

THE SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF PEDESTRIAN MALLS IN EUROPE AND AMERICA

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Beginning in ancient times, pedestrian zones have been the mark of bustling, prosperous cities. Past civilizations banned vehicular and animal traffic from busy areas for reasons similar to those we give for banning automobiles: to reduce pollution, alleviate congestion in the interests of safety and order, and create aesthetically pleasing and peaceful urban spaces. Until the automobile era, the two types of pollution from vehicles were noise and manure—a public health hazard acutely affecting individuals and putting entire populations at risk of disease. H. B. Creswell wrote of London that the “mud,” a euphemism, collected in pools overbrimming the kerbs, splashing everywhere when stirred by the wheels of wagons, and filling the reception rooms of middle class houses with flies, and that the noise of the hammering hooves on the pavement and the rattling of metal-tired wheels and harness chains created a deafening “immensity of sound,” (Jacobs, 1961, p. 342). Additionally, there was the risk to pedestrians posed by careless and reckless coachmen as depicted in *A Tale of Two Cities*. For these reasons, cities both before as well as after the automobile age created pedestrian zones.

In the classical age, the order-minded Romans used the pedestrian zone to solve design problems throughout their empire. “All but certain essential wheeled traffic was excluded from Rome between dawn and dusk, and it is quite common to find access to the forum physically blocked to all but pedestrians,” (Ward-Perkins, 1974, p. 35). Warren (1998) writes that all streets stopped at the edge of Pompeii’s forum, the political, social, and commercial center of the city. In other areas of Pompeii, a traffic-calming measure similar to those employed in today’s *woonerf*en could be found: Large stone blocks were laid low across the roadway with pairs of narrow gaps far enough apart to allow the wheels of wagons to pass through. A secondary benefit of these was to act as stepping stones, allowing pedestrians to keep their feet dry while crossing the street. The Via Appia sometimes became so completely congested that all vehicular traffic was banned.

During the Middle Ages, Northern Italy was the most heavily urbanized area of Europe, claiming Europe’s largest and wealthiest cities. Warren (1998) states that Leonardo Da Vinci proposed a grade separation of pedestrians and vehicles, with special routes for heavily loaded carts for Milan, the powerful city-state and center of commerce on the terminus of the transalpine route to Paris.

The densities of the industrial revolution greatly exacerbated the problems stemming from city life. Warren (1998) writes that London's municipal government prohibited carts and wagons transporting merchandise on selected central streets during most daylight hours, for reasons described above. Other cities with at least partial pedestrian zones at the turn of the 20th century included New York, Chicago, Buenos Aires, and other American, German, and French cities. Warren continues, stating that the Garden Cities of the suburbs also had pedestrian zones. Their designs featured superblocks, with roads on the rim and peaceful walkways in the core.

Since the Second World War, downtowns in which automobile access was restricted retained or saw increased activity far more often than downtown areas which were not pedestrianized (Warren, p. 49). The modern pedestrian zone was born in Kassel, Germany, at the close of the Second World War. With 80% of the city destroyed, urban planners saw a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. "Kassel had always lacked a direct connection from the main railway station to the center square. Now, they could build a straight aisle through the rubble piles," (Hilt, 2005). While many cities in Germany simply blocked streets in their shopping areas, in some "this area was designed solely for this purpose, with a combination of simple architecture, fountains and green spaces, reminiscent of the postwar German's idea of a Mediterranean piazza," (Hilt).

Over the next few years, most German cities and many in other European countries built pedestrian zones. Most contain at least the principal shopping streets and some adjacent side streets, while others contain the entire medieval core. An example of this is Zürich's *Altstadt*, which is bisected by the Limmat River and ringed by regional roads. On the east bank of the river is the Niederdorf area. Its tangle of narrow medieval streets is a center of dining and entertainment. These streets are quite narrow and would not succeed as ordinary streets. On the west bank of the Limmat is the famous Bahnhofstrasse, planned and built during the years 1867-1885. It is a broad, tree-lined boulevard connecting the main railroad station to the shore of Lake Zürich. Automobiles are barred from it for half of a mile of its length, from the train station to the *Paradeplatz*, a plaza faced by the headquarters of banks which, combined, hold more than a trillion dollars in assets. Zürich's blue trams run down two tracks in the center of a street easily wide enough for automobile

