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Kuwait Programme

TOWARDS AN EQUITABLE TRANSPORT SYSTEM IN KUWAIT

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF TRANSPORT ACCESSIBILITY

MUHAMMAD ADEEL AND REEM ALFAHAD

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Towards an Equitable Transport System in Kuwait: Understanding the Social and Cultural Context of Transport Accessibility

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Abstract

Transport is increasingly considered an essential public good as it enables access to services and opportunities spread unevenly across the built environment. The provision of an efficient and accessible public transport system enables access for all and is more conducive to the goal of equitable and sustainable development. This study used a mixed method approach to build a comprehensive analysis of the current accessibility landscape in Kuwait. The first component examines the spatial equality of access to the public transport system across Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents in the Kuwait Metropolitan Area. This study also particularly explores the various social and cultural factors contributing to individual mobility behaviour in the specific Kuwait local context. First, the geographic information system (GIS) based spatial analysis indicates that overall accessibility levels to bus stop locations generally remains poor across the city.

While spatial access is a common problem, the social issues of class, identity and choice limit the access and mobility of the general population. By conducting four focus group discussions and six in-depth interviews with different city residents, the study finds that the non-driving population is far more transport disadvantaged due to additional issues of safety, social status and stigma associated with the use of buses in the Metropolitan Area, and this disadvantage falls more heavily on women of all ages and abilities, and on non-Kuwaiti men. The poor quality public transport networks are not able to fulfil the requirements of the Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti population. Only the 'captive riders', who are largely foreign labourers, use buses for day-to-day mobility. The study concludes with various policy suggestions for making the transportation system equitable and responsive to user needs.

Introduction

Accessibility, Mobility and Transportation Disadvantage

The broad concept of accessibility is concerned with the ease of access to reach spatially dispersed opportunities, resources and freedoms within the society. A built environment is considered more accessible, and thus more efficient, if its opportunities such as income, services and other requirements of a satisfactory life are conveniently reachable to its members within a reasonably acceptable standard of time, cost and effort.[1] Transport has an important role to play in ensuring equality of access as it is a means to reach opportunities and services. It is widely recognised that a transport system can help develop societies through their performance or it can even exacerbate spatial and economic inequalities within societies. Research across the world has shown that transport has an important role in ensuring social inclusion in a society through enabling or restricting access to certain activities, to certain locations and for certain social groups.[2]

The sustainable urban development paradigm has shifted the focus of transport systems from the conventional approaches of increasing mobility, that is, vehicle travel, to the modern day goal of increasing accessibility, that is, the ability to obtain or reach desired places. There are certain reasons behind this paradigm shift. For example, a focus on mobility often results in higher overall transport costs and it may ignore the use of public and active modes of travel which are equally important and are often the only means of access for many, including non-vehicle drivers. In accessibility-based approaches of development and social justice, the concept of basic accessibility is important. It aims to ensure that basic goods and services such as employment, education and healthcare are accessible to all. Provision of basic accessibility is considered a 'merit good' and even a 'human right', similar to the freedom of mobility for individuals. The concept of basic accessibility is fundamental in ensuring an equitable distribution aimed at a stronger degree of social justice for all sections of the society. This is why public transport is often subsidised and even prioritised over other modes so that those without abilities to undertake independent vehicular mobility have an equal and fair chance of reaching desired services.[3]

In reality, the goal of accessibility is a challenging and complex task due to various reasons. Transport is one important part of it, another being land use distribution, personal characteristics along with the spatiotemporal distribution of destinations play vital roles in shaping accessibility levels of a society.[4] While government organisations focus more on improving transport and land use services to achieve accessibility targets, individual characteristics which are defined by socioeconomic, physical and sociocultural capabilities may ultimately play an equally important role in creating the final level of personal accessibility. The trans-

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[1] Mark W. Horner, 'Exploring Metropolitan Accessibility and Urban Structure', *Urban Geography* 25/3 (2004), pp. 264–84.

[2] Floridea Di Ciommo and Yoram Shiftan, 'Transport Equity Analysis', *Transport Reviews* 37/2 (2017), pp. 139–51.

[3] Todd Litman, 'Evaluating Transportation Equity', *World Transport Policy & Practice* 8/2 (2002), pp. 50–65.

[4] Karst T. Geurs and Bert van Wee. 'Accessibility Evaluation of Land-Use and Transport Strategies: Review and Research Directions', *Journal of Transport Geography* 12/2 (2004), pp. 127–40.

port and built environment systems may presume certain preconditions from its users such as access to a car and driving ability, which may put certain sections of the society at a state of transport disadvantage. Studies[5] have shown that these disadvantaged individuals may be significant in number and often include women and young or non-driving or low-income members of the population. This research around the scope of this transportation disadvantage and its impact on individual quality of life and the sustainability of the built environment has gained increasing attention in recent years across the developed and developing world. There is a growing set of literature on the spatial issues of accessibility and their impact on individuals.[6] There persists a large gap, however, in research that focuses on how particular local social and cultural contexts shape accessibility experiences of individuals in a society.

Abdellatif Qamhaieh and Surajit Chakravarty (2017)[7] demonstrate the division between the local Gulf community in Abu Dhabi and the expatriate working population and how that division manifests in mobility practices. They make the case that foreign, low-income workers are 'captive riders',[8] relegated to poorly run and inefficient bus systems out of necessity, while the local Emirati residents maintain distance from these communities out of bias and stigma. The foreign residents are socially excluded both actively, whereby they are in indirectly sanctioned spaces (i.e. the buses, separate residential spaces) and passively through social processes (i.e. exclusion from civic participation).[9] They find themselves in grey areas of citizenship and political rights, which exacerbates their exclusion.[10] Abu Dhabi and Kuwait share experiences of rapid urban expansion, oil-based economies, auto-dependency and blue-collar expatriates making up a majority of the population. The similarities of these contexts make evident the importance of analysing the mobility needs of Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis separately and how they relate to each other.

Adam Hanieh[11] provides excellent insights into the prevalence of class based social structure and lifestyle in the Gulf economies. As the oil-economy brought extreme riches, the Gulf countries have heavily relied on temporary migrant labour inflows for extraction and distribution of petroleum resources. These countries have adopted a narrow definition of citizenship for 'managing' this imported manpower. The significantly lower wages of foreign labour meant that most workers could not live a comfortable life like the native population. They were essentially excluded from the right to public space as an 'acute form of alienated labour'.[12] This subset of the population has their social ties continuously dissolved

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[5] Karen Lucas, 'Transport and Social Exclusion: Where Are We Now?' *Transport Policy* 20/1 (2012), pp. 105–13.

[6] Dai Dajun, 'Racial/Ethnic and Socioeconomic Disparities in Urban Green Space Accessibility: Where to Intervene?', *Landscape and Urban Planning* 102/4 (2011), pp. 234–44.

[7] Abdellatif Qamhaieh and Surajit Chakravarty, 'Global Cities, Public Transportation, and Social Exclusion: A Study of the Bus System in Abu Dhabi', *Mobilities* 12/3 (2017), pp. 462–78.

[8] Kevin J. Krizek and Ahmed M. El-Geneidy, 'Segmenting Preferences and Habits of Transit Users and Non-Users', *Journal of Public Transportation* 10/3 (2007), pp. 71–94.

[9] Amertya Sen, 'Social Exclusion: Concept, Application, and Scrutiny', *Asian Development Bank* (Manila, 2000).

[10] Ibid.

[11] Adam Hanieh, 'Khaleeji-Capital: Class-Formation and Regional Integration in the Middle-East Gulf', *Historical Materialism* 18/2 (2010), pp. 35–76.

[12] Ibid, p. 65.

and shifting because of their transient stay and fully dependent lifestyle. As a result, native residents become a privileged and distinctive class structure where financial wealth and affordability largely shape their contrasting lifestyle and mobility behaviour in the Gulf.

