12 Children and young people

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Abstract

Understanding mobility patterns and transportation challenges for children and young people is fundamental in order to give them proper access to education, friends, social activities and set the basis for a bright future. However, juvenile travel needs, especially those non-school related but intended for leisure and recreational activities, are currently not properly addressed. At the same time, the right to have a safe travel environment is often overlooked. This chapter reflects on children's mobility behaviour and goes deeper into the struggles they face to access transport. It also provides a series of considerations on how to make the transport sector more friendly for younger people and to eventually reduce their dependence on their parents.

Introduction

It is fundamental to consider children and young people when it comes to mobility poverty. In particular, high priority should be given to the understanding of the mobility patterns, travel behaviour and transportation challenges of young people in order to ensure the suitable availability of transport for them, which is fundamental for proper access to education, friends, social activities and, at a later stage, job opportunities.

Even if Europeans are ageing more and more and the share of young people has been steadily declining over the last ten years, the percentage of people who are less than 24 years old still represents a considerable proportion of the population as it ranges from around 30–33% in the “younger nations” (i.e. Ireland, France) to 23–24% in the “older nations” (i.e. Italy, Germany) (Eurostat 2018) (Figure 12.1).

That being said, the rise in the median age of Europeans is a direct consequence of two principal factors: a reduction in the share of children and young people in the total population (resulting from lower fertility rates and women giving birth to fewer children at a later age in life) and a gradual increase in life expectancy that has led to increased longevity. Consequently, in the last decades the share of households with children has generally

Figure 12.1 Young population distribution in EU countries, 2017.
Source: Eurostat 2018.

declined and single-person households and couples without children make up the majority of households, even with some variations among the different EU member states.

In order to describe young people’s mobility, it is possible to consider different sociological and behavioural classifications for this vulnerable group. This chapter will consider the classification based on whether they are free to move independently or not:

- Children under 14 years old, who strongly depend on parents and adults to meet their mobility needs; and
- Young adults under 25 years old, who have relative freedom of movement.

Children's characteristics in transport and mobility

It is indisputable that children under 14 years old are characterised by a strong (if not total) mobility dependence on the adult world, especially that of their parents, meaning that their transport-related characteristics are highly influenced by those of the adults escorting them.

That being said, the presence of children within households has an impact on the mobility needs of the family itself in terms of the number of daily trips (typically, the need to bring children to school, medical visits, leisure and sports activities), social relationships, means of transport used and who, of the family members, is intended to carry out the accompanying role. Therefore, all these aspects have more to do with the mobility patterns related to the family life cycle than with the mobility needs of each individual.

Some interesting insights about children's approaches towards transportation can be found in theories of socialisation. It is suggested that "children learn about travel modes in the same way as other aspects of culture through agents of socialization: the family, school, media, and peer groups" and that "attitudes toward transport modes are embedded in childhood", making car dependency itself to be considered as a social problem and "tackled from a social policy rather than just a travel demand management approach" (Baslington 2008, 93–111). Also, it has been demonstrated that for children "being with and having fun with friends was a reason given for liking various modes of transport even the unpopular school buses" (Baslington 2008, 103). Children in several high car ownership households wanted their parents to change their type of car to faster models while, on the contrary, in car-free households, a higher percentage of children can imagine living happily without a car in adulthood than in households that own a car (Baslington 2008).

The above confirms the correlation between parents' car ownership and children's attitudes towards different transport modes. On the other hand, other studies confirm that the perception of various transport modes as well as the desire to drive or buy a car in the future is also influenced by peers (Haustein et al. 2009).

Other research confirms the correlation between parents' car ownership and children's attitudes towards different transport modes (Cahill 1996). According to the results of these studies, seven-year-old children already associate different modes of transportation with different levels of prestige (e.g. old people are more likely to be associated with bus travel, whereas successful-looking people are linked with car brands such as Porsche or BMW). The latter are also types of cars that children want to own when older, which can be considered as evidence of media influence on children's attitudes to transport modes (Baslington 2008).

When children grow up, their mobility pattern starts to resemble that of young adults, with some peculiar constraints that depend on the presence of a short/safe path to access school, sports and recreational activities on

foot or by bike and by the presence of school bus services. Both in urban, rural and peri-urban areas, children's independence is directly related to the quality of infrastructures and the presence of services.