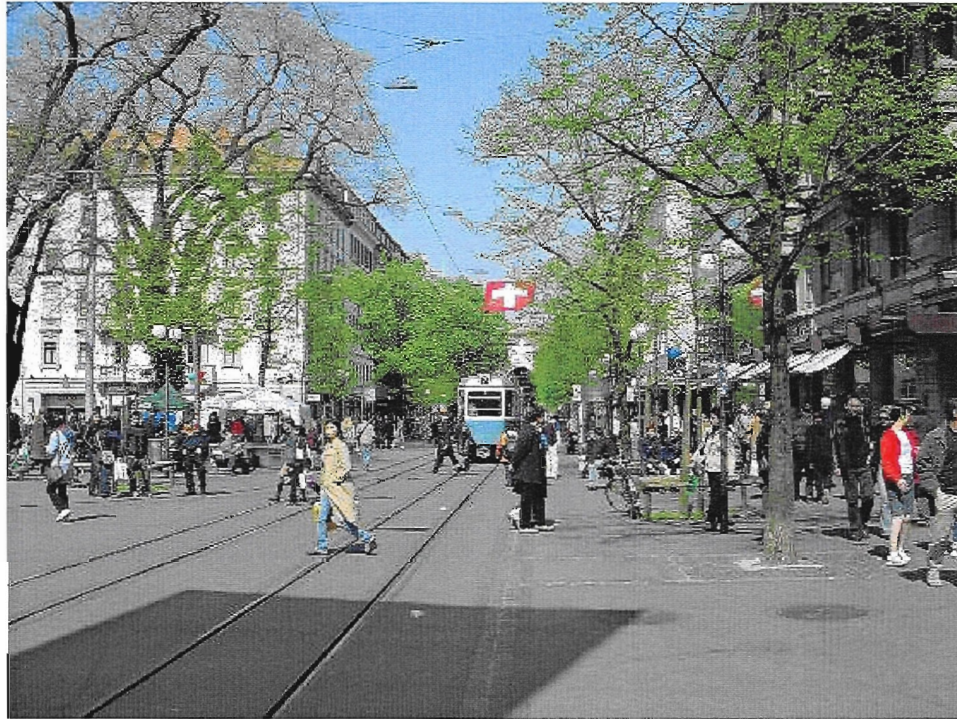


Figure 1: Bahnhofstrasse, Zürich

The Bahnhofstrasse, a broad transit mall built in a Swiss Second Empire style, is the center of finance and shopping in the city.

Photo: Daniel Stoica

traffic. Bahnhofstrasse is a busy shopping destination as well as business center.

“More extensive systems followed in France, Italy, and Spain, encompassing whole districts with public institutions and residential use in addition to the shopping street,” (Zacharias, 2001, p. 4). Forty blocks in the heart of Florence are the *zone pedonale*—Florence’s automobile-free “blue zone,” (Warren, 1998, p. 49). When first proposed, the merchants within the zone opposed the idea. After it became a financial success, merchants adjacent to the zone lobbied for its expansion to include their businesses. This story repeated itself in Germany, where the city administrators would implement *Fussgängerzonen* against the wishes of the city merchants, only to later have the merchants left out of the zones lobby for their enlargement (Warren, p. 57). Vienna’s pedestrian zone only completed portions of its planned pedestrian zone, and those portions are the parts of the city center that did not lose trade to the suburbs (Warren, p. 53).

The Dutch invented a compromise pedestrian zone for residential areas, known as the *woonerf*, that is popular throughout northern Europe. Cars and pedestrians share

the roadway. Pedestrians are the priority users—drivers in cars are merely “guests.” Automobiles are permitted at all times provided they do not exceed walking speed. This unparalleled safety is ensured through use of aggressive traffic calming techniques such as cul-de-sacs, circuitous drives, rough paving, speed bumps, and obstacles, such as trees and planters placed in the road, that force drivers to maneuver around them.

The father of the Automobile Age pedestrian mall in North America was an architect named Victor Gruen. Influenced by his native Vienna and building on his work with suburban malls and multifunctional centers, Gruen felt that automobiles were not only incompatible with urbanity and the souls of cities, but with human beings themselves. He wrote that urbanity depends on “a small-grained pattern in which certain functions may be grouped, and where vital and intimate relationships between all these groupings exist, comparable to the pattern of a tightly woven fabric,” (Gruen, 1973, p. 86). Designing urban cores for the automobile’s insatiable space demands, which he calculated as 5,500 square feet per automobile, starts a vicious circle that leads to the destruction of the city center’s power of attraction (Gruen, p. 157-163). He minced no words when he named this “the war between the city and the automobile.” While he wrote mostly about this war, he was also aware of the ways that the automobile detrimentally affects humans’ health, calling them “gas warfare” and “terrorism through noise” (Gruen, p. 164).

