

# Child in the city



## Third European Conference 16, 17 and 18 October 2006-12-22 Stuttgart (Germany)

The third Child in the City conference on the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of October in Stuttgart was successful with delegates from over 20 nationalities present. Around 180 participants joined the 18 various workshops and five round table discussions. The originality of this congress is to have plenty of workshops and very few plenary sessions, two only in fact.

The congress served also as a platform for further developing The European Network of Child Friendly Cities (ECFCN) < <http://www.childfriendlycities.org/>>. Next edition of Child in the City again in scheduled for 2008. Strangely, the organizers did not give the contact or e-mail addresses of participants. This secrecy about contact addresses and first names is difficult to understand for a Conference which wants to build a network of people interested in giving a place to children in our cities. It is almost impossible to contact people you met unless you asked for their visiting card.

*“The street is too important  
to leave it to technical engineers”*

### The town without children

Stuttgart, 600'000 inhabitants, is a city of contrast.

Large pedestrian and commercial downtown area

Few spaces without cars in the residential districts

Nice park, appreciated by tourists and office employees working downtown

Few green areas of car free spaces in the quarters.  
Residential streets are overwhelmed by parked cars.



30 km zones are implemented in most of the residential districts

The “living streets” with the local shops, restaurants and sometimes schools are still at 50 km/h

<sup>1</sup> In the last slide of one the Dutch presentation



Public transports is well developed, the **lightrail system** is good for the active and healthy users

The outdated **light railway** is very unfriendly to vulnerable pedestrians: the doors are one meter above ground, the ramps and stairs (7 steps!) make it difficult for handicap and elderly people to access to the platform.  
The light railway cuts the districts making the crossings difficult, tiresome and dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists

### Cars before children

In the Stuttgart, home of Mercedes and Porsche, cars come first. The city does not want to implement a residential permit to reduce the amount of car commuters. On the contrary, expressways – another barrier for pedestrians - go right into huge car parks in the city downtown.

For the casual visitor it is evident that cars come before families: indeed, in Stuttgart the amount of households with children has been declining for years. Today, only 18% of the households have children. This dramatic situation has led the municipality to launch several programs for children and families.



Development of playgrounds

Increase the use of cycling for students from 8% to 12%

Reduce the amount of “parent taxi” to school

Walking safely program

Creation of intergenerational houses

Measures<sup>2</sup> to prevent urban risks for children in the public transport system: “the good fairy<sup>3</sup>”, “attention light railway” etc.

<sup>2</sup> Reduction of accidents (50% fewer than in the mid 90s). The outdated light railway being very dangerous for the vulnerable users: cyclists and pedestrians.

<sup>3</sup> The « Good-Fairy » campaign where retailers, social services and the SSB (public transports) display a symbol which shows children they can expect support if needed.



Stuttgart aims at becoming a **child friendly city**. Will that possible without reducing the priority given to car users and without taking political decisions in another direction ? One can doubt it.

“*Kinderfreundliches Stuttgart*”: to download (in German) < [www.stuttgart.de/sde/publ/gen/6126.htm](http://www.stuttgart.de/sde/publ/gen/6126.htm)>

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## Examples from Europe

Let's look at some presentations.

### Germany: children are disappearing...

In many large German cities like Munich or Stuttgart the families are moving towards the suburban towns, leading to various problems – shopping centres and facilities only reached by cars - and areas very unfriendly towards pedestrians.

The ones who remain in the city are the singles, the households without children and families from the immigration.

A study from Humboldt University showed that investment into children and families is a major contribution to reducing the process of suburbanisation.

Countries, like Germany, with relatively low immigration tend to show a decrease in households with children.

### Brussels: the example not to follow

Brussels might be the example not to follow as 60% of children are accompanied to school by car. One of the reasons is the complete liberty of choice given to parents to choose a school. As a result, pupils may be living as far as 40 kilometres away.

In town-planning, *brusselisation* means anarchical construction and planning.

