WALKING AND URBAN VIBRANCY, AN INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF COMMERCIAL PEDESTRIAN PRECINCTS

CARLOS BALSAS

Assistant Professor - Geography and Planning

University at Albany – New York/USA

cbalsas@albany.edu

ABSTRACT

Vibrant urban places are those that enable people to perform many and diverse activities. A fundamental concern is the extent to which human behaviors are influenced by socio-economic, cultural, legal and corporate frameworks that may vary from country to country. In the absence of universal rules, how can urban professionals help to create and to encourage vibrant main streets and city centers? This paper analyzes several public and private commercial pedestrian precincts in different parts of the world. The key findings are that the promotion of a culture of walking is critical to the survival of cities and that commercial pedestrian precincts play an important role in ensuring urban vibrancy.

KEYWORDS: Walking, main streets, urban vibrancy, pedestrian precincts, public spaces

CAMINAR Y HABITABILIDAD URBANA : UN ESTUDIO INTERNACIONAL DE ZONAS PEATONALES

RESUMEN

Lugares urbanos vibrantes son las que permiten a las personas llevar a cabo muchas y diversas actividades. Una preocupación fundamental es el grado en que los comportamientos humanos son influenciados por los marcos socio-económicos, culturales, legales y corporativas que pueden variar de país a país. En ausencia de normas universales, cómo pueden los profesionales urbanos ayudar a

crear y fomentar calles y centros de las ciudades vibrantes? Este trabajo analiza varias zonas peatonales comerciales públicos y privados en diferentes partes del mundo. Las principales conclusiones son que la promoción de una cultura de caminar es fundamental para la supervivencia de las ciudades y que zonas peatonales comerciales juegan un papel importante para garantizar la vitalidad urbana.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Caminar, calles principales, habitabilidad urbana, zonas peatonales, espacios públicos

INTRODUCTION

Vibrant urban places are those that enable people to perform many and diverse activities. Successful city centers are nurtured to allow people to recreate and experience a myriad of behaviors (WHYTE, 1998; ZACHARIAS, 2001). Such an ensemble may look to the untrained eye like spontaneous events without much order or organization. Nonetheless, an urban professional is aware of basic rules that need to be observed to enable the continued vibrancy of those places. There is a fundamental concern with the extent to which human behaviors are influenced by socio-economic, cultural, legal and corporate frameworks that may vary from country to country. In the absence of universal rules, how can professionals help to create and encourage vibrant main streets and city centers?

With a few exceptions, we all walk, we all shop and we all live somewhere (SOLNIT, 2000). That somewhere varies spatially. This paper examines how commercial pedestrian precincts have been used to improve cities. Retailing and commercial activities are important activities in cities and they are likely to remain so in the future. Probably the most adopted typology in main streets in the United States is that of a thoroughfare with wide sidewalks, on-street parking and calmed traffic; a compromised hybrid version between the fully enclosed pedestrian mall and the street for vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Despite this format, many private shopping malls do have pedestrian-only precincts. The assumption is that

they create an environment conducive to shopping and to entertainment (i.e. a designed 'there', often in the middle of outlying big box stores). The problem is that, quite often, these shopping malls drain people and economic activity out of older downtown areas, many of which may have benefited from public efforts aimed at revitalizing their cores.

Downtown revitalization organizations and local authorities have an important role in devising mechanisms to revive and maintain vibrant downtowns (HOYT and GOPAL-AGGE, 2007). Many of those rules have been identified in the literature and applied to cities across the world. This paper examines some of the general principles in face of the 2008 global financial crisis. It is assumed that many of the old principles of urbanity (e.g. centers; human scale; a safe, healthy and attractive built environment) that have endured for centuries in cities are still valid.

In recent decades, many European cities have embarked in urban revitalization operations and have attempted to increase walkability, despite them being organically, a lot more walkable than their north-American counterparts. Can planners, architects and designers learn from interventions in those older agglomerations? As Jacobs (1993, p. 314) wrote in his seminal book Great Streets, "Design counts! Great streets do not just happen." Although it is common to find literature on single case study streets, this paper presents a comparative analysis of common themes to this particular type of street arrangement. Talen (2002, p.258) has admonished that, "it is usually not possible to compare neighborhoods on the basis of their spatial pattern, walkability or morphological characteristics". However, we should also be cognizant of Taylor's assertion (cited by COCHRAN, 1999, p.17-18) that "the subject of commercial culture begs for worldwide comparison because (…) consumption as a global ideal [is] the most universal ideal in human history". The ultimate aim is to arrive at a set of planning implications helpful to both scholars and practitioners.

The commercial pedestrian precincts reviewed in this paper are centered on the following streets: Rua Augusta in Lisbon, Portugal; Largo do Senado in

Macau, SAR; Rua Direita in São Paulo, Brazil; and the "control" precinct Main Street USA in Disneyland®, Anaheim – California, USA. These streets were selected based on the author's analysis and on available data and literature. The motivation was reinforced by the author's prior knowledge of the recent development of shopping districts and pedestrian-only streets in Portugal, Spain, China, Brazil and the US, among others. The reason for including a fully privately owned and managed theme park commercial street in the sample is to illustrate its fully designed nature, the simulacrum of real commercial streets, and its financial implications. According to Neuman (2008, p.83) Disneyland's Main Street is indeed "one of the most successfully designed streetscapes in human history".

