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# Mobility of alternative urban transport policies: multi-site lessons for Brussels.

Paper / Research project summary

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## Introduction

This paper summarises the main goals behind a PhD research project launched in February 2014, funded by the Brussels Institute for Research and Innovation. The research is concerned with the question of mobility of urban transport policies at various scales. Policy mobility is a process which, although described and analysed under a variety of names, essentially denotes a particular practice of policy-makers who "import innovatory policy developed elsewhere in the belief that it will be similarly successful in a different context."[1] Existing analyses of this phenomenon focusing on urban transport have primarily scrutinised policies and practices deriving from a generically neo-liberal agenda of urban entrepreneurialism.[2] Within this paradigm transport is perceived not just as a framework for moving people and goods, but also a tool for increasing urban competitiveness and contributing to city brand and image. This is hoped to be

[1] Stone, D. (1999) "Learning lessons and transferring policy across time, space and disciplines, *Politics*, 19 (1), 52.

[2] Harvey D. (1989) "From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism," *Geografiska Annaler - Series B,* 71, 1, 3-17.

achieved through improving connectivity between strategic nodes and corridors on the one hand, and providing better access to transport for particular social groups — the more affluent city residents and users, or the "visitor class" — on the other. However, short-term gains deriving from such socio-spatial limitation are rarely confronted with possible long-term negative impact on urban development. Relevant examples of such unsustainable approach can be found across Europe: from construction of tram lines linked with real-estate speculation in Marseille[3], metro systems fostering gentrification in Montreal,[4] to large-scale, airport-like high-speed railway stations in Liège or Madrid, which are poorly integrated with urban fabric and have contributed to socio-spatial segregation. In the Brussels Capital Region (BCR), the urban transport system — developed along urban entrepreneurial lines — has failed to directly address the inner-city socio-spatial inequalities.[5] Repeatedly questioned over efficiency, accessibility and sustainability,[6] it is rarely analysed in terms of its (deliberate?) focus on specific areas (e.g. "leverage zones" identified by the BCR's International Development Plan[7]) and thus a carefully selected clientele (e.g. "the mobile class", "the eurocrats").

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[3] Borja, J., Derain, M. & Manry, V. (2007) *Renouvellement urbain à Marseille: centralité populaire et mobilisation collective, le cas de la Rue de la République*. Marseille: PUCA. Available [@]: http://goo.gl/xYsYrr.

[4] Patterson, Z. & Grube-Cavers, A. (2012) "Metros and Gentrification In Montreal: Survival Analysis Approach." Paper presented at *Transportation Research Board 91st Annual Meeting*, Washington DC.

[5] Decroly, J. M. & Van Criekingen, M. (2009), "The Brussels International Development Plan (IDP). Real estate development promises and growing inequalities?", *Brussels Studies*, 25.

[6] Dobruszkes, F. *et al.* (2007) "Réorganisation d'un réseau de transport collectif urbain, ruptures de charge et mobilités éprouvantes à Bruxelles," *Articulo - Journal of Urban Research*, 7; Courtois, X. & Dobruszkes, F. (2008) "The (in)efficiency of trams and buses in Brussels: a fine geographical analysis", *Brussels Studies*, 20, 1–24; Hubert, M. *et al.* (2008) "Mobility to and from, around and about Brussels," *Brussels Studies*, Synopsis no. 1 for the Citizens' Forum of Brussels, 1-14.

[7] Patterson, Z. & Grube-Cavers, A. (2012) "Metros and Gentrification In Montreal: Survival Analysis Approach." Paper presented at *Transportation Research Board 91st Annual Meeting*, Washington DC.

The challenges that the BCR's transport system continues to pose have inspired a scientific project that suggests to examine circulation of policy practices that are significantly different from the urban entrepreneurial mainstream. Their 'alternative' character may be identified in their long-term focus on the entirety of urban territory, and on all urban citizenry. Instead of relying on anticipated "trickle-down" effects stimulated by improving transport networks within spatially and socially limited "creative" clusters, their ambition is to address directly the issues of social inequality, well-being and transport poverty.[8] Thus, instead being approached as a mere tool, urban transport is perceived as main contributor to sustainable urban development. Free public transport programmes as well as urban transformation strategies related to the Ciclovía project — two policies that the research proposes to look at — are examples of such alternative approach to transport. In the BCR context, this means a clear focus on practices and policies that not only help create a more efficient transport system, but also address help socio-spatial fragmentation, and socio-economic inequalities.

