

Governing uneven mobilities

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1. Introduction

What does mobility justice look like in a city with efficient and accessible public transportation? Much of the growing literature on mobility and transport justice focuses on just accessibility and distribution (Preston and Rajé, 2007; Sheller, 2011; Martens, 2016), particularly in contexts where public transportation options are scarce or uneven. Efforts to theorize mobility justice in relation to philosophies of social justice have been productive (Cook and Butz, 2016; Sheller, 2018b), but there still remains work to be done in applying these insights in urban settings, in relation to a diverse range of theoretical debates and propositions, and in particular contexts, including in east Asian cities with model public transport networks. This article contributes to this work by connecting questions of justice raised by Hong Kong's mobility system to the politics of urban transport policy and its manifestations in the landscape. Mobilities are an area of urban policy and governance intersecting with economic, social and environmental concerns (Hanson and Giuliano, 2004). Objectives of governance may be achieved through mobility, rather than simply applied to it (Bærenholdt, 2013; Jensen, 2013). Structural inequalities and social exclusions may be reflected and reproduced in uneven mobilities and constrained opportunities that may be normalized (Levy, 2013). Governance through mobility is fluid and dynamic, incorporating influences in the service of reproducing its mode of operation which is oriented towards circulation, but also order and expansion. This article reveals how uneven mobilities are governed in a putative or "aspiring" global city (Kong, 2007) in Asia – Hong Kong – where public transport is abundant, but where there exists a hierarchy in which different transport modes are positioned according to historically-constituted and ideologically-grounded

institutions and policies. In the case examined here, pedestrian-friendly planning objectives are advanced in relation to environment- and capital-friendly governance strategies.

Hong Kong has among the most extensive and well-used public transportation systems in the world, enabled and supported by the small size of the territory, its density, and various policy mechanisms. A range of modes, including mass transit rail (MTR), light rail, buses, mini-buses, ferries, trams, escalators and pedestrian infrastructure weave together to enable the movement of millions of people daily. The number of private vehicles per capita is extremely low (under 100 per 1000) and so many trips are by shared mechanized mobility options (privately owned public transportation operators) (HKSAR Government, 2018). Private automobile ownership reflects privilege: luxury vehicles are common, congestion pricing was considered long ago but remains unimplemented, and high-occupancy lanes are rare, allowing the drivers of private vehicles a high level of motility, in addition to the perceived freedom that makes automobiles attractive (Schwanen and Lucas, 2011). The status of privileged private automobility is paralleled in inequalities that characterize the territory's socio-economic order, including a high gini coefficient, a housing affordability crisis perpetuated by a hegemonic property (re)development regime (Lee and Tang, 2017), a low minimum wage, and increasing levels of poverty (Goodstadt, 2014; Wissink, Koh and Forrest, 2017).

Aspects of Hong Kong's urban mobility system, such as the Rail + Property (R+P) model of funding rail transport through property development, are appealing (Cervero and Murakami, 2009) and have begun to be replicated (Tsang, 2017). If Hong Kong's mobility system is a model for others, is it just? How does it operate? How is it changing? The paper pursues these questions through a study of the status of walking in Hong Kong's mobility system. Public transport trips include short linking trips, often done on foot, to and from stops and at transfers (TCS, 2011). Such trips are significant as an "unexpected source of physical

activity” with health benefits (Morency, Trépanier and Demers, 2011). It has also long been suggested that walking is an important feature of everyday life in shared city spaces (Jacobs, 1961; Sennett, 1970). However, the paper will argue that walking is contradictory in many ways to the operation of Hong Kong’s mobility system, and that this raises questions of urban mobility and transport justice. Walking, along with other slow, free or inexpensive non-motorized transportation modes that permit individual mobility at street level¹, occupies a lower position in Hong Kong’s hierarchy of circulation than motorized modes like the high-speed and/or high-volume mobilities of the MTR and buses, and privileged automobilities. Attention to how walking is enabled and constrained at street level, where, and for whom, in relation to other walking environments, like elevated footpaths connected to shopping malls, and in relation to the political economy of Hong Kong’s rail-property nexus, requires attention to how governance shapes the “right to mobility” (Verlinghieri and Venturini, 2018).

Challenges to the status of walking within Hong Kong’s mobility system have been launched and have achieved some success, in part as a result of the increasing emphasis on sustainable development in urban policy as evident the Territory Development Strategy, *Hong Kong 2030+* (Hong Kong Planning Department, 2016). With walking now widely recognized as a feature of “livable” and “green” cities, state and non-state actors, including civil society groups, reckon with how to incorporate a less efficient and more democratic kind of urban mobility into a system that prizes speed and uninterrupted flow. Reasons for pursuing this cause are layered and sometimes contradictory: aspirations of walking as a collective “right to the city” (Middleton, 2018) undergirded by notions of what Blomley calls “civic humanism” (2011, p. 17), are advanced alongside quality walking environments as part

¹ Other examples include bicycles, options for the mobility for differently abled people, such as wheelchairs, as well as some forms of inexpensive public transport, such as the tram.

of a “sustainability fix” pursued by entrepreneurial cities (While, Jonas and Gibbs, 2004; Temenos and McCann, 2012; Pow and Neo, 2013). Empirically, the article discusses a campaign to improve the public realm of a major thoroughfare in Hong Kong’s Central Business District, Des Voeux Road Central (DVRC), with a focus on walkability and pedestrian experiences. This case reveals how governmobility works to incorporate some potentially disruptive mobilities – slower, more just, and more sustainable – in the interest of continuing its operation and expansion.