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is a review of two main literature strands: 1) shopping, and 2) walking environments. Shopping and consumption are among the most important activities in cities (URRY, 1995; CHUNG et al. 2002). They occur in a multitude of formats spread throughout the city. The traditional hierarchical relationship of core and periphery has substantially disappeared with the building of suburbs (DEAR and FLUSTY, 1998). In many cases, shopping malls have contributed to emptying out retail activities from central locations and onto more car accessible peripheries. While people may have adapted to this new reality, many consolidated urban areas have experienced urban decline due to a holing out of other urban activities.

During the 1960s and 1970s, commercial pedestrian precincts were built in many U.S. cities, in part, to attempt to reverse this situation (ROBERTSON, 1994). In southern European cities, pedestrian streets were implemented to create more livable and pleasant centers, often in conjunction with urban revitalization programs. German cities built pedestrian-only precincts during the war reconstruction efforts (UHLIG, 1979; HADJU, 1998). British and Nordic cities also took advantage of this technique to create more livable cities (KARRHOLM, 2008).

In Addition, São Paulo and other Latin American cities, such as Santiago and Buenos Aires also have had pedestrian-only streets for a few decades. More recently, Chinese cities have redesigned their city centers to increase livability, vibrancy and to create more human friendly public spaces.

Walking is a quintessential human activity. Southworth (2005, p.247-248) defines walkability as:

"the extent the built environment supports and encourages walking by providing for pedestrian comfort and safety, connecting people with varied destinations within a reasonable amount of time and effort and offering visual interest in journeys throughout the network."

The same author argues that a walkable network has several of the following attributes (2005, p.249):

1. Connectivity of path network, both locally and in the larger urban setting,

2. Linkages with other modes: bus, streetcar, subway, train,

3. Fine grained and varied land use patterns, especially for local serving uses,

4. Safety, both from traffic and social crime,

5. Quality of path, including width, paving, landscaping, signing and lighting, and

6. Path context, including street design, visual interest of the built environment, transparency, spatial definition, landscape, and overall explorability.

Ewing and Handy (2009, p.65) have attempted to measure subjective characteristics of the urban street environment; these included: imageability, enclosure, human scale, transparency and complexity. The main reason behind their study was the need to "arm researchers with operational definitions they can use to measure the street environment and test for significant associations with

walking behavior". Although their analyses took place in commercial streets, they did not study pedestrian-only commercial precincts. On the other hand, Mehta (2008, p.217) has concluded that there is a hierarchy of walking needs and that "given a safe and comfortable setting people look for usefulness, sense of belonging and pleasurability as additional and distinct needs to enhance their walking experience".

Usually, commercial pedestrian malls combine shopping and walking. The main reason for the building of pedestrian malls in the US was the competition from suburban shopping malls (LOGEMANN, 2009). Municipalities and downtown organizations decided to recreate the shopping mall environment by pedestrianizing some of their main streets. Gibbs (2012) has argued that in the United States, this practice was, for the most part, a "failed experiment." The success of pedestrian areas depends, to a certain degree, on its proximity to employment centers. The same author (2012, p.46) has also observed that pedestrian malls have been successful mainly in college towns and that other pedestrian malls are "exceptions to the rule or the result of extraordinary public-private partnerships."

European cities, which grew according to organic patterns and were undamaged by (or rebuilt subsequently to) wars and or natural catastrophes, are usually more vibrant and livable than the cities built after the automobile became the main design element. In those older cities, the urban fabric creates more intimate and human scale living arrangements; shopping can be easily accomplished without reliance on automobiles (CRAWFORD, 2000); and walking occurs with minimum efforts (RAMOS and ALVES, 2010). Those cities have rich urban environments capable of making walking a very pleasant and social activity. European cities, such as Barcelona, Lisbon and Porto, among many others, have maintained much of their urban fabric and walking appeal over the recent decades. North-American Sunbelt cities, such as Phoenix, Los Angeles and Las Vegas, have grown very rapidly, which resulted in a combination of extensive low

density suburban areas, populated by housing subdivisions and shopping malls (DEAR and FLUSTY, 1998). Asian cities and city-states, such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai, have been experiencing rapid urban growth as well (WASSERSTROM, 2009).

OVERVIEW OF THE CASE STUDIES

Despite cities' endemic characteristics, many cities and urban places have similar features and planning solutions that transcend geospatial, socio-cultural and legal country-specific contexts. The case studies presented here are or have been considered, in a not very distant past, successful examples of commercial pedestrian precincts. Each one of them has its own history and was built according to specific legal, socio-economic and geographical contexts. Given recent changes in lifestyle habits, family composition, demographics, cultural influences and spending patterns, one or more of their characteristics may need to be rethought, in order to help maintain and improve the urban livability of their respective city centers.

LISBON

The *Baixa Pombalina* in Lisbon is the name given to the neighborhood rebuilt by Marquês de Pombal after the earthquake of 1755. This area is set on an orthogonal street grid, it has regular blocks and uniform buildings with standard features and limited architectural decorations (SANTOS, 2000). The area was rebuilt according to 18th century Illuminism principles that emphasized living above the store and organizing the streets according to commercial guilds. The Rua Augusta in Lisbon is the main thoroughfare between two squares (the *Praça do Comércio* open to the river Tagus and the *Praça D. Pedro IV,* also known as *Praça do Rossio*) and the central part of an ambitious early modernistic urban design ensemble (Figure 1.).

