THE USEFULNESS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AS A THEORETICAL CONCEPT TO INFORM SOCIAL POLICY IN TRANSPORT

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INTRODUCTION

There are a number of concepts in current use which describe the social condition of an individual. Many of these concepts are not clearly operationally defined, nor functionally discrete. They include: poverty, social inclusion/exclusion, well-being, life satisfaction, happiness, economic utility, capability, community strength and social capital. These have evolved from the perspective of different disciplines as well as the historical evolution of ideas. This paper overviews the concept of social exclusion broadly. It examines its use and value in the transport field as a means of understanding outcomes in relation to how social conditions are impacted by transport, in order to shape transport social policy. It should be noted that the discussion on social exclusion should not be viewed as comprehensive; rather it is a brief overview of the key issues. The paper begins with a short diversion on the concept of poverty due to the central importance of poverty to the field of social policy and the significance of poverty as a major component of social exclusion.

POVERTY

The concept of social exclusion has grown from work which sought to understand poverty. Poverty can be either absolute or relative. Absolute poverty refers to not having access to basic needs, whereas relative poverty is seen as not having access to the same resources as one's peers. Poverty can also be transient or entrenched. Many people can withstand short periods of poverty, but adverse outcomes are more likely to be present where poverty becomes a longer term state, such as where there is disability in the household.

The measurement of poverty has a relatively long history in the field of social policy, often credited with beginning with the work of Townsend who wrote about poverty in the 1970s and undertook the first study of poverty in the UK in 1979. The extent of poverty is commonly viewed as the number of people with income below a certain level. This level has, over time, been refined to account for factors such as the number of people dependent on the income, and housing costs.

In Australia, poverty has been traditionally measured using the Henderson Poverty Line. This is an estimate of disposable income required to support the basic needs of a family of two adults and two dependant children (Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research 2007). This measure is updated quarterly. The current poverty line point is:

- Couple with head in workforce with two dependent children - $661.45 including housing costs; $512.03 excluding housing costs
- Couple with head not in workforce with two dependent children - $594.84 including housing costs; $445.42 excluding housing costs

This level places a couple with two children who receive maximum welfare payments, Tax Benefit A and B and rent assistance, and who have no other income, about $60 under the poverty line (Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research 2007).

Other measures of income poverty are also in current use, such as the Australian measures generated by NATSEM (the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling). Also used is the half-average income line or half-median income line. In the UK, 60% of the median income is deemed as the measurement point.

However, measurement of poverty based on income has a number of drawbacks. For example, apart from the number of dependents and cost of housing, there is no account taken of needs, assets, and other factors which impact on life quality, such as personal satisfaction. Alternative measures have been introduced to address such issues. One such tool used in the UK asks for a self-rating measure about the adequacy of personal income (subjective poverty) where a person compares their personal income with what they rate to be an adequate income (Gordon et al. 2000). Recent work in Australia on Indicators of Disadvantage has derived ratings on essential items or socially perceived necessities from the general community and from people who are disadvantaged (Saunders 2006).

SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND SOCIAL POLICY

The concept of social exclusion is considered to facilitate a broader understanding of the multiple dimensions of poverty. While poverty and social exclusion are closely entwined, social exclusion has been described as the existence of barriers which make it difficult or impossible for people to participate fully in society or obtain a decent standard of living (Social Exclusion Unit 2003). While income poverty is the most commonly cited cause of social exclusion, other examples of barriers include disability, lack of educational opportunity, inadequate housing, ethnic minority status, unemployment, age, and lack of transport. Often the boundary between causes or drivers and outcomes of social exclusion, is unclear (Bradshaw et al. 2004). The logic of the social exclusion approach is that the way of 'including' people with these disadvantages is not only, or even necessarily, to give them more money but also to develop social policies which specifically address their sources of disadvantage.

The concept of social exclusion has been slow to be adopted in Australia. While there has been discussion amongst some Australian academics (for example Jones and Smyth 1999), there has been little integration of this concept into social policy on any sizeable scale. However, pockets of interest in social exclusion appear to be widening, particularly in association with other social policy changes, such as placed-based policy. These include the place-based initiatives of the Beattie government in Queensland, which commenced in 1998, and the establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit by the South Australian State Government in 2002. The Department for Victorian Communities, established in 2002, while placing social policies more firmly on the state government's agenda, uses the language of 'addressing disadvantage' and 'fairness', rather than the language of social exclusion (Victorian Government, 2005). However, the philosophies behind the work of the Department

for Victorian Communities appear to cover similar ground to that subsumed in the concept of social exclusion.

A precise definition of social exclusion has proved to be elusive (Saunders 2003, p.5). While there are some commonalities, different theorists encompass varying aspects and varying emphases to what is viewed under the term of social exclusion.