Specifically, there is a need for qualitative approaches in this field of research in order to fill the information gap that the quantitative analyses overlook. Including qualitative research allows for a deeper interrogation of an individual's decision-making process[13] and provides a lens into the particular local transport landscape as perceived by its users.[14]

Socio-Spatial Configurations of Accessibility in Kuwait

The discovery and trade of petroleum in the 1940s generated enough revenues and demand for urban development to transform the city of Kuwait from a small traditional settlement into a modern-day metropolis within a short time frame. Post-oil urbanisation in Kuwait is based on two key ideas that have profound impacts on the present-day urban fabric of the city. The first key idea was the development vision of making Kuwait 'the best planned city in the Middle East'.[15] Soon after the first oil shipment, the old city was cleared to construct modern buildings to be used for commerce and public services. The displaced residents were accommodated in big houses constructed in the newly developed 'self-sufficient' residential neighbourhoods in the suburbs and residents needed to travel to the city centre only for work.[16] The country started a generous social welfare policy, which provided free, among other things, fully built houses or large residential land parcels to its citizens.[17]

The establishment of the oil industry and the post oil urbanisation boom required employing foreign workers who soon outnumbered the national population. These workers exhibited significant socioeconomic differences from the national population with their own specific lifestyles, customs and values. These differences, coupled with the public policy constraints of wealth distribution, created a metropolis with visible workplace and residential differentiation.[18] Certain neighbourhoods were occupied, and still continue to be occupied, by foreign workers while some parts of the city were, and still are, exclusive to nationals, although a high percentage of non-nationals work as house staff in these areas of the city. Socioeconomic and labour force participation differences meant that the travel behaviour, mode and timing were very different among these two population segments, reflecting their distinct nature of work, affordability and lifestyle.[19]

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[13] Kelly J. Clifton and Susan L. Handy, *Qualitative Methods in Travel Behaviour Research* (Davis, California: Institute of Transportation Studies, University of California, 2001).

[14] Gabriela Beirão and J. A. Sarsfield Cabral, 'Understanding Attitudes Towards Public Transport and Private Car: A Qualitative Study', *Transport Policy* 14/6 (2007), pp. 478–89.

[15] Farah Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).
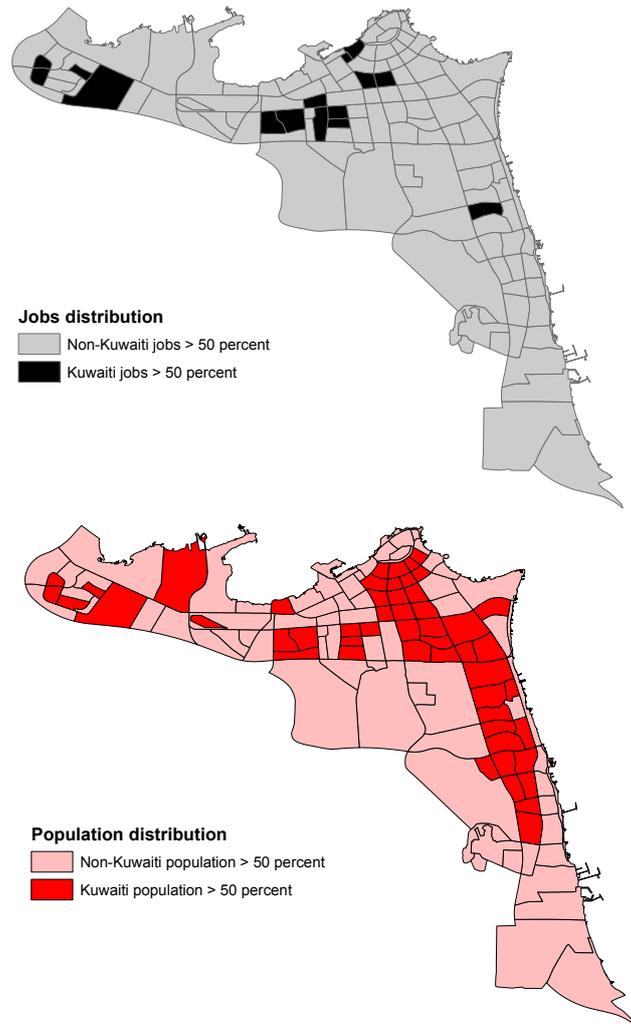
[16] Abdul-llah Abu-Ayyash, 'Urban Public Transport Planning in Kuwait', *GeoJournal* 12/3 (1986), pp. 243–53.

[17] Sharifa AlShalfan, 'The Right to Housing in Kuwait: An Urban Injustice in a Socially Just System', *LSE Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States* 28 (London, 2013).

[18] Bruce G. Hutchinson and Galal M. Said, 'Spatial Differentiation, Transport Demands and Transport Model Design in Kuwait', *Transport Reviews* 10/2 (1990), pp. 91–110.

[19] Philipp Rode, Alexandra Gomes, Muhammad Adeel, Fizzah Sajjad, Andreas Koch and Syed Monjur Murshed, 'Between Abundance and Constraints: The Natural Resource Equation of Asia's Diverging,

Figure 1: Spatial Differentiation of Job and Residence by Nationality Across Neighbourhoods in the Kuwait Metropolitan Area

Jobs distribution
Non-Kuwaiti jobs > 50 percent
Kuwaiti jobs > 50 percent

Population distribution
Non-Kuwaiti population > 50 percent
Kuwaiti population > 50 percent

Source: based on 2011 data from PACI and EMISK, Kuwait

Kuwait's transport infrastructure also reflected this multimodal structure of its urban economics; motorways and cars supported daily mobility for locals who could easily afford a more autonomous lifestyle. A bus based public transport system was initiated to cover the mobility needs of foreigners. As a whole, the transport infrastructure followed a utility maximising approach to travel demand modelling and transport provision. However, according to on the ground realities, this utility maximising approach is not an appropriate solution for mobility requirements in Kuwait because of the marked social and spatial differentiation as well as the significant heterogeneity of the mobility needs of its users.

Higher-Income City Models', *Land* 9/11 (2020), p. 426.

A patterned segregation of land uses and concentration of Kuwaiti jobs in relatively few locations (Figure 1) indicates that accessibility levels are low for Kuwaiti nationals specifically and the non-Kuwaiti population in general. This means that Kuwaitis need to travel comparatively longer distances than their non-Kuwaiti counterparts, even if bus stops are broadly inaccessible for all. Kuwait has a bus only public transport system that is mainly designed for the mobility needs of the working class (foreign) population. The remaining metropolitan residents – including nearly all the Kuwaiti born population – rely on private cars for daily mobility (Figure 2). Beyond accessibility this poses a challenge for the environment. Transport issues such as high per capita transport energy demands, the ever-growing traffic congestion and related issues such as environmental pollution and traffic accidents[20] make urban mobility a pressing problem for the sustainable development agenda in Kuwait.[21]

The 'Resource Urbanisms' project report by Rode et al. (2017)[22] states that Kuwaiti residents experienced comparatively lower levels of public transport accessibility as compared to the non-Kuwaiti population. It is less clear how transport needs of Kuwaiti residents differ from those of non-Kuwaiti residents, and additionally, it is not clear what determines transport behaviour beyond physical access to bus stops. Investigating the social and cultural considerations for transport mobility is crucial to understanding the full transport landscape and to create a sustainable and fair transport policy that ensures at least minimum levels of access for all regardless of class, gender, national background or physical disability.

Figure 2: Percentage of Commuting Trips by Mode Across Non-Kuwaiti (left) and Kuwaiti (right) Travellers
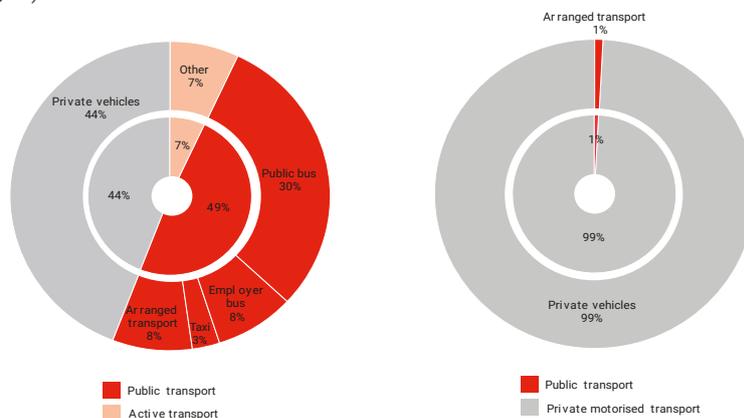
Source: Rode et al. (2017)

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[20] Habib Toumi, 'Car Accident Every 10 Minutes in Kuwait', *Gulf News*, 27 July 2017. Available at https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/kuwait/a-car-accident-every-10-minutes-in-kuwait-1.2065034 (accessed 12 February 2019).

[21] Ahmed El-Geneidy, Ehab Diab, Cynthia Jacques and Anais Mathez, 'Sustainable Urban Mobility in the Middle East and North Africa', *UN Habitat* (Nairobi, 2013).

[22] Philipp Rode, Alexandra Gomes, Muhammad Adeel, Fizzah Sajjad, Jenny McArthur, Sharifa Alshalfan, Peter Schwinger, Clemence Montagne, Devisari Tunas, Christiane Lange, Steffen Hertog, Andreas Koch, Syed Monjur Murshed, Alice Duval and Jochen Wendel. 'Resource Urbanisms: Asia's Divergent City Models of Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, Singapore and Hong Kong', *LSE Cities* (London, 2017).

Research Methodology

Research Objectives

The research addresses the following three objectives:

1. To measure the spatial equity of access to the public transport system across the Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti population.

