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CONTESTED MOBILITIES IN THE LATIN AMERICAN CONTEXT

Editorial introduction

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This special issue brings together contributions from the three diverse perspectives of its co-editors – urban geography, planning and transport studies. Its primary aim is to think through the relevance and utility of *contested mobilities* as a framing concept, and Latin America as a paradigmatic case. In particular, we ask the question: what can scholars learn from thinking about mobility and contestation together, both theoretically and empirically? And, in particular, we think about this in the context of Latin America, which has been as a focus for numerous mass social protests in the transport arena in recent years.

Latin America has emerged in recent years as a critical geography for innovations and experimentations in both urban mobility and urban contestation (Harvey et al. 2012; Zibechi 2012, 2014). As a region with a high and increasing rate of urbanization, urban issues occupy a central place in social, politics, economic and environmental agenda. Most of the cities are characterized by strong social inequalities and spatial segregation, and urbanization dynamics are often characterized by an extended informal urbanization, covering large areas of the cities in the form of precarious settlements. In these areas, but also in part of the formal city, the provision of services and facilities has traditionally been slow, incomplete and extended over a long period of time (Roy 2004; Loayza, Servén and Sugawara 2009; Perlman 2010; Fisher et al. 2014).

These challenges have sparked interventions, which have featured heavily in popular media, the policy literature and academic research. From bus rapid transit in Curitiba, Bogota, and Leon to the gondola projects of Medellin, La Paz and Caracas, from major transit expansion in Mexico City and Santiago de Chile to smaller scale interventions across the continent, Latin America is increasingly being recognized as a location of important transformation in the geographies, policies and technologies of mobility (Hidalgo and Huizenga 2013; Keeling 2013).

At the same time, these interventions are highly uneven, and their dynamic role in shaping and reshaping the urban form of Latin America cities has had uneven and unequal (and often unjust) economic and social outcomes for different population groups living and

working within cities and their urban peripheries. In turn, the way in which transportation services are developed and delivered significantly affects the everyday mobility practices of different citizens. Mobility is one of the dimensions that most clearly reflects social inequities, evidenced, for instance, in poor access to employment opportunities and urban services, like education or health (Vasconcellos 2001, 2014; Hernandez, 2011; Carvalho and Pereiera, 2012; Oviedo & Titheridge, 2015, as well as the papers included in the volume).

This combination of uneven impacts of mobility interventions and ongoing struggles with basic provision have increasingly become important sources of contestation and conflict, and helped spark critical new interventions in urban politics. From the headline grabbing protests in Brazil over transit fares and housing demolitions associated with transit expansion to the more mundane debates in cities and towns throughout Latin America, mobility and mobility-related issues are an increasingly important part of urban debate (Harvey et al. 2012; Cava 2013; Maricato et al. 2013; Nobre 2013).

While considerable thought has already been given to both Latin America as a transport innovator and as a site of important new urban contestations, little has been done to bring the two issues into conversation. This fact became clear to us during early meetings of the Contested Cities Network, a European Union FP-7 funded collaboration between scholars in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Spain and the UK. While initially focused on issues like housing, gentrification and public markets, these cross-border and interdisciplinary dialogues quickly identified transport and mobility as a key site of contestation both physically and subjectively.

In this sense, *contested mobilities* is a concept that is still under construction, and open to wide interpretation. It can refer to a direct dispute over the conditions of transport services and allocation of transport investments, or struggles over everything from costs and benefits to location and externalities. It can be seen as an indirect dispute, expressed as a resistance aimed at maintaining the continuity of mobility practices of social groups that may be threatened by transport policies and projects, or simmering long-term grievances over structurally unequal mobility stretching back generations.

Furthermore, contested mobilities is never entirely independent of the broader context of urban contestations. As many of the papers in this special issue demonstrate, residential setting is closely related to conditions of mobility, which allow access to jobs,

health and education. Struggles over how and where people move in the city are also obviously related to how and where people live, work, learn, shop, play and socialise. Similarly, mega-events and major urban redevelopment projects are rarely without a linked transportation program, and the former in particular are often major drivers of large transport infrastructure investments. The forms of production of the city and the possibilities for access to housing in accessible locations are also all key elements of meeting the basic needs of the poorest households. We can also observe that many of the same institutional actors are involved in both urban and mobility contestations.

