

Barriers to the Pedestrianization of City Centres: Perspectives from the Global North and the Global South

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Abstract

Drawing on personal interviews with local planners, this paper examines barriers to the pedestrianization of city centres in two contrasting settings, one in a Global North city (Brisbane, Australia) and the other in a Global South city (Kathmandu, Nepal). These cases are illuminating because Brisbane already contains a popular three-block pedestrian mall in its CBD but proposals to expand it have not met with support, whereas Kathmandu's plans to pedestrianize its busy historic centre have failed so far. While the cultural and economic circumstances of Brisbane and Kathmandu vary significantly, there are similarities as well as differences in their barriers to pedestrianization. The barriers include: (1) *opposition from residents and motorists*; (2) *opposition from local merchants*; (3) *cost recovery*; (4) *access of delivery vehicles*; (5) *management of alternative transport and parking*; (6) *enforcement*; and (7) *institutional and political support*. These types of barriers are certainly not unique to these two cities. Very likely, similar issues are encountered in other Global North and Global South cities. It is clear that political, institutional, and social barriers are more significant than technical and financial barriers. A dominating car culture is responsible for the general lack of commitment to pedestrianization.

Keywords

Pedestrianization; pedestrian malls; CBD; Brisbane, Australia; Kathmandu, Nepal.

Note

All accompanying figures are at the end of this paper.

Introduction

Up until the mid-19th century, most cities were “walking cities.” With the advent of the automobile a need to regulate, channel, separate, and restrict vehicular movement emerged in urban areas. A pedestrian mall is one type of response to this need.¹ It is generally defined as a commercial or mixed-use urban street in which ordinary vehicles are prohibited from circulating, and limited access is allowed for service and emergency vehicles. The pedestrian mall concept has its roots in Europe in the post-war period, a time when cities were just beginning to feel the devastating effects of car dependency. The pedestrianization of selected streets was introduced as a measure to counter air, noise, and visual pollution in central areas, to encourage walking and socializing, to boost tourism, and to ensure the financial viability of inner city retail stores which were beginning to face serious competition from suburban malls.

Generally, pedestrian malls have been well received in European cities. Since their inception, the popularity of the concept has only grown. Most European capitals have at least one pedestrian mall in their centres. Such success has spurred numerous studies which document the multiple benefits of pedestrianization. Evoking history, some authors have noted that attempts at restricting vehicular movement in favour of pedestrian movement in urban areas date as far back as Classical Antiquity (Hass-Klau 2014; Fruin 1971). Notwithstanding the efforts of academic and practicing planners in advocating for the concept, pedestrian malls – whether implemented or proposed – have met with limited success outside of Europe. In the present era of grave environmental, social, and economic sustainability concerns, cities in both the Global North and Global South are still grappling with various barriers to the pedestrianization of central areas.

Taking a humanist perspective, the authors argue that a focus on pedestrianization remains salient in the contemporary era of artificial intelligence, cyborgs, driverless cars, and flying drones. While gentrification of pedestrianized city centres poses a threat, pedestrian streets are a manifestation of planners’ sensitivity to the human condition and its expression in physical terms. The pedestrian strolling about still represents an essential ingredient of urbanity and of a meaningful collective existence (Pressman 1987). By contrast, cars - including technologically advanced ones such as self-driving, flying, and electric cars - isolate and detach people from their environment.

This paper examines barriers to pedestrianization in two contrasting settings, one in a Global North city (Brisbane, Australia) and the other in a Global South city (Kathmandu, Nepal). Conceptually, this approach is based on the tenets of *comparative urbanism*, which considers variations amongst cities within and across regions, and challenges or bypasses “developed” or “western” reference points. The proponents of comparative urbanism maintain that, given the globalized conditions of production of the “urban,” cities must be understood on a world scale (Robinson 2014). The two cases included in this study are illuminating because Brisbane already encompasses a popular three-block pedestrian mall in its dense CBD but proposals to expand it have not met with support; Kathmandu’s plans to pedestrianize its busy historic centre have failed so far.² In terms of similarities, both places are medium-sized, subtropical capital cities with a strong tourist base.

Drawing on personal interviews with local planners, the authors aim to fill a gap in the literature on pedestrianization, which has focused on the more developed cities of the Global North and has generally dwindled in recent years. Much of the literature is a historical recount of the reasons why pedestrian malls have been introduced in various places. Another portion of the literature, especially on North America, focuses on the reasons why most pedestrian malls here failed. This paper takes a different approach, choosing to focus on the barriers to *proposed* pedestrianization schemes. By elaborating on the nature of the opposition that pedestrian malls

might elicit in different contexts, the paper aims to be of assistance to planning practitioners who want to gain acceptance of pedestrianization proposals.

The paper opens with a comprehensive review of the international literature on pedestrian malls. This is followed by a brief overview of the two case study cities and a presentation of the methodology. The remainder of the paper discusses the findings.

Pedestrianization: The precedents

The first part of this review focuses on Global North cities in Europe, North America, Australia, and Asia, on which most literature has been produced, starting in the 1960s. The second, more limited, part deals with Global South cities. It is valuable to revisit the history of pedestrianization in order to underline cities' motivations, principles, barriers, and achievements. Also, a historical review is interesting in that it allows researchers to discern if barriers to the creation of pedestrian malls have remained the same over the years or whether new issues have emerged. A close reading of the literature suggests that barriers to pedestrianization include: (1) *opposition from residents and motorists*; (2) *opposition from local merchants*; (3) *cost recovery*; (4) *access of delivery vehicles*; (5) *management of alternative transport and parking*; (6) *enforcement*; and (7) *institutional and political support*. The foregoing list served as a preliminary framework for the research design (see later).

