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Environmental Arguing at a Crossroads? Cultural Diversity in Irish Transport Planning

Introduction

Radical changes in physical mobility have accompanied the modernisation process in Ireland, now one of the most car-dependent countries in the world (McDonald and Nix, 2005; Flynn, 2006; Wickham, 2006). The numbers of cars on the roads have trebled since the 1970s and Irish drivers now average approximately 22,000 kilometres every year, which is almost twice as far than the average European driver and still above the US average of 19,000 km per annum (Hibernian Motoring Report, 2007). This shows that Irish people's everyday social and economic activities have become linked to the motorcar both in practical terms and with regard to *how they envisage their own mobility*. The daily school run exemplifies this trend, with many Irish children now experiencing mobility as inherently car-bound. Moreover, mobility practices have come to represent political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental realities in contemporary Irish society: they express the distribution of power as well as patterns of production and consumption. The role of large, expensive cars and SUVs as status symbols exemplifies this connection between mobility and the structure and functioning of Irish society. Overall, car-dependency is now 'locked in', and moves towards reversing this must deal with a car-based transport system firmly rooted in everyday economic, political and socio-cultural conditions. '[...R]estraining car use is [thus] not just a matter of changing people's "attitudes", it is to some extent about changing life styles' (Wickham, 1999: 1).

Attempts at making mobility habits in Ireland more sustainable must take into account how *practical* people imagine these alterna-

tives to be and what meanings they attach to them. Many Irish people today see walking, cycling and the use of public transport as marginal and impractical, associating them with low-status and countercultural groups such as disadvantaged households, immigrants and those who favour anti-consumerist lifestyles.¹ Even those who currently walk, cycle or use public transport, as do many students at NUI, Galway, envisage that they will drive in the near future (Rau and McDonagh, 2006). This marginalisation of sustainable transport options means that Irish people often find it difficult to *imagine* walking or cycling, still less actually doing it. As a result, the 'value-action-gap' between people's attitudes, that is, their moral and ethical concerns, and their actual behaviour regarding others and the environment is exacerbated here, because people simply cannot see themselves changing their mobility habits. This mismatch between the *practical* and the *sustainable* then prevents transport alternatives from challenging the hegemony of the motorcar.

Car dependency both reflects and shapes cultural conditions in contemporary Ireland, including changes in the allocation of *time* and how people imagine the temporality of their own and others' mobility. The claim that new road infrastructure will shave minutes off people's daily commutes has thus become an all-powerful argument which politicians and road lobbyists use to invalidate conservationist or social-cultural arguments against roads. This suggests that Ireland's transport crisis is partly attributable to *cultural specificities* that have assisted the rapid ascent of the motorcar. But are cultural habits and patterns of social organisation in Ireland *particularly susceptible* to the influence of automobility? If so, what does this mean for people who do not share these mainstream cultural views and practices, in particular when they participate in transport decisions such as oral hearings dealing with transport infrastructure? This chapter will explore powerful culture-specific conventions that regulate Irish people's views of mobility, sometimes so much so that they produce disparate worldviews and mobility-related habits that result in cultural conflict, leading to intractable environmental disputes over road projects.

1 See Horton's (2006) account of the connection between environmentalism and the bicycle based on empirical material from Lancaster (UK).

Environmental arguing in Irish transport disputes is expected to fulfil a particular aim, namely to decide what is and is not '*practical*' (and thus presumed to be beyond cultural interpretation), thereby excluding any moral, ethical, overtly ideological or cultural arguments from the debate. Prevailing *discursive habits and conventions* frequently reinforce this emphasis on the 'practical' and often preclude any meaningful debate about sustainable transport solutions that go beyond this technical-pragmatic framework. This is particularly evident during planning appeals associated with road infrastructure projects such as the oral hearing on the Ballinasloe–Galway section of the Dublin–Galway motorway (henceforth BGOH).²

During the BGOH members of the public and representatives of NGOs opposing the road had difficulty competing with civil servants and technical experts whose institutional background and professional training offered them both the knowledge and rhetorical tools necessary to 'win' the argument within the narrow framework of an oral hearing. The BGOH also showed how both officials and conservationists were expected to focus on technical solutions for the effective management of transport problems, such as measurable reductions in travel time. These arguments were assumed to be located *outside the realm of culture* by those who used them during the BGOH to reconcile the mobility interests of disparate groups, such as road lobbyists, the business community, or tourism representatives. However, this chapter will show how this 'technical-pragmatic' approach does in fact represent *a distinct set of cultural conventions*, including a specific view of time as a valuable resource to be measured and saved, though this may remain implicit. Conflicts over transport projects in Ireland will thus persist and possibly become exacerbated unless those involved in transport planning recognise that they do not only disagree over technical points but hold very different opinions on mobility and time.

The remainder of the chapter will be divided into four sections and will include survey data, ethnographic fieldnotes and documents collected in Galway City and its environs between 2004 and 2006 as

2 This oral hearing took place in 2004–5 and lasted for 27 days, thereby making it one of the longest oral hearings in the history of the state.

part of an interdisciplinary research project at NUI, Galway, Ireland.³ The NUIG Transport Survey 2004 (hereafter NUIG-TS04) utilised a questionnaire with 31 open- and closed-ended items which was administered to a sample of 295 NUIG students and staff in December 2004. This NUIG-TS04 survey data will be complemented with field-notes and excerpts from official documents and newspaper articles, including the An Bord Pleanála inspector's report for the BGOH.

