I.L.A. Kollektiv

AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS?

How the imperial mode of living prevents a good life for all

With a preface by **Ulrich Brand, Barbara Muraca** and **Markus Wissen**

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Fast, faster, imperial

When flights are cheaper than train tickets, Green Party voters rank top among frequent flyers and a single country like Germany boasts a significantly higher number of cars than the entire continent of Africa, something is definitely wrong. Nonetheless, our accelerated, energy-intensive mode of mobility remains firmly in the saddle. How can that be? And how can we change direction?

Don't try to sell us hiking!"—this is the refrain of a sulking boy in a pilot's cap and a girl wearing a flight attendant's hat as part of an advert for the now-defunct Air Berlin. "Fly to Greece for just €60. The kids are happy, everybody's happy!" Sure. Why not spend your holidays on the beach in Greece? After all, flying to the Mediterranean coast is now cheaper than taking the train to the nearby mountains. Low-cost carriers only conquered the skies (and our hearts) a few years ago, allowing us to discover the world at affordable prices in spite of our limited time. This ability to fly cheaply has now become a key factor in many aspects of our lives, be it holiday planning, our work lives, our choice of where to live or even whether to commit to a (long-distance) relationship.

Nearly everything in our lives is 'mobile' and dependent on transport. By the time the cotton and thread for our T-shirts have found their way to the textile factory and, eventually, to our wardrobes, they will often have travelled tens of thousands of kilometres. Yet the item's €5 price tag reveals none of this to consumers. We simply take bargain-priced T-shirts for granted.

Mobility, movement, transport, traffic: what do these terms actually mean?

The term mobility describes the spatial and temporal movement of living beings, goods or information. Academic writing tends to define mobility in a broader sense and includes relocation, migration or even social and/or professional advancement.[4] This chapter, however, focuses on mobility as the transporting of people and goods, and the traffic this causes. See the infobox on "Freedom of movement" on migration, and the chapter Digitalisation on the movement of information.

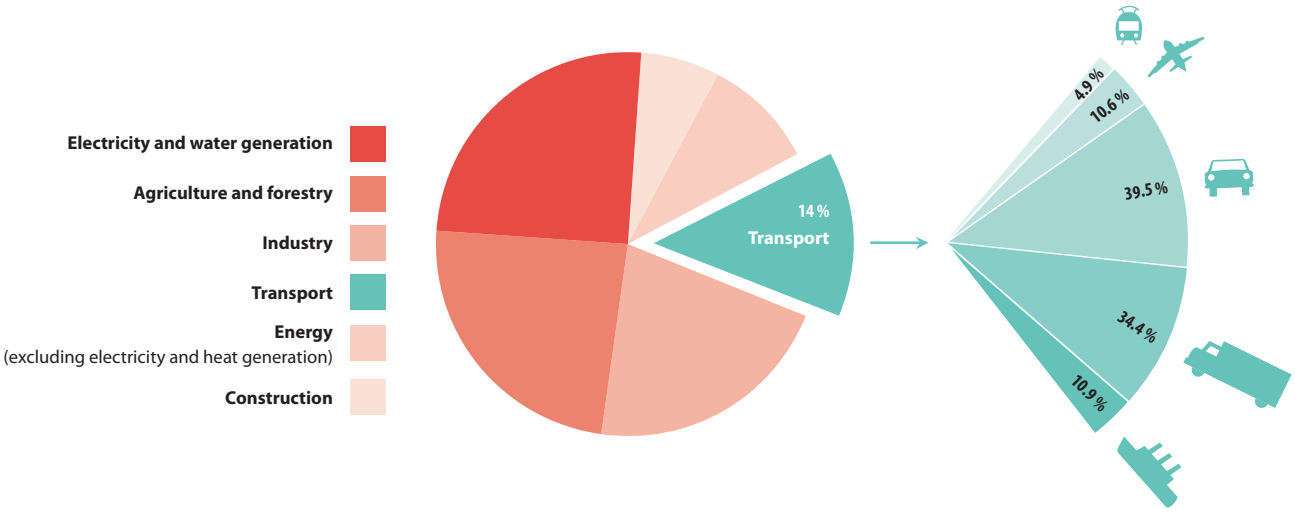
Within just a few decades, the means and speed of transport, as well as the distances covered, have multiplied. While 100 years ago the average travelling speed did not go beyond 90 kilometres per hour, today we travel nearly ten times as fast.[1] While providing many benefits, an increasing number of problems overshadow this development: for instance, every 25 seconds somebody dies in a road accident,[2] while oil, over half of which is used for transport, fuels numerous geopolitical conflicts.[3]

»Building one kilometre of motorway requires 40,000 tonnes of cement, steel, sand and gravel … and roads need 10 to 15 times more space than railways.«

(Krausmann & Fischer-Kowalski, 2010, p. 52)

Figure 8.1: Global greenhouse gas emissions, 2010

Source: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014, p. 9; Miller & Façanha, 2014, p. 6



Despite vehicles' rising efficiency, the transport sector's emissions, and the negative impact they have on the environment, have grown faster in recent decades than those of any other industry. 25 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions in the European Union, and around 14 per cent globally, are transport sector related (Figure 8.1).[5] As the IPCC warns, transport sector emissions could increase by over 70 per cent by 2050 (taking 2010 as a baseline).[6] Accelerated, motorised mobility is not only highly energy-intensive, it also consumes large amounts of resources and space.[7]

