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The Mobility Trap: transport and social exclusion in global South cities



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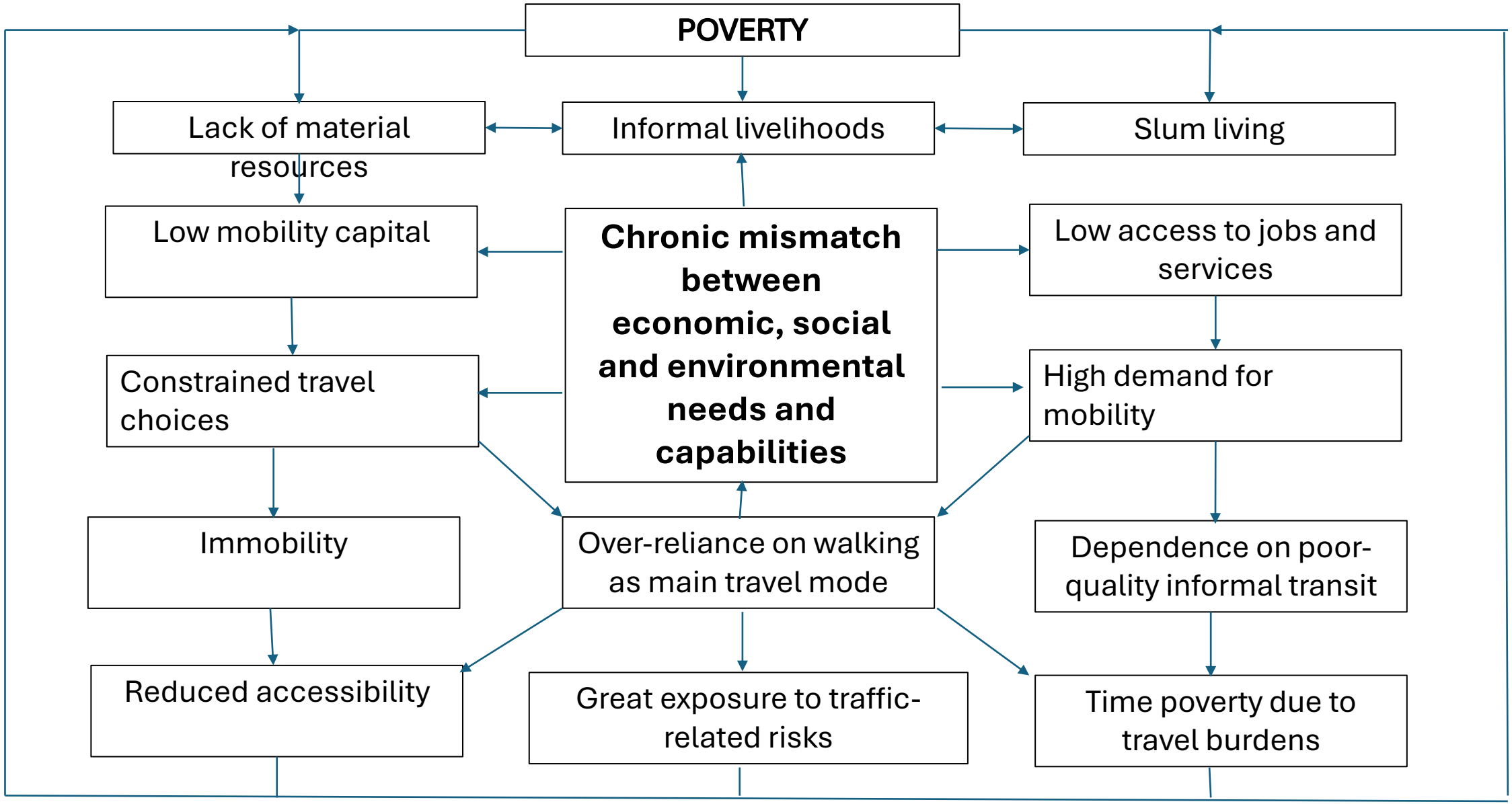
What is the mobility trap?