The article continues in four parts. The next section (1.1) develops a conceptual approach for studying uneven mobilities with an interest in questions of spatial justice using the concept of governmentality. This is followed with a discussion of the methodology (1.2) for studying walking and uneven mobilities. The following section (2) further situates these insights in Hong Kong, specifying the status of walking in a hierarchy, and the colonial production of this mobility system. Sections 3 and 3.1 explore the Walk DVRC campaign, including a pedestrian survey to gather evidence to support regime change. The conclusion (4) highlights the significance of attending to and producing grounded and contextualized accounts of how mobilities are governed in relation to other urban policy agendas, and of carefully considering how sustainability and justice are related and how they might be jointly pursued.

1. 1 Governing uneven mobilities

Against the broader backdrop of increasing attention to the politics of mobility (Cresswell, 2010), efforts to conceptualize and empirically specify mobility justice have flourished (Sheller, 2011, 2018a; Cook and Butz, 2016, 2018; Cass *et al.*, 2018). These reverberate with longer-standing work on transport justice (Lucas, 2004; Gössling, 2016; Martens, 2016), that has begun to be explored in Hong Kong (He *et al.*, 2018). As yet there has not been extensive effort directed at detailing how theories of mobility and transport

justice relate to questions of spatial justice (Dikeç, 2001) and social justice in the city (Mitchell, 2003; Ng *et al.*, 2010). This paper joins Sheller (2018b, p. 22) in an effort to consider “how we might theorize justice in relation to liberal and neoliberal power, global inequalities, and colonial histories and postcolonial presents of uneven mobilities.” Precisely because public transport in Hong Kong is extensive and accessible, efforts that theorize justice beyond questions of distribution are relevant. Cook and Butz (2016) pursue this aim in a different context by building upon Iris Marion Young’s work on structures of domination and their effects (Young, 1990). They highlight the effects of historical and continuing institutional domination of the state in the context of disaster in a peripheral region of northern Pakistan heavily impacted by a landslide. Here, citizens were excluded from decision-making and the implementation of plans and programmes through top-down directives which produce im/mobilities. They propose insurgency that has as its aim a form of participatory democracy as a productive direction. Urban geographers have also taken up Young’s work to theorize spatial justice. As a key example, Dikeç (2001) highlights the importance of temporal and spatial context in addressing questions of spatial justice that include but are not reducible to distribution. At stake are possibilities for capturing the processes through which power is enabled and enacted in the interest of reproducing a hegemonic mobility system or altering it. Spatial justice invokes the social production of space as a process which “not only manifests various forms of injustice, but actually produces and reproduces them” (Dikeç, 2001, p. 1788). Mobility systems are integral to the social production of urban space, pointing to the imbrication of mobility and spatial justice. This insight is particularly helpful in Hong Kong where disruptions, for instance, accidental or planned MTR delays and station closures have significant material and political consequences – slowing production by delaying commuters or, in 2019, interrupting anti-government protests by inhibiting the mobilities of demonstrators. However, we may

question whether conceptions of justice derived from Western philosophies suffice in Hong Kong, or whether a hybrid version drawing also from Confucian traditions emphasizing harmonious relations and the family instead the state as welfare provider (Yung, 2007), may be more appropriate. To study the intertwining of mobility and spatial justice, we may draw upon Bærenholdt's (2013) suggestions to study governmobility by adopting a relational perspective attentive to participation in mobility systems but also resistance, to material infrastructures as well the connections that extend from them.

Government mobility builds upon Foucault's (1991) work on government as extending beyond the state to include various social processes and spaces. Within several pages Foucault twice quotes a phrase from French renaissance writer Guillaume La Perrière, that government "is the right disposition of things, arranged so as to lead to a convenient end" (Foucault, 1991, p. 93). He goes on to suggest a relational understanding of government as imbricated processes of people, materials and institutions oriented to "specific finalities" (p. 95), which could include (among others) efficiency, stability or wealth generation. Interpretations of this schema, including by mobility scholars, have emphasized the regulation of self as "conduct of conduct" as a key feature of government. Bærenholdt (2013) especially picks up on Foucault's references to circulation and its association with freedom to develop the notion of governmobility "as a situation where the regulation of mobilities are (sic) internalized in people's mobile practices" (Bærenholdt, 2013, p. 29). Here, power isn't exercised from above in the form of state institutions or elite interests, but is enacted through self-government; it is practiced rather than directed. Organizing circulation by enabling it becomes a way of addressing urban problems, rather than through judicial, administrative or other means (Bærenholdt, 2013, p. 24), while it is nevertheless also often encoded in law (Blomley, 2011). Research on governmobility should be contextual but also historical, in the Foucauldian genealogical sense, in order to make visible the constitution and