## Research goals

Thus, the research has four main goals:

(1) To identify and assess the depth and conditions of precise urban transport policy models showing significant potential to constitute an alternative to urban entrepreneurialism. This assessment is to be achieved by confronting existing policy practices to Henri Lefebvre's "right to the city" – this notion thus serving here as analytical tool. Two examples of such policies are to be investigated: (A) free (zero fare) public transport, and (B) Ciclovía — a programme in which designated streets are regularly closed for motorised traffic, providing access to pedestrians and cyclists — invented in Bogota (Colombia) in

[8] Root. A (1998) "Home Alone: Is Transport Poverty the Cinderella of Social Exclusion?" *Transport Report*, 21, 11.

the context of a comprehensive urban transformation based on reconstruction of public space and promotion of a "culture of citizenship".

(2) To document and examine the mobility patterns of each of these policies in three geographical contexts (urban areas), by looking (inter alia) at networks and arenas through which they are diffused and transformed, as well as actors involved in this process, and its local and global implications.

(3) Thus, to provide a variety of actors within engaged in urban transport policy-making in the BCR — with a comprehensive analysis of a number of socially innovatory policy instances contributing to genuinely sustainable urban development. However, unlike in the case of predominant 'best practices' manuals and policy toolboxes, the anticipated societal value of this research lies in providing critical insights preventing policy-makers from simplifying, de-contextualising, or deconstructing discussed policies, hence bearing risks of loosing 'en route' their alternative character.

(4) Finally, to interpret these mobilities vis-à-vis existing theories, that is, orthodox theories of policy circulation-diffusion, contemporary studies into mobilities of urban entrepreneurial policies, as well as recently developed unorthodox approaches of policy mobility-mutation. Efficiency and relevance of methodological tools offered by both orthodox and non-orthodox approaches are to be evaluated, thereby attempting to improve the methodological framework and the agenda for research of mobility and mutation of policy alternatives to urban entrepreneurialism.

The urban dimension of policy mobility has been discussed under a variety of terms: from "replication," "transfer" or "emulation" of "policies in motion"[9] and policy benchmarks, to "fast policy transfer"[10] and "inter-local policy transfer."[11] Academics have debated the need for establishing a clear definition of the process[12], created typologies of actors behind it[13], studied their different motivations, the content of the policy package that is 'on the move' and the exact mechanisms of policy transfer, delineating its precise stages[14].

However, the majority of these studies has recently been criticised for their orthodox approach to policy diffusion and transfer as a linear and mono-scalar process[15]. Consequently, a new, 'non-orthodox' approach has been proposed[16]. Inspired by reflexive science and extended case methodologies[17], it intends to reflect on policy mobility and mutation as a dynamic, multi-site and multi-scalar process in which not only the actual policy package, but also the

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[9] Ward, K. (2006) "'Policies in motion,' urban management and state restructuring: The trans-local expansion of business improvement districts," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 30, 54-75.

[10] Peck, J. & Theodore, N. (2001) "Exporting workfare/importing welfare-to-work: Exploring the politics of Third Way policy transfer," *Political Geography*, 20, 427-60.

[11] Theodore, N. & J. Peck (2001) "Searching for best practice in welfare-to-work: The means, the method, and the message," *Policy and Politics*, 29 (1), 81-98.

[12] James, O. & Lodge, M. (2003) "The limitations of 'policy transfer' and 'lesson drawing' for public policy research," *Political Studies Review*, 2003, 1, 179-193.

[13] Dolowitz, D. & Marsh, D. (1996) "Who learns what from whom: a review of the policy transfer literature," *Political Studies*, 44, 343-57.

[14] Evans, G. & Davies, J. (1999) "Understanding policy transfer: a multi-level, multi-disciplinary perspective," *Public Administration*, 77, 2, 361–385.

[15] Peck, J. (2011) "Geographies of policy: From transfer-diffusion to mobility-mutation," *Progress in Human Geography*, 35(6), 773-797.