Figure 1. Rua Augusta in Lisbon

The current combination of retail stores, restaurants, banks, one museum (MUDE) and coffee shops with outside cafés characterizes its daily life. On the other hand, the regular flows of pedestrians walking through the precinct in order to reach other destinations, including the fluvial transportation hub and the nearby subway stations, helps aggregate and disperse the pedestrians through the adjacent centuries old neighborhoods of Moorish, Judaic and Medieval Christian origins. The *Rua Augusta* pedestrian-only commercial precinct is the main element of a network of paved areas (i.e. sidewalks, plazas and streets) and it needs to be studied within that particular urban design structure.

While the hegemonic center of commerce in the city until the mid-1980s, the growth of the city to more suburban areas and the growth of its metropolitan

edge has led to new urban polarities, which have significantly reduced the vibrancy of the Baixa Pombalina and adjacent areas. To reduce these decentralization movements, the municipality has invested in the urban revitalization of its inner-city through renovations of a series of public squares, the rehabilitation of the iconic Rossio train station, the granting of subsidies for the modernization and upgrade of retail establishments, and more recently, programs for the conservation and upgrade of the built environment, among others.

MACAU

Macau SAR is located on the western margin of the Pearl River Delta across from Hong Kong. It is a small enclave of 29.2 square kilometer comprised by one peninsula and two former islands connected by a major landfill. The territory rose to international notoriety after it was handed back to the Chinese administration in 1999. Macau is now an important touristic destination in Southeast Asia. During the last decade, the number of casinos and resorts increased to the point of surpassing Las Vegas in terms of revenues from gaming activities. A significant part of its historic district was added to the UNESCO's world heritage list in 2005 (DU CROS, 2007). Most of the urban fabric built under the Portuguese administration is located in the Peninsula and in specific neighborhood cores in the two former islands. Most of the streets in the peninsula are relatively narrow when compared to similar streets in other parts of the world (Figure 2.).

The Senado Square and adjacent pedestrianized streets in Macau represent one of the best examples of a successful commercial pedestrian-only precinct (Figures 1.). According to Pinheiro (2009, p.29), "the first intent to restrict traffic in the Senate and St. Domingos Squares failed due to strong opposition from the local business community, which believed that traffic and parking lots [were] necessary for the survival of their businesses." Nonetheless, "the political will prevailed and in 1994 the [Senado] square was closed to the traffic."

Figure 2. Largo do Senado in Macau

The key features of its success include the proportion of the colonial buildings and their architecture in relation to the paved area as well the type of commercial activities in the surrounding urban neighborhoods. The extremely high density in the territory (18 thousand people per square kilometer), the quality of the colonial architecture, the monuments, the increase in the number of visitors, and the assortment of retail activities contribute in part to making this area a very vibrant and lively place (PINHEIRO, 2009).

SÃO PAULO

São Paulo is the largest metropolis in Latin America. It is a global city and an important financial center. The city has evolved from the formal historic district settled by the Portuguese in 1553 to the Avenida Paulista created at the turn of the 20th century, to the more recent centralities in the Faria Lima and Berrini Avenues. The city center corresponds mainly to the Sé and República districts and it has experienced population decrease in recent decades. Specialized and popular retail stores co-exist with informal street traders.

Downtown São Paulo comprises two halves on either side of the Vale do Anhangabaú – known as the old and the new centers – and both had many of their streets pedestrianized in the 1970s (Figure 3.). In total, there are more than seven kilometer of streets closed off to vehicular traffic. This was an initiative of the then mayor Olavo Setúbal. Although a successful strategy when it was implemented (LEME and VENTURA, 2000), over the years the large area without vehicular access led to accessibility complaints and the municipality decided to open up a few streets in the second half of the 2000s.

Figure 3. Rua Direita in São Paulo

The center has a high concentration of governmental facilities and several financial institutions, including the São Paulo stock exchange (FRÚGOLI JR., 2000). A singular feature of the shopping structure is the presence of galleries, several stories high vertical shopping malls featuring small retail establishments open to inner courtyards with escalators (e.g. *Galeria do Rock*). Socially, these galleries are not Walter Benjamin's 19th century arcades (i.e. 'le passages') and the *Paulistanos* most commonly found in the downtown area are not the Parisians flâneurs. More

than a century later, even though the construction techniques, materials (glass and iron roofs) and heights differ substantially, the weather-protected inner-courtyards, escalators and the small stores still perform the same functions, and the population is eagerly engaged in communal social and economic activities.

ANAHEIM

Anaheim is a suburban city in Orange County, California. It is known for its theme parks, hotels, convention center and business complexes. The city's main industry is tourism and it has been growing in population due to recent increases in employment opportunities. Its location in Los Angeles metropolitan area, its mild climate and expansive landscape comprised of residential subdivisions crisscrossed by highways and car traffic is a perfect example of the postmodern agglomeration described by Dear and Flusty (1998). Main Street in Disneyland is the entrance thoroughfare to the first Walt Disney theme park built in the 1950s. The street recreates a typical American small town main street with down-scale replicas of commercial buildings from an important period in the history of the United States.