Early work from the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) UK

In 1997, the Blair government in the UK established the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) as part of a policy campaign to combat social exclusion. The Social Exclusion Unit in the UK has used a couple of definitions of social exclusion. An early definition, noted above, related to the existence of barriers to participating fully in society. There is also the idea that people need to experience multiple problems to be socially excluded. The SEU notes that it has always adopted a flexible and pragmatic definition of social exclusion as 'what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked and mutually reinforcing problems' (Bradshaw et al. 2004 p. 5).

This SEU definition of social exclusion is not really a statement of what happens and is therefore not technically a definition (Levitas 2000, reported in Saunders 2003). The variability of the meaning and the difficulty of separating social exclusion and multiple deprivations also doesn't facilitate easy measurement of social exclusion.

The Social Policy Research Unit, University of York

Work funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation claims to be the first attempt to measure social exclusion empirically (Gordon et al. 2000). The following definition was used for measurement purposes:

- Impoverishment
- Non-participation in the labour market
- Lack of access to basic services. This included access to basic services in the home such as power and water supplies, or outside the home, such as transport, shopping facilities and financial services.
- Exclusion from a range of social relations. This is viewed as:
  - Non-participation in common social activities
  - Social isolation
  - A perceived lack of support in times of need
  - Lack of civic engagement
- An inability to get 'out and about'

London School of Economics (LSE)

Researchers from the London School of Economics developed a more precise definition of social exclusion, stating that an individual is socially excluded if he or she does not participate to a reasonable degree over time in certain activities of his or her society, and (a) this is for reasons beyond his or her control, and (b) he or she would like to participate (Burchardt 2000, p.388, reported in Saunders 2003).

However, this definition also has limitations. For example, the term 'certain activities' is ambiguous and there is a need to distinguish between reasonable and legitimate forms of exclusion and discriminatory forms of exclusion (Saunders 2003).

The LSE team moved to improve measurement of social exclusion by delineating four key activities or dimensions of social inclusion. These are outlined below, together with broad indicators of exclusion:

- Consumption – where equivalized household net income is under half mean income
- Production – the person is not employed, in education training, or looking after family
- Political engagement – the person did not vote in the general election and is not a member of a campaigning organisation
- Social interaction – in any one of five respects, the person lacks someone who will offer support (listen, comfort, help in crises, relax with, really appreciates you) (Burchardt, LeGrand and Piachaud 2002).

The authors note some important issues in relation to these measures. For example, as expenditure is not measured, only income is used as a measure of consumption and the reasons for exclusion (as noted above) are not considered in this definition. In practice, the Hills and colleagues use each of these dimensions independently and over time, not assuming an association between the extent of exclusion and the number of dimensions on which the person is excluded. They note that exclusion should be described in terms of a continuum, there being no evidence in their empirical testing, of an 'underclass' or a cohort of people excluded in all four dimensions.

Further developments from the SEU (UK)

In 2004, the SEU reported on social exclusion from a domain perspective: income, employment, education, health, housing, transport, crime, social support/social capital and the impact of the neighbourhood (Bradshaw et al. 2004). The term, social capital, is introduced in the context of social exclusion. While the 'confusion' around the meaning of social capital and its measurement, or its relationship to social exclusion is noted, the issue is not progressed (p.82). Although there continued to be acknowledgement that 'the boundaries of the subject are still matters for debate', the SEU still viewed social exclusion of people or neighbourhoods in terms of linked and mutually reinforcing problems (Bradshaw et al. 2004, p.5). The researchers provided an overview of how people in Britain are faring in these domains, again exploring more the outcome of social exclusion, rather than the causes.

THE USE OF THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN TRANSPORT RESEARCH

Transport was one of the early areas of interest of the SEU. The publication of a major report on transport and social exclusion proved to be a defining point for work in this area (Social Exclusion Unit 2003). With the primary focus on issues of accessibility, the SEU's transport study drew links between the exclusion of people who do not have access to a car and their needs for education, employment, access to health and other services, food shopping, as well as to sporting, leisure and cultural activities. Barriers to accessibility were seen as centering around:

- The availability and physical accessibility of transport
- The cost of transport
- Services located in inaccessible places
- Safety and security – fear of crime
- Travel horizons – people on low incomes were found to be less willing to travel to access work than those on higher incomes.

The SEU argued that to remove these barriers and reduce social exclusion through transport improvements, there is a need to understand how people access key activities and link this with planning to improve such accessibility (accessibility planning), as well as undertaking key strategic policy initiatives, such as:

- reviewing the regulations governing provision of bus services (especially relevant to the UK context where de-regulation of service provision has taken place outside London)
- integration of transport planning into planning for services provision (e.g. education)
- a range of initiatives to make transport more accessible, such as reducing cost and addressing the fear of crime associated with public transport
- the formation of partnerships between transport providers, local authorities and local service providers, such as education and health, and work on transport solutions.