[16] McCann, E. & Ward. K. (2011) *Mobile Urbanism: Cities and Policymaking in the Global Age*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press; Peck, J. & Theodore, N. (2012) "Follow the policy: a distended case approach." *Environment and Planning*, 44, 21-30.

[17] Burawoy, M. (1998) "The extended case method" *Sociological Theory*, 16, 1, 4–33.

actors and spaces involved and the very network embracing them are constantly transformed.

Furthermore, most of existing studies on transfer and mobility of urban policies have focused on models exemplifying the dominant urban entrepreneurial agendas, which lead to an ever-increasing competition between cities, thus encouraging urban authorities to seek policy examples coming from "celebrity cities" that "have managed to turn around their economic fortunes or emerge like a phoenix after crisis."[18] Staying in tune with certain urban 'policy fashions' has become a way of achieving legitimacy as well as reassuring the voters and – perhaps even more importantly – potential new city-dwellers and investors, about the correctness of the direction the city is heading towards. These policy mobility packages tend to be composed of ready-made recipes including several 'fixes' that concentrate on a limited number of issues, such as sustainable neighbourhood development, urban renewal and large-scale projects related to sport events or culture magnets, 'starchitecture,' quality urban design, public-private partnerships, and consensus-oriented urban governance methodology. The transport policies this "extremely narrow urban-policy repertoire" [19] involves often concentrate on limited territorial clusters and address specific social classes, possibly contributing to gentrification and the deepening of unequal access to urban transport.

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[18] Gonzales, S. (2010) "Bilbao and Barcelona 'in motion.' How urban regeneration 'models' travel and mutate in the global flows of policy tourism," *Urban Studies*, 2011, 48(7), 1398; McCann, E. (2011) "Urban Policy Mobilities and Global Circuits of Knowledge: Toward a Research Agenda," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 101, 1, 107-130.

[19] Peck, J. & Tickell, N. (2012) "Neoliberalizing space." in N. Brenner and N. Theodore (eds), *Spaces of Neoliberalism*, pp. 47–48. Oxford: Blackwell, qtd. in Gonzales, S., *op. cit.*: 1413.

Much as there is to be learned from the orthodox approach to research on policy transfer and analyses of mainstream urban entrepreneurial policy mobility, their narrow focus has lead to a major gap in literature that this project intends to seal by incorporating elements of both orthodox and non-orthodox approaches and centring upon policies alternative to urban entrepreneurialism.

To identify such policies (goal 1), the research project builds on the theoretical apparatus provided by the concept of "the right to the city". Formulated in the 1960s by Henri Lefebvre[20], the notion was originally an expression of criticism against the Fordist-Keynesian urbanism, and a demand for a radical social, political and economic change. Today it can be heard again, resounding in response to the contemporary multifaceted crisis of the neo-liberal age.

The research therefore applies the right to the city as a powerful intellectual remedy to urban entrepreneurialism. As highlighted by a number of recent re-interpretations of Lefebvre's work[21] — instead of adding to the list existing liberal-democratic rights, and becoming transformed into de-politicised charters and resolutions[22], the right to the city should be seen as delineating a strategy dedicated to transfer power over the appropriation and production of urban space out from the market's and state's hands, to those of inhabitants. Throughout research selected cases of urban transport policies are therefore expected to have become part of this strategy, providing a "right to totality, and

[20] Lefebvre, H. (1968) *Le Droit à la ville*. Paris: Economica.

[21] Harvey, D. (2012) *Rebel Cities.* London, New York: Verso; Mayer, M. (2012) The 'right to the city' in urban social movements. In N. Brenner, P. Marcuse & M. Mayer (Eds.), *Cities for People, not for Profit*. London: Routledge, 63–85; Purcell, M. (2013) Possible worlds: Henri Lefebvre and the right to the city. *Journal of Urban Affairs*. Online version of record published before inclusion in an issue.

[22] UN Habitat (2005) "Urban policies and the Right to the City," [@:] http://goo.gl/4zASt.

complexity,"[23] rather than a particular social or spatial fragment of the urban realm. In this view, urban transport should challenge and reach beyond existing configurations of power over all aspects of urban development — be it in its social, political, built or aesthetical dimensions — and join a call for "utopias of spatial form" (Harvey & Potter, 2011, p. 46): a new urbanity.