Pedestrian malls in the Global North

Europe

European cities began pedestrianizing their centres as early as the mid-1940s. The first small-scale pedestrianization schemes appeared in the German cities of Wilhelmshaven, Lippstadt, and Bonn. By 1955, 21 German cities, mostly in Rhine-Westphalia region, had created pedestrian malls averaging between 400-900 m in length (Hass-Klau, 2014). However, Copenhagen is considered the pioneer of large-scale pedestrianization, having banned all car traffic from Strøget, the main shopping precinct in the old town, in 1962.

Initially, the idea of having this street converted to pedestrian use raised a storm of protests. Shop owners contended that taking away the wealthy car shoppers would reduce their business turnover. The police and traffic engineers argued that the parallel streets were too narrow to accommodate the displaced traffic. The public transport companies objected that they would lose passengers by running on secondary streets. However, Strøget turned out to be a great success in both urban planning and commercial terms. In addition, neighbouring (non-pedestrianized) streets experienced a virtual revival. Ten years later, shop owners had become strong supporters and initiators of pedestrian malls (Lemberg 1990).

Taking inspiration from German and Danish early examples, a wave of pedestrianization spread over European cities in the 1960s and 1970s. In the UK, Colin Buchanan's famous report *Traffic in Towns* (1963), was instrumental in introducing the view that cars are detrimental to already strained urban settings and car-free zones are a desirable and feasible solution to the pedestrian-automobile conflict (Hass-Klau, 2014). Sweden's three largest cities, Stockholm, Lund, and Gothenburg, pedestrianized their centres by 1961, and by the end of the decade, 35 cities across Sweden followed suit (Robertson 1991). In other cities pedestrian malls were created anew. For example, in Rotterdam, which was heavily bombed during the war and entirely reconstructed in the after-war period, the Lijnbaan mall (first opened in 1953) became the retail centrepiece of a modern CBD (Susai 2004).

Reasons for creating pedestrian areas included: control of traffic and pollution; conservation of the architectural tissue; beautification of the environment; achievement of meaningful social

spaces; and less flow of trade to competing towns and suburban shopping centres. In some medieval city centres, banning traffic was the only choice as vehicular movement (which boomed in the post-war period) was entirely incompatible with the narrow and winding street patterns (Turner and Giannopoulos 1974; Pressman 1987; TEST 1988; Barber and Hall 2008; Hass-Klau, 2014).

Thanks in part to pedestrian malls, European cities began to experience a revival of the urbanity that had preceded cars (Pressman 1987). Consequently, the issue of pedestrianization was soon taken up at the federal level. The Council of Europe included pedestrianization themes in its Urban Renaissance campaign and the OECD set forth policies for the creation of pedestrian malls as early as 1972 (OECD 1972). Those European municipalities which launched central area pedestrianization programs with enthusiasm, generally followed through with further extensions until a sizeable pedestrian-only zone was established.

The exclusion or limitation of cars either revitalized city centres or these stopped or slowed down their decline. Although trade may have remained static or declined slightly during and immediately after the introduction of a pedestrian mall, in the medium and long terms the benefits to trade were substantial and far outweighed any earlier losses. While shopkeepers tended to initially oppose any form of restraint, they generally became supportive once they experienced the benefits. To compensate for city centre car restrictions, some cities provided park-and-ride lots at the urban edge, or built underground parking garages beneath the pedestrian mall, and/or increased the public transport to the pedestrian mall (TEST 1988; Ramsay 1990; Topp and Pharoah 1994; Sastre et. al 2013; Balsas 2007). Today there are hundreds of pedestrian malls in Europe, many of which have been successful in terms of traffic containment, and social and commercial liveliness.

North America

In contrast, the history of pedestrian malls in the US has been marked mostly by failure. Starting in 1959 with the Kalamazoo Mall in Michigan, more than 200 cities experimented with the creation of pedestrian malls (Hardwick 2004). US malls were envisioned as a way to lure shoppers back downtown and revert the post-war CBD decline (Brambilla and Longo 1977). Ironically, the initial design criteria for pedestrian malls followed the suburban shopping centre model avoiding diversions from the basic shopping mission (Robertson 1994). However, in the 1970s pedestrian malls came to be thought of as social and communal centres (Brambilla and Longo 1977).

Encouraged by the success of pedestrianization in Europe, US merchants agreed to pay higher taxes in order to accommodate pedestrian malls. Part of pedestrian amenities were paid for through “bonus zoning”, which granted added development rights in exchange for the construction of desirable pedestrian improvements (Fruin 1971). In addition, the US federal government made available (massive) urban renewal funds for remaking downtowns. Some states (e.g., California) updated their legislation to accommodate pedestrian malls (Rubenstein 1992).

Initial evidence justified the optimism and expense that accompanied these experiments (Fruin 1971; Breines and Dean 1974). However, by the 1980s the expected benefits of pedestrian malls had not materialized in most American downtowns. Users only showed up to celebrate a mall’s opening but rarely returned to shop. Typically, rents were lower on the pedestrian mall, and vacancies higher. Pedestrian malls were not able to induce new habits into a suburbanized population. Some malls had a bad reputation as a dangerous place to go at night, where the homeless would camp taking advantage of the lack of traffic. The general lack of appeal of American downtowns was responsible in large part for pedestrian malls’ failure. Suburban

shopping centres, on the other hand, were up to date on economic trends, had climate control, and ample free parking (Robertson 1994; Rubenstein 1992). As a result of the dissatisfaction with their performance, very few pedestrian malls were constructed during the 1980s and 1990s. By mid 1990s, over one hundred cities had demolished their pedestrian malls and/or turned them in traffic thoroughfares (Robertson 1994).

