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To cite this article: Chiara Vitrano & Christina Lindkvist (2021): Justice in Regional Transport Planning through the Lens of Iris Marion Young, Planning Practice & Research, DOI: [10.1080/02697459.2021.1874637](https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2021.1874637)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2021.1874637>



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Published online: 24 Jan 2021.



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Justice in Regional Transport Planning through the Lens of Iris Marion Young

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ABSTRACT

The paper investigates whether and how regional public transport plans in Sweden address issues of social justice. Drawing upon a theoretical and analytical framework based on Young's concept of domination and using a critical discourse analysis conducted on regional transport plans in three Swedish regions (Skåne, Stockholm and Västra Götaland), we identify discourses potentially resulting from and reproducing domination dynamics. The analysis highlights the centrality of economic growth goals and the framing of public transport users as customers not involved in the decision-making processes, which contradicts the declared justice and sustainability aims of the plans.

KEYWORDS

Regional public transport planning; social justice; Sweden; critical discourse analysis

Introduction

Social sustainability in transport planning is a global concern identified in the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development and has been on the political and planning agenda for some time (see e.g. Grieco, 2015; Levy, 2013; Lucas, 2012; Preston & Rajé, 2007; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Sustainability is based on the interdependency between environmental, social and economic aspects; however, its social dimension has been relatively unexplored (Vallance *et al.*, 2011). Notwithstanding the 'conceptual chaos' around its definition (Vallance *et al.*, 2011, p. 342), social sustainability is often understood as closely related to issues of social justice and equity (Connelly, 2007; Dempsey *et al.*, 2009; McKenzie, 2004). Hence, a transport system aiming at being sustainable needs to be planned according to principles of social justice and equity as well.

The vast literature on social justice in planning draws upon a number of theoretical approaches to define and operationalize justice and equity. In this paper, we propose to look at social justice in transport planning by adopting a framework based on our understanding of Iris Marion Young, through which we will analyse regional public transport plans in Sweden. The paper aims to provide a contribution useful for both scholars and planners in the field of transport by presenting an analysis of discourses adopted in planning documents that goes beyond the dominant distributive approaches to transport justice. This will contribute to developing a more comprehensive approach to transport planning that includes aspects of procedural justice and recognition.

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Scholars and researchers have recently begun to adopt approaches to transport system analysis that highlight its social dimensions. Seminal works such as the Social Exclusion Unit's (2003) report *Making the Connection* and the establishment of the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Hannam *et al.*, 2006) have increased interest in the relationship between transport, mobility and social, spatial and temporal inequalities (see Lucas, 2012; Lucas *et al.*, 2016 for comprehensive reviews). They have also drawn attention to 'politics of mobility', that is, 'the ways in which mobilities are both productive of such social relations and produced by them' (Cresswell, 2010, p. 21). Further, together with an increasing interest in critical perspectives in transport, a specific attention has risen around issues of justice and equity. Research on transport justice is primarily based on recognizing the transport system's pivotal role in guaranteeing or hindering access to crucial opportunities and, thereby, delivering equity in all welfare domains (such as health, education and housing) (Jeekel & Martens, 2017). Some scholars (Enright, 2019; Sheller, 2018; Verlinghieri & Schwanen, 2020) have indicated that research on justice in transport planning mainly draws upon distributive approaches. Research on transport justice has hitherto predominantly focused on the distribution of 'inequalities of transport-related resources, observed daily travel behaviour, and transport accessibility levels' (Pereira *et al.*, 2017, p. 176) and has analysed the uneven outcomes of transport projects and policies (Gössling, 2016; Linovski *et al.*, 2018; Lucas *et al.*, 2019; Manaugh *et al.*, 2015; van Wee & Geurs, 2011). Different approaches to justice have informed these analyses—such as Rawls (1971) egalitarianism (van Wee & Geurs, 2011), Sen's and Nussbaum's (e.g. Nussbaum & Sen, 1993) Capabilities Approaches (Beyazit, 2011; Nahmias-Biran *et al.*, 2017), the concepts of vertical and horizontal equity (Di Ciommo & Shiftan, 2017; Welch, 2013), Walzer's (1983) 'spheres of justice' (Martens, 2012) or Dworkin's (2000) theory of equality of resources (Martens, 2017). Since fair distribution 'cannot be judged in isolation from the process of which they are an outcome' (Pereira *et al.*, 2017, p. 186), some authors have recently argued for expanding the conception of justice in transport planning to also include issues of participation, recognition, citizenship-building and power imbalances between social groups:

Two dimensions of justice are considered relevant beyond the distributional [...] concept: the recognition of those affected by public policies as citizens entitled to get involved in decision-making through proper participatory or collaborative processes, and the acknowledgement of differences, reaching out to particular social groups that deviate from what those involved in policy design and implementation agree to consider as 'normality' (Aparicio, 2018, p. 122).