the systematic and repeated denial of sufficient mobility resources that is visited upon already social disadvantaged individuals and communities, who nevertheless need to travel to enable access to daily life-supporting activities

- It's a worldwide phenomenon with severe social consequences
- More acutely experienced by people living in poverty in low- and middle-income urban contexts
- Women, young and older people, people with disabilities and slum dwellers are disproportionately affected


POVERTY
Lack of material resources
Informal livelihoods
Slum living
Low mobility capital
Chronic mismatch between economic, social and environmental needs and capabilities
Low access to jobs and services
Constrained travel choices
High demand for mobility
Immobility
Over-reliance on walking as main travel mode
Dependence on poor-quality informal transit
Reduced accessibility
Great exposure to traffic-related risks
Time poverty due to travel burdens

What is the problem?

- Getting there
  - Lack of access to transport systems
  - Poor connectivity to employment, education, healthcare, markets, social amenities, social support
- Paying for it
  - High cost of transit relative to incomes
  - Low and precarious wages of transport workers
  - Financing new transport services
- Staying alive
  - Health and safety risks of ‘walking captured’ people
    - High levels of exposure to road traffic deaths and injuries, and traffic pollution
    - gender-based violence and sexual harassment (GBVSH)
- Homeward bound
  - Entrapment of urban migrants on undeveloped land within cities and their peripheries
  - Impacts of slum clearance programmes in the modernisation plans of cities

Getting there



I wish that they could have some recreational venue to help children who do not go to school and those who are not employed to equip them with basic skills of some sort, just to keep them busy, sports and so forth. Like the thing they show on tv, they show draft, they show chess, something like a park, where they can go and be kept busy instead of having children missing and dying and mutilated and try to take them out of stealing.



Paying for it

I need to be able to get enough money for transport. I used to work at the place where all they paid me was enough for transport and I quit the job because I could not afford my other needs.



It is cheaper to live in the township the problem is transport. You have to use taxis to come to town on a daily basis and we cannot afford that money. If we are here at least we can walk or use a train and therefore we spend less on transport.



Staying alive



1.9 million people die each year in road crashes and a further 50 million are injured, 92 percent of which occur in LMICs. This is despite $3.34 billion dollars of World Bank investments in road safety projects, mostly delivered in Africa and South Asia



In a Bangladeshi study of women's experiences of GBVSH on paid (public) transport revealed that of the 200 women that were interviewed 32% rarely or never felt safe whilst travelling and a further 53.5 percent only sometimes felt safe. , King et al. (2021)

Homeward bound



The landowner came and obtained a court order to demolish the whole community and that's how those structures were brought down … Then they come to enforce eviction orders, which is against the will of the people on the land …Not only did the housing go, but lots of businesses as well, right alongside that road. All everything that was there, if any investment, school, all the businesses, supermarkets were all brought down





Why is it happening?

- Colonial and post-colonial settlement patterns
- Inherited planning cultures from Europe and North America
- *Coloniality – trapped in colonial desires* (W.D. Mignolo, 2013)
- Mass urbanisation with little responsive housing provision and service planning
- Rapid motorisation with poorly protected infrastructures for traditional mobility modes
- Idealistic expectations to deliver modern/smart cities through technical innovation
- A lack of knowledge skills and resources to ‘do things differently’