Working in a time that was deeply concerned with the future of the urban core, Gruen was concerned with preserving the area’s power of attraction. He posited that the urban core’s power of attraction is rooted in its concentration of exceptional and highly significant functions—those that have a high ratio of human experience to their space demands—be they residences for “those who, due to their work or interests, are potentially the most enthusiastic participators in city life,” the seat of government representation and key offices of both public and private organizations, and other functions that have an urban, regional, national, or international significance (Gruen, 1973, p. 160). However, he stated that the power of attraction based on these functions could not overcome poor environmental conditions, inadequate accessibility, and a lack of public open spaces reserved for human function. He wrote that the core must be the highest expression of environmental quality, that it should be free of noxious smells, unpleasant mechanical noise, disorder, dirt, and ugliness,

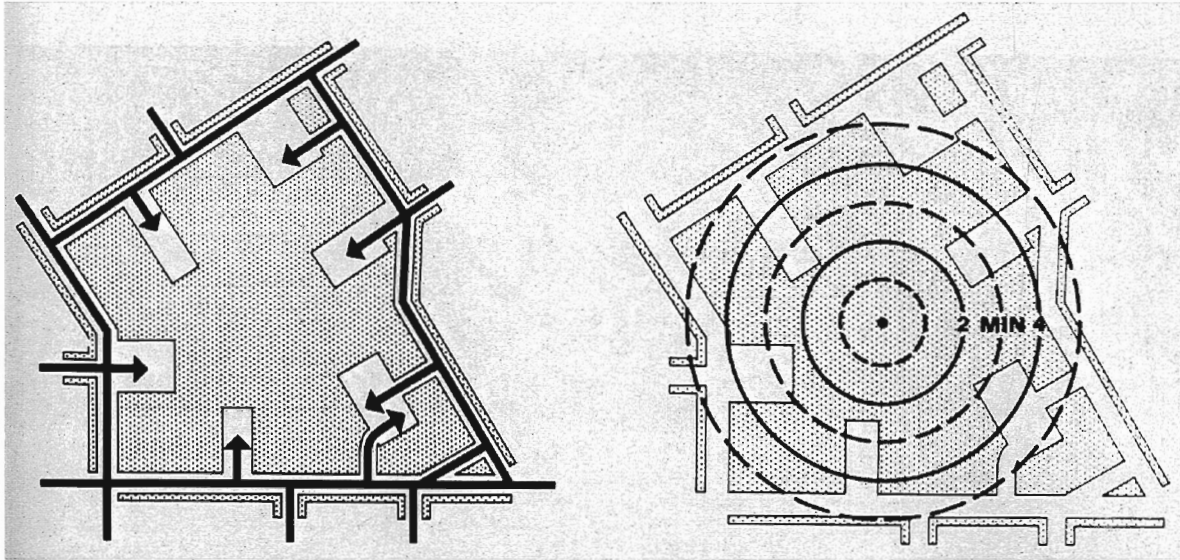


Figure 2: Schematic Diagrams of the Ft. Worth Plan

Left: The parking structures and ring freeway system.

Right: Walking time distances from the parking structures to the center of the auto-free zone.

Diagrams: Victor Gruen

that “human senses should be flattered and inspired by the impressions they receive from the man-made environment,” (Gruen, p. 161). According to Gruen, adequate accessibility in the core is technically impossible to supply with “individual travel containers.” Regarding public open spaces, he wrote that all service functions, from drainage to electricity to public transit, have been vertically separated from human functions except for individually operated vehicles, and that every moving or stationary automobile in the urban core displaces the human activity vital to the mind and soul of the city. His solutions for these problems as expressed in the young cities of North America are best demonstrated in his plans for Fort Worth, only partially implemented, and Fresno.

The plans for Fort Worth and Fresno balanced what Gruen called two types of utopia: that of implanting a new heart into the cities and that of treating the disease with “palliatives and cosmetics.” The plans were loosely based on Gruen’s plan for Vienna, in which the Ringstrasse around the medieval core became a loop road, inside of which only electric minibuses and delivery vans could drive. Both Fort Worth and Fresno were to have similar pedestrian refuges in the central area, surrounded by loop roads on which would be parking garages with enough space for all those who needed access to the center. In the Fort Worth plan, this loop road system, “the last and impenetrable defense line” (Gruen,