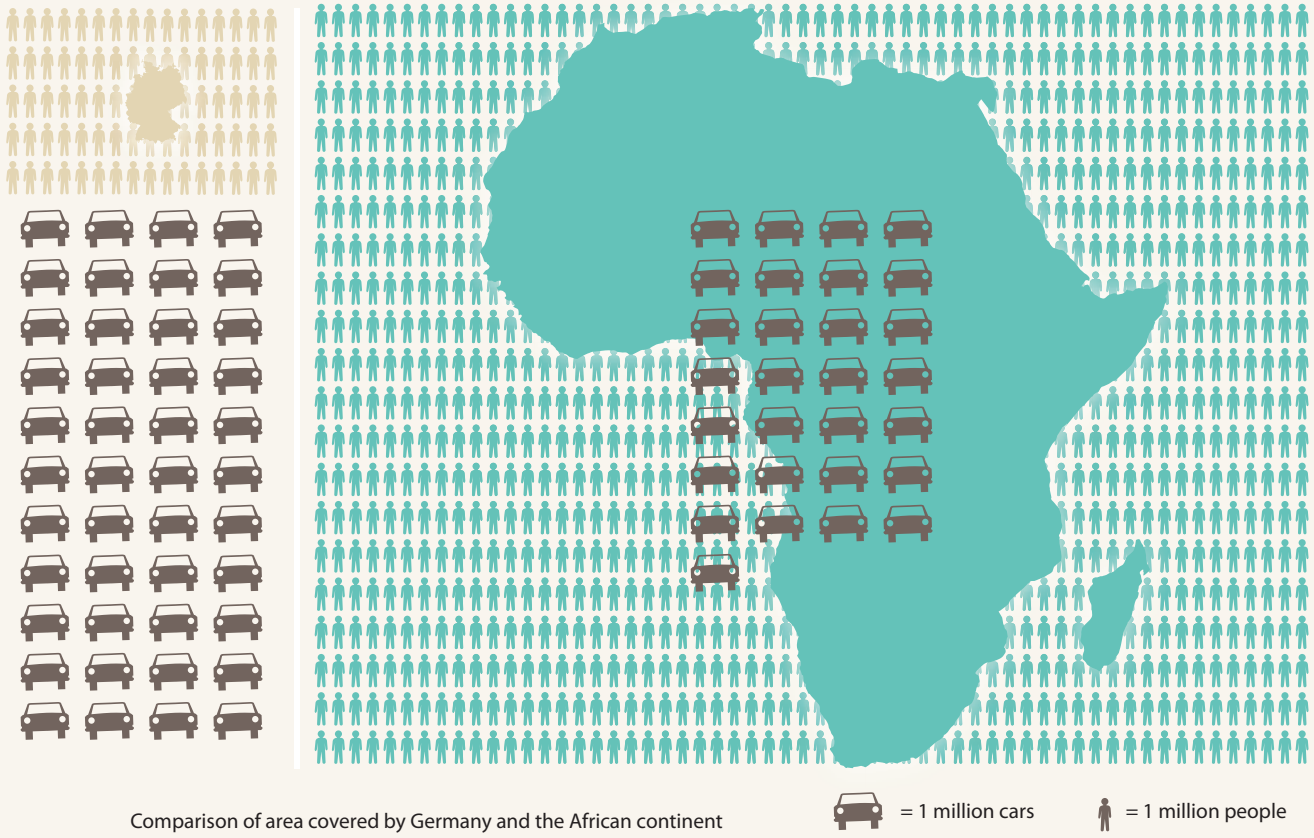
Is this merely the collateral damage of an otherwise highly beneficial acceleration? After all, the achievements of the transport revolution allow us to travel almost anywhere whenever and as quickly as we want, just as we can buy products from all over the world with a single 'click'. But is everyone benefitting from these advances? A mere ten per cent of the global population are responsible for 80 per cent of motorised passenger kilometres.[8] Due to a lack of financial means, harsh border controls and the limited awarding of visas, the majority of people around the globe are currently suffering severe restrictions on their freedom of movement (see infobox on "Freedom of movement"). The promise of mobility does not apply to everybody: the globalised economy ensures the mobility of goods and of people from Western societies, while denying it to the majority of other people. It wants cheap trousers from Pakistan, but not the immigration of Pakistani textile workers who earn starvation wages in their home country.

The dominant mode of mobility is highly exclusive and imperial. Its structure is built on the fact that those who have permanent access to overseas products or are able to travel at high speed do so at the cost of others. It is a privilege that comes at the expense of the biosphere, people in low-income jobs, younger and elderly people, future generations and those in the Global South, who are already suffering the consequences of climate change.[9] But what would happen if citizens in the Global South were to take up similar mobility habits? Now that the dream of accelerated mobility is coming true for millions of people in countries such as China and India, we are starting to realise that a form of mobility that cannot function as a globally applicable model is becoming universally accessible (Figures 8.2 and 8.3).[10]

We have long been aware of the social and environmental implications of our system of mobility. But why does nothing change? Why, in spite of growing contradictions and the availability of sensible alternatives, is the imperial form of mobility so firmly entrenched in our lives? This chapter tries to find answers. Based on two examples, we will first explore 21st-century mobility by looking at freight transport and air travel. We then analyse the factors that have helped establish a resource-intensive form of accelerated mobility as the norm and why it remains so dominant. Only by understanding such elements will we eventually be able to overcome the prevailing transport system. Possible starting points, strategies, as well as socio-ecological approaches to a transformation of the sector are the focus of the final part of the chapter.

