



International Cycling Conference ICC 2017 – Mannheim-Germany

Social Practices and the Importance of Context

Prof. Dr. Peter Cox and Heike Bunte

Agenda

- 1. The (academic) dilemma of theories of social practices**
- 2. How to overcome the trap or can't we?**
- 3. Similar arguments lead to different outcomes**
- 4. Campaigning nowadays**
- 5. Discussion**
- 6. References**

1. The (academic) dilemma of theories of social practices

- Social practices: collected habits and repeated behaviours (= driving daily to work by car / typical bike racing incl. white socks and helmet / cycling campaigns incl. incorporated, distinctive articulations = „typical greenish cycling activism“)
- Practices comprise **meanings, competencies, perceptions** and **materials**, all entangled into a cultural / historical context
- We cannot assume that understanding a practice better can instantly transfer to effective policy advice or: positive results for cycling
- Survey on 100 papers analysing problems and intervention for cycle transport
- Main assumption / argument(s): promotional activity and research into changing behaviour is problematic: lack of analysis of social & political forces

Comparative case studies of 1970s activism in Europe - same time, same topic, but different outcomes - the oil crisis as a changer



Picture 3



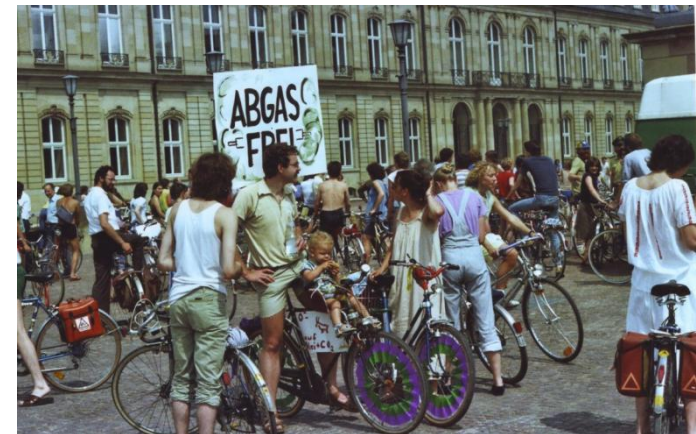
Picture 6



Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6a

2. How to overcome the trap or can't we?

- Change is not simply a product of correct technique or the best argument
 - the same materials and competencies can be coupled with different meanings, depending on the relation with other practices
 - Comparative case studies of 1970s activism demonstrate that similar actions and arguments had different outcomes



Picture 1



Picture 2

3. Similar arguments might lead to different outcomes

- Germany

Governmental level:

Forcing infrastructural separation between car and bike traffic

Civic participation level:

Building cycling advocacy for better cycling and living conditions in cities

- UK

Governmental level

Bike as a „carriage“ with (technically) „same right“ on roads

Civic participation level:

Building cycling advocacy
For the right to use the road –
equally with cars

Social forces & soft impacts of 1970s social practices - perspectives and meanings



Picture 7



Picture 8



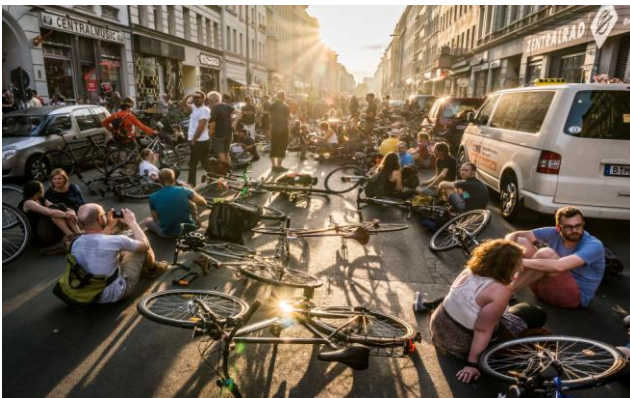
Picture 9



Picture 10

4. Nowadays: national cycling plans versus professional cycling advocacy Case: Berlin Bicycle Referendum and Bicycle Traffic Law

- Social cycling campaigning
Berlin Bicycle Referendum
- Distinct cycling campaigning with changing roles -
case of Berlin Bicycle Referendum



Picture 11



Picture 12



Picture 13



Picture 14

5. Discussion

- Social Practice theories trouble ideas about change as a linear process
- More knowledge is not a magic solution, but without study we cannot begin the process
- Academic research is a necessary but not always a sufficient condition
Research may not always produce policy-friendly answers
- Understanding change is a contested field
- There are no easy answers - context is more important than the design of the intervention (i.e.: different success stories of national cycling plans and their effects / non-effects on modal share)
- For example: Politicization/fixation on the „bike“ (= button: „bikes don't stink“/
addressing social consternation / concentration on individualisation) vs.
„normal instrument“ for every day life (= NL)

6. References

Literature:

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Thank you for your attention!

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