



Social exclusion, vulnerable groups and driving forces: Towards a social research based policy on car mobility



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ABSTRACT

Social research was, until recently, not very important in the transport and mobility domain. There was a bias towards technical studies, engineering studies and towards transport economics. Social science was essentially a fringe activity; psychology was used in traffic management, under the name “human factors”, and human geography focussed on the relationship between the characteristics of urban and rural space and the production of mobility. Sociological studies, cultural studies and governance studies were scarce in the transport and mobility domains.

This state of affairs changed the last 15 years. The relations between social research and transport and mobility are intensified. In the scientific world there is now an ongoing production of studies that relate social, cultural and governance perspectives to transport and mobility. There is a stock of literature on social exclusion or inclusion in transport, on travel behaviour and on driving forces for car mobility. But is the body of knowledge that did arise in these 15 years used in the design and evaluation of transport and mobility policies? It looks like this research is first and foremost an activity within the boundaries of academia. The way in which results and insights of social research are included in the design, definition and evaluation of car mobility policies is the central theme in this paper. The paper is written from a policy-maker's perspective by someone who has some 20 years of experience in the relationships between transport policies in practice and transport research results.

Three domains and ten themes give an overview of the field. A summary of results of social research on car mobility shows interesting results. However, not many of these results are included in the design of national policies on car mobility. We show the state of the art and try to identify and analyse reasons for the rather difficult dissemination of results and insights from social research into national car mobility policies, with a focus on more socially inclusive and equitable policy outcomes in mind.

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1. Social research on car mobility: introduction

Car mobility and social science had in the past a rather weak relationship. When car mobility was studied this was mostly done from a traffic flow perspective, or from a “predict and provide” – perspective related to the provision of infrastructure. A third line of research was on traffic safety. Studies on choices related to car mobility, on the experiences of car users or on the role of car mobility in the functioning of societies were scarce. There were a few early publications (e.g. Schneider, 1971; Marsh and Collett, *Driving passion; the Psychology of the Car*, 1986; Sachs; *For the*

love of the automobile, 1992) but development of social research themes on car mobility seemed rather slow. A notable exception was the work of Hillman (1973) and Hillman et al. (1976). Hillman worked in his books consequently from a users perspective on mobility, and had his influence in transport policy in the U.K. in the pre-Thatcher period.

The state of art changed 15 years ago. There is now an ongoing production on articles and books on social and cultural aspects of car mobility. An important focus has been on social exclusion, and on vulnerable groups. It would be interesting to study why and how this acceleration in social studies related to car mobility did arise. In this article the spectrum of social research on car mobility is introduced. The results of research are summarised in a generic way, and the focus is on the implementation of these results in the national policies on car mobility.

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2. Three domains of research related to car mobility

For this purpose systematisation of the social research on car mobility is necessary. Three domains will be presented. These domains were chosen in an intuitive way by the author. It was also necessary to set some boundaries. Included were articles and books from the social sciences. This creates especially in the second domain a split, as there is also a vast literature based on economics and on engineering disciplines. The first and last domain are more inherently of a social science nature.

The first domain consists of studies that focus on analysing social equity and inequalities in the transport domain. The key word here is inequality, of experiences and perspectives of different social groups related to car mobility. The second domain consists of studies that focus on understanding car mobility patterns and choices. Understanding is the key word; researchers try to understand the patterns in car mobility, and the choices made by car users. And the last domain consists of studies that reflect on future perspectives for car mobility. This is the domain of scenario builders, and of governance studies.

What type of results did the studies introduced in the three domains arrive at? What can be noted as the state of the art of the perspectives from the social sciences on car mobility? Such a question is easy to ask, but difficult to answer. Most scientists are rather reluctant to present a broad overview of results. They fear to overstress their academic power. And indeed; you need to overcome some barriers to present such a broad overview of results. On the other hand, such a broad inventory is exactly where policymakers can relate to for their work on defining, refining and designing policies on car mobility. Reluctance of the scientific communities to present generic and easily readable overviews of results of social studies can lead to a lack of knowledge of important results and ideas of social research in the worlds of the policy makers.

Finally it seems appropriate to mention that the author could not strive for comprehensiveness. Most relevant literature has been included, but certainly not all the relevant literature, as that seems a rather impossible task within the scope of this article.

3. Analysing social equity and inequality in transport

This domain is at the core when discussing social issues in car mobility. It is a vast growing domain, and especially in this domain a bias on studies from the Anglo Saxon world can be seen. Studies from the United Kingdom and Australia dominate the scene. France has its own tradition of equity and inequality studies. This domain is not frequently visited by researchers in more complete Welfare States like Germany, the Netherlands or the Scandinavian countries. It would be interesting to analyse this state of the art.

Three main themes can be identified.

The first theme is on specific groups in their relation to car mobility.

