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LIFE-STYLE AND MOBILITY

by Marie Thynell

8.1 Introduction

As is indicated above, it seems necessary to introduce questions of life-style and life-style changes into the discussion of sustainable transport in the Baltic region. This confronts us with some theoretical difficulties. To use and define the concept of 'life-style' is a controversial matter. Knowledge of how life-styles change or are changed is far from satisfactory.

In this chapter, three aspects of the issue of life-style and transport will be dealt with. A discussion of how to define the concept of 'life-style' is presented first. It is followed by some observations on the occurrence of this concept in transport policy and a discussion of actually possible future life-style changes in the field of transport. For the sake of clarity, there is then a section on the distinction between the concepts of 'behaviour' and 'life-style'. The chapter ends with some conclusions about the role of life-style changes in transport policy.

8.2 The concept of life-style

Life-style can be defined at three different levels: countries or cultures, classes or social groups, and individuals. Car-use can be associated with all these levels. In the USA, the car is an integrated part of 'the American way of living'. In poor countries, ownership of a car is a common way of demonstrating one's privileged position in society. In a country like Sweden, some people use their cars to express their personality, for example, by selecting a special car type or by providing the vehicle with special equipment, etc.

"We are talking about challenging one of the major social forces of our time, the increased reliance on personal and private mobility. The private car has given a degree of control over time and space, and quantities of movement, which are historically unprecedented. Behind these trends is not only the convenience of moving from A to B, but also questions of life-style, status, psychology, sociology, money and power." (P. B. Goodwin)

Life-style also expresses values. The role of values in relation to the concept of life-style is discussed by Lööv and Miegel (1989): "According to most theories of life-style, one of the basic features of life-styles is that, one way or another, they are expressions of human values. Since life-styles are often distinguished, however, on the basis of consumption, taste and preferences in different areas, they are often distinguished and identified on the basis of aesthetic and material values."

Aesthetic and material values are, no doubt, important parts of life-style. As expressions of human values, life-styles should in reality be regarded as containing "four different types of values, namely, ethical or moral values, religious and metaphysical values, material values and aesthetic values." (1989).

What about ethical and metaphysical values? In most life-style theories they are simply neglect-

ed. One reason for this may be that ethical and religious/metaphysical values are not as easily distinguished, since they are not as visibly expressed as are the aesthetic and material ones.

Nevertheless Lööv and Miegel maintain that they are equally important determinants of individual life-style. They are the values that lie behind the individual's subjectively determined efforts and aspirations. They form the basis of the individual's judgement of what is right or wrong, what is good or bad, etc. They are conditioned by our culture and they influence our perception of problems and possibilities. We cannot change these values like we can change, for example, our means of transportation. They are a part of the social context.

These ethical and metaphysical values are sometimes expressed in aesthetic and material forms. Individual taste, therefore, may express not only the individual's position in the social structure but also, and more

Many social scientists today maintain that the present time should be seen as "the second crisis of modernity". If this interpretation of the historical process is more widely accepted, it is possible that there can be substantial changes in the general public's attitudes and behaviour. Such changes could result in a redefinition of the role of the private car in transportation systems and help to solve the negative consequences of the increased individual use of the private car.

Four families – four life-styles

In an unpublished Danish study, four different imagined Danish families have been compared as to their energy use and emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂), sulphur dioxide (SO₂), and nitrous oxides (NO_x). The estimates have been made by means of life cycle assessment. This means that the total environmental impact of a certain activity is calculated from resource extraction, through manufacturing and use, to final disposal of waste products. (It is noticeable in this calculation that of the carbon dioxide from car driving less than 50 % originates from driving the car). The impact of their transportation activities (not the total impact of their lifestyles) is shown below.

The four families consist all of two adults and two children. The adults commute to their workplaces, in the case of family D consciously chosen at short distances (which might be seen as somewhat unrealistic) and the children to their schools. All families live in private houses of different types.

(from P. Christensen, Impact of different lifestyles on the environment, Department of Planning and Development, University of Aalborg 1995)



Family A is a Danish family with a high mobile American lifestyle.

Family A has two cars, one driven 25,000 km/yr and one 15,000 km/yr.



Family B is an average Danish family with a lifestyle which may be described as modern in a cultural sense.

Family B has one car, driven 15,000 km/yr and four bicycles.

Transport modes	Primary energy MJ/yr	CO ₂ kg/yr	SO ₂ kg/yr	NO _x kg/yr
first car	137 350	11 840	7	18
second car	82 410	7 104	4	11
TOTAL	219 760	18 944	11	29

Transport modes	Primary energy MJ/yr	CO ₂ kg/yr	SO ₂ kg/yr	NO _x kg/yr
the car	82 410	7 104	4	11
4 bicycles	688	-	-	-
TOTAL	83 098	7 104	4	11

importantly as far as life-styles are concerned, his or her personal and subjective efforts, aspirations, wishes and desires, in short, a number of very subtle phenomena which are important components of a person's life-style. "The basic assumption is that individual transport behaviour is embedded in, and significantly directed by, the institutions, organisations and generally adopted life-styles in society" as formulated by two Dutch psychologists, Vlek and Steg (1996).

8.3 Life-style and transport policies

During the last few years, the idea that changes in life-style are a necessary element in any policy directed towards sustainable transport has been put forward in different contexts. In the OECD report 'Urban Transport and Sustainable Development' (1995), it is for instance said that : "life-styles and technology of western countries and the direction of the development in

the rest of the world will have to change. The logical place in which to start promoting such changes is in cities".