Figure 8.2: A comparison of car density between Germany and the African continent

Source: OICA, 2017; Statista, 2017; Federal Statistical Office; UNDP, 2017



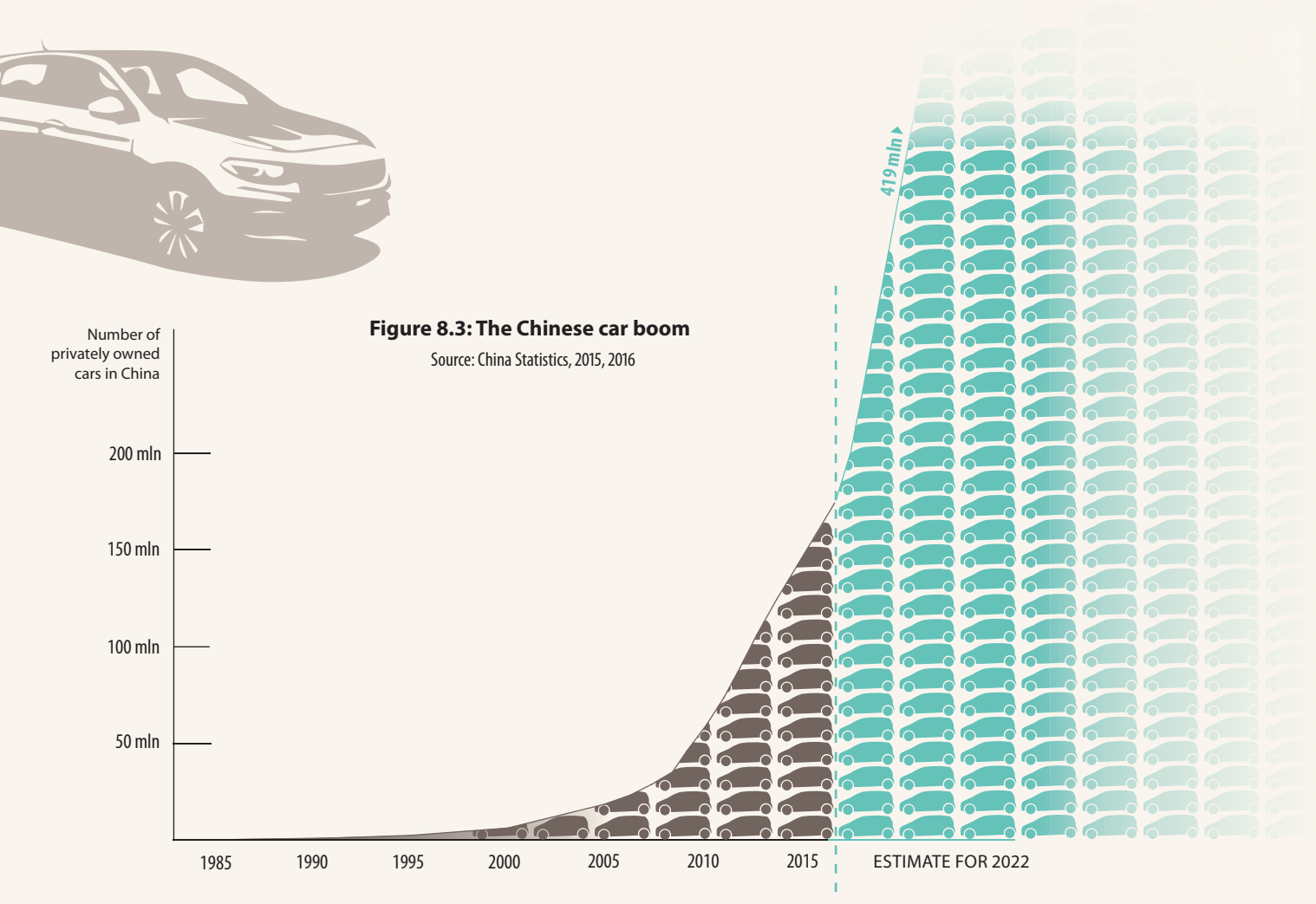


Figure 8.3: The Chinese car boom

Source: China Statistics, 2015, 2016

Trade and logistics

Let us return to our example of the €5 T-shirt. The fact that the item can be sold for so little is not least thanks to the low costs involved in transporting the product (around 35 cents). It is not uncommon for T-shirts to travel around 20,000 kilometres before arriving on a shop shelf.[11] Extremely cheap freight transport provides the basis for the bloated production chains of the global textile, IT and food sectors. During the early stages of industrialisation, transport costs factored in at around half of a product's final price; in today's textile sector, however, this has dropped to a mere seven per cent.[12] The products we buy frequently travel thousands of kilometres between production stages often purely for the purpose of exploiting cheaper labour and more lax environmental standards.