While it is true that most downtown pedestrian malls failed, some have thrived, especially those located in cities with specialized markets such as students, tourists, or DINKs.³ Alongside the urban revival movement of the new millennium, friendly, lively, pedestrian-scale places have re-emerged in the imagination of Americans. Also, a number of major national chain businesses are seeking a district identity, with individualized storefronts or buildings that suburban shopping malls cannot offer. The new malls are often pedestrian-oriented rather than entirely car-free, and ample parking is generally provided for visitors from the suburbs (Pojani 2008; Kobara 2013).

Australia

In terms of land use and transport patterns, Australian cities lay somewhere between European and North American counterparts with more similarities to the latter. Suburban residential and commercial sprawl and car dependence are evident throughout the continent. However, city centres have retained their vitality and, in contrast to US cities, do not have crime and safety issues. Many have been recently undergoing a spur of revitalization. In 1971, the first three pedestrian malls were created in Australia: Garema Place in Canberra, Martin Place in Sydney, and Hunter Street in Newcastle. After the introduction of these initial malls, the concept quickly took on and a host of other cities across Australia opened up their own version. However, research is limited to only a few case studies.

Similar to many American cities at the time, Melbourne's centre had been usurped by cars and was subject to much criticism in the 1970s. This led the municipality to commission a study by world-renowned architect Jan Gehl, which recommended lunchtime street closures to improve the public realm. A decade later, the average number of pedestrians in the Melbourne CBD had increased by more than a third during the day and by nearly 100% in the evening (Hayter 2006). In the state of Queensland (where Brisbane, one of the present case studies, is located), the first pedestrian mall to be established was Cavill Avenue in the Gold Coast, a major tourist destination by the Pacific Ocean. It opened on a trial basis in 1973, after almost a decade of lobbying; the support of the local Chamber of Commerce was crucial in this case. The popularity of this mall with locals and visitors resulted in its expansion in 1982, as well as the development of state-level guidelines and allocation of budgets for pedestrian malls. A procession of pedestrian malls followed, including the Flinders Street Mall in Townsville in 1979, the Queen Street, Chinatown, and Brunswick Street Malls in Brisbane in 1982, 1987, and 1991 respectively, and smaller malls in Cairns and Rockhampton (Baker 2012). Notwithstanding these successes, some research in the Australia-New Zealand region suggests that, when new pedestrian malls are proposed, retailers still respond negatively pointing to potential rent increases, issues of overcrowding, and reduced patronage (Wooller et al. 2012).

Asia

English-language literature on pedestrian malls in the Australian neighbours in Asia is limited to a few case studies set in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (the so-called Asian Tiger economies), as well as in China.

In Singapore the pedestrian mall concept is somewhat different from the western contexts discussed above. While some permanent pedestrian malls exist (e.g., in Chinatown and Little India), many other pedestrian malls are "temporary." In keeping with the hot and humid

tropical climate and a vibrant street life at night, many streets which are vehicular during the day are closed to traffic starting at sunset (movable barriers and food stalls are placed in these malls after work hours). Other types of car restrictions complement pedestrian malls. For example, area licensing laws have been in place since 1975, which allow only a limited number of permit holders to access the downtown, and a majority of pedestrian malls are accessible by mass transit. While North American and European cities have often introduced pedestrian malls as part of urban revitalization schemes, pedestrianization in Singapore has been adopted for the primary purpose of reducing car dependence - pedestrian safety and comfort and increased economic activity being the secondary reasons (Yuen and Chor 1997). Hong Kong authorities have followed the same rationale. After the first few successful trials, pedestrian malls have expanded all over the city. As in Singapore, a highly efficient public transport network supplies malls with potential customers.

The Hong Kong scenario is one where retailers are strongly in favour of pedestrianization (Wong 2014). This is in line with the vibrant and public urban culture which has traditionally prevailed in Chinese and other Asian cities (Mateo-Babiano 2007). However, in Hong Kong pedestrianization often leads to such high commercial rent increases that only upscale businesses can afford while smaller shops are forced to relocate (Wong 2014).

In Taiwan, the development of pedestrian malls began in the 1980s, led by the government. The aim was to revitalize declining city centres and encourage the private sector to invest in property maintenance and thus boost real estate values. The most successful malls tend to be those in which both the private and public sector are involved in operations, management, and marketing (Cheng and Shih 2005).

During socialism, China was a pedestrian and cycling paradise. While cars came to dominate urban space in the post-reform era, Chinese cities, large and small, contain numerous pedestrian malls. Many are community-oriented spaces, much like the malls of Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan noted above. A special case is Shanghai's Xintiandi mall, a "trans-historical" site (i.e., where "Old Shanghai" tradition meets modernity). After renovation, it was broadly conceived as a site of high-end consumption. Xintiandi constitutes a flagship development, which plays an indispensable role by signalling to the world messages of China's economic development and cultural vibrancy. As such, it reflects Shanghai's consumerism trends and its aspirations to global city status (He and Wu 2005; Wai 2006).

In the post-industrial era, Xintiandi and similar malls represent a new use of downtown pedestrianization (in the ambit of redevelopment) as a device of a place promotion. This is a departure from the motivations of earlier, more idealistic eras, which centred on the well-being of pedestrians and the viability of local businesses. Contemporary place branding does not always have a positive effect. It often marginalizes poorer segments of the population in favour of local elites and foreign tourists and expatriates.

