

THE RICKSHAW, AN URBAN LIFE LANDMARK

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Abstract. In an era where motorization has reached high shares and its negative effects are visible, the problem of replacing the current means of transport with sustainable and effective ones is raised. There have been written many rapports for the cities of Asia and Africa in which the problem of rickshaws traffic efficiency has been debated, and also case studies of its social implications. All this things being considered, there is still no overlay on these ideas to highlights the effects over the Asian and African urban life peculiarity. The current paper aims to achieve a clear correlation between the importance of the use of these sustainable vehicles and the socio-cultural impact on certain categories of people, a correlation meant to emphasize their powerful influence as urban life landmarks.

Key words: cultural symbol, income, traffic efficiency.

1. Introduction

The entire society is dealing at present with issues related to traffic and pollution (Kenworthy *et al.*, 1999) with respect to finding solutions to them different approaches being proposed (Tanaboriboon, 1992), one of these issues is represented by the use of alternative means of transport (Dimitriou and Gakenheimer, 2011; Hall, 1983).

The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the impact which the rickshaws have on the city in general and not only on social aspects of environmental protection and economics which were reached until at present, often ignoring the cultural implications that their presence has on the streets. The problem of sustainability of the means of transport is pointed in the

cities from Asia and Africa namely the rickshaws and their maintenance in traffic (Rajvanshi, 1999-2000, 2002).

The problem of rickshaws' circulation also has social implications that must be permanently taken into account.

The Middle East's cities are cities with high urban densities in comparison with the European and American ones, which leads to the former having a lower capacity of bearing an intense auto traffic (Gallagher, 1992; Ramachandran, 1989) (Fig. 1).

Despite this, the planning of cities such as Dhaka, Hanoi is oriented towards motorized vehicles and discourages walking by foot, by bicycle or using the rickshaws.

All these because the governments wrongly associate the idea of non-motorized transport with poverty (Gallagher, 1992).

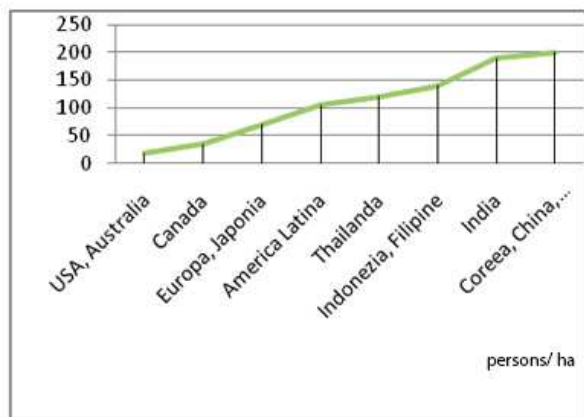


Fig. 1. The density of population, interpretation of data from the report for transport from Asia (Kenworthy *et al.*, 1999)

2. Methods

As the subject is permanently present in the daily life of the cities from Middle East and has a high complexity degree due to the social, cultural and political implications, many case studies and reports were approached in time and they will definitely be refreshed and completed with the new ones.

The rickshaws theme has been studied in many fields, but always missing the one of the urban life which influences it so much.

For the achievement of this field, the conclusions of the other fields have been analyzed but also the perceptions of the users, of the drivers and of the policy on the presence of the rickshaws in the cities.

2.1. Rickshaws evolution

Cultural landscape elements on the streets of Oriental cities, today rickshaws with three-wheel and pedals, evolved from rickshaws pulled by men (Fig. 2) first appeared in Japan around 1868.

Originally it had been intended only nobility subsequently (Fig. 3) became vehicles for the middle class. They spread in the whole Orient, being important elements in the development of cities by enabling the movement of people and goods (Trillin, 2008; Warren, 1986).



Fig. 2 A model of the traditional rickshaw (Art.com, 2013)



Fig. 3. The efficient transport of people and services (Kishwar, 2006)

Beside the three classical wheels which are powered through pedaling, motorized rickshaws also appeared (Fig. 4) which have the capacity of being adjusted to modern standards of transport allowing the equipment with electric engines and solar panels (Mallouh *et al.*, 2010; Rahman *et al.*, 2004).



Fig. 4. A motorized rickshaw (Rahman *et al.*, 2004)

Rickshaws are currently the most used means of transportation in cities like Dhaka, Hanoi, Bangkok, New Delhi, Calcutta, Jakarta, Surabaya (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Rickshaws on the Dhaka streets (Bangladesh Traveller, 2010)

2.2. The dependence of the poor population on these means of transport

The rickshaw drivers come from the poor population and have a low level of education, most of them are immigrants, some of them being farmers who chose this occupation as an alternative during the unproductive period of the agricultural year (Begum and Sen, 2004, 2005) (Table 1).