Challenges for children in transportation

As the picture of children's travel behaviour is complex, it is clear that the car plays a large part in the travel behaviour of children for a number of reasons including the complexity of modern life, parental perceptions of traffic danger and the possible risk of abduction, government policy giving parents the choice of school and the decentralisation of urban areas which has partly been caused by greater availability of the car. Figure 12.2 summarises the effects of modern life on children's walking and cycling.

As anticipated in the previous section, in Western Europe, children's independent mobility has seemingly declined during the past 30 years, with trends of increased car usage and accompaniment by adults (Pyer and Tucker 2014; Barker 2006, 2009). Also, it is argued that children spend an increasing amount of time on indoor activities such as computer gaming (Sandercock et al. 2012). One of the most widely cited explanations for increased dependency on parental chauffeuring is parents' concerns for their children's safety (Barker 2003, 2006; Hillman and Adams 1992). However, research in the United Kingdom has shown it is the perception of risk for children in particular that has increased and not necessarily the exposure to risk. Hence, comparing oral histories of children's everyday mobility in the past with recent accounts of children's mobility found that – apart from the perception of risk – actual mobility patterns of children remained the same (Pooley 2011).

Figure 12.2 The influence of modern life on children's walking and cycling levels.

Source: Mackett 2013.

If children need to be accompanied, additional traffic will be generated as parents make additional trips to drop off and then return to pick up their children. This extra traffic is likely to further reduce the likelihood that parents will grant their children independent mobility.

This strong dependence of children on adults for transportation forces households and parents to rely heavily on the use of the private car every day. This has direct effects on society in the form of negative externalities (e.g. pollution, noise, traffic safety issues) due to the increase in road traffic, particularly around highly sensitive locations such as schools or recreational facilities. In addition, negative effects on children's health such as an increase in obesity and disease due to a reduced independent mobility and physical activities are more likely to occur (European Commission 2013). Other adverse effects on children's well-being, health and personal development include loss of autonomy and access to a safe environment outside the home, lowering their quality of life and insufficient gain of practical and social skills due to inexperience in acting independently.

Further challenges may be experienced by children living in rural areas, where accessing suitable public transport might be very difficult. Lack of suitable public transport will pose restrictions on opportunities to meet with friends, push boundaries and develop independence (Hillman and Adams 1992; Romero 2010; Ross 2007), but won't help avoid built-in car dependency on growing children either (Pyer and Tucker 2014; Matthews et al. 2000; Storey and Brannen 2000; Tucker 2002).

Finally, children are a population group at high and increasing risk of poverty, due to the increasing number of low-income households and marginalised or migrant families. Such a trend is a direct result of the increase in the precariousness of the labour market and the reduction of the welfare system. This applies not only to rural areas but also to urban areas. Among the factors that accentuate the poverty of families with small children we can recognise the facts of living in a single-parent family (single adults with children accounted for 4.3% of the total number of households and this value is increasing year by year (Eurostat 2015), living in a household with a female head of the family and living in a household with a head of the family who has a low level of education.

Young adults' characteristics in transport and mobility

While children under the age of 14 who tend to be almost totally dependent on their parents, young adults start to acquire some degree of autonomy in the way they travel. However, today's young adults have also grown up with limited freedom as regards independent travel compared to previous generations, as their surrounding environment has been dominated by traffic and their travel options limited because of traffic's lack of safety (Shaw et al. 2015).

That being said, young adults are still the second group of heavy users of public transit with 36% of their trips made by this mode, after elderly people who show the highest percentage; 53% of their trips are made by public transit. They make most of their journeys by bus and use them more than the average person. They often depend on buses for access to education, training and jobs (Campaign for Better Transport 2014). In addition, they are the main group for cycling (8% of their trips by bike) and walking (12% of their trips on foot) (European Commission 2015).

Car usage is showing signs of a decrease among young adults. Compared to the mid-1990s, they make significantly fewer car journeys per person per year (377 vs. 600) and fewer young people (aged 17–20) now own cars or have driving licences (38% vs. 48%) (Campaign for Better Transport 2014). The reasons for these trends are still not well understood, but some of the insights will be discussed below.

Regardless of these numbers, the transport-related characteristics and mobility patterns of young adults are particularly difficult to frame due to the significant changes in the social and economic structure that have occurred in recent years and have strongly and rapidly modified the way in which young people live, work and travel.