This street is different from the other seven streets introduced previously because of its ownership structure and fully designed nature (FRANCAVIGLIA, 1996). Contrarily to the other pedestrian precincts, its main aim is to set the stage for the entertainment activities available in the venue and to influence patrons' behavior as they enter and exit the theme park. It has been considered the "epitome of commercialism" where "Disney was the ultimate merchant on main street and visitors to Main Street USA are the ultimate customers" (FRANCAVIGLIA, 1996, p.156).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THEMES

It has been established that places can be assessed by the degree that they perform their functions. Among some of the main assessment characteristics

one finds access and linkages, comfort and identity, usability, economic activity, sociability, etc. (PAUMIER, 2004). This part of the paper analyzes and compares eight main themes running across the case studies (Table 1.). The comparative themes include:

1) Location of the streets in the cities and main reasons for their creations,

2) Proportion of the pedestrian precincts in relation to the cities and to other centers and subcenters,

3) Relationships between the streets and the surrounding areas and activities,

4) Accessibility to the pedestrian precincts and movement in the streets,

5) Conciliation between the needs of different street users,

6) Strategies to respond to competition from new and emerging centers,

7) Funding of improvements and continued management activities,

8) Perpetuation of success and avoidance of decline

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF MAIN THEMES

City, street, population, creation date	Lisbon, Rua Augusta, 547,631 in the city, 2 million in the metro area; 1984
Location of the street	Downtown
Proportion of the pedestrian precinct	Pedestrian-only linear street transversed by perpendicular streets, 8-blocks long
Relationship between the streets and the surrounding areas / activities	Uniform building typology forming a seamless skyline, landmark archway, banks, a museum and a combination of approximately 90 independent, franchise and brand name retail stores, lodging establishments
Accessibility to the pedestrian precincts and movement in the street	Nearby subway stations and parking garages

Conciliation between the needs of different street users	No landscaping, basalt coble stone, informational kiosks and outdoor coffee shops
Strategies to respond to competition from new and emerging centers	Seasonal displays and public uses of certain buildings facing the street, living statues
Funding of improvements and continued management and promotional activities	Municipality and *Associação de Dinamização da Baixa Pombalina*
Perpetuate success and avoidance of decline	Seasonal luminaries, artistic pavement, sense of monumentality

City, street, population, creation date	Macau, Senado Square and adjacent streets, 556,800 people in Macau SAR, 28 million visitors in 2011; 1994
Location of the street	Downtown
Proportion of the pedestrian precinct	Pedestrian-only area linking several serendipitous streets and connecting several religious and monumental tourism attractions
Relationship between the streets and the surrounding areas / activities	Traffic-calming devices, retail stores, consolidated urban fabric, supermarkets, restaurants
Accessibility to the pedestrian precincts and movement in the street	Multiple entry points into the pedestrian precinct, transport hubs within walking distance
Conciliation between the needs of different street users	Very few trees only in certain locations of the pedestrian network
Strategies to respond to competition from new and emerging centers	Classified as UNESCO's World Heritage in 2005, multitude of events, gatherings and public displays

Funding of improvements and continued management and promotional activities	*Instituto Para os Assuntos Cívicos e Municipais*
Perpetuate success and avoidance of decline	Waving pavement and centrally placed public fountain, arcade buildings, colonial architecture

City, street, population, creation date	São Paulo, (Rua Direita, Rua Barão de Itapetininga and Rua de São Bento are the most emblematic streets). 11.2 million people in the city; 19 million in the metropolitan area; 1976
Location of the street	Downtown
Proportion of the pedestrian precinct	An area with pedestrianized streets and plazas on both sides of the Vale do Anhangabaú, in total there are more than 7 kilometres of pedestrianized streets
Relationship between the streets and the surrounding areas / activities	Combination of government buildings, galleries, department stores, shops, shopping centers, restaurants, services, hotels, cultural centers and performance venues
Accessibility to the pedestrian precincts and movement in the street	Pedestrian bridge (viaduto de Santa Ifigênia) connecting both sides of the downtown area, opening up of a few streets to vehicular traffic in recent years, subway stations
Conciliation between the needs of different street users	Cobble stones, concrete and granite
Strategies to respond to competition from new and emerging centers	Surveillance on the precinct, recently removal of advertising from buildings, street furniture, "zeladores" (hospitality ambassadors)

Funding of improvements and continued management and promotional activities	Municipality, Viva o Centro and *Aliança pelo Centro Histórico de São Paulo*
Perpetuate success and avoidance of decline	Popular retail, combination of governmental, historic, financial, services, entertainment and cultural buildings

City, street, population, creation date	Anaheim, Disneyland's Main Street USA, 336,265 in the city, 17.6 million in the metro area; 1955
Location of the street	Theme park in Anaheim, Orange County, California
Proportion of the pedestrian precinct	Linear street connecting the main gate of the theme park with the Main Street Square, 2-blocks long
Relationship between the streets and the surrounding areas / activities	Stand alone symbolic buildings typical of small town America
Accessibility to the pedestrian precincts and movement in the street	One main entrance and exit location for patrons, separate entrance for deliveries
Conciliation between the needs of different street users	Construction of similar centers in other cities throughout the world (e.g. Paris, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Shanghai)
Strategies to respond to competition from new and emerging centers	Multitude of events and parades, music, entertainment
Funding of improvements and continued management and promotional activities	Walt Disney Corporation

Perpetuate success and avoidance of decline	Simulacrum, fun, fantasy

Major sources: Author's field work and references.