Pedestrian malls in the Global South

Very little literature is available on pedestrianization efforts in Global South cities. The authors were able to identify only three case studies set in Thailand, Albania, and Egypt. The main findings are summarized below. It is evident that theories from Global North cities are unlikely to perfectly fit these contexts.

In Thailand, the same program of night-time street closures for markets, eateries, and other activities occurs as in Singapore. Bangkok was the first city in the country to adopt this policy in 2002, and it was soon followed by other cities. The pedestrianized streets are used in an informal manner and serve a strong public space function (Oranratmanee and Sachakul 2014).

In Tirana, Albania - another place with a convivial street culture alongside extreme car congestion - a district-wide pedestrian scheme was introduced in the centre (the Bllok) in 2004-2005, which appeared to be popular with the broader community. However, it ended up failing due to complaints from affluent residents, mainly regarding vehicular access arrangements to their places of residence (the centre mixes commerce and housing). A few years later, the scheme resurfaced in a much reduced version which was successful (Pojani 2007). Recently, the main city square was also pedestrianized. While ultimately successful, this pedestrianization project was much contested for years, due to the division of power in the political system (between the local and national governments) and personal disputes and vendettas among the involved politicians (Pojani 2015).

In Cairo, pedestrianization was proposed in the late 1990s in conjunction with plans to revive and enhance the urban fabric of the once-splendid Old City (Fatimid Cairo), which was crumbling into ruins. (The area contained one of the greatest concentration of medieval architectural treasures in the Islamic world.) An opportunity arose when a new road tunnel was built, which absorbed most vehicular traffic from the area. Car circulation was banned on one street during the day (emergency vehicles and “VIP vehicles” were exempt), and extensive renovations to the historical buildings and public spaces took place. In addition, a multi-story garage was built for visitors. While pedestrianization became official in 2008, the project was rather controversial. Long-time local residents fretted not only about restricted car accessibility but about gentrification trends. Local business were concerned that their regular clientele would be driven away as the scheme would open up the area for tourism. But these were clearly the government’s preferred outcomes (Fahmi and Sutton 2003).

Case study contexts

A brief overview of the two selected case study cities, Brisbane and Kathmandu, is provided below.

Brisbane

Brisbane is a subtropical city of 1 million (more than 2 million in the metropolitan area). Located in eastern Australia, it is the capital of the state of Queensland and the third largest city in the continent in terms of population. Due to its proximity to the Pacific Ocean, Brisbane is also a major tourist destination. The average population density is relatively low: less than 1,000 inhabitants per sq. km. The city is crossed by a large snaking river (Brisbane River), and lies on a flood plain. The Central Business District (CBD), a major cluster of businesses, retail stores, and government offices, is laid out in a grid pattern tucked into a curve of the river (Fig. 1). World Expo ‘88 created extensive access to the river, with parklands and places to meet and be entertained. As a result the local population now enjoys a friendly, safe, and relaxed outdoor lifestyle. The city centre is relatively well served by public transport. Some portions of Brisbane are hilly but a mild climate year-round makes the urban core conducive to walking. Beyond the inner city and a ribbon of development along the river, low-density sprawl prevails and cars are the main transport mode (Sanderson 2003; Ganis et al. 2014).

As noted, a three-block long pedestrian mall (Queen Street Mall) has been in existence in the Brisbane CBD since 1982. It is a popular and vibrant space, which faces a multitude of retail stores, restaurants, cafés, and offices – though residential uses are limited in the CBD. It hosts more than 26 million local, national, and international visitors a year (Fig. 2). Queen Street (of which the Mall is part) runs through the city centre with the river at either end. In its City Centre Master Plan, the Brisbane City Council sets forth plans to extend the mall to cover the entire length of Queen Street, thus becoming the city’s “river to river” link. The plan is to

anchor the street with waterfront viewing decks and places for people to gather at either end. A brief Queen Street Visioning Plan has been prepared for this purpose since 2015, after a broad consultation with local stakeholders. The extension is envisioned as a pedestrian-friendly boulevard, rather than a pedestrian mall. Other nearby streets (Edward Street, Adelaide Street, and Elizabeth Street) will also be upgraded to boulevard status, with many pedestrian amenities introduced or upgraded, but not fully pedestrianized (BCC 2014; BCC 2015). The projected timeline for these revitalization projects is short: they are to be complete by 2019. Therefore, the present study is timely in terms of capturing the discourse surrounding these projects, and the barriers to the full pedestrianization of the main city centre commercial precinct.

Kathmandu

Located at the foothill of the Himalayas, Kathmandu is the capital and largest city in Nepal. Although at a high elevation, it has a warm subtropical climate, similar to Brisbane's, which is conducive to non-motorized transport use. The Kathmandu Valley is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, famous for its Durbar squares, Buddhist stupas, and Hindu temples, which provide testimony to an ancient history and traditional civilization (Fig. 3). The capital's population has doubled since the 1970s from less than half a million to more than a million - and more than 2 million in a "tri-city" metropolitan area. Geographically, the city is nestled into a bowl-shaped valley which has served as a natural container of urbanization. It is dissected by eight rivers: the Bagmati River and its tributaries. The terrain is generally flat. Densities are high (4,400 inhabitants per sq. km in the city proper) and urbanization patterns rather haphazard (Fig. 4). Many poor households still lack basic infrastructure and services, such as water and sewer lines and waste management. The first formal plans for Kathmandu were prepared in the 1960s and focused on preserving the built heritage in the urban core. While western-style zoning was attempted outside the centre, it was unenforceable. At present, traffic congestion is ubiquitous, threatening the health and safety of the mass of pedestrians and the viability of traditional monuments which constitute one of Kathmandu's major attractions, tourism being the city's major economic sector. The CBD's narrow streets and alleys, in which passers-by, vendors, animals, and even chariots (during religious and cultural festivities) mingle, are entirely incompatible with motorized vehicles (Thapa et al. 2008).

