

# Mobility Biographies

Studying travel and transport behaviour in the context of the life course

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**Step Change ... a collaboration between transport studies researchers (ITS, Leeds) and qualitative social scientists (CRESC, Manchester)**



# Step Change : the panel study

- 5 year qualitative longitudinal study
- 4 areas in Leeds and 4 in Manchester
- panel of 240 people
- repeat contact annually for 4 years

# Contexts

- **Transport planning and modelling**
- **Transport Studies**
- **Mobilities paradigm**

# Transport Modelling

- Short term (e.g. day to day traffic dynamics)
- Longer term (20 -30 years forecasting)
- Relies on assumption of fixed behaviour
- 'Unobservable factors' (values, beliefs, etc) remain constant over time
- Change modelled on extrapolation of present observable factors (e.g. economics, demographics) from the present or from past trends

# Mobility Biographies Approach

## In transport studies:

- to add depth to cross-sectional approaches
- through consideration of panel studies and/or retrospective interviews
- e.g. See Lanzendorf; Scheiner; Axhausen; Frändberg

**“From this viewpoint people’s behaviour can be explained by its continuity over life time and by specific events that involve major changes in other domains of life. The term ‘mobility biography’, then, refers to the total of an individual’s longitudinal trajectories in the mobility domain and assumes that events in these trajectories exist or, put in other words, that at certain moments in individual’s life the daily travel patterns, the car ownership or other mobility characteristics change to an important degree.” (Lanzendorf 2003)**

# Mobility Biographies Approach

Key concerns:

- Reliability
- Causality
- Time

# Wave 1: 2011-2012

- Travel diary
- Residential and migration history
- Life history
- Life diagram and Timeline
- Last week, travel and activities

## A Walker: Laura (Female, 40, White British)

- But I walk nearly everywhere...
- But for me, you know, as long as like my legs are walkable, I will walk.
- But I'm one who walks [laughs] I've always been a keep fit fanatic as well so I try and look after myself by walking everywhere I go.
- So we always used to walk. Yeah, always. Always been a walker.
- Yeah, I mean I can't afford a car, it's too expensive. I'd sooner--, for what it costs to keep a car you might as well catch a bus or a Metro, you know, it's just as [inaudible 5:50] but the majority of the time I do walk wherever I go.

- **'I can't remember from being a kid, there's no way I can talk about being a kid. I can't remember it'.**
- **'I say that to my mum, I can't remember from being four, I can't remember from being ten, I can't remember from being anything of being a kid. I can't.'**
- **'You know, I can't even remember my dad, you see my dad's not with us anymore, my dad died 18 months ago.'**

'I went to school, I went to college, did a diploma for four years in computer studies from 2001 to 2005 here at Abraham Moss on Cheetham village. I did a course there for four years. Went to college and then after that did an administration NVQ admin course for about a year, [laughs] it's not things I think about, I don't think of the past, I think of the future. I don't live in the past. [...] I went to school, I left school, couldn't get a job at 17, and if I can remember. You go in the Jobcentre, there's nothing there, they're asking for people who are older, 20-odd, and then when I got to 20-odd they were asking for people at 17 because they were asking for less pay. Right. So that's one thing. Then I'm looking for a job, I used to work in a butcher's, Saturday jobs, things like that. Erm, trying to think. Left there, just generally couldn't get a job. I went back to college, did a typing course 'cause I didn't do typing at school. Went back to college, did a typing course, learnt to type, NVQ in typing I **think** or diplomas, stuff like that. If I can remember that must have been in my 20--, well it must have been 'cause I left school at 16. It must have been 18 to 20. I went back to college. I've always been in college, I've always done something to teach meself something. That was about 20. I went to get a job in 19--, how old was I? 1991, erm, never been in work very much because work's been really hard to get. Saturday jobs or butchery, I used to work in butcher's and markets in [inaudible 17:25]. And eventually I got a job in Birthdays in Manchester. So that was where I worked for seven years. After that I left there in 1998 with depression, never went back to work, I left after a year. From there I went back to college. So I did my--, that's when I decided I wanted--, computers were coming in and typing wasn't in so much. So I went back to college for four years and I did a diploma then. And then from there I worked for--, I got a job eventually with DWP in 2003. After I left or it must have been while I was working, doing still the course. And I was there for year. Got sciatica. I left the job because they didn't renew my contract. Six months later I was diagnosed with breast cancer and that's up to the present day. Not much going on in my life, darling [laughs].'

**'But the only thing I can really remember is this last--, that's been very hard for me is at this last six, seven years, properly, because I've been through cancer.'**

# 'Conclusions'

- Qualitative panel study offers us a way of making an intervention into existing paradigms around mobilities
- Temporality is deliberately designed into the research process to make change the focus of analytic attention
- Multiple temporalities within as well as between methods
- BUT how to redefining the transport 'model' to accommodate?

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[www.changing-mobilities.org.uk](http://www.changing-mobilities.org.uk)

