

## Transportation Research – Part A

Special issue

### ***“Rediscovery the social role of transport infrastructures”***

Editorial

This special issue on “*Rediscovery the social role of transport infrastructures*” stems from discussion on sustainability of transport investments and policies, and thoughts shared during the 44<sup>th</sup> European Transport Conference (ETC) organized by the Association for European Transport (AET), from October 5th to October 7th 2016, in Barcelona (Spain).

The ETC is a major annual event where European transport practitioners and researchers come together for presenting and discussing on robust and affordable responses to the challenges of economic growth, social and demographic change and the need to become more sustainable. Uniquely in Europe, the Conference provides a forum for those engaged in research, policy and business in transport, bridging the gap that often arises between theory and practice.

Transport equity and social issues related to infrastructures have gained mayor attention in the last years. In line with strategic objectives of the European Commission, a specific stream of papers within the conference, have been dealing with the role of transport policies to improve the quality of life of citizens and to foster investments contributing to more equitable and balanced growth of cities. Accessibility to a diversity of opportunities and sufficient level of service to essential needs and practices, independent of spatial location (either central or periferhal), income level, age, gender and any other impairment of different nature, play an important role in that. It is, therefore, of great interest to know how different transport policies and projects can impact accessibility both in urban and wider regional environments. In fact, changes made to accessibility can impact:

- the ability of different public collectives to access basic facilities and public services (health , education) and the provision of daily consumer goods and services;
- the opportunity to access employment opportunities;
- the involvement into environments and practices of social integration, including travel for family matters and leisure purposes.

In this respect transport infrastructure and policy ought to be seen as a support tool for social cohesion enhancing a wider integration of citizens into the social fabric.

These aspects are often neglected or poorly assessed in traditional transport investment appraisal. Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) which represents the conventional and most diffused tool for assessing public investment, keeps the focus on economic and financial aspects: by summing up monetized effects (including environmental impacts) foster transport projects more suitable for higher willingness-to-pay, high income, more dynamic and mobile segments. As a result, transport projects selected using CBA, typically benefit the rich more than the poor.

Social impacts, whenever considered, are evaluated to a much lesser degree, largely because there are neither a shared conceptualization about its meaning nor a wider recognised methodology which allows it to be assessed. Social sustainability is met when infrastructure is based upon actual needs of territories and population, bridging solutions to difficult contexts. This is related to accessibility planning, equity and social inclusion issues: how transport can help to improve quality of life and individuals' well-being, with particular attention on vulnerable segments of population (women, elderly, disabled people, ...); to overcome physical barriers and to create opportunities of interaction among cultures and economies, people and ideas.

In order to reconcile the utility paradigm with social and environmental sustainability, participation by the public in different phases of the decision processes, from preliminary design and to project implementation, is desirable in avoiding local opposition, also referred to as NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) syndrome and to design infrastructure well-integrated with the landscape and more responsive to the needs of people. Participation could be instrumental in creating feelings of belonging to a community and may contribute to the creation of a sense of civic awareness or civic pride in society.

The papers included in this special issue present original and novel research which analyses how transport policies do impact social sustainability in terms of fair access to opportunities and social cohesion at urban, regional and national level. They present new methods to assess infrastructural projects giving particular emphasis to:

- capturing and measuring the value of accessibility,
- embedding equity and transport justice principles into network design models
- improving project appraisal with a specific look at rural and peripheral areas
- understanding the link between accessibility and socio-economic growth.

These subjects has been addressed by multiple disciplines including economics, engineering, geography and sociology. We consider such interdisciplinary cooperation an added value of this topical collection, which, in our view, represent a good training opportunity and an occasion for presenting empirical evidences, improving methods for assessing transport policies and contributing to the debate on challenging matters of policy at the high level, related to equity issues in transport.

As the guest editors of this issue, we are pleased to see such a variety of articles contributed by scholars and professionals from all over the world. Special thanks go to Prof. Juan de Dios Ortuzar, editor-in-chief of the journal, who made this issue possible, and to reviewers and those involved in the production process for their assistance.

The guest editors:

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