

Shaping Future Mobility

Tom Bieling, Book Review

The future of mobility has been a much-discussed topic for a long time, which has become even more relevant in recent years (on the one hand: the ever-deepening realization of the climate catastrophe; on the other hand: the most recent experiences of traffic in the light of the pandemics). (How) will we live without cars? (How) can design solutions for the mobility of tomorrow be found? To what extent are the design decisions related to further, e.g. political, infrastructural decisions? Current and future approaches to mobility were and are the starting point for a four-year research project, now summarized and published as a book.

Concluding their four-year research project on mobility design, Peter Eckart and Kai Vöckler complete research findings with Volume 2 on the future of mobility design. While volume 1 was primarily conceived as a compilation of international best practice examples, volume 2 provides the scientific contextualization of the research findings, including methodological arguments in the interdisciplinary discourse between architecture, design, geography, psychology, social sciences, urban and traffic planning, as well as information- and communication-technologies.

Both books outline new perspectives on the transformation of existing transportation systems and common understandings of mobility, toward a networked, sustainable mobility system. The focus is not necessarily on the organization and planning of traffic flows and systems, but on the mobility experience itself. Here, the digital expansion of the mobility space in particular moves into the spotlight.

Based on the assumption that design to a large extent also implies the design of the user experience, the various dimensions connected with it are specifically taken into account: The affective impact (aesthetic dimension), the usefulness (practical dimension), as well as the meaning (symbolic dimension) of artifacts that are formulated and shaped through design (cf. Vöckler 2021).

Vöckler and Eckardt refer in particular to the "Offenbach approach" developed in the 1970s as a theory of product language (cf. Gros 1983; Fischer & Mikosch 1984; Gros 1987). In this approach, the human-object relationship is defined in design theory as the actual design task: It is through the interaction of human and object that meaning emerges (cf. Gros 1976). Meaning – and thus the understanding of designed objects – comprises the aesthetic effect of formal structuring with its accompanying affects, which unfolds in perception.

The concept of affordance, which was significantly coined by Donald Norman and implemented in design theory from cognitive science, is taken into account, as is the consideration that artifacts always have social and cultural references and create offers of identification, which in their symbolic meaning serve self-assurance. Accordingly, artifacts create meaning that goes far beyond their practical function (cf. Krippendorff).

In the context of mobility, both volumes approach interaction with a view to, among other things, three distinct yet interrelated qualities:

- Access (practical dimension)
- Experience (aesthetic dimension)
- Identity (symbolic dimension)

Accordingly, core aspects of access are, for instance, those of recognizability, accessibility, usability, information, or orientation. Core aspects of experience refer, for example, to those of quality of experience, autonomy, sense of security, sociality and privacy. Identity aspects are related, for example, to questions of comfort or perception of status.

Especially in this complementary compilation of reflections and positions on questions of mobility design, both volumes provide valuable contributions to the continuously essential question of a mobility revolution.



Kai Vöckler and Peter Peter Eckart with Andrea Krajewski, Book launch, Architektur Galerie, 8 December 2022, Berlin.



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