



Gendered key events in the life course: effects on changes in travel mode choice over time



Joachim Scheiner*

Technische Universität Dortmund, Faculty of Spatial Planning, Department of Transport Planning, 44227 Dortmund, Germany

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies changes in travel mode specific trip rates after life course (and accessibility) related key events from a gender perspective. It is theoretically informed by the mobility biographies approach, and by gender/travel studies. The data used is the German Mobility Panel (GMP) 1994 to 2010 in which households and their members are asked three times in three subsequent years to report the trips they made over a week. The changes reported are regressed to key events over the life course, cohort effects and period effects, while sociodemographics and spatial context attributes are controlled. A cluster-robust regression approach is used to account for the non-independent character of panel observations. Significant effects were found for some key events, including the birth of a child, entry into the labour market, and changes in spatial context, accessibility and mobility. Some effects differed distinctly between men and women, suggesting that men and women are differently affected by life course events. However, taken together the associations found, as well as their gender differences are rather limited. Hence, key events over the life course seem to be only loosely associated with travel mode specific trip rates.

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1. Introduction

It has long been recognised that the trajectories that shape individuals' life courses differ between the genders (Rossi, 1985). Life courses may be understood as paths from birth to death that are shaped by multi-faceted context factors including the social, economic, cultural, political, technological and regional circumstances in which an individual leads his or her life. What is more, an individual's preferences, goals and intentions shape his or her life-path and, possibly, the paths of connected others as well.

The impact of context as well as the way individuals make use of and shape context is strongly gendered in many respects. The reasons for this include gendered access to resources, social role expectations, preferences, and possibly the patriarchal structure of society which may be based on gendered power relations (see for discussion, e.g. Bianchi et al., 2000; Hakim, 2003; Babcock and Laschever, 2003; Blau et al., 2010; for contributions from transport geography see Hanson and Pratt, 1995; Polk, 1998; Law, 1999; Rosenbloom, 2006; Kwan et al., 2009; Grieco and McQuaid, 2012 and other papers in the same issue; Gil Solá, 2013; Schwanen et al., 2014).

The mobility biography approach has been developed over the past decade to capture the travel and mobility elements in people's life courses (Lanzendorf, 2003; Scheiner, 2003). In empirical applications of this approach, numerous key events over the life course have been found to significantly affect people's availability and/or ownership of mobility tools, such as cars or public transport season tickets, and their travel behaviour alike (review in Scheiner, 2007). However, this approach has as yet been little applied in combination with gendered analysis, although life courses have been shown to be gendered in many respects. Perhaps the most striking example is the traditionalisation of gender roles after childbirth, when women tend to take disproportionate responsibility for the child, the family and the housework while men tend to take on the breadwinning role (Best and Lanzendorf, 2005; Blau et al., 2010; Davis and Moore, 2010; Grunow et al., 2012).

The life course has become an important issue in geography in recent years, and its gendered nature as well as its links to travel have been clearly recognised (Rosenbloom, 1993; Jarvis et al., 2011). Yet the links between gender, travel and the life course have not been fully developed, let alone been clarified empirically. This paper aims to shed some light on the gendered nature of mobility biographies. Specifically, changes in individual travel mode use from one year to the next are studied focusing on the effects of key events in the life course while controlling for a large variety of potentially explanatory variables including sociodemographics

* Tel.: +49 231 755 4822; fax: +49 231 755 2269.

E-mail address: joachim.scheiner@tu-dortmund.de

and spatial context at the residence and the workplace. Separate models for men and women are estimated to account for the gendered nature of the key events. Employing a life course perspective on the gender-travel link extends existent research in the field and helps clarify gender equity issues in transport as well as recognise potentials for change at certain moments in life. A possible way of looking at the gendered character of the life course would be to focus on activity patterns which are known to be gendered in many respects. However, feminist/transport studies including geography have consistently argued that women's limited access to transport modes is a major source of inequality, i.e. women's disadvantageous time use, labour market access and activity patterns in general (Ortoleva and Brenman, 2004; Dobbs, 2005; Grieco, 2008). Hence the focus here is on travel mode use.

