

Lecture with discussion

Sustainable Travel Habits

- Shifting perspectives

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This Lecture is about

methods, social science concepts regarding travel patterns ... and provides an example of how [to use a social science concept] to analyze stability and change in travel habits ...

The Readings (easily found via KTHB or e.g. scholar.google.se):

Börjesson Rivera et al (2012) *Getting There and Back Again. Commuting and ICT in six cities around the globe*

Structure of lecture:

The research field

Sustainable transport

The object of study

Travel habits

Theory

Social Practice Theory

Method

Ethnography

Application

“How to affect habits and practices?”

Discussion exercise

The research field:

Transport patterns with significant environmental consequences

The overall purpose is to provide knowledge useful for achieving truly sustainable development, as it is currently defined politically and scientifically

Evolution of transport patterns



How to study travel habits?

How to *change* travel and communication patterns?

My starting points

A. What pattern of action to study I choose according to environmental significance

B. However, the *travel habits* and *social practice* is then defined based on it's characteristics and social context, and **not** based on environmental impact, sector or technical system

Example: The habit/practice of commuting by bike



A defined, measurable system of e.g. bike commuting trips (in relation to car and publ trip trips)



Instances/actions of the social practice of biking



the object of study for social sciences within this field:

Pattern of action (travel pattern) – the most neutral concept for the object of study

Behavior and *Habit* – implies an individual-centered perspective/methodology

Social practice – the travel practice itself (e.g. commuting by bike), as an evolving social phenomena, is the object of study

What is a habit?

- A (sequence of) acts that the individual repeats with a minimum of planning
- The individual aspect of a social practice, and thus habits could be very much imitated and adjusted between people

Methodological starting point from an individual perspective: the needs and mindset of the individual



Habits ...

- ... provide the potential to resort to previous experiences in a given situation.
- ... help conserve mental capacity and allow people to multi-task, to direct their attention in a certain direction and reserve decision-making capacity for genuinely unexpected situations.
- ... play a dominant role in everyday life and are used to organise it.
- ... are actions that are repeated, fitted into a social pattern and thus important for people





A **collective** perspective on **habit** is offered by e.g.

Social Practice Theory (SPT)

