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Gender, transport and health studies open new horizons for planning



Perhaps not surprisingly, this special issue on Latin America brought out an emerging generation of research into gender and transportation. For almost 20 years, Curitiba and Bogotá have led innovation in thinking about sustainable transport, experimenting with new models of “surface Metros”, known as Bus Rapid Transit, and testing ways of integrating active transport, both walking and cycling, more effectively into urban lifestyles.

Only recently, however, have issues arising from women's subordinate roles, amidst cultures strongly marked by *machismo*, come to the fore. Gwen Kash's article from the previous issue (Kash, 2019) provides an excellent curtain-raiser to the complex socio-cultural issues involved, using mixed methods for both measuring and understanding their depth and dimensions, and proposing policy responses. In some of the world's most unequal economies, these findings have major implications for equity and social inclusion, particularly after 30 years of car-centred planning despite the majority not having access to the private car.

In this issue, we find articles regarding sexual harassment and transport in Barranquilla and the role of masculinities in the behaviour of motor-cyclists in another Colombian city, Valledupar. This interest, from a diverse scientific community, comes on the heels of major studies by international organizations (Interamerican Development Bank and CAF, the Latin American development Bank with the FIA Foundation), and surveys and ongoing coverage by the media, particularly a Reuters study, which was among the first to raise a red flag on gender and transport issues (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-transport-women-poll-mexico/exclusive-mexico-city-transport-ranked-as-most-dangerous-for-women-global-poll-idUSKCN1NK059>), placing Mexico City at the top of a global ranking of gender insecurity. It complements and is consistent with emerging work from South Asia (Hoor-Ul-Ain, 2019).

The results are, at once, encouraging and alarming. Encouraging, because we are beginning to understand a phenomenon that significantly limits women's participation in the workforce, politics and other crucial social spheres. Alarming, because — as occurs with women's double burden of unpaid domestic work and paid employment — when women navigate Latin American cities, they also face a double burden of violence: the general violence of social difference and criminality, and additional concerns arising from gender-related harassment and violence.

While methods and statistics for harassment vary, women's responses seem remarkably similar, with three crucial conclusions in a world attempting to meet global Sustainable Development Goal: (i) women avoid certain places when they travel and often remain in their own neighbourhoods where they feel safer or at least more conversant with the danger points, even if it means sacrificing potential paid work; (ii) they teach their children, especially their daughters, to avoid public transport; (iii) even very low-income women, so-called “captive” users of public transport, organize their trips to use safer transport, typically taxis. In other words, achieving “sustainable transport” will not be possible without addressing these issues, using a carefully thought out combination of urban planning tools, including land use, safety and transport measures.

Transport planning is heavily dominated by male engineers and widely considered a “technical”, mainly quantitative field of study and action (Law, 1999; Grieco et al., 1989; Hanson, 2010). Moreover, planners focus on a predominantly male pattern of commuter trips, from home to work and back again, rather than the “chained” trips characteristic of women, who must combine diverse care-giving activities (shopping, escorting children to school, sick people to health centres, or other similar responsibilities). These care-related trips (Sánchez de Madariaga and Zucchini 2019) are underrepresented in many transport studies and are often invisible in decision-making. Moreover, in our siloed planning cultures, public transport officials typically ignore access and egress trips associated with public transport, which typically involve walking or, less commonly, cycling.

In this sense, the article in this issue on masculinities (Torres-Quintero et al., 2019) is, or should be, a precursor for a new era of road safety studies: to examine social values that deeply influence attitudes to speeding, aggression, harassment and other problematic behaviour. This complements other research on dealing with these issues early in the cycle of life, through a Kool Routes to School programme that uses a gender approach to in-school programs about walk-bike-bus sustainable transport issues, empowering girls and teaching boys about new masculinities and more collaborative values (Sagaris and Lanfranco 2019).

Most recent studies have occurred in the realm of public policy and practitioner reports, showing important concern for remedies

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for gender-violence in transportation systems (Whitzman et al., 2010, Allen et al., 2019; Scholten and Joelsson, 2019). These authors propose solutions, such as reporting systems, legislation and regulations, to outlaw this behaviour and punish those responsible; communications campaigns; and, one of the most controversial approaches (discussed by Kash), women-only metro cars, buses, taxis and other services. These responses sound logical, but until we understand perpetrators and the socio-cultural conditions that trigger their actions, it is dangerous to assume these measures are the most appropriate or effective.

Further research, then, is crucial and urgent, bringing in expertise from psychology and criminology to look at perpetrators, and diverse areas of social sciences to evaluate the impacts of judicial and communications responses. Above all, we need to know more about how to co-create new masculinities, in both neighbourhood and transport systems. Less car-dependent and more feminist urban planning, as it is emerging in places like Barcelona, Spain, or has consolidated in the Netherlands, suggest some strategies can address immediate risk through comprehensive bundles of solutions. This too requires systematic research.

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