1973, p. 178), was that freeway which before the plan was planned to cut through the core. In the Fresno plan, the freeway loop was at a considerable distance from the core, which was bordered by an inner loop road. These inner loop roads served parking garages and bus terminals to provide suburban citizens with access to the core. The streets in these pedestrian islands within these cities were to be gardens, flower beds, fountains, and places where dances, markets, and street concerts could be held, hubs of multifunctionality rich in human experience. From the Fort Worth plan, only the freeway ring was implemented. Gruen blamed this on opposition from parking garage operators and resentment on the part of city authorities, and that the plan was so far ahead of its time. The Fresno plan was adopted in full, though "the closure of Fresno and Tulare streets was postponed, and in time, dropped altogether," and only three of the planned five parking garages were built (Clemings, 2004). Though a booming success in its honeymoon period, continuing shortages of money plagued the project, delaying or quashing such planned improvements as downtown apartment towers and office space as well as the planned enlargement of the mall area (Clemings). Gruen also cited "schizophrenic" government actions that sited federally-funded urban functions outside of the core and as early as two years after completion of the downtown pedestrian mall approved plans for an indoor shopping mall on the outskirts of the city (Clemings).

In the meantime, planners and downtown merchant associations in cities across the continent found inspiration in Gruen plans. Streets were closed to cars in more than 200 downtowns nationwide (Warren, 1998, p. 64), beginning in 1959 in Kalamazoo. Kennedy Smith of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center estimates that, by 2002, about 30 remained closed to traffic (Branaugh, 2002). Kalamazoo reopened a lane of traffic and some parking in its famous mall, and Fresno is planning to do the same. Why did so many of these pedestrian malls fail that the idea is "generally considered to be a failed experiment in U.S. city planning" (Flisram, 2000), and what made the few success stories possible? Unsurprisingly, there are many answers to this question and many planners and authors endeavoring to answer it.

A feature of the Gruen plans that helped ensure their failure was their encirclement of the core by limited access loop roads. In his Vienna plan, the model for his subsequent



Figure 3: Bird's-eye view of the Ft. Worth revitalization project

The belt of freeways sharply defines the revitalized downtown and acts as an impenetrable barrier to those living in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Photo: Victor Gruen

renewal plans, this “impenetrable defense line” was to be a surface street. In the United States, these loop roads were superhighways around the intended business, government, and retail core. These loops severed the connection between the neighborhoods whose everyday needs could have been served by businesses in the retail core. The loops also created sharply-defined transition zones within which redlining and disinvestment took place, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of urban decay. Larry Ford writes that another reason that the Gruen plans specifically failed to revitalize downtowns was that they “skirt[ed] around the issues of sense of place and character of the physical landscape,” (Ford, 2003, p. 68), epitomized by the Fort Worth plan having “as little to do with the city’s location on the cowboy frontier of Texas as possible,” (Ford, p. 68). Jacobs (1961) wrote that, as implemented, Gruen plans and imitations of those plans were “dinky, timid designs for isolating a few shopping streets in the fashion of suburban shopping malls,” (Jacobs 1961 p. 344), limited to “bench installing and shrub planting,” rather than an intensification of complexity and use in the core. A more fundamental problem pointed out by Jacobs was

that Gruen's plans were only practical presupposing a great reduction in the number of private automobiles bringing people to the urban core. Even Fort Worth's 60,000 parking spaces in the new garages would not be sufficient for the planned intensity of use in the core. Gruen made a leap of faith when he assumed that planned express buses serving the suburbs would absorb "a far higher ratio of downtown users [than was then] served by public transportation," (Jacobs, p. 345). As implemented, his plans failed to take this measure, limiting the intensity of use in the core to the number of parking spaces built on the ring road. Had it been possible to increase the intensity of use in the core under these conditions, "it would have meant converting the entire downtown to garages and rendering the ring road inadequate for access," (Jacobs, p. 345).

One trait that most authors agree caused pedestrian zones to fail is being too large. William Whyte (1988) said that the principal reason pedestrian malls fail is too much space for too little activity. Without cars, the broad rights of way in Western cities are a vacuum that can't be filled by fountains, sculptures, and lawns. "The breadth of the area is so great that one side of the street is out of impulse distance from the other. Sometimes you can't even read the lettering on the stores on the other side," (Whyte, p. 312). Most pedestrian malls are also far too long, given the high spirits surrounding their implementation. Whyte found that many cities discovered that three blocks is a good limit for length of pedestrian malls. Excessive length also spreads the stores that remain downtown over a wide range. "Stores thrive best when they are cheek by jowl... The loss of stores was bad enough, but worse was the break in continuity," (Whyte, p. 321). Many downtowns have enough stores to create a small, lively center, but the stores are spread out over too long a street, creating a feeling of bleakness. The problem of excessive length is not only a problem of excessive space, but one of perceived accessibility. Potential retail lessees are wary of siting their businesses in the middle of these long malls for fear that their customers would be unwilling to haul merchandise that far. In an article in the New York Times about the reopening to cars of Poughkeepsie's pedestrian mall, a bicycle store owner said that he "wanted to be in the center of the city, but not stuck in the middle of the mall. 'I need to be in a free-standing structure... People don't want to shlep a broken bike through a mall.'"

