

All About the Money? Social Inclusion and the Car

Julie Clark

University of Glasgow
Department of Urban Studies
25 Bute Gardens
Glasgow
G12 8RS
Scotland
UK

Tel: +44 (0)141 330 4377
Email: j.clark.1@research.gla.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Current urban policy in the UK rests on the triumvirate of regeneration, sustainability and social inclusion. However, an analysis of the social impacts of car-use exposes a policy dilemma, rooted in the tensions between environmental, economic and social objectives. Intuitively, the primary function of the car can be considered as one of serving social inclusion. The mobility that comes with private transport increases personal freedom and expands opportunities, securing greater access to economic participation, social networks, leisure activities, education and medical services. Nonetheless, the dominance of the car and the wider impacts of car ownership also give rise to a range of environmental externalities, which can be seen as exclusionary by virtue of impacting most significantly on already disadvantaged members of society. However, additional to environmental concerns, the influence of the car on social dynamics operates at a more pernicious level; traditionally, diversity has been seen as one of the virtues of the city but the separation of urban functions since the advent of private transport has also meant the increasing separation and segregation of different social groups. Similarly, the nature of the car is such that, as “private” transport, by definition it reduces opportunities for the kinds of casual social contact that have been theorised as central to neighbourhood and social cohesion.

Within the wider policy framework, contemporary holistic approaches to regeneration policy aim to improve the economic wellbeing as well as the physical fabric of participant communities. However, increased economic affluence is correlated with increased levels of car ownership and use. This in turn, produces further externalities - both environmental and social – which threaten levels of social interaction and cohesion. One approach to resolving this dilemma could lie in a better understanding of how spatial scale interacts with other socio-economic determinants of car ownership. This paper presents empirical research exploring the determinants of car ownership and examining changes in the relative strength a range of social inclusion indicators using the British Household Panel Survey.

Key Words: social inclusion, car, transport, logistic regression, BHPS