

Jeannot's Blog March 2017

Less is more: Reduce car traffic in urban areas

"Cities around the world are beginning to realise that by getting more people walking and reducing the number of cars, they will create a healthier, more equal society and attract business and investment into the city. It's time to get future city leaders to commit to creating walking cities"

(@livingstreetsuk)

Much has been said about the need for safer ways to school for children, especially in developing countries where child deaths and injuries are a big issue. Every 3' minutes a child dies following a traffic incident and many more see their health at risk from air pollution, most of them produced by cars, or more correct, by drivers in those cars.

Of course large footpaths and separation of pedestrians from motorised traffic where speed exceeds 30km/h are a welcome initiative and maybe more effective and sustainable than education or repression. Maybe well furnished speed humps and sensibilisation of children (and adults) may also have some effect.

But we all know that children are no small adults and their behaviour is much different, especially in complicated and unexpected situations where even adults have sometimes difficulties to deal with.

We also know that the greatest dangers are there where children (and other vulnerable road users like elderly and people with a handicap) have to cross a busy street. Pedestrian crossings may give a false feeling of safety as we have experienced in many European countries and even a red light giving way to pedestrians is not always the best solution. Whereas we know that bridges and underpassing's for pedestrians are in no way an adapted way to deal with safety issues.

So what to do? Shouldn't we try instead of all those well intended measures to reduce car traffic in built up areas and close to school zones?

Here in Europe most of the parents are driving their kids to school with their car as they are afraid of the heavy traffic and dangers coming "from cars".

But luckily in some municipalities there are changes underway, closed streets and ban of cars from areas where children move. Let's give back the room to our children to play, to go or cycle to school and to live.

And finally this will be an advantage for every road user and good for health and the environment too. Some 60 years ago we experienced this and it worked very well.

The emerging countries should not do the same mistakes we have done around here during the last century. They should not plan too much for cars but plan for people and especially for kids.