Jacobs (1961) lists too much space as one of the design flaws deemed inherent

to pedestrian malls. Pedestrians want to be where there is action, so they crowd against the storefronts, leaving the former domain of the automobile mostly empty. The habit is so ingrained that, even on Disneyland's Main Street USA, the only time people choose to stroll down the main roadway is when they join the trolley or the vehicles in the parades. Even in enclosed shopping malls, people will walk close to the storefronts, forsaking the center of the "street" unless there is something there to see. According to Jacobs, the main benefit of the pedestrian mall is that pedestrians no longer risk their lives to jaywalk—in a pedestrian mall, they may cross at any time something on the far side catches their fancy or to avoid an obstruction. However, Jacobs concludes that this principal benefit can be obtained without segregating traffic by simply keeping cars from dominating the space.

Another compelling suggestion is that the associations formed to see to the construction of the pedestrian malls did not continue to promote and manage the downtown malls after the grand opening celebrations. According to Project for Public Spaces (1984), the builders of pedestrian malls believed that design improvements to make downtown public spaces resemble as closely as possible suburban shopping centers was downtown revitalization. They say that the downtown associations would have been seen a better return on mimicking the management and promotional programs of the privately-owned suburban centers. What makes the suburban center so attractive, they say, is its ability to cherry-pick tenants and place them within the center where they would best compliment the stores already extant. Whyte (1988) agrees, saying, "What [cities] should be copying is the centralized managements of [shopping malls]: their ability to coordinate tenant selection, promotion, leasing, and market research," (Whyte, p. 323). He emphasizes that the key to drawing people downtown is variety of stores—specialty stores in particular, especially those, such as men's clothiers and camera stores, at which shopping malls do not excel. To Whyte, this managed outreach is one of the most important parts to creating a successful downtown. Other activities that the management organizations of successful pedestrian malls orchestrate are promotional activities like concerts, farmers' markets, and late-night sales events, and to see to maintenance above and beyond that required for streets in ordinary neighborhoods. Promotional events set these outdoor public spaces apart from the sterile indoor shopping malls. Cities are reluctant to spend the extra money to maintain the



Figure 4: Santa Monica Mall

Shoppers quickly lost interest in Santa Monica Mall after the promotional events celebrating its grand opening came to a close.

Photo: McGuigan

amenities concentrated in pedestrian malls, despite intense use to which pedestrian malls are subject. The Santa Monica Mall, built on the recommendation of a report by Victor Gruen, opened in 1965 and began to decline almost immediately thereafter. In McGuigan (2003), Herb Katz blames the deterioration of the Santa Monica Mall on the poor ambiance—the lack of entertainment and anything to build the feeling of community. Santa Monica city council member Bob Holbrook specified that, because there was no outdoor dining or entertainment, there was no reason to go downtown after dark (McGuigan). After a renovation, this failed pedestrian mall would go on to become the busy 3rd Street Promenade.

It is difficult to organize this level of management for a city neighborhood with its buildings owned by many different landlords and its public rights of way. A unit of general government may not be able to give special assistance to one group of commercial interests based on location because of either laws or lobbying from other groups in the city. “Downtown Associations” are typically voluntary and self-taxing, so they are usually limited to funding minor maintenance and improvements. One way of increasing the efficacy of management of marketing and continuity is to include it in neighborhood design. Specific plans sometimes verge into management when the city retains control over developments within the plan. Another way is for the association to petition the city council to form a Business Improvement District. San Jose, California, assesses all business license holders within its downtown BID an annual fee based on the number of employees and type of business. This fund is managed by the San Jose Downtown Association, which uses the money for physical maintenance and aesthetic improvements, hosting entertainment and activities, and promotion of the area to potential businesses, residents, and visitors (BID questions and answers).