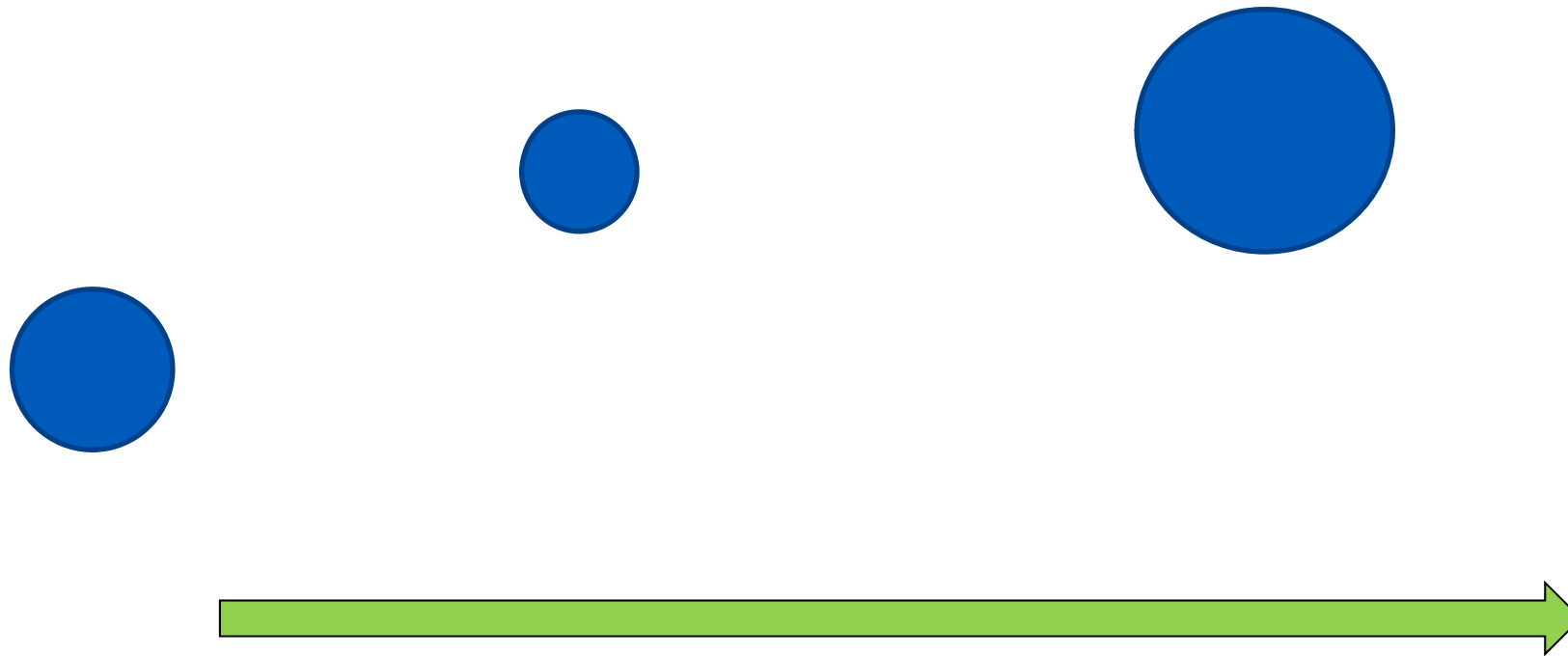
Every practice has a history

Individuals join and leave the practice

Through the practice people influence each others doings and choices - consciously and in other ways

It is by the social and technological circumstances that practices are kept in place, sustained, modified, replaced ...

The practice of e.g. Commuting by bike recruiting and losing practitioners over a few decades



Social Practice Theory ...

- Definition: a social practice is a provisionally stable and “temporally unfolding, and spatially dispersed, nexus of doings and sayings” (Schatzki 1996, 89.)
- E.g. the social practice of football would not exist if people did not play it. And if people played differently, or if they invented different rules (Reckwitz 2000, 255) , (Shove & Pantzar 2007: 156).
- Social practices tend to be self-reinforcing, through that the actions that constitute them tend to be imitated and repeated
- Main elements of any social practice are at least the knowledge equipment, practical skills and specific actions involved.

Example: The social practice of commuting by bike



A theoretical axiom

Axiom: Actions performed by using specific artifacts, and that people in a group or a society recognize and perceive as purpose- and meaningful tend to be repeated / reproduced!





SPT and the activity based approach to travel (see Börjesson Rivera et al p. 26 -)

- ... mobility is not (only) 'about' getting from A to B
- ... it is instead about integrating everyday life and the activities required of 'normal' practice.
- People are travelling in order to preserve the sense that they are behaving in normal and ordinary ways. They go home to eat together (as a proper family should), they go to sports clubs and activities (as active people like them should), and they go around at work as busy people do ...

Method

To frame the (scope of the) sustainability problem and identify and describe the relevant habits respectively social practices:

My method for investigating habits and practices: Ethnography, i.e. interviews combined with individual travel journals



Methods to study patterns of action

Investigate

Measure many &

Study a few in detail (my
empirical method)

Describe

Analyze

Describe & Analyse


- Percentual correlation
(measure many)
- Processual relation
(study a few in detail)

Travel mode habits in Stockholm

Car-based (often including few other means of trp)

Mixed (often including both publ trp, walk, bike [moped!] and some car-travel)





Daily travel is habitual (see Börjesson Rivera et al 2012)

- A commute consists of routine practices, i.e. it is done on a regular basis with few major variations (p. 15)
- The routine aspect means that expectations quickly build up regarding how the trip should proceed, so any disruptions that occur have high significance (ibid)
- Commuting routines are vehicles of boundary control; moving between public and private; work and leisure; home and away (ibid.; and quoting O'Dell 2009).

Application / usefulness

*An **extraordinary** level of knowledge and agency*

Try to affect the "bubbles" of social practices over space and time

*SPT provides a model **of** the practice*

*But could also be used as a model **for** affecting the practice*

Changing travel practice


... in an individual and / or ...

.. from one "generation" to the next



To change daily travel habits/practices (see Börjesson Rivera et al 2012)

- [most habitual] car drivers are unlikely to change commuting habit, at least in the short term (p. 14; w ref. to Steg 2005; Sheller, 2004; etc.)
- sporadic drivers are the ones more likely to increase their use of public transport (ibid.)
- “To create a new ethics of automobility (...) will require a deep shift in ... our embodied experiences of mobility, our non-cognitive responses to cars and the affective relations through which we inhabit cars and embed them into personal lives, familial networks and national cultures.” (ibid. ; w ref. to Sheller 2004).



To change travel practice (see Shove 2002, quoted in Börjesson Rivera et al.) ...

- ... implement transport-related policies [that]... shape social expectations and practices [and make them less environmentally damaging]



Exercise/group discussion (after the break, at the end of lecture)

- Was done in groups of 2-5 students, see next slides ...

Main elements of any social practice are at least the equipment, practical skills, knowledge and actions involved.

So what about the practice of "Annual beach holidays by flight"

1. Reasons for this practice becoming a dominant in a population?
2. Basic social science concepts that can explain the trend (e g sharp increase or decrease) in it?

Summing Up: Enable sustainable practices and restrict unsustainable ones

Think of a practice as a bubble floating through time



If it is unsustainable, stop new recruits from joining!