Yet, how can transport be so cheap? The obvious efficiency gains made thanks to gigantic container vessels and the digitalisation of logistics (Digitalisation) are just one piece of the puzzle. A greater role is played by the numerous direct and indirect subsidies provided to the freight transport sector. Ocean vessels burn heavy oil, a refinery by-product. Governments do not tax heavy oil, making it an extremely cheap fuel.[13] The same applies to cargo planes that run on tax-free kerosene.[14] Moreover, governments invest billions annually to build and maintain the necessary port, road and rail infrastructure. States charge transport carriers little to use this infrastructure, and these costs are a negligible factor in price calculation and final product price.[15] One example is the €100 million Germany annually spends on its ports in Bremen.[16] If companies had to pay these infrastructure costs, this would considerably increase the price of transport.

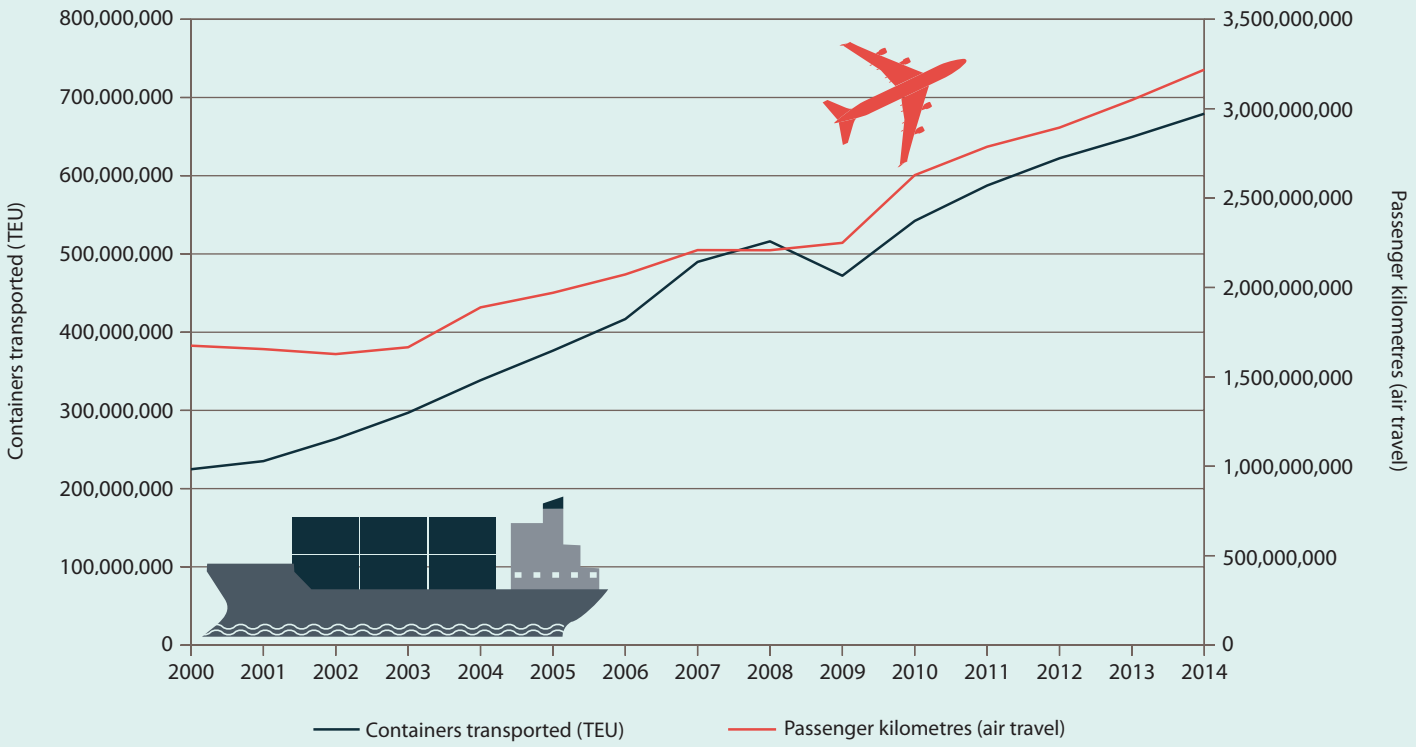
Flagging – the cheap way out

The exploitation of workers on container vessels is a further factor that contributes to low transport costs. The basis for this is the practice of using *flags of convenience* (FOC) whereby ships do not fly the flag of the country of their owners, but use the civil ensign of cheaper countries, i.e. where labour standards, taxes and environmental legislation are more lax. In Germany, the country with the fourth-largest shipping fleet globally, 89.9 per cent of ships fly the flag of a foreign country.[17] The most important flagging countries are Panama (20.6 per cent of global tonnage), Liberia (12 per cent) and the Marshall Islands (10.1 per cent).[18] The process frees shipping companies from the constraints of union-enforced minimum wages, maximum working hours or break time regulations. These exploitative labour conditions mainly affect people from the Global South.[19] Often, taxes in the registering countries are lower or non-existent, which further reduces transport costs.[20]

Transport costs can also be kept so low because the environmental impacts of its activities are externalised (see externalisation in the Glossary) and therefore are not (and cannot be) reflected in the price. Today global shipping already accounts for three per cent of global CO_2 emissions, 13 per cent of sulphur dioxide, as well