There are other failings of pedestrian malls cited in the literature. One suggestion is that slow traffic and street parking added to the feeling of liveliness and character of the street (Ford, 2003). Another is that the management of privately-held indoor malls can generate publicity and novelty more easily than city governments. In the public's eye, the downtown malls became "a tired piece of urban design fashion whose novelty had long worn thin. Worst still was the reputation these spaces were earning throughout the country as being magnets for the urban underclass—a situation no doubt made worse by the high number of social service agencies and thrift stores that took up residence on the malls when no one else would," (Flisram, 2000). Another is the lack of a captive audience, be it office workers or residents (Flisram). The anchors of many malls, the locally-owned department stores, often could not compete with the larger chains. Robertson (1990) cites the poor aesthetics of the structures, including blank walls and new modernist boxes clashing with Victorian structures as a reason for a St. Cloud's Mall Germain's decline, and pointed to the atrocious maintenance of Providence's Westminster Mall. Whyte focuses on the design of public spaces as they relate to physical comfort and the creation of stimulating environments for socialization. He cites many examples of thoughtlessly located and designed amenities, including ledges impossible to sit on to keep transients away, trash cans that don't accept trash, benches placed where nobody wants to sit, "too much unified signage, too many award-winning light standards—too much good taste in general, or the pretension of it, and since many designers have the same good taste, the result is a bland conformity," (Whyte, p. 102).

Perhaps these shopping streets converted to pedestrian malls would have failed to compete with suburban shopping centers even had they not been converted. Whyte (1988) wrote that "one regional shopping mall too many," (p. 312) could be all it takes to keep a pedestrian mall from succeeding. Fresno's mall was successful for over ten years until it was "overwhelmed by broader trends... [and started] again losing shoppers to the suburbs," (Clemings, 2004). In an interview with Clemings, city Development Director Nick Yovino opined said, "You can say that the Gruen plan was too grandiose, you can say there wasn't enough housing implementation, but I think what really happened was we just grew away from ourselves." As happened in cities throughout the country, shoppers stopped using the

downtown as they moved farther away from the city's core.

In the period before the decline of America's downtowns, the department store was the king of downtown retailing. Most pedestrian malls were built to use these giant stores as anchors, as the retail districts in cities were defined as the area around the two or three locally-owned major department stores. Ford (2003) wrote that as these huge stores became self-contained and built parking garages, people spent more and more of their shopping day in them and neglected the surrounding retail districts. In most cities, these districts lost business and became seedy. Banks redlined them, and governments disinvested in the infrastructure and slated them for urban renewal. These stores, upon which the downtown malls depended for activity, began to close as they lost to competition from national chain department stores. "Decisions to close or revitalize stores were made elsewhere, on the basis of market research data, and civic loyalty seldom mattered. Most people, it seemed, would never be willing to shop where they had to pay to park," (Ford, p. 164). Downtown retailing collapsed without these hubs, whether or not the city had a pedestrian mall.

Warren (1998) named four exogenous reasons that pedestrian malls have failed in the United States. First, the area's dominant industries and general economic health may have declined, resulting in less money entering and circulating in the local economy. Second, people may have left decaying regions for more promising ones. Warren's third reason is that pedestrian malls may have been initiated too late to have had any effect. The last is that the area may have been lacking essential elements such as the already good health of the shopping area, a customer base consisting of a sufficient critical mass of residents or workers, effective publicity, or integrated transit. In the case of Kalamazoo, the city's mall was prosperous until the 1980's while it enjoyed the foundation of success such as a large population of captive users (including residents and community college students), strong anchors, and a robust economy. "By the end of the 1980's, however, it seemed that the Mall, as in most other cities, had become an anachronism; a tired piece of urban design fashion whose novelty had long worn thin," (Flisram, 2000). Johnson (2005) wrote that at the same time, Kalamazoo was in undergoing economic turmoil, losing not only manufacturing jobs but also hundreds of high-paying executive positions. Ford (2003) noted that cities built

pedestrian malls at the same time that they cleared the surrounding housing and retail areas that might have complemented the malls. In fact, during the 1970's, the time during which most of literature places the decline of the pedestrian malls, downtown populations declined by 10% nationwide, 14.8% in the Midwest, and 26% in the South (Birch, 2005). Without a diverse customer base of residents, students, and the daily torrent of office workers, store closures and vacancies in the city are inevitable, mall or no mall.

Pedestrian malls cannot rescue failing downtowns, but, appropriately located, scaled, and supported, they can create vibrant and truly public spaces that act as destination or festival retail areas of the post-modern downtown. Pedestrian streets have prospered in urban areas as large as the Los Angeles region or as small as Boulder, Colorado, where they serve both local users and tourists. Additionally, other cities, like Denver, Santa Cruz, and Rapperswil, Switzerland, have had success using other types of pedestrian-priority streets.

