

Reflections on Alternative Mobility Concepts and the Mobility Transition

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In urban areas, three mobility options are now taken for granted:

1. public transport
2. two-wheeled transport
3. the heavy passenger car

In theory, the mobility transition is expected to take place without the passenger car.

In reality, it does not.

A significant proportion of the urban population is unwilling to give up individual mobility on four wheels.

This fact is often ignored in the debate about mobility.

The result: the heavy passenger car remains the dominant solution, even though it is oversized for everyday urban use and obstructs the mobility transition.

Yet the majority of urban car journeys could be made in much smaller, lighter electric vehicles known as microcars.

In many Asian cities, microcars have long been part of everyday life.

In Europe, they are available but have so far failed to gain acceptance.

We believe that this can be changed.

In Europe - and particularly in Germany - the passenger car is not a neutral means of transport.

It is an expression of autonomy, status and how we see ourselves and are seen by others.

This is precisely where the microcar's problem begins.

It is not perceived as a conscious choice, but as the result of a lack of options.

Not enough money, not enough alternatives, not enough aspiration.

Not chosen - simply what was left.

Microcars are therefore seen not as a solution, but as a substitute.

As vehicles for people who cannot have what they really want.

Many microcars reinforce this impression.

They look like poorly proportioned, scaled-down passenger cars.

At worst, like shrunk SUVs attempting to imitate normality.

Cheap materials, fashionable effects, a short lifespan - nothing about them ages with dignity.

Nothing conveys conviction or a clear position.

The consequence is uncomfortable, but real:

People would rather face criticism for driving an oversized, overweight car through the city than endure the unspoken suspicion that they had no better option.

Better to be considered environmentally harmful than presumed poor.

Better ignorant than unsuccessful.

Better an environmental offence in an SUV than status anxiety in a small car.

This creates a cultural stalemate:

The passenger car is socially problematic; the microcar is socially compromising.

And until microcars are perceived as a deliberate, self-assured choice, they will play no part in the mobility transition.

No matter how efficient, how electric or how well intentioned.

Following this analysis to its logical conclusion inevitably points to the need for a different understanding and a different perception of the microcar.