Is it possible to gain legitimacy for policies of less and slower mobility?

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Contents

1. Doughnut economics
2. Less and slower mobility
3. Lack of legitimacy
4. Catalytic policy instruments
5. Positive visions
6. Conclusions
1. Doughnut economics

Point of departure in Doughnut Economics (Raworth, 2012, 2018)

The doughnut combines an ecological ceiling of nine planetary boundaries with a social foundation of 12 human needs.

Outside the ecological ceiling lies serious planetary challenges.

Inside the border of the social foundation lies human distress and suffering.

Within the two rings, we find the doughnut. That is the space where all needs can be fulfilled with the resources available at the planet (Raworth, 2012, 2018).
Implications for living

Humankind has to reduce our use of space and resources and limit pollution.

More fair and equal distribution of wealth is needed.

In particular in rich countries this impacts on residence, consumption, food, travel etc

This goes for the cities, too.

“There is a very clear and well-recognized detrimental relationship between the standard of living and the ecological footprint” (United Nations, 2019)
No countries are in the top left quadrant where basic human needs and sustainable resource use are more in balance.
2. Less and slower mobility

What are the implications for passenger transport and mobility?

United Nations has advocated for the avoid-shift-improve approach to achieving sustainable mobility:

- Avoid = reducing transport
- Shift = modal shift to less polluting modes
- Improve = Technological improvements


All of these strategies have to be applied
Believing that new, shared modes will help us out

"In order to become a serious competitor to private motorized transport, non-private motorized mobility modes must reach a level of service as high as that provided by private cars, which means providing a transport solution to people at anytime, from anywhere to everywhere” (Audouin & Finger, 2018 on MaaS)

A point of departure that is also sometimes repeated by other research colleagues, authorities etc.
Dis-believing that new shared modes will help us out

Audouin & Finger’s vision – I think - is only possible in the centre of big cities, where it is difficult for the car to compete, and in particular favourable relations between cities.

On the outskirts of big cities, in smaller towns, in most relations between cities, and in international relations, alternatives cannot compete in speed, comfort (and price) with travelling by car and air.

(Liao et al, 2020; Saunier & Chabin, 2020)
What are the consequences?

New technical solutions are extremely important, but not sufficient. To the current focus on improve, also shift and avoid has to be added.

The consequence:

A future mobility system within planetary and social boundaries, for most people in the Global North will be less and slower.

**Less means:**
- Shorter trips
- Fewer trips

**Slower means:**
- Using the train rather than air transport
- Using walking, cycling and public transport rather than the car
- And when using the car, going on lower speed.
3. Lack of legitimacy

Gaining public support and legitimacy for a policy of less and slower mobility is very difficult.

It is hard to gain policy legitimacy for measures reducing and slowing down transport

And why is it so?
What is legitimacy?

Within political science, legitimacy is a big field of research.

A policy is legitimate "when people in general believe it to be so, and openly acts so as to reinforce this notion" (Matti, 2009).

Legitimacy can be gained because policy is rooted in the values and norms in the population

Legitimacy can be gained by the way that government chooses to craft and execute a policy
We are used to the high mobility society...

The global middle class find that the previous one or two generations have gained from the high mobility or hyper mobility society with fast, comfortable and cheap mobility.

We are used to long commuting distances, visit friends and family easily all over the world.

The global middle class perhaps consisting of about 4 billion humans in Asia, Latin America, Africa, North America and Europe

In Denmark we often quote H.C. Andersen: To travel is to live (“at rejse er at leve”)
The politicians...

... know that many people find we have gained from increased mobility options.

Therefore, most politicians are reluctant to introduce policy instruments limiting and slowing down mobility options.

They expect protests like *Mouvement des gilets jaunes* (France), *Bränsleupproret* (Sweden), *Folkeaksjonen nei til mer bompenge* (Norway) etc.

... and I find their concern is real.
4. Catalytic policy instruments

Catalytic policy instruments are suited to gain legitimacy for policies of less and slower mobility.

"Catalytic" refers to the ability of the instrument to provide support for introducing another transformative policy instrument. E.g. support for introduction of congestion charging or support for limiting car access.
How to gain legitimacy for policies reducing and slowing down mobility?

A number of catalytic policy instruments are relevant (Howlett, 2008; Stark & Yates (2021)

• Justice and equity in focus of solutions – (Martens, 2017; Mullen & Marsden, 2016)

• Policy packages that combine advantages and disadvantages (Givoni, 2014; Thaller et al., 2021)

• Citizen participation (Hansson et al., 2023; Sørensen & Isaksson, 2021)

• Positive visions about the better life with less and slower mobility (Hedrén, 2009; McPhearson et al., 2016)
5. Positive visions

Visions about the *better* life with less and slower mobility are needed because

The believe that climate disasters will cause political action and create legitimacy seems mostly to have failed
Catastrophes are not sufficient

Despite – among other things

• Canada experienced in 2023 the worst forest fire ever of about 185,000 km²

• Very serious drought at the Horn of Africa is continuing, affecting millions of people

• Very heavy rainfall, typhoons and landslides in China

... climate does not seem to gain much more attention at the political agenda nationally or internationally.

It is not a core topic in general elections.

The believe that climate catastrophes will make citizens require action, seems to be wrong (Latour & Schultz, 2022)
Dystopian visions can cause apathy

"Dystopian visions can cause apathy, lack of empowerment, intransigence, and stymie efforts about how to transform [...] However, positive visioning can help guide decision-making for plausible, desirable, and sustainable urban futures”

(McPhearson et al., 2016, p. 33)
Content of visions for less and slower mobility

• Attractive, livable cities, towns, and villages with less traffic, more shops and services

• Better health: less cardiovascular diseases (noise), less cancer and less respiratory disease (air pollution) and more exercises (cycle, walk)

• More beautiful, more silent, less noisy, less harmed landscapes and nature

• More relaxing, less stressful lives at a lower pace – speed in transport (and life) is reduced

• More and closer neighbourhood relations

• Slow travelling opens for other aspects: reading, thinking, watching, making friends – we should not only see travel time as wasted time
Who should engage in this?

Visioning could be among the roles of

• politicians

• authors, painters, artists (theatre and movies)

• think tanks

• NGOs

...and researchers

McPhearson et al. (2016):

“Researchers have an important role in creating visions” (p. 39)
6. Conclusions

- A future within planetary and social boundaries implies for the global middle class less and slower mobility
- However, the global middle class is used to fast, comfortable and cheap mobility
- ...which makes it hard to gain legitimacy for policies of less and slower mobility
- But catalytic policy instruments might help to gain legitimacy
- One such catalytic policy instrument is positive visions of life with less and slower mobility

Conscious and deliberate use of known and new catalytic policy instruments can increase the possibility to gain legitimacy for policies of less and slower mobility
Thanks for listening

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