Social Sustainability in Transport: Cinderella Shall Go to the Ball

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Dr Karen Lucas is a senior research fellow within the Transport Studies Unit and Environmental Change Institute at Oxford University. She has more than 15 years’ experience of researching social issues in transport and is internationally recognised for her pioneering research of transport and social exclusion in deprived communities. Her research was recently used to frame the Environmental Audit Committee's Parliamentary Inquiry into Transport and Accessibility to Public Services. She is also director of the Oxford University Global Challenges in Transport short course programme UK editor for the Journal of Transport Geography.
Abstract

Whilst the economic and environmental costs and benefits of transport systems and policy-making is now well recognised, social issues in transport have tended to receive much less academic and policy attention. This lecture conceptualises the social dimensions of the sustainability paradigm and offers a discussion of why it is so important to achieve socially sustainable mobility in our towns and cities. It then discusses some of the major challenges facing such an agenda and how these could be overcome through improved interdisciplinary research into integrated policymaking and delivery practices. The presentation draws on a wide range of case study examples taken from Dr Lucas’s own theoretical and applied research.
What is social sustainability?

• There is no single agreed definition of SSD (as with SD)

• Church and McHarry (2006) note a common focus on delivering services that create more sustainable communities, built around five objectives:
  1. Tackling exclusion and protecting the vulnerable
  2. Minimising social inequalities
  3. Improving public health
  4. Building social capital and community cohesion
  5. Bringing long-term benefit to all relevant stakeholders
Why is it important?

*Cities [and their hinterlands] need to be emotionally and psychologically sustaining, and issues like the quality and design of the built environment, the quality of connections between people and the organisational capacity of urban stakeholders become crucial, as do issues of spatial segregation in cities and poverty.* (Landry, 2007)
SSD redefines the parameters of SD ...
Includes a fourth ‘governance’ dimension ....
And considers duties and trade-offs *between* the different ‘pillars’ of SD
SSD recognises the policy interface between environmental and social goals

- **Environmental policy** impacts on **social conditions**
- **Environmental policy** impacts on **environmental quality**
- **Social drivers** impacting on **environmental quality**
- **Environmental quality** impacts on **social conditions**

**Legend:**
- Orange arrow: Environmental quality impacts on social conditions
- Red arrow: Environmental policy impact on social conditions
- Green arrow: Social drivers impacting on environmental quality
- Blue arrow: Social-Environmental policy interface
SSM explicitly consider different spatial scales and contexts

Micro - communities and neighbourhoods

Meso - Connectivity between key places

Macro - Regeneration and regional development

Global – Climate change impacts and knock-ons
Working definition of socially sustainable mobility

Achieving the levels of mobility and accessibility that is necessary to maintain a reasonable quality of life for all, whilst respecting the limits of the Earth’s capacity
Why Cinderella?

A hidden and forgotten beauty

Cleaning up after 2 ugly sisters (economic gain & eco-efficiency)
5 key policy objectives for SSM

1. Fair allocation of transport resources
2. Equal opportunity to be mobile and have access to key ‘life chance’ activities
3. Reducing adverse effects of transport system – including pollution, accidents and social exclusion
4. Inclusion in transport decision-making
5. Legal recourse to transport justice
Key SSM policy issues (1)

• Connecting individuals to key activities
  – Emphasis on ensuring that non-car users have safe, reliable and affordable access to work, education, healthcare, shopping, leisure, cultural & social activities

• Encouraging mode shift from cars and reducing the need to travel whilst protecting vibrant local & national economies
  – Emphasis on providing good strategic and local public transport services and cycling and walking facilities and integrated transport and land use planning over longer term

• Protecting people from worst negative effects of transport – noise & air pollution, community severance, road deaths & casualties
  – Emphasis on reducing child pedestrian casualties especially for children from low income and ethnic minorities backgrounds
Key SSM policy issues (2)

• Encourage social cohesion within and between communities
  – Emphasis on good transport connectivity, service integration and adequate supply of affordable housing and other public services

• Encourage healthy communities by promoting active travel and preventing social isolation in older age

• Strengthen community capacities, resilience and adaptation to climate change through the transport system
  – Emphasis on awareness-raising, community proofing and recognising the SDIs of climate change policies

• Strengthen local governance and participation through the transport planning system
One size does not fit all …

DEVELOPED CITIES
- Majority car ownership
- Poverty and social exclusion are minority issues
- Majority urban populations
- Highly developed urban transport networks
- Public transport in low demand
- Small informal transport sector
- Low levels of cycling and walking

DEVELOPING CITIES
- Minority car ownership
- Poverty and social exclusion are majority issues
- Large rural populations
- Basic transport infrastructures missing
- Demand for public transport outstrips supply
- Major and multiple informal transport providers
- High reliance on walking and cycling
But some marked similarities …

- Huge & persistent inequalities across almost every indicator transport behaviour
- An unmet need for motorised transport to fulfil basic daily activity needs
- Transport is a key barrier to life chance opportunities such as employment, education, healthcare and social interaction
- Cost of travel is unaffordable resulting in significantly high levels of suppressed demand for some social groups
- Transport externalities disproportionately negatively affect low income groups
- Government spending on and subsidies for transport disproportionately benefit high income, highly mobile groups
And the devil is in the detail


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- Representing multi-dimensional concepts
- Integrated vs. composite indicators
- Consistent and transparent measurement
  - i) comprehensible, ii) measureable, iii) complete, iv) operational, v) decomposable, vi) non-redundant, vii) minimal
- Dealing with normalization, aggregation, uncertainty and sensitivity
- Incorporating stakeholder perspectives (inclusivity)
- Incorporating geographic context
A concluding thought …

“The Western model of large urban developments has not yet shown us a solution to severe problems of world poverty and growing inequality in developed and developing nations and the growth in greenhouse gas emissions”

The Spirit Level - Wilkinson and Pickett (2010)
AND …

• Low carbon futures cannot be achieved without the fundamental redistribution of transport wealth
• Accessibility for all is not achievable within the private, competitive model of transport provision
• Individuals need to accept that there are constraints on the freedom of their transport choices
• And so SSM requires a major paradigm shift private mobility towards communal ownership and improved access
So perhaps

Cinderella Shall Go to the Ball!!!
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