The need for a more comprehensive approach to justice is evident in the growing body of transportation research that focuses on issues of social and political recognition (deliberative justice), meaningful participation (procedural justice), knowledge production (epistemic justice) and admission of responsibility, reconciliation and reparation (restorative justice) (Cook & Butz, 2016, 2019; Enright, 2019; Karner *et al.*, 2020; Smeds *et al.*, 2020). These contributions draw on multiple perspectives on social justice—such as the ones proposed by the Capabilities Approach (Nussbaum, 2009; Sen, 2009) and by feminist political philosophy (Fraser, 1997; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Young, 1990)—spatial justice (Fainstein, 2009; Soja, 2009), environmental justice (Schlosberg, 2007) and mobility justice (Sheller, 2018); they also draw on the knowledge produced by social

movements (e.g. Untokening Collective, 2017). Research on justice in the domain of transport can also benefit from communicative and participatory approaches in planning theory and practice, such as reflexive planning (Howe & Langdon, 2002). For instance, Freudendal-Pedersen and Kesselring (2016) stress the importance of acknowledging people's perceptions of good life and well-being and claim that 'building up trustful and reliable social processes to tell new 'stories' on the future of mobility and transport is the fundamental basis on which comprehensive policies for the future of urban mobilities can be built upon' (p. 583).

In this paper, we will draw upon our understanding of the conceptualization of justice provided by the US political theorist and feminist Iris Marion Young in her 1990 groundbreaking book *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Despite its limited application in transport and mobility justice research thus far (Cook & Butz, 2016; Smeds *et al.*, 2020), we believe Young's theory of justice provides a suitable framework that can enrich research on social justice in transport. Specifically, we will adopt Young's theoretical framework to conduct a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1993; van Dijk, 1993) on a selection of Swedish regional transport planning documents in order to examine whether Young's theory of justice is suitable for understanding social (in)justice and its conceptualization in transport planning documents. We focus on Sweden, a social-democratic welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990), where public policies, including public transport provision, have long been based on principles of egalitarian universalism, redistribution and progressive income taxation. In this context, the recent market opening of public transport poses challenges to the realization of its social sustainability and justice goals. The paper will answer the following research questions: Is Young's conception of justice and injustice suitable to analyse social justice in transport planning in Sweden? Do Swedish regional public transport planning programs contain discourses which, according to Young's framework, emerge from domination dynamics and contribute to reproduce them?

The paper is organized as follows: The next section introduces the main features of Young's conception of justice, focusing on the process of domination and its main dimensions. It also provides an analytical framework for the critical discourse analysis performed on a selection of Swedish regional transport planning documents, presented in the third section. Based on the framework derived from Young's theory, the analysis allows us to ascertain whether and how discourses reflecting domination are expressed in planning documents. The findings contribute to identifying aspects of injustice overlooked by distributive approaches in order to widen the understanding of justice in transport planning and to support decision making for equitable and sustainable transport systems.

Beyond Distribution: Iris Marion Young's Enabling Conception of Justice

Young (1990) proposes 'the earliest direct and forceful challenge to theories of justice based solely on issues of distribution' (Schlosberg, 2007, p. 14) by addressing issues of recognition and procedural justice. Part of a broader debate on the limits of a merely distributive approach to justice (Fraser, 1995; Sandel, 1982; Taylor, 1985), Young's determined and well-supported critique is articulated in three main argumentations. First, justice pertains not only to those matters which can be assimilated to the logic of