The rickshaw drivers manage thereby to provide money for their families from the villages through an honest work (Kurosaki *et al.*, 2007). This occupation represents the main source of income for 20% of India's population and despite the fact

that it has been criticized as being inhuman, it makes possible the survival of these social categories.

Table 1. The distribution of the denizens before becoming rickshaw drivers-Delhi, India (Kurosaki *et al.*, 2007).

jobs	Number of persons	% of total
unemployed	15	33.33
workers	8	17.78
services	9	20.00
sealers	4	8.89
drivers	1	2.22
rickshaws drivers	3	6.67
other	5	11.11

Once with the ban of the use of these means of transport in some cities (Bari and Efroymsen, 2005), the rate of unemployment has considerably increased and along with it the one of the criminality, the drivers obtaining incomes with 34% lower (Human Development Research Centre, 2004) (Table 2).

Table 2. Incomes before and after the adoption of the ban regarding the use of the rickshaws (Bari and Efroymsen, 2006)

Driver	The average monthly income and net (taka)				
	Before the ban		After the ban		monthly income loss
	month	day	month	day	
Rickshaws driver	3,834.17	165.27 (\$2.6)	2,600.15	106.5 (\$1.6)	-32%
Motorized rickshaws driver	4,836.25	208.46 (\$3.3)	2,837.03	116.2 (\$1.8)	-41%

2.3. Current situation

The result of the research made to evaluate the rickshaws' capacities in traffic (Bari and Efroymsen, 2006; Rahman *et al.*, 2004; Rimmer, 1986) has concluded that these are the ideal means of transport in the cramped cities. The reasons are related to the fact that rickshaws occupy a limited area on the

streets, they are not expensive and they manage to transport persons and goods on short distances in a short time (Dimitriou, 2006; Madhav, 2011) (Fig. 6).

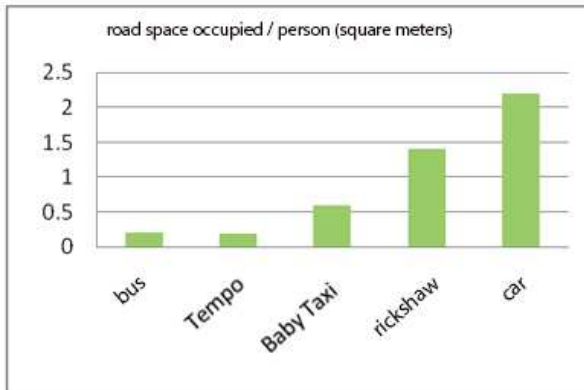


Fig. 6. The driving space necessary for the movement of a person (Human Development Research Centre, 2004)

Despite all these, the governments of many developing states use campaigns for the discouragement of the use of rickshaws, bringing in their favor no factual basis such as “the limited speed, the main cause of traffic jams, pollution sources” (Bari and Efroymsen, 2005), without taking into account the social effects of this ban.



Fig. 7. The painting of the components of a rickshaw (Kishwar, 2006)

2.3. Cultural aspects

The fact that rickshaw moves with a speed that makes the journey enjoyable, a ride is a unique experience where the user participates directly to the city life, having contact with the external

environment through the sight, smell and hearing senses.



Fig. 8. The variety of decorations of rickshaws from Bangladesh (Kishwar, 2006)



Fig. 9. The peculiar rhythm of Indian cities streets (Madhav, 2011)



Fig. 10. Urban landscape from moving (Madhav, 2011)

In some cities like Dhaka there is a true tradition of decorating rickshaws (Fig. 7), what makes it contributes to the need to

maintain these cultural landscape elements (Kishwar, 2006) on the cities streets (Fig. 8).

The way of movement of these vehicles, their flexibility in traffic determines a special rhythm (Fig. 9), which is specific to the Middle East cities, giving the impression of a moving swarm (Fig. 10).

3. Conclusions

A rickshaw travel means high mobility within the city, providing a decent living for those who drive it, care for the environment and not least a new experience every time.

Because it also complies role as mere means of transport and as source of income, it can be said with certainty that the rickshaw is an essential part of urban life in Africa and Asia.

Such research should continue to highlight the main cultural aspects of rickshaws, hoping that people and especially governments and authorities involved in the transport and mobility field will begin to realize the value that this simple means of transport has it for the urban activities.

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