

Subject: Reading Practice (1) Reading Practice (1) FINDING THE LOST FREEDOM 1. One of the most important aspects of these European cities, in terms of giving cities back to children, has been a range of 'traffic calming' initiatives, aimed at reducing the volume and speed of traffic. As our roads become more dangerous, more parents drive their children to more places, thus contributing to increased levels of danger for the remaining pedestrians. In many parts of Dutch cities, and some traffic calmed precincts in Germany, residential streets are now places where cars must give way to pedestrians. However, allowing our cities to be dominated by cars has progressively eroded children's independent mobility. (Such children may see more, but they learn less.) Not only is it important that children be able to get to local play areas by themselves, but walking and cycling journeys to school and to other destinations provide genuine play activities in themselves. In recent surveys, when parents in some cities were asked about their own childhood experiences, the majority remembered having more, or far more, opportunities for going out on their own, compared with their own children today. This in itself may exacerbate fears associated with assault and molestation of children, because there are fewer adults available who know their neighbours' children, and who can look out for their safety. In these areas, residents are accepting the view that the function of streets is not solely to provide mobility for cars. These initiatives have had complex interactive effects, leading to a sense that children have been able to 'recapture' their local neighbourhood, and more importantly, that they have been able to do this in safety. The private car is assumed to have widened our horizons and increased our mobility. This depends on 'active exploration', which is not provided for when children are passengers in cars. There are very significant time and money costs for parents associated with transporting their children to school, sport and to other locations. The extra traffic involved in transporting children results in increased traffic congestion, pollution and accident risk. Anyone who has experienced either the reduced volume of traffic in peak hour during school holidays, or the traffic jams near schools at the end of a school day, will not need convincing about these points. When we consider our children's mobility, they can be driven to more places (and more distant places) than they could visit without access to a motor vehicle. Children have lost much of their freedom to explore their own neighbourhood or city without adult supervision. The reduction in children's freedom may also contribute to a weakening of the sense of local community. As fewer children and adults use the streets as pedestrians, these streets become less sociable places. Thus, there are also important environmental implications of children's loss of freedom. As individuals, parents strive to provide the best upbringing they can for their children. However, in doing so, (e.g. by driving their children to sport, school or recreation) parents may be contributing to a more dangerous environment for children generally. Allowing them to get to know their own neighbourhood and community gives them a 'sense of place'. Research in the United Kingdom estimated that this cost, in 1990, was between 10 billion and 20 billion pounds. The idea that 'streets are for cars and back yards and playgrounds are for children' is a strongly held belief, and parents have little choice as individuals but to keep their children off the streets if they want to protect their safety. Streets may also be for social interaction, walking, cycling and playing. They had more freedom to explore their own environment. Children's independent access to their local streets may be important for their own personal, mental and psychological development. There is less opportunity for children and adults to

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