Memorising Mobilities: measuring mobility practices over the life course

Mary Greene, Henrike Rau, Frances Fahy
National University of Ireland, Galway
mary.greene@nuigalway.ie

SCORAI (Europe) Sustainable Consumption and Production Workshop
Royal Society of Arts, London
Sept 30 - Oct 1 2014
Outline

- Consumption and the Life-course
- Researching transitions in practice – gaps & opportunities
- Development of methodology – a biographic, life-course, practice-oriented approach
- Preliminary findings
- Summary/reflections

www.consensus.ie
Consumption and Life-course

- Understanding of dynamics of ordinary consumption essential for developments in SC research and practice
- To date, lack of meaningful attention to temporality, dynamism, longitudinal processes in consumption research
- Linkages between consumption, everyday life & processes of transformation across the life-course poorly understood
Researching Transitions in Practices

- Shift towards social practice perspectives & approaches in SC research

- Social practices as unit of analysis (cf. Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984; Shatzki 1996, 2001)

- Consumption as an outcome of social practice (cf. Warde, 2005)

- Understanding of the dynamics of routine, ordinary consumption practice (entity vs performance)
Gaps & Opportunities

- But need for greater attention to **temporality** (cf. Rau and Edmondson, 2013; Southerton, 2013)

- Dynamics of entity $\leftrightarrow$ practice (Shove et al. 2009)

- Rehabilitating notions of culture, **human agency, subjectivity** in social practice perspectives (cf. Spaargaren, 2013; Sayer, 2013) – understanding “practitioners” biographies and careers
Researching Transitions in Practices

- What are the **methodological implications** of adopting temporally-oriented inquiry in consumption research?

- Potential for **cross fertilisation** between social practice perspectives and other temporally-oriented approaches for conceptualising social change?
Researching transitions in practice
Cross fertilising perspectives and approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Course Theory</th>
<th>Social Practice Perspectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Structure ← → Agency</td>
<td>✓ Structure ← → Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Context</td>
<td>✓ Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Temporality</td>
<td>✓ Temporality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Lived experience</td>
<td>✓ Lived Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Focus on individuals-in – society</td>
<td>✓ Focus on social-material practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concepts
- Methodological tools

- Methodological tools
Life-course dynamics in consumption (mobility) practice

Conceptualising the life-course as a “social constraint” that serves to structure the contexts and organisations of everyday life and consumption practice over time (cf. Scheiner, 2007; Southerton, 2013)
Time-centred concepts & methods

- Drawing attention to trajectories and careers of practice in people’s lives

- Identifying periods of change/stability - changing social roles, key events, turning points, transitions and milestones in people’s lives

- Exploring how these wider biographic contexts intersect with and shape dynamics in everyday life and consumption practice over time
Mobility Biographies: A biographic, life-course, practice-oriented methodology

- Focus on social practice - mobility practice careers
- Emphasising the lived experiences of individuals, as skilled embodied agents in their recursive engagement with and performance of mobility practices over biographical time
- Connecting individual’s biographies (practitioner biographies) to wider history of practices
Analytical Steps/Aims

- **Describing** the development of mobility practice – *How* does practices change over time?
  - Tracing mobility careers & trajectories
  - Practitioners’ biographies
  - Embedded in a history of practice approach

- **Explaining** stability and change in mobility practice careers over time – *Why* does practice change over time?

- **Evaluating** the multi-methodological approach
Stage 1: Desk study of history of practice

Stage 2: Problem Centred Interviews
- Biographic context & practice careers

Stage 3: Daily practice diary
(2 weeks)

Stage 4: Walking house tour & further exploration of practice biographies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection phase</th>
<th>Overview of material generated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1:</strong> History of practice desk study</td>
<td>• Key milestones &amp; transitions in broader mobility, policy, structural and cultural contexts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Phase 2** | • “Practitioner” life history & biography  
• Practice careers and trajectories  
• Participatory timeline; practice biography graphs  
• Postscript, reflective field notes |
| *Life Path, Daily Path* | |
| **Phase 3:** Ethnography (2 weeks) | • Material, temporal, social and spatial contexts of everyday practice |
| *Daily Path* | |
| **Phase 4:** Follow up interview & house tour | • Further reflections on life-course transitions in practice  
• Contexts, meanings, mechanisms/processes associated with transitions/turning points/milestones  
• House Tour – multi-sensory data on contexts of domestic practice |
| *Life Path, Daily Path* | |
PRELIMINARY RESULTS
## Car use across life course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Car use stage</th>
<th>Childhood</th>
<th>18-24 years</th>
<th>24 – 38 years</th>
<th>38 – 53 years</th>
<th>53 years – now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practicalities</strong></td>
<td>Couldn’t drive</td>
<td>Learned to drive and passed test at 18 years of age. Drove parents’ car occasionally</td>
<td>Lived in Mullingar so often drove to Galway shopping. Sold car in 1990 and shared one</td>
<td>Got my own car in 1996. Some travelling at weekends but mostly around Galway City</td>
<td>Moved to Headford – mileage greatly increased. Average 60 km four days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feelings, opinions, values</strong></td>
<td>My boyfriend already had test so often drove to dates etc. Got first car when 24</td>
<td>Family car</td>
<td>Did a lot of mileage when examining around Ireland</td>
<td>Driving a pain but love living in the country</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Mobility milestones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life stage</th>
<th>Car use</th>
<th>Mobility milestones</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>Drivers licence + first car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>Selling own car + use of family car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 - 38 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>Own car again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38 - 53 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>Long-distance commuting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53 years – now</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The graph shows a timeline of car use across different life stages, with milestones indicating significant changes in mobility.
Social and policy context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Car use</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>Child-hood</td>
<td>18-24 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMNs</td>
<td>Drivers licence + first car</td>
<td>Selling own car + use of family car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and policy context</td>
<td>Rise in car use and regularisation</td>
<td>Emergence of ‘car culture’ in Ireland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

• Mobility → key consumption practice that changes across life course

• Turning points (‘mobility milestones’) reflect major life events

• Individual mobility biographies linked to wider social and policy context

• Opportunities and challenges of life-course-centred mobility research
Discussion/Reflections

• Broader challenges of qualitative, retrospective methodologies

• Can interviews account for “doings” as well as “sayings”?

• Value of multi-method, combined Life History practice approach

• Methodology as intervention