

The Tramway in French Cities: Complication of Public Spaces and Complexity of the Design Process

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Abstract : The redeployment of tram networks in French cities has considerably modified public spaces and the way citizens use them. Above and beyond the image that trams have of contributing to the sustainable urban development, the question of safety for users in these spaces has not been studied much. This study is based on an analysis of use of public spaces laid out for trams, from the standpoint of legibility and safety concerns. The study also examines to what extent the complexity of the design process, with many interactions between numerous and varied players in this process has a role in the genesis of these problems. This work is mainly based on the analysis of links between the uses of these re-designed public spaces (through observations, interviews of users and accident studies) and the analysis of the design conditions and processes of the projects studied (mainly based on interviews with the actors of these projects). Practical analyses were based three points of view: that of the planner, that of the user (based on observations and interviews) and that of the road safety expert. The cities of Montpellier, Marseille and Nice are the three fields of study on which the demonstration of this thesis is based. On part, the results of this study allow showing that the insertion of tram poses some problems complication of public areas of French cities. These complications related to the restructuring of public spaces for the tram, create difficulties of use and safety concerns. On the other hand, interviews depth analyses, fully transcribed, have led us to develop particular dysfunction scenarios in the design process. These elements lead to question the way the legibility and safety of these new forms of public spaces are taken into account. Then, an in-depth analysis of the design processes of public spaces with trams systems would also be a way of better understanding the choices made, the compromises accepted, and the conflicts and constraints at work, weighing on the layout of these spaces. The results presented concerning the impact that spaces laid out for trams have on the difficulty of use, suggest different possibilities for improving the way in which safety for all users is taken into account in designing public spaces.

Keywords : public spaces, road layout, users, design process of urban projects

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