



Commute in practice – Is a practice approach fruitful for analysing commuting?

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‘Sustainable Consumption –
Towards action and impact’

Hamburg, 6 – 8th November 2011

ConsEnSus project

- **consumption, environment & sustainability**
- Cross-border research on sustainable consumption on household and individual level in Ireland
- Research areas: transport, food, water and energy
- 4 year interdisciplinary project funded by Irish Environmental Protection Agency
- Trinity College Dublin & NUI Galway

Overview

- ❖ Car dependence & research focus
- ❖ Transport behaviour research
- ❖ Theoretical alternative: Practice approach
- ❖ Critical considerations & analytical frame
- ❖ Initial findings from empirical analysis

Car dependence

Excessive car use causes social & environmental damage

Modal split for commute to work

Country	Bicycle	Car	Foot	Motorcycle	Public transport
Germany	8	68	10	1	13
Denmark	22	56	5	3	14
Netherlands	24	60	3	3	10
Ireland	5	69	13	1	12

Source: Urban Audit 2004, Irish Census 2006

Research focus

Gain understanding of commuting practices

- ➔ find possible avenues to instigate change towards sustainable commuting patterns



Transport Research

Psychological and economic models dominant:

focus on individuals' motives & economic rationale
neglect social dimension of actions

BUT: individuals don't act in isolation



Practice theories

No practice coherent theory

Move beyond dichotomy of structure and agency

Individuals & actions embedded in practices and constituted within them

Neither subject of absolute free will nor determinant structure

Address problems of other theoretical approaches

Fundamental difference

Unit of analysis = practice instead of individuals

People engage in practices – do not act in isolation

Narrow def.: array of human action & shared understanding

Acquisition of practical intelligibility = what makes sense

Performing practices produces and reproduces them

Practices establish social order

Practice theories I

Social site

Field of possibilities

Practice = set of doings and sayings, which are hierarchically organised (Schatzki 1996)

Doings and sayings are linked through...

- rules
- understandings
- teleoaffectives structures

Practice theories II

Practical understanding: skill-like know-how

↔ practical intelligibility

Teleoaffective structure of a practice :

set of actions that participants should or may perform
as well as emotions, moods, beliefs etc associated

