

Urban Mobility, Wellbeing and Inequality: Understanding the Relationships

Tim Schwanen

Transport Studies Unit

University of Oxford

e-mail: tim.schwanen@ouce.ox.ac.uk

The literature on transport and wellbeing is burgeoning, with many studies seeking to examine in particular the hedonic experience of travel behaviour. Research in this vein is a welcome and important complement to the conventional focus on cost, speed, convenience and attitudes in transport studies. Nonetheless, wellbeing as a concept is much broader than hedonic experience or indeed subjective experience, and transport studies can benefit from harnessing and advancing other conceptions. This is particularly important if transport scientists want to consider questions of inequality and justice alongside or as part of wellbeing, and understand the transport-wellbeing nexus in cities across the planet. Cities are, after all, not only the sites where most people live and sustainable mobility might be achieved most easily but also the places where inequalities run deepest. This presentation will elaborate a transport-related conception of wellbeing that is eudaimonic and rooted in Amartya Sen's capability approach yet also move beyond this to consider the relational, emergent and experiential nature of capabilities as they relate everyday mobility. To this end the presentation will also draw on and rework on the concepts of 'motility' and 'spaces of wellbeing'. It will utilise empirical research about cycling and walking in São Paulo and London to illustrate salient aspects of the interrelations between wellbeing and travel behaviour. One insight emerging from this manner of thinking is that wellbeing cannot be understood as inhering in individuals but rather is an always-emergent quality of shifting configurations of humans and all kinds of other urban elements.