In a study on the possibility of creating a transport system adapted to the constraints of the environment, a committee led by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency in 1995 takes the same view: "If the measures will be accepted, society has to be partly characterized by new values. Human health and a non-polluted environment will be

What is life-style?

There is no consensus among social scientists about how to define the concept of 'life-style'. Two Swedish researchers of cultural sociology, T.Lööf and F. Miegel, have, however, suggested a definition which seems to fit well in this context. They claim that the concept of life-style could be determined and analysed on three different levels:

- the structural level: at this macro level we look for differences between various countries, societies or cultures, as well as for differences evolving within one society over time; all basic differences between, for instance, Islamic and western societies, agrarian and industrial societies, religious and secular cultures are to be found at this level

- the positional level: at this aggregated level we analyze differences between large categories, classes, population strata, social groups, etc. existing in a given society or culture; such large groups are characterized and basically distinguished according to their different positions within the given social structure; it is possible to identify a number of differences between, say, status groups, social classes, men and women, different age categories, etc.
- the individual level: this micro level deals with the individual and we try to understand differences between how individuals face reality and live their lives, how they develop and express their personality and identity, how they relate to other individuals and groups of individuals, etc.



Family C has a modest green lifestyle.

Family C has four bicycles and uses public transport, 15,000 km/yr. (N.B. the Danish trains are normally driven by diesel).



Family D is a Danish family with a radical green lifestyle.

Family D uses only their four bicycles. The differences in resource use and environmental impact is, as can be seen, enormous.

Transport modes	Primary energy MJ/yr	CO ₂ kg/yr	SO ₂ kg/yr	NO _x kg/yr
train	6 621	480	0.5	7
4 bicycles	688	-	-	-
TOTAL	7 309	480	0.5	7

Transport modes	Primary energy MJ/yr	CO ₂ kg/yr	SO ₂ kg/yr	NO _x kg/yr
4 bicycles	688	-	-	-
TOTAL	688	-	-	-

estimated higher than today and life-style will have been changed“ (my translation).

Conscious changes of life-style may be associated with the reflexive ability of the individual. The sociologist A. Giddens writes about the reflexive projection of the self. New types of social movement based upon what Giddens has called 'life politics' have addressed problems associated with the environment. This might be a first step towards a reorientation of material and ethical values in

the future. The structuring of society takes place in daily events and in an individual's life-planning.

Modern men and women have to construct and reconstruct their meaning of life permanently. How does this relate to changes in personal mobility? I think that the present time should be regarded as a critical stage in the modernization process. Many social scientists today maintain that the present time should be seen as 'the second crisis of moder-

nity'. If this interpretation of the historical process is more widely accepted, it is possible that there can be substantial changes in the general public's attitudes and behaviour. Such changes could result in a redefinition of the role of the private car in transportation systems and help to solve the negative consequences of increased individual use of the private car.

8.4 Life-style and behaviour

For the sake of clarity, it is important here to make a distinction between the concept of 'behaviour' and the concept of 'life-style'. The reason is that political authorities often try to influence the behaviour of road-users. The measures they have used have been laws and regulations but also other political instruments such as economic incentives and information campaigns (propaganda). But a conscious change in one's individual life-style cannot be the result of external pressure.

The individual himself/herself creates his/her individual life-style within the current social context. Life-style is expressed by a complex set of actions based upon his/her values. This pattern of activity can be studied in terms of attitudes, behaviour and consumption. In the field of transportation, this refers to the level of mobility and the prevailing consumption of transport in other words the preferred mode of transport chosen, for example, car, bike or public transport.

Increased levels of mobility and car use can be seen as aspects of modern life. If there is a crisis of modernity today, mainstream development may have to be re-defined. If so, increased mobility

and increased car use may lose its present cultural value.

More fundamental changes in transport behaviour should therefore be discussed in terms of life-style changes and not only in terms of changed behaviour.

8.5 Life-style changes in the context of transport policy

Life-style changes are no substitute for the other measures in transport policy mentioned above. In a combined strategy able to solve the energy and environmental problems associated with car-use, it seems necessary, however, to include life-style changes. Many ordinary car-users and their organizations react today in a negative way to any attempt to redefine the role of the car in their lives. The British transportation researcher P. B. Goodwin has described such reactions in a way worth quoting: "We are talking about challenging one of the major social forces of our time, the increased reliance on personal and private mobility. The private car has given a degree of control over time and space, and quantities of movement, which are historically unprecedented. Behind these trends is not only the convenience

of moving from A to B, but also questions of life-style, status, psychology, sociology, money and power" (1994:8).

In less-developed countries and in countries with rapid motorization, we find traditional ways of living and forms of mobility as well as different degrees of westernized life-style. The trend seen today is that the developing countries strive to achieve modern mainstream life-style, its behaviour and values. A life-style that responds and reacts to the crisis of modernity is not yet found on a large scale. The emerging modern life-style is still connected to the extensive use of the private car. The western life-style has adopted the car physically and mentally. The use of the car often has a social and cultural meaning that cannot be replaced by other modes of transport which are more energy-efficient or environment-friendly.

However, in this context, life-styles must be understood as potential forces for social and cultural change. In order to understand these processes it is necessary to account for the way in which culture flows from the macro level to the micro level. Socialization is the generic term for this process. The concept of life-style is here used to describe how culture's three modes of ex-

istence – ideas, actions and artefacts – are being welded together at the individual level.

In the long run, therefore, life-style changes must be regarded as both a necessary and possible part of the development towards sustainable mobility in the Baltic region.