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

Critical thoughts

Call for **materialisation** of practice theories

- a) Material objects and bodies
- b) Material and physical environment

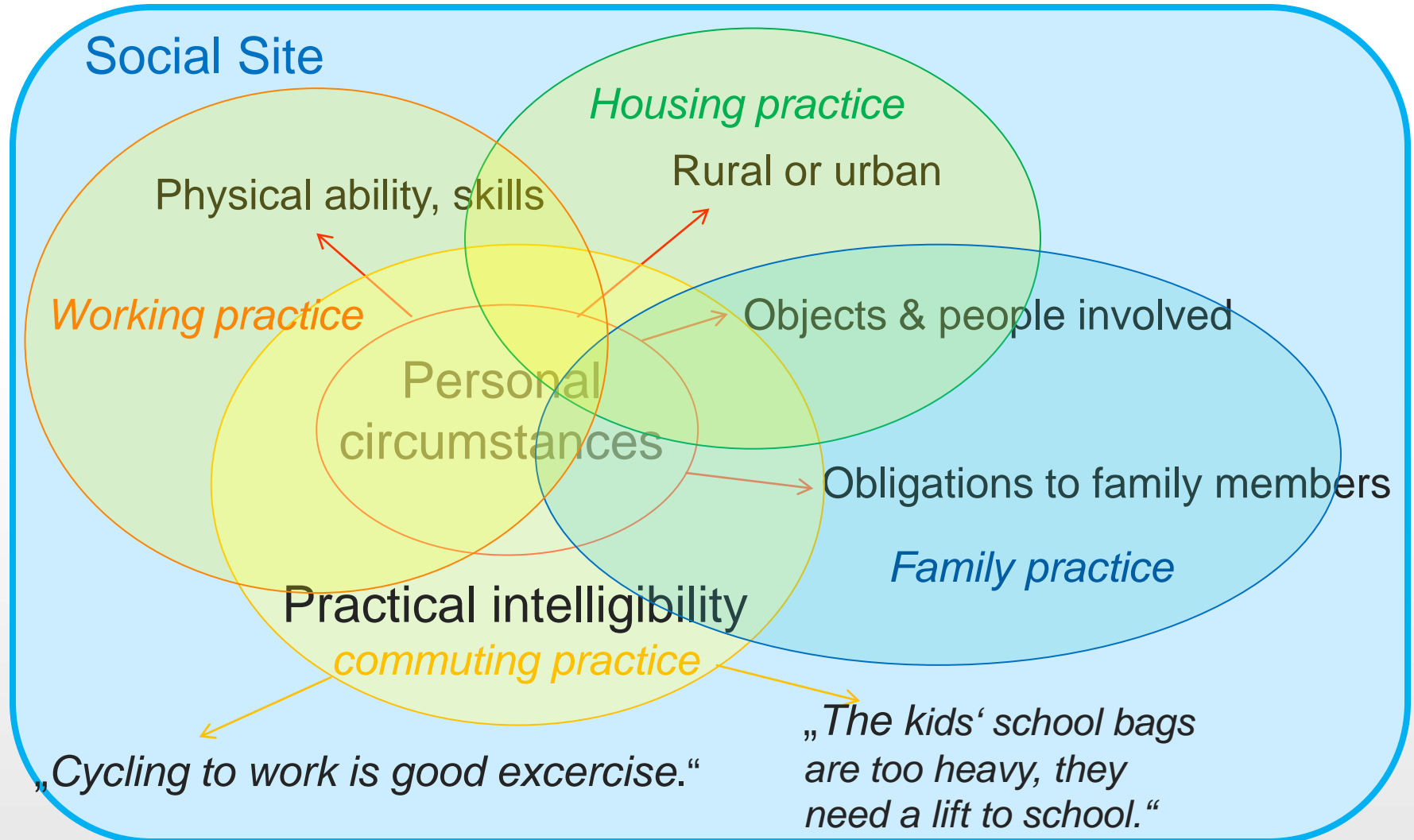
Conceptualisation and gain understanding **changing** of
action patterns & practices

Guiding concepts

- ❖ Extended concept of practice as entity
- ❖ Practical intelligibility
- ❖ Social site
- ❖ Field of possibilities

Data: 39 interviews revolving around commute to work

What shapes practical intelligibility?

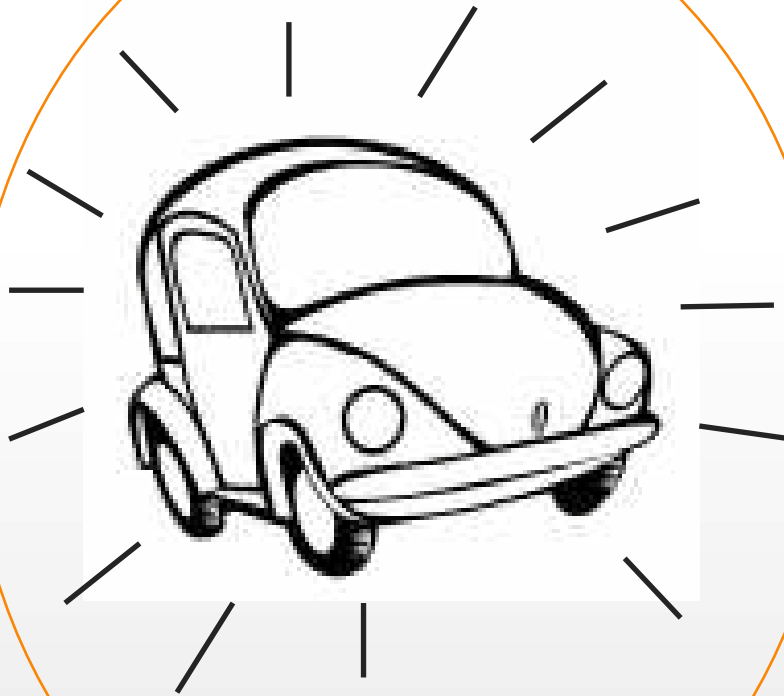


Preliminary findings

A



B



C



Conclusion

Highly abstract – identify guiding concepts

Inclusion of material aspects and conceptualising change

Brings social dimension back in, shift of focus

Insight into what people do in relation to what makes sense

 not in a rational sense



Thank you very much for your attention!

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