Table 12.1 summarises the causal factors proposed by Delbosc and Currie (2013), Aretun and Nordbakke (2014) and IFMO (Institute for Mobility Research 2013) for the changes in young adults' travel behaviour.

In particular, two of the main developments that are having an impact on young people's mobility patterns are ICT usage as well as car usage and the perceptions of cars.

ICT and, more specifically, the impact of smartphones on young adults' mobility is relevant as such devices enable them to perform other online activities while travelling, with an impact on modal choice (Konrad and Wittowsky 2017) and because they may replace the car as the new highly visible status symbol (Tully 2011).

Specifically, in urban areas, the increasing use of ICT and the increasing availability of (travel) information is considered to make public transport and the use of new forms of mobility (e.g. multimodality and sharing) more attractive and feasible (better accessibility, the possibility of using travel time for socialising and communication).

The young "digital natives" who grow up using smartphones as part of their daily life are the main users and beneficiaries of this technology allowing them to easily access real-time travel information, download and store a ticket or unlock a shared vehicle belonging to a self-service system (e.g. a bicycle or car) (Prensky 2001). ICT obviously facilitates inter- and multi-modal travel. Users can choose the mode of travel best fitting their situation, individual time and financial budget (Tully and Alfaraz 2017).

On the other hand, it is also demonstrated that the availability of information about activity opportunities as a result of ICTs and the extended

Table 12.1 Causal factors for the changes in young adults' travel behaviour

<i>Main category</i>	<i>Specific factor</i>
Demographic situation	Postponing of parenthood Increase in cohabitation
Living situation	Migration to a foreign country (study or work) Living with parents longer Decline in private home ownership Increased urbanisation
Socio-economic situation	Increased participation in higher education Increase in woman's labour force participation Increased work in the service sector Increase in low-waged, uncontracted work Decline in disposable income
Information & Communication Technologies	Increased ICT use Use of mobile devices to arrange everyday life ICT use whilst traveling on public transport Increase in gaming
Values and attitude	Extended youth Rise of pro-environment attitudes Decline in cars as status symbol
Transport and mobility	Improvements in public transport Strict driver licensing regime Increased car insurance costs Increased spending on transport Rise of shared mobility

Source: Based on Delbosc and Currie 2013; Aretun and Nordbakke 2014; Institute for Mobility Research 2013

scope of decision-making has an enhancement effect on two levels: it results in more trips and especially in additional longer trips (Konrad and Wittowsky 2017, 3–7). Another factor to take into account when describing young people's mobility patterns is the car's decline among this generation. Despite the fact that the acquisition of a driver's licence is still considered one of the most important travel-mode related life events (Klöckner 2004) and a sort of initiation rite, which also implies the social dimension of crossing a very important threshold into adult life (Schönhammer 1999), in many western countries car use is increasing less than before or even declining (Delbosc and Currie 2013; Millard-Ball and Schipper 2011). This is particularly appropriate for young people who seem to be less car-oriented than previous generations (Kuhnimhof et al. 2013).

The affordability of a car is a growing issue for young people (particularly the cost of insurance), parking availability is limited and maintenance costs are increasing with modern vehicle technology. In Great Britain, Norway and the United States, the decrease in licensing among young adults contributed to the recent decline in car availability (for which holding a licence is one important prerequisite). In Germany and France, where young adults' licence-holding was stable, it is mostly the decline in the car ownership of

households in which young adults live that has caused the decrease in car availability (Institute for Mobility Research 2013).

There is good evidence from cross-sectional analyses of UK data to suggest that the fall in licence holding has been driven, at least in part, by changes to the lives of young people in terms of demographics, their living situation and socio-economic situation (Berrington and Mikolai 2014; Levine and Polak 2014).

Besides the decrease in car ownership, additional relevant developments have contributed to the observed car mileage reduction among young adults. The most important reason for young drivers' decreasing car use is that they use alternative modes more, i.e. they exhibit increasingly multimodal behaviour (Institute for Mobility Research 2013).

Moreover, according to academics such as Chatterjee et al. (2018, 29), while "economic circumstances explained the lower level of car access for Millennials living independently of other adults" for "Millennials living dependently (e.g. with parents or other older adults) there was an unexplained cohort effect" indicating a lower tendency to own or have access to a car among Millennials. Attitudinal research also demonstrates that cars are not seen as aspirational by financially better off, non-car owning young people (Thornton et al. 2011).

