

DAILY MOBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY: AN INTERPRETATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

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This article examines the new challenges posed by daily mobility analysis from the perspective of Human Geography. Although our discipline has a long record of daily mobility studies, in recent years the number of studies has strikingly increased, while a wider scope of objectives and analyses has meant rethinking concepts and methodology. This article delves further into this rethinking from the basis of the changes which have taken place in economic and territorial structures at the end of the 20th century: the introduction of the new sustainability paradigm which brings with it the impact of transport means on the environment and includes social structures – incorporating the people who make trips as an analytical variable and not just the means of transport used. This article also highlights the quantitative sources of information that are generated, underlining the need for these to adapt themselves to new challenges posed in daily mobility analysis.

Daily mobility is a growing and complex phenomenon that is deeply rooted in territory. Where journeys begin and end define its primary spatial coordinates, but, at the same time, how a territory is organised along with its geographical variables (density, morphology, functionality, population etc.) have a direct bearing on how the movements of the population are structured. All of this explains why Human Geography, both at a Spanish national level and internationally, is paying increasing attention to this phenomenon from its various analytical fields.

Population Geography approaches the study of mobility from the perspective of the spatial movements of people, from where the term spatial mobility derives, and here we have territorial and sociodemographic variables interacting. When speed becomes an integral part of a population's daily life and with it the various means of transport, we have the emergence of Transportation Geography, which could be defined in terms of the study of transport systems and their impact on space. Daily mobility is also closely linked to urban and metropolitan phenomena. However, it is extremely difficult to maintain the archetypal dichotomy between city or country life in scientific terms nowadays, and so cities are no

longer defined by conventional socio-economic variables, but rather daily individual flows. Functional territories are discussed in these terms, and this is where there has been a long tradition in Geography of identifying the origins and destinations of work related trips. Postmodernism, linked with Post-Fordism, has become manifest in rethinking traditional topics of study and with the appearance of a collection of «New Geographies» concerned with previously overlooked aspects of human activities. From this perspective, daily population mobility is analysed from the perspective of its impact on the environment and the social environment, with energy consumption and contaminating gas emissions being the dimensions which give most cause for concern. The «New Cultural Geographies» have also approached daily mobility from the basis of the particular interests of non-hegemonic social groups. This perspective challenges the daily mobility metanarratives, different mobility-related social realities are studied, revealing different daily mobility habits, and also the different ways the territory is used.

At the same time that it has become more prominent in the various fields of geography and evolved alongside the most recent paradigms, analysis of daily mobility has progressively integrated variables which have enhanced the discipline. The major conceptual leap took place in the closing decades of the 20th century when the focus of studies moved from means of transport to considering the people who actually make these journeys.

In addition, in recent times daily mobility has undergone considerable structural changes in the form it takes and its function. From the perspective of Geography we can acknowledge these changes from three angles: transformations in economic and territorial structures with the move from Fordism to Post-Fordism, the inclusion of environmental variables within the sustainability paradigm, and incorporating how mobility is structured socially –since this concerns the people who travel and not only the means of transport used.

The profound changes in the 1970s, which resulted in moving from a Fordist to a post-Fordist structure, radically transformed economic and territorial models in the final decades of the 20th century, and with it a transformation in mobility models and analyses. The present territorial dynamics of urbanised spaces are the result of two parallel processes: population activities becoming more dispersed in urban and metropolitan environments and, at the same time, greater concentration and proximity in which neighbourhoods gain social value. The first of these processes develops along the lines of an increasingly circular outward dispersal of the population and their activities, a decentralisation resulting in changes at an urban and metropolitan level. The second process means denser neighbourhoods, in big cities or the semi-rural belts in metropolitan areas. Mobility is on the increase and becoming more diverse: flows are more and more numerous and occupy more space and time. Flexibility in the working day has meant the progressive inclusion of more varied working hours, when work itself is also combined with a whole range of other activities, to the degree of breaking down the distinction between rush hours and off-peak hours. And so, the reasons for making journeys multiply and all of them, whether from the productive or reproductive sphere, are necessary and indispensable. This means that, in addition to work and study-related motives, going shopping, visiting friends and taking the children to school are also reasons for making journeys that have been included in mobility questionnaires.

The turn of the century has not only meant a transformation in the economic structure but also substituting the modernity paradigm for the sustainability paradigm. Environmental

consequences are thus highlighted from not only a local perspective (air pollution, noise levels, land cover, territorial fragmentation, etc.), but also from a more global logic (climatic change, biodiversity, limitations of natural resources, etc.). At the same time, the study of mobility has opened up to social conflicts resulting from territorial models which until then had been left out.

Changing the subject under analysis, from means of transport to the people who travel, has encouraged a number of studies focused on the relationship between mobility models and the social structure of the population. The means of transport used, the reasons for the trips and the time they take, among other variables, are subject to a series of social conditioners. Furthermore, this approach, has allowed for illustrating social conflicts resulting from mobility and placed them at the heart of the debate, while also underlining how important it is for all social groups to have access to daily activities.

From all this, one can see that the information tools on mobility and transport have to adapt to the necessary development of our discipline. This not only means defining a new object and subject of study, but also extending the range of analytical methods. Clearly, if the subject and object have changed we need new analytical instruments and data gathering methods. The most widely known and used of these sources of information are questionnaires. The degree of theoretical and empirical argumentation we have reached as a consequence of population mobility analysis is illustrated by which variables and agents are included, the basis for territorial zoning, methodology, design and publishing, and applicability to public policies. Therefore, it is essential to adapt information tools to the implications of new demands posed by epistemological advances.