In realization of this alarming situation, the Government of Nepal with assistance from international funding agencies and local NGOs, has taken steps to restrict the entry of motorized vehicles into historic precincts. The Kathmandu Sustainable Transport Project, which is funded by the Asian Development Bank, is in its third year of implementation and represents the most recent effort in this direction. The pedestrianization of the historic city core is one of the key components of the project (ADB 2016). However, overall it has not been successful to date. While cars are generally discouraged on Durbar Squares (the plazas opposite the old royal palaces), these have not been connected into a pedestrian network.

Methodology

This study is based on the input of ten highly knowledgeable informants (five in each case study setting) - substantiated with relevant policy documents and news media items where possible. While opinions vary on how many interviews are sufficient in qualitative studies, a survey of leading experts confirmed that a minimum of five interviews per case study is adequate in a study like the present one, with a narrow focus on a particular issue (Baker and Edwards 2012). Interviewees included local public sector planners, NGO activists, academics, and private consultants. In both places, interviews took place in person and were conducted in English. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. In the case of Brisbane, in which

the pedestrian area has a longer history, two mature-age planners were included in the study, who were familiar with the events surrounding pedestrianization since its inception. The questions were designed in accordance with the preliminary seven-point theoretical framework noted earlier, which consisted of the following: (1) *opposition from residents and motorists*; (2) *opposition from local merchants*; (3) *cost recovery*; (4) *access of delivery vehicles*; (5) *management of alternative transport and parking*; (6) *enforcement*; and (7) *institutional and political support*. While the questions were designed around this framework, the interviews were semi-structured in order to allow for flexibility and the surfacing of issues that may have not been covered in the existing literature. The analysis of the interview transcripts was manual and followed a standard iterative process employed for qualitative data. Interpretations were based on the authors' understanding of the case study contexts.

Findings

The interview findings are structured in accordance with the framework set forth above, not all the elements of which were corroborated by the research. Interestingly, the gentrification of pedestrianized districts, and the negative aspects associated with place branding (which may be major issues elsewhere) did not emerge as distinct themes.

Opposition from residents and motorists

In both places pedestrianization schemes have encountered some resistance from local residents who own cars. However, this type of barrier is not major due the particular set of circumstances in the two case study cities.

In Brisbane, the CBD is mostly a place to do business and go shopping rather than to live. Not only are there relatively few night-time residents, but, in a suburbanized and car-oriented city such as Brisbane, they are also a self-selected group who tends to prefer car-free urban living. Therefore, the interviewees are optimistic that, as far as residents are concerned, the narrative in the CBD will increasingly shift toward pedestrian-friendliness. The full pedestrianization of the entire length of Queen Street, as well as of other nearby streets, is not yet supported but the reasons for this lack of support do not have to do with local residents (see later).

When the creation of Queen Street Mall was first proposed in the late 1970s, motorists who used the space were upset that their ability to drive through the area would be curtailed. However, after careful observations at the time, the City realized that the street was not being used as a functional thoroughfare but rather as a sort of car parade ground, and therefore decided to proceed with pedestrianization. With the success of Queen Street Mall as a retail and community space, public support for pedestrianization projects has increased. The ability to experience the benefits of pedestrianization first hand has led to broad public acceptance. Meanwhile, perhaps due to the still low number of residents in the CBD, no concerns over gentrification – as caused by pedestrianization - are voiced in Brisbane. A lesson for planners is that well-thought out and incremental pilot projects are needed in order to garner public support. Sweeping pedestrianization schemes, while desirable from a sustainability point of view, might create major frictions, which might then be difficult to appease and might hurt the reputation of a pedestrian mall from the outset.

In the case of Kathmandu, there is a higher amount of housing in the centre relative to Brisbane. However, here, car owners are only a minority (albeit the most powerful one) – although the levels of congestion on the roads might lead one to believe otherwise. But, unlike Brisbanians, locals have yet to realize the benefits of pedestrianization schemes as existing ones have been implemented in a patchwork manner (e.g., only in a few isolated historic squares rather than in whole districts or networks) and, crucially, without extensive consultation with the community.

Therefore, when shown examples of pedestrian malls from overseas, local residents are not entirely convinced these could work in the Nepalese context. Interviewees believe that communication is key in this case. Low-cost but targeted and effective awareness raising campaigns could do much to promote the concept of pedestrianization – an intervention which all interviewees believe is much needed at this stage.

However, educating the public on the added value of pedestrian malls is not a panacea. For example, concerns about personal security need to be tackled in other ways. Women returning home from work in the evening are now able to access their buildings on a motorcycle. Many would not feel comfortable walking alone at night through a pedestrianized area. Moreover, in a country like Nepal, with high levels of inequality, socio-economic status is important to people and motor-vehicle ownership constitutes an important marker of high status. Cars, in particular, are a luxury that is only available to those in the upper echelons of society. A poor public transport system compounds the problem. It has forced local middle-class citizens, including those who can ill-afford private motorization, into motorcycle dependence. In a city core that was originally designed with narrow car-free streets, motorized vehicles consume very scarce and thus extremely valuable space and constitute a major nuisance. In the future, rising housing prices in more desirable, pedestrian-friendly areas might become a problem.