Initially, the focus will be on recent changes in mobility to explore the possible connection between facets of Irish culture, such as an apparent preference for temporal flexibility that prioritises social relationships over clock-based temporal arrangements, and Ireland's fervent embrace of automobility culture (section two). Are there any links between mobility choices and cultural conventions which justify talking about distinct *mobility cultures*? Sections three and four will then illustrate how differences in mobility cultures confound attempts by more powerful groups in Irish society to maintain a unifying and 'culturally neutral' discourse during transport-related disputes. Interestingly, some of their strategies seek to conceal the cultural distinctiveness of particular mobility-related views and those who hold them by emphasising technical-practical and 'rational' aspects and by representing them as *culturally neutral*. This suggests that we need culturally sensitive approaches to understanding (and possibly resolving) such disputes which take into account their more implicit elements. After all, people often see environmental issues such as transport-related threats to the integrity of a scenic area as symbolic of wider issues of justice, power, the state of Irish democracy, or the relationship between state and civil society. The chapter concludes by emphasising the intercultural nature of decision-making processes in the area of transport and mobility and argues for greater intercultural awareness in transport policy making and implementation. It suggests that to avoid or mitigate mobility-related conflicts such as the ongoing M3/Save Tara protest we must look at the adversarial relationship between the Irish state and environmentalists and make the connection to deep-

3 I would like to thank Dr John McDonagh for his collaboration in the project. We are also grateful for financial support received from the NUIG Millennium Fund which covered phase two of the project (2005–6).

seated intercultural differences between stakeholder groups in Irish transport planning and decision-making.

Connecting Time and Space: Traditional and Contemporary Images of Mobility and their Reflection in Everyday Practice

An examination of Ireland's cultural landscape, in particular the diverse *paces of life* in contemporary society, can help explain its recent car dependency: a cultural-historical analysis of past and present mobility practices reveals their connection with cultural and power-related differences. However, these links between culture and mobility have perhaps been exacerbated by Ireland's rapid modernisation in the 20th century. Discrepancies between *representations* of Irish (time) culture, such as images depicting Ireland as a culturally homogenous 'escape' from modern life which shape both tourists' and local people's cultural imaginations, and Irish people's *actual behaviour* which displays great cultural variability, suggest complex interactions between traditional and modern timescapes and mobility. The sight of horse-drawn carriages for tourists getting stuck in one of Galway city's traffic jams during Galway Race Week 2006 exemplifies these disjunctions between representations of Irish culture as pre-modern 'haven of tranquillity' and many Irish people's struggle to meet the demands placed on their time today (author's fieldnotes, 5/08/2006). So are there any characteristics of (representations of) Irish time culture – past and present – that pander to individualised automobility, albeit in a culture-specific way?

Past representations of Irish culture frequently featured the ideal of a slow-paced, bucolic life rooted in locality (McManus, 2005). Pre-Celtic Tiger Ireland was often depicted as relaxed and reliant on traditional modes of transport, a 'lackadaisical pre-modern culture, inhabited by old men and rusting bicycles' (Cronin and O'Connor, 2003: 3). Automobility and other traces of urban life were often ex-

cluded from these images, eclipsing their powerful role as drivers of socio-environmental change. For example, the transition from communal transport solutions (such as walking, cycling, car-sharing between family members and neighbours) to individualised, car-based mobility as part of modernisation has been associated with novel perceptions of time as accelerated, desynchronised and condensed (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998; Garhammer, 1999; Urry, 2004). Ireland's (sub)urbanisation changed people's everyday mobility patterns from occasional trips to regular commutes, thereby altering connections between negotiated time regimes (for example working hours) and settlement patterns. Print advertisements for new suburban-style housing in rural villages within Dublin's expanding commuter belt illustrate the tensions between Irish people's desire for a modern lifestyle and their yearning for the vestiges of rural culture (Corcoran and Slater, 2006). Overall, stereotypical images of past mobility as slow-paced and pre-modern used to promote tourism and advertise real estate tend to misrepresent mobility patterns in modern, car-dependent Ireland.

Idealised views of past time regimes in rural Ireland contrast sharply with accounts of how up until recently individuals' lives and the long-term sustainability of communities were subject to mobility pressures to do with (in-) accessibility, such as those experienced by islanders dependent on boats or ferry services. Ethnographic accounts of island life along the west coast of Ireland show that access was often very difficult, with some islands eventually abandoned because they could not be reached in a safe and reliable manner. The last inhabitants of Inishshark, an island off the North-Western Connemara coast, eventually left for the mainland or neighbouring Inishbofin after a boating accident killed two young islanders. A long list of accidents preceded this final tragedy which resulted in the government-funded vacation of Inishshark in 1960 (author's fieldnotes, 11/03/2006, recorded during fieldtrip to Inishbofin).

The above example shows how access and wider mobility issues such as (forced) emigration and displacement affected many peripheral regions in Ireland and Europe. However, what seems unique to the Irish colonial experience is the way in which geographical isolation and inaccessibility became associated with the protection of

traditional Irish culture against colonial influences (Gibbons, 1984). The dismantling of many railways exemplified a rejection of the infrastructural legacy of British rule. Overall, island and/or rural life in the west came to symbolise an Irish culture untainted by modernity and Anglicisation. Rural depopulation thus carried strong cultural, political and ideological connotations, in particular after Irish independence in 1921. The complete depopulation of the Great Blasket island in County Kerry in 1953 serves as a prime example here.

Many mobility practices changed dramatically in the second half of the 20th century because of innovations in transport and technology, including the use of helicopters for transporting supplies and people to islands off the Irish coast. The modernisation of Irish agriculture introduced new machinery and farm vehicles, which reduced the need for migrant farm workers and transformed rural temporal and spatial practices (cf. Shutes, 1989; Feehan, 2003).⁴ As a result, long-established links between personal mobility and social synchronisation that ensured the socio-ecological sustainability of many rural communities were gradually replaced with modern time use and mobility patterns, such as the (real or perceived) acceleration and individualisation of everyday life caused by automobility.

