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An example of working women in Mexico City: How can their vision reshape transport policy?



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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on mobility and accessibility in Mexico City especially for low-medium income working women using a qualitative approach. Through in-depth interviews, we discuss different mobility and transport issues to understand what the main factors that influence their travel patterns are, how the different services are perceived and evaluated, and what their daily constraints are. Our final aim is to understand what is still missing and to discuss the following steps regarding transport policy in Mexico City and its Metropolitan area through a gender perspective. Interestingly, even if there are important gender issues raised by participants, they have assumed these issues as being part of their daily life, modifying their transport patterns accordingly. They also perceive that there are many problems, which concern the transport system in general, others related to the complexity of the metropolis and the lack of civic-mindedness. The results also show a huge gap between women's needs, depending on their income and place of residence.

1. Introduction

International organizations, recognize that sustainable urban transport is an important factor towards social and economic development. In this respect, transport projects and policies have an important social component: Through transport infrastructures, citizens access their daily activities and services, like employment, education, health, social networks and so on. It directly impacts on people's well-being. However, the use and attractiveness of such infrastructures is perceived differently depending on wage levels and gender. In fact, the transportation field is well known to be a male-dominated sector where policies might tend to be male oriented. For example, in 2003 the UK Social Exclusion Unit accepted that many past transport and land-use policies increased different social inequalities (Stokes, 2015).

Even if nowadays there is more awareness of the social dimension of transport, there is a lack of awareness of the gender-differentiated and gender equality impact of transport policy and provision, along with a lack of knowledge during implementation by policy makers (Turner et al., 2006). In fact, the integration of gender issues should be taken into account in all phases of a transport project, to show an understanding of the socio-cultural and biological differences between men and women in daily life.

There are many interesting studies regarding gender issues in transportation. For example, the Scottish study from 2000 (Reid-Howie Associates) focused on transport providers. There, it is stated that transport services are in need of a change in order to ensure that transport providers take into account key issues in order to improve transport services for women, since they are experiencing restrictions and barriers to their travel. The TRANSGEN report (Romer Christensen et al., 2007) identifies that the problem is the lack of recognition of a gender dimension when planning. For instance, when evaluating projects and calculating the value of time,

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planners forget the gender perspective in their cost-benefit analyses which results in misleading estimations. Yet, there is a lack of methodologies which incorporate gender analysis in transport policy and planning, through alternative tools such as “gender impact assessments”, “monitoring, evaluating and auditing”, and gender disaggregated statistics” or others, which would provide valuable information and improve results (Romer Christensen et al., 2007; Gendered Innovations, 2015).

UN-Habitat considers that Mexico City faces important challenges as a Mega-city, which especially affects low income people, and especially women, children, elderly and people at risk of exclusion. Even though it has experienced multiple changes regarding transport infrastructure within the last two decades, for many people, all these changes have neither improved their use of transport (both public and private) nor improved their accessibility to services. In this paper we discuss how transport infrastructure and accessibility needs encounter in Mexico City especially for low-medium income working women using a qualitative approach. Our final aim is to understand how the implemented transport policies are ineffective to address the needs of an important part of the population, which measures are still missing to improve transport accessibility for different population groups and to discuss the following steps regarding transport policy in Mexico City and its Metropolitan area through a gender perspective.

2. Literature review

There are different concepts and terms that are highly associated with transport-related exclusion: Lucas (2012) exposes a comprehensive discussion on each of these terms. In the next paragraphs, some of these topics are discussed.

Social exclusion has received more attention after the UK transport Exclusion Unit Report in 2003. It is about the lack of resources and opportunities available to take part in daily activities, which may be of different types: social, economic, cultural and so on. It limits the integration of an individual into a society and therefore damages both the individual and the society as a whole (Lucas, 2012; Levitas et al., 2007).

In the international literature, transport poverty has been a controversial term, being especially difficult to define. However, it is clear that the combination of low income and poor accessibility highly diminishes the opportunities for a certain sector of the population. As Lucas (2012) graphically describes, transport poverty has two main components, social and transport disadvantages which interact directly. It limits accessibility to activities and services, to economic resources and to social networks and this situation may end up leading to social exclusion. For this author, the approach is moving from the traditional analysis of transport provision to a social policy perspective, to become more focused on people’s needs.

Transport related social exclusion implies that people have limited opportunities to participate in different every day activities due to their restricted accessibility to transport, mainly because the urban environment is designed for people with high mobility and accessibility opportunities (Kenyon et al., 2002).

Other visions also put the focus on spatial mismatch. Spatial mismatch is related to residential and labor market opportunities, which have gone through a disconnection process (Matas et al., 2010). The lack of sustainable accessibility planning increases inequalities. Poor people tend to live in the fringe areas, with limited accessibility to jobs close by, therefore they have to incur high commuting costs and time restrictions in order to access the job market. This factor plays a major role as in many cases the urban environment is dispersed and car-oriented, therefore, the lack of an available car enormously limits the accessible socio-economic, educational and health activities of a household. Poor people then have a huge restriction in accessing job opportunities and the transport costs to overcome this problem may be a heavy burden. Authors like Gleeson and Randolph (2002) and Currie et al. (2010) put the accent also on “forced car ownership”, where it is a necessary condition to live on the outskirts of a metropolitan area, as it notably reduces accessibility problems.

Time poverty is then, a result of a dispersed and transport disconnected urban environment. It is related to the lack of time available to carry out daily activities. Time poverty and the lack of sufficient economic resources limits the chances of overcoming poverty and promoting well-being. Time poverty is especially compelling as a gender matter. Literature has shown that many differences arise, men tend to make single-purpose trips using a better mode of transport, whereas women tend to have complex travel patterns and trip chaining in order to carry out their activities and take care of the family and many household tasks (Turner and Grieco, 2000).

Gender mobility is heavily affected by all these issues. Women face different problems to gain access to services, economic activities and other social activities while at the same time taking care of the household or being responsible for many activities related to children and other unpaid care work. As mentioned in the previous section, many studies have dealt with this issue; however, in developing countries, as already highlighted by different authors (Law, 1999; Lucas et al., 2016), this topic has not received enough attention.

3. Characteristics of the metropolitan area of Mexico

Mexico City is located in the center of Mexico. Surrounded by two different States, the Estado de Mexico covers most of the borders around Mexico City, and in the south the State of Morelos closes the ring around Mexico City (Fig. 1).

It is important to clarify that Mexico City itself has “only” 8,851,080 inhabitants (INEGI, 2015). However, the metropolitan area expands beyond the Mexican capital, covering part of the Estado de Mexico and the state of Hidalgo. According to the INEGI (2015), the population of Mexico’s metropolitan area is 20,116,842; which makes it one of the biggest in the world.

Sustainable urban transport is in the spotlight nowadays because it is seen as an important factor towards social and economic development. In this respect, it is currently agreed that Mexico City, as many other Mexican metropolitan areas, faces important challenges, like urban congestion, pollution, transport costs, time spent commuting, accident rates, unsafe transport, deficient public

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