According to the interviewees, many vehicle owners are torn when considering pedestrianization. On the one hand, they realize that driving in Kathmandu is inconvenient at an individual level and unsustainable at a social level. On the other hand, a major preoccupation with status keeps them “wed” to their cars. To many, riding the currently substandard public transport vehicles to access the city centre would be unimaginable. Thus they keep spending hours in a saturated road network and will continue to do so until dignified and high-image public transport means are provided. Interviewees indicate that the city is still far from reaching that target. However, in terms of pedestrianization proposals, local motorists have not been particularly vocal in their opposition. Possibly, in the overall context of major traffic gridlock in Kathmandu, the conversion of the historic centre into a pedestrian mall is considered a relatively minor issue.

Opposition from local merchants

While the literature suggests that local merchants are initially reluctant to lend support to pedestrianization schemes, this has not been quite the case in Brisbane and Kathmandu, again due to their particular circumstances. In fact, in Kathmandu, merchants are supportive of pedestrianization, if cautiously so. They realize the traditional importance of pedestrians among their customer base, while traffic jams make it difficult for patrons to reach their store. Small-scale shops tucked in narrow alleys that can only be accessed on foot or by bicycle or motorcycle have little to lose from pedestrianization. With the growth of international tourism, it is becoming clear that visitors prefer areas that are free of cars and related paraphernalia. The preliminary reports from partial pedestrianization attempts are mixed: some areas have seen an increase in retail activity while others have experienced no change. One of the most successful examples is Mandala Street, a short stretch in the heart of the tourist district Thamel, which was previously choked with traffic and is now a flourishing pedestrian mall with a vibrant mix of restaurants and shops. Up to now, no economic drawbacks to pedestrianization have been recorded, which justifies optimism.

In the Brisbane CBD, the pedestrian mall concept was first introduced in reaction to the retail shopping decline afflicting the urban core as a result of competition from new and shiny suburban malls and megastores – the vogue of the 1960s. The examples for the creation of Queen Street Mall were drawn from American cities, which at the time were also

experimenting with pedestrianization as an urban revitalization tool, as noted, while European centres were considered too different to serve as role models to Australia. By contrast to most U.S. pedestrian malls which ended up in failure, Queen Street Mall thrived. Property owners and commercial tenants on the mall are still strongly supportive of the concept. The mall has benefited from an attractive design, with many al fresco eating places, a regular activity schedule (such as outdoor music performances), and a “recreation retail” base. It is weekday and weekend destination for leisurely strollers and tourists, who are willing to spend time window shopping.

However, some interviewees point out that the mall would not have worked as well had its retail base been comprised of utilitarian stores and service centres (such as banks, dentist offices, or convenience stores), which users want to access quickly by car before or after work. In the neighbouring CBD streets, businesses that cater to daily needs and “chores” are predominant. Therefore, merchants on those streets have mixed reactions to car bans. One stretch beyond Queen Street Mall includes mostly high-end stores such as fashion design ateliers and brand-name jewellerys. Merchants here are opposed to pedestrianization arguing that their patrons are among the rich, and as such are unlikely to access the area on foot or public transport. These functional and cultural barriers are not easy to overcome, at least not in the short term.

Cost recovery

In terms of cost, the literature (discussed earlier) indicates that pedestrian malls in western settings are usually paid for through levies imposed on the property owners (and commercial tenants) whose stores and businesses face the mall and who are expected to benefit the most from pedestrianization. This concept of paying for “future” benefits is culturally foreign to Kathmandu and will likely constitute a major barrier once a pedestrianization scheme is designed. In fact, the city had a great deal of difficulty in charging an entrance fee to some cultural heritage sites. The public expects the government to pay for any interventions in the built environment “commons.”

By contrast, in Brisbane there is more willingness on part of local property owners and tenants to cover the cost of creating pedestrian-only or pedestrian-friendly malls, provided that all other issues are dealt with in a satisfactory manner. This might be explained by cultural differences or a higher level of awareness on the benefits of pedestrianization in Brisbane. In addition, locals have been long accustomed to pay for the right to access transport-related infrastructure, such as road runnels, highways, and parking spaces, and have a more clear understanding of the purpose (and inevitability) of taxation.

Access of delivery vehicles

The access of delivery vehicles did not emerge as a barrier in neither Brisbane nor Kathmandu. In Brisbane, Queen Street Mall enjoys the benefit of having a service lane running parallel to it: Burnett Lane, once the exercise yard of a colonial prison and the scene of grim floggings and public executions. The laneway is used by the suppliers of the hotels and retail stores facing the mall. Moreover, businesses on the mall have underground garages with direct access to the shops aboveground, which are also used for the delivery of goods and services.

A controversial multimillion-dollar program of pedestrianizing CBD laneways has been recently proposed, following the example of other major cities such as Melbourne and San Francisco. The idea is that, narrow laneways have a certain gritty and funky urban vibe and intimacy that appeals to adventurous urbanites. A host of cosy cafés, outdoor restaurants, graffiti displays, and charming music venues have already appeared on local laneways. The

patrons must at times battle with delivery vans and refuse bins and critics of the program argue that Brisbane's laneways lack lustre. However, in terms of the effect of this program on major pedestrian malls, interviewees opine that the loss of access space would not present a barrier as the delivery of supplies can take place on a time-restricted basis (e.g., at night).

Interviewees in Kathmandu, where no service lanes exist in the densely built tissue of the historic city, share the same view: the delivery of goods and accessibility for services would not be a barrier if the management is done properly. Given a still vibrant walking culture, suggestions are made that manually operated carts or bicycle rickshaws could also be employed in this case to deliver goods from the perimeter of the pedestrian district to the local stores.