If it is sustainable, recruit new adherents, make it compulsory in an attractive way

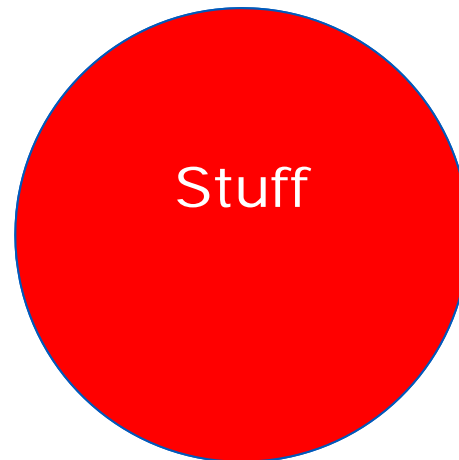
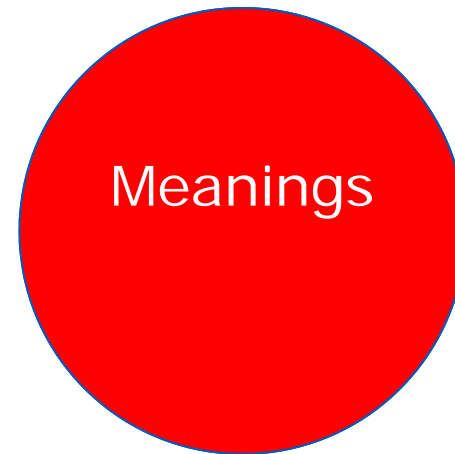
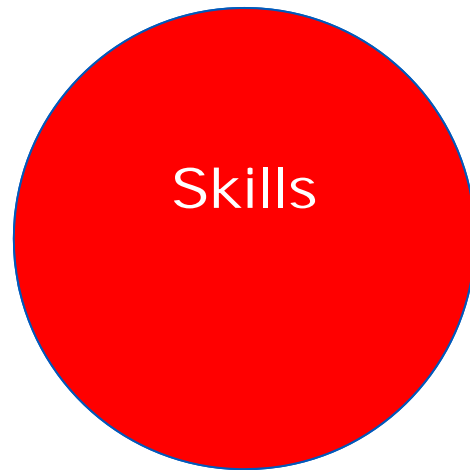
If it is something in between, make it change direction and content

Here ended the
lecture/ lesson

But below you can
find some
‘bonus slides’
that might be
informative for
you ...



Fundamental components of any practice



Answers to exercise questions 2014

1a There exists around the world an expanding, more wealthy middle class, increasingly traveling for holidays by air

1b –

2a

2b Useful concepts: Social acceptance /social norm; early adopters ; identity ...

Answer on top of lecturers mind april 2014

"purchase power (i.e. decreasing economic constraints for buying electronics); *possibility opening* (exploring new possibilities); *social comparison and identity*; *fashion shifts*; *expectations/necessity* (as a member of a social group you are expected to ...);



ICT use is increasingly affecting daily travel (Börjesson R et al 2012)

- ICT use on public transport include travel planners (in mobile/smart phones and PC:s etc), MP3 players for entertainment, tablet computers and e-book readers etc., used to be both productive and entertained (p. 18)
- ICT by car in addition include navigation systems, traffic reporting (e.g. via radio), Bluetooth equipment in the car. However, the technologies are facilitating but also distracting (and even against the law in some cases), thereby putting the driver, passengers and other vehicles in danger. (ibid.)
- What do Berkhout&Hertin (2004) say about transports, telework, e-commerce ...

Is a routinized practice possible to change?

Yes

Step 1: Make the practice visible and
consciously reflected upon

Step 2: Try and change the
components: skills, stuff,
meanings and structures in
society



Social, but not environmental practices

“Presently, most social practices and situations do not demand either pro-environmental awareness or action.” /---/

“what is needed first is to change the nature of the social situation to include an environmental component” /---/

(Hargreaves 2008)



Daily ICT use is also habitual (Börjesson R et al 2012)

- respondents adopt certain strategies on what functions to use and what to turn off, depending on all sort of circumstances; e.g. the battery level of a device.
- New routines develop to make sure e.g. that one can send an important text message in time; and often one would like to be less limited in one's use of ICT devices

Travel is a social practice

- what does it mean?
- Individuals are the *objects of our investigation* but the practice is the *unit of analysis*

To conclude on travel practice...

- a great bubble in return:

The floating travel practice bubble

- A new perspective ?

Recommendation:

- A) Improve practices by working on your meanings, skills and stuff
- B) Variation + selection
evolution
→

Habits ...

- Habitual actions, once established, tend to be copied and eventually institutionalised, so that they appear increasingly self-evident.
- The self-evidence in habits may mainly consist of habits not being *noticed* or evaluated, although it may also involve negotiating them.
- Practices and preferences are learned under the influence of various positionings between groups and classes in society. Together these form an internalised second nature with clear continuity, i.e. resistant to change. Against the background of such resistance, where, why and how can changes in individual habits and social practices occur?



Here ends the
'bonus slides' from,
the lecture

Good luck with the
rest of the
course! ,

Greger