Yet, while linked, contested mobilities and the broader contestation over urban development and change are not synonymous. While people's mobilities might be considered as a cornerstone of the broader socio-spatial political economy of urbanization, mobility contestatioons generally have their own logic, their own institutional actors, their own particular political economy, their own node in the broader global network of migrating policy fixes and capital demands. As such, our purpose across the papers in this special issue is not to tie down this broader concept of contestation, but rather use it to collate the evidence to demonstrate how the patterns in the field of social contestation can be mirrored in the case of contested mobilities. Latin American cities provide an interesting specific case because although they are classed as 'developing' many of their public transport networks are already well-established and highly sophisticated in their operation and management.

Each of the papers explores a differing aspect of mobility contestation, from different mobility systems and urban policies (Vasconcellos), and how this affects access to urban opportunities education (Moreno Monroy et al.), (jobs - Hernandez), jobs and social activities (Figueroa). A number of papers identify socio-spatial differentiations of urban mobilities within their case study cities (Blanco and Apaolaza, Hernandez). Various authors consider how urban policies like housing and real estate interact with urban mobility resources to differential provide differential access to the city (Figueroa, Lukas and Lopez Morales) and how transport infrastructures can also be the site for contested from mobilities. Other papers consider the issue of mobility contestation and protest itself, and the potential of social movements, social actors in changing the current status quo in the allocation and appropriation of mobility resources (Sosa Lopez and Montero, Verlinghieri and Venturini).

We bring together both established scholars and new voices The authors hail from a variety of academic disciplines, including geography, sociology, urban studies, planning and engineering, most are themselves from Latin America backgrounds, and/or have undertaken extensive empirical research studies in these contexts. The case studies they present feature both the well-known and the under-explored: Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Montevideo, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Santiago de Chile. We also include both the large-scale interventions for which Latin America is becoming famous, and the many smaller scale changes (or lack thereof), which are often forgotten. They also offer a broad range of examples of contestation, whilst also demonstrating that, in the case of Latin American cities, the same issues act as a locus for contested mobilities by social protest movements.

In particular we seek to explore the following key questions:

- What are the effects of unequal and uneven mobility on poverty and social inequality in Latin American cities?

- How have neoliberal urban policies and recent trends of urbanization and transportation innovation affected the mobility conditions of the different social groups?

- How is urban transport and mobility in Latin American cities being contested and why?

Blanco and Apaolaza set the scene by discussing the main areas of contestation between urban geography and mobilities in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region. The authors assess how inequalities in the mobility resources of different social groups leads to an uneven appropriate of the resources that cities have to offer, which results in knock-on social inequalities. Their mixed methods research design analyses data on urban structures and services at census track level and travel data from the Metropolitan Travel Survey, and combines this with the rich qualitative data on the mobility strategies of young people, domestic workers and older residents in living different territorial areas of the city. They find that rapid population growth combined with the increasing privatization of different territorial domains in the city-region enforce unequal burdens on the mobility practices of residents. The highest burden of enforced mobility most often

falls on the poorest social groups, which can be both a condition and consequence of their social inequalities.

In a similar vein, Vasconcellos, analyses how urban mobility systems in Brazilian cities protect the interests of elite and middle-income car users, which can often be to the detriment of low-income residents. He offers an overview of the rapid move to motorized transport in Brazil (both cars and motorbike taxis), and how this is affecting environmental and road safety condition. His paper offers a social and political approach, inspired by time/space geography and human rights theory. Vasconcellos uses what he terms the 'mobility metabolism' methodology to investigate mobility consumption and its negative consequences for human health, safety and wellbeing. For him, mobility is a key site for social contestation, in and of its self, but he offers the hope for change with a new generation of Brazilians that is better informed to confront the prevailing ideology surrounding the widespread adoption of car-based urban transport systems.

Lukas and Lopez-Morales link the development of housing property development with questions about the role of transport, mobility/accessibility in the spatial exclusion of populations living in different areas of the Santiago Metropolitan Region of Chile. They use qualitative interviews with key actors in local resident associations to bring a critical urban political economy perspective to the study of transport geography and mobility research. They explore whether new forms of 'world class' housing development tend to aggravate social segregation and spatial fragmentation or if the new investments advanced public transit systems can overcome these divides. They conclude that whilst most residents of inner city areas have benefitted from the proliferation of new transport projects, this has not been the case in the urban periphery where many of the displaced residents from inner city housing redevelopments now reside.