Each policy is thus to be screened against precise *ingredients* of "the right to the city": distinguishable yet intricately related 'rights' which — as previous research has demonstrated[24], can serve as practical analytical tools capable of exposing the relative extent of the alternative character of urban policies and models.

These tools are to be applied to analyse two specific instances of urban transport policies showing significant capacities to constitute an alternative to urban entrepreneurialism. However, a door shall be left for including other examples of a transport policies and practices alternative to urban entrepreneurialism.

(A) Free (zero-fare) public transport. Abolishment of transport fares on the one hand appears as a head-on solution to unequal access to urban transport, and a holistic and redistributive approach having a significant impact on the urban environment, and at the same time allowing to cut certain operational costs (personnel, equipment). It becoming increasingly popular, having been implemented in nearly 50 cities (approximately half of which are in Europe).[25] On the other hand, in certain cases, particularly in Northern America, it has led

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[23] Marcuse, P. (2012) "Whose right(s) to the city?" in N. Brenner, P. Marcuse and M. Mayer (eds), *Cities for People, Not for Profit*. London: Routledge, p. 35.

[24] Kębłowski, W. (2012) "Participatory budgeting and the right to the city." Master thesis defended in September 2012 at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, within the framework of UNICA Euromaster in Urban Studies; Kębłowski, W. & Van Criekingen, M. (forthcoming) How 'alternative' alternative urban policies really are? Looking at participatory budgeting through the lenses of the right to the city. *Métropoles*. Issue topic: *Alternative Urban Development Policies*. Soon available at: http:// metropoles.revues.org/4623.

[25] http://freepublictransports.com/city/

to a significant decrease in service quality,[26] and the economic cost has recently forced some urban areas — for instance the municipality of Hasselt, one of the most renowned fare-free cities — to roll back the programme. In the BCR, while existing studies have analysed certain elements of free public transport policy such as free or reimbursed travelcards for particular social groups (e.g. students, commuters),[27] possible impact of a more holistic approach has not been examined.

(B) Ciclovía — a programme in which designated streets are regularly closed for motorised traffic, providing access to pedestrians and cyclists — invented in Bogota (Colombia) to promote equal access to urban space, social capital and sustainable transport[28]. Since its conception in 1970s, Ciclovía has gained the status of a 'best practice' embraced by nearly over 100 municipalities across the world, notably in Europe.[29] Existing studies demonstrated that the lesson that came from Colombia has been adapted in a number of diverse ways[30]; in Brussels, several small-scale adaptations of Ciclovía have been held since 2011. However, a precise examination of *how* and *why* the Ciclovía programme travels — often in disregard for its initial anchorage in comprehensive and redistributive

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[26] Perone, J. S. & Wolinski, J. M. (2006) "Fare, free, or something in between?" *National Center for Transportation Research*, [@:] http://www.nctr.usf.edu/pdf/473-132.pdf; Perone, J. S. *et al.* (2002) "Advantages and disadvantages of fare-free transit policy" *National Center for Transportation Research*, [@:] http://goo.gl/1QLTuR.

[27] De Witte, A. (2006) "The impact of "free" public transport: The case of Brussels." *Transportation Research*, Part A, 40, 671–689; De Witte (2008) "How persuasive is 'free' public transport? A survey among commuters in the Brussels Capital Region." *Transport Policy*, 15, 216– 224.

[28] Torres A. *et al.* (2013) "The Ciclovia and Cicloruta programs: promising interventions to promote physical activity and social capital in Bogota, Colombia." *American Journal of Public Health*, 103, 2, 23-30.

[29] Montero, S. (2013) "Constructing Bogotá's Ciclovía: From Urban Experiment to International 'Best Practice'" *AAG Annual Meeting*, Los Angeles, US.

[30] Sarmiento, O. *et al.* (2010) "The Ciclovía-Recreativa: A Mass-Recreational Program With Public Health Potential" *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 7, 2, S163-S180.

strategy for public space transformation and promotion of a "culture of citizenship"[31] — has not yet been carried out.

