The value of mobility in two and three wheels beyond informality and transport. The case of Barranquilla Metropolitan Area in the 21st century

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My research aims to contribute to bridge critical urban theory and mobility research by focusing on the value of mobility in two and three-wheelers in two adjacent but contrasting municipalities of the Barranquilla Metropolitan Area (BMA), a rapidly growing under studied urban area in Colombia. In the context of this century's increased global attention to public transport policy, I aim to build on previous endeavours of critical urban theory to understand urban realities beyond binaries by exploring the use value in contrast to the institutionalized value assigned to these forms of mobility labelled in policy and the media as informal. Mobility is understood as "the freedom… of all citizens to move in public space with safety and security – and without censure and social control" (Levy, 2013, p.26) and constitutive of economic, social and political relations (Cresswell, 2010; Urry, 2007). By having mobility as my unit of analysis I aim to explore a key urban practice that has been and is predominantly, if not exclusively known and governed through technocratic universalized frameworks.

The overall goal is to "re-open the question of value – what is to be valued, by whom and how" (Simone, 2018, p. 618) in the case of urban mobility. Understanding informality as a policy epistemology (Roy, 2005) the overall goal is to reframe those realities traditionally seen as a deviation from "an unspoken norm" (Bhan, 2019, p. 642), but attentive to not romanticizing by overlooking exclusion and exploitation (Doherty, 2017). First, I will identify the 'delivery configuration' (actors, institutions, equipment and resources) of mobility in BMA between 2002 and 2018, focusing on mobility in two and three-wheelers since its emergence as a mode of public transport. Second, I aim to elucidate the situated use value of mobility in two and three wheelers based on the conversion factors necessary to transform these socio-technical devices into mobility. Finally, I will explore the symbolic and material value assigned to mobility in two and three-wheelers in the city in relation to other forms of mobility questioning the registers and mechanisms that constitute the institutionalized public worth of these forms of mobility. The objective is to re-think a core urban practice, its meaning and enabling resources beyond transport demand models and cost-benefit analysis. Through the lens of value I intend to open new lines of sight and unsettle parochial evaluative frameworks that have been normalized. The premise is that the divergence of the valuing on the ground and the value institutionally ascribed through public resources

and regulations to different forms of mobility will underscore the relation between valuation frameworks and existent unequal affordances to define what is to be valued.

To highlight the uneven capacity to define and assign public value to mobility practices and the associated distributive inequalities I aim to address my research employing a mixed method approach. Qualitative methods (in-depth interviews, secondary text information and ride-along observation analysed through timelines and content analysis) will enable me to explore in depth the value of these forms of mobility and analyse secondary data. Recent research about public transport in two and three-wheelers (Evans et al., 2018; Kemajou et al., 2019; Phun et al., 2015) shows that the statistical and geographical information systems' description of the dynamics of these forms of mobility in the city, supports and complements their understanding.