LOCATION OF THE STREETS IN THE CITIES AND MAIN REASONS FOR THEIR CREATIONS

Most of the pedestrian streets in this study are located in the downtown area of a metropolitan main city. Urban morphologies, design plans or both have influenced their locations. Streets are by their very own nature fluid spaces for people, goods and intangibles to circulate in a myriad of ways. Most city centers have a great concentration of activities that can attract many people. The existence of possible conflicts among street users has led some city administrations to find answers to this problem, and in collaboration with individual merchants and their associations, many have created pedestrian-only precincts. Such a street arrangement is an interruption in the regular flow of total traffic through a particular street. As a consequence, vehicular traffic may be diverted to surrounding streets. But the novelty, and the reduction in conflicts between users, facilitates the flow of walkers and the newly created space is more likely to attract people who just want to enjoy the precinct without spending much money in the local economy.

A critical mass of activities may be able to maintain and or increase the number of people attracted to the precincts. Those who invest in them expect a return; otherwise they will go somewhere else with fewer risks and higher returns. The center usually benefits from a concentration of rich architectural buildings, public spaces and a high concentration of activities. People patronize those spaces differently depending on their demographic group, socio economic background and gender, marital status and profession.

Public authorities are usually responsible for ensuring that public spaces remain public, clean, safe and attractive, that vehicular traffic flows

uninterruptedly and, indirectly, that businesses are successful. They are receptive to contributions for improvements in the public realm, which also may benefit commercial establishments, but business owners are ultimately responsible for their own spaces. The separation between public and private realms is critical. When cities are successful they grow, usually in outward ways, which can, if nothing is done, partially weaken their commercial and historical cores. The risk of new centralities may dislocate some economic activities to other areas of the city, as has happened in many of the case studies.

PROPORTION OF THE PEDESTRIAN PRECINCTS IN RELATION TO THE CITIES AND TO OTHER CENTERS AND SUBCENTERS

Very few studies have examined the location of pedestrian areas and their relationships to the entirety of the agglomerations and to other centers and subcenters. Usually, commercial pedestrian precincts coincide with the core of a city as it was argued previously. Suburban neighborhoods may not have the same density of patrimonial assets as those that can be easily found in downtowns. There can be commercial areas anchored in specific stores or in groups of stores. Successful pedestrian precincts normally have a very diverse concentration of businesses.

The mix of activities influences the precincts physicality and character. Depending on the organicity and how a city evolved over time – or was deliberately planned – pedestrian precincts may coincide with or extend to public spaces, such as squares and parks. A common occurrence is the partial appropriation of many of those public spaces by adjacent businesses. Quite often, this includes the payment of a specific fee; but such charge is in the mutual interest of both the municipality and the businesses.

Pedestrian areas may also connect emblematic and touristic places in a city, which is likely to attract a high number of visitors. It is the continuous flow of foot traffic that maintains the vibrancy and the economic success of the

businesses located in the pedestrian area. Pedestrians are also encouraged by short distances. In Macau, the Senado Square and the streets leading to the ruins of Saint Paul's Cathedral constitute a good example of this principle. In large cities, such as São Paulo, the option to extend the pedestrian precinct to most of the streets in the downtown area has made it relatively difficult for people to reach certain destinations far away from the main access points.

A design feature common to several of the case studies is how the main thoroughfare connects two main points or centralities (e.g. Lisbon: *Praça do Comércio* and *Praça D. Pedro IV*; Disneyland: Victorian railroad station and Sleeping Beauty Castle). This represents an important planning principle that argues for the power of landmarks to define and terminate vistas (FRANCAVIGLIA, 1996).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STREETS AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS AND ACTIVITIES

A vibrant pedestrian precinct can only meet its purposes if it satisfies the needs of its users. It is in the interest of both businesses and local authorities to create and maintain quality public spaces. Those spaces are successful if they attract and entice patrons to remain there for a while, patrons who then also might end up visiting the stores and purchasing goods and services. In collaboration with the city's social services, homeless people can be helped in humane ways by downtown ambassadors. A combination of retail stores, restaurants and other commercial establishments constitute the bulk of economic activity in those precincts. Those stores need to be serviced with goods, goods need to be stored and sold. Depending on the layout of the neighborhood blocks, the servicing can be commonly carried out through alleyways or through the front of the stores.

Retail businesses will typically be located on the ground floor and in some cases will occupy the upper floors as well. Services such as law offices, medical, insurance, language schools, travel agencies, banks, post offices, internet cafés,

beauty parlors and personal grooming are traditionally located in these areas. Many and varied entertainment venues can also be easily found in central areas. Some of them attract large crowds ranging in size from several hundred to a few thousand people. Improvements in the public space are usually reflected in gains for the adjacent built environment. As Pinheiro (2009, p.30) states about Macau's pedestrianization efforts, the rehabilitation of squares was critical to sustain local businesses and to improve the condition of surrounding buildings. Housing typologies vary greatly depending on the city. Usually, commercial and entertainment districts do not have many housing units because of the inconvenience and nuisance created by loud entertainment activities and their attendees, difficulty with parking, high monthly rents and usually small unit sizes.

