

Sven Kesselring, 14.09.2020

## **Introduction “Sustainable Mobility in Metropolitan Regions – 10 years of research”**

“Changing unsustainable mobility cultures” – what a mouthful, you might say!

And indeed, the title of our final conference is ambitious. Actually, it even needed an exclamation mark. But of course, we are aware that we won't be able to fulfill all the expectations attached to the conference title.

“Changing unsustainable mobility cultures” rather tells quite a story about the underlying rationale of the PhD program. And about the young scholars who have been working hard throughout the past decade. Today, we are celebrating and presenting mainly the work of the second phase of the program. But in fact, there was a first phase with a group of students at least as ambitious as the one of the second phase.

Since 2011 the Hans Böckler Foundation, the second biggest foundation supporting students in Germany and closely working with the trade unions, generously supported this group of 17 funded PhDs plus about 10 associated PhD scholars.

Why did they do this? And why did we apply for this project?

Seen from today, the reasons are pretty clear:

1. Let's take the German automobile summit of last week as an indicator. Again, the German government and the Germany-based automotive industry sat together and debated the future of the sector and the ongoing present and pressuring situation of the whole industrial sector – let's call it a crisis! The automotive industry is in turmoil, the future of the sector is at stake. And with it thousands of jobs and livelihoods, of production and supply systems and chains, of the whole system of automobility with its wide-spread national and global networks, power relations and dependencies!

2. We have an open discussion on the future of sustainable mobility in Germany and beyond. This is connected with topics such as electric mobility, autonomous driving, shared mobility, advanced production systems, urban policies, the restructuration of urban space, the re-configuration of priorities for pedestrians, bikes, scooters, kick-scooters and –boards, and finally and probably most political: cars, trucks and busses.
3. Accelerated by the ongoing new normality of COVID-19 in the cities we see a new speed in urban mobility policies, pop-up bike lanes and changing priorities on the streets.
4. We are talking about mobilities instead of mobility, we prefer the terms mobility and mobilities instead of transport. Why? There is no such thing as mobility or transport alone, it is always connected to political, economic and social processes with significant impact on the layout of countries, urban and everyday life. At the time when we applied for the PhD program talking about mobilities produced significant question marks on people’s faces. Today, against the backdrop of COVID-19 many aspects are clearer:
  - ➔ there are at least physical, digital, social and cultural mobilities that play an eminent role in conceptualizing and theorizing sustainable mobilities in the digital age, COVID-19 and social-ecological transformations of the system of automobility and the car-centered city.
5. Changing unsustainable mobility cultures: after a decade of research and debate we can clearly say: there is hope. The transformation from a historically grown, globally networked and spread system of automobility to a system of multiple mobilities of interconnected modes of transport, the Internet of Things and automated forms of mobility is in the making. As Johannes Weyer puts it: we are in the middle of a rising real-time society. 2
6. But at the same time we are in the middle of a rising mobile risk society! Current transformations of the industrial basis of modern societies – Australian sociologist Anthony Elliott calls artificial intelligence a “technological tsunami”. It is changing the fundamentals of how we produce, work, live, maintain intimate relations, love, share and experience solidarity and community and so forth. The current

transformations of the automotive industry represent the rise of the mobile risk society in a nutshell. Taken for granted securities, certainties and reliable futures are eroding. Where my university is based, in Baden-Württemberg, the wider Stuttgart region, companies like Daimler and Porsche guaranteed stable income, wealth and progress for almost a century. Today, and this brings me back to the automobile summit of the German government last week, nobody really knows if the automotive industry still represents the future of mobility and of sustainable mobility in particular. At least, the German transport minister's statement last week, the industry needs a purchase flatrate because the produced cars with combustion engines need to get of the yard ("vom Hof") sounded pretty outdated. It sounds like advertising slow-sellers to the customers.

