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TRACK 13

Transport Planning and Mobility Policies:
Available and Affordable Transportation

"I MOVE THEREFORE I CAN". TRANSLATING MOBILITY CAPITALS INTO PLANNING PRACTICE

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Abstract

Aim of the paper is to understand if the construction of mobility capitals, as shaped by planning actions, could be introduced in planning practice and if it could contribute to the orientation of individual and collective travel behaviours towards more sustainable mobility practices. Mobility capitals, that can be framed as the opportunities in the field of movement which are available to individuals, are introduced as a key concept to associate individual aspirations and their reflection on mobility practices, focusing on how individuals differently appropriate the opportunities of movement. Consequently, the potential significance of mobility capitals for mobility planning is discussed through various examples, referred in particular to the now spreading Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans – a planning tool developed at the European level – which seem to contribute to the construction of mobility capitals with different styles of mobility governance.

1. Introduction

Contemporary urban settings are more and more shaped by mobility practices, which at the same time are crucial to shape individual lives. Relevant in this sense are mobility capitals, that can be framed as the opportunities in the field of movement which are available to individuals. The concept of mobility capital, developed in particular by mobility sociologists, is nevertheless missing attempts of concrete applications in planning.

Aim of the paper is to understand if the construction of mobility capitals, as shaped by planning actions, could be introduced in planning practice and if it could contribute to the orientation of individual and collective travel behaviours towards more sustainable mobility practices. In this way, it could be possible to provide mobility opportunities which would meet more closely individual aims, while providing more generally positive externalities (like lower pollutant emissions or wider access to job occasions). Specific interventions on mobility capitals could in fact provide wider and varied opportunities for movement while reducing the negative externalities related to personal trips.

The paper then introduces mobility capitals as a key concept to associate individual aspirations and their reflection on mobility practices, focusing on how individuals differently appropriate the opportunities of movement. Consequently, the potential significance of mobility capitals for mobility planning is discussed through various examples, referred in particular to the now spreading Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) – a planning tool developed at the European level – which seem to contribute to the construction of mobility capitals with different styles of mobility governance.

The concept of mobility capitals has not established significant relationships with the current planning practice, maintaining mainly an academic nature. Then, it is not possible to observe ongoing examples of mobility planning practice which explicitly assume mobility capitals as a guiding concept. On the contrary, it is possible to observe if and how some current experience provide potential contributions to the construction of mobility capitals, nurturing specific features which do increase individual and collective opportunities in the field of mobility. In this sense, the recent SUMPs may provide a tentative field for this exploration. The European guidelines shaping them in fact recognise a key role to the achievement of social targets, referring also to 'ensure all

citizens are offered transport options that enable access to key destinations and services' and 'contribute to enhancing the attractiveness and quality of the urban environment and urban design for the benefits of citizens, the economy and society as a whole' (Wefering et al, 2013: p. 8). The interest in SUMPs could deepen in particular the reading of those plans which have been considered as best mobility planning practices, like those that since 2012 have received the Sump award (as part of the Do the Right Mix initiative, promoted by the European Commission). Considering the recent nature of this planning tool, the analysis of examples which are already considered as positive experiences allows a preliminary examination of the paper's question.

2. The relevance of mobility capitals

Mobility is imposing itself as a category that can frame and arrange into new forms contemporary social life, leading to the definition of a new paradigm for social sciences (Sheller and Urry, 2006). Mobility appears as a fundamental tool to analyse contemporary urban settings, considering the possibility that every individual has to move both from a spatial and a social point of view (Canzler & al, 2008). From academic debate to policy discourse, it is seen as a crucial aspect to understand what already exists and to prefigure future scenarios. The wide recent production of reflections on the issues of mobility seems to reflects such rich influence (as well summarised in Sheller, 2011).

The rich debate reflects a shift in the way mobility is considered. Like any other discipline with a strong (but not exclusive) technical component, also mobility planning has been influenced for long time by the Positivist approach criticised by Donald Schön (1981): an attitude summarised in the concept of problem solving, according to which any given problem has its own solution, specified by technical standards and technology. The approach has characterised a rational form of planning partially abandoned only in the last decades, but is instead still present in the transport field. The planning activity dealing with mobility in fact is oriented by efficiency, with the purpose of favouring existing mobility trends as observed in the given settings. The search for an efficient mobility is reflected in the prevalence of technical tools, like transport modelling and cost-benefit analysis.

