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Mitigating or generating impact? 'Traffic Generating Poles' under a new mobility paradigm

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Urban mobility has reached a high level of importance in the debate about the production of cities that are socially inclusive and environmentally friendly. In Brazil, the city of São Paulo has, historically, oriented its public policies, concerning mobility, including the provision of infrastructure, towards motorized private modes. This political option has been adopted despite the fact that these modes are responsible only for around a third of the daily trips. Besides, the use of these modes raise with income, which means that lower income population are, in general, excluded from these policies and the use of this infrastructure. Furthermore, mobility solutions focused on motorized private modes have been proven unsustainable, producing deleterious effects. As an example, they have led the city to reach extremely high levels of traffic congestions, alongside an unacceptably low quality, or sometimes even lack, of public transport system and infrastructure for soft modes (e.g. pedestrians and cyclists).

In this context, the municipality has created an instrument entitled Traffic Generating Poles (TGP). Its objective is to control the impacts on the urban circulation produced by buildings or activities that, according to the criteria established by this regulation, generate traffic. The conception of this instrument was based on the models of the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), in the United States, imported to the Brazilian reality as if it were the same as in its origin. Unlike the Neighborhood Impact Study (NIS), that implies a more comprehensive approach, including a socioeconomic evaluation, the TGP is focused on the analysis of the urban circulation system, and mostly dedicated to mitigate the impact of the attraction of motorized private trips. Another difference is the amount of buildings that must comply with the measures imposed by the NIS or the TGP regulations. While the former can only be applied on very large buildings, the latter incorporates smaller ones, hence more buildings are

included. For this reason, the TGP is the main instrument used in São Paulo to deal with the impacts on the urban environment.

The evaluation of the impacts and the definition of actions to mitigate them are done by the Traffic Engineering Company (TEC), the traffic authority in São Paulo. The main actions required by them are, on the one hand, to offer more off-street parking space and, on the other, to improve the circulation system for cars, including measures such as enlarging roads, constructing bridges or tunnels, restructuring the traffic light system, implementing traffic signs, and so on. Considering that traffic can be induced by the offer of space for cars, either for circulation or parking, it is critical to question if the instrument of TGP, addressed here, is really mitigating the impact, or actually generating it. Additionally, it is also essential to consider that this instrument is not only fueling the vicious cycle of private motorization in São Paulo, but also being socially segregating, considering that lower income population are less likely to own a car or use it on their daily trips.

Also, the recent federal and municipal legislation indicate a different approach. In 2001 the City Statute bill included the Right to the City as one of the objectives of this law. Over ten years later, in 2012, the National Policy for Urban Mobility bill was passed, in line with the global tendency to promote more sustainable urban environments. It determines that mass transit has priority over motorized private modes, and that soft modes have priority over motorized modes. More recently, in 2014, the Strategic Master Plan of São Paulo was reviewed, incorporating what the federal law determined, thus transposing it to the municipal level. These regulations indicate a progressive and socially inclusive tendency yet to be incorporated in the instrument addressed here.

In view of the exposed, this paper aims to discuss this instrument used to control the impacts on the circulation system produced by TGP. In order to do so, we analyze a sample of such buildings in São Paulo, considering, on the one hand, the actions of the social actors involved, especially the developers and the public organ responsible for the application of this instrument, i.e. the TEC. On the other hand, we analyze the conditions of the territory, particularly in respect to the aspects of geomorphology, socioeconomics and urban accessibility, and oppose it to the mitigation measures

demanded by the TEC. This paper demonstrates, firstly, that the instrument addressed here has low adherence to the conditions of the territory, leading to a shortsighted approach to the elements of production and attraction of trips. Also, it fails to promote a more environmentally friendly and socially inclusive mobility. With this paper, we hope to contribute with the current debate about the production of an urban environment and mobility policies oriented for people, promotion of social inclusion and a more sustainable approach of environmental issues.