

Two Interviews, Images of the Mobility Paths

Maria Isabel Imbronito

PhD, Professor at USJT, Brazil.
imbronito@gmail.com

Biagio Antonio Barletta Jr

Master student at USJT, Brazil.
barlettabiagio@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This document compares two videos that date from the same year (1969) and provide a basis for discussion about two different paradigms of urban thinking present in the 1960's: an interview with Jane Jacobs on the show "The way it is", on Canadian broadcaster CBC, in which she disputes the plans to build Spadina Expressway in Toronto, and a presentation by the then Mayor of São Paulo, Paulo Salim Maluf, on the plans to build Elevado Presidente Costa e Silva (currently named Elevado João Goulart, nicknamed Minhocão [the Big Worm]), an elevated expressway in São Paulo. By confronting the videos, the antagonism of the discourses regarding the role of road infrastructure, the value given to the urban environment, and the idea of quality of urban life becomes clear. The materials are also an illustration of two different outcomes: the halting of the Spadina Expressway works in Toronto and the completion of the Minhocão works in São Paulo.

KEYWORDS: Urban mobility. Walkable cities. Quality of urban life.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to set up a discussion based on two videos that date from the same year: 1969. Both were produced to inform the audience about issues related to the urbanization and transformation of their respective cities and can be easily accessed on YouTube. They are: an excerpt of a TV report by Kenneth Foley for Canadian broadcaster CBC aired on the show "The way it is", which contains an interview with a newly arrived and distinguished resident of Toronto, Jane Jacobs, who was invited to share her views on the Spadina Expressway, an expressway whose extension into the city center was halted due to public opposition. The second video shows the then Mayor of São Paulo, Paulo Salim Maluf, announcing the construction of a new elevated expressway named Elevado Presidente Costa e Silva – currently named Elevado João Goulart and nicknamed Minhocão [the Big Worm] – a work that has been controversial since its opening and which is part of the everyday life of the population in the downtown area of São Paulo.

The two videos are the object of a historical analysis. A detailed description of their content illustrates two different paradigms of urban thinking, as they present opposing views of the urbanization models adopted and the use of cars. This paper aims to identify and point out some of the urban principles underlying this rich historical material.

Figures 1 and 2. Collage with scenes of the two videos analyzed in the present study.



Source: Collage created by the authors with scenes taken from: <https://www.mhpbooks.com/jane-jacobs-has-a-few-thoughts-on-the-new-wasteful-often-destructive-but-nevertheless-exciting-shape-of-the-cities-in-this-1969-canadian-tv-segment/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j44cTNnDHps>

Jane Jacobs moved to Toronto in 1968, after having lived and been actively engaged in neighborhood resistance movements in the south of Manhattan in the 1950s and 1960s. These civil society movements have stopped large projects that would have annihilated the neighborhoods of East Village, SoHo, and Greenwich Village had they been carried out. Among the projects proposed were the extension of 5th Avenue, which would cut through Washington Square, and the construction of the Lower Manhattan Expressway (LOMEX), a partially underground and partially elevated thoroughway that would cross the south of the island East to West.

One can see how Jane Jacobs's thinking gained momentum and strength as the resistance actions in which she took part to stop these and other works were put in place, in an effort to gather arguments and disseminate them to media outlets and to society as a whole. Jacobs took a stance against developmental arguments, fighting to bring back the values of the quality of urban life linked to the traditional city and to revive the criteria based on neighborhood vitality, pedestrian-friendly cities, the appreciation of the heritage built throughout time, and the opportunities that arise from the sum of these factors, such as affordable rents, gradual recycling of buildings, and a mix of different types of people living in the same space. Jacobs attempted to show that a lively neighborhood results from the exact opposite of what the modern city planning intended to create (IMBRONITO, 2020). The density and intensity of cities, according to the journalist, are guaranteed by the proximity of the properties to the street and by the density and juxtaposition of distinct and interconnected activities, which generate a complementary use of the space by people at different times. Amongst the themes that permeate these issues are the strengthening of social and economic relationships, and of the bonds of individuals with the place they live.

The resistance committees in which Jacobs participated went against the city's official stance, which aimed to promote road complexes filled with tunnels, overpasses, and large avenues that would require major construction works and could give rise to new developments. Led by Robert Moses, who gained more and more space in the urban planning arena not only in New York but in many other parts of the world, these projects faced organized popular resistance and, after much struggle, were rejected in favor of the preservation of the old neighborhoods.