Today instead it is more and more necessary to consider mobility from an enlarged perspective, able to take into account also social issues (Martens, 2006). Planning practice has always had social and political reflections, also when dealing with movement: the relationships between subjects and communities are effectively developed also through a specific construction of the territory and its networks (Raffestin, 1983). Nevertheless, in addition to this some current environmental, social and economic issues frame mobility as a fundamental opportunity for any individual, being an essential requisite for the recognition of citizenship rights (Secchi, 2014).

The rise of this social dimension of mobility is conveyed by different approaches that try to deal with it, with a specific attention to overcome existing inequalities among individuals and communities. On the one hand, many have focused on transport-related social exclusion, developing conceptual frameworks and operative tools based on three different features: accessibility, capability and time geography (as in the summary provided in Lucas, 2012). On the other hand, a more purposeful and political approach is related to wider conceptualizations of social justice, framing mobility as a fundamental right to guarantee also civic freedom for every citizen (Sheller, 2014).

Within this rich debate, the perspective we choose to explore in this paper is that of mobility capitals. Considering its current development in fact this approach seems to well focus on the freedom that a person has to lead one kind of life or another, adopting it as a relevant ethical approach even for planning practices. Mobility in facts acts as a tool for differentiation, guarantying to anyone a capital that can be used to pursue one's own aspirations. Framing mobility as a capital, different are the definitions, such as motility (see for example Kaufmann, 2002), network capital (see Larsen et al, 2006) or potential mobility (Kellermann, 2007); these different definitions anyway share the focus on both individual resources and local ties, opportunities and

endowments. Potential interactions between these principles and the actions in the mobility field are missing, suggesting to take into account the possible practical inflections of a theme discussed mainly from a theoretical perspective – up to now, at least. The possible relevance of the topic then is not only academic, but possibly wider: a deeper understanding of the empowering role of mobility and its uses in planning are not just a contribution to an existing debate, but could help the current planning practice. Amongst the others, an approach focused on making individuals and territories capable – even through mobility – could increase the opportunities available to them and consequently contribute to their development, even in terms of struggling with new opportunities and risks (Donolo, 2005).

3. Mobility capitals and practices

Mobility has a relevant influence on contemporary societies, acting as an element of individual differentiation (Litman, 2011) and having as a consequence an increased plurality of urban populations and spatial practices (Pasqui, 2008). Nevertheless, it seems constraining to consider mobility simply as a frame to read contemporary urbanity: could it be possible instead to frame it also as a policy tool (Pucci, 2015)? Aiming at forecasting and influencing future urban scenarios, individual behaviours could have a fundamental role (Urry, 2008). Existing or new mobility practices could generate positive externalities both for individuals and communities: in such a perspective, mobility capitals could become a reference, both to work on individual behaviours (promoting existing virtuous examples and sustaining alternative practices) and to increase individual opportunities (providing access to basic services which are currently inaccessible for specific areas or populations).

The first operational option draws on the fact that, in their multiplicity, mobility practices become the tactical expression of wider strategies, which mobilize different capitals in different ways. Practices are not ended in themselves, since they often have an instrumental value (for example, a movement aims at reaching a certain place, to carry out a certain activity or facilitate a specific interaction) and intercept other dimensions. They also provide occasions for aggregation: according to the situations, mobility becomes the field in which are expressed or from which are originated unexpected occasions for interaction and for the mobilization of capitals. Often the mobility practices convey requests and propose solutions which can intercept the public action, with travel behaviours which express new needs and sometimes propose alternative solutions, being an expression of the multiple trajectories and interests that characterize contemporary mobility. Then, moving from the aim of orientating behaviours, mobility practices can be examined starting from the capitals they mobilize, developing then specific actions to support them. This relationship also seems to anticipate a new way to conceive mobility policy. Traditionally, a mobility demand from the bottom was sided by an offer defined by institutions, that starting from technical analyses developed infrastructures and services for mobility, framing them as a further form of welfare (Secchi, 2005). Contemporary practices instead show more and more examples that from below express a mobility demand which, at the same time, tries to internally develop also part of the offer. The demand-offer dichotomy, as expressed in diverse forms of social engagement, questions also traditional approaches to mobility planning.