These transformations are ongoing and partly resemble developments in other countries, such as the weekly flow of workers from East to West Germany after 1990, with long-distance commutes being the only option for significant numbers of East Germans. They also do not have the same effect everywhere in Ireland, with growing differences between the Greater Dublin area and other regions. However, a particular combination of traditional and modern mobility cultures simultaneously bear on Irish society and the environment today; this includes a time culture whose emphasis on representations of rural temporality partly eclipses the powerful transformative influences of urban patterns of time use and mobility. As a result, some of Ireland's cultural specificities in relation to mobility, including its over-reliance

4 Irish novelist John McGahern's book *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002) includes detailed descriptions of the social and temporal dimensions of hay-making in a West of Ireland community on the brink of modernisation.

on the motorcar, appear to reflect its unique political and socio-cultural history.

Changing mobility patterns do not only affect the amount of time people spend travelling but also transform its social meanings. Particular modes of transport represent different forms of mobility and reflect prevailing socio-economic conditions, cultural values and practices as well as ideas about the organisation of society itself (Low and Gleeson, 2003; Urry, 2004). Nowhere does this become more apparent than in Ireland's recent transformation into one of the most car-dependent countries in the world. The potential outcomes of this car culture, however, are subject to considerable debate coinciding with (party) political differences in transport policy. Some commentators associate the modernisation of Irish mobility practices with positive social values, such as individuality, flexibility, (temporal) freedom and progress.

Yet others see the car as 'time trap' and symbol of a modern time culture (Garhammer, 1999) that contributes to congestion and the unfettered consumption of distance. Some argue that individualised transport promotes 'negative' social synchronisation and threatens the fabric of Irish society by undermining many commuters' ability to actively participate in public life.⁵ A survey of 1,250 rural Irish households conducted as part of the e-learning Diploma in Rural Development 2005/6 showed that more than two thirds of working rural dwellers now avail of off-farm employment that requires commuting, with one quarter travelling more than 40 miles a day. Many respondents also self-reported low levels of civic engagement and little or no involvement in local activities, stating that they lack time and/or have no interest (*The Irish Times*, 24/01/2006). Commuting therefore marks the liminal, 'in-between' status of the journey to and from work, burdening those who do not conceptualise it as part of their working day while offering others a temporal 'buffer zone' between work and domestic responsibilities.

The introduction of modern mobility patterns and associated time regimes into Irish society was not all-embracing, nor did it necessarily

5 Recent cartographic representations of travel patterns show large commuter belts of 20 miles and more around most Irish cities (McDonald and Nix, 2005).

overwrite familiar cultural habits. Instead, even today the car continues to coexist alongside alternative modes such as walking and cycling. And while most modernist commentators have implicitly or explicitly rejected the slowness of traditional (mobility) cultures in favour of faster-paced ones, others have challenged late modern mobility as environmentally unsustainable and socially disruptive (cf. Whitelegg, 1997, 2003). In Ireland new conflicts have emerged between advocates of an oil-dependent transport economy and those who pursue a 'post-carbon' agenda to meet future mobility needs, though these debates are often much more complex and by no means restricted to transport. In fact, disputes over transport infrastructure often function as proxies for people's concerns about quality of life issues, the state of Irish democracy, or people's relationship with the past. For example, anti-road protests such as the M50/Carrickmines dispute and the ongoing 'Save Tara' campaign have challenged the Irish government's top-down transport planning system, making future confrontations between State and environmental lobby groups increasingly likely. As a result, some have called for urgent reform of existing planning and land use legislation and for an end to the institutional culture of blaming others (cf. Flynn, 2006; Rau and McDonagh, forthcoming).

Arguments for more sustainable modes of transport such as cycling, walking and car-sharing put forward by Irish environmentalists, community activists and journalists such as Frank McDonald, environmental editor of the *Irish Times*, are now a regular occurrence. But can Irish people reconcile the conflicting paces that represent both traditional (though often future-oriented) and contemporary mobility practices? Or is it indeed the case that the Irish experience a 'temporal dislocation [... reflected in] this ambivalent desire to be mobile and yet connected' (Kuhling, 2005: 5)? Opponents of hypermobility, that is, the over-consumption of distance prevalent in Ireland today, draw attention to its many problems, including the increase in fatal road accidents (Newman, 2006).⁶ They are also calling for new ways of experiencing time and mobility, including suggestions to value the free-

6 In 2005, 400 people were killed on Irish roads, 26 more than in 2004 and 65 more than in 2003 (National Safety Council Statistics, 2006).

dom not to move and to embrace slowness as a desirable lifestyle (cf. Honoré, 2004; Sauter, 2006). This sparked renewed interest in alternative mobility cultures and more sustainable settlement patterns, such as the concept of ‘walkable’ neighbourhoods (Leyden, 2003).⁷

Overall, dominant time-space regimes inherent in people’s mobility choices are the outcome of specific historical, economic and socio-political circumstances. For example, Ireland’s fervent embrace of individualised mobility may be partly attributable to its political, economic and geographical proximity to the Anglo-American sphere whose mobility culture reflects the dominance of the motorcar. Today Ireland harbours competing mobility cultures that bring about intense political and cultural struggle, including anti-road protests. Attempts at reconciling traditional views of mobility which revolve around car usage with arguments for more sustainable, multi-modal transport suitable for a post-carbon world remain scarce, but it is envisaged that these debates will be at the heart of Irish transport planning in years to come. This makes it necessary to identify competing mobility cultures and stipulate real intercultural dialogue between their members, in particular if those who find themselves marginalised by the current hegemony of the motorcar, including people without access to a car and those unwilling to drive for personal, environmental or ethical reasons, succeed in influencing environmental decision-making in the future.