### Child participation

Various studies in Flanders, Britain or Germany showed the importance of the child participation in developing infrastructures and equipments which respond to their need.

### Children's Autonomous Mobility / stranger = danger

One of the interesting topics was “Children's Autonomous Mobility”. It is clear that it is inherent in children's process of growing up that they want to move autonomously. On the other side in this process children meet more and more obstacles. Caring parents worry about the dangerous traffic in the cities and they are often concerned about social safety. Because of this, parents hinder the children in their development. It takes a lot of discussions between children and parents before children are allowed to bike alone to school.

A lot remains to be done on the subject “*stranger = danger*”, that is to tell the parents that our European streets are safe and that children do not need parental supervision all the time and that they should be allowed to walk – bicycle more autonomously.

## “Ambassadors” for walking bus

Interesting development in Sweden in the *Pedibus/walking bus* scheme, whereas “ambassadors” (Pedibus conductors with experience) are designated to inform newly formed walking bus conductors.

## Great Britain - Ireland

Report from London (Caroline Boswell) shows that the congestion charge not only reduce the numbers of cars but also benefit to the pedestrians.

In London, in contrary to the German cities the amount of children is increasing, a quarter of the population is below 17 years of age, that may come from the immigration as 41% are from black, Asian or minority ethnic group origin. Child poverty is high, 51% in inner London.

The Mayor of London has launched a program to implement 27 policies and 84 actions in order to make London a more child-friendly city. With the road safety being one of the main problems, typical projects are: safe routes to schools, home-zones, playable grounds, youth spaces, local playable spaces, etc.

## Accessibility Standards



- Under 5's – 100m
- 5-11 year olds - 400m
- 11 –16 year olds – 800 m

One of the spectacular measures concerns the youth up to 17 years old, who may travel freely on London buses and trams.

In UK, funding by the lottery support many programs concerning the youth. One of the important one is the “safe route to school program”.

*The role of home-zones is important in these strategies.*



**Link:** <<http://www.homezones.org/>>

In Ireland, like in many countries, a decrease in walking and cycling has been noted with young people. As a result, a “National Children’s Strategy” has been launched.

## Neighbourhood playgrounds

An interesting study in Vienna (Petra Daschütz) compared the leisure mobility of children and adolescents in a park and an inner-city quarter.

The comparison shows that “pedestrian children” who can play in the neighbourhood are more likely to socialize and be autonomous than the children having to travel by car or by bus to a far away park, even if better equipped.



Consequently, the space required for various games presumes a safe network of lanes and sufficiently large places. For the leisure mobility of children and their activity space the closeness to the play site is crucial. It influences the frequency and duration of stay, the type of company and the modal choice.

Figures from Brussels and Great Britain indicate that children accompaniment amount to 10 to 20% of cars in the rush hours.

### Netherlands

Even in the Netherlands, often given as an example – although school trips are mainly made on foot or by bike – only 36% of primary school children are allowed to do so unaccompanied. 15% are accompanied by car.

Tab 1 - Children going to school

Traffic mode	%
Walking (accompanied)	18
Walking (independently)	15
Cycling (accompanied)	28
Cycling (independently)	21
Car passenger	15
Miscellaneous	3



The Dutch presentations were the more complete and gave the most information and ideas in urban planning.

### Interesting links:

• Got to International Institute for the Urban Environment: <http://www.urban.nl/>

And then you shall find several links of great interest like:

- Results of the Childstreet 2005 conference in Delph (NL)
- Tools to test the child friendliness of a street:

**Alain ROUILLER** *conseiller en mobilité – sécurité des déplacements* |  
Reporting for IFP International Federation of Pedestrians <http://www.pedestrians-int.org>



Contact :

**Bureau-Conseil ATE** (Association Transports et Environnement)

18, rue de Montbrillant | CH-1201 Genève

[Alain.Rouiller@ate.ch](mailto:Alain.Rouiller@ate.ch) | ++4122 777.1002

Internet: <http://www.ate.ch> or <http://www.pedibus.ch>