In the 5th Avenue extension project, Robert Moses's objective was to extend New York's grid plan, which dates back to 1811. The gridiron layout was interrupted precisely in the Greenwich Village, since the neighborhood already had an established layout and occupation prior to that date. The LOMEX project, on the other hand, whose initial design dates from 1955, aimed to connect the East and West sides, extending beyond the island through bridges and cutting through several districts. The municipality argued that there was a need to modernize the roads and upgrade the old buildings which, according to the authorities, housed tenements and other degraded unhealthy spaces. Countering official arguments, Jacobs stated that these neighborhoods were not run-down and that the old buildings were used as housing and for diverse activities, playing a vital role as the cement of urban life. Furthermore, they had a pleasing human scale on the whole. For the journalist, the notion of neighborhood degradation was not related to the age of its buildings or the social class of its residents. Rather, it was about the loss of excitement and vitality that would be brought about by the modern and massified complexes proposed for the area.

High speed car-centric designs, which led to the expansion of the suburbs and the construction of expressways that precluded any local use of the area, a model that had been in vogue since the rise of the automobile and its adoption as an individual means of transportation, did not face confrontation at first, becoming the main factor that led to the sprawl of the suburbs. Supporters of the suburban way of life that has the single-family households in remote residential areas as its main value attributes still play their role, and many cities around the world continue to expand according to this paradigm to this day. However, when the expressways entered dense urban centers, generating bottlenecks, demolitions, loss of environmental quality in more consolidated areas, and brought along with them a stream of cars that was incompatible with the existing neighborhoods, the 1950-1970s models began to face opposition and questioning.

Another important point that was widely disseminated and that dates from the same period relates to the necessary participation of the population in the decision-making process of the spaces in which they live. This was the type of argument presented by Jacobs in her interview to the show “The way it is”, in which she commented about the proposal to build the Spadina Expressway in Toronto.

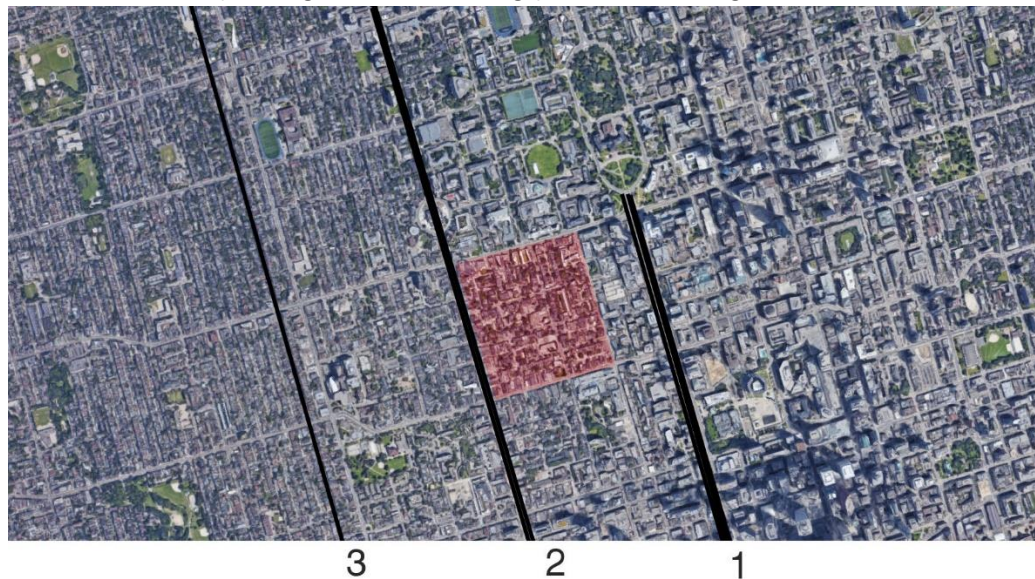
JACOBS AND THE SPADINA EXPRESSWAY

“I hate University Avenue.”

These are Jacobs’s opening words about Toronto, which she says right after scenes of her trying to cross the avenue to meet the reporters on the other side are shown. Despite the harsh beginning, she goes on to underscore the qualities of a refreshing Toronto near Kensington Market, where former residences turned into shops allow for great use of the public space. In her own words: [it is] “full of romanticism, quirks, surprises in the way outdoor space is used [...] and its wide sidewalks” (JACOBS in FOLEY, n/d). She also mentions local residential streets, such as Markham Street, which are similar in proportion, scale, and operation to the local streets in Greenwich Village, where she used to live in New York City.