Figure 8.4: No end in sight – growth of container shipping and air travel

Source: IATA, 2016; International Transport Forum, 2016b; World Bank, 2017a, 2017b



as 15 per cent of nitrogen oxide emissions.[21] Besides having a direct impact on the inhabitants of port cities, for example, by exposing them to high levels of sulphur pollution, ships running on heavy oil contribute to ocean acidification.[22] Studies already warn that further pollution of the oceans could destroy the foundations of life for many marine animal and plant species and severely threaten the balance of these ecosystems.[23]

Container vessels represent one of the world's fastest-growing markets (Figure 8.4).[24] Between 2000 and 2015 alone the market tripled in size, and it is expected to triple again between now and 2050.[25] The volume of air freight transport doubled during the same period, and rail transport increased, albeit more slowly, managing a sector growth of 20 per cent. As a result, each passing year sees the same products travel a greater number of kilometres before they finally reach stores. While the German government has been vocal about its aim to reduce transport intensity, all estimates point in the opposite direction.[26]

While the freight transport sector is itself an expression of the imperial mode of living, the sector's structures also promote this way of life. Low transport costs are the main reason for the existence of multinational production chains. That is why it is profitable for the North Sea prawn industry to ship their catch to Morocco for shelling and then transport the goods back to Europe in lorries (Food and agriculture).[27]

Air travel

Right now, at this very moment, around half a million people are in the air.[28] As a study, published in the renowned journal *Science*, revealed in 2016, the problem with air travel is that for each tonne of CO_2 emitted, we lose around three square metres of Arctic sea ice.[29] A return flight from Berlin Tegel to Kalamata in Greece destroys around four and a half square metres of Arctic ice.[30]

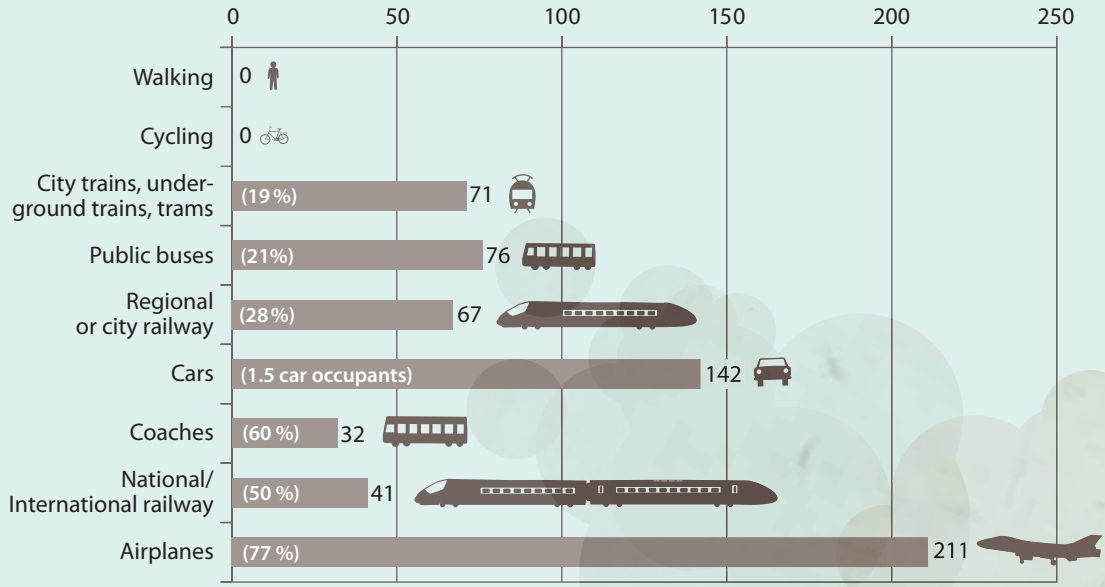
In Germany, 45 per cent of the transport sector's impact on the climate is flight-related, with cars contributing another 46 per cent, leaving a mere six per cent contributable to public transport, such as buses and trains (Figure 8.5).[31] Around five per cent of man-made climate change is attributable to global commercial air travel, two per cent of which results from CO_2 emissions.[32] And this figure is set to rise: the International Energy Agency estimates that between 2005 and 2050 flight travel will increase four fold (Figure 8.4).[33] By 2034 the number of passengers will probably have doubled; there are currently around 3.4 billion flights annually.[34] But this does not mean that half of the global population flies. Estimates from the early 21st century calculate that only five per cent of the global population has ever set foot on a plane.[35]

Who flies and who can't? Injustice in the air

On 6 September 2016, a dozen "Black Lives Matter" activists blocked one of the runways at London City Airport. "Climate Crisis is a Racist Crisis" was their message. They protested the building of a new runway close to a London working-class neighbourhood. The residents, many of whom identify as black British African, earn significantly less than the passengers flying above their heads.[36] In the UK, levels of fine dust exposure are 28 per cent higher for black British Africans than for white British citizens. Of course, this is also related to

Figure 8.5: Greenhouse gas emissions caused by different forms of transport

Source: Umweltbundesamt (Federal Environmental Office), 2016; Verkehrsclub Deutschland (Association for ecological Traffic), 2017