2. To examine the impact of these spatial accessibility issues in shaping the travel decisions and mode choice in the study area.

3. To investigate the role of non-spatial factors (e.g. social, cultural) affecting travel behaviour and mode choice.

The study follows a mixed methods approach of enquiry. It starts by undertaking a detailed, quantitative analysis of the spatial equality of access to the Metropolitan Area's public transport system through GIS based spatial analysis. Later on, it explores the impacts and underlying causes of accessibility inequalities through primary data collection via focus groups and semi-structured interviews from the residents of the Metropolitan Area. This stepwise approach combines the quantitative and qualitative data and methods to more comprehensively understand the mobility and accessibility problems in the study area.

Data and Methods

Secondary Data Collection and Analysis

The project began with the analysis of secondary datasets aimed at a clearer identification and quantification of the spatial accessibility variation in Kuwait Metropolitan Area. GIS datasets prepared by an earlier completed research project at LSE Cities, 'Resource Urbanisms', were re-examined,[23] including:

- Urban footprint mapping carried out using remote sensing analysis of Landsat satellite imagery for the year 2015.

- Bus stop locations identified through published reports and improved through ground verification.[24]

- Number of jobs and resident population by nationality were calculated and mapped for each neighborhood.

- Dominant typology of residential areas and their plot size was identified through a Google Satellite map and verified through expert discussions.

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[23] The data was collected through desktop research as well as sourced through various government departments.
[24] Bus stop locations mapped at https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/3/edit?mid=16LDrfDBkb9wn-0HZ-Hxu7pTjbNkA&usp=sharing.

The population and employment data was sourced through various government departments e.g., the Environment Public Authority (EPA), the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) and the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW). These spatial datasets were analysed to measure the variation in accessibility to public bus stops across social and economic groups in the study area. The share of built-up area within various distance bands of bus stop locations was calculated through GIS buffer analysis. The average distance between all jobs in the study area was measured through GIS analysis for both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti job types in order to measure the social disparity of access to workplaces. Assuming that the population and jobs are located in the built-up area and that the distribution of jobs and population is uniform within each neighbourhood (an assumption supported by Kuwait's neighbourhood street and land subdivision pattern), the portion of the population and jobs within each buffer category was calculated for each neighbourhood.

Primary Data Collection

In travel behaviour studies, qualitative data is often used to fill the information gap from the quantitative analyses, allowing for a deeper interrogation of an individual's decision-making process and provides a lens into the transport landscape as perceived by its users.[25] A mixed method, stepwise framework enabled a dynamic and open research approach, which is very useful in information scarce settings like that of Kuwait where participants are not always easy to access and cultural segregation and cultural barriers may prevent this kind of research from taking place regularly. Because so little research of this kind has been conducted in Kuwait,[26] it is important to collect primary data and allow the patterns and concepts to emerge directly from it and not superimposed from other geographic contexts which may not share the same cultural considerations. In the qualitative phase of analysis, we use primary data collection and analysis to focus specifically on understanding 'access' beyond the literal lens of potential transport links, towards a more 'emotional' and 'cultural' notion of access, taking into account the residential and economic stratification between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, which largely shapes the public lives and mobility behaviour in the country. This included four specific focus group discussions and a number of follow up in-depth interviews, with the details as follows.

Focus Group Discussions

A total of four focus groups discussions were conducted, consisting of between 10–12 participants each, where each lasted between 90–120 minutes. Each participant filled out an anonymous survey that detailed their nationality, age, occupation, residential typology, neighbourhood, car ownership, whether or not they had a driving licence and relative income level (Appendix A). Two focus groups included a mix of Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, and were conducted in English, the third was for only Kuwaitis and was conducted in Arabic. The fourth was only non-Kuwaitis and was conducted in English. The division by nationality was necessary to provide an open space for people to share

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[25] Clifton and Handy, 'Qualitative Methods in Travel Behaviour Research'.

[26] Shafeeq Ghabra, 'Kuwait and the Dynamics of Socio-Economic Change', *Middle East Journal* 51/3 (1997), pp. 358–72.

freely what they would otherwise censor from their non-Kuwaiti/Kuwaiti counterparts, particularly given the usual socioeconomic, language and residential differences. The participants were selected from an open call through social media, fliers at bus ticket stations and word of mouth. Free pick up and drop off transport and lunch were provided to encourage attendance.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The focus groups made clear that the gendered transport experiences and constraints required more in-depth study beyond what was expressed in the group settings. Kuwaiti women found it more comfortable to express their opinions in one-to-one settings. Additionally, the focus groups lacked participation from female domestic care workers who experience additional financial and temporal mobility constraints to those experienced by other expatriate women.

Six semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in order to include these experiences in the analysis. The interviews included three foreign domestic care workers of different ages and lengths of time in Kuwait, from India, Ethiopia and the Philippines. They also included one middle-income retail worker from the Philippines and two Kuwaiti women of different ages. Participants were more open and candid in this one-to-one discussion and highlighted gendered mobility concerns ranging from privacy and security concerns to social dynamics that affect their mobility and mode choices.

The data collected from the focus groups and in-depth interviews was analysed using a 'grounded theory' approach that allows for direct feedback into the analysis, in which the initial results that come from the field are used to identify emerging themes that can then guide and shape the focus groups and interviews, while still leaving space to develop new concepts and viewpoints from emerging information.[27]

Primary Data Processing and Analysis

All the focus groups, interviews and the public discussion were digitally recorded and completely transcribed. These were identified and adapted using a form of the constant comparative method,[28] that first includes a familiarisation stage, in which the data is reviewed in its entirety, and initial common themes are identified. These themes included:

1.   Sense of safety

2.   Cultural negotiating

3.   Privacy

4.   Gendered expectations/behaviour

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[27] Barney G. Glaser, Anselm L. Strauss and Elizabeth Strutzel, 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research', *Nursing Research* 17/4 (1968), p. 364.
[28] Carla Willig, *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology: Adventures in Theory and Method* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2013).

5. Social stigma

6. Performance in public culture

In detailed qualitative analysis, these themes were supplemented with those that consistently emerge in similar research such as freedom, power, control and status.[29] The following section details the findings of the focus groups while maintaining these differences, separating the findings along Kuwaiti, non-Kuwaiti and income groups. Some of these categories, where relevant, include gender specific findings.

Results and Discussions

Patterns of Urban Development and Automobile Reliance

The Kuwait Metropolitan Area spreads to nearly 853 km^2 or five percent of the country's total land mass. It can arguably be called the beating heart of Kuwait as it contains nearly 90 percent of the country's urban development and nearly all of the jobs and residential population are located here. The Metropolitan Area is divided into six administrative regions called governorates. Each governorate has been divided into smaller units with specified land uses called neighbourhoods.

As presented in Table 1, GIS analysis highlights that the Governorate of Capital City covers nearly 16 percent of the Kuwait Metropolitan Area but contains 52 percent of its jobs and nearly 23 percent of its residential population. Farwaniya, on the other hand, contains nearly 27 percent of the population and 16 percent of the jobs with much higher densities.

Table 1: Distribution of Jobs, Residential Population and Urban Area in the Kuwait Metropolitan Area

Governorate	Total Area		Population		Jobs		Built Area	
	Km^2	%	No.s	%	No.s	%	Km^2	%
Ahmadi	240	28.2	774,818	18.7	207,825	12.2	77.8	18.4
Capital City	135	15.9	584,879	14.1	878,376	51.6	98.4	23.3
Farwaniya	101	11.9	1,115,584	26.9	270,785	15.9	70.1	16.6
Hawalli	162	19.0	963,984	23.3	224,595	13.2	75.7	17.9
Jahra	83	9.8	492,015	11.9	75,459	4.4	52.3	12.4
Mubarak Al Kabeer	130	15.2	213,501	5.2	46,094	2.7	47.7	11.3
Total	853	100	4,144,781	100.0	1,703,134	100	422.0	100.0

Source: Data for year 2015 from PACI, EMISK and LSE Cities

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[29] Susan Handy, Lisa Weston and Patricia L. Mokhtarian, 'Driving by Choice or Necessity?', *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 39/2–3 (2005), pp. 183–203.

The Resource Urbanisms study[30] found that the average travel distance to all jobs was nearly 18 kilometres for the entire Metropolitan Area and only 30 percent of the population could access bus stops within a 500-metre walking distance. The bus service in Kuwait is poorly managed and is mostly run on profitable routes, creating local congestion and poor supply issues. The average bus speed in the Metropolitan Area is around 10 to 15 kilometres per hour.[31] The patterns of uneven spatial development and a poor public transport service have fuelled a historic trend of complete automobile reliance in the Metropolitan Area for urban access to all activities and locations.