7 Leyden’s (2003) comparative work on the walkability of traditional and modern neighbourhoods in Galway City reveals the significant impact of car dependence on health and social participation levels.

Tracing Mobility Cultures: How Similar Are Irish People's Mobility Patterns?

Introduction

Variations in mobility are not only relevant if we compare Ireland to other countries – they are also an important source of intercultural diversity *within* Irish society. Modal choices in Dublin differ from those in Galway or Cork, partly because of size of the city and availability of public transport but also because of differences in people's perception of what it means to inhabit and move around in urban and rural spaces respectively. Similarly, different social groups (are forced to) make transport choices which distinguish them from others, thereby translating socio-economic pressures, transport policy environments and cultural choices into visible mobility practices. Counter-cultural movements such as New Age travellers in Cork have been known for their alternative mobility patterns, including their preference for (semi-)nomadic lifestyles (Kockel, 1993). Wickham's (2006) recent work suggests that professional status impacts on car ownership rates both in Dublin Inner City and outlying areas of the capital. Unskilled and semi-skilled workers are less likely to own a car than professionals and are, therefore, more reliant on other modes, for better or for worse. But are these groups of transport users sufficiently different from one another with regard to lifestyle, cultural values and mobility practices to justify treating them as distinct *mobility cultures*? The following example of travel and mobility patterns among academic staff and students in Galway certainly supports the claim that different mobility cultures co-exist in Irish society today.

Expressions of Irish Mobility Cultures: Understanding Staff and Student Travel Patterns

Commonly-held views among students and university staff relying on very different timetables and engaging in very different temporal-cul-

tural practices are confirmed by evidence from the NUIG Transport Study 2004–6. NUIG students and staff who participated in the Transport Survey 2004 (NUIG–TS04) stated that they engage in very different mobility practices which also affect the time they spend travelling to and from university (see Tables 1 and 2). These findings were also confirmed by a second mobility survey carried out at NUI, Galway which identified significant mobility differences between students and staff (Lipscombe and Knight, 2006).

%	On Foot	Bicycle	Bus, mini-bus or coach	Train	Motor-cycle or scooter	Car, lorry or van (Driver or passenger)
NUIG–TS04	44.4	7.8	4.1		1.4	42.4
– <i>Students</i>	56.0	8.4	4.9		0.9	29.8
– <i>Staff</i>	7.1	5.7	1.4		2.9	82.8
Galway City and County*	15.3	2.1	12.5		0.4	62.5
National Average*	16.9	2.3	15.5		0.8	57.9
*CSO Statistical Yearbook 2006, p. 339.						

Table 1: Mode of transport to work, school or college

Almost two thirds of students who participated in the NUIG–TS04 reported that they walk (56%) or cycle (8%) to college while fewer than 30% travel to college by car as driver or passenger. This compares with almost 83% of staff respondents who commute by car and 13% who either walk (7%) or cycle (6%) to university.

		Affiliation with NUIG regrouped		TOTAL
		<i>Student</i>	<i>Staff</i>	
Travel time to work / university	< 5 minutes	16.0%	0.0%	12.1%
	5–30 minutes	76.4%	66.7%	74.0%
	> 30 minutes	7.5%	33.3%	13.9%
	TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Table 2: Travel times for single trip by affiliation with NUI, Galway

Lipscombe and Knight's (2006) report confirms these findings: they record 75% staff and 24% students travelling to university by car, 10% NUIG staff and 55% students walking, 7% staff and 12% students cycling and only 4% staff and 7% students using public transport.

As regards the amount of time spent travelling to work (one way), both groups display rather distinct patterns. The majority of students (92%) spend 30 minutes or less on their journey to college, that is, a maximum of one hour per day for the round trip. Only 8% of students who responded to the NUIG-TS04 said that they spend more than half an hour one way. In contrast, one third of NUIG staff participants (33%) find themselves in the category 'more than 30 minutes'. These figures are based on respondents' estimates and may vary in their accuracy; however, the general trend in the data can be expected broadly to reflect NUIG student and staff travel time patterns.

These findings may seem somewhat surprising, given that both groups – staff and students – are (more or less) exposed to university time regimes and inhabit similar transport (policy) environments. However, both groups are highly distinct from one another regarding other key variables such as economic standing, home ownership, age, family responsibilities and household size, all of which impact significantly on the respondents' mobility patterns. The following comment by one of the student participants illustrates how property ownership, location and economic concerns affect this person's mobility patterns:

I try to live in the city centre every year because the transport system in Galway is rubbish – unreliable, inconvenient and timetables not displayed at all bus

stops. Also a lack of bus shelters. The amount of money you save on rent by living in say Glendara [*large housing estate in the West of Galway City offering affordable private accommodation for students*] instead of the city centre is negligible because of the cost of taxis you have to get on nights out (female student, No.79, NUIG-TS04).

Also, some students' comments in the survey show that their leisure time regimes are often radically different from those of staff (and others in the community), though they share some work-related timetables. Again, this means that effective and sustainable transport solutions must do more than just provide a generic service for all – they must instead take into account the cultural specificities that characterise the conceptualisation and use of time among different groups in Irish society.

