

Report workshop “Sustainable Urban Mobility: History & Transitions”  
Eindhoven, The Netherlands 27-29 June 2018  
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Sustainable urban mobility is urgent and attainable and fundamentally shaped by the past. An event in Eindhoven late June 2018, sponsored by SHOT’s small grants scheme, gathered scholars interested in this timely subject matter.. The workshop aimed at a cross-fertilization between historians of mobility and technology, transitions scholars with more STS-based approaches, and practitioners working in urban mobility. Participation was very international, including scholars from across Europe, but also from Brazil, New Zealand, Nigeria, and South Africa. Representation from the United States was assured through the presence of eminent mobility history scholar Peter Norton from the University of Virginia as one of the guests of honor. The workshop consisted of five different parts.

The first part explored various aspects of Smart Cycling Futures. This part of the workshop resonated with an ongoing Dutch research project studying how innovation in business models, governance and urban form may upscale cycling in The Netherlands. The first set of interventions studied the social dynamics behind such innovations and looked at how socially sustainable they are: to whom are they accessible geographically and financially? A second segment looked into matters of speed, studying newly proposed types of infrastructure to support speedier forms of bikes and fast cycling, but also posed the question whether we would sometimes rather need to slow down instead of speeding up. This part of the workshop ended with various critical approaches to smart velomobility in smart cities and the use of urban living labs to promote cycling.

The second part was dedicated to the ongoing project *Cycling Cities*, which portrays a century of urban mobility for each of the cities participating in the project. Adri Albert de la Bruhèze and Eric Berkers reported on their studies of Munich and The Hague respectively, which have just been published by the Foundation for the History of Technology. Njogu Morgan shared results from his study of Johannesburg. Subsequently a range of other scholars presented potential future projects at various degrees of ripeness for Barcelona (Spain), Birmingham (UK), Delft (The Netherlands), Gothenburg (Sweden), Kanu (Nigeria), Lisbon (Portugal) and Turku (Finland). The series of projects will allow future comparative work to better understand changes in the modal split in all these cities and explain the retention of significant levels of cycling or its disappearance based on the factors fleshed out in the seminal study *Cycling Cities: The European Experience* (ed. Ruth Oldenziel, Martin Emanuel, Adri Albert de la Bruhèze & Frank Veraart, Eindhoven: Foundation for the History of Technology, 2016): alternative modes, urban form, social movements, local mobility policy, and culture.

The third and main part of the workshop brought together work in transition studies and mobility history. The keynote “The (Post-)Politics of Resilient Design” by Greet de Block from Antwerp University observed that current design practices move in a decidedly technological-managerial direction. She called for careful consideration of the political dimension in urban infrastructure design in general with special attention for initiatives for green infrastructures and ecology. After a concluding roundtable reflecting on the relevance of De Block’s message from a global perspective, the workshop then continued in parallel

sessions the next day. First, it unpacked the notion of ‘sustainability’ by investigating its ecological, social and economic dimensions. Secondly, the workshop explored the importance of the urban form for the potential of sustainable urban mobility; governance, including social movements, in transitions towards alternative mobility paradigms and a transition towards sustainability; and the pros and cons of various historical and social scientific methodologies to study sustainable urban mobility. This part of the workshop concluded with an unavoidable cycling excursion to share various cycling particularities of the surroundings of Eindhoven: bike streets, railway station/bike parking facility integration, shared bike services, and the Van Gogh-Roosegaarde cycle path lighting up at night inspired by Vincent van Gogh’s famous *Starry Night* painting.

The fourth part consisted of a workshop for the book project *Sustainable Urban Mobility since 1850: The Roots of Today’s Challenges* (to appear in Berghahn’s Explorations in Mobility book series, 2019). The book’s premise is that decisions in the past have fundamentally and profoundly shaped our current state of mobility. The resulting path dependencies cannot be undone with the stroke of a pen, despite the fact that in the near future the prospects for sustainable urban mobility look relatively bright in comparison to mobility over longer distances. This book explores how long-term urban analyses of mobility shape sustainable futures. It elaborates on what we consider as a useable past from a sustainable urban mobility point of view, addressing issues such as: Just how do we explain the processes of normalizing unsustainable mobility patterns? How can we apply historians’ expertise in understanding issues of continuity and change, contingencies and path dependencies, or stasis and tipping points, in order to recognize and improve the prospects of future change? How do we uncover historical user practices and account for their importance in processes of change? In what way does recovering alternative pasts motivate action towards sustainable futures?

The fifth and final part *Cycling Goes Glocal* proposes to research the global process of the local appropriation of bikes, bike production and cycling. It embraces recent calls in business history for a transnational turn and a global history approach that does justice to all parts of the world. Connecting bike production and an industrial lobby to policy matters allows investigating in careful comparisons if it mattered for local urban mobility policies whether cities had bike producing industries or car factories. An active interest in the mutual shaping of consumption and production would allow *Cycling Goes Global* to benefit from a particularly rich history of technology tradition.

All in all these elements provided a rich, varied workshop and the kick-start of various new initiatives that will help us grasp the historical underpinnings of the urban modal split and stimulate a transition towards more sustainable urban mobility in line with the ambitious agenda to combat climate change.