The second option focuses instead on the availability of mobility opportunities and on the consequent possibility to use them. While capitals represent a form of potential mobility, which could be appropriated according to individual aims and aspirations, often the provision of mobility opportunities is scarce, compromising even the ability to access basic services. Accessibility to places, goods, services and people becomes then the focus of an approach that can use mobility as a tool to increase the availability of such opportunities. In this sense, mobility is a medium rather than an end, being related to the access that it allows. The focus on basic accessibility seems more suitable where massive interventions on mobility are missing (leading to informal alternatives) or address only specific interests; the Western tradition that has included transport infrastructures and services within a wider definition of welfare somehow reduces the relevance that this specific approach could have in European settings. This approach could anyway act both at a microscale

(with specific interventions on chosen areas) or with a broader perspective (making the capability approach contribute to ongoing planning processes, especially when referring to mobility). Compared to the approach working on individual behaviours, the focus on basic accessibility would consider specific, systematic practices – those related to the access to basic services and opportunities like workplaces, schools, market places and social services, which are needed on a daily or regular basis. This approach would then convey a more traditional framing of mobility issues, related to the provision of increased opportunities: its difference would rely on the proposed approach, based on the construction of individual capitals and not simply on the public provision of transport services and infrastructures.

4. Mobility capitals and planning

Privileging mobility capitals and the practices using them, planning practice would require specific adaptations to such approach, considering that up to now this has mainly remained within an academic domain. Nowadays, mobility practices reflect the multiplicity of interests, opportunities and need of any individual: occasional trips are growing, in relation to varied activities (leisure, services, accompanying…) and to different periods of the day. The multiplicity of time and destinations obstacles the provision of effective alternatives to the use of private cars. Moreover, multiple mobility practices continuously question traditional administrative divisions, defining contingent territories shaped by the temporary presence of urban populations (Pucci, 2013). Such multiplicity is an issue for traditional approaches to the government of mobility, but maybe is also an opportunity bringing potential solutions. Practices may propose claims and produce collective goods, developing policies from the bottom. In the first case, the relevance of practices is in their very existence, since it allows specific forms of spatial appropriation. In the second case instead the focus is on 'the social production of public goods, so to have commons by social practices rather than by policies' (Donolo, 2005, p. 47). Such perspective associates the multiplicity of mobility practices with a potential production of collective goods: individuals and communities may contribute to their creation, using existing services in unexpected ways or creating new possibilities for mobility.

An attentive planning approach to mobility may then recognize those contributions from the bottom which could develop interesting features to be considered within mobility policy. Nevertheless, even traditional forms of planning may focus on the production of those features which constitute individual and collective mobility capitals. Preliminarily assuming the features of mobility capitals as exemplified in the concept of motility (for which more operational definitions have been provided), their construction should focus on 'access to different forms and degrees of mobility, competence to recognize and make use of access, and appropriation of a particular choice, including the option of non-action' (Kaufmann et al, 2004, p. 750). Adopting mobility capitals as a reference for planning, existing and new actions can be evaluated according to their contribution to individual and collective capitals, going beyond a simple evaluation of their technical or economical efficiency. Rather than introducing new solutions, the proposed perspective works on how the planning practice is framed: it becomes an activity oriented to guarantee opportunities. To do so, it differently evaluates traditional approaches and becomes more attentive to those proposals and initiatives which may contribute to the provision of such capitals.

As a way to explore the feasibility of such paradigm change, the discussion of some recent European Sustainable Urban Mobilities Plan aims at observing ongoing actions, to consider if and how they already contribute to the construction of these capitals and how. The current mobility planning practice does not consider explicitly the concept of mobility capitals; nevertheless, before proposing devoted actions an attentive analysis of what already exists can explore a different framing, to orientate current actions towards different, and possibly more effective, directions.