Modes of transport other than the car are often associated with particular social groups, including students who are frequently assumed to be without a car. This is supported by NUIG-TS04 data which cast doubt on claims that students now all drive to college which were made during a dispute in 2004–5 between staff, students and university management over car-parking arrangements on campus. The dispute revolved around the allocation of on-campus parking spaces which clearly favoured academic staff and which saw the allocation of a limited number of spots for student parking relative to the number of students. NUIG-TS04 results reveal that the level of car use among students is still significantly below that of members of staff and that the majority of NUIG students continue to walk, cycle or use public transport to university. More importantly, however, it can be shown that staff and students choose their modes of transport for a variety of reasons other than to meet their need to be mobile. This implies that effective (policy) proposals for sustainable mobility must address people's ethical, cultural and social concerns, as transport choices are about much more than just practical solutions to everyday mobility problems. Respondents who offered more detailed accounts of their mobility practices at the end of the questionnaire described how they actively develop mobility strategies that reflect and cater for the complexity of their cultural preferences, lifestyle choices as well as their moral and ethical concerns regarding the environment:

I'm walking most of time to go to work. I take the car only when needed; shopping, heavy items, bad weather on the top of that if I need absolutely to do any of them. I don't abusively take my car but traffic is a real nightmare in Galway (female member of staff, No. 66, NUIG-TS04).

Here the respondent's transport choice reflects a range of concerns, including her assessment of prevailing socio-cultural conditions. This shows that transport issues such as car use are much more than just engineering problems that can be solved through technical solutions, though this idea is frequently conveyed by those involved in transport planning and decision-making. Instead, people's mobility strategies offer an opportunity to respond to socio-economic pressures and prevailing political structures and power relationships in wider society, while also reflecting patterns of social interaction and cultural practices. Overall, people's mobility choices provide readily-available solutions to everyday problems and opportunities for self-expression both as individuals and members of groups, thereby enabling people to inhabit distinct *mobility cultures* that reflect their values and practices, at least to some extent:

Despite the frequently bad traffic, there is no way I would surrender personal control over my transportation (daily needs) to a third party. It would only be a useful backup option, occasionally. I'm greatly looking forward to the new road projects around Galway: M6/N6 and outer bypass. I would also welcome the increased public transport provisions that this survey is advocating. Not for myself, but because it would take other car drivers off the roads I use (male member of staff, No. 67, NUIG-TS04).

Here we can observe a connection between the respondent's mobility choice – the car – and his perceptions of the impact of society on his personal freedom in particular, and that of individuals in general. In his argument he places individual choice over and above the interests of wider society and any need for collective action, such as using public transport to solve existing mobility problems. The respondent's decision to travel by car is thus not just a practical response to prevailing physical conditions such as the availability of road infrastructure; it also reflects his interpretations of the socio-cultural and political conditions in society, including his opinion on who should and should not have control over people's (mobility) time. Moreover, these views

clearly resonate in and are in turn shaped by his everyday mobility practices, including his use of time. This amalgamation of embedded mobility practices, taken-for-granted views of the social and physical environment and deep-seated cultural values regarding the distribution of power and the role of the individual in society, turn his mobility choices into complex socio-cultural practices rather than mere responses to infrastructural conditions. This means that political arguments for more sustainable transport options need to focus on these complex cultural practices.

To conclude, people's mobility patterns do not only represent practical solutions to everyday problems related to the use of time and the consumption of distance, though such views tend to dominate transport planning in Ireland (see section four). Instead, examples from the NUIG-TS04 clearly show that people's mobility choices, such as whether to travel in the first place and what mode to use, constitute important elements of cultural identification and their expression through socially embedded practices among NUIG students and staff. The data show that staff and students form heterogeneous groups that adopt different mobility patterns which reflect differences in life-style, socio-economic standing and cultural outlook both between and within these groups. The record of a recent debate within the partnership group on mobility management at NUI, Galway supports this view:

A lengthy discussion took place regarding different categories of staff within the University, their various work patterns and the problems they have encountered since the commencement of the parking permit scheme. It was agreed that Parking is an issue *that affects everybody equally, though in different ways* (minutes of partnership group meeting, 30/11/2006, emphasis added).

Disagreements over transport projects, such as the NUIG parking dispute in 2004, thus reflect significant tensions between groups who, among other things, differ in their views of the role of mobility in society and who engage in very specific time-space practices as part of their identification with a specific set of cultural values and habits. This means that we cannot reduce disputes such as the NUIG parking issue to clashes between people with incompatible preferences for particular technical-pragmatic solutions. Instead we must view them as

instances of cross-cultural misunderstanding which reach far beyond the immediately visible and the practical. This point will now be explored in detail, using evidence concerning an ‘intractable’ dispute over a road project in County Galway.

The Clash of Mobility Cultures? Intercultural Conflict in the Ballinasloe–Galway Motorway Project

The transformation of time and mobility has touched on many components of Irish culture, with traditional paces of life now competing, and sometimes colliding, with new demands placed on people’s time (cf. Keohane and Kuhling, 2004). Diverse mobility choices now act as proxies for deep-seated cultural differences in Ireland which are omnipresent but which rarely result in open conflict. After all, members of different mobility cultures in Ireland share (road) spaces more or less successfully every day, despite occasional accidents. Nevertheless, intractable disagreements sometimes arise between people who embrace and promote modern car culture, and those critical of Ireland’s car dependency, in particular whenever state actors and road lobbyists attempt to marginalise or suppress alternative voices. Transport-related conflicts, therefore, do not only reflect disagreements over practical issues such as whether or not to build a particular road but offer less powerful groups in society a forum for contesting dominant (mobility-related) values and practices, an opportunity which is rarely afforded in a relatively closed Irish (transport) planning system (cf. Rau and McDonagh, 2006). Disputes over transport infrastructure such as new motorways thus bring to the fore people’s cultural convictions, not just their pragmatic mobility choices, and occasionally culminate in intense cross-cultural struggles that go well beyond regular transport planning debates.