ACCESSIBILITY TO THE PEDESTRIAN PRECINCTS AND MOVEMENT IN THE STREETS

Since residence in the commercial precinct is low, people have to travel to get to it. There are many ways to access it; while there, the main mode is usually walking. Plentiful parking will help ensure that patrons will find it convenient to reach the precinct. Affordable parking rates can also influence how long costumers will stay in the precinct. Reaching it by foot is probably the easiest way to ensure that people will not be worried about having to extend the parking payment, in case of meters. Among the most common design strategies capable of influencing the comfort and safety of the walking experience, one finds the type and smoothness of pavements used, the marking of crosswalks, the existence of bulb outs to decrease crossing distances.

Also very important is the regulation of logistics and delivery of goods and products, such as deliveries are to be made no later than 11 a.m. and only after 9 p.m. Most cities have regulations coordinating the servicing of economic activities located in the streets and access to parking garages. The simple existence of regulations is limited if there is lack of enforcement. An alternative to having

delivery and service vehicles driving on pedestrianized areas is to establish a neighborhood logistics center and to attempt less intrusive deliveries.

CONCILIATION BETWEEN THE NEEDS OF DIFFERENT STREET USERS

Cities are used by everyone. Commercial precincts are mainly aimed at shoppers. Those are likely to constitute the main group in the area. Visitors are also attracted to special events, such as art walks, food and festive occasions, and other celebrations (e.g. end of the year block parties). As one would expect, these spaces are appropriated differently depending on the needs of their users. Adjacent businesses are likely to benefit from high footfall and the celebration of community events. Business owners might even be among the event organizers in cooperation with public officials. The success of pedestrian areas can sometimes lead to unwanted activities, such as unsolicited attempts at selling goods and services.

Important conflicts that need to be avoided include reserved parking for store owners and employees and the time and frequency of deliveries, as well as minimum clearance for emergency services and cleaning crews. Vulnerable street users, such as blind and handicapped people, rely on physical markings and designed solutions to navigate their way through pedestrian precincts. Pedestrian precincts with well delimited movement corridors and tactile mats enable disabled people to walk or ride wheelchairs in safe, convenient and unobstructed ways. Pedestrians need to be protected when crossing the street and São Paulo has recently promoted a successful safety campaign to reduce traffic accidents (Figure 4.).

Figure 4. Pedestrian safety campaign in São Paulo

STRATEGIES TO RESPOND TO COMPETITION FROM NEW AND EMERGING CENTERS

One of the main reasons why pedestrian malls are dismantled and streets re-opened to vehicular traffic results from added competition from new shopping areas, with a larger variety of stores, more protagonism, and better adapted to the needs of customers. Accessibility to the precincts is critical as is parking. The reason why modern shopping malls are so popular is because they are designed and planned with careful attention to details, an approach that cannot be easily found in the organicity of the downtown urban fabric. For some people,

authenticity is one of a city's biggest advantages, which cannot be easily replicated elsewhere. In the shopping mall – or in the theme park – the threshold might involve appeals to differentiation and niche market segmentation. Certain pedestrian precincts are known for their expensive brand stores and signature designers. Establishments are likely to capitalize on the realism and vibrancy of those spaces. Urban authenticity and patrimonial value might be the main reasons behind the success of some of the most well-known commercial streets in the world.

The compactness of old historic districts with extremely high population densities, like Macau, makes walking in the downtown area a very pleasant way of experiencing the city, something that cannot be easily found anywhere else. In most cases, the strategy might be to capitalize on the authenticity and urbanity of the downtown cores while reducing the threats posed by new centers. The local and regional authorities have an important role in implementing such strategies without curbing development opportunities excessively. In short, a "town-center first" approach coupled with high levels of cleanliness, safety and attractiveness, while leaving the rest to spontaneity, is a strategy attempted by some of the cities in the sample.

São Paulo's pedestrian streets have seen a steady number of patrons in the city center. The efforts of *Viva o Centro* and its neighborhood local actions (i.e. *ações locais*) were critical to the development of a growing awareness about the value of urban conservation and historic preservation. The *Viva o Centro* was created to aid with the revitalization of the downtown, which, over the years, had seen its pedestrianized streets become overcrowded and littered with rubbish, its pavements damaged by utility crews and service vehicles, and the presence of many informal street vendors (i.e. *camelôs*). The *Viva o Centro* was modelled after the North-American Business Improvement District (BID) concept and it developed campaigns to attract residents to the center, to help revitalize the area and to increase the area's levels of safety and cleanliness, services which continue

till today. The main difference was that financing was based on sponsorship and voluntary contributions and not on enforceable taxation, which may have limited the effectiveness of the organization (FRÚGOLI JR., 2000).

FUNDING OF IMPROVEMENTS AND CONTINUED MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Funding (or the lack of it, to be more specific) is probably one of the most critical reasons why some of these commercial precincts may deteriorate in appearance over time. Funding for professional management in shopping centers is part of operating budgets and it is covered, in part, by the monthly rents, as well as by other financial mechanisms. BIDs in the United States and Town Center Management schemes (TCMs) in the United Kingdom have been relatively successful financial arrangements to pay for the activities of downtown management associations (HOYT and GOPAL-AGGE, 2007). In other cases, community development corporations have been used to help rehabilitate neighborhoods and to provide training and new skills for people in need.

