



Mobility Practices in Ireland:

What are the merits and drawbacks of a practice approach to studying mobility behaviour?

Barbara Heisserer

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Overview

- ❖ Motivation & Research question
- ❖ Mobility Research:
Economic and Psychological models
- ❖ Practice theory as theoretical framework
- ❖ Merits & Drawbacks

Motivation

- IRL = one of the most car dependent countries
- “an **excessive or disproportionate need for car use** to meet routine mobility needs” (Flynn 2007)
- Car travel to work 63% (Irish Census 2006)



Consequences:

Social and environmental damage

Research question

Q: What are good ways to reduce volume of car use by encouraging sustainable travel behaviour?

How does change in behaviour come about?



Quest to find appropriate theoretical approach...

Economic & psychological models

- Information deficit model
- Adjusted value expectancy models
- Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991)
Based on rational choice theory
- Norm Activation Theory (Schwartz 1977)
Personal norms determine behaviour

Economic & psychological models

Strengths:

- Straightforward models
- Fairly easily applicable to empirical cases
- Ideal for quantitative methods

⚡ **Value-Action Gap:** models can't explain that behaviour or predict behaviour well

Economic & psychological models

Weaknesses:

- Linear relationship: attitude & behaviour (simplistic)
- Rational choice & Assumption of conscious choice
- Contextual constraints ?
- Ignore social dimension
- Don't conceptualise behavioural change

Practice approach – Why?

- Adopts wider perspective:
Brings social and society back into the picture
- Individuals not isolated but embedded in context
- Shift from exclusive focus on individuals to practices as unit of analysis
- Rough conceptualisation of change in practices

Practice theory

- Many theories of practice
- Famous practice theorists: Bourdieu and Giddens (Bourdieu 1977, Giddens 1984)
- Recent practice approach by Schatzki (1996, 2002) is partly based on ideas of philosopher Wittgenstein

Fundamental difference

People engage in practices (implies not isolated)

Coexistence is central to practices approach

Acquisition of practical intelligibility = what makes sense

Carrying out practice produces and reproduces practices

Practices establish social order

Practice approach – Practice I

Practice = set of doings and sayings (tasks & projects)

Organisation of practices: actions correct or acceptable

Doings and sayings are linked through...

- rules
- understandings
- teleoaffectives structures

Practice approach – Practice II

Teleoaffective structure of a practice :

set of ends, tasks, projects that participants should or may perform as well as emotions, moods, beliefs et cetera associated with it.

NOT a set of properties of actors, BUT of practice -
although individuals carry out projects of practice.

Practice approach – Agency & Change

... agency is the central motor through which the mesh of practices and orders are continuously taking place and frequently mutate. (Schatzki 2002)

agency = doings

agent = **whoever** or **whatever** performs doings
can be nonhuman or human (unique)

Practice approach – Change

2 Processes of change:

- **Reorganisation** of rules: occasional & intentional
- **Recomposition**: shifts in practical understandings are continual & unintentional

Can modify, destroy or fragment old practices as well as create new practice.

Strength & Weaknesses

Strength:

- Individuals NOT regarded as isolated
- Conceptualisation of Change
- NOT simplistic concept of human behaviour

Weaknesses & Questions:

- Highly abstract – How can it be operationalised?
- Conceptualisation of change still weak
- Superior to other sociological theories?

Thank you very much for your attention!

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