Oral hearings covering submissions and objections by members of the public, environmentalists and NGOs to proposed road projects such the Galway–Dublin motorway exemplify such discord between

members of different mobility cultures. Similarly, recent cases of direct action such as *in situ* anti-road protests carried out by the ‘Carrickminders’, a group opposed to the destruction of Carrickmines Castle as part of the construction of the M50, reveal the (re-)emergence of considerable opposition to Ireland’s state-sponsored road building programme and its related disregard for alternatives (Leonard, 2006; Newman, 2007; cf. Wistrich, 1983; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998 for examples of UK road protests). These disputes suggest that environmental arguing in transport planning has come to a crossroads, with recent hearings such as the BGOH in 2004–5, or the legal action taken by ‘Save Tara’ campaigner Vincent Salafia demonstrating resistance to the prevailing hegemony of the car as symbol of accelerated Ireland. Furthermore, recent disputes over roads appear to mark the beginning of a period of contestation and a ‘breakdown of consensus’ between stakeholders involved in planning and environmental decision-making.⁸ In fact, these persistently adversarial relationships between state and environmentalists and the refusal by the Irish state to enter a debate with environmental NGOs as part of the social partnership talks have been identified as major obstacles to the implementation of environmental policy and the promotion of sustainable development in Ireland (Flynn, 2006). For example, the BGOH was accompanied by stand-offs and walkouts by members of the public and NGO representatives and high levels of tension between pro- and anti-road lobbyists:

5.5 OBJECTORS’ SUBMISSIONS (ORAL) [...] In relation to the exclusion of Mr Podger it was not explained to him why he was excluded. He was advised by Gardai who were called that if he attempted to enter the room he would be arrested and possibly charged. These actions were well in excess of the powers of both the Board and the inspector [...] There is also an issue relating to An Taisce, both in a corporate context and individually in relation to Mr Lumley and his exclusion from the oral hearing. A geophysical report had been prepared in the past six months. Time had been sought by Mr Lumley and others to read this voluminous document in order that questions could be addressed [...] An incident occurred in relation to a jug of water. Mr Lumley apologised but was excluded [...] (ABP Inspector’s Report, p. 69–70).

8 This closely resembles observations made by Garavan elsewhere in this volume in relation to the Corrib Gas dispute in North Mayo.

The BGOH received considerable coverage in the local and national media, partially because of its duration (27 days) and conflict-laden, argumentative nature which challenged the consensus framework characteristic of oral hearings, at least until recently (see also Garavan, 2006 and in this volume). In the case of the BGOH, implicit and explicit rules which govern most oral hearings and which reflect discursive and behavioural conventions and existing power relations suddenly came under pressure, thereby exacerbating tensions between the attending parties. So what difficulties arose during the BGOH dispute and how do they relate to the contention made here that Irish society harbours very different mobility cultures?

First, objectors to large-scale road projects in sensitive areas frequently criticise the (transport) planning process itself, which they feel does not give them sufficient room to present arguments and influence decisions, in particular those related to the initial inception of projects rather than subsequent issues of route selection and environmental impact mitigation measures. This becomes evident in the following excerpts detailing the nature of the consultation process for the Ballinasloe–Galway motorway. In this context, ‘alternatives’ are understood and presented by those in charge as *routing alternatives* rather than fundamental decisions about the need for road infrastructure:

A contention has also been advanced that there has not been adequate consideration of alternatives. However, detailed information as to the consideration of the alternatives and the reasons for choosing the proposed scheme is contained in the [EIS] and has been elaborated upon at the hearing in relation to the process used *to select the route starting with the constraints study, followed by the corridor selection report and then the route selection report*. It is clear that *alternatives were considered at each stage of the process* (ABP Report, p. 89, emphasis added).

Other routes were looked at and fully examined at all stages of the design process from the first assessment of corridor options up to the time of the presentation of the Environmental Impact Statement. It is to be noted that an assessment of the alternative routes was carried out fully and properly by the relevant experts (ABP Report, p. 99).

Secondly, objectors frequently criticised attempts to impose dominant values and assumptions, including a preference for the

motorcar, on those with alternative opinions – in particular during supposedly ‘neutral’ consultation processes such as the BGOH. This confirms Sauter’s (2006) assumption that transport policies reflect dominant socio-cultural concepts of time and space, despite their claim to objectivity and political neutrality. For example, the ascendancy of the car as vehicle for individualised mobility is often associated with the idealisation of the temporally flexible individual consuming vast distances which dominates the thinking in many modern, capitalist societies, including Ireland. Similarly, prevailing views of globalisation that present the ever-faster mobility of goods and labour as inescapable ‘ideology-free’ consequences of the growing interconnectedness of the world and the resulting ‘time-space compression’ (Harvey, 1989) leave almost no room for (slow-paced) alternatives. Challenges to the hegemony of the car, which epitomises this (neo-)liberal-globalistic view of society to many of its proponents, must thus uncover their socio-cultural, political and ideological dimensions, such as the interconnections between speed, progress and power, and their influence on mobility-related decisions:

At the beginning of a new century, it is time for a new paradigm. It is time to focus on the freedom to walk and the prerequisites for civilised walking. It is time to look at the connection of *speed and (political) power*. It may even be time to write a new manifesto for the future – a manifesto on the freedom to walk, on democracy and the *redistribution of time* and public space (Sauter, 2006: 2, emphasis added).