5. SUMPs and mobility capitals

A tentative recognition of the SUMPs awarded since 2012 as best European plans can provide first elements to support the possible introduction of a mobility capital approach in the planning practice. The short overview of their various plans can refer to the three already mentioned categories that compose mobility capitals (as framed by the motility concept): access, competence and appropriation (Kaufmann et al, 2004). As a preliminary observation, all the examined plans seem to share a similar approach to mobility planning: it is seen as an activity combining projects and policies, trying to reduce the use of private cars and to replace it with more sustainable alternatives – from public transport to cycling. The focus on sustainability, mainly seen as an environmental target, leads to a shared emphasis on some widespread current planning principles, referring to land use-transport connection, promotion of active mobility, integration among different transport modes. As a consequence, the plans tend to privilege similar actions and most of them seem to foster individual and collective access, with a minor emphasis on competence and appropriation.

As for access, it 'is constrained by options and conditions. The options refer to the entire range of means of transportation and communication available, and the entire range of services and equipment accessible at a given time. The conditions refer to the accessibility of the options in terms of location-specific cost, logistics and other constraints' (Kaufmann et al, 2004: 750). It tends then to include the majority of the actions proposed in the examined plans, especially those increasing the opportunities for movement. A first action in this sense is the integration of existing transport networks, combining different transport services, offering common titles of use and providing interchanges. The action combines service planning and fare policy: for example, the German city of Dresden has promoted the networking of all transport modes by intermodal and multimodal transfer points, while the compatriot city of Bremen has improved the integration of transport network across its region. In addition to these overall approaches, integration is pursued also via smaller specific infrastructures, like park and ride structures or bicycle stations (as in Dresden). All these elements facilitate the use of the networks, making easier to access them and take advantage of their various parts.

A further element increasing access is the provision of specific services and infrastructures that are missing or incomplete. Apart from the expansion of public transport and cycle networks (which are almost commonplaces of sustainable mobility planning and can be found almost in any place, at least as guidelines), some plans have fostered the diffusion of new sharing services, focusing on cars. Both car pooling and car sharing have then been introduced as a way to provide new connections that can more effectively serve specific relations in specific times of the day, when alternative services are not available: even if their sustainability can be questioned, shared cars do increase the opportunities for access, especially for places and hours with poor services.

The previously mentioned actions somehow intervene on the options, including means of transportation, services and equipments; the focus on public spaces instead seems to work on the conditions of accessibility, privileging interventions on the locations. The Belgian city of Ghent offers a traditional approach to the theme, focusing on the extension of pedestrian areas and proposing the reduction of cut-through traffic in the historic centre; the measure in itself reduces specific quotes of accessibility, preventing car drivers to use the central roads, but also guarantees wider opportunities of use for non motorists, increasing the available areas and the possible usages of these public spaces. Instead, the Basque city of Vitoria has promoted a diffused use of the superblocks, urban cells of different dimensions from which motorised vehicles are prevented to enter. Traffic is concentrated on the bordering roads, while the inner streets are left to active forms of mobility – from cycling to walking; also public transport is redesigned accordingly. In this way, the quality of urban space is increased and specific forms of mobility become more attractive – from the improved public transport to the safer cycling.

Moving to competences, this is maybe the most difficult field of action for current mobility planning. Our attitudes to mobility are influenced by previous experiences that are part of our mobility biographies, so that a sedimentation of experiences and opportunities continuously shapes

the individual competencies for mobility. Various communication and civic education initiatives addressing specific categories (children in particular) work on the construction of individual competences, while interventions on the legibility of networks reduce the level of complexity in the use of transport services. Among the most recent SUMPs, the plan of Dresden provides a small example in this sense, having worked on the adjustment of public transport schedules: an integrated system, with regular passages and interchanges, provides an easier understanding for its users and requires then a lower level of competencies in order to be used. In other cases, inbetween competence and appropriation, some cities have developed devoted marketing initiatives: for example, the Slovenian town of Ljutomer has introduced a "day of active mobility", promoting the use of cycling and walking also as modal choice for everyday trips.