Greenhouse gas emissions (CO_2, CH_4 and N_2O as CO_2 equivalents)
in gram per passenger kilometre based on average capacity utilisation (in brackets)

who can afford a flat in a less polluted area.[37] Moreover, the "Black Lives Matter" protest action highlighted the UK's significant contribution to the climate crisis, the effects of which the country hardly feels, while Africa has become the continent most threatened by global warming.[38]

Who is able to fly and who is impacted by the damaging effects of air travel is therefore also influenced by racist structures, as well as gender (according to industry analysts, men fly more frequently than women[39]) and, in particular, social class. In Germany, the group earning the highest salaries flies 6.6 times per year on average, whereas the figure for the group earning the lowest salaries is only 0.6.[40] This leads to the seemingly paradoxical phenomenon whereby those who vote Green (in Germany at least) are the voters who fly the most as they tend to earn higher salaries.[41]

How flights are made cheap

Due to the success of budget carriers, many low-income earners today can afford to fly more often, especially when a flight becomes significantly cheaper than a train journey to the same destination. How can that be? Governments heavily subsidize the most environmentally harmful form of travel — in Germany to the tune of around €10 billion annually. This is mainly because almost no country taxes kerosene. Furthermore, international flights are mostly exempt from VAT.[42] Airports also usually do not pay property tax.[43] Small regional airports only survive due to government cash injections.[44]

For decades, civil society organisations have demanded the introduction of a tax on kerosene and the abolition of certain privileges enjoyed by the airline industry. A new concept, however, has helped brush aside these old proposals. It is the promise that air travel could soon deliver green expansion. A closer look, however, quickly reveals the fundamental contradictions and flaws of this green economy strategy (see infobox on "Green Economy").

The dream of green growth: sustainable air travel?

Could aircraft fleets one day operate on hybrid or solar energy? Or could they be run entirely on agrofuels? CO_2 neutral flights sound enticing. Over the past few decades, media and the aircraft industry itself have repeatedly discussed planned innovations in the sector. A 2016 study analysed the dominant discourses on technological innovation in air travel.[45] The analysis concluded that a few years after such an announcement was made, the promises of 'green' air travel always turned out to be illusions or pipe dreams. Their implementation would require huge leaps in innovation, for example, lightweight energy storage systems or superconductors. Meanwhile even industry insiders admit that this technology is at least another 25 years away. As planes have a service life of around 30 years, our energy-intensive planes of today will be around well into the 2060s.[46]

Airplane fuel efficiency currently increases by just 1.5 per cent annually, which is far below the rate at which the number of flights and subsequent emissions are growing. This is a typical example of the rebound effect (Glossary).[47] The plan to replace kerosene with agrofuels is unrealistic, not least due to the large volume of crops that would be required. Environmental organisations also criticise such projects as they would lead to less land availability for food cultivation (see info-

INFOBOX

Emissions trading and offsets – the problem with market-based measures of environmental protection

Since the signing of the Kyoto Protocol, emissions trading has become a central instrument of climate protection and one of the core Green Economy (infobox on "Green Economy") strategies. It is based on the assumption that the same market mechanisms that caused the climate crisis can be used to tackle it. The idea is that states define caps on greenhouse gas emissions for individual economic sectors. They then issue a corresponding number of emission certificates to be distributed between industrial plants. Every year states then ratchet up these emission caps and reduce the number of available certificates. Factories that emit more CO_2 than they are allowed to (based on the number of certificates they hold) must then buy further certificates to continue polluting. Factories can buy certificates from others that still have certificates spare. This turns CO_2 and 'CO_2 equivalents' (such as methane) as well as global carbon sinks like forests into new products with fluctuating prices that are traded, speculated with and used to make a profit.[53] Instead of leading to a restructuring of the economy and promoting new low-emission industries, this system effectively offers factories a cheap way to avoid taking responsibility and has, to a certain degree, in fact achieved the opposite.[54] Instead of purchasing emissions certificates, many emissions trading schemes also give industrial plants or airlines the option of investing in an offset project that purportedly reduces emissions (Figure 8.6).[55]

Mostly, these projects are located in the Global South and include hydroelectric power stations or wind farms, "clean" coal power stations with improved filters, risky Carbon Capture and Storage projects (Glossary) or reforestation projects (including environmentally disastrous monoculture plantations).[56] The REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) forest programme is set to become the biggest scheme for offsetting aviation emissions.[57] Frequently, offset projects lead to human rights abuses and are not as beneficial to the environment or the climate as they claim. In many cases, REDD+ projects have limited the traditional use of forests by farmers and indigenous communities or actually led to their displacement.[58] As a concept, offsetting also fails to recognise that at the current stage of the climate crisis an 'either-or' is no longer possible. We need to reduce emissions where they occur as well as protect forests and implement measures to reduce CO_2 emissions. As it legitimises the 'business as usual' approach, emissions trading can even be considered counterproductive.[59]

> *»REDD is a threat to the rights of [indigenous] peoples, their territories, the balance of Mother Earth and the creatures that inhabit it. It does nothing to mitigate the injustice of pollution and over-consumption related to industrial capitalism.«*[60]
>
> (CONAIE [the national indigenous federation of Ecuador] in a letter to Ban-Ki Moon, 2011)

