

Past Futures: How Experts Envisioned Urban Mobility in the Twentieth Century

Traffic safety discourses in the era of “control” by experts
The Portuguese case

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(Post-doc grant SFRH/BPD/93517/2013 financed by FCT)

*Traffic Safety, City Planning, and Social Justice:
A Symposium on Sustainable Urban Mobility, Gothenburg, Sweden - October 5-7, 2017*

Acknowledgements

- FCT - Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (*Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, Portugal*) (post-doc grant SFRH/BPD/93517/2013)
- CIUHCT - Interuniversity Centre for the History of Science and Technology (*Centro Interuniversitário de História das Ciências e da Tecnologia*), financed by the FCT (UID/HIS/00286/2013)
- Organizers of the Symposium *Traffic Safety, City Planning, and Social Justice* and the CPSUM network

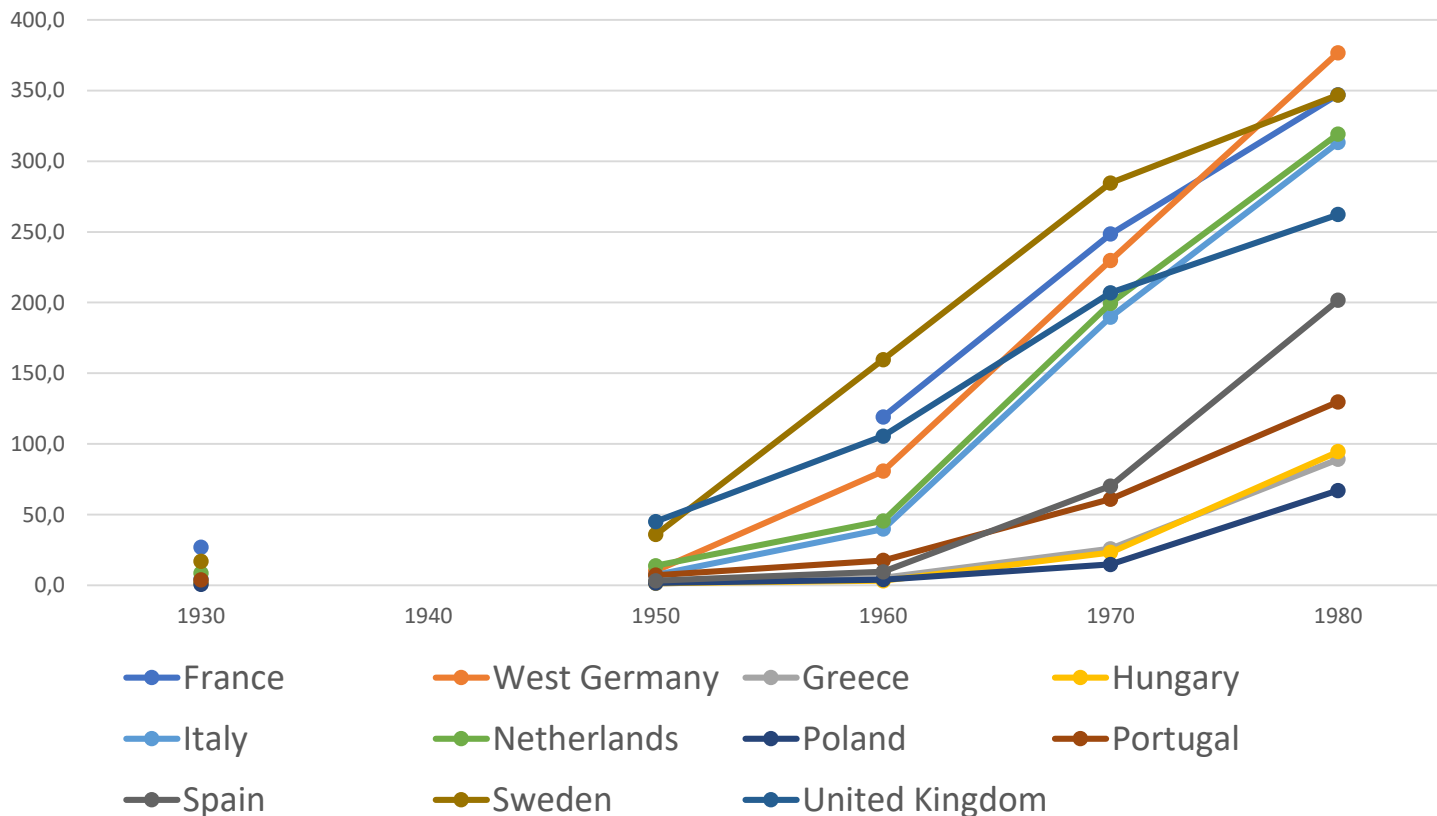
Overview

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Introduction – the construction of the idea of the automobile's inevitable dominance

How the idea of the automobile's inevitable dominance emerged during a period when cars were still a tiny minority within the modal-split statistics (and low motorization rates)?