resistance of powers of mobility (Sheller, 2016, p. 16). The idea of governmobility may help to explain participation in and reliance on systems that are unsustainable, that benefit few at the expense of many, and that marginalize populations – in other words, systems that are *unjust*. This frame has been applied in different contexts. In the bicycle mecca of Copenhagen, for example, Jensen (2013) points out that discourses enacted in cycling-friendly, “green” urban policies aim to achieve human-centred inclusivity, but nevertheless differentiate social groups – the more or less urban or physically able. In Hong Kong, improving street-level walking is a disruptive effort, but it resonates with environmental and economic policy directions. It is pursued in the case considered here by actors working within established governance frameworks and represents an evolving direction in internalized mobility practices, however, one in which the status of existing uneven mobilities is unclear.

1.2 Studying walking and uneven mobilities

Citing the organizational categories of a recent edited collection (Adey *et al.*, 2014), Sheller writes that uneven mobilities include “uneven *qualities* of experience, uneven access to *infrastructure*, uneven *materialities*, uneven *subjects* of mobility, and uneven *events* or temporalities of stopping, going, passing, pausing, and waiting” (Sheller, 2018b, p. 23, original emphasis). Uneven mobilities may be unjust, but they may appear normal when “internalized” in mobile practices (Bærenholdt, 2013). Hong Kong’s transportation system produces uneven mobilities and this is evident when non-motorized modes are considered. For example, pedestrian experiences in Hong Kong’s “privately-owned public spaces” are often superior – faster, less polluted, more comfortable – to those on street-level sidewalks. The implications of such differences become legible through the lens of mobilities research. Transport-oriented research on walking and pedestrian infrastructure has often examined technical questions related to speed, efficiency and capacity. Characteristics of pedestrian flow in different kinds of environments and conditions, including in stations and at cross-

walks (Lam, Lee and Cheung, 2002), have been studied to inform planning and spatial design. A model of pedestrian route preferences performed less well in Hong Kong than in New York, a fact the authors of the study attribute to the challenging and complex nature of the city's walking infrastructures and environments (Guo and Loo, 2013, p. 135). In part in response to these conditions, experiences of which are difficult to quantify, this article takes cues from approaches to walking at the intersection of transport and mobilities (Middleton, 2010, 2011; Lorimer, 2011) and uses qualitative methods to study walking within the larger mobility system. Walking is, of course, healthy and useful, but it is also social and meaningful. Walking environments do not only contain and direct; they animate and foreground socialities and experiences of place. As the most affordable transport option and often most accessible (yet shaped by gender, age, race, dis/ability and their intersections), walking is often positioned unevenly in relation to other transport modes. For this reason, it is relevant to questions of mobility justice, including the "right to the city", and experiences of uneven mobilities created and reproduced through evolving power relations and everyday practices.

The methodology was designed to capture how Hong Kong's mobility system operates, the injustices – for example, uneven mobilities – that it creates and normalizes, and possibilities for change and resistance. The positionality of the author as a resident of Hong Kong and a daily user of its public transport network and sidewalks with an interest in walking figured in the research design. A mixture of qualitative methods was adopted, alongside attention to history. Data was gathered through key informant interviews, participatory action research, and participant observation between in 2016 and 2018. Targeted key informant interviews were conducted with stakeholders of the DVRC initiative. The purpose of the interviews was to access background information about the creation of the initiative and its activities, and the dynamic between different actors, including supporting

organizations, local business owners, and government departments. Participatory Action Research (PAR), emphasizes collaboration and co-production of knowledge with non-academic partners, including those typically marginalized in the pursuit of research (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007). Here PAR involved participation in the design and implementation of a pedestrian survey organized by Walk DVRC volunteers (including professionals, neighbourhood residents, students, and walking advocates) to gauge public opinion of the street and the possibility of improving the walking experience. The author conducted participant observation at several events organized by Walk DVRC, including a walking tour, the Open Streets Day, and an international conference called Walk21.

The bilingual (English and Chinese) questionnaire was designed iteratively with members of Walk DVRC and volunteers. An early draft was deemed too long and the final version consisted of only 5 multiple choice questions and one open-ended question. The early draft, developed as a short, structured interview, had been envisaged for gathering qualitative data about pedestrian experiences and preferences. It was scaled back to be short enough that rushed pedestrians would agree to participate and to capture data that could influence government stakeholders. The open-ended question, selected because it had been the subject of discussions among stakeholders, asked respondents to explain why or why not they would be willing to accept inconveniences (such as detours) if improvement works were to be carried out on DVRC. The process of conducting the questionnaire, more than the data it generated, along with the interview and observational data, are treated in the interpretation that follows.

2. The colonial production of hierarchized circulation in Hong Kong

Any understanding of Hong Kong's mobility system and the status of walking within it must recognize the continuing effects of its colonial origins, and the challenges of an emancipatory politics of mobility in the context of Hong Kong's governance system.