The reader should keep in mind that the policy context for gender relations in Germany may differ from other countries. Germany is commonly considered a conservative (or social capitalist/corporatist) regime in terms of gender relations, similar to France, Belgium, and The Netherlands (van der Lippe et al., 2011; Kan et al., 2011). This regime is politically and culturally (and geographically) situated between the Mediterranean regime, from which it differs in having better developed social security systems and somewhat less 'catholic impact' and conservative gender ideology, and the Nordic social democratic regime in which both policy and society strongly promote gender equity by providing universal child care to allow women to take full-time occupations and by encouraging fathers to take parental leave (Ruppner, 2010; Kan et al., 2011). Germany has some notable incentives for couples to conduct a male-breadwinner-and-female-housewife type of work sharing, including a joint income tax system for couples and a relatively poor provision of public childcare (Apps and Rees, 2005; Cooke, 2006; Kan et al., 2011). In line with this, female labour force participation rates are lower than in more 'progressive' Nordic countries, but the fertility rate is still lower (Apps and Rees, 2005; Dustmann, 2005). In the eastern parts of Germany – the former GDR – public child care has traditionally been and still is more common (Cooke, 2006). Parental leave regulations in Germany are relatively generous (36 months since 1992), but included little financial benefit until 2006 (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2012). Female labour force participation rates have increased steadily over time, but with high proportions of part-time work when compared to countries as diverse as France, Italy, Sweden, Japan, Australia or the USA (Dustmann, 2005).

In the past few years, German governments have undertaken considerable efforts to expand child care facilities, encourage women into employment and fathers to take paternal leave. Since 2007 a new parental leave scheme that has been adopted from Sweden grants parents two thirds of their prior net income for 14 months. Two months are reserved for each partner, thus encouraging fathers to take at least two "daddy months" of leave (Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2012).

Hence Germany has recently experienced a process of rapid change in gender relations. As the empirical work done in this paper is based on data spanning the period 1994–2010, I expect recent trends to have relatively little impact on the results. Within the scope of this paper, Germany should be considered a relatively conservative gender regime, with some trends towards modernisation and equity.

In the next section the state of the research is introduced. As the novelty of this paper lies in making a link between gender, the life course and travel (here: mode choice), the review does not attempt to provide a full picture of the rich gender/travel literature as far as it does not refer to the life course. The subsequent section describes the data and methodology of analysis. Subsequently the results are presented. The paper closes with some conclusions and an outlook on further research.

2. Life course, gender, and mobility biographies – state of the research

The state of the research is developed in three steps here. Firstly, gendered structures in the life course are briefly introduced, followed by (secondly) a short overview of the mobility biography approach. Thirdly, expectations concerning the gender specific effects of key events on mode use are elaborated upon.

2.1. Gender and the life course

Life course and biography research have become a broad field of inquiry over recent decades¹, the most pertinent disciplines being sociology and psychology (for an overview see Mortimer and Shanahan, 2006), both of which developed relatively independent perspectives on the life course (Diewald and Mayer, 2009). Gender as a basic concept is, however, somewhat underdeveloped in this research (Widmer and Ritschard, 2009, p. 29; see also Corna, 2013, for life course related health studies). This is despite the fact that it has been given some attention. For instance, in her essay Rossi (1980) reflects carefully on the nature of gender differences in the life course, with a focus on the biological nature of sex and on the distinctiveness of cohort affiliation.

Attention has been given to the gendered character of the life course by economists (Dustmann, 2005 and other papers in the same issue). However, the general focus is more on certain stages in the life cycle than on a true life course perspective. Rossi (1985) edited a seminal book on gender and the life course which covered historical, demographic, psychological and sociological, economic and political perspectives. Gender structures in the life course seem to be obvious, given that the timing, sequencing and occurrence of some life stages are characterised by strong gender inequalities. For instance, women leave their parental home earlier than men, marry earlier and become parents earlier in life (Hillmert, 2005 for Germany). Inasmuch as such structures open up or inhibit options for subsequent life stages, they may cause new inequalities at later stages. The most researched example and consistent finding in this respect is childbearing that has a traditionalising influence on ideology (Davis and Moore, 2010), on household work sharing and, hence, activity patterns (Apps and Rees, 2005 for Australia, the UK, and Germany; Grunow et al., 2006, 2012 for Germany) and travel patterns (Best and Lanzendorf, 2005 for Germany). Apps and Rees (2005) add that the gender gaps in employment as well as in domestic work tend to become narrower again in later life stages.

These trends are on the household and individual level. On the aggregate level changes over time point in the other direction, i.e. more egalitarian gender relations (Blau et al., 2010 and Bianchi et al., 2000 for the USA, Schäfer, 2004 for Germany). This means that cohort and period effects in gender analysis may show opposed trends compared to life course effects. Period and cohort effects may also intersect with life courses from one generation to the next in gender-specific ways; e.g. the spread of the internet is one such cohort-specific change, and its adaptation is linked with the gender division of household work (Schwanen et al., 2014). Gender convergence in travel behaviour over time has also been observed to evolve in cohort specific ways (Scheiner et al., 2011), specifically in terms of decreased travel by men (Frändberg and Vilhelmson, 2011 for Sweden; Kuhnimhof et al., 2012 for Germany).

¹ There is no distinction made here between life course and biography, even if there are notable differences in theory and methodology between life course research and biography research (Sackmann, 2007; see Rossi, 1980 and Elder et al., 2006 for brief discussions of the terms life course, life span, and lifecycle).

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