For Jacobs, the city of Toronto shows a split personality, a kind of schizophrenia: small groups of people who establish bonds with a fun, gracious, vernacular spirit contrasting with the official city and its big but pompous mediocre and expensive plans and projects. The journalist says she already notices among residents a certain questioning about the official proposals for the city, so much so that they consider the Spadina Expressway the greatest threat to the city of Toronto.

Figure 2. Places of interest for the discussion of the video: 1 - University Avenue, a wide avenue with intense crossing by the University community; 2 - Spadina Avenue, the avenue that would receive the expressway that never came to be; 3 - Markham Street, a local street in a residential area, with narrow blocks and old buildings. The University area features larger blocks and buildings. South of University Avenue is the verticalized financial district (lower right corner of the image). In red, the Kensington Market area.

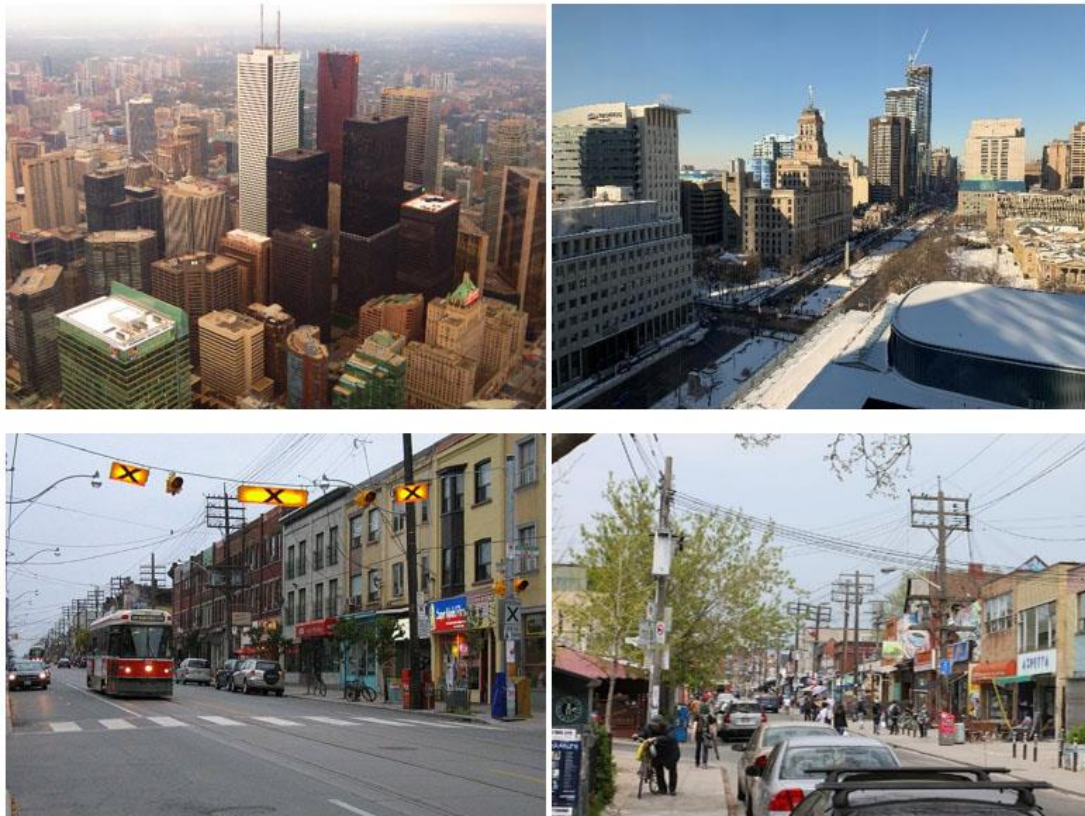


Source: Photo taken from Google Maps and treated by the authors.

In the interview, Jacobs also presents technical arguments. According to her, taking an expressway into the densely populated city would be equivalent to dumping a large stream of cars that enter and leave the expressway at specific points, creating huge bottlenecks that would lead to traffic jams on local roads around those points. She goes on to state it is impossible to reconcile the intersections of an expressway with the local city streets that are already there. An expressway enters the existing fabric with no possibility of crossings and intersections. When crossroads are avoided, crossings need to be sorted through overpasses and tunnels, which cause great impact and destroy the existing urban fabric. The activist mentions the blocks are ruined with the construction of expressways. As the car lanes are widened, pedestrian sidewalks are narrowed, and trees are cut down, any small park or sitting area in the surroundings give way to cars and parking lots right in the heart of the city.