Considering appropriation, the discussed measures imply the effective possibility to rely on a given service, choosing to use it or not. A first example is that of operative traffic information, as those provided in Dresden: ongoing road works, traffic conditions and parking possibilities are communicated on real time, offering the information that allow to know which is the most convenient modal alternative in a specific moment of the day. This action intervenes providing updated information, allowing then the appropriation of a modal alternative in a precise moment; it does not have the structural consequences that can obtain actions focused on fostering individual and collective competencies, since it allows the appropriation of something that can be already used. A second approach is that of providing incentives for specific categories, fostering the use of existing services which may prevent some citizen groups from their uses. The French city of Strasbourg has intervened both creating special facilitations for disabled people, both providing fare incentives for financially disadvantaged families. In this way, services that already exist and could be potentially used become more usable also to those categories that are currently experimenting restrictions to access, due to physical or economic reasons. In general, also the actions for appropriation are difficult to define, since external interventions can privilege one modal choice or another, but the final decision on how to move is in charge of each individual.

It must be also noted that all the examined plans share a specific attention to stakeholder involvement and participatory planning processes. While not being directly related to the provision of further opportunities for mobility, this can be framed as an aspect that fosters both competence and appropriation. On the one hand, participatory processes help to increase knowledge of existing transport alternatives and more general mobility issues, expanding the perspectives of everyday urban experiences. On the other hand, appropriation is potentially fostered, admitting that participatory processes allow a better knowledge of different mobility alternatives and increase the familiarity of individuals and communities to them.

6. Conclusions

From the short overview on the awarded European SUMPs, what emerges is the potential space for a mobility capital approach even within the current planning practice. The overall attention to sustainability in fact provides some elements that contribute to the construction of individual and collective capitals. Most of the actions contribute to access, working on the offer of mobility services and, indirectly, on the quality of public spaces (which can facilitate specific forms of active mobility). Devoted measures, like incentives and promotional initiatives, provide elements facilitating the appropriation of mobility. Competences instead are almost completely absent from current mobility planning, without structural marketing or educational initiative which may shape the individual ability to use one or another modal choice.

The current planning practice seems then to provide a partial contribution to the construction of mobility capitals. It is relevant to notice that most of the examined plans have been developed in medium-sized cities, mainly located in Central Europe: the results of this preliminary overview are then influenced by the focus on relatively small cities where the principles of sustainable mobility planning have been in use since long time. It would be interesting to conduct a similar analysis on completely different areas, less sensitive to the issues of sustainability or less influenced by

consistent planning traditions; more simply, also a study of more complex metropolitan areas and urban regions could potentially provide different results on how mobility capitals are currently constructed throughout these different settings.

In general, a potential space for a further attention to mobility capitals appears. The European guidelines on SUMPs recognise specific social objectives that mobility planning should pursue, while the dominant planning paradigms tend to privilege actions that are environmentally sustainable (considering also that it is easier to measure their impacts and benefits); as a consequence, the social benefits of mobility plans are very specific (with precise categories receiving the positive externalities of some actions) or too generic (without any possibility to quantify the positive consequences of specific interventions, especially if generally benefitting the whole community). Instead, a focus on mobility capitals could guarantee specific references for their construction (referring to the three categories of access, competence and appropriation, and eventually to further, more precise categorisations), and at the same time could also provide wider occasions to consider and support those everyday mobility practices which contribute to the pursuit of wider collective aims.

The paper then aims to suggest a different, and potentially fruitful perspective for mobility planning, trying to give more relevance to the social dimensions of mobility. Its starting concepts require further research, in order to be expanded and even adapted to the peculiarities of the planning practice: considering the various definitions provided for mobility capitals and their scarce planning uses, it becomes necessary to understand at which conditions a mainly sociological concept could be transferred (and become usable) within the current mobility planning practice. Nevertheless, a reference to mobility capitals can give more relevance to individual attitudes and behaviours, making mobility opportunities more effective thanks to a closer connection to the ways in which they are used. More importantly, framing mobility from a capability perspective may allow to consider the wider uses of mobility, taking into account also the activities and the social relations to which it can contribute.

7. References

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