TOMORROW, EVERYBODY WALKS!

Having long ago been displaced by cars and public transport, walking is making a gradual come-back as a means of urban transport. Public transit operators and local authorities are even integrating walking into their development planning. Insights from researcher Sonia Lavadinho.

A s obvious mode of transport when it comes to taking a stroll, walking as a means of moving about the city is not part of our normal routine. The constraints are many, including distances between locations, pedestrian hazards and a lack of clear links to other modes of transport. Despite these obstacles, a revival in urban walking has been underway over the past decade. In the United States and Europe, authorities in numerous cities are looking for ways to achieve greater coherence between various types of circulation, with walking as a key link in multi-modality. Cities like Geneva, Strasbourg and Stockholm have already put forth ambitious pedestrian plans.

Walkers and operators are reclaiming the city differently

“A walkable city is more than just wider sidewalks and more pedestrian crossings,” explains researcher Sonia Lavadinho. Of course, comfort and safety are pre-requisites but, above all, the journey has to be attractive. Indeed, “nothing is worse than a monotonous walk.” Providing breathing space, creating a surprise and enabling people to meet are some of the essential rules for encouraging the return to walking. “The challenge, therefore, is to go beyond simple answers and seek to stimulate a sense of discovery.”

Operators have a particular interest in the subject and are directly involved in these discussions. Better links between bus, tram or train stops and centers of human activity can create a significant increase in use of public transport by occasional customers – who thus become a new marking target. A more comprehensive approach to the transportation network and a clearer understanding of its links can provide pedestrians with more freedom to combine modes of transport, a winning solution for everyone.

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