No. of passenger cars/1000 inhabitants in some European countries



Source: No. of passenger cars - B. R. Mitchell, International Historical Statistics: Europe, 1750-2000, 5th Ed., (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Population - U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base and B. R. Mitchell (2003) for West Germany

- how that sense of inevitability seemed to emerge simultaneously across national boundaries?
- how the sense of inevitability came to redefine road mobility in Europe in the post-World War II period?

- During the 1920s and 1930s the automobile system became institutionalized, namely through the role of experts (road engineering and boards, traffic services, etc.) in many European countries
- The automobile “lobby” projected road’s uses (on regulations and infrastructures’ design), defining the “road problem” as an “automobile problem,” sidelining other non-motorized users.
The Permanent International Association for Road Congresses (PIARC, founded in 1909) is an example of this at the transnational level (Oldenziel, 2014; Mom, 2015)

Legitimation of the car: traffic safety discourses and the “control” by experts

THE FOUR PARADIGMS OF TRAFFIC SAFETY IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY UNITED STATES

<i>Paradigm</i>	<i>Speed</i>	<i>Construction of victims</i>	<i>Road design</i>	<i>Vehicle design</i>	<i>Drivers</i>	<i>Crashes</i>
Safety First (1900s–1920s)	Crucial: Inherently dangerous	Innocent pedestrians	Peripheral factor	Peripheral factor	Chiefly responsible	Inevitable with speed
Control (1920s–1960s)	Can be safe (with good road design)	Vehicle occupants; responsible pedestrians	Crucial: Design to prevent accidents	Peripheral factor	Recklessness: The “nut behind the wheel”	Preventable (“the Three Es”)
Crashworthiness (1960s–1980s)	Can be safe (with good road and vehicle design)	(Innocent) Vehicle occupants; pedestrians almost absent	Design to make accidents safe	Crucial: Design to make accidents safe	Secondary: Many factors beyond drivers’ control	Inevitable: Too many factors to control
Responsibility (1980s–present)	Can be safe (with above, plus responsible drivers)	(Responsible) Vehicle occupants; pedestrians returning?	Design to involve drivers	Design to make accidents safe	Drivers must be involved	Inevitable, but responsibility will prevent many

The four paradigms proposed by Peter Norton (*Technology and Culture*, 2015) for the **evolution of traffic safety in the US**

This proposal also serves to think the evolution of traffic safety in other countries (f. i. , Sweden (Lundin, 2008), as we shall see in the case of Portugal (Sousa, 2016)

1920s–1960s: “Control” traffic safety “paradigm” (Norton, 2015)

Expert control through the “Three Es”:

- (highway) Engineering
- Education (“undisciplined” pedestrians, new drivers)
- Enforcement (reckless drivers)

Growing attention to motorists and road design (and regulation)

Speed could be safe

Expert control paradigm of traffic safety was nurtured by traffic safety discourses

- Part of the process of the transformation of public roads/streets into thoroughfares for motorised vehicles (f.i. McShane, 1999; Bertho Lavenir, 2000)
- gradual organization of space around the disciplining of bodies and of uses in order to prioritize the means to efficiently circulate on public roads/streets, that is, to give priority to faster vehicles, particularly automobiles (Bonham 2016)

Expert control paradigm of traffic safety was nurtured by traffic safety discourses

- This reorganization of space regarding mobility priorities according to **speed** was accompanied by the production of **normative discourses** regarding “public order and morality,” public health, and aesthetic concerns.
- An answer to the need to free public roads from obstacles to automobiles (particularly, private automobiles), and from disorder, diseases, and anaesthetic views was the creation of a **safety discourses**.
- These discourses are part of disciplinary processes that are made **according to technical knowledge** developed by various **experts** on the security of each public roads/streets’ user. (Packer, 2003)

A national case: disciplining professional motorists and pedestrians from the private motorists' point of view in Portugal (Sousa, 2016)

“Safety discourses” in Portuguese dictatorships

- Were not neutral, and produced normative categories, prescriptions for proper conduct, and relations of power
- Framed in the context of the Military Dictatorship (1926-1932), followed by the right-wing *Estado Novo* (New State) dictatorship (1933-74), and the production of normative discourses regarding “public order and morality,” public health, and aesthetic concerns
- Framed also by the expectation of the development of tourism, the “great façade of nationality,” the promotion of the dictatorship’s image indoors and outdoors, which meant:

on the one side, on the development of an **automobile tourism for well-off motorists**, based on the maintenance of a “status quo” for the elites that supported the regime and

on the other side, on the **promotion of Portugal’s image for foreign tourists**, which relates with the creation of a clean public space, materialized in the repression of beggary and the hiding of poverty