The analysis of a specific instance of mobility-related conflict – in this case the BGOH – also reveals how *cultural factors* can influence both the emergence and progression of disputes. Road engineers and transport planners clearly dominated the BGOH through their institutionally specific ways of arguing and reasoning and their use of key rhetorical strategies, including the use of technical-legalistic terminology unfamiliar to most members of the public. Imposing such a technocratic framework on the BGOH often prevented real environmental arguing, partially because it disproportionately benefited stakeholders possessing specific forms of ‘cultural capital’. For example, many pro-car stakeholders who participated in the BGOH shared an intrinsic understanding of the role of the car as a powerful symbol of

societal progress which they then used to justify building roads. This also reflected power relationships in Irish society along new fault lines created by people's relationship with the environment. While officials emphasised traffic flows, infrastructural costs and calculable risks, thereby *conceptualising mobility as an a-cultural physical-spatial practice to be managed effectively*, socio-cultural and environmental implications of the road were either ignored, or conceptualised as beneficial outcomes of increased car-based mobility:

Responses to Questions [...from members of the public...] The economic and social needs of people in the rural areas will not be affected by the [Ballinasloe-Galway motorway] scheme other than making it easier to get to places of work with less congestion (ABP report, p. 29).

Some objectors rejected this exclusive focus on technical aspects and effective management as either one-sided or too narrow. The fact that increased car dependency was neither treated as problematic nor sufficiently addressed also caused considerable frustration among some members of the public who attended the BGOH (author's field-notes, April 2006). In fact, the inspector's report lists a number of benefits normally attributed to *car-free environments* such as noise reduction and improved conditions for pedestrians and cyclists, which were used by expert witnesses to justify the new motorway rather than upgrading existing road infrastructure:

The proposed road will have positive and negative socio-economic impacts. The inhabitants of the towns will benefit from the reduction in traffic, relief from severance, improvement in amenity and accessibility to facilities. Pedestrians and cyclists will have more pleasant journeys. Passing trade reduction will affect businesses particularly in rural areas. The towns along the existing route will benefit in terms of business and residential attractiveness (ABP report, p. 34).

Queries by members of the public regarding climate change, emissions and sustainability issues were responded to with managerial and eco-modernist arguments, whereby environmental problems could be solved through technological and market-based mechanisms. Once again, the policy of further encouraging car-based mobility was never

questioned and socio-cultural and environmental implications were seen as subordinate to economic concerns:

In relation to climate changes there is a commitment to reduce CO₂ in accordance with the Kyoto Protocol. Newer vehicles are achieving lower CO₂ levels and other market orientated measures are being considered with a view to CO₂ reduction (ABP report, p. 43).

Similarly, the environmental impact statement (E.I.S.) prepared for the BGOH was criticised by members of the public and NGO representatives for over-emphasising the measurable outcomes of the proposed road, such as quantifiable levels of noise and water pollution, while disregarding less tangible or long-term social and environmental impacts:

Mr Sweetman and the Irish Heritage Trust [NGO] are concerned about the restrictive nature in which the hearing was run [as well as] the inadequacy of the E.I.S. (ABP report, p. 70).

Others criticised the lack of attention paid to the potentially negative socio-cultural implications of the project, such as the impact of spatial fragmentation and large numbers of commuters on local communities. This shows once again how the framing of the Ballinasloe–Galway road project as a technical problem to be managed failed to address many participants' concerns. Cultural differences between actors regarding mobility choices also remained invisible, or became suppressed by more powerful parties in attendance, such as the ABP inspector and key witnesses for Galway County Council.

Another source of concern during the BGOH was the persistent exclusion from consideration of the needs and claims to recognition of groups of transport users other than motorists. Responses to questions from members of the public show that pedestrians and cyclists were often not adequately catered for in the proposed road project and that existing problems regarding accessibility either remained or became further exacerbated by the scheme:

The popular circular walk being referred to is not affected by the scheme. If one is on the circular walk going out the N6 via the R357 one will have to cross two roundabouts. Whilst the road will be carrying national traffic one can do so half

at a time using the middle islands. [...] There are no cycling facilities provided on any bridges. Footpaths are to be provided across bridges (ABP report, p. 35–7).

[*Official response to Mrs. O’Dea’s submission*] that there is a major impact on local community groups as a result of the proposed route. The changes in the local road network in this area are “not significant” and “minor” except for the realignment of the Esker East Road which is termed major. [...] The impacts of this road realignment [...] show that the impact in visiting neighbours on the opposite side of the N6 applies to one dwelling only. The impacts of this realignment in terms of visiting community facilities [are] *not significant when journeys are made by vehicles* (ABP report, p. 94, emphasis added).

Here, the images evoked by this response – pedestrians standing on a small island in the middle of a roundabout carrying national traffic and locals forced to use their cars to access their community facilities – illustrate the dominance of car culture over other mobility choices, including popular walkways which mirrored local people’s preferences and habits and which have developed in line with changes in the surrounding landscape.

Another source of intercultural conflict that emerged during the BGOH was the application of international engineering and environmental protection standards without testing their adequacy and consulting with local people. The BGOH report refers to UK standards used to assess the socio-economic impacts of the road scheme while admitting that no local area study had been carried out:

The socio-economic impacts of a large scheme such as the proposed are wide-ranging. There would be no other study (local area) which would provide information. The scheme was assessed in accordance with the DMRB (Design Manual for Roads and Bridges), a UK publication. No other guidelines were looked at. The DMRB has been used throughout Ireland (ABP report, p. 37).