Figure 3: Historical Growth in the Population, Private Cars and Major Roads in Kuwait
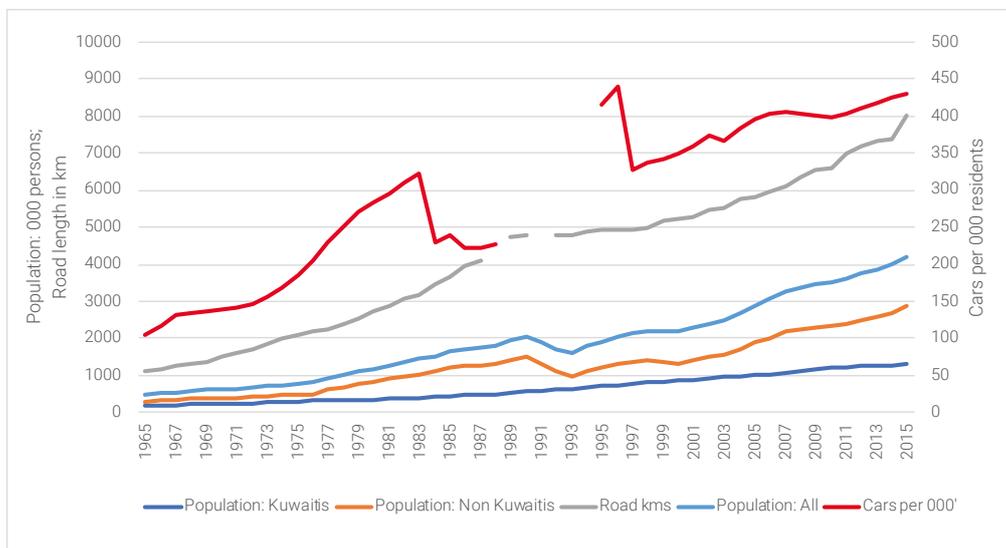
Source: Annual Statistical Bulletins from Kuwait's Central Statistics Bureau; various years, with missing data

As shown in Figure 3, car ownership per capita in Kuwait stood at nearly 430 private cars per 1,000 residents in the year 2015. The car ownership rate peaked in the 1900s and has remained steady at above 410 cars per thousand persons over the past ten years. It becomes even higher when considering that most of the non-Kuwaiti population (which was nearly two thirds of the total population in Kuwait in the year 2015) do not own private cars. In this case, the car ownership rate amongst the Kuwaiti population may be considerably higher than that of the United Kingdom (507) and the European Union (498).[32] Generally, road development in Kuwait has followed the rise in car ownership as evident from the figure above. However, the public transport network or the supply of a mass transport system has always been considered as a mobility tool for the labourer population.

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[30] Rode et. al, 'Resource Urbanisms'.

[31] Jassim Al Awadhi and Geoffrey Martin, 'Where the Bus At? Public Transportation Challenges in Kuwait', *LSE Middle East Centre* blog, 21 January 2020. Available at https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/ (accessed 21 April 2020).

[32] 'Number of Passenger Cars in the European Union (EU) in 2014, per 1,000 Inhabitants', *Statista* (2016). Available at https://www.statista.com/statistics/607540/car-per-capita-eu/ (accessed 21 March 2020).

The Kuwaiti national population has largely and consistently relied on personal car use for day-to-day mobility requirements. At present, the space for road development has become scarce while the mobility needs and overall travel demand continues to grow in the Metropolitan Area.

Spatial Equality of Access to Public Transport

In 2015, the Kuwait Metropolitan Area had a total population of nearly 4.2 million of which Kuwaiti nationals comprised nearly 1.5 million or 77 percent of the total, while the remaining 2.5 million were non-Kuwaiti nationals. The spatial planning of the Kuwait Metropolitan Area generates both high and low urban densities of workplace and residential distribution. Some of the residential neighbourhoods, such as Farwaniya, Jleeb Al Shouykh and Khaitan house more high-density residential apartments whereas many other residential areas, like Qortuba and Abdullah Salem, house low-density sprawling residential villas. The non-Kuwaiti population usually resides in multi-storey apartment buildings in fewer high-density areas whereas the local Kuwaiti population resides in low-density residential houses and villa types, which are more spread out in the Metropolitan Area. However, Kuwaiti job distribution patterns show a relatively higher degree of spatial concentration than non-Kuwaiti jobs.

As shown in Figure 4 below, overall, the capital governorate and Hawalli are the most public transport accessible governorates where nearly 40 percent of the population resides within a 500-metre walking distance of bus stops. The Governorates of Jahra and Mubarak Al Kabeer exhibit the least levels of public transport accessibility where less than one fifth of the resident population and local jobs are within 1 kilometre of bus stop locations.

Figure 4: Share of Residents (top) and Jobs (bottom) by Distance to Bus Stops Across Each Governorate
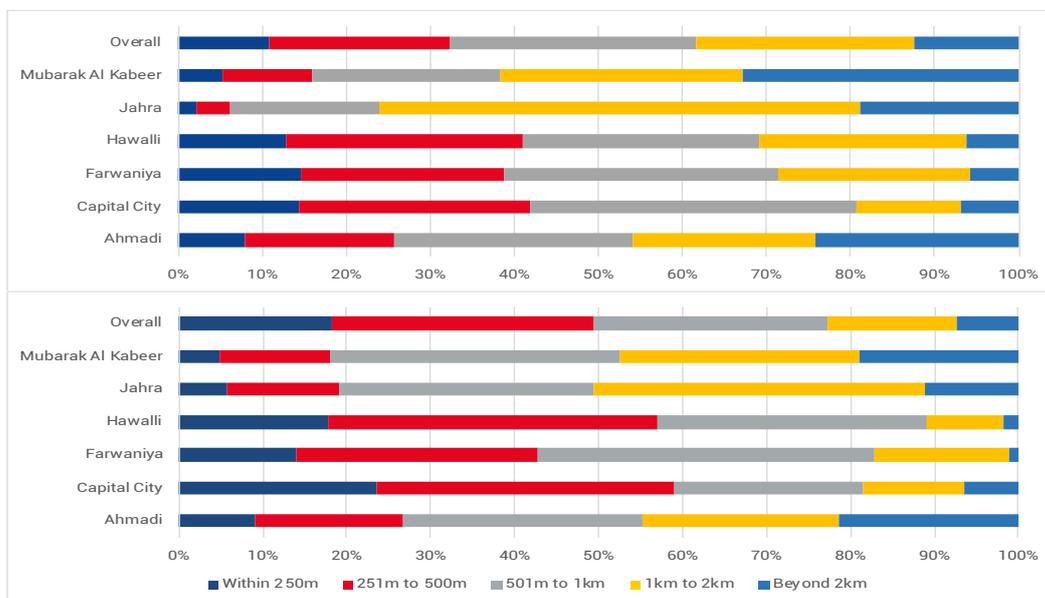
This study finds that public transport stops are located significantly closer to jobs than to residential locations. Overall, nearly 31 and 30 percent of the total metropolitan population is located within a 500-metre and 500 metres to 1-kilometre buffer distance to bus stops, respectively. On the other hand, nearly 50 percent of jobs are located within a half kilometre and an additional 28 percent of jobs are located within a 500-metre to 1-kilometre distance from a public bus stop. These patterns highlight a tendency of local transport planners to focus more on workplace accessibility and less on trip origins or connectivity between residential and workplace neighbourhoods. This also means that non-work trips may be particularly vulnerable to the lack of transport options. Another impact of this approach to transport service provision is that some of the areas, which are overlooked for bus services, tend to develop additional issues such as the running of informal bus/minibus transport services run by private individuals and localised congestion at peak times.

Figure 5 below shows that, although the expat population experiences comparatively better transport accessibility levels than Kuwaiti nationals, the level of public transport accessibility remains low for both social groups compared to many global cities with an established public transport system.[33] Compared to 40 percent of non-Kuwaiti residents, only 20 percent of Kuwaiti residents live within 500 metres of bus stops. As the residential location choices are more flexible among the non-Kuwaiti population, the comparatively higher levels of access to bus networks among this social group can be partially attributed to their residential self-selection as they tend to rent homes in the areas of higher transport accessibility.