The mobility of each of these policy instances is to be documented and examined by investigating the following questions (goal 2):

- What are the extent, geographies and modalities of each policy? Through what networks does it travel and mutate? At what scales does it operate and move?
- How does the mechanism of its mutation *en route* work, as it is being incorporated into existing, not necessarily flexible social and political urban systems? What is the distance between its final form in a new destination and the initial urban policy agenda *in situ*?
- What formal and informal actors are involved in the process, and with what role?
- What are its local and global implications, including the impact on democratic institution-building, state/administrative reform, and (re-) construction of civil society?
- Do different sorts of mobilities of 'alternative' urban policies constitute a distinguishable pattern — a separable kind of urban policy mobility?
- How does its mechanism and network compare to the mobility of urban entrepreneurial policies? In other words, do urban policies alternative to urban entrepreneurialism move in alternative ways?

The empirical material concerning each policy instance is to be collected in three different geographical contexts (urban areas). Hence, six case studies will be investigated. Free public transport policies will be analysed in Tallinn

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[31] Pérez Fernández, F. (2010) "Laboratorios de reconstrucción urbana: hacia una antropología de la política urbana en Colombia." *Antipoda. Revista de Antropología y Arqueología*, 10; Wright, L. & Montezuma, R. (2004) Reclaiming public space: The economic, environmental, and social impacts of Bogotá's transformation," *Cities for People Conference, Walk21*, Copenhagen, Denmark, [@:] http://goo.gl/Nj1BN.

(Estonia; the largest city thus far to have implemented the policy), Hasselt (particularly interesting due to both its benchmark-like character and recent programme suspension) and Aubagne (France). Cyclovía policies will be observed in Bogota (Colombia), Los Angeles (USA) and Brussels (Belgium).

This multi-contextual and multi-site approach is therefore likely to create additional research potential as different facets of inter-urban policy mobility in both mature and developing political and social systems may be discovered.

Methodologically, the mobility patterns of the two alternative policies are to be documented and examined using the framework presented in *Table 1* below.

As the proposed methodological is framework combines both orthodox and non-orthodox approach to policy mobility research, it will enable an interpretation of urban policies alternative to urban entrepreneurialism vis-à-vis orthodox literature, contemporary studies into mobilities of entrepreneurial policies, and non-orthodox — non-linear and dialogic — approach to mobility/mutation (goal 4). Importantly, following the extended case method,[32] the aforementioned methodology will be continuously adjusted to the dynamics of mobility/mutation of researched policies, providing a reflection on the methodological framework. Hence, a relevant and efficient methodological framework for further research agenda concerning policies alternative to urban entrepreneurialism will be constructed, thus realising the third goal behind the project.

[32] Burawoy, M., *op. cit.*

*Table 1.* Proposed methodological framework for researching the mobility and mutation of urban transport policies alternative to urban entrepreneurialism.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Methodological tools proposed by orthodox approach to policy mobility as well as studies into mobilities of urban entrepreneurial policies.</th><th>Methodological tools proposed by non-orthodox approach to policy mobility.</th></tr>
<tr><td>12 steps of policy transfer (Evans & Davies, 1999)</td><td rowspan="2">Desktop research: qualitative analysis of the discourse accompanying policy mobility/mutation. Focus on:<br>• Academic publications;<br>• Relevant (mass) media engaged in the process: newspapers, magazines, websites, blogs and videos;<br>• Official channels of policy circulation on the local level, such as municipal policy papers and documents.</td><td rowspan="2">Desktop research: deepened qualitative analysis of the discourse accompanying policy mobility/mutation seen as both local and transnational phenomenon. Focus on:<br>• Official channels of policy circulation on the transnational level, for instance facilitated by NGOs and institutions such as World Bank and UN;<br>• Unofficial channels of policy circulation, such as publications and papers issued by grass-roots and local activist groups.</td></tr>
<tr><td>1. Recognition<br>2. Search</td></tr>
<tr><td>3. Contact</td><td rowspan="5">Fieldwork. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with actors involved in the process on the policy import and export side.</td><td rowspan="5">Fieldwork. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with:<br>• Actors operating alongside the process, not necessarily allocated to the policy origin or destination side;<br>• Actors excluded from the process.</td></tr>
<tr><td>4. Emergence of an information feeder network</td></tr>
<tr><td>5. Cognition & reception</td></tr>
<tr><td>6. Emergence of transfer network</td></tr>
<tr><td>7. Elite and cognitive mobilisation</td></tr>
</table>

