

# A Social Practice Perspective on Travel

D.G. Williams, T. J. Chatterton

Air Quality Management Resource Centre, University of the West of England, Bristol



## 1. Introduction

In the UK, the majority of everyday journeys are made by a lone occupant private vehicle, which is inefficient and damaging to the environment. In 2009 Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) accounted for 84% of UK Greenhouse Gas (GG) emissions. Of these 25% were from transportation (69% of which were made up of travel by road) (DECC, 2011). This means that travel by road contributed 14.5% of all UK GG emissions in 2009.

The UK has set the ambitious target of reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions by 80% of 1990 levels by 2050 (DECC, 2011). Traditional methods of changing behaviour focus on the individual and attempting to get them to change their behaviour. This approach can be limited, as many individuals are unable to alter routines and practices due to other aspects of their life, such as working patterns, family commitments and where they choose to live (Darnton *et al*, 2011). A social practice approach looks at changing wider society to enable people to change their existing travel habits and routines, thereby reducing the levels of CO<sub>2</sub> associated with private transport.

## 2. Travel Routines and Habits

Elizabeth Shove's 2003 book: *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: the Social Organisation of Normality* analyses the changes to climate control, laundry and personal cleanliness habits that have occurred throughout history in the UK and USA. Shove uses four metaphors to discuss how routines and habits change over time.

**Co-evolution** – how habits and routines have grown and developed in different locations and how these have converged over time;

**Ratchet** – a ratchet is a device that ensures motion in one direction only;

**System of Systems** – a routine or practice influenced by outside pressures cogs which is similar to a ratchet except it can move in both directions;

**Pinwheel** – routines and habits loosely held in place by a combination of theories and justificatory concepts. When these theories and concepts change, so does the routine or habit.

These metaphors can also be applied to the way we travel.

## 3. Co-Evolution

Travel in the UK and China 1980s



UK



China

### Convergence

UK and China 21<sup>st</sup> century



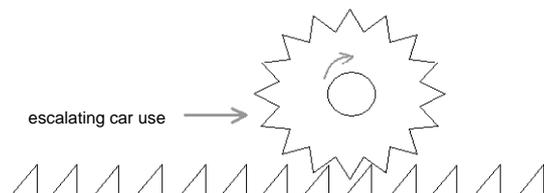
UK



China

## 4. Ratchet

Design of out of town shopping centres requiring trip by car has become the norm for many people it is difficult to see how this habit can be changed in the future. The ratchet effect has led to a decline in town centre shopping facilities in many towns of the UK, which has reduced the range of shops available and the services provided increasing the need to drive.



## 5. Cog

Prior to the 1950s car ownership was low, as there was a lack of availability of affordable vehicles. As the design, affordability and market for vehicles increased, the road network improved to allow long distance travel it appeared logical for people who could afford a vehicle to travel this way.

The cogs can move in any direction and can influence each other with one being dominant at any one time. Between the 1970s and 2000s the trends of the number of trips increased, yet this trend has changed in the past few years, due to factors such as the cost of travel, cost of insurance and the availability of alternative means of communication (Goodwin, 2012).

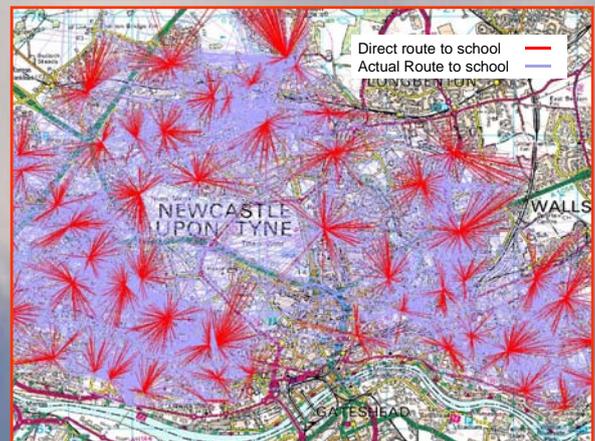
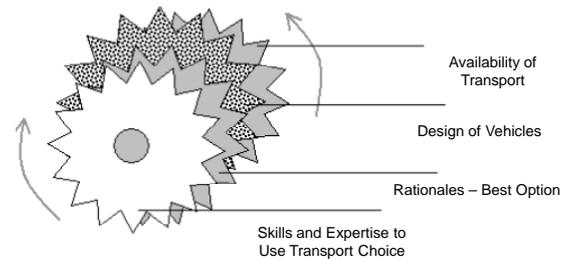


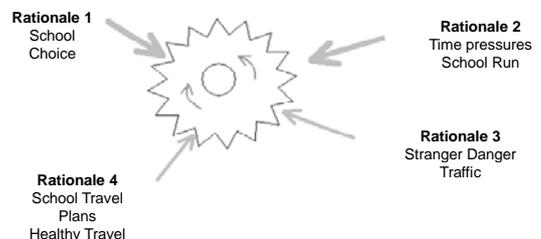
Figure 1: Post-Welfare Inequalities of School 'Choice' Household Resource Strategies from a North England Case Study (Jarvis and Alvanides, 2008)

## 6. Pinwheel

"at any point in time, routines and habits are loosely held in place by a distinctive combination of theories and justificatory concepts. As these change so do the conventions of normality they sustain." (Shove, 2003).

For school travel in the UK the way children travel is influenced by school choice as shown in Figure 1, where school choice has increased the complexity of journeys to school in Newcastle.

Several factors therefore influence how and why people travel to school.



## 7. References

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