Social Practices and the Importance of Context

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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

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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
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
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
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
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“/adressing social consternation / concentration on individualisation) vs. „normal instrument“ for every day life (= NL)
6. References

Literature:

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