Santa Monica's 3rd Street Promenade is an ideal example of a pedestrian street. It began its life as the Santa Monica Mall, a typical pedestrian mall of the 1960's. The city government commissioned Victor Gruen Associates to study the problem of declining activity on their main shopping street. In the report, he recommended that the city build the mall and parking structures to compliment it. It featured landscaping, reflecting pools, some nearby parking structures, no management or promotion, and no way to compete with the shopping malls in the surrounding area. By 1974, a shopping mall had opened on its southern end, sucking away what life remained in the outdoor mall (McGuigan, 2003). In the 1980's, planners, designers, and stakeholders met to determine what should be done to turn the mall around. What would become the 3rd Street Promenade had its roots in the ambitious plan of providing potential shoppers with "something to eat, something to see, and somewhere to go," (McGuigan). Rather than concentrating on a retail mix to compete head-to-head with the indoor malls, the city took a different tack and concentrating on entertainment. The city updated the mall's aesthetics, wooed outdoor eateries, and drew movie theaters by banning their construction anywhere else in the city. The movie theaters were the key to sustaining

the Promenade.¹ The Promenade is now “viewed as Santa Monica’s ‘outdoor living room,’” (McGuigan) thanks to the continuing active management of the area.

Pearl Street Mall in Boulder, Colorado, is a bustling district with a mix of uses and a lively street life. City and county government offices are on the mall, providing the mall with a base of customers. Also contributing to this base are private offices, a new residential project, and the University of Colorado, whose 17,000 students are a ten minute walk away. An attraction unique to the Pearl Street Mall is the “Church Row,” a group of churches built at the turn of the 20th Century (Underhill, 2002) that empty crowds of customers onto the mall every Sunday morning. Key to the site’s aesthetic attraction are the \$2 million budget that goes towards programming, maintenance, and marketing, and the stunning views of the Flatiron mountains (Branough, 2002). The mall also recently underwent a design update to stay novel and competitive with other shopping and entertainment districts (Underhill). The retail mix is also specialized, emphasizing specialty shopping, tourism, and entertainment. Additionally, a very high percentage of citizens use alternative transportation to get to work, including nearly half of the employees working along the mall. Gruen assumed this would be the case when making his plans.

A mere 30 miles from the Pearl Street Mall is Denver’s 16th Street Mall. Its designers call it a “Transitway Mall,” (Pei, Cobb, Freed & Partners). Electric shuttle buses run along two one-lane road surfaces between the wide sidewalks and the tree-lined central area, traversing the mall’s sixteen blocks and connecting two bus terminals on either end of the mall. Its extreme length is not detrimental as one would expect; in fact, “the mall does not seem overly long when walking it; the design features and layout contribute to an interesting and enjoyable walk,” (Robertson, 1990). Every weekday, 60,000 people ride these free shuttles (Downtown Denver Partnership), and during rush hour, the shuttles arrive every 70 seconds (Robertson). In 1990, 90,000 people per day used the mall to access the State Capitol, office towers, specialty and festival retailing, entertainment, and nearly all of Denver’s 5,300 hotel rooms (Downtown Denver Partnership). Developers and national chain retailers and restaurateurs have continued to invest in the mall, increasing the retail

¹ The 3rd Street Promenade originally had a temporary single lane of one-way traffic because the stakeholders were unsure of its success. After only a week, the lane was closed because there were so many pedestrians that driving was impossible.

space dramatically. Street vendors are encouraged by the management, a progressive step that contributes to the vitality of the street. Another improvement taken from the pages of William Whyte was to provide movable chairs (Robertson).

Though downtown Santa Cruz wasn't facing particularly strong competition from suburban shopping centers, the city council commissioned its design with the intention of creating "a more attractive and prosperous downtown retail center with a parklike community gathering place," (Robertson, 1990, p. 258). The Pacific Garden Mall on Pacific Street is a shared street that functions as both a retail and social center. Wide sidewalks share the lushly planted six blocks with a one-way, one lane street and limited on-street parking. Extensive traffic calming features on the mall help ensure pedestrian safety. Allowing automobiles allows the drivers to become familiar with stores on the entire length of the mall, and "illusion of available parking" encourages activity on the mall and leads drivers to the parking structures nearby. UCSC supplies a great number of people who are not averse to walking. While many buildings were damaged in the Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989, the mall survived and attracted new construction to replace what was lost. The mall's very success as a social gathering place is sometimes cited as its greatest flaw: Until recent heavy enforcement of laws forbidding most loitering, sitting, and panhandling, the downtown was popular amongst undesirables such as "teenage punk rockers" and "deadheads' from San Francisco," (Robertson, p. 260).

