



Editorial for special issue of European transport research review: transport poverty and inequalities

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It is my pleasure to introduce this small collection of four papers that emerged from sessions on *Cultural and Social Issues in Transport* at the 2016 World Conference on Transport Research in Shanghai, China.

I first became interested with this important topic of transport poverty and inequalities as an early career researcher in 1999 during my time working on the Jubilee Line Extension Impact Study for London Transport. The client kept asking ‘What are the social benefits of the new metro line?’ and I kept replying, ‘Benefits for who?’ At that time nobody seemed to understand what I was talking about. Unlike many other areas of public policy with which I was more familiar at that time, such as housing, education and, healthcare, transport policymakers did not appear to concern themselves with the social distribution of the benefits derived from their delivery sector, nor the inequalities therein. Neither did they seem willing to consider that there might be an unfair distribution of ‘negative impacts’ from the transport system, which should be mitigate to protect vulnerable populations and communities.

More than 20 years later, I am glad to say that the situation has improved to some extent. There is certainly greatly increased recognition of transport poverty in its many forms and manifestations. The academic literatures seem to be ever

expanding and deepening in their theoretical understanding of transport poverty and inequalities and the technical dexterity of their methodologies to measure and evaluate this. Transport poverty can be broadly defined as follows:

An individual is transport poor if, in order to satisfy their daily basic activity needs, at least one of the following conditions apply.

- There is no transport option available that is suited to the individual’s physical condition and capabilities.
- The existing transport options do not reach destinations where the individual can fulfil his/her daily activity needs, in order to maintain a reasonable quality of life.
- The necessary weekly amount spent on transport leaves the household with a residual income below the official poverty line.
- The individual needs to spend an excessive amount of time travelling, leading to time poverty or social isolation.
- The prevailing travel conditions are dangerous, unsafe or unhealthy for the individual ([7]: 356).

Nowadays, literally hundreds, and perhaps even thousands of researchers, both young and old, focus on the important social and distributional aspects of transport, as well recognising their connection to wider economic and social inequalities. Many different theoretical and methodological approaches have been brought to bear on the problem, and they have been applied in urban and rural case studies from across the Northern and Southern hemispheres. For anyone wishing to plot an historical chronology of these studies There have been a number of books (e.g. [1, 10, 14]), edited collections (e.g. [2, 3, 5, 12]); and special issues (e.g. [4, 6, 8, 9, 13]) under the broad banner of ‘transport equity’.

What is still severely lacking in terms of progress in this research domain, however, is its transfer into policy

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and practice. Although most European cities offer some form of fare subsidies to some low income groups, such as pensioners and children, most do not actively and systematically address the knock-on effects of transport poverty and transport-related social exclusion, such as reduced labour markets, ill-health, inaccessibility and social exclusion. This situation cannot any longer be blamed upon a lack of awareness or insufficient evidence of the problem, or inadequate know-how. As the recent OECD report ([11], 11) states in clear and certain terms:

There is significant evidence across countries that lower-income populations tend to suffer more from restricted transport options, have lower quality transport services available to them and travel under worse conditions (safety, security, reliability, comfort). Broad evidence also suggests that the lack of, or poor access to, transport options is central to limitations on access to jobs, educational institutions, health facilities, social networks, etc., which in turn generates a “poverty trap”.

Similarly, the 2017 World Bank’s Global Mobility Report, which is a first-ever attempt to track the performance of the transport sector against the Sustainable Development Goals identifies that most indicators are going *in the reverse direction* where equitable accessibility for all is concerned, as well as for human safety and protection from traffic-related pollutants.

The four papers in this collection touch upon a number of these problems. They have the common lens of social equity at the heart of their theses. In the first paper, Genevieve Boisjoly highlights the low levels of community participation within local transport planning, which leads to a poor representation of social and environmental issues within the local plans that are produced. Her research was conducted in two boroughs of Montreal, Canada. It draws upon social learning and participation theories to analysis the documented evidence of public participation exercises, and semi-structured interviews with local transport planners and community representatives. Her paper points to the need for a paradigm shift in the production of knowledge within local transport plans, whereby communities and local planners work together to iteratively improve, reframe and ultimately transform the current status quo, which favours smooth traffic flows over people’s access to services and social inclusion.