How do different groups approach car mobility, and which specific patterns and problems can be seen? Here we have studies on the specifics of *carless households* (Dittrich-Wesbuer and Freudenau, 2002; Jeekel, 2011, 2013; Sandqvist and Kristrom, 2001; Zumkeller et al., 2005). We have studies on the mobility patterns and problems of the *poorer segments* of western societies (Coutard et al., 2002; Grieco and Raje, 2004; Kim, 2002; Runge, 2005; Taylor et al., 2009), we have many studies about the mobility of *children* (Bachiri, 2006; Bachiri et al., 2008; Davidson et al., 2008; Fotel and Thomsen, 2004; Funk, 2009; Gough et al., 2001; de Groof, 2004; Hume et al., 2004; Lewis et al., 2006; Limbourg, 2005; Limbourg and Rieter, 2003; Lyons and Swinbank, 1998; Mackett et al., 2002; McDonald, 2005; Nelson et al., 2008; Paskins, 2004; van der Ploeg et al., 2008; Ridgewell et al., 2005; Risotto and

Tonucci, 1999; Sandqvist, 2002; de Singly, 2002; Sjolie and Thuen, 2002; Tillberg Mattson, 2002; Tranter and Malone, 2003; Tully, 2000, 2003; Turbin et al., 2002; Weston, 2005; Zwerts and Werts, 2003), on the mobility of *single parent households* (Chlund and Ottman, 2007; Titheridge, 2008), *elderly* (Davey, 2004; Gorti, 2004; Izumiyana et al., 2007; Rosenbloom and Stahl, 2002; Scheiner, 2006; Tacken, w.y.), *students* (Choplin and Delage, 2011), *disabled* (Bakker and van Hal, 2007; Dejoux and Armoogum, 2010), and of *households living far from their work* (Dodson and Sipe, 2006; Halleux et al., 2002; Motte-Baumvol, 2007; Noack, 2010; Ortar, 2008; Rouge and Bonnin, 2009).

Social exclusion in transport is an important research theme. Carless households – mostly singles, elder women, disabled, single parent families, more frequent in urban areas than in rural areas – travel far less kilometres, and do sometimes have problems reaching services and locations without the help of others. Many poorer households have cars, but their mobility comes at a price; a great part of their household income goes to car mobility. Elderly people, especially men, fear the moment they have to stop driving. Elderly people then do only ask lifts for health care, but not for visiting friends, so their world shrinks without cars. Due to heavy traffic, to longer distances to school and to a general risk aversion in modern societies children nowadays have far fewer “free mobility” than in the past. They are very often escorted by their parents, who are anxious on what can happen. Children do not learn to become “streetwise” in all its aspects. From research is rather clear that *car mobility for vulnerable groups is an area for potential anxiety, because opportunities normally available for car users can be missed*. We still miss good data on the dimension of these missed opportunities.

The second theme is on accessibility of services and opportunities.

Are there problems in reaching important services like work or health care? (Bowden and Moseley, 2006; Kawabata and Shen, 2005; Larsen and Gilliland, 2008; Roberto, 2008; Sanchez et al., 2003; Stoll, 2005; Todman, 2003; Wright, 2008; Williams et al., 2001). And which persons and which households face these problems in which circumstances? (Lucas et al., 2001; Miller, 2004; Smith et al., 2006). What is the magnitude of social exclusion via transport? (Carson, 2003; Cass et al., 2003; Church et al., 2000; Currie et al., 2009; FIA Foundation, 2004; Gentili, 2003; Hine and Mitchell, 2001, 2003; Imanashi, 2003; Kemming and Borbach, 2003; Lucas, 2003; Lyons, 2003a,b,c; Orfeuill, 2004a,b; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003; Solomon and Titheridge, 2009). And are accessibility problems related to the characteristics of the afflicted households (Morris, 2006; Raje, 2003; Raje et al., 2004), or are they integral part of the development of modern western societies (Dowling and Lyth, 2003; Grieco, 2003; Sanchez and Brenman, 2007)?

Accessibility is an important theme in car mobility policies. It is mostly operationalised as “the time to reach destinations”. Social research studies the real and manifest accessibility problems. These are the *problems that poorer and carless households can face in reaching work locations, health services and cheaper shops*. As Orfeuill (2004a,b) states “basically the location of residences and amenities is more and more directed by the upper and middle class behaviour, for whom car use is not a problem”. A Spatial Mismatch seems to exist, between the housing locations and the work locations for poorer and less educated households. This problem becomes greater because these households mostly have smaller travel horizons, than their middle class counterparts. Services with rather easy access can than be perceived as unreachable.

The third theme is on social cohesion and car mobility.

Here broader studies dominate. There are studies on hypermobility (Adams, 1999, 2005; Ascher, 2006; Lipovetsky and Charles, 2004; Sager, 2005; Schokker and Peters, 2006), on the mobility in

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