Following the work of the SEU, a few other studies have explored the association between social exclusion and transport. Hine and Mitchell (2003) cover much of the same ground as the SEU. They still largely define social exclusion in a transport context in terms of a loss of ability of people to connect with services such as 'health facilities, local job markets and leisure activities' (2003, p.6). They note that expressing accessibility in exclusion terms has the advantage of clarifying the multiplicity of issues which result in transport disadvantage, such as poor social planning and policy at society and institutional levels. They recommend a number of transport-related approaches to tackling social exclusion, such as targeting of subsidies and concessions and provision for public transport in new housing developments. Like the SEU, Hine and Mitchell propose coordination between public transport services and separately, coordination between various community transport operations.

A number of other studies have also come from the UK, largely targeting accessibility around specific groups of people. For example, Cartmel and Furlong (2000) found rural youth are more likely to suffer social exclusion than urban youth, due to an inability to access basic activities such as health services, education and employment. The 2004 SEU review reinforced the importance of transport to those at risk of social exclusion, and argued that the social costs of poor public transport are overlooked (Bradshaw et al. 2004). The emphasis remained on accessibility to 'key' services.

In short, accessibility has been an integrating framework for much work in the UK on social exclusion/inclusion. There has been little attempt to go beyond this, however, and establish how such access improvements might increase the well-being of those involved. Improved accessibility effectively becomes the outcome to be achieved.

The language of social exclusion is largely absent in discourse from the United States and it is understood that the same conclusion applies to Canada. Although not operating from a social exclusion theoretical framework and language, however, it would appear that there is a widespread interest in mobility issues faced by particular transport disadvantaged groups in

North America (e.g. seniors and people with a disability) (Burkhardt, Koffman and Murray 2003). As with the UK, the conversation is largely around the need for transport disadvantaged people to access jobs, health care and recreation. Service coordination is strong focus in US research, mainly within the community transport sector (paratransit) and, less frequently, between community transport and public transport.

There has been little application of social exclusion concepts within the transport field in Australia, until very recently. However, the concept of transport disadvantage has been recognised in some transport planning initiatives (as in the US). Research has been undertaken on specific groups who are at risk of social exclusion. For example, Alsnith and Hensher (2003) and Harris (2005) have researched transport issues for seniors and Currie and colleagues (2005) have worked on accessibility to transport for youth in rural and regional Australia. The issue of social exclusion was specifically addressed in an Australian study which explored the transport needs of groups of people said to be at risk of social exclusion (Stanley and Stanley 2004).

Thus in conclusion, while the concept of social exclusion and associated concepts are becoming a force in several non-transport policy areas (such as neighbourhood renewal, child welfare and community arts), the concept has had little impact on transport policy in Australia to date. The exception has been the growth of community transport. However, this has been based on more a 'bottom-up' recognition of the need for mobility and to reduce the isolation experienced by certain groups of people, rather than through a purposeful social policy direction which is theoretically linked to social exclusion.

IS SOCIAL EXCLUSION SUFFICIENT?

A number of issues are problematical in relation to how social exclusion is viewed and the options for measurement espoused in the literature, which have implications for use of the concept in the transport field. One example (and the most straightforward), voting in the federal election (as espoused by the LSE) is not a good indicator of social exclusion within Australia, as voting is compulsory. Political engagement in general may also be aspirational, as anecdotal evidence suggests that many 'included' Australians do not actively engage in political activities.

Some forms of social exclusion tend to be overlooked, and particularly not measured. For example, asylum seekers in Australia are often excluded due to government policy rather than personal inabilities, such as the denial of the right of some refugees to seek employment. The experience of racism on public transport is a driver in social exclusion as it had led to the avoidance of use of public transport, even where people had few other travel options (Stanley and Stanley 2004). The whole question of indicator thresholds requires a great deal of work.

There is a need to ensure that the use of the term social inclusion is not value-loaded towards a consumer-based society. The measurement of social inclusion is weighted towards economic factors. Research into happiness suggests that improvements in income mirrors increases in happiness to a certain point at which on-going increases in wealth do not result in commensurate increases in happiness (Layard 2005). Thus, a person could be excluded from mainstream society but not excluded from other value sets which may be present in their community of place or interest. This model could be based on alternative communities, village life in the UK in the past, and in some less developed countries today.

WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Work by Stanley and Stanley (2007) suggests that the concept of social exclusion may be too narrow in two important aspects. The discourse on social exclusion views the achievement of social inclusion as the end-point goal of a policy process. The authors argue that reducing social exclusion per se is not the ultimate policy goal, which should instead be couched in terms of enhancing the quality of life. There are a number of terms used for this idea. Happiness is referred to above, there is a great deal of interest at present around the notion of well-being, McGregor and colleagues talk of 'human flourishing' as a social policy goal (Walker 2007).

