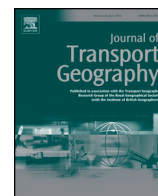




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## Access to the Brazilian City—From the perspectives of low-income residents in Recife

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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study of the transport and accessibility needs of residents living in low-income communities in the City of Recife in Brazil. It discusses the theoretical background underpinning the academic and policy rationale for such a study. We outline the qualitative methodological approach, which was adopted to engage in meaningful knowledge exchanges with what are often considered by policymakers to be the 'hard-to-reach' citizens of Brazil's favelas. In the exploration of our study results, we describe the complex relationship between the mobilities and livelihoods of the research participants. A key question the paper seeks to examine is how far the restricted mobility and activity patterns of citizens in these low-income communities influences or interacts with their quality of life outcomes in terms of their wealth, health and wellbeing? A second question is whether transport planning and policy can have a role to play in enhancing their future life chances? Currently, transport planners and policymakers in Brazil know very little about the specific accessibility and mobility needs of people living in Brazilian low-income communities. Our aim is to shed some light on the issue of their mobility needs in the context of a wider set of policy discussions about how to protect the livelihoods and wellbeing of low-income populations within rapidly emerging urban economies.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to explore the complex relationship between the mobility and accessibility needs of citizens living in low-income communities and their economic and social wellbeing. The research we discuss took place in two different parts of the City of Recife in Brazil in 2012. The main issues the paper explores are how different low-income travellers in these two different geographical locations within the same city make their decisions about where and where to travel, and how well the transport system currently works to support their livelihoods and wellbeing.

Contrary to the volume of studies about slums upgrading programmes for low income communities in Brazilian cities (see for example, Rolnik, 1999; Marinho, 2007; Maia, 1995), there have been very few studies about their transport needs. Until recently these communities have been largely inward looking and self-serving in terms of the everyday activity patterns of their populations. Therefore, the Brazilian academic and policy literature is incipient in this respect.

Previous studies, such as those developed by Rivera (2011); Fiori and Brandão (2010) and Duarte and Magalhães (2009), have focused

on the introduction of major transport infrastructure facilities such as cable cars, escalators and elevator in slums areas in Rio de Janeiro and the benefits they bring to the community. However, the issue of transport provision in slums upgrading programmes generally refers to the paving of roads and improvements to stairways as the most important measures for improving connectivity. Most of these studies focus on issues of mobility *per se* and none of them consider how people in low-income communities gain access to socio-economic opportunities within the cities in which they live or how transport facilities can be an enabler of, or barrier to, this access.

Koch et al. (2013) developed an important more detailed study. It describes people's travel and activity patterns in three slums in the City of Rio de Janeiro and explores specifically how transport investments can help to support slum-upgrading programmes in these communities. A mobility index, vehicular ownership, non-motorized transport, trip times and motives, and perceptions of road safety were analysed based on a survey of 2000 residents. The authors conclude that:

- (i) "Investments in transport are a central component of slum-upgrading programmes, yet the base of knowledge about transport use in Rio's favelas is woefully inadequate and the impacts of previous efforts to improve transport remain little understood or analysed" (ibid: 56), and
- (ii) "upgrading projects have profound impact on how residents get around their community and how they access the formal city. Any

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*definition of transport should include vehicle ownership, modal split, and non-motorized transport (ibid: 57)".*

The authors affirm that it takes time and detailed explorations to understand the specific travel constraints and the unique accessibility needs of low-income communities, which have been disconnected for so long from formal political, economic and social processes within Brazilian cities. Their perspective has partly helped to support the rationale for our own study, which adopts a detailed qualitative methodology.

Our study also echoes the shift away from solely mobility-focused policies towards accessibility and social welfare perspectives that have been charted in the contemporary transport policy literature outside of Brazil. For example, in the UK, it is achieved through the accessibility planning function as part of local transport plans (Department for Transport, 2006). In The Netherlands, all new transport projects must now prove their contribution to improved accessibility against new accessibility indicators (Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, 2011). Australian States also now have transport policies, which directly aim to improve the accessibility of low-income populations (Lucas and Currie, 2011). These policies have been widely adopted in recognition that, whilst mobility is an important contributor to the social inclusion of low-income population, it is access activities rather than access to transport itself that is the key factor.

There is less evidence of this conceptual shift within transport planning in developing context. In Latin America, most of the experience is concentrated in Colombia (e.g. Cahill Delmelle and Casas, 2012; Jaramillo et al., 2012). In Chile, some research has been undertaken to assess the role of public transport in the social disadvantage of individuals (Ureta, 2008) and for the development of indicators of social exclusion at the transit zone level (Jara, 2009). In Asia and Africa, some studies which focused on understanding the mobility needs and access to transport in slums areas revealed, for instance, that residential location, employment location, time and cost of travel influence the travel behaviours of the poor; non-motorized trips are made more frequently for the residents of the centrally located settlement; the use of public transport is low and most trips are made on foot (Baker et al., 2005).