Management of alternative transport and parking

Clearly, in both cities the issues of pedestrianization, public transport provision, cycling infrastructure supply, and parking provision and management are interrelated. Brisbane's pedestrian malls must rely on visitors outside the immediate vicinity given that the CBD does not contain much housing. In Kathmandu, city centre densities are considerably higher, as noted, but here too, pedestrian malls need a constant stream of visitors from other parts of the city to remain economically viable.

Brisbane's CBD is reasonably well supplied with bus lines and a new Cross River Rail project has been approved. However, in a car-saturated context, many people also access the area by car, and expect parking spaces to be provided at the end of their trip. The pedestrianization of CBD streets is seen as taking away "precious" parking spots. One of the reasons why motorists did not object to the creation of Queen Street Mall was that little parking was provided on the street before pedestrianization. Surrounding streets along the CBD grid accommodate one or two lanes of on-street parking each and removing those is a rather contentious issue. Given a limited overall supply of parking in the CBD, its cost is much higher than around suburban shopping malls. Local retailers are concerned that reducing the supply further will draw away their customers.

Technically and financially, Brisbane has the capacity to increase the supply of off-street parking spaces (e.g., in multi-story garages wrapped by retail stores or underground facilities beneath malls – solutions which are much less visually disruptive than surface lots). Also, some underground parking is available nearby. However, the interviewees believe that, if locals are to be trained to abstain from using their cars, the parking supply in the CBD should not be increased as it would only fuel additional driving demand. Rather, the solution would be to address underlying gaps in cycling infrastructure (in particular, segregated paths and lanes and secure bicycle parking at the mall entry points) and public transport service. (Now, there are train stations and bus stops near the mall but suburbs outside the 10-km inner city radius are ill supplied with bus and train services.) Already, planning provisions have been made to allow developers to reduce or eliminate parking provision in new CBD buildings while increasing the gross floor area.

Converting more CBD streets into pedestrian malls would mean blocking the access of public buses, in addition to private cars, from those streets. Interviewees are not entirely comfortable with that idea. The concept of "transit malls" in which only buses and trams are allowed access is put forwards a practical compromise. Some interviewees believe that, allowing public transport vehicles (and possibly even cyclists) in CBD pedestrian malls would be beneficial from a liveability perspective too, and would add to the vibrancy of the street scene. Others argue that, these types of "shared streets" or "naked streets" are not culturally appropriate in Australian cities and modal segregation is preferable here. A trial would be needed to determine whether that is the case.

In Kathmandu, the discourse is different. Unlike Brisbane, here parking requirements are not considered during development approval processes. Given that less than half of the local population owns cars, parking provision is seen as catering only to a minority while consuming and polluting valuable public space. The historic centre, with its narrow and winding streets (“shared streets” in effect), has hardly any room to accommodate on-street parking. Centrally located land is too scarce to waste on off-street surface lots. Moreover, building multistorey or underground garages in the historic centre is not feasible from an economic standpoint.

Under these circumstances, local motorists are already taking steps to self-manage parking. Some have purchased or leased spaces outside the historic centre. This means that they are already accustomed to making the final leg of their journey on foot, and therefore would not be substantially affected by pedestrianization. By contrast, entirely banning motorcyclists from accessing the historic centre would likely produce a negative reaction. Interviewees suggest that, if local residents were allowed to access their homes by motorcycle during certain timeslots (e.g., the commute peaks), this would make the pedestrianization concept much more palatable. No mention is made of the possibility of issuing access permits to local residents (a commonly employed mechanism elsewhere).

Overall, the increase in parking supply in the historic centre as a way to support pedestrianization is not seen as critical in Kathmandu. Other issues are more immediate, such as the management of the existing (limited) parking spaces through pricing mechanisms, the substandard quality of public transport, and the negative popular attitudes toward alternative modes (although cycling as a transport mode rather than a recreation activity is slowly increasing in popularity among the young). These issues reach far beyond pedestrian malls and will likely require an extended period of time and considerable resources to tackle in full.

Enforcement

This might be a challenge mainly in Kathmandu where law enforcement tends to be lax. Here there is a risk that parked or moving vehicles will illegally encroach on pedestrianized areas. Clear signage and physical design that prevents through traffic, such as that applied to Brisbane’s Queen Street Mall, are suggested as solutions. However, permanent barriers would not work because residents and suppliers might need car access during certain times. Retractable bollards would be ideal but this technology is costly relative to the City of Kathmandu budget. Low tech solutions which also provide some local employment (e.g., the employment of police guards at the entry points of pedestrian malls), might be more appropriate in this context. Some interviewees note that, if properly motivated, the local police will make an extraordinary effort in administering the rules; for example, recent laws against drunk driving have been strictly enforced. Others believe that the local police do not have the adequate resources and capacity to constantly monitor pedestrian malls. The community needs to take an active role in this respect. Currently, community action and management plans are under development, will empower and guide local communities in the management of pedestrian malls.

Brisbane too is not entirely free of enforcement challenges but these pertain more to shared streets, as noted, rather than fully pedestrian malls. Although local motorists generally dislike restrictions, where they have been consulted regarding the purpose and benefits of pedestrianization, they have eventually adapted to the changes.

Institutional and political support

Lack of institutional and political support for walking as both a transport and recreation mode has been identified as one of the biggest barriers facing pedestrianization projects. Local

governments have not shown a real commitment towards projects favouring pedestrians, and local politicians have not strongly championed pedestrian malls. Sadly, this obstacle has been present since the inception of pedestrian malls decades ago.