distribution (e.g. of material goods or of social benefits) but also to decision-making procedures, to the division of labour and to culture. In contrast with a merely distributive approach, Young (1990) puts forward an 'enabling conception of justice' according to which justice refers not only to distribution but also to the institutional conditions enabling self-expression (i.e. 'developing and exercising one's capacities and expressing one's experience') and self-determination (i.e. 'participating in determining one's action and the conditions of one's action') (p. 37). Second, Young asserts the relevance of the social and institutional context, which the distributive approach overlooks in favour of an abstract idea of it. In Young's reasoning, justice and injustice involve differences among social groups that have been created by *situated* political and economic structures, divisions of labour and cultures. Instead, the individualist ontology of the distributive paradigm 'implicitly assumes a social atomism, inasmuch as there is no internal relation among persons in society relevant to considerations of justice' (p. 18). Third, Young refuses an idea of justice as 'assimilation', namely 'the transcendence of group difference' that 'usually promotes equal treatment as a primary principle of justice' (p. 157). What Young refers to as the *ideal of impartiality* consists in the adoption of a universal and objective point of view: 'Impartial reason aims to adopt a point of view outside concrete situations of action, a transcendental "view from nowhere" that carries the perspective, attributes, character, and interests of no particular subject or set of subjects' (p. 100). Impartiality, described by Young as 'impossible', actually reduces plurality and particularity to unity through the denial of difference: 'Reducing differences to unity means bringing them under a universal category which requires expelling those aspects of the different things that do not fit into the category' (p. 102). This represents a crucial element of discordance with the distributive approach, which leads to the core of the *Politics of Difference*. Young argues that 'equality as the participation and inclusion of all groups sometimes requires different treatment for oppressed or disadvantaged groups' (p. 158) and opposes a universalist approach to justice.

In brief, Young (1990) sees justice as the result of institutional conditions enabling self-expression and self-determination within a situated context and based on a 'positive self-definition of group difference' (p. 158). 'Oppression' and 'domination'—as the institutional restriction of self-development and of self-determination, respectively—emerge in Young's theory as the conditions defining social injustice. Oppression is a condition of (members of) social groups where systematic institutional and social processes 'inhibit people's ability [...] to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen' (p. 39). In the context of contemporary welfare capitalist societies, oppression is 'the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society' (p. 41). Thus, unlike tyranny, oppression is structural and 'embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols' (p. 41). Oppression manifests itself in dynamics of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence; hence, it cannot be understood by adopting a merely distributive approach to injustice.

The second disabling constraint to justice is domination, that is, the 'institutional constraint on self-determination' (Young, 1990, p. 37) and the opposite of democratic participation. Domination consists of the 'institutional conditions which inhibit or prevent people from participating in determining their actions or the conditions of

their actions' (Young, 1990, p. 38). Domination and some of its constitutive dynamics—such as the *growth imperative*, the *privatization of the citizen* and the *ideology of expertism*—will be the focus of the next section and will constitute the conceptual tools adopted in our analysis to understand justice and injustice in transport planning.

Domination in Welfare Capitalist Societies

According to Young's (1990) analysis (based on Habermas, 1987, among others), welfare capitalist societies create new forms of domination since 'increasingly the activities of everyday work and life come under rationalized bureaucratic control, subjecting people to the disciplines of authorities and experts in many areas of life' (p. 76). In what she calls the 'administered society', social phenomena become objects of technical control by bureaucracy and its universal, instrumental and efficiency-based reason. This kind of rationality brings about a *depoliticized society* where an *ideology of expertism* is prevalent.

In this depoliticized society, social conflict mainly pertains to distributive issues, and structural conditions regarding production processes and decision-making procedures are not put into question. Since social conflict is reduced to interest-groups' 'competition over distributive shares of the total social product' (Young, 1990, p. 70), economic growth becomes the main goal for governments and businesses. The *depoliticization of society* and the *growth imperative* lead to a client-consumer orientation towards citizens. For the privatized citizens—that is, the citizens who are encouraged to 'think of themselves primarily as consumers, to focus their energies on the goods they want, and to evaluate their government's performance according to how well it provides them with goods and services' (Young, 1990, p. 71)—the goal of participation is made difficult to reach or even to imagine. The lack of participation possibilities emerges also as an outcome of the 'ideology of expertism' that characterizes the administered society, according to which 'only the knowledgeable have a right to rule, because they are masters of the objective and value-neutral discipline [...], and thus their decisions are necessary and correct' (Young, 1990, p. 80). Through this ideology, people will be persuaded that policy issues can be understood only by experts, 'whose judgments determine [people's] actions or the conditions of their actions' (Young, 1990, p. 80) in a dynamic of domination.