Jacobs disqualifies the decisions that do not have the dynamics and characteristics of local neighborhoods in mind by saying that the model of University Avenue is borrowed from other cities, that Dominion Center – designed by architect Mies van der Rohe and completed in 1967 – is an imported model of office buildings, and that the city resulting from these works is dull and lifeless. Rather than building fast, noisy, and grand spaces, she recommends that spaces be designed and built to human scale.

Figure 3. Upper left corner: Toronto Financial District overlooking Dominion Center. Upper right corner: View of University Avenue. The images at the bottom depict the urban excitement around Kensington Market.



Sources: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Toronto-Dominion_Centre_and_Scotia_Plaza_from_CN_Tower,_Toronto,_Ontario_\(21652084160\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Toronto-Dominion_Centre_and_Scotia_Plaza_from_CN_Tower,_Toronto,_Ontario_(21652084160).jpg);
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aerial_view_of_Toronto%27s_University_Avenue.jpg;
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/97/Augusta_Avenue_Kensington_Toronto.jpg;
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Toronto_Little_Italy_23_\(8439722583\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Toronto_Little_Italy_23_(8439722583).jpg).

Jacobs mentions Montreal as an example of the negative impact of expressways, with the so-called autoroutes entering the city, cutting through neighborhoods, and spreading heavy vehicular traffic across urban areas. In addition to the barriers created by the autoroutes, she points out that the green spaces along the expressways are impacted by the excessive noise and pollution and become unsuitable for use. According to the activist, the urban spaces around expressways become “poisoned” by cars.

Figure 4. As an example of unfortunate constructions, Jacobs cites the expressways in Montreal. The images show the entrenched traffic on Autoroute 15 (left) and Autoroute Ville-Marie (right).



Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a7/Autoroute_Decarie_Montreal.jpg;
https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Autoroute_Ville-Marie_-_04.JPG.

ROBERT MOSES IN SÃO PAULO, MINHOCÃO, AND PAULO MALUF

The idea of introducing major car-centric road systems to expedite the circulation around the city of São Paulo started with the 1930 Plan of Avenues, proposed by Prestes Maia and Ulhôa Cintra. In addition to the ring roads (the riverfront highways along the two main urban rivers of São Paulo, known as “Marginais”), this system proposed a North-South connection forming the so-called “Y system”, consisting of 9 de Julho, 23 de Maio, and Tiradentes Avenues. According to Assunção (2016), 9 de Julho Avenue was built as a parkway under Mayor Fábio Prado’s administration whereas 23 de Maio Avenue was built as a highway 30 years later, under Mayor Faria Lima’s administration. In addition to being provided for by the Plan of Avenues, these roads were mentioned in the 1950 Public Improvement Program for the City of São Paulo, also known as the Moses Report.

Moses envisioned an enhanced use of automobiles and the construction of expressways in several cities around the world. According to Neto (2018), Moses took advantage of his reputation for the works in New York and, thanks to the intermediation of Nelson Rockefeller who promoted closer ties between Brazil and the United States, came to São Paulo and influenced the city’s urban design. Among other things, the Moses report for the city of São Paulo planned to straighten the Tietê and Pinheiros rivers and to build an East-West connection through a highway, currently known as Radial Leste. An important part of this connection, the Minhocão, was built a few years later, when these recommendations gained support and met political and economic will and convenience during the administration of Mayor Paulo Salim Maluf, between 1968 and 1971.

The second video that is object of this analysis dates from the same year as Jane Jacobs’s interview, 1969. In it, the then Mayor of the city of São Paulo, an engineer who graduated from the Polytechnic School of the University of São Paulo and who was recognized for his major highway works, announces the Minhocão project, narrating the strategies and presenting the construction timeline. Before turning the floor to Mayor Maluf, the host describes the project as “sumptuous”. It is worth mentioning that, according to the dictionary, sumptuous means something that demands large sums of money, done with great expense, in which there is excessive ostentation (Houaiss, 2008).

