



**To:** Place Directorate

**From:** Adrian Davis

**Date:** 26/01/2015

**Subject:** Essential Evidence on a page: No 130 Democratic Streets

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Top line: Democratic streets, as a concept is not new. It can be defined as one where streets are well used and invite direct participation, provide opportunities for discovery and adventure, and that are locally controlled and broadly accessible.

Streets are an important part of the landscape of everyday life. People rely on them for such daily activities as travel, shopping, and interactions with friends and relatives. Much social life and learning occurs along streets. From the 1960s empirical research, historical analysis, and some demonstration projects began to show that good streets are democratic streets – streets that have meaning for people, invite access for all, encourage use and participation, are loved, and are well cared for by their users.<sup>1</sup> These basic qualities have increasingly been removed from many towns, cities and neighbourhoods across the developed and developing world.

Street democracy declined in large part with the rise of motorised transport, then its speed and eventually by the increasing dominance of the motor car. Not only did the car provide the means for people to move away from heavily trafficked streets to the suburbs, it also took people away from direct involvement with the streets themselves. In contrast the concept of the democratic street is grounded in the notion of public use. It recognises streets as playing larger social, economic, and ecological roles in towns and cities. A democratic street is one that reflects the history as well as the social and economic diversity of the larger neighbourhood and city. Friendly to pedestrians and livable for residents, it also reflects social justice, economic health, and ecological vitality. The democratic street does not exclude the motor vehicle user but provides spaces for vehicles by providing an equitable balance with other street users, namely pedestrians and cyclists. It stresses safety and comfort but also emphasises the access of different kinds of people.

Jane Jacobs, one of the early advocates of democratic streets, made planners aware that the “eyes on the street” were important in creating a sense of place and security in neighbourhoods.<sup>2</sup> Healthy streets are used by different people for a variety of activities yet are often dominated by one function. Resident satisfaction with neighbourhood streets has been found to be dependent in large part on motor traffic volume and speed. The less motor traffic the higher the resident satisfaction. Greater social contact has been found among residents with less motor traffic.<sup>3</sup> The street should be a comfortable setting whereby learning by children, teens, and the elderly alike can take place naturally. The spaces near the home environment are especially important for children. Safe and easy access to nearby street spaces and parks continues to be a major factor in residential satisfaction, and lack of safe and easy access reduces children’s independent mobility and physical activity time. The experience and interpretation of the street by all ages is critical to the continued education and development of an urban society.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, M. *The making of democratic streets*, 1991 in Moudon, A. (Ed) *Public Streets for Public Use*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobs, J. 1961 *The death and life of great American cities*, New York: Vintage.

<sup>3</sup> Appleyard, D., Lintell, M. 1972 The environmental quality of city streets: The Residents’ Viewpoint, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 38:84-101.