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TOWARDS A SPATIALISED AND CIRCULATORY ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL
STRUCTURE

RURAL AUTOMOBILITY ON THE CANADIAN PRAIRIES

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This paper explores rural automobility, largely through analysis of a regional case study in rural Saskatchewan, Canada. Here, rural automobility shapes community character and survival and people's access to livelihoods, healthcare, safety, leisure, and goods and services. Rural life is changed as practises of rural automobility intersect and reciprocally construct other practises. Social and economic restructuring have increased automobility and its effects, with increased centralization, concentration and rationalization of the economy, depopulation, aging, inequality, dependence on town jobs and flexibilization of work, and public sector contraction all contributing. Now, what it means to live a normal life is shaped by rural automobility and depends upon the reality created by it. That people spend much of their day driving long distances

to go to school, work, shop, visit, play, and attend appointments is unremarkable and now seen as normal to the rural way of life. That many can drive supports the centralization of activities—necessitating even further travel to carry out the activities of living—and the offloading of costs to individuals who either cannot drive or who bear the responsibility of driving others. Vehicles are forms of “capital,” shaping advantage, exclusion and social risks. All rural people are required to be mobile, but they are not all capable to the same extent, and their movements do not have the same social meaning. This heightened automobility has helped to hollow out rural communities as people live their lives in many different places across region, and as mobility becomes increasingly important as a source of individualization, exclusion and disadvantage.

Palavras-chave: rural transportation; automobility; canada; rural restructuring; social inequalities.