The car's decline in young adults' interest can also be related to the increasing prevalence of life situations which do not engender car use. The number of young adults entering higher and specialised education, located mainly in urban centres, is increasing. They usually have an urban lifestyle for their employment and social life, facilitated by modern mobile technology. In addition, young adults are increasingly adopting an environmental attitude towards transport, with public transport and walking accounting for significant shares of their modal split and cycling being regarded as more fashionable among young adults and young professionals.

Challenges for young adults in transportation

For a long time, transport-related issues came at the very top of young adults' concerns. In fact, the availability of transport is fundamental for young adults to ensure proper access to education, job opportunities, friends and other social activities. However, this is not always easy to realise, especially for those who live in rural/deprived areas or within low-income families.

Good transport links are vital for young people to access job training, but transport costs and availability can hinder both their job search and the ability of young people to remain in work if they can find it. It can also prevent access to further education and training, which in the long term has serious implications for growth and productivity.

In addition, accessing jobs by transport is not always easy for young adults, as low skilled jobs are increasingly located outside city centres where

they are more difficult to reach by public transport and may involve shift or weekend work when buses are less frequent or may not run at all (Campaign for Better Transport 2014).

Another challenge for young adult's mobility is the aspect of safety in public transport. A study showed that people aged between 16 and 24 are the most likely to experience a worrying episode on public transport, especially at night (Transport for London 2014). This is particularly true for young females, an aspect that has already been investigated in Chapter 4.

Not only on public transport, but safety in general is a topic of concern for young adults. In fact, road accidents represent the first cause of death for young adults (aged between 14 and 25), with young males more exposed to this risk compared to young females. This issue is even worse for low-income young adults. In the United Kingdom, those who belong to the lowest social group appear to be five times more likely to die in road accidents than those from the highest; and "more than a quarter of child pedestrian casualties happen in the most deprived areas" (Samek Lodovici and Torchio 2015, 34).

Finally, many researchers argue that virtual mobility reduces the need for physical mobility and thus substitutes travel. E-shopping, e-learning and telework can replace the need for physical presence and hence reduce travel. In social relationships, ICT tools such as messaging and internet telephony can create a sense of proximity between people who are physically divided and thus decrease the need for physical meetings and travel (Konrad and Wittowsky 2017).

On the other hand, with growing networks and distances, the need for physical mobility to nurture these networks and fulfil social obligations is also increasing and visiting friends and relatives involving middle and long-distance travelling has become a substantial part of leisure travel and can be a significant challenge for those who are not able to conduct physical travel frequently (Elliott and Urry 2010).

Conclusions

From numerous points of view, mobility represents a fundamental aspect of children and young people's quality of life, hence the transportation needs of children and young adults must be taken very seriously by governments, local authorities and by all stakeholders involved.

So far, public policies have not always properly addressed children's travel needs, especially those related to leisure and recreational activities. The result is that, with the exception of home-school journeys (which only account for little more than a third of children's journeys), the right to have a safe travel environment outside is overlooked (Shaw et al. 2015). Such a situation is even exacerbated in rural areas, where, most of the time, adequate services to support children's travel are lacking.

To change such a trend, it is fundamental that transport authorities prioritise the consideration of the evolving needs of children and young adults

more clearly and encourage bidders to improve their service offer specifically addressed to young people. In addition, a stronger impetus should be put on accessibility and the planning system should support the creation and retention of schools and jobs (particularly entry-level jobs suitable for young people) in locations that can be served by public transport. A package of appropriate measures should also be introduced to make roads safer, provide cycling training at schools and eventually reduce young people's dependence on their parents' cars (Campaign for Better Transport 2014).

In addition, it is extremely important to recognise the situations in which children also have to deal with other vulnerabilities. For example, children living in rural areas will inevitably have access to fewer opportunities than those living in central urban areas. The children of low-income families will find it harder to travel than those belonging to wealthier ones. Similarly, children of immigrants will face more severe challenges in mobility than those of the domestic population.

If youth's transport barriers and challenges are not clearly understood and properly addressed, future scenarios are likely to occur where young people without adequate access to transport services are excluded from opportunities and precluded from a bright future.

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