Certain temporary events require a cover charge to enter a precinct. These funds help defray operating costs but usually are insufficient to pay for major capital improvements. Capital improvements, such as new pavements and street furniture, are likely to be funded in collaboration with other public authorities. One of the main differences between pedestrian precincts and theme parks is that people want to have a pleasant experience without necessarily having to shop. The concentration of shopping and entertainment activities, and the professionalism of the enterprise, is in many cases not comparable to the experience found in a commercial pedestrian precinct. Partnerships and alliances are powerful mechanisms capable of generating public participation and additional resources.

PERPETUATION OF SUCCESS AND AVOIDANCE OF DECLINE

Urban professionals can sometimes become very attached to the places where they work or frustrated with sameness that they may disengage from public causes. In certain contexts, they may attempt to preserve legacies passed on to them by their predecessors and they do it by enacting legislation and other regulations that limit the uses allowed in certain urban zones and buildings. In other cases, they may deregulate and allow patrimonial heritage to become irremediably lost. Urban regeneration programs can sometimes lead to gentrification processes with residents in central areas getting displaced to the suburbs where they may become "heavy car users or spatially marginalized pedestrians" (RAMOS, 2010, p.93).

Retailers may initially oppose pedestrian precincts, but in the majority of European cases, generally, businesses appreciate the additional patronage created by these pedestrian areas. Pedestrian streets tend to attract international brands, which often increases competition and may displace independent family owned businesses. In democratic societies, the broader public sphere plays an important role in balancing the preservation and up-keeping of patrimonial assets and local entrepreneurship.

Theme parks are either loved or hated by researchers. For instance, Bauman (1994, p.152) has argued that "Disneylands are the footholds where the avant-garde of postmodern culture tests and probes the form all life is to take up and practice". Sorkin (1992) quoted by Dear and Flusty (1998, p.56) describes theme parks as places of simulation without end, characterized by aspatiality plus technological and physical surveillance and control. On the other hand, King (2011, p.225) as associated many technological and managerial innovations with the techniques deployed and perfected at Disneyland such as in "banks (line theory), food courts, (theming), airports (people movers), museums (total immersion exhibits), and customer service ("guestology" training)".

In a highly globalized world, it is becoming increasingly difficult to prevent international trends, technologies and ideologies from dominating local and

regional agendas and from shaping the urban landscapes of cities. Cities are shaped by a myriad of decisions, sometimes beyond the control of public officials. Yet their livability depends, to a large extent, on the degree to which appropriate visions and models can be devised and implemented in coordinated ways. In brief, do not over plan, but be aware that consumers will definitely know the difference between authentic and genuine places and their built environments, and the recreation of structures and places in faux, yet hyper-real, themed environments (CASTELLO, 2010).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Pedestrian-only precincts have been used to create more enjoyable public places in cities for several decades, if not centuries (LOUKAITOU-SEDERIS and BANERJEE, 1998; HASS-KLAU et al., 1999). In the 21st century, the human needs to experience urban vibrancy, to gather collectively in open public spaces and to socialize remain the same. The main purpose of this paper was to identify how professionals with responsibility over the design, planning, engineering and management of commercial pedestrian areas can help to create and to encourage more vibrant main streets and city centers. The increase in urban living, with all its demands, requires a transition to a low carbon society. Pedestrian areas have the potential to make urban living a more pleasant, authentic and pleasant experience. They can bring back the socializing and communal realms, partly stolen by modern transport and information revolutions, and by the pervasiveness of mobile technologies.

Professionals interested in improving urban vibrancy have much to learn from past experiences in cities. Shopping mall and theme park designers have successfully applied commercial urbanism principles to their developments in the past, often in ways that have weakened downtowns and central areas of cities (PHILIPS, 2002). But design and urbanism principles have also been used in the reconstruction of the city of Lisbon, among others. Its concept was the result of a

deliberate planning and architectural intervention, which made use of a commercial urbanism model to articulate the whole design approach.

In terms of planning implications, it is important to realize that we can learn from each other's attempts. For instance, it is risky to overdoing it without first testing the design concept. São Paulo's pedestrianized area is the most extensive of the four case studies and the number of closed streets had to be reduced recently given its accessibility difficulties. Secondly, certain streets are more conducive to pedestrianization schemes than others; neighborhoods with high density, small blocks, good under and above ground linkages and parking, and relatively narrow streets seem to be ideal candidates. Thirdly, even when streets can be closed off to automobile traffic, they still need to be serviced and to remain "open" to service crews and emergency vehicles. Fourthly, these implications are based on the eight case studies and do not constitute an endorsement to the creation of pedestrian malls in other cities.

Finally, downtown professionals should not blindly emulate commercial pedestrian precincts but they need to know that under certain conditions, this type of revitalization solution can create vibrant public spaces for everybody. The pedestrian precincts from three different continents reviewed in this paper show that, given the proper location, design and management solutions, commercial pedestrian precincts are successful and advantageous to cities, to the point where Peter Rowe (2011, p.187) as aptly called the phenomenon: "pedestrianization for the masses". More than using pedestrian-only commercial streets to stimulate shopping and consumption, the promotion of a walking culture to the survival of livable cities will lead to and ensure more vibrant, democratic and socially solidary cities.