Despite negative experiences and resistance, market-based mechanisms of climate protection such as these are spreading globally, not least because certain people are clearly profiting from them, as indicated by the example of airline industries. However, the concept has not only garnered support as a means of climate protection. Biodiversity offsetting is also becoming more popular around the world.[61] The underlying principle is the same: the biodiversity lost at one location through the construction of an airport needs to be recreated elsewhere. Frequently, such arguments are used to override environmental concerns, legislation or resistance and implement harmful projects.[62]

The mechanisms of climate and environmental protection that currently dominate are market-based and, as they outsource the impacts of projects (and the remedying of those impacts) to far-off places and people, integral to the imperial mode of living. For those who can afford it, getting trees planted in Brazil is a better option than flying less. Indigenous organisations and the climate justice movement have therefore dubbed these market-based climate and environmental protection measures 'green neocolonialism' (Historical overview).[63]

box on "Agrofuels").[48] The study also highlights the fact that promoting such technology myths actually prevents the development of an effective climate policy for our skies.[49]

In October 2016, the UN International Civil Aviation Organisation set up a global emissions reduction scheme for the aviation sector. However, this agreement does not include plans to curb flight travel as a measure to combat climate change or to reduce the sector's CO_2 emissions. Instead, offsetting will be used to partially reduce planes' CO_2 emissions. Offsets are projects to counteract the damaging effects of air travel, for example, by organising reforestation projects in the Global South (see infobox on "Emissions trading and offsets"). Under CORSIA (Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation), airlines can buy their way out of taking responsibility to reduce emissions. According to the aviation industry, "a simple carbon offsetting scheme would be the quickest to implement, the easiest to administer and the most cost-efficient".[50] With CORSIA, they got what they wanted: a blank cheque for further growth. Offsetting is not the only reason why this agreement is questionable. It isn't expected to come into force until 2027 and many countries such as India or Russia are exempt from the agreement. Moreover, the scheme only applies to international flights and to CO_2 emissions.[51] The climate impacts of other factors of aviation, for example soot particles or contrails, are at least double that of CO_2.[52]

> *»Tell me the speed at which you travel, and I'll tell you who you are.«*[64]
>
> (Illich, 1974)

Figure 8.6: Offsetting

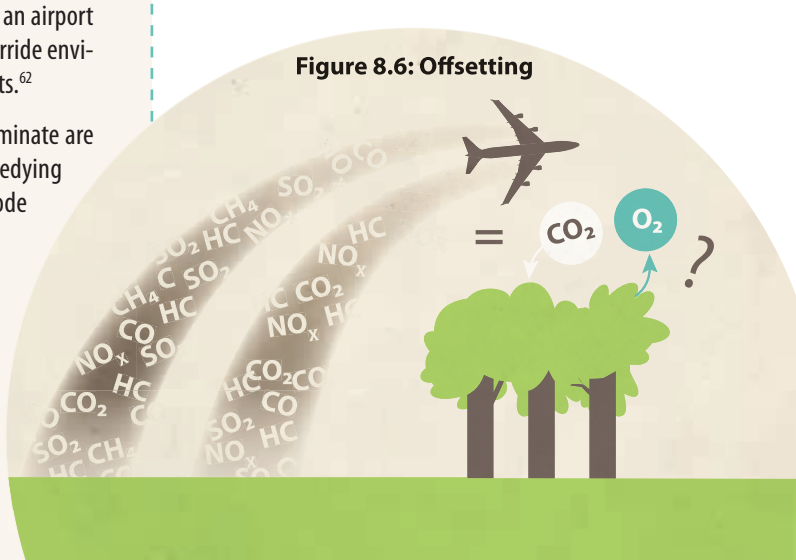


Figure 8.7: Material dimensions of Germany's vehicle fleet

Source: own calculations

Placed on the equator, Germany's bicycles and motorcycles, fleet of cars, lorries, tractors, buses, trains, planes, helicopters and ships would **stretch 9.5 times around the earth** (figure taken from 2009).

Bogged down: why a mobility transformation is proving so difficult

The analysis of these two spheres of mobility — freight and aviation — already highlights some of the injustices and contradictions related to our accelerated mode of living. We must therefore now turn to the question of why our imperial modes of mobility, despite their inherent problems and our recognition and understanding of these problems, is proving so hard to transform.

A privileged few

The reason our accelerated and resource-intensive form of mobility has not entered a state of crisis yet is mainly due to the fact that — so far at least — only a small fraction of the global population has access to such transport. If everybody were to drive a car and fly, this would very soon deplete the necessary resources. Our accelerated mobility is thus imperial in nature because only a few people enjoy the privileged access to the biosphere and cheap labour. It is also imperial, because this form of mobility is universally desired and, as we highlight below, there seems to be no alternative to it.

Nonetheless, this form of mobility continues to spread, putting pressure on, or even supplanting, other forms of mobility and lifestyles. Although it may seem paradoxical, the massive increase in the number of cars has meant that ever fewer people are actually mobile. The rise exacerbates social differences. Streets and parking spaces occupy ever more space that could otherwise be used for housing, parks, to ride bicycles, walk or be used by public transport.[65] As traffic jams illustrate, individual acceleration does not necessarily lead to an acceleration of society as a whole.

This fact underlines the complexity and contradictory nature of our imperial mode of living. Due to the global spread of an accelerated, energy- and resource-intensive mobility regime, even the less wealthy can now afford to fly or buy a €5 T-shirt, and yet in spite — and precisely because — of this, exploitation, ruinous competition and ecological destruction are the result.