Nairobi, Kenya





- Colonialism came quite late to Africa and did not last long, starting in the late 1800s and ending in the mid-1960s
- *'European rule, underpinned throughout the continent by coercion and racism, was often violent, exploitative and traumatic … For some Africans colonial rule represented a threat; for others, an opportunity'*. (Parker and Rathbone, 2007: 1)
- In Kenya, British colonialism was firmly grounded in the exploitation of natural resources, farming in the highly contested White highland areas, and cheap labour supply supported through a concentration of developments in a few strategic urban areas.
- Transport infrastructure played an important role in the development of Nairobi from its outset. It was first established as a railway camp during the construction of the Kenya and Uganda Railway in 1899.
- Early colonial period, most incoming travel to Kenya was either by sea or over-ground on foot or horseback. Local people most usually walked to carry out their daily activities, which were not catered for in urban planning and services.
- By 1906, the population had increased to approximately 11,000 citizens, of which the majority population were Africans who either worked to build the railway, or were railway workers, or came to the city to supply food and other goods.
- The city also included approximately 2581 Asian immigrants from the Punjab, Gujarat and Sindhi regions, who were specifically brought to Kenya as 'coolie' labourers
- The Asian residential areas that housed these workers were segregated from the Europeans and Africans signalling the beginnings of a urban structure that purposefully sought to divide rather than unite the different ethnic communities.

Updated Kenyan Integrated National Transport Strategy 2022

- '*Poor physical planning has led to dispersed land uses that promotes urban sprawl, long trips, use of private passenger cars, and generally leads to an expensive urban transport system, especially in Nairobi. Some land uses along the transport corridors conflict with transport functions and negatively affect safety and security … The inefficiency of urban transport is due to inadequate infrastructure, lack of integration of roads transport with other modes of transport and weak traffic demand management. As a result, the majority of low-income urban workers find public transport costly hence meet most of their transport needs by walking and cycling.'* (2024: 27-28)
- Three reasons for these failures:
- i) procrastination – i.e. that the time is not right, or the money is not there;
- ii) symbolic action – i.e. that they are doing good things already - more will come in good time
- ii) professional preservation of the status quo – i.e. don't rock the boat and go with the flow.

Quito, Ecuador

- By 1990, public transport in Quito was provided by 68 lines of colectivos and 18 lines of *busetas* - estimated 6,000 operating vehicles in the historic centre
- Devolution of transport decisions to Metropolitan District of Quito in 1993.
- New Transport Studies Unit was established to design a transport plan for the city – Bus Rapid Transit system seen as a solution to traffic congestion and air pollution
- **No** transversal routes or rapid expressways included to serve the low-income populations in peripheral areas were - partly Spanish Development Bank financial decision
- Partly local political processes - the decision and planning process was surrounded by elitist knowledge held by a few powerful individuals not based on the local evidence of priority need





What transport is right for Quito?

- Massive new investment on new metro line in city centre , which duplicates BRT lines
- But motorbikes have gained increased popularity in the whole country, reaching 813,509 vehicles by 2023 (118,000 in Quito) – very popular with women.
- Peripheral low-income areas have witnessed constant population growth with poor opportunities for education and jobs and few local amenities in these areas of growth and overcrowded housing provision .
- But – is BRT the right planning choice if reducing transport exclusion in the urban periphery is main objective?
- Do the people who live in these areas want to get to Quito's main city centre, which is quite far away?
    - The city offers completely different lifestyles to the ones the residents are currently living, so do they want to support their livelihoods through city-centre employment or tourism?
    - Could the money that was spent on extending the BRT to these remote and well-contained communities be better targeted towards supporting local business start-ups, improving community services and providing more bus services to local activities?
- Elite professionals and external financial institutions still take the core decisions that most affect the mobilities of the poor across the city region
- Participative planning processes are largely absent from the contemporary planning processes for the region (as it has been throughout Quito's colonial and post-colonial history.)