Hong Kong Island became a British crown colony in 1842, providing a foothold in China and point of trade and exchange as an entrepôt port. Property sales were used to raise funds to administer the colony and harbour reclamation created additional land and revenue (Nissim, 2011). It was a divided city, with policing and spatial control of the growing Chinese population a chief concern of the colonial administration, along with exploiting its labour (Lowe, 2015). This project expanded following WWII and the Japanese occupation when hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Chinese civil war settled in Hong Kong, fueling the shift from a trade-based to industrial economy. Colonial spatial planning beginning from the 1950s, with underlying political motivations (Smart, 2006), included the resettlement of large numbers of people living in squatter settlements into public housing estates and the creation of industrial districts. Mizuoka (2018, p. 166) shows how connecting these separate residential and industrial areas became a political objective with “subtle yet determined colonial intentions.” In contrast to overcrowded and sometimes unreliable buses, rail transport would be efficient, clean, and spacious. The first segment of the MTR system opened in 1979, linking the earliest public housing estates in Shek Kip Mei with the Kwun Tong industrial area. This is an early instance of the use of mobility to achieve political-economic objectives, or governance *through* mobility.

In order to fund the expansion of the system the government would grant the MTR Corporation the right to develop the property surrounding stations. First discussed in the mid-1970s, R+P became integral to the business model of the company by the 1980s. Cervero and Murakami (2009, p. 2020) describe the R+P as “a carefully conceived process for planning, supervising, implementing and managing station-area development and tapping into the land price appreciation that results.” They find that transit-oriented designs and mixed land uses result in both higher levels of ridership and higher property values around stations. They also reference high-quality pedestrian environments around stations but do not discuss how these

compare to those at street-level. A decade later, in the context of further MTR network expansion in Hong Kong and escalating real estate prices, the local impacts of transport infrastructure development have drawn scrutiny. He et al (2018) study the impact of MTR expansion in terms of public and private housing developed around new stations, seeking to determine whether this form of transit-oriented-development (TOD) leads to injustice in the form of spatial exclusion and displacement of lower-income residents. Results of their quantitative study suggest that though there isn't severe spatial injustice, effort should be made to provide more public housing. Beyond this example of distributive justice questions can be asked about the place of the MTR in Hong Kong's broader mobility system in terms of dominance and the power relations involved, and the relative positioning of other transport modes and infrastructures.

Extensive modal separation facilitates circulation around MTR stations and at street-level, but it does so unevenly. The same logics of efficiency and circulation guide planning and design in different kinds of urban spaces. Guardrails, modeled after those in the UK (Interviewee E01, 2016), separate sidewalks from street carriage-ways. Footbridges and underground tunnels replace at-grade street crossings in many places. Around MTR stations and in commercial districts elevated walkways form grade-separated networks that have been called "cities without ground" (Frampton, Solomon and Wong, 2012). These infrastructures, which add complexity to the notion that the sidewalk is the primary space of a rationality premised on order and circulation known as "pedestrianism" (Blomley, 2011), emerged in the 1970s as a way to address congestion at street level while also expanding the profit-generating potential of above-ground retail spaces. These networks enable unimpeded pedestrian movement oriented towards facilitating consumption (Tan and Xue, 2016). Meanwhile, they are "ambiguous" in relation to established notions of public and private because they are often built and operated by developers reflecting corporate control of space

(Cuthbert and McKinnell, 1997; Tan and Xue, 2014) enabled by Hong Kong's hegemonic land governance shaped by collusion between real estate and government (Lee and Tang, 2017). Perhaps not surprisingly, pedestrian networks are accepted and liked by many for the convenience and comfort they offer (Interviewee E01, 2016). Thus, "analogous cities" (Boddy, 1992) continue to be built in Hong Kong, particularly to integrate MTR stations with surrounding land uses.

Features of Hong Kong's transport and mobility system discussed thus far, and the status of walking within them, are the residual effects of planning and design guidelines that originated in the U.K. and were transported to Hong Kong and adapted to the local context by the colonial administration. While planning ideas and approaches have evolved, many policies and guidelines have changed little. In this context a growing number of organizations (many of which include both planning and transport professionals and lay citizens among their members) have begun to advocate for pedestrian-friendly policies, for example lowering automobile speed limits, improving street design, implementing stricter roadside emissions standards, and more; government is increasingly receptive to these ideas. These objectives have various motivations – accessibility, health, sustainability, livability – sometimes undergirded by economic rationalities. In October 2016 the Walk21 conference was held in Hong Kong, for the time in Asia. Walk21 is an international charitable organization that advocates, develops knowledge, and shares best practices and policies for improving walking. Its bi-annual conference is a point of convergence for actors working around this common goal. The presence of representatives of the MTR, Transport Department, and developers at the conference signaled a recognition of walking as an item on policy agendas in Hong Kong². The conference was coordinated by Civic Exchange, a long-established think tank with extensive public and private sector networks and partners. In addition to the traditional

² The registration fee made the event out of reach to some organizations and individuals.

conference programme, a series of themed walks on different aspects of Hong Kong's built environment was offered. Featured in both presentations and walks was the work of Walk DVRC, an organization advocating for changes to Des Voeux Road Central.