Figure 5: Share of Kuwaiti (top) and Non-Kuwaiti (bottom) Population by Distance to Bus Stops Across Each Governorate
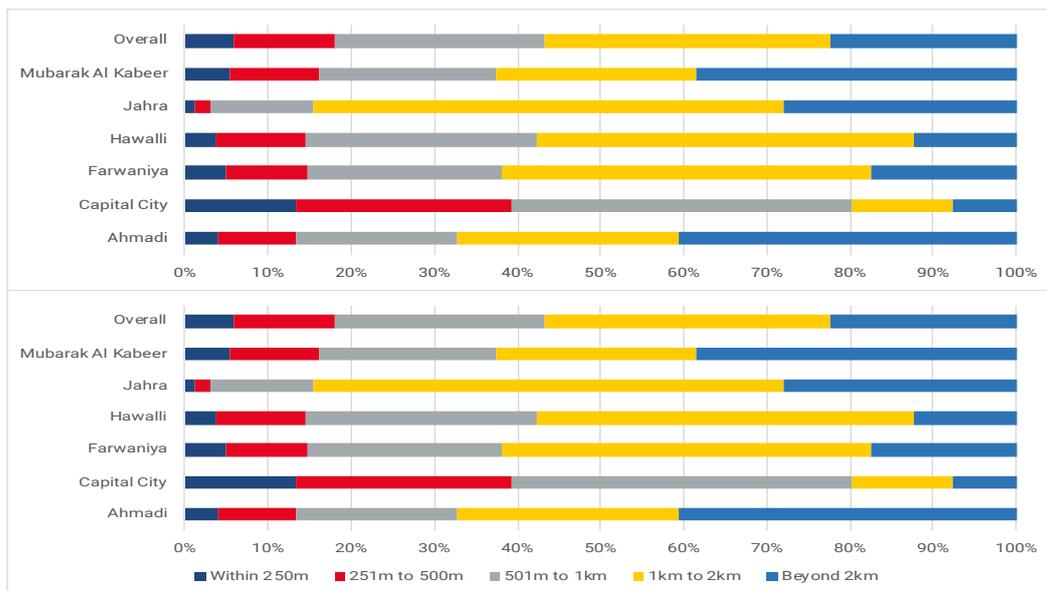

[33] 'Cities on the Move: A World Bank Urban Transport Strategy Review', *The World Bank* (Washington, DC, 2002).

This spatial concentration and segregation of residence and workplace creates a challenging spatial environment for job accessibility in the study area. The residents of Jahra and Ahmadi have to travel at least 7 kilometres more than the average distance to all jobs. A lack of suitable public transport options means that those who can afford it certainly rely on and use private cars or taxi services for their daily commute. As the qualitative analysis in the next section highlights, automobile dependency further increases during the summer period when the local weather conditions become tougher for walking or the use of public transport.

Urban form and housing types have a significant impact on residential consumption and the quality of the built environment. The spatial clustering of various housing typologies not only affects the urban density, it also means that these typologies have specific user populations and built environments.[34] As shown in Figure 6, amongst housing typologies, apartment units have the best accessibility to public bus stops as nearly half of the apartments are within a 500-metre walking distance to bus stop locations compared to only 17 percent of detached housing and just seven percent of semi-detached housing areas within this threshold. This compares to multi-unit residential buildings that have the least accessibility and most of them do not have any public bus stops at all in their local neighbourhoods.

Figure 6: Share of Population by Distance to Bus Stops Across Housing Typologies
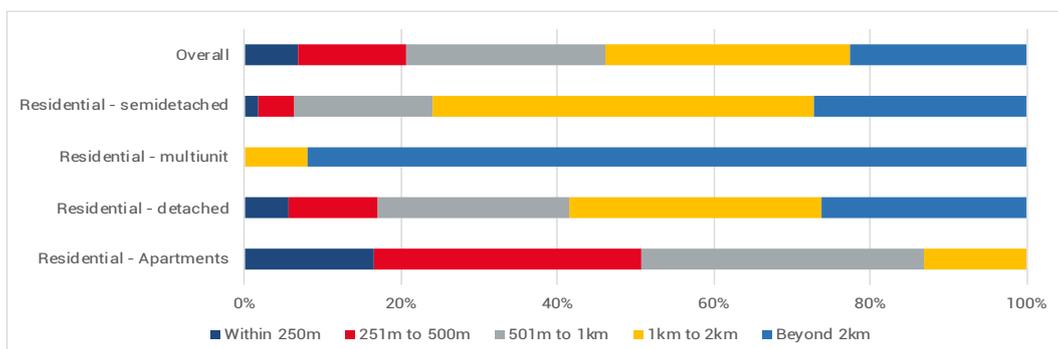
The lower levels of transport accessibility mean that these housing types have to be fully reliant on car use for their residents and are the least suitable places to live and work for non-car owner households. The figure shows that high income residential areas exhibit a comparatively lower level of accessibility to public bus stops than larger residential units. The variety of housing typologies among Kuwaitis, however, is significant to demonstrate that there is some level of income disparity among Kuwaitis, even when the local population theoretically has access to basic subsidies from the State.[35]

The section above focuses on the quantitative aspects of transport accessibility and mobility in the Kuwait metropolitan area. It measures the share of the population with respect to various levels of accessibility across different socioeconomic groups. However, the quantitative explanation falls short in explaining why these patterns are occurring and

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[34] Yosef Rafeq Jabareen, 'Sustainable Urban Forms: Their Typologies, Models, and Concepts', *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 26/1 (2006), pp. 38–52.

[35] AlShalfan, 'The Right to Housing in Kuwait: An Urban Injustice in a Socially Just System'.

how people react to these socio-spatial realities by choosing their modes of transportation and frequency of travel. The following section aims to explain these behaviours using the social constructs of 'class' and 'status' as these two constructs appear influential in shaping mobility patterns in Kuwaiti society where income inequality and social rights are highly unequal across the 'national' and 'non-national' segments. The gender dimension also adds another layer of complexity to this context.

Social and Cultural Inequalities of Access

The study attempts to provide a qualitative understanding of 'access' beyond the literal lens of potential transport links, towards a more 'emotional' and 'cultural' notion of access. It takes into account the residential and economic stratification between Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis, which largely shapes the public lives and mobility behaviour in the country. The grounded theory-based approach brought to light four main 'explanatory' social and cultural structures at play, which dominate the existing transport landscape.

1. Firstly, a male-dominant public culture, which largely hinders both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti women's sense of safety in movement.

2. Secondly, a dominant local versus expatriate divide in the Gulf countries overall and specifically in Kuwait places expatriate mobility in a completely different sphere from Kuwaitis.

3. Thirdly, a shared, albeit sometimes interrogated, fidelity towards tradition as an organiser of society and individual obligations. This mainly affects Kuwaiti men and women.

4. Fourthly, the culture of status, entertainment and class associated with private vehicles, both for those who create and propagate that symbolism and those who feel excluded from it.

It is important to note that while the latter (No. 4) is common in most auto-dependent cities,[36] in Kuwait it is particularly salient in the way that it reinforces the other three 'explanatory cultural structures' – namely, it exacerbates the male-dominated culture, where cars become symbols of wealth and masculinity. This is particularly applicable to young Kuwaiti men who are potentially wealthy, but also potentially bored, and/or under pressure to adhere to traditional expectations for Kuwaiti males to demonstrate wealth. It also deepens the local-expatriate divide; the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. It creates a pathway for otherwise excluded expatriates to be considered equal or worthy of status (i.e., buying/renting an expensive car to feel included by Kuwaiti counterparts, or wealthier Kuwaiti counterparts if you are lower-income Kuwaiti). And it intertwines with a sense of duty towards tradition, where owning a car indicates fulfilling a societal duty of providing for the family. Similarly, the issues of choice, status and social class significantly affect mobility patterns for women in particular and the low income, expatriate population in general.

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[36] Handy, Weston and Mokhtarian, 'Driving by Choice or Necessity?'.

Additionally, socioeconomic status exacerbates all four explanatory structures. Broadly, the Kuwait Metropolitan Area can be divided into two broad groups of low and high accessibility. The former (low income and middle income non-nationals) experience limits in their ability to choose how to mobilise. They experience disadvantages because of their background and class, which is what categorises them as 'captive' users.[37] The difference with the high accessibility group (high income expats and mixed income Kuwaitis) is that they still have the option of using public transport, but they choose not to. The discussion about low accessibility group revolves around limited choices, whereas for the high accessibility group, it is more about the impressions and beliefs that influence their choices. When it comes to access, these beliefs most certainly play a role in transport behaviour and an individual's ability to 'access' (even if culturally) use of a certain transport system. But it is important to note that these differences in barriers, one demonstrating "captivity" towards certain transport, and the other indicating "choice" shows a particular socioeconomic divide in the transport landscape.

For the high-income expats, stigma around using buses is an example of the kind of barrier that influences their choice rather than holds them captive to it. This group associates public buses with inconvenience and low status. Many of these individuals say that they would not even know how to take the bus even if they wanted to because no one they know regularly takes it, and they perceive that is supposedly difficult to find information online. For the low income expats, the information was never an issue because they have no choice but to use the public transport systems, so necessity drives their knowledge for use. In accompanying one of the participants on a typical day of using the public transport system to move around the city, the researcher observed that the participant would talk with the driver about what other buses were passing, or the fellow Filipina riders who were waiting for the bus in order to acquire the necessary knowledge about the routes. She also stated that if you have no choice but to use it every day, it is inevitable that you learn the routes.

