



## What do Oakland, Vilnius, and Rotterdam have in common?

By Derek Robertson, *The Guardian*, October 12, 2020

“Rotterdam’s Witte de Withstraat was a car-choked thoroughfare. Today, cars are banned after 4pm, locals stroll down the middle of the road, and special wooden terraces have taken the place of parking spaces. ‘They give the extra space we need right now. And they’ve been decorated in a very attractive way — there’s a completely different energy to the area now,’ a local café owner said.

“The reallocation of urban space has become one of Covid-19’s most tangible effects on the built environment. Cities are being forced to innovate, and the car is bearing the brunt.

“[Cities] are introducing ideas that challenge decades of orthodoxy in urban planning and design.

- “Oakland, California, has converted many neighborhood streets into pop-up ‘[slow streets](#),’ closed to car traffic.
- “London mayor Sadiq Khan, introduced [Streetspace for London](#), including temporary cycle lanes and wider pavements.
- “In Paris, the plan is for 650 new kilometers of pop-up ‘[corona cycleways](#),’ and the removal of 72 percent of on-street parking.
- “Even Vilnius, Lithuania, with its typically cool, rainy summers, made an effort to turn public streets into an [open-air cafe](#).

“Parking spaces have proved the perfect way to reclaim the required land. Many people are working remotely, and inner cities have had huge drops in visitor numbers. American cities have been particularly aggressive in this regard.

- “Portland, Oregon, was one of the first to seize on parking spaces with its [Come Thru Market](#). The initiative connects black and minority ethnic farmers with customers through local parking lots in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.
- “Las Vegas has erected tented shelters and ‘cooling centres’ in unused parking lots for homeless people to take refuge and access services.
- “And China has recently accelerated plans for a huge, [car-free district in Shenzhen](#), ‘designed for and about people.’”

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