In paper two, Lena Sterzer examines the important relationship between housing competition, people’s mobility and accessibility in the Munich Metropolitan Region of Germany. This case study selection is important because of the highly competitive nature of level of the housing market, especially within the more accessible inner-city areas of Munich. Her research suggests that in this context, low income households with little financial flexibility make compromises concerning

accessibility-related decision criteria when searching for a residential location. They cannot neither afford housing in the accessible inner-city neighbourhoods, or the costs of transport and mobility by locating in less well-connected suburban areas unaffordable. As such their housing choices are extremely limited, and as a consequence they have little or no opportunity to relocate to places where new employment opportunities might arise for them. This severely reduces their social inclusion, life chances and quality of life. Her research used semi-structured, ‘problem centred’ interviews with seventeen, low-income earners who had recently moved within the Munich area. One key issue to emerge from the interviews was that many of these relocations were essentially enforced, because it was the only option to sustain a living, or because it had become unbearable to continue living in their previous home, e.g. because of severe health constraints. Their top priority in choosing a new home after considering its affordability is good access to public transport which is seen a literally a lifeline to connect them to jobs, schools, shops and healthcare services.

The issue of health is the main focus of the subsequent paper by Yusak Susilo, which is focusing on the developing world context, in the Bandung Metropolitan Region of Indonesia, which is the bus capital of West Java. The author reports on the results of a three-week, self-reported survey of individuals’ physical, mental and social health. Interestingly the study did not find the positive relation between health outcomes and walking and cycling activities that are often claimed by studies that are undertaken in the developed world context. This maybe because the majority of people undertaking these activities may be doing so for lack of any other travel alternatives, and in far from optimum travel environments, e.g. with limited footpaths, with high levels of exposure to traffic-related casualties, fatalities and pollutants, as well as acts of crime. Although the survey found no correlation between income and health outcomes, part-time and non-workers reported significantly lower health outcomes than full-time workers.

The fourth and final paper in the special edition is by Shengxiao Li and Pengjun Zhao. The paper focuses on an unusual case study of migrant workers living in a highly accessible, but low-income, enclave community in central Beijing, China. The paper focuses on the prolific phenomenon that can be observed in all large Chinese cities of high numbers of peasants from rural areas coming to the city to look for jobs. These migrant workers are an especially marginalised social group in that they do not qualify the same housing, education or healthcare privileges that are given to the indigenous citizens of these cities under the *hukou system*. The study focuses on the daily mobility activities of these migrant workers using qualitative interviews. It shows that many trips are by cycle and walking to save on costs, and that people’s everyday mobility largely centre on work-based activities and escorting children to school. They choose to live in this

neighbourhood party because renting is informal and unregulated by government, and partly due to its close proximity to a high density of low-skilled, employment activities. One unique feature of the paper, is that it emphasises the importance of social networks for these low-income individuals, many of whom have relocated to be closer to their family ties, and others who are now disconnected from them as a result of their emigration. This means that their non-mandatory social travel is extremely limited, either because their families live nearby or because they cannot afford to visit them in the rural area.

Although only a small collection of papers, each serves to highlight that transport poverty and inequalities are often not solely a ‘transport’ problem. There is an urgent need for transport policymakers to recognise and take advantage of this and to unite with their social policy counterparts - in housing, healthcare, education and welfare – to tackle these problems, as well as to work with affected communities and their representative organisations to find socially sustainable solutions. Without an integrated, human-centred policy approach, cities will continue to deliver inadequate, unaffordable, unsafe and socially unacceptable transport systems, which exclude the poorest and most vulnerable in our society from living a full and active life.

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