3. Des Voeux Road Central and the Walk DVRC Campaign

Des Voeux Road Central has an important history as one of the major streets in a Chinese business district that developed in the second half of the 19th century just west of the original colonial settlement. Named after a colonial governor (in Chinese, a transliteration of his name: 德輔道中), it sits on reclaimed land first envisaged in the 1860s as a Praya to ensure public access to the harbor front (Hase, 2008). It was widened to become a road in the 1880s and a further major land reclamation project initiated in 1898 added land to the north. Today it stretches 1.5 kilometers from Central Business District in the east to the Western Market in the west. It is lined with banks, department stores, and commercial buildings, including the Central Market (fig. 1), currently being revitalized as part of the government-led conservation scheme. Des Voeux Road West continues on the other side of the Western Market and is known for its dried seafood shops. A century-old tram (fig. 2) runs down the middle of the street, flanked by lanes serving a large number of bus routes other motorized vehicles. Entrances to MTR stations are located along the street. Both street-level walking and the tram have an uneven status in relation to the other transport modes. Sidewalks are often crowded with commuters, tourists, workers and local residents. The tram, costing 2.3 HKD (around 0.3 USD) is affordable, but it is uncomfortable, lacking air conditioning and adequate seating, and slow, with frequent stops and delays due to congestion. Both tram users and those using the sidewalks are exposed to poor air quality caused in part by the large number of diesel buses and exacerbated by the building canyon effect (Rakowska *et al.*, 2014).

The idea of pedestrianizing DVRC was initiated in the late 1990s by the Hong Kong Institute of Planners (HKIP)³, the official body of the planning profession in Hong Kong, which proposed a scheme to transform a section of the street into a pedestrian precinct while retaining the tram line (HKIP, 2003). This proposal was not implemented. It re-emerged in 2013 and 2014 in the context of a seemingly friendlier policy climate in a report featuring technical assessments of air quality and traffic congestion and proposing a pedestrian and tram precinct (HKIP, 2014). The DVRC Initiative was branded as Walk DVRC and became a Non-Governmental Organization in 2017. Board members includes representatives of supporting organizations like the Hong Kong Institute of Planners and Clean Air Network, as well as businesses and others. The group advocates street and landscape changes to improve walkability and the pedestrian experience. These include rerouting buses, pedestrian crossing facilities such as bump-outs, and removing motorized vehicles from part of the street while maintaining the tram route. The language Walk DRVC uses to promote its mission strategically highlights the symbolic status of DVRC to Hong Kong as “Asia’s World City”, a city deserving of a quality public realm in its Central Business District. A discussion of the context in which this initiative re-emerged after 2013 and its efforts to gather support to influence pedestrian-friendly policy changes reveals the shifting complexity of governing street-level walking in the context a hierarchically arranged mobility system.

The justification for improving the pedestrian realm of DVRC includes several recent developments. First, several large culture and creativity themed heritage conservation projects were recently completed in the area, including Tai Kwun (the Former Central Police Station and Victoria Barracks Compound) and PMQ (formerly the Hollywood Road Police Marred Quarters) and DVRC improvements are framed as way to better connect these sites.

³ The HKIP has statutory status, includes a broad spectrum of members from the planning profession, and includes among its objectives work that is in the best interest of the community.

Though the initial impetus for conservation came from community activists, these projects have become part of a long-term state strategy to diversify the economy and develop “hardware” for creative industries (Ku, 2010; Barber, 2018). Second, infrastructure developments in recent years, including the opening of the western extension of the Island Line of the MTR, and the Central-Wan Chai By-pass (CWB), present opportunities for change (HKIP, 2014). The CWB – announced with the tag-lines “uninterrupted flow” and “urban greening” (Highways Department, 2013) – eases congestion by adding road capacity via a new tunnel on reclaimed land. The negative environmental impacts and significant expense of this project, which primarily benefits automobility, and the larger harbour reclamation were criticized by civil society groups (Ng, 2008). A key message of the campaign was that the additional capacity provided by the by-pass meant that DVRC could be reconfigured for the benefit of pedestrians without worsening traffic congestion (Interviewee P03, 2016).

The efforts of Walk DVRC were also spurred along by an unanticipated debate. In August, 2015 Sit Kwok Keung, a retired government town planner and consultant, proposed removing a section of the tram line to ease traffic congestion. Mr. Sit argued that the MTR along the same route had made the tram obsolete and the road space it occupies would be better used by motorized vehicles (Sung, 2015). His proposal, was submitted for consideration by the Town Planning Board and sparked a strong response: the Board received over 22,000 comments from the public, 98% of which supported retaining the tram (Chui, 2015). The proposal to the Board was dismissed but not before environmental and heritage groups submitted an official counter-proposal supporting the Walk DVRC vision (Town Planning Board, 2015). Sit’s efforts had brought to light the uneven status of the tram within Hong Kong’s mobility hierarchy. The strong public response was an indication of the tram’s

perceived value as an accessible albeit inefficient mode of transport and a culturally symbolic fixture of the landscape.