In Brazil, the recognition of the interface between transport provision, the accessibility of activities, goods and services and social disadvantage is largely absent from both academic and policy formulations. However, it is increasingly being recognized that without such a shift in policy focus, urban transport provision will be inefficient from both the point of view network design and the delivery of public transport services (Santos and Aragão, 2000). Until now the overwhelming tendency of transport and city planners in Brazilian cities has been to merely reproduce patterns of organization and operation of a transport network without taking into consideration their prevailing segregated and increasingly sprawled nature. The abundance of community and informal transport serving the low-income communities of many Brazilian cities can attest to the inadequacy of Brazil's urban public transport networks. One example is the proliferation of *mototaxis*, vans and community minibus services, which are highly valued by urban poor communities but, in general, remain unregulated by the public sector and considered as informal/illegal transport (Maia and Orrico Filho, 2007).

This evidence suggests that interactive research with urban poor populations in order to understand more about how transport policy and planning can help to enable their social inclusion from their own perspectives within the rapidly changing urban contexts of Brazilian cities that they face. Our paper is aimed at providing some initial insights in this respect. It first sets the wider context of the study based on a review of the relevant academic and policy literatures. Second, it presents an overview of the Brazilian and Recife in order for the reader to be able to understand the background social context for the study. The third section describes the methodological approach that was adopted, including a description of the two case study areas. In section

four, we discuss the headline findings from the study based upon our qualitative analyses of the self-reported accessibility and mobility needs of study participants. Finally, we offer a discussion of the implications of our findings for future sustainable urban planning and transport policy in the City of Recife, as well as identifying the wider relevance of our findings for other similar rapidly developing urban conurbations.

## 2. An overview of the Brazilian and Recife context

The transport geography literature suggests that people's ability to reach any given destination is intrinsically affected by numerous factors. People living in certain geographical areas may have better access than others to employment, health care, education and social networks, for instance. Furthermore, the lack of opportunity to travel by certain modes of transport, such as the automobile, can have a significant effect on the ability of individuals to reach different destinations within the city (Handy, 2005). As such, it is important as a first step to offer an overview of the wider geographical, social and political context for our research.

### 2.1. The Brazilian context

According to the Census 2010, 84% of the 190,732,694 of the Brazilian population live in urban areas (Brasil, 2010). This figure was less than 50% in the 1970s. From that decade onwards the rapid urbanization process which was undertaken in the country was characterized by unequal distribution of the goods and burdens with low-income people often living on inappropriate urban land, in areas of risk and/or located on the outskirts of the cities with limited access to facilities and services, including the provision of schools, health care centres and public transport (ibid). According to IBGE, most of the households in low-income settlements are concentrated in 20 Metropolitan Regions, especially in São Paulo, in Rio de Janeiro, in Belém, in Salvador and in Recife (ibid).

These settlements are characterized by the illegal and informal occupation of public or private land, high-density settlements with inadequate basic infrastructures. A mixture of land uses common within these areas—small shops, groceries, pharmacies, bakeries, private and public primary schools, health units, churches, etc. Their geographical location in relation to the CBDs may vary from city to city. For instance, in Recife, where the fieldwork was undertaken, they are fully extended throughout the city scattered across all neighbourhoods; in São Paulo they are concentrated in the periphery (Lacerda et al., 2007; Somekh, 2011). As such, differences in housing location may not only make a huge difference to people's accessibility and mobility needs, but can also affect their travel horizons and perceptions of the activities they can reach within the city.

### 2.2. The Recife context

Recife is the capital of the State of Pernambuco in the Northeast of Brazil with 1.5 million inhabitants. It is the main city of a metropolitan region that is composed of 14 municipalities reaching a total of 3.7 million people<sup>1</sup>—the fifth largest metropolitan region in the country. Historically, this region has been characterized as a place of social inequality and massive poverty, of huge socioeconomic contrast among its population. In 2007, GDP per capita in Pernambuco was about US\$ 4000, representing just half of the average Brazilian rate.<sup>2</sup> In the last few years, however, Pernambuco has become one of the fastest growing and most affluent states in Brazil and will experience further

<sup>1</sup> IBGE—Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. Censo 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Agência Estadual de Planejamento e Pesquisas de Pernambuco CONDEPE/FIDEM. Pernambuco: realidade e desafios. Recife, 2009.

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