In addition to these income specific considerations, the most vulnerable to the aforementioned explanatory structures are females, particularly migrant females. Many expressed experiences of verbal and physical harassment and how it inhibits them from using the transport system freely and safely or even comfortably walk from one place to another. Although some migrant women 'choose' to not use the transport as a result of this harassment, it still demonstrates a form of 'captive' decision-making, in which they are circumstantially obliged to choose their sense of safety over the potential convenience or affordability of public transport. For those that do not have the means to avoid public transport, they are forced to endure the harassment.

The table on the next page summarises how these explanatory structures shape accessibility and mobility choices in the area before discussing them more thoroughly in the next section.

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[37] Krizek and El-Geneidy, 'Segmenting Preferences and Habits of Transit Users and Non-Users'.

Table 2 Social Structures and Their Accessibility Constraints in Kuwait

Social Structures	Group 1: Low accessibility and limited mobility choices		Group 2: Better accessibility and wider mobility choices	
	A. Lower Income - Expats	B. Middle Income - Expats	C. Higher Income - Expats	D. Mixed Income - Kuwaitis
Local vs. Expatriate Divide	• Language and cultural barrier • Fear of deportation • Financial stress	• Fears of deportation • Language and cultural barrier • Cultural collision with other passengers • Financial stress • System complexity	• Cultural collision with other passengers • Lack of information due to lack of necessity • Frustration with Kuwaiti bureaucracy in getting a licence, end up using ride sharing	• Cultural collision with other passengers • Lack of information due to lack of necessity
Male Dominated 'Public Culture'	• Fear of harassment (for women and men) • Perceived security with private vehicles	• Fear of harassment (for women and men) • Perceived security with private vehicles	• Fear of harassment (for women) • Perceived security with private vehicles	• Fear of harassment (for Women) • Shame (for women) • Women feeling the need to constrain presence in certain public spaces
Tradition		• Cultural practices of keeping maids at home • Construction workers/labourers seek to minimize contact with Kuwaiti nationals and authorities, so prefer informal or private transport	• Seek to minimise contact with strong Kuwaiti tradition, and potential collision with authorities, so prefer informal or private transport	• Stigma towards public transport and seeking to distinguish themselves from 'lower' income expats • 'Fatherly' expectations to provide private transport • Lack of privacy at home, private vehicle becomes source of privacy and autonomy
Status and Entertainment	• Lack of access to private vehicles relegates to lower status in society	• Lack of access to private vehicles relegates to lower status in society	• Lack of sufficient entertainment - cars become source of entertainment • Buses perceived as low status	• Lack of sufficient entertainment - cars become source of entertainment • Buses perceived as low-status

The Economic Inequalities of Access

The four groups (columns) presented in Table 2 are examined in more detail below.

Low Income Expats

Domestic care workers often come from underprivileged backgrounds and enter Kuwait on domestic care visas. The Kuwaiti family that employs them becomes the sponsor of their visas. They live, eat and work with their Kuwaiti families and the lines between work and life are blurred. Additionally, expat care workers are legally entitled to one day off every week, but a number of participants stated that they never get a day off, and when they do, it is every two weeks or month. As a result, they rarely leave the employer's home. This is a major barrier to access; it is taken for granted that these domestic care workers delay their individual social needs for the duration of their (usually) 2-year contract. Bus routes do not go through Kuwaiti neighbourhoods, so they are required to take a taxi or rely on the family for mobility needs, which creates further dependency on the employer.

Financial stress is another important aspect of accessibility constraint among the working class population. For example, many women participants stated that they earned an average of 120 KWD per month while an average taxi ride from a Kuwaiti neighbourhood into the City Centre could cost between 2–4 KWD meaning that a weekly round trip would cost around 16–32 KWD or nearly 15 percent of their monthly income, making it unafford-able. The same number of trips using a bus would cost only 2KWD or only 1.67 percent of their monthly income. Public transport is the cheapest mobility option, but it is often not a viable option for them given the lack of geographical access.

> 'One time by fiancé sent me a package, and I had to go to a post office – it was hard to orient myself, and the taxi charged me 7–10 KD because I didn't know that neighbour-hood, I felt lost, and he had to wait for me. He charged me 10 KD, and if he doesn't wait, I would need to wait 2–3 hours for another taxi, because everyone else that is there with a car. And I couldn't carry my package. So it was 10 KD. That's why no meter, it's all negotiation. There is no accessible transportation. And Kuwait can be good if we lose the abusive and corrupt taxi drivers, we are left without an option and swallow their abuse, their overpricing, because we have no other option."

Non-Kuwaiti, female housemaid, Age: 35

Among the low income population, there is a clear gender-based differentiation of accessibility constraints. For example, female domestic care workers are largely immobile and often dependent on employers for mobility. Men, though, are largely dependent on public buses and/or informal vans. Language/cultural barriers often leave the majority of these female workers feeling intimidated by the prevailing 'male-dominated' public areas and transportation system. Many of these women tend to travel and rely on other women workers or help from social networks for a safe and comfortable travel experience. However, male expats consider financial difficulties as the most important reason for mobility constraints. This working class male population becomes 'captive riders'.[38] They usually live in Jleeb Shieukh or Farwaniya; areas that are usually transport hubs and that held a stigma of 'unsuitable' areas for a family and social life. Many respondents stated that they had to endure long bus rides that take two hours for a journey that would be 20 minutes by car. To avoid this trouble, this group is forced to take 'informal' vans, which are privately owned but operate more flexibly than public buses in terms of route choice and price. Several participants, both male and female, expressed frustration with harassment on buses from 'young, stateless/'Bedouns' men' as they identify them, who allegedly come into the buses, intimidate them, sometimes break the windows and generally make their life difficult while commuting. In the non-Kuwaiti focus group, every single participant (of the various income categories) shared negative experiences of being harassed on the buses because of their identity.

> 'Walking late at night doesn't feel safe. The buses take too long. I take the company buses, but I hate when I miss them, and have to take the public bus. The other day I was bullied and my headphones were flicked off of my ears. I couldn't move, I didn't feel like I had the right to do anything. There is a general rule in the Indian community: do not go near the Arab kids. This is the unspoken rule. Any Arab, even Kuwaiti… [You should] try to avoid [them]. And especially in buses, cos you can get beaten up. You will be made fun of.'

Non-Kuwaiti male, Construction worker, Age: 30

These experiences were commonly understood and expected among the non-Kuwaiti participants and they did not come up at all among the Kuwaiti participants. Multiple participants discussed times where their buses were suddenly stopped by the police and everyone on board is forced to go to the police station so that their paperwork can be checked. Participants expressed fear when entering the bus that they would be unnecessarily checked or their legal status would be questioned. It was difficult to confirm that these checks indeed take place and their frequency but the significance of these checks is not whether or not they actually take place but how the stories of these checks circulate among migrants and then create an environment of fear of deportation when riding the bus.

> 'The police will stop the bus at any bus stop, bring down the passengers one by one and randomly they will ask someone to get into their car, take them to the police station, tell them: "Okay call your sponsor." Some people they are afraid of using

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[38] Ibid.

public transport, which is why they prefer their own car or even company transport. If I am going to my office, I will miss half an hour and I may lose my job.'

Non-Kuwaiti male, Labourer, Age: 40

Middle Income, Non-Kuwaiti Population

The middle income, non-Kuwaiti group mostly rely on taxis and organised transport, whether public or private, as their only means of transport. Private organised transport is preferred over public and public transport is considered a last resort. A major accessibility challenge for this group was the legal system, particularly laws that restrict access to licences for foreign residents in Kuwait. Many do not meet all the licence requirements of earning a high enough salary 650 KWD or higher). Similarly, the licensing agency officers may ask for additional requirements on an ad hoc basis such as holding a university degree and holding a managerial position in their place of employment, without which they are denied a licence.

'My biggest frustration used to be finding a taxi, because I don't drive here. Two of my colleges are top 10 in India, and they're not recognised in Kuwait - so I can't have a licence until the accreditation happens of my college. Which is frustrating because I have to take a taxi.'

Non-Kuwaiti male, Retail Manager, Age: 40

'I would really need a licence. I am working, I am studying and I have a daughter too. So paying this much for transportation really kills me. If my daughter gets sick, my house is 5 buildings away from the main highway, so I have to carry her to the main highway, wait for the taxi and sometimes in the middle of the night.'