While 'social interaction' is one of the four commonly used measures of social exclusion, it tends to be viewed narrowly and specifically. For example, the LSE measures social support only. Although researchers from the University of York take a broader view, their model overlooks family based interactions and would benefit from a theoretical structure/perspective. Stanley and Stanley (2007) suggest that social capital and connections with the community are two important components of social exclusion. Social capital is perceived as networks between people which have norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness (Putman 2000). The building of social capital binds networks of people who cooperate to resolve collective problems, promote personal and business interactions and widening awareness of others and flows of useful information (Putman 2000). Family networks, networks with community members, and links with organisations and government structures are all important for well-being. Interaction between people promotes a sense of belonging and strengthens communities. This in turn builds capability and capacity in the community, such as leadership skills, participation in community organisations, volunteering pride, a sense of safety and well-being.

The role of transport in facilitating social inclusion through the development of social capital may be (as viewed by the SEU) through promoting accessibility to key services. The provision of public transport may facilitate direct access to employment. Alternatively, transport may provide the means to enable people to form associations or relationships and engage with other people and groups, a common way of facilitating employment opportunities. The act of being on public transport, in itself, may directly improve social capital, as travel offers opportunities to engage with other travellers.

Little theoretical work has been undertaken on social capital and transport, apart from some recognition that transport does play a role. Putnam (2000) has suggested there are negative links between car dependence and the development of effective social capital. Axhausen (2005) notes the lack of empirical evidence of cheap travel and increased communications on the structure of social networks. Urry (undated) argues that to be a full, active and engaged member of society requires social capital within localities and participation involves transportation and mobility.

Mobility is not about getting from A to B; rather it is about integrating everyday life and 'normal' activities (Cass, Shove and Urry 2005). Social inclusion is clearly about being able to enjoy life, leisure and relationships. While not under-estimating the importance of being able to access critical services like education and health, it is the unstructured realm of friends, family leisure and social experiences that are also of great importance for inclusion. This finding was confirmed in a small study which examined the use of new bus services in an outer Melbourne suburb (Bell et al. 2006). While people used these new services to access

education and other services, the major use was for social and leisure activities of an informal, unstructured nature.

This suggests that there are two important elements which should be considered: the need for people to determine their own goals of social inclusion and well-being, and the need for society to provide opportunities for people to be able to choose alternatives and achieve these outcomes. This argument aligns with work being undertaken by theorists like Nussbaum who seek to understand the components of well-being. She argues that individuals should choose what well-being is to them (within the limits of the legal system) and the government has to provide opportunities so this choice can be made (Nussbaum 2005). Sen argues for the need for people to be given capabilities, or the need to have basic capabilities or opportunities to choose (Nussbaum 2005).

AFFECT AND PERSONALITY

An important study – MOBILATE - on mobility in the aged was undertaken across five European countries (Mollenkopf et al. 2005). The aim of the project was to understand how outdoor mobility related to personal and environmental factors across different countries and in urban and rural settings. The study used subjective well-being as a key indicator of life-quality in old age. The study also included measures of personal psychological functioning, a clear omission in much of the social exclusion work and likely to be a compounding factor in driving social exclusion. However, the work included little on community interactions.

Research in Australia has recently commenced which seeks to understand the association between transport, social exclusion, well-being and disadvantage. The study seeks to understand the role and importance of mobility in achieving well-being and social inclusion. It is planned that the study will use a broader perspective of social exclusion, thus raising the problem of measurement and indicators. Perspectives on well-being discussed by Nussbaum and Sen (Nussbaum 2005) are purely theoretical. Despite extensive literature on social capital, there is both variability of meaning and no broad agreement on measurement. This issue was reviewed recently by Stanley and Currie (2006). As in the MOBILATE study, this research seeks to examine the role of personality and affect on social exclusion. Here the problem of measurement is more straightforward as the psychological literature has a history of examination of the relevant areas of subjective well-being, psychological well-being, quality of life examined according to various domains (social, physical, psychological, environmental etc), and mental health (Vella-Brodrick 2006).

CONCLUSION

Social exclusion and its association with mobility is an issue with high relevance to understanding how to address disadvantage and improve personal and community well-being. Considerable work is needed. The three year Australian Research Council study should assist in developing knowledge in these areas. As social exclusion occurs on a continuum, social policy should be most concerned with the most highly excluded people. These people are often excluded across a number of domains. As transport is not usually the goal in itself but a derived demand, this Australian study seeks to understand the interface between mobility and other forms of disadvantage. Drawing on the idea of social exclusion comprising linked and mutually reinforcing conditions, it is possible that for some people, fixing their mobility problem may lead to reductions in other forms of disadvantage. The importance of mobility as a driver of social exclusion will be examined.

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