| Methodological tools proposed by **orthodox** approach to policy mobility as well as studies into mobilities of urban entrepreneurial policies. | | Methodological tools proposed by **non-orthodox** approach to policy mobility. |
|---|---|---|
| 8. Interaction | Fieldwork:<br>• Qualitative ethnographic participant observations of the 'spaces' and 'practices' of the mobility/ mutation process, such as conferences, official and unofficial meetings, grass-roots events and fact-finding excursions.<br>• Quantitative questionnaires gathering information from users and participants of such 'spaces' and 'policies'. | • Fieldwork. Further semi-structured in- depth interviews attempting to reach beyond passive observation and extend the observer to participant, leading to dialogue in which research guidelines and results are continuously communicated and knowledge is co- produced.<br>• Quantitative questionnaires gathering information from actors excluded from such 'spaces' and 'policies'. |
| 9. Evaluation<br>10. Decision<br>11. Process<br>12. Outcome | • Desktop research. Qualitative analysis of actual policy packages implemented (focus on official municipal documents).<br>• Fieldwork. Ethnographic observation of 'spaces' and 'practices' of policy practices implemented.<br>• Fieldwork. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with actors involved in post-implementation network.<br>• Desktop research. Qualitative analysis of post- implementation discourse; focus on (mass) media engaged in evaluation (newspapers, magazines, websites, blogs and videos) | • Fieldwork. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with actors excluded from the post-implementation network.<br>• Fieldwork. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with actors observing or accompanying policy implementation from the policy origin side, as those not necessarily allocated to the policy origin or destination side.<br>• Desktop research. Qualitative analysis of possible post-implementation changes in policy package in the place of origin. |

Data gathered throughout the research will allow for its goal 3 to be fulfilled: authorities and institutions within the BCR will be provided with deepened knowledge concerning two socially innovatory urban transport policies: free public transport and Cyclovía. Although both of these transport

strategies have been to an extent applied in the BCR, their full in terms of social innovation remains unused. Furthermore, no examination has been made concerning possible local and regional impact of a more profound and holistic implementation of free public transport and Cyclovía in the BCR context. At the same time, BCR's public transport system appears not to wholly respond the socio-spatial problems within the city. Herein the research aims to provide BCR authorities and stakeholders (listed below) with:

- A toolbox for setting adequate goals for a socially sustainable urban transport;
- Precise indications concerning practical measures, solutions and actions plans to achieve these goals — deriving from observations and conclusions made in the field (urban areas selected for case studies);
- Methods of screening and assessing the outcomes of discussed policies in the light of preset goals.

These operational outcomes and tools will be transmitted to stakeholders within the BCR in the form of three deliverables, prepared throughout the course of research.

Crucially, concurring with criticism of the ubiquitous 'best practice' discourse,[33] the operational outcomes of the research — unlike in the case of many policy manuals — will be anchored in a transdisciplinary, multi-contextual reflexion concerning *how* and *why* exactly the concepts of free public transport scheme and Cyclovía *move* and *mutate* from city to city. By producing new knowledge concerning networks and motivations involved, as well as implications produced, the project is hoped to avert the danger of simplifying, de-contextualising, or deconstructing discussed policies through copy-pasting of

[33] Moore, S. (2013) "What's Wrong with Best Practice? Questioning the Typification of New Urbanism," *Urban Studies*, 50, 11, 2371-2387.

'best practices.' Herein lies the anticipated societal and political value of the project.

## Conclusion

In sum, the originality of the research can be identified in four of its facets. First, in its object of investigation, which — unlike the majority of existing literature — does not concern mainstream urban entrepreneurial agendas, but genuine policy alternatives. Second, in its trans-disciplinary perspective on transport and its socially innovatory potential, which thus far has remained unexamined in the context of the BCR. Third, in its methodology, that analyses alternative policy models through the lens of Henri Lefebvre's concept of the right to and city, and that confronts policy mobility with both orthodox and non-orthodox theories. Finally, the results that the research intends to produce are to contribute not only to the academic debate concerning urban policy, but also to the work of actual policy-makers on the federal, regional and municipal level, various public transport operators present in the BCR, and, last but not least, local citizen groups.