This is not to suggest that international codes of best practice such as DMBR or ISO–14001 cannot accommodate local conditions; however, the lack of cultural awareness and the obvious disregard for local people’s concerns evident during the BGOH highlighted the necessity to ‘localise’ such standards to mitigate disagreements between local people and those representing national and international interests. The following excerpt from the BGOH report illustrates the

impact of the road scheme on historically important locations and cultural achievements of past generations living in the area, a problem which would have required a culturally sensitive approach:

Archaeological evidence of the battle [*of Aughrim, 1691, the bloodiest battle in Irish history*] site may be disturbed, such as burial pits, concentrations of cannon and muskets balls, or other artefacts. The reduction in status of the present N6 may lead to relaxation of planning restrictions on roadside development with possible adverse consequences for the conservation and presentation of the [...] site. [...] The absence of any junction of the proposed route at or near Aughrim [*location of battle site*] is likely to have an adverse impact on the viability of the interpretative centre, which is the product of much local effort, as well as investment by public bodies (ABP report, p. 52).

The BGOH clearly failed to address this issue adequately and in the end, debates regarding the traversing of the Battle of Aughrim site became one of the most contentious aspects of the hearing, together with the exclusion of An Taisce's representative and the representative of local environmental organisation 'Hands Across The Corrib'. A recent letter in the local newspaper by historian and Aughrim trust member Dr Padraig Lenihan demonstrates that concerns raised at the BGOH about the future integrity of the battle site were entirely justified, with housing development now taking place in the area (*Galway Advertiser*, 17/08/2006).

The exertion of power played a key role during the BGOH. The imposition of *time limits* on oral submissions were interpreted as attempts by more powerful stakeholders (e.g. the ABP inspector) to impose rules on less influential groups and members of the public. The following excerpt, covering a submission on behalf of two members of the public, highlights this point:

M/S B. [*Ohlig*] Schaefer and Messers (*sic*) Hession and Grealish have been impeded in relation to the presentation of their cases. This arises in relation to various rulings which were made and are ultra vires the powers of the Inspector. Issues sought to be raised were prevented from being addressed. The Inspector's function is primarily as a fact gatherer so that the Board may take the appropriate decision. *A significant example was the application of time limits within which issues could be raised. This was unfair and prejudicial to the interests of the parties represented. The rulings were made time after time* (ABP report, p. 70, emphasis added).

To conclude, it is clear from the above analysis of the APB inspector's report and related information that the BGOH failed to recognise local heritage and cultural traditions affected by the new road and did not accommodate alternative views of mobility either. Local people's concerns about their heritage, historical memories and relationships with particular landscapes in their area, as well as their long-established mobility practices, were largely ignored. Instead, technical-rational arguments inherent to the institutional culture of many planners and transport experts dominated the hearing. The BGOH transcripts show how attempts by officials to restrict the debate to technical-practical matters and measurable aspects of the road project failed, resulting in the exacerbation of existing tensions, in particular in relation to the Battle of Aughrim site. This triggered unprecedented reactions from both sides and introduced uncertainty into the process. Subsequent steps taken by officials to regain control over the hearing through the imposition of time limits and the exclusion of some members of the public from the hearing were criticised by some objectors as infringements on their right to speak.

Conclusions

Evidence discussed in this chapter has shown that the modernisation of Irish society has brought about major changes in people's mobility patterns, affecting time use as well as many other cultural conventions and habits. Irish society now harbours very different mobility cultures whose members do not only disagree over practicalities, an assumption which is frequently made during disputes over transport projects and which tends to exacerbate existing tensions, but also hold fundamentally different views of the impact of their mobility choices on society. Moreover, these mobility cultures and their modal manifestations undoubtedly reflect wider social issues, such as the distribution of economic power and political clout across different groups in society. Many cycling campaigns in Ireland, for example, argue for the

equal treatment of cyclists – ‘same roads, same rights’ – and the protection of their interests from hegemonic claims to the majority of public space by car drivers. Mobility styles thus reflect people’s concerns about many social and environmental issues, such as justice and equality, guaranteed access to vital services and resources, or environmental risks for current and future generations.

Public perceptions of the advantages of the motorcar over other modes of transport, including its apparent potential to save people time, are persuasive and drastically limit the possibilities for more radical changes in how Ireland organises and meets its present and future transport needs. Transport projects in Ireland such as new motorways are often justified exclusively on the grounds that they reduce travel times. This chapter has shown that this is not only misleading because it ignores the qualitative consequences of people’s mobility-related behaviour, it also prevents important debates about the connections between mobility and sustainability, supply-and-demand-driven approaches to road-building and the implications of distances travelled (not just time spent) for society and the environment. However, this exclusive focus on potential time savings currently appeals to many harried Irish people and, therefore, continues to dominate transport policy while preventing any immediate or radical alternatives to car dependency.

There is now considerable potential for intercultural conflict in Ireland, with some commentators arguing that newly-emerging mobility cultures cannot easily co-exist with more traditional ones (Keohane and Kuhling, 2004). The image of a tractor holding up traffic on a narrow Irish country road and thereby increasing the risk of collisions due to overtaking has been deployed on many occasions to illustrate this. Moreover, Ireland’s transformation into one of the most car-dependent countries in the world has increased the likelihood of road accidents and transport planning disputes. To make visible the cultural factors responsible for these frictions and, if possible, provide new spaces for social-environmental arguing in transport planning and mobility-related governance thus appears to be rather urgent.

This chapter has shown that encounters between members of different mobility cultures during (controversial) transport projects are often prone to intercultural (mis)understandings, though these may

be neither immediately observable nor directly expressible by those involved. This poses major challenges for those who are interested in preventing conflicts over developments and who favour more people-centred, sustainable planning. Culturally sensitive sociological inquiry, mediation and other forms of deliberative intervention, such as ethnographic investigations in local areas affected by projects and the use of constellation analysis to visualise the different positions in cases of environmental disputes (described by Kruse in this volume), could thus assist the resolution of such conflicts and misunderstandings, at least to some extent.

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