Dhaka, Bangladesh

- New country - only 54 years since Bangladesh's independence
- Eighth most populous country of the world - young and growing population in both its rural and urban areas - roughly 20% aged 25 to 54 years,
- Ethnically and religiously homogenous: 98 per cent are Bengalis and 91% Muslim
- In the city centre, pedestrians compete for road space with the 500,000+ people-powered peddle rickshaws, 50,000 motorised autorickshaws (jitneys) and city buses = Frequent road collisions, death and injuries and air pollution levels regularly exceed WHO's health standards
- Britain gained commercial, military and administrative control of Bengal in 1757 – as a foothold into the rest of the Indian subcontinent
- Establish an elite local ruling class with political power over the majority poor farming population and with landlord land exploitation, which still remains today
- Partition of India & Pakistan led to further impoverishment of the masses and left Pakistan with weak administrative assets – dependence on USA for finances to support new infrastructure development
- Civil War in 1971 established new Bengali State>. Despite overall economic growth there is a growing divide between rich and poor and remaining gender inequalities.

Cycle rickshaws – problem or solution?

- Approximately 80,000 *licensed* rickshaws operate in Dhaka North and South City Corporations – there are many more unlicensed.
- They are a convenient way for people to travel short distances around the city and they are pollution free in a city which regularly exceeds WHO health standards for pollution levels
- Rickshaw pullers and their families, who migrate to Dhaka from rural areas of the country in search of a better life and financial security, rely on them for their livelihoods.
- But governments regularly ban rickshaws from operating along main corridors or in certain areas – why?



- Hasan & Davila (2018) identify multi-actor involvement that aim to sustain 'elitism' and promote automobility and infrastructure-intensive projects blaming international donor-driven policies as anti-NMT, and pro cost-intensive and large-scale infrastructure investments, such as flyovers and commuter rail systems e.g. new Metro Rail project
- Foreign consultancy firms who design these projects have a tendency of pushing local experts to negligible roles with limited decision-making capacity and the foreign consultants tend to influence majority of the decisions.

Manila, Philippines

- Manila established as a Spanish colonial city around 1571 as a Pacific Rim trading centre
- Filipinos were the largest ethnic group of settlers in the city, but Chinese and Japanese also present - the Japanese providing labour and the Chinese collecting taxes for Spanish government
- 1898 Spain ceded the *Islas de Filipinas* to America for $20million as part of the Paris Peace Agreement - gave the US a first foothold in the Caribbean and West Pacific both militarily and politically
- Forbes (Governor General 1909 -) 'enduring American Empire' through the production of space' leading to draconian spatial strategies to build a new city
- Introduction of Swift's electric streetcar (based on Detroit system) in 1905 and intercity buses introduce in 1917
- Post-war independence introduced roads as the main form of transport - by 1978. There were 486,389 cars, 273,995 trucks, 235,756 motorcycles and 81,888 jeepneys but only 21,234 buses registered in the country



Manila's iconic jeepneys – problem or solution?