In welfare capitalist societies, the *growth imperative*, the *privatization of the citizen* and the *ideology of expertism* all emerge as mechanisms constituting and reproducing domination, distancing the citizens from participation in decision-making processes. In order to tackle domination and realize social justice, Young argues for a democratization of decision making-processes in all institutions. In doing so, and drawing upon Harvey (1973), Young identifies the regional government as the most appropriate government scale for applying democratic decision-making processes and hence social justice. Young (1990) conceives regions as 'both an economic unit and a territory that people identify as their living space'; further, 'Regions usually have a city or cluster of cities as a focus of their activity and identity, but include less densely populated suburban and rural areas' (p. 252). According to Young (1990), one of the main tasks of regional governments would be to provide regionally standardized services to meet the educational, industrial, commercial, housing, transportation and recreational development needs of the region. A democratic regional government can overcome the decision-making structures and 'hidden mechanisms of redistribution' (p. 242) that reproduce dynamics of domination

and processes of segregation and exclusion within cities and between cities and rural areas. Young's envisaged model of regional government calls for restructured processes of democratic representation and for the inclusion of empowered representatives from neighbourhood assemblies, workplaces and other collectives representing oppressed and disadvantaged groups; these neighbourhoods and workplaces would have 'considerable powers of implementing regional policy and administering public services' (p. 253).

Aside from distinctions related to the specific administrative and political US context on which Young bases her analysis, we find her approach useful for our own analysis of social justice in Sweden's regional transport planning, especially because regional public transport administrations were assigned responsibility for public transport provision in a legislation that came into practice in 2012 (SFS, 2010b). Further, Young's 'politics of difference' is appropriate to address the policy domain of transportation, where different subjects of (im)mobility are treated as 'universal disembodied subjects' (Hine & Mitchell, 2001) and predominantly utilitarian approaches to justice (Sheller, 2018) hinder recognition and participation (Smeds *et al.*, 2020).

The next section presents a critical discourse analysis conducted on regional transport plans in the three main Swedish regions (Skåne, Stockholm and Västra Götaland) and focused on identifying discourses reproducing domination based on the following main themes: the *growth imperative*, the *privatization of the citizen*, the *ideology of expertism* and *participation*.

Justice in Regional Transport Planning: The Case of Sweden

Sweden is a welfare capitalist society. Esping-Andersen (1990) defines it as a 'social-democratic welfare regime' characterized by universalism and de-commodification of social rights—namely, every person 'can maintain a livelihood without reliance on the market' (p. 22). This kind of welfare regime promotes 'an equality of the highest standards, not an equality of minimal needs' (p. 27). Sweden has an exceptional history of social democratic state governance: The Social Democratic Party managed to rule for four consecutive decades. With such continuity, the party had time to establish the welfare state as it has become recognized internationally (Rothstein, 2009). Equity and gender equality have been core values of the formation of the late modern welfare state. According to the historian Yvonne Hirdman (1989), the success behind the ideology of the People's Home (*folkhemmet*) lies in the design of the welfare system as a general and universal program for all households and citizens in society, where high income taxes were compensated with public services and economic transfers to the households. The ideology of universalism has since then been well integrated into Swedish bureaucracy. According to Rothstein (2001), the universal welfare model has had redistributive effects that have reduced poverty. However, a recent report about 'the new poverty' in Sweden (Mood & Jonsson, 2019) shows that immigrant households and single-parent households are overrepresented poverty-wise and that poor households are exposed to a risk of social exclusion. Given Young's critical approach to universalism in the framework of her 'politics of difference', we argue that Sweden is a fitting study case to employ her conceptualization of social justice in analysing transport planning documents.

Public transport in Sweden is partly financed by taxes¹ and considered as a welfare service (Stjernborg & Mattisson, 2016). Stjernborg and Mattisson (2016) draw attention

on the difficulties public actors meet in mastering the financialization of public services, including public transport:

Local decision makers must set priorities and do trade-offs of different societal needs. Available space in central locations, available financial resources and sustainability issues are all crucial prerequisites to the public transport that is required for sustainable development and other public values at the local level. (Stjernborg & Mattisson, 2016, p. 11)

We understand this comment as a call for transport planners to pay attention to social sustainability in the regional public transport provision programs. This is particularly relevant in a Swedish context, where the income gap between the most well-off and the poorest households have reached its all-time high since the mid 1990s (Mood & Jonsson, 2019, p. 23).

Recent research has shown that, in Sweden, public transport is planned with the aim to develop strong, competitive regions (Hrelja *et al.*, 2017), focusing on services in already strong commuting routes for middle-class people with standard working hours. Furthermore, the collaboration between public and private stakeholders and a policy which encourages private initiative to develop public transport (Molander *et al.*, 2012) have contributed to the depoliticization of public transport planning by giving the decision-making power to experts, instead of elected politicians. Consequently, citizens now have less influence on how public transport should be developed to meet the needs of different social groups.