3.1 Governmobility on Des Voeux Road Central

Walk DVRC has engaged in public outreach activities, promotional campaigns and research activities oriented to achieving short and long-term goals that challenge aspects of Hong Kong's mobility system but also require government support. The organization's efforts can be understood through the lens of governmobility as working relationally with government and other actors to achieve change that, in the absence of such an approach, might be too disruptive. Hong Kong's first "Open Streets Day", a precursor to a longer proposed trial, was organized by Walk DVRC and partners in September, 2016. Planning began almost half a year in advance and the government's early response was positive, in part due to the selection of Hong Kong as the host city for the Walk21 conference (Interviewee P01, 2016). The initial plan was to close 1.3 km of the street to traffic. As the date grew closer government support wavered with questions concerning safety and community consultation. The length of the route was reduced to 80 metres, then, through negotiations, was raised to 200 metres (Interviewee P01, 2016). The event took place on a warm Sunday with extensive safety planning (fig. 3); one lane was closed to traffic and place-making activities were set up along the route. At intersections volunteers and police controlled pedestrian movements, allowing traffic to continue to flow smoothly along perpendicular streets. The concept of "Open Streets" is contradictory to the operation of the system; the difficulty with which this "trial run" was implemented and the limited space it was given reveal the caution with which the prospect of altering the status of walking is approached. This interruption to the routine was only permitted on a Sunday with little traffic, only in one lane, and with programming.

Walk DVRC, with its high-profile partners and professional members, has lines of communication and working relationships with government departments relevant to its mission. Nevertheless, it must work to influence these parties, most directly the Transport Department (TD). Outreach activities, including walking tours, exhibitions, media campaigns, participation in various events, brought attention to the campaign. However, more evidence was needed that the proposed changes were acceptable to users of the street, including members of the public and business owners. Walk DVRC hence decided to conduct a street intercept survey to present as evidence to TD. On the surface the objective of the survey was to gauge public opinion. It can also be understood as an exercise in knowledge production to supplement dominant economic and transport engineering perspectives – in a way, to locally form new knowledge about the street from the perspective of its non-motorized users. Such local knowledge was needed in spite of the widespread evidence from elsewhere because the plan runs counter to the ingrained aspects of Hong Kong’s mobilities hierarchy, such as not disrupting the flow of motorized traffic. The author participated in the design of the survey and data collection between May and November, 2018⁴.

During the survey periods the street was busy: a steady stream of buses, taxis and trams passed noisily, while the sidewalk was lively with commuters. In front of the survey location was a bus stop with a long queue. When approached only a small number of people queuing were willing to complete the questionnaire, even though they were waiting.

⁴Surveys were conducted on four days in November: two weekday evenings during rush hour from 5:30 to 7:30pm (Tuesday, 18 September and Thursday, 20 September) and two weekend afternoons (Saturday, 24 Nov. and Sunday, 25 Nov.). The survey count for the weekdays was n=78 and for the weekend days it was n=189. The survey was conducted in a mid-block location across the street from the entrance to an MTR, in front of a bus stop, and at the junction of DVRC and a narrow alley used by pedestrians and a few vending booths. Both weekends and weekdays were selected in order to capture different groups of pedestrians – mainly commuters walking from the surrounding office towers to public transport on weekdays, and visitors to the district, including large numbers of foreign domestic workers who congregate in the Central district on their days off work on weekends, especially on Sundays (Law, 2002).

Commuters and others, including street cleaners and labourers pushing cartloads of cardboard and rubbish or construction debris, regularly crossed from near the MTR exit across the street, even though there was no signalized crossing. At times the large number of pedestrians on the sidewalks created delays. The survey responses revealed that many of those surveyed cross the street at any convenient location. A majority supported modifying the pedestrian facilities; not necessarily complete pedestrianization but rather a mid-block signalized crosswalk at the MTR station entrance. Though the sample size is too small to draw generalizable conclusions, the responses and site observations suggest that efficiency is important for pedestrians, but that infrastructure that supports safe and efficient street crossings in this location isn't currently provided. Moreover, there simply isn't enough space for all of the users of the sidewalk during peak hours. Evidence of these and other problems in the survey findings is part of the work of Walk DVRC to advance a cause that is simultaneously an emerging government interest and contradictory to ingrained aspects of its mobility system.

The survey and the other activities of Walk DVRC can be understood as both a disruption of Hong Kong's mobility system and a form of government mobility within it. The vision for the street recalls its historical form prior to the creation of layers of hierarchized circulation produced by colonial transport and land policy accompanying economic growth, the sinking in of infrastructures like MTR lines and elevated footpaths, and their embodiment in movements of residents of the city. The DVRC campaign enlists the discourse of Hong Kong as a global city and the Central and Western District as a visible space within it to improve street-level pedestrian realm. The respondents, in their stated desire for more convenient marked street crossings and other minor improvements rather than complete pedestrianization, have a modest vision: to have their street-level mobilities facilitated with fewer barriers and obstructions; in other words, for their experience to be less unevenly

positioned in the hierarchy. A reality the survey findings are not able to capture in detail – in part due to the time-challenged format of intercepting people on the street at rush hour – is that different users of the street have different mobility needs. Tourist and retail shoppers' needs will differ from those of commuters, particularly in low-wage sectors. Moreover, the needs of local residents of different ages and backgrounds are different from occasional visitors, including domestic workers on Sundays. The prospect of a safer and more convenient at-grade crossing is modest, but it is one that cuts across many of these differences. If implemented here successfully, it may also be realized elsewhere in locations where improvements to street-level non-motorized mobilities are needed.