In a second Chilean case study, Figueroa explores the territorial aspects of transport and social housing policies transport in Santiago using a combination of documentary review and quantitative analysis. He identifies that almost all key activities in Santiago, except for shopping, are highly concentrated in specific areas in the central area. His analysis shows that whereas public transit connectivity and journey times to these destinations is high for people living in the central and eastern parts of the city, they are particularly poor for its southern periphery. However, social housing policies from the 1980s have created dense estates in these less well-served peripheral areas, meaning that lower income

populations not only have longer journey times but also higher travel costs to reach jobs, healthcare, education and other services. We see these same unequal spatial and travel patterns acted out in many of the other papers in the series.

In terms of this right to urban access, and important question of how fairly this is currently being delivered through the urban mobility systems in Latin American cities Moreno-Monroy et al specifically focus on education services in their study of the São Paulo Metropolitan Region (SPMR). They develop a GIS-based accessibility index of schools based on the home location of students, the location of schools and the ability of the connectivity of public transport system to these destinations. The tool the authors have developed could readily be used by educational service providers, as well as by other sectors (such as health, welfare and housing) that influence the location of public services. It would enable service providers to more accurately determine where the mobility constraints of its clients might undermine their ability to participate in important life enhancing opportunities, such as education, health care and gainful employment.

In a similar vein, Hernandez considers the uneven opportunity for access to employment and education in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. Here, as in many other Latin American cities, there is a very unequal concentration of the urban poor in the periphery far from the key economic and social opportunities, making public transit an essential requirement for participation. Using a cumulative time/cost opportunity measures to reach key destinations via the public transit system, the author identifies that the percentage of jobs a person living in a low-income area can reach within a 30-minute travel time is five times less than that of a person living in a middle-income area. Hernandez argues that mobility inequalities and the associated social exclusion that results, can only be addressed through state intervention in integrated urban land use and transport planning, in order to overcome the market-led agglomerations of land uses that dominate currently urban spatial reproduction in Latin American cities.

This equal rights to the city thesis that is implied in previous papers, is the focal point of the paper by Verlinghieri and Venturini, who use this important concept from urban contestation to frame a 'rights to mobility' agenda. Their action research study is focused on the protests of urban social movement in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil during the 2013-14 'mobility crisis' and uprisings. Based on fieldwork notes, interviews with key actors, and original documentation produced by activist groups themselves, the authors identify how

the huge investments that have gone into improving the Bus Rapid Transit system in the central areas has served to reinforce the existing mobility divides between rich and poor populations. The authors' rich descriptive analysis of the conceptualisations, interpretations and protest actions of the two urban social movements they studied is used to develop a new 'right to the city' transport planning discourse that is shaped around the its citizens. Used in this way, they propose, rather than being seen as a barrier to the reshaping of the city and its transport systems, the actions of urban social movements can become a radicalising energy for the move towards more sustainable and just urban living.

The work of Sosa Lopez and Montero also focuses on the production and contestation of policy, but in this case centered on sustainable mobility policy in Mexico. The authors analyze the characteristics and ways of action of new key actors, whom they call "expert-citizens". Expert-citizens combine specific knowledge as members of a global epistemic community of sustainable mobility experts and practitioners in their position as a civil society group that is not affiliated with any political party, but is well connected with environmental NGOs and activists. Through the repertoires of actions of two of these organizations, one the Mexico City office of a global think-tank based in New York, and the second an environmental NGO based in Guadalajara, the authors describe a set of practices that reveal the strategies of these expert-citizen actors. They focus on small-scale interventions, they engage the state and civil society through a 'toned-down' language that speaks to their different concerns; and they strategically use media and public opinion tools. It is particularly interesting to evaluate the work that these actors do in relation with the government: sometimes they collaborate with government officials and in other occasions they become their most forceful opponent. The article shows a more complex group of actors doing mobility policy and implementing more diversified strategies and actions.

When taken collectively, the papers serve to illustrate the significant and ubiquitous inequalities that arise from urban transport systems in Latin American cities, as well to demonstrate the knock-on consequences for social exclusion and denial of the basic human right to the city and all of its opportunities. The papers show how patterns of urban contestation in other sectors, such as housing, employment, education and health are both mirrored and exacerbated in the case of contested mobilities. Repeatedly, the

demand for world-class central city lifestyles incrementally pushes the urban poor to the urban periphery, where public transport services are is in increasingly short supply. This is not only a problem in rapidly developing Latin America cities, but also in developed and developing cities worldwide. This leads us to a fundamental question of whether the overwhelming dominance of neoliberal market-led models of urban development and governance can ever meet the mobility and accessibility needs of all urban citizens, and particularly the urban poor?

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