

ADAPTIVE URBANISM. RETHINKING THE LAND DEDICATED TO PARKING

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It is not easy to access reliable statistics, but anyone who takes a little in-depth look at the city and the land occupation model will suspect that we dedicate a large part of the available land to paving it for a **unique and inconstant use** to deposit those appliances called cars. As an approximate figure, in some cities around a third of the metropolitan grids are occupied by spaces dedicated to parking. This trend, in any case, can vary considerably depending on the type of city we are dealing with, but it can be used as a reference to understand the high opportunity cost of occupying the scarce urban space to dedicate it to parking space. It is not necessary to go to the most extreme cases to understand that the availability of parking space has been a priority in the spatial organization of the city, becoming almost a kind of right and a constant request to the authorities.

Does it make sense how we have thought and designed parking policies?



Picture Courtesy: Institut für Verkehrsplanung und Verkehrstechnik, TU Wien

A few weeks ago, [Roger Senserrich](#) at [Car parks, traffic jams and prices](#) offered some clues about the economic treatment of urban mobility and its physical reflection in the form of traffic jams and parking policies, both with a significant economic burden. An adequate **price** policy is an obvious resource that the authorities have at their disposal to organize mobility, but the lack of daring and the collective subconscious that parking is free are a great obstacle to creating another way of understanding urban mobility. But, in addition to the pricing policy, intelligent **regulation** is needed and an evident improvement in the **design** of these spaces ([European cities getting smarter about parking policy](#)). [Christopher Mims](#) explains [here](#) some reasons why the traditional method of managing parking supply policies is a blunder that we are [subsidizing](#) (nothing is free, heat island effect, occupation of valuable land, etc.)

Below are some illustrative and extreme examples of the space that these surfaces can occupy both in the center and on the outskirts of some of the most prototypical cities:

[ATLANTA](#)



[HOLLYWOOD](#)



[HOUSTON](#)



[LOS ANGELES](#)

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They are large commercial areas on the outskirts with large car parks on the surface designed to accommodate the maximum number of customers at peak times (which means that most of the time they are underused), car parks around the [corporate headquarters](#) of the large companies on the outskirts of cities or industrial and technology parks and, also, the margins of most city roads

for parallel and battery parking. As one of the most unique facts about the city today, [Eran Ben-Joseph](#) has published a magnificent, very detailed analysis of the impact of this reality and the transformation potential that they could have from **urban design** to provide them with alternative uses and less impact social and environmental. [Rethinking a lot. The design and culture of parking](#) is a proposal to deactivate what aptly calls the "parking culture".

The idea of rethinking parking has hardly caught on in **surface parking**, unlike **underground parking**, which has indeed led to significant improvements, either **technological** (little by little, these types of car parks are incorporating automation systems to indicate the number of available spaces and guide the customer in some way), or **design** (for example, the car park of the [Hotel Puerta América in Madrid](#) (PDF), by [Teresa Sapey](#) , which at the time had a lot of media impact).

The question is whether these spaces can be designed in a more attractive and aesthetic way, whether environmental considerations can be included in their design and operating dynamics, and whether they can accommodate other uses other than the simple car container. Given that they take up so much space and have so many implications for our perception of the quality of space in the city, despite being such a passive element and to which we pay so little attention (in fact, we only "see" it in that 5 % of time on average that our cars are actually running), we need to think beyond zoning, ratios and minimum design requirements, the three legs through which we think about these spaces. The regulation of vehicle parking on public roads is, in fact, a constant in history, and the author rescues the first vestiges in Assyria and in the time of the Roman Empire, but it was not until the arrival of the private combustion automobile and its extension since the beginning of the 20th century when the first cities began to systematize exclusive parking areas (*parking lots*) and, later, with the arrival of the *urban sprawl*, its use as a claim in the suburbanization of the city.

Strategies for a better spatial integration of these spaces in the [continuum of the city](#) (instead of barriers or discontinuities), conditioning and equipment for recreational use (for example, in the parking lots of large commercial surfaces or sports stadiums), its flexibility for shared use of parking and public squares , the use of new materials instead of simple asphalt, admitting its use as spaces for cultural exhibitions, use as solar farms on its roofs, its temporary claim in the style of the [Park\(ing\) Day](#) and or similar initiatives,... are some of the [alternatives](#) that the author proposes. It is an approach that also fits with the idea of [adaptive urbanism](#). If we need to fully activate all tangible and intangible resources and capacities, the considerable area dedicated to parking is one of the **liabilities** that we could begin to make available with little effort in many cases and, nevertheless, many social benefits in the form of activation and maximum use of the city for alternative uses and to create new conditions of possibility in the use and enjoyment of the city.

There are no comments yet.