The ideas of sustainability and justice are included in the present Swedish government's transport policy, whose overall objective is 'to ensure the economically efficient and sustainable provision of transport services for people and businesses throughout the country' (Regeringens Proposition, 2008). The secondary objective pertains to gender equality and accessibility:

The design, function and use of the transport system will contribute to provide everyone with basic accessibility, of good quality and functionality, and to the development capacity throughout the country. The transport system will be gender equal, meeting the transport needs of both women and men equally. (Trafikanalys, 2014, p. 4)

Nevertheless, the report on transport policy objectives by Trafikanalys (2017), which is a government body evaluating transport policy outcomes on an annual basis, pointed out the need to further improve the service in order to meet the objectives on gender equality. Furthermore, the concept of accessibility seems to be limited to guaranteeing access for people with functional impairment, whereas wider considerations on transport-related inequalities, such as transport poverty, are not evaluated. Compared to the studies and policies promoted by the British government on transport accessibility, which acknowledged transport poverty as a crucial element of social exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003), the analysis conducted in Sweden appears simplistic.

Methods

Using Young's theoretical framework on justice in combination with a critical discourse analysis, we investigate the construction of social (in)justice in the regional planning programs for public transport in Sweden by addressing the following questions: Is Young's conception of justice and injustice suitable to analyse social justice in transport planning in

Sweden? Do Swedish regional public transport planning programs contain discourses which, according to Young's framework, emerge from domination dynamics and contribute to reproduce them? The analysis aims to understand whether and how discursive practices potentially emerging from and reproducing domination are expressed in the planning documents. The findings aim to highlight processes that are potentially fostering injustice in (transport) planning and that might be overlooked when adopting distributive approaches.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is the most suitable method to answer our research questions. CDA is 'discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes' (Fairclough, 1993, p. 135). CDA sees language as a social practice, both 'socially shaped' and 'socially shaping' (Fairclough, 1993, p. 134). Hence, it focuses 'on the role of discourse in the (re) production and challenge of dominance' (van Dijk, 1993, p. 249).² Specifically, CDA investigates 'what structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative event play a role in these modes of reproduction' (van Dijk, 1993, p. 250), paying particular attention to the fact that 'dominance may be enacted and reproduced by subtle, routine, everyday forms of text and talk that appear "natural" and quite "acceptable"' (p. 254). CDA, which has been criticized as an 'ideological interpretation and not an analysis' (Liasidou, 2008, p. 493),³ differentiates itself from other discourse analysis because of its explicitly acknowledged socio-political orientation (van Dijk, 1993).

Drawing upon Fairclough (1993), we analyse the links between the written text and the discourses. We do so according to our theoretical and analytical framework and, hence, with a focus 'upon the discursive event within relations of power and domination' (Fairclough, 1993, p. 136). The CDA is here conducted by reviewing the main strategic and compulsory public transport provision programs produced by the Regional Public Transport Authorities (RPTAs) in Sweden, which were an outcome of the Public Transport Legislation that came into practice in 2012 (SFS, 2010b). According to the legislation, each RPTA should set and update goals for the regional public transport provision on a regular basis (2010b, chapter 2, 8 §). The first round of programs was completed around 2016. In the analysis, we also include the remittance version of the revised programs. In Sweden there are 21 RPTAs. In this paper, we analyse the documents provided by the RPTAs of Skåne, Stockholm and Västra Götaland. These regions were chosen because they all include urban core areas as well as sparsely populated areas. Hence, they present both issues linked to the peak-hours crowdedness and to routes with fewer passengers to whom the accessibility to public transport is essential. In the analysis, we also include other documents provided by the RPTAs and documents relevant to the planning of regional public transport, such as the Regional Development Program. All in all, the 13 documents analysed consist of 700 pages. Most of the data contributes to the contextualization of the analysis, and the excerpts referenced in this article mainly draw on the regional public transport provision programs in the three regions.