Non-Kuwaiti female, Retail worker, Age: 35

This points at a wedge between the expatriate and local communities, where the foreign population experiences a complete separation from their Kuwaiti counterparts. The system of laws and regulations exists as an enigma to most non-Kuwaitis and they forfeit the ability to understand or hold that system accountable. On the other hand, due to language issues, foreigners often fail to understand the transport system requirements, which creates a significant hurdle in personal accessibility. This indicates that their 'access' is not simply about being able to meet the requirements and pass a test for a licence but having to navigate a system that they feel is not designed to include them.

This challenge also points to a reoccurring theme among all non-Kuwaiti participants, of feeling like their ability to execute their civil rights, particularly when it comes to mobility or feeling safe in transport, is mitigated by the constant threat of deportation. Many feel they are not entitled to stay and speaking up may jeopardise their visas. Given their migrant status, precarious employment and/or perceived notions that the local population deems migrant workers 'interchangeable' and 'replaceable', many users (particularly women) do not approach authorities if they experience abuse or harassment on buses

because they think that their complaint will be used as justification for the termination of their employment and that they risk experiencing further emotional/verbal or physical abuse by the authorities.

> 'I wouldn't [file a case] – I know of one lady, she was harassed on the bus and the man beat her, she didn't know what to do. They hope that by sharing on social media, someone is going to help them. Because they don't know how to navigate the Arabic - to whom they should go, what they have to do. The police station is intimidating, they are afraid to go there, because they don't know how they will be treated as expats. They are afraid that they will be deported or something. They have an instilled fear of the police.'

Non-Kuwaiti female, Philippines, Age: 30s

> 'I got in a car accident once. It was my fault. It was with an Indian guy. When we got to the police station, the police yelled at him, not me! The foreigner is always considered at fault first by the authorities.'

Kuwaiti male, Age: 20s

> 'This is why non-Kuwaitis don't stand up for themselves in this country, being a bus driver, or a student, or anyone, a bus driver told me that I won't stop here the police will talk to me, and even if he has all his paperwork, he still feels in danger of being arbitrarily picked on.'

Non-Kuwaiti male, Age: 20s

While they are also vulnerable to the harassment mentioned in the earlier section on low income non-Kuwaiti men, there is an additional layer of harassment expressed by women who use public transport. Most stated that that there is daily, regular harassment of men catcalling, staring or subtly touching or brushing up against the women on the bus.

> 'I used to work in Shuwiekh, and I only lasted a year, and since mostly men work there, I had to fight my way onto the buses during peak hour then when I am inside, the men will harass you or touch you. And it's not really safe to wait by myself at night. That bus situation is the main reason I resigned. But now in the Avenues with the informal buses, and with more women, I feel safer.'

Non-Kuwaiti female, Philippines, Age: 35+

> 'In Farwinya where I live most of the residents are bachelors. They can tell I am a woman that is not from any part of the world close to here, they stare a lot. It's uncomfortable.'

Non-Kuwaiti female, Eastern Europe, Age: 20s

> 'One of my friends, I wasn't with her in the bus, it was a pretty empty bus. And she was touched. By another passenger. And he was behind her. And she knew it was him, I mean there wasn't anyone else. And there are some instances that are pretty bad. And

nobody helped; in the end she hit him. She yelled and nobody did anything. And she still takes the bus. She doesn't have an option, she has to be strong.'

Non-Kuwaiti female, India, Age: 30s

In addition to avoiding challenges of sexual harassment, many expressed a preference for private vehicles because on public transport they feel exposed and vulnerable not only in terms of entering a 'state' sanctioned and monitored space as mentioned earlier (i.e. potential scrutiny of migration status), but also these spaces consist of a large mix of migrants, and mainly men, and young migrant women state that there is a lot of friction between the different nationalities – and a need for constant cultural negotiation. Many resort to using private bus companies, particularly for those who work for big companies like the Avenues or similar shopping malls, where they pay a one-time fee per month (around 18 KD) and are picked up from their house and then transferred to a larger bus that takes them to work. Many feel these buses are more efficient and much safer, particularly at night. They afford them privacy and remove them from the larger public sphere in which they feel vulnerable. For the same reasons, several opt to take taxis, when affordable, but this also does not remove them from potential friction with migrant or male counterparts.

'I prefer a car because on a daily basis, why do I need to interact with like 100 people, and talk to the bus driver, and the taxis, too many people in a day. It's enough.'

Non-Kuwaiti female, Eastern Europe, Age: 20s

'One time I took a cab, and I was going to Hawalli, and the driver offered me a cigarette. And I felt unsafe, and I walked out, and slammed the door, and walked to the workplace. And it happened multiple times, they ask you in a dirty way where you are from.'

Non-Kuwaiti female, India, Age: 20s

High Income, Non-Kuwaitis

While the middle income category expressed frustration with not meeting the requirements placed on foreigners for a driving licence, this group is frustrated with what they perceive as arbitrary bureaucracy that they view as only favouring Kuwaiti citizens. Participants from this group largely meet the salary, education and managerial position requisites but they state that they are often still denied a licence.

'You have to go through the system again and again. I passed the test but had to take it two more times. Unless you have a wasta [a personal connection to the state or influence] or something, you go through the driving test, and you fail the driver's test without any explanation.'

Non-Kuwaiti male, Manager, Age: 40s

If they are a woman, you are more likely to be granted a licence if you have children because this demonstrates a 'need', which puts women without children at a disadvantage.

> 'You ride the bus only when you really need it, it's a last resort. And that's if you're a working man expat, you can more likely get a licence. Or if you're a homemaker - the woman cannot apply unless she has kids. So if you're a woman and want to drive, you need to have a kid first.'

Non-Kuwaiti female, Secretary, Age: 29

For the high income expat group, they also lack information on bus routes. An individual's need for that information, however, drives their access to it – which distinguishes the high income expats from the 'captive riders'. That being said, for the self-identified low income individuals, no access to the networks that the middle income individuals have because they are unable to regularly leave their employers' homes, also prevents them from accessing this information, despite a potential need.

> 'In Kuwait, I've never been on a bus, I wouldn't have a clue about where that bus would take me, it's all how much time I'm willing to put aside for that day, I could put aside hours and never get to the location.'

Non-Kuwaiti male, Age: 40s

> 'I travel almost exclusively through Careem [ride sharing app]. But I'm a Western expat, and I can afford that, if I had to navigate the public transport system or not be able to pay for Careem, I honestly don't know what I would do.'

Non-Kuwaiti female, Age: 27

As opposed to:

> 'If I want to go from my house in Hawalli to work, I can see that I have to take two buses. I find out from experience. I ask people at the bus stop. And then I get off at the other bus stop and then ask again.'

Non-Kuwaiti male, Age: 40s

A lot of these high income expats, therefore, rely on taxis, particularly ride-sharing apps. When the taxis are hailed off the street, participants in this group stated that there is always a cultural negotiation taking place, not just a monetary one.

Mixed Income, Kuwaitis

Kuwaitis in the study were most predominantly concerned with safety on the road, with little to no regard for public transport. The buses were often referred to as a nuisance on the road or a potential safety concern because of the perceived quality of driving. The Kuwaiti focus group collectively agreed that many drivers on the road drive irresponsibly and 'get away with it' based on 'who you know'. Participants also expressed an interest in public transport if it were only more 'accessible' to Kuwaiti neighbourhoods. For some young participants, their cars become their only means of transport for reasons of privacy and autonomy.

> 'Now for me, driving for me is so important. The time I have to myself. The purest form of freedom is the full tank of petrol. When people would say what's your favourite place

in Kuwait, I say: My car. I don't feel privacy at home... Because my parents come in all the time, my siblings, so [my] most sacred place is [my] car. [I] sit in my car. [I] put make-up on in [my] car. [I] study in [my] car. [I] eat in [my] car cos it's [my] space.'"

Kuwaiti female, Age: 20s

Participants believed driving more expensive cars grants you respect on the road and among peers, relatives, prospective partners and prospective employers. Male participants particularly expressed an attachment to private vehicles as an extension of identity.

'It's a social signal. I don't have to tell you who I am or how much money I make because you can see my car. Even though for a lot of them, if you open their wallet there isn't much there, because here people take out loans to buy cars. I had a cousin who just graduated from the military academy in France, he's 22, and he's getting himself with his first salary a Range Rover which is like 36,000 KD. Which is crazy.'

Kuwaiti male, Age: 40s

References were made to a 'love street' on the 1st Ring Road, where young men and women spend hours purposefully stuck in traffic in order to engage with different youth. Other participants brushed off 'love street' with irony and talked about driving or calling friends to go on a long drive around the city with no particular destination.

'Flirting in the car protects you from the law. In person, you risk getting beat up by the father or brother. In the car, you can just drive away.'