The video with Maluf's account is objective and straightforward. He presents the project and details of the design: which points the expressway would connect, its point of origin and route, how there would be an elevated section over Amaral Gurgel Avenue, and where the connection, entry and exit points were to be located. His account is filled with quantitative data: the extent of the project (3.5 Km), the number of vehicles it could take, the estimated speed (80 Km per hour), the number of lanes and the size of the structure, the efficient and modern construction system to be used, the costs (37,000,000.00 Cruzeiros Novos), and deadlines (delivery after 14 months of uninterrupted construction, including Sundays and holidays). As the largest construction with reinforced concrete in Latin America, the expressway would be elevated from Roosevelt Square to Largo Padre Péricles, on Francisco Matarazzo Avenue. The Mayor then shows pictographic representations of the accesses to the elevated highway (Largo do Arouche, São João Avenue) and intersections (Angélica Avenue) – silent and unpolluted images accompanied by the words of those who come and go by car and praise the ease of commuting. The Mayor compliments the proposed solution saying similar projects allowing for uninterrupted traffic on elevated highways with no intersections had been appropriately used in other large cities around the world.

The video makes no mention of pedestrians or other urban impacts of the construction. The newspapers are the ones in charge of speaking up against the initiative and pointing out specific aspects that were brushed aside in the video. Assunção (2016) refers to these critical newspaper articles repeatedly, some of them expressing opposition to this ambitious plan and others denouncing the degradation of Amaral Gurgel Avenue, the latter happening a bit later, in the 1980s. The opposing views were repressed and the work continued, though the budget and the deadlines initially proposed were exceeded. The opening day cannot be considered a success either, as a car broke down on the highway and brought the traffic to a standstill. The negative impacts on the urban environment and the degradation of the properties along the expressway are seen to this day.

Figure 5. The Minhocão for cars.



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Viaduto_cheio.jpg. Gsé Silva, CC BY-SA 4.0
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

It is worth mentioning that this process is still unfinished. A decision was made to transform this elevated expressway into a park. With that, the Minhocão's legacy aligns with the new urban paradigms that promulgate different principles of more person-centered and sustainable cities in which cars give way to people. The discussions now focus on how to transform this gigantic structure that caused so much degradation to the urban environment into a positive legacy for the city.

Figure 8. The Minhocão for people.



Source: Authors' photo, 2017.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The videos described in this paper show opposing perspectives on cities and cars. While Toronto was halting the construction of its expressway, São Paulo, in line with other cities around the world, chose to build a large-impact expressway. The incompatibility between the metropolitan-scale infrastructure and the dynamics of the local population – with their different flows, interests, and relationships of degradation and permanence – generated long-term conflicts that remain unresolved. This paper brought to light the contrasting positions of those involved in the production of urban spaces and the changes in urban planning and thinking with regards to the aspirations, interests, priorities, and directions for urban life and the future of cities that occurred in the 1960s.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

ASSUNÇÃO, E. L. L. **Minhocão e arredores: construção, degradação e resiliência (1970-2016)**. Master's dissertation (Masters in Architecture and Urbanism) School of Architecture and Urbanism, Mackenzie Presbyterian University. 2016. Available at <<http://tede.mackenzie.br/jspui/handle/tede/3089>> Accessed: 15 May 2021.

FOLEY, K. **How we love the land**. 4th episode, interview with Jane Jacobs. CBC TV, Toronto, n.d. Available at: <<https://www.mhpbooks.com/jane-jacobs-has-a-few-thoughts-on-the-new-wasteful-often-destructive-but-nevertheless-exciting-shape-of-the-cities-in-this-1969-canadian-tv-segment/>>

IMBRONITO, M.I. Teoria e resistência em Jane Jacobs. **Revista Políticas Públicas & Cidades**, Belo Horizonte, v.9, n.1, p.1-16, 2020. Available at: < <https://rppc.emnuvens.com.br/RPPC/article/view/317/254>>

NETO, C. M. C. A esfera técnica e o jogo político em São Paulo: o relatório Moses. In: ENANPUR, XV. 2013, Recife. **Anais XV Enanpur**. S.l., 2013, v.15, n.1, p.1-17. Available at: <<http://anais.anpur.org.br/index.php/anaisenanpur/article/view/477>>

PAULO MALUF anuncia a construção do Elevado Presidente Costa e Silva. São Paulo [S.l.: s.n.], 1969. 1 video (2.26 min). Published by xol8loox channel. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j44cTNnDHps> Accessed: 12 May 2021.