Domination and Discourse Practices in Swedish Regional Public Transport Plans

Social Sustainability and Equity

According to the national transport policy's general and functional objectives (Trafikanalys, 2014, p. 4), the aim of the transport system is to offer a sustainable and

accessible service throughout the country, taking into consideration different needs based on gender and on functional impairment according to accessibility laws (Trafikanalys, 2016). As stated in the Skåne Regional Council transport planning document, ‘public transport which contributes to public benefit in terms of better public health and increased accessibility can be of benefit to more socio-economic groups and contribute to less alienation and increased equity’ (Region Skåne, 2018, p. 53). In the Västra Götaland Regional Council public transport planning document (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2016), social justice is related to discrimination legislation (SFS, 2008). The document is structured according to the seven grounds of discrimination, and people with disabilities are identified as a target group in reference to equity (see also Västra Götalandsregionen, 2018). The Stockholm Regional Council public transport program also explicitly states equity as a goal:

The county council together with stakeholders are to secure equity when planning, developing and running the public transport system. This should be done by actively ensuring that all social groups, not least children, old people, impaired travellers and inhabitants from different backgrounds are included in the planning process. There are large economic and social disparities in the region. Improved public transport can contribute to equity by offering accessibility to education, work places and services to people and places. (Stockholms Läns Landsting, 2017b, p. 23)

The sustainability assessment of the Stockholm Regional Council public transport provision program claims that ‘Most of the objectives in the regional public transport provision program responds directly [...] to the UN Global Goals number 5, on Gender Equality and the number 10 on Equity’ (Stockholms Läns Landsting, 2017a, p. 16). The general conclusion made by the regional public transport authority, which is responsible for the program, is that further work needs to be done to meet the social sustainability objectives. Nevertheless, the document does not provide any direction on how to understand and assess social sustainability.

Public Transport and the Growth Imperative

The studied documents provide a more straightforward set of argumentations when referring to the goal of economic development. The overall discourse regarding public transport provision is closely connected to what Young (1990) refers to as the ‘growth imperative’. In Sweden, the public transport provision plan is connected to the regional development plan, which is compulsory and is regulated by Swedish legislation (SFS, 2017). The regulation aims to support the regional growth policy and to implement the European Union Cohesion Policy framework. According to the regulation, efforts need to be made to enhance regional growth (SFS, 2017, § 2); further, the regional growth policy should combine different social sectors and take into consideration local, regional, national and international institutional levels, where collaborations between stakeholders should be encouraged (§ 5). All regions in Sweden have developed regional development plans (e.g. RUFSS in the Stockholm County, regional development strategy in Skåne County and VG2020 – Strategy for growth and development in Västra Götaland County).

Since the beginning of 2000, improved comfort, quality, speed and accessibility in passenger transport has been an outspoken policy objective aimed at increasing the size

of the functional regions and thereby improving the matchmaking between labourers and labour markets to ensure regional growth (SOU, 2000). The legislation on public transport implemented 12 years later (SFS, 2010b), in which the public transport program is made mandatory, emphasizes the need to promote regional growth by connecting people and businesses, enhancing commuting and supporting the enlargement of integrated functional regions. This connection is stated as follows in Stockholm's regional plan for public transport: 'public transport contributes to accessibility, which in the long run has impact on growth, labour market, the market in general, housing market and land-use' (Stockholms Läns Landsting, 2017b, p. 8).

Consequently, all the strategic documents regarding public transport, including the public transport provision plans we have analysed, refer to commuting, labour market integration, education, 'growth engines', extended functional regions, public transport as a tool to match the labour force with the labour market, connections to national and international travel hubs (e.g. international airports), businesses and attractive and competitive regions. For example, in the provision plan for Skåne County, the closeness to Copenhagen airport and to the cities of Copenhagen, Hamburg and Berlin is identified and stressed as a pivotal advantage of the region in creating accessibility to international destinations and to an extended labour market (Region Skåne, 2016, p. 21). In Västra Götaland County, public transport is described as a tool for regional development, where 'the prioritized routes are a combination of our most important commuter routes and politically identified routes which are important to bind together Västra Götaland and the region with its surrounding regions' (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2016, p. 2). Investment in regional commuter trains is considered as the backbone for regional development 'to contribute to strong and larger labour markets' (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2016, p. 3).

From Citizens to Customers

In the analysed policy documents, citizens are often referred to as 'customers' of public transport and additional services. One exception is the Västra Götaland Regional Council, where the text in the provision plan clearly distinguishes between the customer and the citizen, referring to the transport company as responsible towards public transport users and to politicians as responsible towards citizens (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2016, p. 25). The Skåne Regional Council public transport provision program uses the term 'customers' when reflecting on the public transport's market shares contra private cars: 'It is about both investments for improved capacity to manage increasing travel demand and actions to improve attractiveness to attract new customers' (Region Skåne, 2016, p. 22). Further, when referring to the need to provide a public transport that is accessible to everyone, the document mentions 'customers' (Region Skåne, 2016, p. 23).

