I have to get up at 4 o'clock every morning to get to work. Walking to the bus, transferring several times, and waiting for buses takes three hours in the morning and three hours at night. When I arrive home, I am tired. We never go into the City for a movie or football game — it's too far. My children's school is also far. Anyway, it's too small, so not many children can go."

So says Manuel, a resident of Mexico City who is lucky enough to find occasional work in construction. While he knows that all the living conditions in his city are difficult, transportation problems are uppermost in his mind. His views are shared by development critics René Dumont and Marie-France Mottin, who paint a rather bleak picture of development in Latin America, calling it rather "misdevelopment." For example, at its present rate of growth of nearly one million per year, Mexico City will have a population of 35 million by the year 2000. Half the population, now about nine million people, live in shanty-town districts. Since 1945, most countries of the Third World have experienced rapid urbanization. Many governments consider the most pressing development problems to be in the rural areas, where an overabundant labour force works mainly in agriculture, a sector with low productivity. For them, urbanization has been equated to economic diversification, to an all-too-appealing modernization.

But the resulting improvisation in urban development planning has led to severe problems of congestion, not only in transportation but also in employment and housing. In Southeast Asia, for example, the industrial and urban infrastructures in 1960 were compared to those of Japan in 1920. Several authors described the development of cities in the region as "pseudo-urbanization," noting that it is not much more than the transferring of rural ways of life to increasingly large and densely populated areas. Young, unemployed men form the bulk of the rapid rural-to-urban migration. When the samlor, a type of rickshaw popular as a low-cost mode of transport, was banned in Bangkok in 1960, half of the 11 000 drivers thrown out of work were peasants who had come to the city to earn something for their families who were still struggling in the villages.

PARA-TRANSIT

Thailand's samlor is only one of many artisanal modes of transport invented or adapted in Asia as a result of rapid urbanization (see Reports 8(3) September 1979). In a study on urban tensions in Southeast Asia in the 1970s, A.A. Laquian, former Associate Director of the IDRC's Social Sciences Division, describes the phenomenal spread of these traditional means of transportation. In Jakarta, for instance, no fewer than 200 000 becaks (pedal-powered tricycles) provide jobs for 400 000 workers otherwise unable to enter the labour market because they lack seniority or skills. What modernization could justify the abolition of 400 000 jobs?

An idrc-supported project, the results of which were recently published, provides a positive assessment of these means of transportation in five cities in Asia: the becak in Bandung and Yogyakarta, Indonesia; the samlor and silor in Chiang Mai, Thailand; the jeepney in Manila, Philippines; and the dolmus in Istanbul, Turkey. All cities suffer from chronic traffic congestion problems. One of the issues that concerned the teams of researchers in the five cities examined was whether the low-cost transportation (LCT) aggravated the problems.

In comparing such different cities, with very different modes of transport, the researchers concluded that if the samlor and their ilk created some problems, they also

Low-cost transportation, like this becak (right) in Indonesia, or this samlor pedicab in Thailand (far right), give the urban poor who ride them access to jobs, health, education, and other social services at an affordable cost. And for the drivers, who may not have skills or training, low-cost transportation provides employment that might not be possible otherwise. The dolmus in Turkey (below, right) may add to traffic congestion, but it provides a cheap and flexible service to areas outside mass transit routes.

MOVING THROUGH THE CITY

JACQUES DUPONT
solved many others. One of their most important contributions was in providing jobs for hundreds of thousands of migrants, who form a largely unskilled labour force — although, as noted by all the research teams, the profit made by the driver or the owner-operator is small.

Despite the vehicles' popularity, however, there seems to be little inclination on the part of authorities to recognize the value of the ICT — even in cities where drivers' or owners' associations exist to defend them. Municipal policies tend to keep this type of transportation marginal.

The studies described in the book provide timely data for civic authorities in the countries involved, and should help them take a more rational approach to public transportation. As more formal mass transit schemes are costly and lack flexibility, the ICT should be considered as an alternative that can be improved rather than as a nuisance to be eliminated.

Will the ICT become the scapegoat for governments wishing, belatedly, to rationalize a disorganized and too-rapid urban growth, rendered even more chaotic by the invasion of massive numbers of cars and trucks in streets better suited to becaks and jeepneys? If so, the future of Asia's cities may well resemble René Dumont and Marie-France Mottin's Mexico City, where "Two million vehicles try to move in massive traffic jams, as the hundreds of thousands of privileged car drivers asphyxiate those who must walk or cram themselves in buses and who are condemned in perpetuity to the smoke of exhausts and factories."


In Manila, as elsewhere in Asia, the "modernization" of urban transportation is perceived in terms of rapid rail service or expressways. Such systems, if they exclude low-cost modes of transport like the jeepney and its competitor (below) from the streets, may create many other problems in solving some. Low-cost transport may be more appropriate, both economically and socially, to a developing country. Researchers suggest that such modes be considered an alternative that can be improved, rather than a nuisance to be eliminated. (Below, right) The human dimension of transportation: a festival day in the Philippines.