

Concept Development: 'Woonerf'

Scope

Woonerf has been described as: a street for children, where cars are allowed.

Traffic-calming (German: Verkehrsberuhigung) is a prerequisite, but the 'woonerf' concept aims further. The street should be safe and friendly for people of all ages, inviting various social activities.

The concept is known in many countries and under different names. A literal translation would be

'residential yard', or 'living yard'. In English one speaks of Home Zone and Shared Space, in German of 'Wohnstrasse' and 'Begegnungszone' (meeting zone).

Introduction

Not too long ago most streets were safe and friendly for people of all ages, inviting various social activities. Apart from the main streets, children used the full width of the street for their activities and every traffic participant did expect so. And still one can find these conditions, all over the world, in many streets where cars did not (or could not) take over and dominate street life.

As a result of mass automobilisation, car traffic and car parking had an enormous impact on street life. In northern Europe the turning took place in the 1960's and several initiatives were taken to defend the residential street use. In new housing projects in Emmen (Netherlands) a new element was introduced: a transition area, between the parking space and the houses, meant for social activities.

Delft began in 1970 to rearrange existing streets using all kinds of street furniture (bollards, benches, lampposts, greenery) in order to calm traffic and to support the residential function. The 'woonerf' was born. This concept spread to many countries. Several examples are displayed in this conference.

In the Netherlands, the concept 'woonerf' was broadened to 'erf' and included other applications as shopping 'erf', city-centre 'erf', school 'erf' and rail station 'erf', as examples of shared space: pedestrians come first, but cars are allowed under strict conditions (very slow, limited numbers). Another powerful feature of the 'erf' is the strength in the field of multiple and multi-functional land use, creating opportunities for different social activities. Not only to play outdoors, but also to meet your neighbours and sit in the sun, to shop, enjoy urban life and visit heritage sites.



"A city friendly to children is a city friendly to all"

Need to rethink

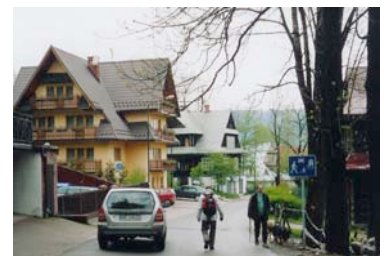
However, it became clear that the concept needs rethinking. Some reasons are:

1. the ever growing impact of traffic (speed and numbers) and parking (space);
2. the decreasing number of children playing outdoors;
3. the policy of traffic calming without affecting the dominance of cars;
In the Netherlands consensus was reached on establishing a 30 km speedlimit in most of the residential streets, but not on changing the streetscape.
4. different ideas about the applicability of the 'woonerf';
Only in isolated dead-end streets (cul de sac), or in vast, comprehensive 'habitat-zones'? Only in residential streets, or in any street?
5. different ideas about the applicability of the traditional street, or main road;
Everywhere, or only when inevitable? What makes inevitable?
6. confusion about differences between 30km max and 'woonerf';
7. the relative high costs to rearrange an existing street into a 'woonerf';
8. different interpretations and different names in various countries for a more or less similar concept.
In the Netherlands, a district court defined in 1998 the maximum speed on the woonerf as 15 km/h, while in Germany is common to refer to a walking pace (6 km/h). In Switzerland, the woonerf (meeting zone) sign was adapted and max20 (km/h) was included.



More information in the conference file

- In particular the papers of Schepel, Imai and Huttenmoser
- Some pages of Living between buildings (Gehl, 2003)



Your group challenge

Please present your ideas about the (new) concept:

- a) When and how is it a safe and friendly option?
- b) When and how is a traditional street / main road a safe and friendly option?
- c) How do we develop smart, creative and low budget solutions?
- d) Does this concept contribute to the quality of life and the economic conditions in urban areas?
- e) How about the name and the traffic sign?