In both Brisbane and Kathmandu, but especially in the latter, pedestrians continue to be seen as marginal in the transportation system - and in urban planning more broadly. The term “transport” is strongly associated with roads and cars. In both cities there are many cases of road construction or widening projects which fail to include pedestrian footpaths or crosswalks and even take away pedestrian space. In Kathmandu, even international donor agencies have been known to fund such unsustainable projects. Where pro-pedestrian policies exist on paper (e.g., Brisbane’s active transport policies, its pedestrian mall guidelines in the Local Government Act, and its City Centre Master Plan), they are poorly and patchily implemented.

Clearly, this is a vicious circle: where politicians and administrators perceive a lack of popular support for pedestrian malls, they are less likely to advance these topics on the institutional agenda. Sensing the politicians’ and planners’ tepid attitude, the public is not enthused about pedestrianization projects either. In both Brisbane and Kathmandu, bold action on part of environmental groups will be necessary to break the circle and bring about positive change.

Conclusion

While Brisbane and Kathmandu are separated by a great distance culturally and economically, there are similarities as well as differences in the barriers to pedestrianization in both places. The identified barriers mostly - but not always - corroborate earlier findings. They are certainly not unique to these two cities. Very likely similar types of issues are encountered in other Global North and Global South cities.

In Kathmandu, barriers are more pronounced than in Brisbane. Kathmandu is an ancient city, the historic centre of which was originally designed for walking and is now being devastated by automobiles. The latter are still a novelty item. By contrast, Brisbane is a “New World” city mostly designed around the car. As it has been grappling with automobile-related externalities for decades, some disillusionment with suburbanization and the car age has already set in. One portion of the population is ready to let go of the North American urban development model and turn to pedestrian-friendly European cities for inspiration. While barriers to pedestrianization do exist in Brisbane too, it has made more progress than its Nepalese counterpart, if only through pilot projects.

It is clear that in both places, political, institutional, and social barriers are more significant than technical and financial barriers. A dominating car culture is responsible for the general lack of commitment to the pedestrianization of the centres. This is then articulated into concerns about enforcement, parking management, access of delivery vans, and the like. Underlying issues, such as poor public transport service and cycling network, raise the barriers to pedestrianization projects. But these too are ultimately due to the fact that the automobile reigns supreme over other modes, overwhelming the urban space and lifestyle.

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Figures

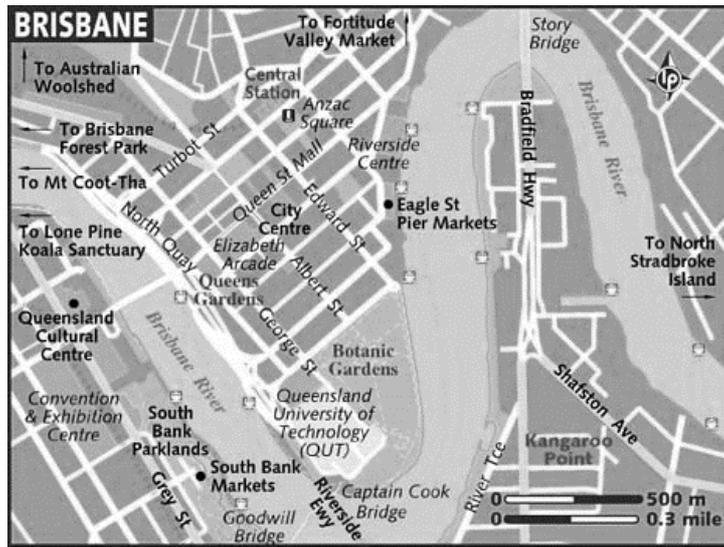


Figure 1. Brisbane CBD. Courtesy of Lonely Planet (modified by authors).



Figure 2. Queen Street Mall. Courtesy of Brisbane Marketing.



Figure 3. Kathmandu Durbar Square. Courtesy of Jorge Láscar/Flickr.

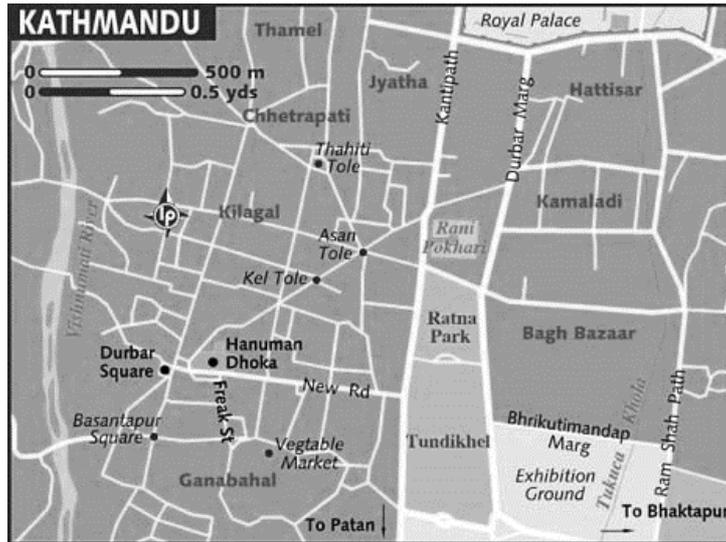


Figure 4. Centre of Kathmandu. Courtesy of Lonely Planet (modified by authors).

Notes

¹ “Pedestrian mall” is the term which is typically used in the United States to signify “pedestrian outdoor streets.” For simplicity’s sake, in this paper the authors use “pedestrian mall” consistently.

² In the literature, the term Central Activity Zone (CAZ) is gradually replacing CBD. However, the authors have employed CBD in this paper because it is still the standard term in Australia, including in common parlance.

³ DINK stands for “Dual Income, No Kids.” It describes a professional couple that does not have children.