at the city level and, if the improvements are applied consistently in many neighbourhoods in many cities, there will be a reduction, even if small, of the emission of pollutants that contribute to global warming. This means that, potentially, the whole world, including future generations, benefit from interventions applied at the local level.

The event also gave me insights on specific issues faced by Barcelona, during practical exercises and in my morning walking commute to the event, which was held in Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCB). It became clear that the city is succeeding in moving from a concept of "streets made for moving" to one of "streets for living". This is easier to achieve in the old, dense, mixed-use areas with narrow streets near the CCCB (left picture). But there are also long, continuous, pedestrian-only streets in newer areas (centre picture), in corridors that in other cities would probably be full of cars. Of course there are also some large roads in Barcelona, which are not easily transformed into people-friendly environments (right picture). Several possible solutions emerged from the discussions with other participants in the INTREPID event. Once again, I benefited from fresh views provided by researchers working in other urban issues and using other methods. For example, several participants stressed the need for public participation at all stages of interventions to improve public space, not only on the diagnosis of the problem but also on the design and evaluation of the solutions, - aspects that I was not always fully aware of during the course of my project.