4. Conclusion

Mobility justice and sustainable mobility have been proposed as twinned prospects for transitions away from carbon-intensive mobility systems (Sheller, 2011). A transition away from automobility is inevitable and parts of Hong Kong's mobility system are desirable. But how just is Hong Kong and what lessons can be drawn from it? This question is important given the status of the city as an exemplar for public transportation. Deciding what to learn from Hong Kong's mobility system requires attention to the complex matrices of power through which the system developed and evolved, as well as how people both participate in and challenge it. Property developers and the MTR have contributed to shaping walking as a means to a convenient end, often resulting in its removal from the street, and uneven qualities of experience, of waiting, of stopping and going (Sheller, 2018b). Sidewalk users, including those walking and using wheelchairs and other assistive mobility devices, are exposed to environmental nuisances and harmful roadside pollution, and directed in ways that minimize disruption to motorized vehicles, many of which are private automobiles. This reality affects the everyday experiences of the majority of Hong Kong's commuters, it affects low-wage workers who labour in the streets, and it affects irregular leisure visitors, both tourists and

Hong Kong residents. The perpetuation of these inequalities may appear contradictory to Hong Kong's cheap and efficient public transport, but they mirror broader inequalities and a system that reproduces them (Wissink, Koh and Forrest, 2017). There have been various attempts by civil society to challenge this status quo in the realm of walking mobilities, among which Walk DVRC a notable example. Such efforts can be understood through the lens of government mobility as working in productive tension with political objectives, a relationship without which they might not achieve anything. So, what kind of challenge to power, relation to power, or expression of power is Walk DVRC, a campaign with a vision that is simultaneously disruptive to norms and, in an age of sustainable cities as global currency, common sense?

Walk DVRC aims to influence decisions by government on bus routes, pedestrian facilities and street-level landscape in a symbolic location. Its efforts have purchase in part because the government has already begun to study and implement some of the changes they have been advocating for. Change does not come easily; a proposal to introduce a pilot scheme of a low speed limit in Central near DVRC elicited a negative response from bus companies and some politicians who argued that it would worsen traffic congestion (Zhang, 2019). Hong Kong's Central district is becoming a landscape of tourism and consumption with a growing number of new and old cultural attractions, in the context of a shift to the entertainment and tourism-focused service-sector economy (Ku, 2010). Whether to prioritize the circulation of buses and cars shown to contribute to roadside air pollution, or the experiences of a range of commuting, working, and leisure-seeking pedestrians and sidewalk users from varied backgrounds, hinges on shift in governing ideology. Improving the public realm on a major street with the specific aim of making it more walkable is a civic project, but one that ultimately fits within Hong Kong's sustainable development objectives, evident

in the incorporation of environmental discourses and concerns in a broadly neoliberal or market-oriented policy framework.

A conclusion drawn from the discussions at the Walk 21 conference is that walking is a right, and one that doesn't exist unproblematically in Hong Kong, even if most trips involve some travel on foot. The "right to mobility" (Verlinghieri and Venturini, 2018) in the street is not unconnected from – and, some would argue, foundational to (Attoh, 2019, p. 3) – other struggles for spatial justice. This point has also been made in studies of mobility and transport justice as well (Mullen and Marsden, 2016). Although this article hasn't broached a full analysis of the concept of justice, it is important to recognize the potential of culturally situated interpretations that may, for instance, emphasize harmonious relations over or in combination with individual rights (Yung, 2007). As the Hong Kong case shows, even in public transportation-friendly environments, everyday mobilities may intersect with and be bound up with structural inequalities. These relationships are legible in the landscape and is experienced in practice. The grounded street-level analysis here reveals the ways that differently positioned mobile subjects at the micro level are part of a larger mobility system that has developed over many decades in accordance an evolving governance approach in which circulation is integral to growth.

Many MTR stations offer seamless pedestrian interfaces with shopping malls and an array of land-uses, the development of which served to fund to a system that prizes efficient circulation. The colonial production of this system, and its continuing reproduction in an era of integration with Mainland China which includes unprecedented levels of cross-border mobilities, is a matter of spatial justice. Public transport is accessible in Hong Kong, and there are efforts afoot to introduce much needed focus on street-level walkability, but to date the system is organized to facilitate the perpetuation of hierarchized circulation reflecting other inequalities in the landscape, such as the corporate domination of public space. This

will likely continue unless the health, human, and use values of non-motorized transport for people across a spectrum of social differences are meaningfully recognized. The work of Walk DVRC reminds of the need to pay careful attention to questions of justice and uneven mobilities in the pursuit of more sustainable mobility options.