Kuwaiti female, Age: 20s

'I feel like most times cars is more than going from point A to B. A lot of times, it's like okay I'm going to go pick up all our friends, we don't know where we are going but we're just going to be in the car. It reflects a social reality that we have nothing to do here.'

Kuwaiti male, Age: 30s

Kuwaiti female participants stated how buses may expose them to harassment from foreign men. It is slightly different than the harassment feared by expatriate women, because there is an additional aversion towards the 'foreignness' of the men among the Kuwaitis.

'So if a girl is dressed up, she wouldn't feel comfortable going into a bus. It's not comfortable, the men who are on the bus, exposes her to harassment. She would feel uncomfortable. So maybe she wants women, or Kuwaiti men to notice her, but not non-Kuwaiti men who are coming back from their construction job. My relatives believe that out of respect for your family, and who you are, there are things you shouldn't do, like riding a bus.'

Kuwaiti female, Age: 20s

The accuracy of this threat is questionable, however, since a Kuwaiti woman, with her likely political and cultural clout due to citizenship, is much less vulnerable in a public space than a low-income expatriate woman, and if anything were to happen, retribution is more accessible – which may discourage foreign men from harassing a visibly Kuwaiti woman.

> 'I think non-Kuwaitis would feel less comfortable walking at night and are more vulnerable to harassment because the men know they are likely here alone, without a support system, without a state that truly cares about them.'

Non-Kuwaiti female, Age: 20s

Kuwaiti participants said they never considered riding the bus in Kuwait as a legitimate option. And for the older participants, who were over 50, they remember riding the buses regularly as children. Now they would hesitate to allow their kids, especially their daughters, to ride the buses. When the 50+-year-old Kuwaiti participants were asked how they would feel if their daughters took the bus, one replied:

> 'No, it's not safe. In the past, in a way it was better than now. You knew where the buses were going. When we would get on the bus, we would know that bus 25 went to such and such places. And our parents were aware too. It was general knowledge. Now it's not the same.'

Kuwaiti male, Age: 50+

Female participants stated that male dominance in public space poses a societal barrier to mobility. Further, they expressed the feeling that their actions are monitored and they want to avoid bringing shame to their family. Male and female participants stated that if a Kuwaiti female is seen using a bus, it reflects poorly on the father for not providing for her. Additionally, Kuwaiti participants with diverse needs felt their needs are not met by private vehicle ownership.

> 'Part of the "fatherly duty" is to provide transport. Like my daughter shouldn't have to drive around, if I can't, then I should give her a driver. It's a way to protect them.'

Kuwaiti female, Age: 20s

> 'With buses, I of course can't even try, because there are steps. And I can't climb steps in my wheelchair. In taxis, when I tell him put down the cushion and pick up the wheelchair, it's like I'm talking Chinese, they just don't understand. They look at me like I'm crazy. So people with disabilities really avoid anything but private transport. And with private transport, if my driver is on holiday or away or sick, I have to put my life on pause.'

Kuwaiti male, Age: 30s

As evident from the direct quotations and the discussion above, the transport and mobility system in Kuwait is strongly segregated along the lines of gender, income and nationality.

As the interviews made clear, women were more likely to experience mobility and accessibility disadvantages than men. Being of a young age and with children compounded their fears related to safety and personal security. This particularly affected the mobility of non-national workers where women were forced to use more expensive means of personal mobility than the cheaper bus transport system. Similarly, the male respondents expressed that the lack of 'access rights' and affordability of personal transport meant that they had become captive riders of the existing low quality transport system. Those who could afford a private car would use it in almost all cases for all their mobility needs. The ethnicity and nationality of a traveller was particularly stigmatised on the transport system. Overall, the qualitative discussions reveals that the social and cultural aspects of mobility strongly affected the personal accessibility of individuals in the Kuwaiti context.[39]

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study used a mixed method analysis to identify the characteristics and drivers of socio-spatial and social inequity in access to different transport modes, particularly public buses and private vehicles. By exploring the issues of access and choice from a gender sensitive research framework, the research allows for a dynamic and context specific analysis. This framework is very suitable for the Kuwaiti situation, where data is often incomplete; vulnerable user segments are difficult to access; and the user perceptions are complex due to prevailing social and cultural barriers. The literature cited in this report shows that very little research of this kind has been conducted in Kuwait. The use of a mixed method approach has allowed for the patterns and concepts to emerge directly from the opinions and viewpoints of the Kuwaiti population and are not superimposed from other geographic contexts which may not share the same cultural considerations.

The study contends that the urban transport policy of a welfare state such as Kuwait should aim to ensure basic accessibility to key destinations as a basic human right for all its residents (citizens and non-citizens). Public transport has an important role to play in ensuring basic accessibility for all, particularly for non-drivers and the low income, often foreign, population. Public transport in Kuwait is mainly supplied to serve the expat workplace and residential areas, however, this study has identified that transport accessibility levels are generally low both for foreign and local populations. These are exacerbated by socioeconomic differences. While a significant share of the local Kuwaiti population has good access to public bus stops, they are not able to utilise bus services as the current public transport system does not fulfil their mobility needs.

In addition to the spatial stratification in access, the focus groups and in-depth interviews revealed the ways that citizenship and class largely determine transport behaviour in Kuwait. Barriers experienced by the male and female lower income population are based on constraint; 'captive' riders that use public transportation because alternative forms of transport are inaccessible to them. The transport behaviour of higher income expatriates

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39 Beirão and Sarsfield Cabral, 'Understanding Attitudes towards Public Transport and Private Car: A Qualitative Study'.

and the local population, in contrast, is based on stigma, status, tradition and convenience. Given the ways that public transport is perceived as largely for expatriate populations, with little to no political clout, the infrastructure remains limited and inefficient. The model as it stands is inequitable for the lower income expatriates, who bear the consequences of an inefficient system, and rely on informal transport to better accommodate their needs.

A series of policy recommendations can be extracted from the findings to better meet the needs as well as fight the social constraints of the growing expatriate and local population.

This includes catering transport to different populations. Several participants expressed wanting the system to 'meet them where they are at' meaning that the system should become as convenient as possible for users to switch to as an alternative to their current transport practice. For example, participants spoke favourably about the Dubai VIP sections on public transport, saying

> 'There is a family section there, and also a young men section. It better reflects the culture.'

Kuwaiti female, Age: 20s

A systematic review of need identification is required to inform the urban transport policy in the Kuwait Metropolitan Area as to how the current bus based transport system serves the accessibly needs of the population, while taking into account the gender and nationality based cultural constraints imposed by the wider social system in Kuwait.

There is ample room for 'technical' improvements in the transport system to improve spatial accessibility. For example, increasing the efficiency of bus travel through bus lanes and carpool lanes; compact development which limits sprawl; and investing in small scale public transport (i.e., trams in busy industrial and commercial areas like Shuwiekh or City Centre). Also, there is a need to consolidate bus routes; in the current model, the three bus companies (KPTC, City bus, KGL) cover the same routes and are in competition with each other for revenues. Creating a consolidated public infrastructure in which these private companies work under one larger transportation entity (similar to Transport for London in the UK) can ensure that the routes that are not profitable but necessary can be covered and that buses in the current routes can be better filled to capacity. Buses themselves could be made more accessible by improvements such as adding ramps and ensuring bus arrival and departure information is displayed at bus stops.

Acknowledgements

Appendix A: Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Focus Group Participants (count data)

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Total
Gender						
Female	14	2	4	6	4	30
Male	11	12	8	7	6	44
Nationality						
Kuwaiti	14	6	8	13	0	41
Non-Kuwaiti	11	8	4	0	10	33
Age of respondents						
18 to 29	18	8	4	8	5	43
30 to 39	6	2	6	2	4	20
40 to 49	1	3	2	1	0	7
50 to 59	0	1	0	2	0	3
Above 60	0	0	0	0	1	1
Income level						
Better off than most	7	4	5	3	0	19
Slightly better off	6	4	5	8	3	26
Average	9	5	2	2	5	23
Slightly worse off	3	1	0	0	2	6
Usual mode of travel						
private car	20	12	8	13	4	57
bus	1	0	0	0	3	4
taxi	3	2	4	0	3	12
other	1	0	0	0	0	1
Employment status						
Employed	12	10	7	5	7	41
self employed	8	2	4	5	1	20
unemployed	0	0	0	1	0	1
student	5	2	0	1	2	10
Retired	0	0	1	1	0	2
House type						
Apartment	10	8	4	3	9	34
Semi-detached	2	1	1	3	1	8
Total	**25**	**14**	**12**	**13**	**10**	**74**

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Total
Detached	13	5	7	7	0	32
Car ownership						
Yes	19	9	9	12	3	52
No	6	5	3	1	7	22
Total	**25**	**14**	**12**	**13**	**10**	**74**

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