REFERENCES

BAUMAN, Zygmunt, Desert spectacular. In: TESTER, K. (Ed.) *The Flâneur.* New York, Routledge, pp.138-157, 1994.

CASTELLO, Lineu, *Rethinking the Meaning of Place, Conceiving Place in Architecture-Urbanism.* London, Ashgate, 2010.

CHUNG, Chuihua, INABA, Jeffrey, KOOLHAAS, Rem And LEONG, Sze., *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping.* New York, Taschen, 2002.

CRAWFORD, James, *Carfree Cities.* Utrecht, International Books, 2002.

DEAR, Michael. and FLUSTY, Steve, Postmodern Urbanism. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers,* 88(1), 50-72, 1998.

DU CROS, Hilary, *Cultural Heritage Management in China.* New York, Routledge, 2007.

EWING, Reid and HANDY, Susan, Measuring the unmesurable: Urban design qualities related to walkability. *Journal of Urban Design,* 14(1), 65-84, 2009.

FRANCAVIGLIA, Richard, *Main Street Revisited.* Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 2006.

FRÚGOLI JR., Heitor *Centralidade em São Paulo, trajetórias, conflictos e negociações na metrópole.* São Paulo, Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2000.

GIBBS, Richard, *Principles of Urban Retail, Planning and Development.* Hoboken, John Wiley and Sons, 2012.

HADJU, Joseph, Pedestrian malls in West Germany: Perceptions of their role and stages in their development. *Journal of the American Planning Association,* 54(3), 325-335, 1998.

HASS-KLAU, Carmen, *Streets as Living Space: Helping public spaces play their proper role.* London, ETP, 1999.

HOYT, Lorlene and GOPAL-AGGE, Devika, The business improvement district model: A balanced review of contemporary debates. *Geography Compass,* 1/4, 946-958, 2007.

JACOBS, Alan, *Great Streets.* Cambridge, MIT Press, 2003.

KARRHOLM, Mattias, The territorialisation of a pedestrian precinct in Malmo: Materialities in the commercialization of public spaces. *Urban Studies,* 45(9), 1903-1924, 2008.

KING, Margaret, The Disney Effect, Fifty Years after Theme Park Design. In: JACKSON, Merlock and WEST, Mark (Eds.) *Disneyland and Culture: Essays on the Parks and their Influence.* Jefferson, McFarland and Co. pp.223-226, 2011.

LEME, Mônica and VENTURA, David, *O Calçadão em Questão: 20 anos de Experiência do Calçadão Paulistano.* São Paulo, Belas Artes, 2000.

LOGEMANN, Jan, Where to shop? The geography of consumption in the twentieth-century Atlantic world. *Bulletin of the GHI,* 45, 55-68, 2009.

LOUKAITOU-SEDERIS, Anastasia and BANERJEE, Tridib, *Urban Design Downtown: Poetics and Politics of Form.* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998.

MEHTA, Vikas, Walkable streets: Pedestrian behavior, perceptions and attitudes. *Journal of Urbanism,* 1(3), 217-245, 2008.

NEUMAN, Robert, Disneyland's Main Street, USA, and its sources in Hollywood, USA. *The Journal of American Culture,* 31(1), 83-97, 2008.

PAUMIER, Cy, *Creating a Vibrant City Center, Urban Design and Regeneration Principles.* Washington DC, Urban Land Institute, 2004.

PHILIPS, Deborah, Consuming the West, Main Street, USA. *Space and Culture,* 5(1), 29-41, 2002.

PINHEIRO, Francisco, Rehabilitation of Squares in Macao's Historical Sites. *World Architecture,* 12/2009 (234), 28-34, 2009.

RAMOS, Manuel, Trampling over paradoxical trends and visions of European walkability. In: PQN Report – The future of walking. Available on http://www.walkeurope.org/ accessed on May 9, 2012, 2010.

RAMOS, Manuel and ALVES, Mário, *The Walker and the City.* Lisbon, ACA-M, 2010.

ROBERTSON, Kent, *Pedestrian Malls and Sidewalks, Traffic Separation Strategies in American Downtowns.* Avebury, Aldershot, 1994.

ROWE, Peter, *Emergent Architectural Territories in East Asian Cities.* Basel, Birkhauser, 2011.

SANTOS, Maria, *A Baixa Pombalina, Passado e Futuro.* Lisbon, Livros Horizonte, 2002.

SIMON, Breines, *The Pedestrian Revolution; Streets Without Cars.* New York, Vintage Books, 1974.

SOLNIT, Rebecca, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking.* New York, Viking, 2000.

SORKIN, Michael, (Ed.) *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space.* New York, Hill and Wang, 1992.

SOUTHWORTH, Michael, Designing the walkable city. *Journal of Urban Planning and Development,* 131(4), 246–257, 2005.

TALEN, Emily, Pedestrian access as a measure of urban quality. *Planning Practice and Research,* 17(3), 257-278, 2002.

URRY, John, *Consuming Places.* New York, Routledge, 1995.

WHYTE, William, *City: Rediscovering the Center.* New York, Doubleday, 1998.

ZACHARIAS, John, Pedestrian behavior and perception in urban walking environments. *Journal of Planning Literature,* 16(1), 3–18, 2001.