Why Transport Poverty is an Issue of Social Exclusion - Impact Hub Vienna

May 11, 2011 | Matthias Reisinger

I come from a small village in the south of Poland, which does not have public transport. It also doesn't have local government-funded transport connections to the bigger cities in a travelling distance. A private network of minivans, the only mode of transportation for those without a car, goes back and forth between Cracow and my home village, often filled to the brim with people. Imagine being squeezed into an overcrowded bus for almost 2 hours during peak times Monday to Friday and you will get the idea. The lack of reliable mode of transportation meant up to 3 hours of commute per day, five times per week, during my school years and being forced to pass up interesting job opportunities as the work schedule wouldn't allow me to get to the bus stop in time to catch the last ride home. Eventually, in pursuit of education and a better future, I had to move.

As the rapid urbanisation trend continues to climb worldwide – by 2050, 83.7% of people in Europe are projected to live in urban areas (European Commission) – more and more people are hit by the phenomenon called "*transport poverty*". Countries **are not developing urban and urban-adjacent areas fast enough to accommodate the influx and transit needs of the inhabitants**, which leaves many people not being able to benefit from a better infrastructure. This problematic urbanisation by-product is not only a serious hindrance to the continuous economic growth – it's also a major inequality and social disadvantage problem. Particularly affected are the vulnerable groups such as people with reduced mobility, children, younger and older generations, women, migrants and ethnic minorities, and citizens affected by low income or unemployment.

At the time of writing this article there is no standarised definition of transport poverty. According to the Finnish Transport Research Centre Verne at the Tampere University, transport poverty can be defined as "phenomenon that consists of four concepts: mobility poverty, transport affordability, accessibility poverty and exposure to transport externalities." This description has to be further elaborated on in terms of macro-scale factors (for example, the cost of car ownership or physical location) and micro-scale factors, such as the size of a household, income, street connectivity, the level of bus services and neighbourhood safety (Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice). **HiReach**, a three-year EU-funded Horizon 2020 project that focuses on the development of new tools and business models to improve accessibility for local areas and communities in need, compiled a list of mobile poverty qualifying components. An individual is transport poor if at least one of the following conditions cannot be fulfilled as they try to satisfy their daily basic activity need:

- **Availability** – No suitable transport option available
- **Accessibility** – Transport options do not reach destinations and opportunities
- **Affordability** – High cost burden
- **Time budget** – Excessive amount of time in travel
- **Adequacy** – Travel conditions are dangerous, unsafe or unhealthy for the individual

Social Effects of Mobile Poverty

In itself, transport poverty is a significant obstacle to the fulfillment of basic needs. Lack of suitable transportation means cutting off access to decent job opportunities, education, advanced health assistance and basic amenities available to city dwellers. Transport poverty also perpetuates poverty. For example, low mobility opportunities combined with the requirement to own a car gave rise to the phenomenon known as "Forced Car Ownership' (FCO)", which describes a situation in which an individual or a group spends a large chunk of the household budget on the purchase and operation of a car despite also reporting financial difficulties (Household car adoption and financial distress in deprived urban communities: A case of forced car ownership?). The underlying problem with FCO is that many people have to secure a mode of transportation to commute to work in an attempt to improve the financial situation and simultaneously bear the burden of spending large amounts of money on the vehicle as motoring costs increase every year.

Transport poverty is a serious concern because it's existence signals that we are not on the path to achieving equality and sustainability for all. Transportation system and accessibility are referenced as one of the key conditions required for the fulfilment of a wide variety of SDG's progress milestones (Analysis of the Transport Relevance of Each of the 17 SDGs Report). Social benefits of accessible and convenient transport are explicitly covered by **goal number 11- Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**, through the 11.2 target: *By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons* (SDG Knowledge Platform).
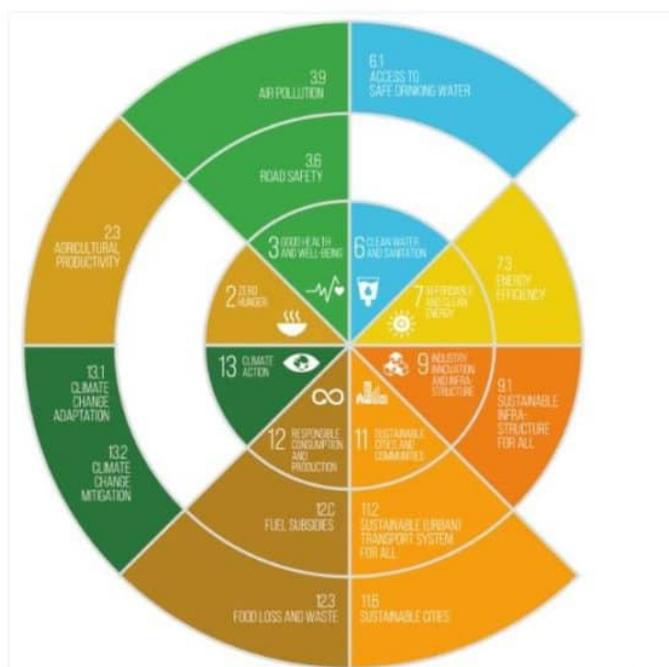

Figure 1: Transport-related SDGs and targets (Source: SloCaT, 2015)

Source: SloCaT

Transport-related social exclusion is highly individual-specific and takes on different forms as people, particularly the vulnerable groups, struggle to maintain a reasonable quality of life. Women in rural areas are more affected by time-constraints than their city counterparts, while women living in dense urban areas will have their transport decision heavily influenced by the question of safety of their respective neighbourhoods. The elderly or people with disabilities will weigh accessibility and comfort against the number of trips they are forced to make, even if the government waives their bus ticket fees. Further considerations have to

be made in terms of income status, which directly influences access to potential mobility solutions, digital savviness or transit access.

When any member of our society cannot rely on an affordable and convenient mode of transportation, we cannot talk about achieving inclusive societies.

Can We Solve the Issue of Transport Poverty?

In the spirit of Impact Hub Vienna, I say: Yes, we can! Transport poverty is not only a social problem, but also a market opportunity for new mobility solutions to reduce time and cost, or even trigger new mobility needs. It's an avenue of opportunity for innovative transportation startups, which are working on business models that cater to the needs of the most affected disadvantaged groups. The HiReach Startup Lab is an Accelerator Program, which launched in 2019 targeting start-ups, which create mobility solutions for vulnerable groups. It's part of the EU Project, HiReach. Find out more about the program here.

HiReach reaches its last mile in 2020 and invites you to join the **final virtual events**, a series of two consecutive weeks appointments during which you will find out more about the startups, as well as the program. **Click here to register for the events scheduled for September 2020.**