

Editorial 18 - The wider social context of transport and health

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In a society where the negative externalities of transport need to be reduced there has been an increasing emphasis on a more person-centred understanding of transport and travel behaviour change (Musselwhite, 2020). This has led to a need for research, policy and practice to understand transport in the wider social context, not isolated or divorced from its social origin. Over the past decade, there has been a growing recognition of the need to view transport within the social context of which it is embedded (Musselwhite and Curl, 2018). The traditional consideration of transport as an abstract concept divorced from its social origin has resulted in transport policy and practice that has unintended consequences for wider society within which transport is part of. As a result the system has been dominated by private motor vehicles at the expense of the environment, personal health and safety creating a society dependent on oil, a society severed in residential areas with associated eradication of local service, shops and provision and an unhealthy acceptance of injury and death and associated illness and injury, through an unwavering pursuit of policy aimed at a predict and provide approach (where road capacity was forecast and provision put in place to meet such prediction). The negation of the social element of transport has reduced the concept of travel and transport to a mere mechanism of getting to a destination as quickly and efficiently as possible for the greater majority at the exclusion of localness and the positive utility of the journey.

This edition has a set of papers highlighting the importance of the social aspect of mobility and transport. This is both in determining transport use, mode and amount of mobility, for example in Ghana, Siiba, (2020) found children's age, home ownership and the employment status of mothers are negatively associated with active travel to and from primary school, and Brown et al (2020) found the importance of social ties of friends and family can reduce the negative affect of driving cessation in older people in Barbados. It is also crucially important in terms of impact of transport on wider society, as evidenced in the case of the bicycle's impact on mobility, physical health, access to health care, social capital, self-esteem, and employment for homeless people (Grimes and Smirnova, 2020). In addition, Kingham et al (2020) found a temporary street closure resulted in residents getting to know their neighbours better as well as increasing active travel.

The relationship between social and transport factors are also explored, for example in terms of life satisfaction and travel satisfaction where the two are linked, especially with regards to security and safety of travel (Olsson et al., 2020). The relationships are multi-faceted bringing together transport and mobility with different social factors, for example Tennakoon et al (2020) found barriers to using transport for older people included poorly designed road systems and vehicles, unsatisfactory services, lack of involvement in transport planning and in engagement in society along with negative attitudes of the general public, with poverty enhancing this and negatively affecting their quality of life and well-being.

Overall, this knowledge shows the need to consider wider social determinants of transport use and transport outcomes when designing interventions or developing transport policy or strategies; transport cannot readily be studied in isolation from its social context.

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