Please, do not get me wrong: I am not saying that we have the answers or that two phases of a PhD program like mobil.LAB is enough to generate the concepts, the ideas and the innovations to move out of this crisis. But in fact, we, and the PhD students in the first place, have produced quite strong contributions and built a pool of expertise in many of the fields and questions relevant for cities, the industry, the trade unions and works councils, local, national and transnational governments and policy networks, NGOs and so forth. The New Green Deal of the European Union as well as the social-ecological transformation in Germany call for detailed and competent analyses like the one you will see and hear, today.

But, excuse me, "What was the question, again?", you might ask.

The underlying or overarching question for all the individual projects, for the common work in mobil.LAB, the discussions and publications along with the program, was:

How can we describe, analyze and understand the social-ecological transformations towards sustainable mobility in cities, regions, with stakeholders and in people's private lives?

In line with Ulrich Beck's risk society theory the research presented today gives very strong evidence for a process of reflexive modernization and a reflexive

governance and transformation of the system of automobility. It shows data of a process not yet in full shape – of course – but towards a still to come, still to materialize and still to stabilize “system of multiple mobilities”.

Be it the research on connected mobilities, on automated driving, non-commercial carsharing, the Uberization of semi-public transport, the social inequalities of micro-mobilities, the rise of co-working and co-living mobile lifestyles, new mobility services in general, Mobility-as-a Service and so forth, all these aspects and individual research projects and topics tell a common story:

**The transformation of the system of automobility is unstoppable. The digitalization of public, private and public-private mobility and the social practices of individuals, customers and citizens are about to change significantly and for good.**

All attempts to re-organize cities, industries, and markets along with the principles of car-centricity are hopeless and ignore the power of the ongoing transformative processes. Instead, what we need and enforce is a politics if **riding the tiger**, as Anthony Giddens called it once. We need to accelerate and radicalize the social-ecological transformation of cities, regions and industrial production systems.

We all know Polanyi’s seminal work on the rise of capitalism called The Great Transformation. Economist Uwe Schneidewind, the current president of the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, gave the same title to his book on the social-ecological transformation. Claus Dörre and Hartmut Rosa added a big question mark to the title and ask if the great transformation seriously happens and can succeed.

And this is exactly where we and the PhD students put our fingers into:

- Instead of trying to solve these questions mainly theoretically and epistemologically you will hear a number of presentations and get examples of how the social-ecological transformation of mobility and transport happens, fails, and gets developed, propelled and hindered.
- You will learn about the uncertainties, insecurities, and risks of developing sustainable mobility cultures and get inspired and motivated

of how it happens and which paths stakeholders travel to get to the goals.

- Today, you will see critical research that doesn't buy into taken-for-granted assumptions. You will hear from scholars working in the very best tradition of the Hans-Böckler-Foundation and who go beyond mainstream and take innovative approaches and apply unconventional strategies to understand the social-ecological transformation of mobility and transport.
- Many of the examples you will hear today, will focus on the two regions of Munich and Stuttgart. But Munich and Stuttgart can be everywhere! New mobility concepts are not local nor global. They are **glocal**. They are being discussed all over the world. The companies involved operate globally and the concepts travel worldwide. But they materialize in specific places, are being put into specific contexts and need to get along with different cultures. These two cities/regions stand for global phenomena in many ways. But we know that Stuttgart and Seoul, Munich and Mumbai are not the same. Even if the concepts are the same, they need translation, contextual and cultural adaptation and embedding.

I am looking forward to listening together with you to many exciting, innovative and critical presentations throughout this day. It was a great pleasure to work together with such a good, highly committed and engaged group of people for such a long time. I am glad to see the outcomes and I am even more looking forward to learn about the impacts and the follow-up projects in the future.

Before I am handing over to the next speaker, let me thank a few people and organizations:

- In the first place the PhDs and specifically those who worked closely with me for quite some years and I had the pleasure to supervise their PhDs.
- Special thank goes to Helen Carter, who was setting up the second phase together with us and who came extra from Aalborg, Denmark, to work with us. I also thank Dominic Villeneuve and cat Silva for their work as coordinators.

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