Mediators as producers of disciplining discourses

- Safety discourses *were produced* by the mediators

on professional motorists and pedestrians by elitist Automobile Club of Portugal and their private motorists, and also by physicians as a way of disciplining street's use

on a more “scientific” approach to road planning and construction by the expert organisation Board of Roads (*Junta Autónoma de Estradas*) and its engineers

- Safety discourses *produced* regulations (legislation) and representations (forms of social control) and technical standards:

the definition of spaces according to certain users' mobility (traffic routes to particular modes of mobility; separation or mixture of low and fast mobility modes)

the social and mobility control and its surveillance (creation of traffic rules, speed limits or their absence, signals; creation of penalties)

the determination of minimum standards to allow vehicles and bodies to move (inspection of the vehicles, their safety conditions, and the decision on having, or not, an insurance; driving licenses and medical exams to motorists)

Discourse on “amateur” motorists as “gentlemen” and as “masters”

- The public roads belonged to all, but served only to transport, i.e., to the efficient and fast movement
- The motorist (the amateur driver of a private passenger car) should remain free of restrictions, including speed limits outside of localities, because he would know how to judge the correct "relative" speed



A via pública pertence a toda a gente. A via pública só tem por objecto o transporte. Não é um lugar de conversa, nem de brincadeira, nem um canil, nem um galinheiro.

Public roads belong to everyone. Public roads' purpose is solely transport. It is neither a place for talking, nor for playing, neither a kennel, nor a henhouse.



A velocidade em si não tem perigo e não tem limites. Só a velocidade relativa é perigosa. A velocidade relativa depende exactamente das condições e das contingências, infinitamente variáveis, em que se encontra o veículo.

Speed in itself is not dangerous and has no limits. Only relative speed is dangerous. Relative speed depends exactly of the infinitely variable conditions and contingencies, in which the vehicle is.

ACP advocates commandments of circulation ('Os 10 mandamentos fundamentais de toda a circulação', *Boletim Oficial do Automóvel Club de Portugal* 15, 1930: 9, 10)

A national case: disciplining professional motorists and pedestrians from the private motorists' point of view in Portugal

Safety discourses: production knowledge and educational campaigns

- Production of **knowledge on road accidents**: Traffic services **started producing statistics** in the 1930s (creation of a "Traffic Accident Form" and involvement of roads' accident related entities)

Pedestrians were the **main victims**

Motorists were the **main responsible**

Registered accidents happened mostly in **cities and towns**

- The **need for educational campaigns** were a recurring theme, **producing disciplining discourses on road's users**, namely pedestrians

Examples in: ACP's journal, fuel companies' leaflets, National Assembly's debates, papers presented at the Second Congress on Automobility and Civil Aviation (Oporto, 1937)

Roads' accidents: surveillance, civil compensation and criminal liability

- **Surveillance** was developed: a **traffic police** was set up with the 1930 Highway Code

- **ACP** lobbied against an adequate civil compensation, and against harder measures for transgressions to the Highway Code, being successful in the 1930s and 1940s

through its **connections to the political power** (National Assembly) and through **its journal**

- The **1954 Highway Code** changed the situation:

it affirmed that the "**criminal punishment for traffic accidents was clearly benevolent**, in any way corresponding to the social needs of the moment"

made certain **offenses comparable to voluntary crime**

removed the legal limit of the civil compensation to be paid in the case of the driver was the culprit of the accident, created by the 1930 Highway Code (and defended by ACP)

Final remarks: experts' discourse and the construction of “inevitable” past futures

- **Expert control paradigm of traffic safety** was nurtured by traffic safety discourses
- **Mediators'** safety discourses contributed to the construction of the idea of “inevitable” futures, namely that of the dominance of the automobile in the public road/street regarding other uses
- We need to know more about how the **transnational circulation of knowledge** interacted with local knowledge production and how this construction of “inevitable” past futures occurred in many (European) countries at the same time

Final remarks on the Portuguese case – no exceptionalism

- Traffic safety discourses produced **legislative initiatives** (to which these actors – legislators and mediators - had an active contribution) **representations**, (stereotypes of other non-welthy “professional” motorists and other road users), and **technical standards**
- The disciplined mobilities were also achieved through the **denial of wealthy “amateur” motorists’ responsibility** in road fatalities
- They served the **legitimation of the Portuguese dictatorship indoors and outdoors**, the idea of **foreign tourism’s growth** as an important economic income, the **redefinition of the street as a thoroughfare** (i.e. for high speed vehicles) and the consequent increase of road accidents (being pedestrians the main victims)
- Although there are local particularities there is **no exceptionalism**: traffic safety paradigms also apply.

Final remarks: experts’ discourse and the construction of “inevitable” past futures

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