In the documents, this perspective emerges when discussing the increasing costs of the public transport system, the need to create an attractive public transport service and the threshold of subsidies versus ticket price and is related to the market opening of public transport. The market opening of public transport, a result of the national public transport legislations and the European Union's regulation on public transport (SFS, 2010b; European Commission, 2007), becomes visible in the regional public transport plans when the public transport authorities formulate ideas about new market niches and how these need to be developed mainly by private transport companies providing the

public transport services: ‘New market niches of interest to commercial public transport might be designated commuter lines which minimize changes and provide high comfort and reliability’ (Stockholms Läns Landsting, 2016, p. 25).

Based on the classical economic theory, according to which private competition develops more cost-efficient services (Lidestam *et al.*, 2016), the Swedish public transport legislation (SFS, 2010b) fosters market opening and encourages private companies to compete for tendering. As a result, the Swedish public transport authorities have established more integrated collaboration with transport companies and developed public transport on market-oriented principles and public-private collaborations. This shift has impacted business models, contracts and decision-making processes (Hrelja *et al.*, 2017) and has made it difficult for citizens to gain an overview of and exercise political influence over the content of the contracts and, thereby, over the development of public transport services. In this context, there is a risk that the decisions about the investments in public transport will become less transparent and out of reach for public inquiry. This process relates to the *depoliticization of society* and the *privatization of the citizen*—crucial dynamics of domination according to Young (1990).

The Ideology of Expertism and Participation

The capacity to meet the users’ needs to access everyday destinations appears as a crucial objective in the investigated public transport plans. For example, the Stockholm Regional Council states,

Planning, development and the operation of public transport is an activity which is performed with respect taken to people’s needs [...] from an equity and gender equality perspective. This leads towards good accessibility to important destinations on equal terms for anyone living or staying in the region. (Stockholms Läns Landsting, 2017b, p. 22)

Hence, the aim of transport planning should be ‘to design and operate the public transport according to the different needs and prerequisites to make work, education, service, culture and free time activities as accessible as possible’ (Stockholms Läns Landsting, 2017b, p. 13).

However, when systematically analysing the regional public transport programs, it is not possible to identify references to the actual users’ needs and suggestions in relation to accessibility or design. According to the Swedish legislations on comprehensive planning (SFS, 2010a), citizens and inhabitants are entitled to have a say in the planning process in public and accessible democratic meetings. The public consultations are advisory but should be taken into consideration when finalizing the planning strategies. Although participation is described as the focus of the regional public transport provision plans, the latter do not state clearly how inhabitants and citizens participate to the decision-making process. Furthermore, the users’ and citizens’ needs are not explicitly included among the goals of the plan: ‘The public transport provision program has three objectives: increasing numbers of passengers, smart public transport and an attractive region’ (Stockholms Läns Landsting, 2017b, p. 13).

In the investigated regional public transport program documents, the authorities describe the consultations they conducted, which have involved mainly passengers’ organizations, most of them representing retired people or people with functional impairment. Nevertheless, when identifying the relevant actors involved in developing

the public transport provision programs, the plans include only other local and regional authorities and bureaucracies. In the revision of the public transport provision program in the Västra Götaland County, the decision-making process is described as,

a thorough assurance process. The board of the public transport in Västra Götaland has led the process in close collaboration with the public transport councils and its officials, where all the municipalities were included. A special group of eight municipal officials, two from each sub-region, have prepared documentation for the councils. Two workshops have been conducted with the transportation companies and the national and regional trade organizations. There has been dialogue with the neighbouring public transport authorities, neighbouring regions, the Transport Administration Board and additional stakeholders. (Västra Götalandsregionen, 2016, p. 24)

Sweden being a representative democracy, the politicians in the boards and councils represents the citizens. However, research findings from local policy and transport planning indicate that policy makers and politicians even at local levels have little experiences using public transport (Book & Westerdahl, 2019). This indicates that even representative democracies need to engage in dialogue processes with citizens and public transport users to fully understand the importance and meaning of accessible and fairly distributed public transport for different social groups.

Discussion and Conclusions

The goal of planning public transport according to social sustainability principles cannot be met while overlooking issues of social justice. The latter have been defined and assessed in the field of transport planning mainly by focusing on distributional outcomes (Sheller, 2018). While studying issues of accessibility distribution is important, we cannot overlook issues of participation, recognition and knowledge production when assessing or realizing justice in transport. Using an analytical framework that draws upon Young's concept of 'domination' (1990), we have conducted a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1993; van Dijk, 1993) of a selection of Swedish regional public transport policy documents, focusing on the regions of Skåne, Stockholm and Västra Götaland. In the documents, we have identified elements of discursive practices that could produce or reproduce social processes fostering domination and social injustice as defined by Young.

