

SHAPING URBAN MOBILITY FOR CRISES

IN BRIEF

- The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated mobility restrictions had far-reaching socio-economic consequences.
- Most affected were the use of public transport, walking, and cycling.
- Urban planners, researchers, and citizens reacted with pop-up cycle lanes, meeting zones, and intensive use of pavements, parks, and public green spaces.
- Such ad-hoc solutions are more than a “quick fix” and need to be evaluated as permanent solutions as part of a forward-looking policy. This strengthens social resilience during crises with mobility restrictions, such as pandemics, climate change or blackouts.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

The COVID-19 pandemic forced governments into lockdown and society into social distancing, working from home, and closed schools and private services. Who contracted the virus? Who could continue to work from home, who had to go out? These issues disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, exacerbating already existing inequalities. Social distancing measures and the potential or acute threat of COVID-19 discouraged many people from using public transport. However, many workers depended on it to get to work and thus had to put themselves unwillingly at risk. Moreover, despite the number of cyclists and pedestrians increasing, measures for their safety were hardly effective.

Citizens are always innovative in times of crisis. The majority of people follow the rules, they help each other and proactively develop solutions. This commitment could also be observed in Vienna during the pandemic with regard to mobility issues.



Credit: iStock.com/ICphotography

Pop-up cycle lanes were put in place to make cycling in the city safer, but soon removed.

The use of public transport decreased dramatically (especially during lockdowns). People walked more and used less congested routes to reach their destinations. They spent more time outdoors and in parks. They cycled more and used cycle lanes and pop-up cycle tracks to make riding on the road safer. When queuing in shops, they made sure to keep a distance from each other. The need for social distancing resulted in queues forming outside pharmacies and shops. The pressure on pavements was exacerbated by the increase in deliveries and by e-scooters. There were many more people in public parks (if they were open) and public places, which led to crowds forming; in some cases personal safety was compromised.

BASIC DATA

Project title:	COVPOL – COVID-19 Mitigation strategies and their local impact: the case of mobility in the city of Vienna
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CHALLENGES

The pandemic has shown us what measures need to be taken and followed to increase personal safety. What are the challenges that arise from this?

The increased use of cycle lanes and pop-up cycle lanes has shown that there is a need for further infrastructure development. The increase in cycling resulted in the creation of pop-up cycle lanes, which were later removed, although they are still needed.



Credit: Platz für Wien

Crowding on pavements due to multiple uses and conflicts of interest.

The pressure on the pavements exposed a great need for wider and safer areas for pedestrians. Until pavements are widened, they will remain too narrow to walk safely in pandemic crises. The pressure will continue to increase with deliveries and technological innovations such as delivery robots regardless of crises. The challenge of creating space by reducing parking spaces remains.

The increase in people spending more time in public spaces near their homes highlights the lack of available public spaces. The need for meeting zones, but also working in public space, poses new challenges for urban planning, not only in times of crisis.

WHAT TO DO?

Mobility solutions that emerged during the pandemic could be considered valuable knowledge for the future rather than be seen as temporary solutions. Many of these solutions are also suitable to build resilience in other crises, such as the climate crisis, and not just during pandemics:

- Improvements to cycling infrastructure and better integration of cyclists into traffic initiated by the pandemic measures need to be maintained.
- The primary function of pavements needs to be maintained to ensure that they are safe for pedestrians. The increase in deliveries, the use of e-scooters, and social distancing exacerbate the pressure and sometimes severely restrict vulnerable road users such as children.
- Consideration should be given to making private parks and green spaces temporarily accessible for the public in times of crisis. This way, citizens could use green spaces near their homes without having to rely on public transport.

FURTHER READING

Frey, H. *et al.* (2020) 'Mobilität in Wien unter COVID19: Begleituntersuchung Temporäre Begegnungszonen und Pop-Up Radinfrastruktur', Technische Universität Wien, Institut für Verkehrswissenschaften, Wien.
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