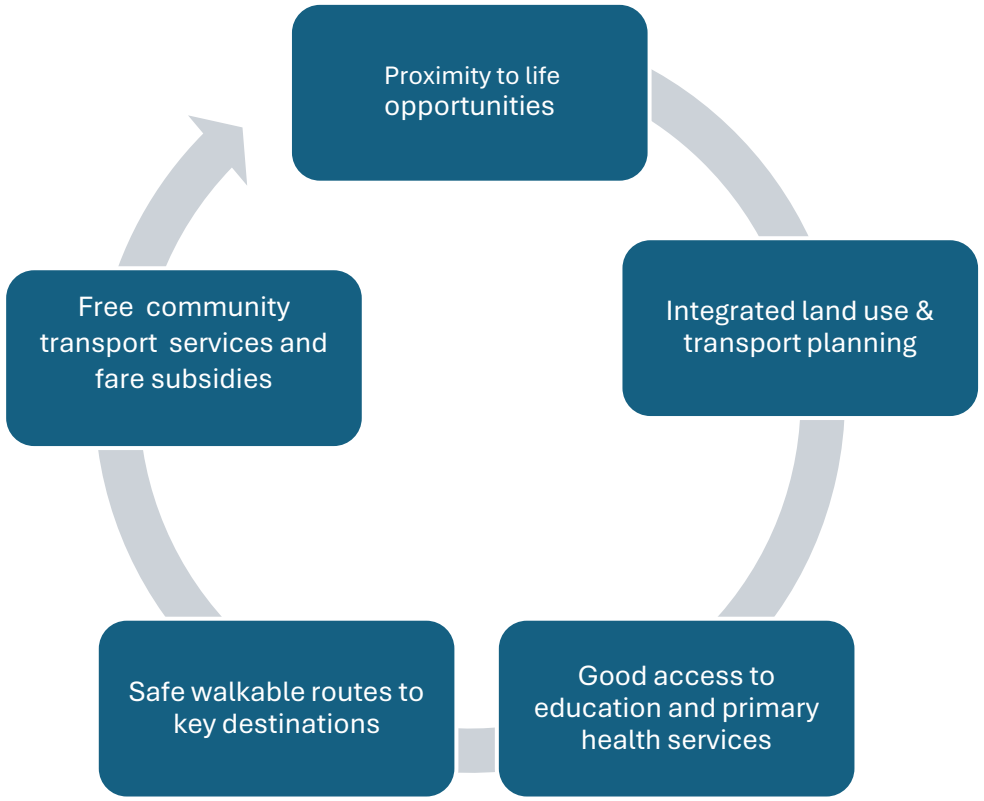
- Jeepneys are considered as a cultural icon with their colourful designs, loud music, and aggressive drivers, gaining the monicker “King of the Road”. From the point of view of passengers, jeepneys were affordable and widely available.
- Fragmented nature of jeepney operators led to fierce competition especially on high demand routes. Poor maintenance practices also led to safety and environmental concerns.
- In 2017, the Philippine government launched the Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program:
  - Consolidation of individual operators to cooperatives and corporations;
  - Engaging local governments in developing public transport route plans;
  - Vehicle standards conforming to safety and environmental guidelines;
  - Stakeholder support programs for upskilling and potentially displaced workers;
  - Financing support via equity subsidy and low-interest loan programs.



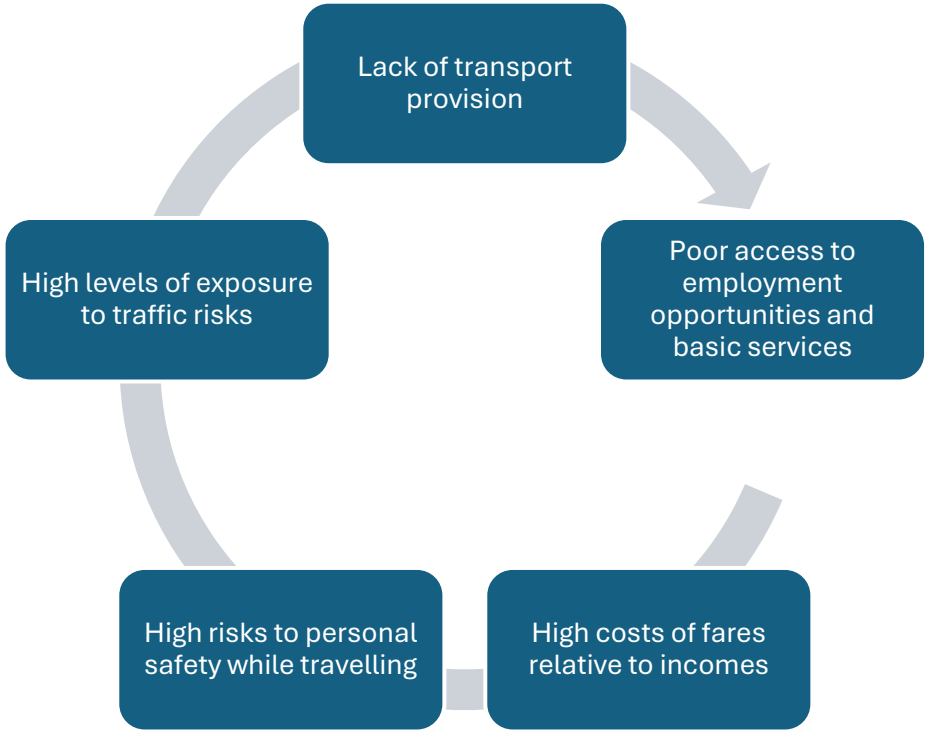
- But poor finance , lack of business training and management amongst operators
- And many city authorities lacked the skills for route planning

What can be done?