While many of the original German pedestrian downtowns are beginning to suffer the effects of economic downturn and the introduction of suburban discount shopping centers (Hilt, 2005), Rapperswil's new pedestrian core grows more and more popular. Rapperswil, Sankt Gallen, is a small city on Lake Zurich in Switzerland. It is popular for day and weekend tourism and has a dense medieval old town on the shore, extending onto a small peninsula. Since 1996, the *Altstadt* in Rapperswil has been a *Parkierungsfreizone*, or parking-free zone. This means that the entire core has no parking spaces and limits access to residents, merchants, and hotel guests for loading and unloading, with the intention of reducing through traffic on its narrow streets. Its perimeter road—a regional highway, parking garages, public transit, and mix of uses make it similar to Victor Gruen's ideal for the urban core. Its small scale ensures its walkability and continuity of the storefronts. The



Figure 5: Public garages surrounding Rapperswil SG's medieval core

Rapperswil's *Altstadt* area, the peninsula to the left of the map, is a pedestrian-priority area ringed on its inland sides by regional roads (in yellow). The parking removed from the core was replaced by five times as many spaces in garages either adjacent to the zone or within a short walk.

Map: Rapperswil City Government

key to the *parkierungsfrei* plan was to replace the 400 parking spaces in the medieval core with 2000 in the new perimeter parking garages (Martin Klöti, personal communication, June 24, 2005). The elimination of the 400 surface parking spaces allowed the reclamation of some beautiful and valuable public space, especially the *Hauptplatz*, or main square, *Fischmarktplatz*, or fish market square, and the *Seequai*, a tree-lined walk along the lake-front. A restaurant wishing to take advantage of this outdoor space for seating must rent the ground from the town and submit its furniture to design review—no umbrellas with advertising allowed. Most restaurants use simple white outdoor furniture, but others use cushioned lounge seating to bring the indoors outside. One of many thoughtful features is the public art that acts as a traffic calming device in the *Hauptplatz*. Drivers must steer between two halves of a periodically-changing word written in 6 foot tall letters. Planners and merchant promoters take advantage of Switzerland's love of summer festivals by scheduling



Figure 6: Hauptplatz, Rapperswil SG on a Saturday mid-morning

Rapperswil's parking-free main square was formerly a parking lot. Note the faded lines that used to delineate parking stalls. The restaurants do brisk business at lunch and dinner-time. In the background one can see the traffic-calming letters spell out *Musikstadt*.

Photo: Jeff Rosen

several each season, from jazz to a carnival to the local tech college's rock festival. Even the patronage of Europeans, whose love of strolling and dense towns is supposedly ingrained, cannot be taken for granted by the stakeholders of urban cores if they wish to maintain their vitality and prosperity.

From 1959 until the end of the 1970's, downtown boosters and civic governments believed that the only way to compete with the new enclosed suburban shopping malls was to mimic their design as closely as possible. Modernist urban designers believed that the ills of the city could only be cured through design by separating uses, especially removing the pedestrian from the dangerous, dirty street. In the past 50 years, we've found that the act of designing American shopping streets to mimic the physical form of streets in European medieval towns will not undo the damage to the form of the urban core caused by several generations of designing for the automobile and modernist separation of uses—it will not change American habits of living, working, and moving formed over those generations. We've learned that replacing automobile traffic on a street with planters and reflecting

pools cannot save a dying downtown, and that leaving well-enough alone in a downtown cannot compete with the sophisticated promotion and management of privately owned shopping centers—especially ones closer to the customer and surrounded with free parking. However, pedestrian malls can be a vital part of a prosperous, lively downtown. They serve as landmarks, retain shoppers seeking a specific item, provide an attractive environment for browsers, and connect the shopping areas on opposite sides of the street. They serve as a catalyst to unite downtown interests. More importantly, pedestrian malls serve important functions: They are green oases in the urban environment in which people can sit without buying anything. They are truly public places in the busiest part of town, unlike shopping centers. In privately-held centers, security often harasses, drives off, and profiles socializers, demonstrators, loiterers, people-watchers, the poor, and minorities. Successful pedestrian malls share with suburban shopping centers the trait of proactive management. Novelty, promotion, activities, and a fitting mix of stores in a compact, contiguous area are what this management should work toward to generate vitality in the mall. Well-implemented pedestrian malls can be the centerpieces of post-modern downtowns that compete with suburban areas by offering what can only be found in the urban core.

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