The social and political unrest in Hong Kong in 2019, sparked by the proposed Extradition Law Amendment Bill, revealed unexpected new contours of government mobility and the politics of mobility that must be researched with the questions of justice raised in this article in mind. The metal guardrails that separate pedestrians from vehicular traffic throughout Hong Kong, while simultaneously containing, directing and constraining pedestrian movements, were taken apart by protesters with tools, both to enable the flow of large-scale demonstrations on foot, but also to use as barricades in the street. The government subsequently removed the guardrails from many areas. The MTR was initially used by protesters to facilitate rapid movement in their tactic of “be water” – flash-style protests that form and dissipate quickly (rather than long-term occupations like that for which the 2014 Umbrella Movement is known) – but by mid-summer this changed. Stations began to close around planned protests, reaching a peak on October 1, China’s National Day marking the 70th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, when entire MTR lines were shut down as confrontations between police and protesters broke out in multiple districts. There is not space here to treat the politics of mobility in the anti-EXLAB and related protest movement, except to point out that it is related to Hong Kong as a model public transport city. Transport infrastructures, whether public transport networks or sidewalks, are not are not “neutral technologies” but rather political spaces (Enright, 2019, p. 2). This fact requires attention to power relations and inequalities in both exceptional and everyday circumstances, to how mobility systems come to be experienced as normal and how we might envision alternatives.

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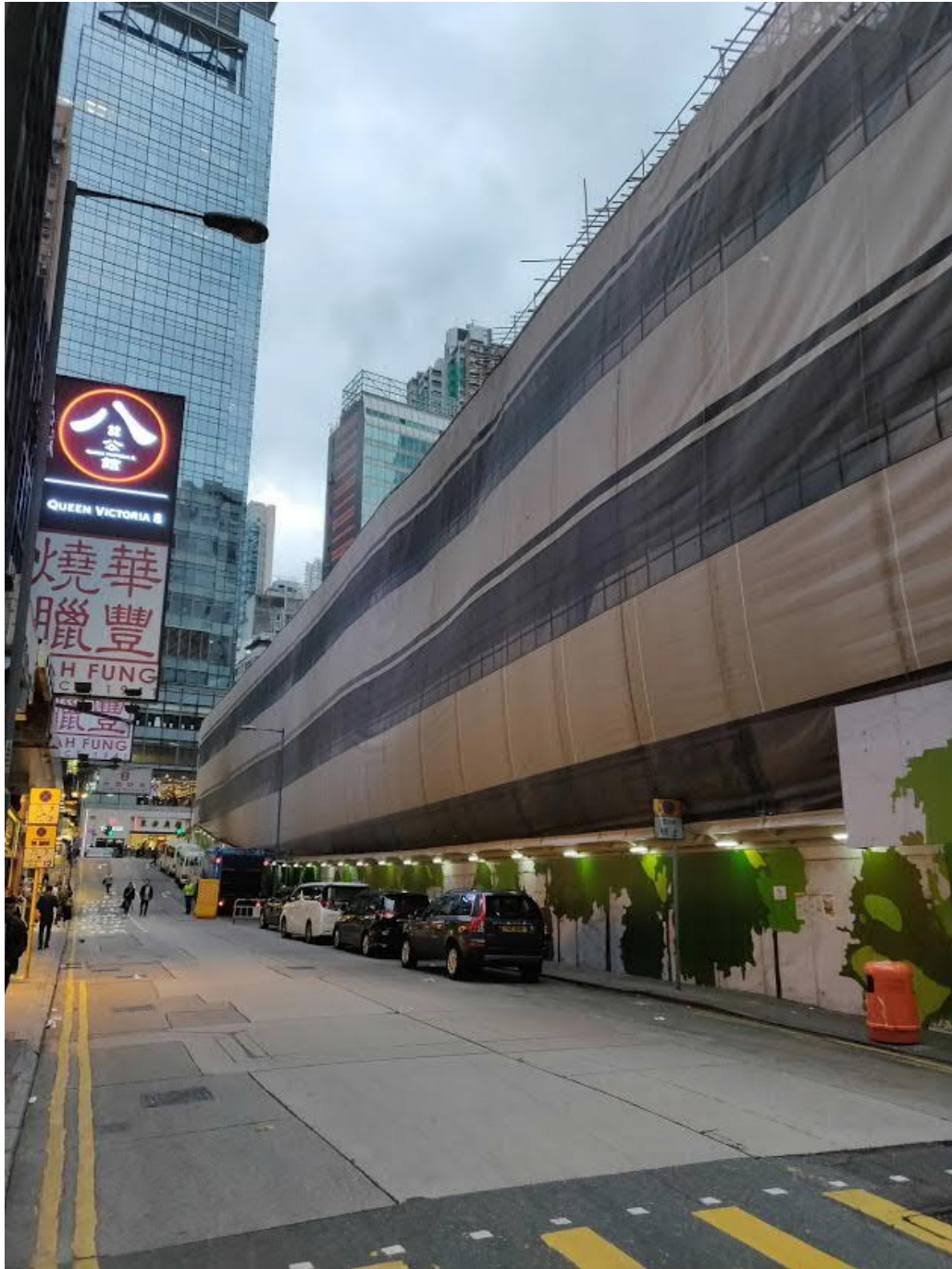


Figure 1: The Central Market covered in stylized construction hoarding awaiting revitalization



Figure 2: Hong Kong Island tram on DVRC



Figure 3: DVRC Open Streets day safety infrastructure