ENABLERS OF INCLUSIVE MOBILITY



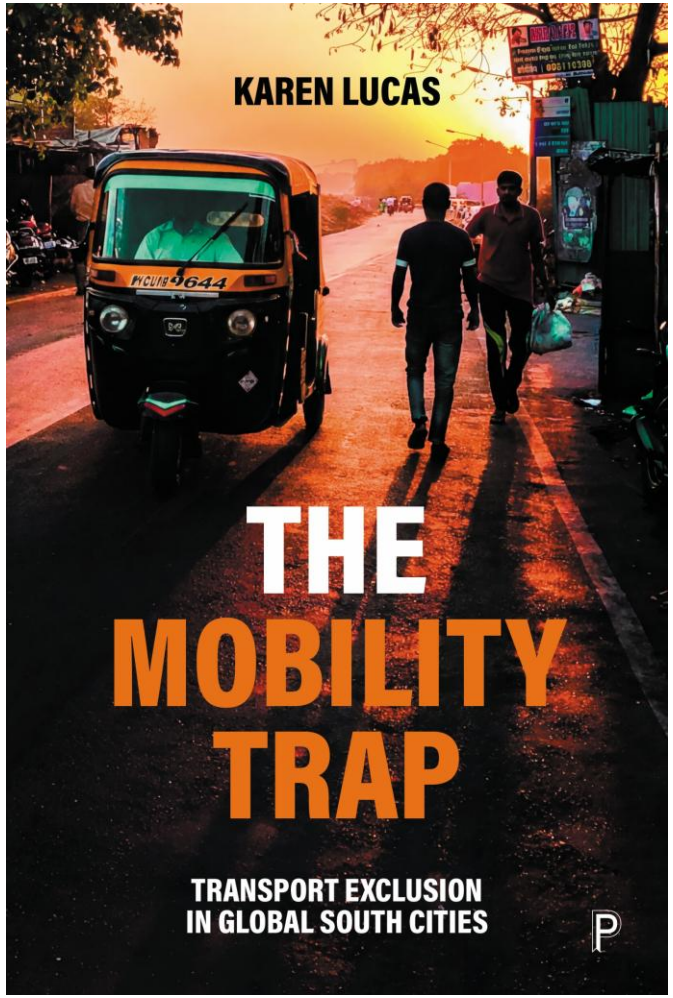
DISABLERS OF INCLUSIVE MOBILITY



So, what for transport geography research?

- De-westernise transport and land use models and abandon colonial mindsets
  - Journey time savings are not the key priority in LMIC cites – accessibility and ease of connectivity
  - Modal shift is not from cars to public transit/ it is from walking to motorisation
  - Discrete 'choice' models (e.g. do you prefer this route or that route) and willingness to pay (e.g. how much will you pay for x, y, z) should not predominate in spending decisions
- Identify the mobility priorities of local citizens with special attention to the mobility trap
  - New methodologies to put personal safety, health and wellbeing at the centre of transport and land use decision-making
  - Always consider the socio-spatial distribution of benefits and disbenefits of policy interventions
- Begin by addressing the needs of walking captured populations
  - Improve walking environments
  - Introduce traffic calming measures and vehicle restrictions in highly populated areas
  - No more high-speed urban highways
- Make better use of the informal sector within integrated transport planning
- Understand the power relations (and corruption) that exist within cities and how they underpin transport governance

Thanks for listening



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