Discussion: Potential for carfree development in the UK - categorising carfree communities

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"Categorising carfree communities"

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On reading the interesting article 'Potential for carfree development in the UK' (Melia et al, 2012), we were struck by the notion that nowhere in the extant literature is there a comprehensive taxonomy of what might be termed 'carfree communities' in the most general sense. As a tentative first step in this direction therefore, we propose ten possible criteria to consider.

First is to do with the degree or **level of 'car freeness'** in a community and whether the emphasis is on either ownership or use, or on both (Melia, 2010). For instance, in some cases car ownership is entirely forbidden, whilst in others car use may merely be deterred at particular times of day by the imposition of an access charge (Litman, 2012).

Second is the **spatial size** of such 'communities', which might range from certain types of vehicle being denied entry to a single site or road facility (such as the Strøget shopping street in Copenhagen, Denmark), right up to a town (Venice, Italy) or even potentially a region or nation (Cuba) being entirely 'car free' (Crawford, 2000; Wright 2005).

Third, car free/reduced communities can be categorised by their **degree of permanence**. Thus, such communities can exist over a range of timescales from quite short term episodes, for example where a road is closed off for an afternoon to host a

street market; through to medium term controls, say where a bridge is closed to traffic for structural repairs; through to a situation where restrictions on vehicles are permanent (Cairns et al, 1998; Wright, 2005).

Fourth, is whether car free/reduced communities occur on a **planned and regular** basis, **or** whether they are a more **reactive and/or irregular** or 'one off' events (Cairns et al, 1998; Wright, 2005).

Fifth, it is interesting to look at the reasons or **motivations for establishing car free/reduced communities**, which can be thought of as being either to meet specific local needs, and/or for addressing broader social, economic or environmental concerns. For example, car free developments have evolved in London due to restricted space for parking coupled with already low car ownership levels and relatively good public transport (Morris et al, 2009), whilst (almost) car free communities emerged throughout Cuba in the early 1990s due to the economic and political context there (Enoch et al, 2004), and the Amish community in North America chooses to remain car free for religious reasons (Wagler, undated).

Sixth, there are several **means by which car free/reduced communities have been enforced**. These include moral, as well as physical, regulatory and fiscal, mechanisms (Scheurer, 2001). Thus, community pressures enforce car freeness in Amish communities (Wagler, undated), and physical barriers prevent car access to the island of Sark in the English Channel for example.

Seventh, is the **'type of boundary'** – whether physical, institutional, socio-economic, cultural or a combination. Many car free areas are physically isolated by being islands surrounded by water or due to 'difficult' terrain (e.g. Venice, or Clovelly in Devon, UK); or are institutionally defined, such as the Congestion Charging Zone in Valletta, Malta (Attard and Enoch, 2011).

Eighth, is the **'permeability' of the boundary**, that is, the degree to which car freeness is 'enforced' within the car free community, a characteristic which is likely influenced by the means of enforcement and the type of boundary in particular.

Ninth, concerns the **roles of the different stakeholders involved** in establishing such a community. Particularly, was the process imposed by a government agency or

landowner that is in a 'top down' manner' (as in the case of Sark); or was it generated from within the community itself from the 'bottom up' (like in the Christiania area of Copenhagen)? (Litman, 2012; Morris et al, 2009).

Tenth is the **nature of the broader context** within which each car free/reduced community developed needs to be considered, in terms of whether the surroundings are in any way 'special' or unique and thus more likely to support a measure that seeks to limit car ownership and/or use. Once again, the Cuba example is pertinent here (Enoch et al, 2004), as are the cases of Venice, Italy and Mont Saint Michel just off the coast of Normandy, France – which for geographical and historical reasons have so far remained car free (Crawford, 2000).

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