First, the analysis has shown the adequacy of Young's definition of domination and its constitutive dynamics in analysing transport planning documents highlighting processes and discourses which would have been overlooked by distributive approaches—dynamics such as the *growth imperative*, the *privatization of citizens* and the *ideology of expertism*. The dynamics identified are closely related to the market opening of the Swedish public transport system (Molander, 2018; van de Velde, 2014) and need to be addressed if we want transport plans to contribute to social justice.

In line with the urban austerity and neo-liberalization of the economy (Peck, 2012), where public services and goods become reduced to budget posts to choose between on the basis of conflicting interests (Mouffe, 2005), the Swedish discourse about the provision of public transport has become framed by market-oriented communication. Specifically, the analysis has shown the centrality of the regional growth goals in transport plans. In line with a neoclassical approach, these plans depict public transport as

a tool for economic development, provided in order to match the labour force with the labour market, connect to national and international travel hubs and build attractive and competitive regions (Kebrowski & Bassens, 2018). The focus on growth emerges in this analysis as problematic not only because, as stated by Young, it could foster domination dynamics and hence social injustice but also since it might be in conflict with the provision of a sustainable transport system (see Atkinson, 2008). Rather than favouring the high mobility of the most profitable users and routes, a just and sustainable transport system needs to be planned on the basis of the recognition and meaningful participation of (potentially) disadvantaged groups and their accessibility needs.

Moreover, the analysis has highlighted how, in the selected documents, citizens and public transport users are often referred to as ‘customers’. This relates to what Young (1990) identifies as the process of *privatization of citizens*. Despite the statement, present in the Swedish legislations on comprehensive planning (SFS, 2010a), stressing the importance of a focus on people’s needs, the analysed plans do not clearly address how potential transport users should actually be involved in the decision-making processes. Participation—seen by Young as the opposite of domination and, hence, of social injustice—seems to be present in the plans only as a buzzword, contradicted by priority statements and mentioned without paying attention to the actual conditions of democratic involvement, to the power relations involved and to the knowledge held by ‘non-experts’. As research on participation in transport planning has shown, public involvement is not synonymous with democratic empowerment, and the unfolding of power relations in participatory processes may actually exacerbate exclusionary dynamics (Bickerstaff & Walker, 2005, 2016; Booth & Richardson, 2001). This aspect emerges as particularly relevant in a field as transport planning, where top-down and technocentric approaches have always prevailed and where experts seem to act from a disembodied and privileged, almost omniscient, position (Haraway, 1988). The ‘ideology of expertism’ (Young, 1990) is strictly related to issues of knowledge production and epistemic justice (Sheller, 2018), which need to be taken into consideration to achieve social justice in transport planning.

The analysis represents a first attempt to utilize our understanding of Young’s theory on justice in analysing transport planning documents. It aims to be a useful contribution to both scholars investigating the underpinnings of transport justice and planners interested in fostering the adoption of comprehensive approaches to social justice. The analysis supports the call for broadening the concept and field of *transport justice* beyond distributive approaches to include issues of deliberative, procedural, epistemic and restorative justice. Further research is needed to analyse the framing of social justice in transport planning in Sweden and, especially, to assess the actual conditions of recognition, participation and knowledge production in defining public transport plans and interventions in a post-political context (Legacy, 2015). For instance, this could be accomplished by adopting a ‘socio-centric’ approach and learning from social movements and activists (Enright, 2019; Karner *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the theoretical and analytical framework provided by Young on the basis of her study of welfare capitalist societies could be adapted to better comprehend social (in)justice in contemporary neoliberal post-welfare societies (Baeten *et al.*, 2015), in order to identify the specific forms of domination in a context where the inclusion of market principles in the provision of public services has become the norm.

Notes

1. According to the documents which have been analysed, the financing ratio for public transport is between 35 and 75%. In the metropolitan regions, the ratio is just above 50%.
2. Critical discourse analysts define dominance as ‘the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that result in social inequality, including political cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality’ (van Dijk, 1993, p. 250), therefore showing analogies with the concepts of oppression and domination identified by Young (1990) and used to frame our analysis.
3. For a review of responses to and criticism of CDA, please refer to Liasidou (2008) and Lewin-Jones (2017), especially concerning accusations of ‘cherry picking’ versus ‘deliberate selectivity’ or ‘purposive sampling’, the researcher’s subjectivity and the power relations in which they are entangled.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

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