After the consolidation of urban expansion, with the consequent processes of metropolisation and suburbanisation, today we have to reread the right to the city described almost half a century ago by Lefebvre (1978) as a right to accessibility and mobility. Late capitalism has used technological innovations in transport as a way to compress space-time coordinates, effectively “shortening distances”. In other words, these advances have reduced the time needed to move from place to place or transport merchandise (Harvey 1998). Some authors have gone so far as to claim that we have entered the Era of Mobility (Salazar 2010; Sheller-Urry, 2006; Urry 2007). Nevertheless, the impact of efficiency on transport is not homogenously and equitably distributed amongst the population. Not everybody can access the most efficient and costly means of transport, and not all metropolitan suburbs surrounding large cities are well connected to major rail or car routes (Jirón 2007; Le Breton 2002; Orfeuil 2004; Ureta 2008).

Half a century ago, the North American economist John Kain (1968) published an influential article that initiated a debate that is still ongoing. It involves the hypothesis known as spatial mismatch, which highlights the mismatch between the residential location of low-income households and the location of appropriate job opportunities. This situation, studied by Kain in the African-American populations

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of Detroit and Chicago, has been confirmed by numerous subsequent studies as a problem affecting black and Latino populations in the USA as a result of residential segregation, economic restructuring, and the increasing suburbanisation of employment (Ihlanfeldt/Sjoquist 1989; Ihlanfeldt 1994, 1998; Kain 1994; Stoll et al. 2000).

Getting a job requires mobility that not all people can afford, particularly in sprawling cities with unfriendly urban planning and little or no suburban public transport. These processes have been described in cities such as Montreal (Chicoine, 1998) and Santiago de Chile (Jirón 2007, 2008; Imilán et al. 2015; Ureta 2008). In this ethnographically pioneering literature on mobility, we can see that, in addition to the condition of social class and purchasing power, there are clear gender and age divisions that exacerbate access difficulties and therefore limit the rights of these citizens to the city (Chicoine 1998; Jirón 2007).

Sociological, geodemographic and economic approaches, which are the mainstream of transport and mobility research, on the one hand deal with variables such as distance, travel time, means of transport, multimodality, self-containment rates, geographic origins and destinations, while on the other hand looking at daily mobility which serves other purposes such as provisioning, leisure activities, the use of services and the pursuit of culture (Albalate/Bel 2010; Featherstone 2004; García-Lopez 2012; Kaufman et al. 2015; Small/Verhoef 2007; Urry 2004). In some cases they also establish correlations between the choice of means of transport and the options available, according to the type of locality or territorial region, within the framework of typologies that have greater or lesser connectivity (centrality or marginality) or the level of wealth or poverty (Abramo 2008; Cervero et al. 2002; Dávila 2012; Dercon/Shapiro 2007; GlAESER et al. 2008).

However, what quantitative approaches to the subject of mobility do not provide are the meanings and rationales behind the use of each mobility type in the case of individuals, families or social groups. An ethnographic approach to the subject seeks a deeper understanding of the logic that moves people in the organisation of their personal, family, work, and residential lives. In all ethnographic approaches, people have faces, social frames of reference that we must reveal, and trajectories that we have to uncover, while their actions are based on reasons that we wish to make explicit and which are the expression of vital aspirations. In the end, all people possess varying and relative degrees of roots and rootlessness, measured in social and territorial terms (Pujadas 2012). Nevertheless, we wish to emphasise that our approach to the subject, although anchored basically in the tradition of urban anthropology and ethnography, is defined as a contribution that seeks to engage in dialogue with and join the interdisciplinary effort to understand and document the new forms of mobility.