How Sustainable Urban Mobility, Public Space and Architectural Heritage Can Lead to a Healthier Urban Environment in Xi’An

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1. Context/Background

This special session about the City of Xi’An (China) will introduce how the challenges of historical heritage conservation facing rapid urban development create complex issues in terms of public transport infrastructure, urban mobility issues and traffic congestion.

In the light of the recent Covid-19 pandemic, the session will identify how Asian megacities like Xi’An have implemented adapted approaches to human movement and public health.

This session will be part of the new ISOCARP Community of Practice (CoP) on urban mobility and its East Asia chapter.

2. Short Description of the session

Targeted strategies and solutions for the City of Xi’An will be presented by three authors from China and Belgium. The presentations will show how to promote balance between urban livability, heritage conservation, walkability and healthy mobility in the context of an emerging metropolis in Asia with 6000 years of History like Xi’An. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the response of the City of Xi’An will be illustrated from the angle of public space and public transport infrastructure.

3. Objectives of the session

- To illustrate how to promote balance between heritage conservation and sustainable transportation for megacities such as Xi’An
- To introduce some positive experience of responses to Covid-19 pandemic in public transport.
- To introduce a few perspectives on how healthy urban mobility can be achieved at the city level and at the street level.

4. Format of the session

The session will consist of one contextual introduction of the City in Xi’An and its urban mobility challenges, the introduction of the ISOCARP CoP Urban Mobility, followed by the 3 presentations using PPT support.
5. Programme/Agenda

The session will consist on one introductive presentation of the research topic, followed by 3 presentations described below. In the context of the covid-19 pandemic, each topic addressed about mobility and public space in Xi’An will be illustrated with the response of the City to the Covid issue and how it has impacted Xi’An citizens daily life.

1. *Introduction (City of Xi’An; ISOCARP CoP Urban Mobility) – 5 min.*

2. *Presentation of Mr Li Qi:*

   *The Sustainable Mobility Strategy of the City of Xi’An and its Recent Transport Improvement Plan*
   – 15 min.

3. *Presentation of Mr Zhu Kai:*

   *Making People-friendly Historical Districts in Xi’An: a Holistic Improvement of their Urban Functions and Mobility Systems*
   – 10 min.

4. *Presentation of Mr Sebastien Goethals:*

   *Achieving a Healthier Urban Mobility through Street Design Transition and Digitization*
   – 10 min.

5. *Conclusion – 5 min.*

Xi’An is one of the largest cities of China today and the former capital – Chang’An – of one of the four ancient civilizations in the world. It has a long history of 6,000 years and a rich cultural heritage, as it was once the capital of 13 dynasties in ancient China and the first city in History to have reached more than one million people. Today, Xi’an has emerged as a modern metropolis, at the heart of Shaanxi Province, and is one of the 9 most important and largest cities of the country.

Rapid demographic growth and economic development have made traffic congestion one of the main obstacles of the quality of life in Xi’An, affecting its 12 million citizens.

However, the unique historical and architectural heritage of Xi’An provides to the city a strong identity in China and is a major resource in modern urbanism as public spaces, parks, neighborhoods, major roads and transport systems can benefit from the city’s History.

This session aims to explore the links to be made between sustainable urban mobility and transport, a unique historical heritage, modern public spaces and a better livability for Xi’An population.

How can the quality of a transport system form a winning synergy with the protection of historical and cultural heritage? The question is a major topic of interest for the local authorities of the Municipality of Xi’an.
Three original causes of traffic congestion have been identified in Xi’an:

- The rapid urbanization and motorization conflicts with the slow growth of the public transport network development, comparatively with the size of the city.
- The rapid spatial growth of Xi’an influences the expansion of the transport networks and the constant increase of commuting distances.
- The landscape of the city and new discoveries of ruins related to Xi’an History are restricting the development of the transportation network, creating therefore multiple bottleneck areas and related congestion.

Mr Li Qi (director of Xi’an Urban Planning Institute) and Mr Zhu Kai (transport planning expert, Xi’an Urban Planning Institute) will introduce the related challenges identified in Xi’an and their four strategies to improve urban mobility in a more sustainable way:

- Encourage a greener and healthier mobility
- Optimize the road network for a better use
- Manage car traffic demand with appropriate parking policies
- Innovate in intelligent traffic management methods

They will illustrate those strategies with specific case studies in Xi’an linking public space, mobility and heritage conservation.

Sebastien Goethals (Citilinks / ISOCARP) will then introduce a few perspectives on how healthy urban mobility can be achieved at the city level and at the street level.

He will illustrate how urban environment and street design can be enhanced for more walkability and connectivity between multiple transport modes: public transport, walking, cycling, car-sharing, ride-hailing. The recent impacts of the pandemic will be analyzed through the prism of street use improvement.

The potential impacts of the current transition of the transport sector (decarbonation, digitization, sharing, automation) will be illustrated with international references.

He will demonstrate then how smart intermodality and parking management can be approached to increase the space dedicated to pedestrians (and healthy human activity in general) and how it impacts public space design.