Out of sight, out of mind?

As most strikingly illustrated by climate change, we have outsourced the impacts of our mobility both spatially and temporally, and so far this has prevented the system from derailing. As mentioned above, flight corridors frequently pass over the poorer neighbourhoods of our cities and luxury apartments are only rarely close to the roads their inhabitants use. Destructive oil drilling or the mining of rare earths required for vehicle electrification (Digitalisation), agrofuel plantations (see infobox on "Agrofuels"), as well as the disposal of the (sometimes toxic) waste materials that result from car scrappage often take place in countries of the Global South.[67] Ultimately, being blind to the consequences of our actions helps stabilise our mode of mobility.

Increasingly, however, it is becoming clear that it is not possible to outsource all of the system's negative aspects. In cities in Asia, even the upper classes cannot escape the smog, which is mainly produced by cars.[68] Fine dust pollution is also a massive problem in European cities. The European Environmental Agency estimates that every year air pollution causes the premature deaths of around 467,000 people on the continent.[69] Environmental crises, however, are not the only problem caused by our fossil fuel-based mode of mobility, as highlighted by the high number of traffic accidents that

INFOBOX

Freedom of movement

Not all people are equally mobile. The privilege of being fast and mobile not only hinges on having the necessary financial means as well as the corresponding infrastructure. It is also a question of who has the right to be mobile. In 2010 Europeans were allowed to travel to an average of 62 countries without requiring a visa; for citizens of African countries, however, the figure is only 15. A study reveals that instead of helping the mobility regime to become more open, globalisation has in fact had the opposite effect: inequalities and restrictions have increased.[66] Border regimes help maintain these privileges and keep them largely off limits to migrants. People are allowed to travel for leisure and business, but not to survive.

occur every day. Often, the victims of car accidents are pedestrians and cyclists. Less than half of road traffic deaths involve people in cars.[70]

Something that cannot be outsourced easily are the health and psychological problems associated with traffic, traffic jams, noise pollution and a lack of parking spaces, but also more generally with our accelerated and peripatetic lifestyles. More and more jobs require a high degree of mobility. As studies indicate, long-distance commuters often suffer significantly poorer health than non-commuters. In particular, this affects those who are forced to commute, rather than those who do so voluntarily.[71] As Stephan Rammler writes: "People's greater and ever more frequent mobility makes it hard to maintain that measure of stability in families and group relations essential to social cohesion. […] Sustainable approaches to mobility policy should include strategies for social and cultural deceleration."[72]

But as the following section highlights, the global trend seems to be going in the opposite direction.

"People who don't fly aren't normal"?

Fossil fuel-based forms of mobility are also imperial in nature as they present themselves as the only way to travel. People all over the world consider high-tech means of land and air transport as modern and a lifestyle based on fast and frequent movement as progressive. The idea that the permanent availability of all commodities is what characterizes developed societies has penetrated our everyday lives and thinking on a global level; it seems like the only desirable lifestyle. Alternative notions of society are lacking. Owning a car or flying is the norm; paradoxically, this is even true for the vast majority of the global population that is barred from this lifestyle and that is supposedly still 'underdeveloped'. Being fast and mobile is a reality for a few and an illusion for most — but nonetheless the norm for nearly everybody.

Participation in the accelerated mode of mobility is linked to numerous promises: individual freedom, flexibility, security (by means of the car and from cars), travelling the world, increasing one's knowledge, comfort, effective regeneration and status. Today the image of the well-travelled tourist or the hypermobile entrepreneur increasingly appears alongside — or, in certain urban circles, even replaces — the frequently used masculine status symbol of the car. The 'modern nomad' might be born on the outskirts of a German town, his wife and children live in France, and while waiting for his flight to New York he skypes with Bangkok. "This suggests that the 'nomads' postulated by researchers are freed from reproductive work and are therefore theoretically male. Female figures appear at the destinations and junctures of travel routes as wives, lovers, mothers, maids or sex workers."[73] (Care). Whether these hypermobile subjects are happy or not is a wholly different question. Even for our modern middle- and upper-class nomads, their permanent mobility may not be voluntary, but instead related to the demands of flexible and globalised labour.

It isn't only work that has changed but holidaying too (see above). Getting on a plane and 'jetting off to a beach' has become the mantra of an era in which no one seems to have time for slow travel. We aim to travel the greatest distance in the shortest possible time, indulge in complete relaxation and return to work with our batteries fully recharged. We no longer consider the physical part of getting to a destination as travel. In a brochure published jointly with Airbus, the president of the Green Party-affiliated Heinrich Böll Foundation wrote, "If you wish to discover the world and take part in the global conversation, flying is essential."[74] That this only applies to a small fraction of the global population was not mentioned. Being able to travel anywhere at relatively low cost and with little effort is the very essence of the lifestyle and freedoms that even Green Party voters and hardcore anti-globalisation activists share. Many of the large environmental organisations therefore seem to be afraid to speak out against flying.

The fact that our current mode of mobility is anchored so firmly in our everyday lives, influences our desires and helps to fulfil our needs (which are often artificially created) is what enables it to remain so dominant and resilient. Flight or car advertisements (many of them sexist) stand proud on countless street corners. While spending your holidays in the mountains may have appeared perfectly normal and fine ten years ago, today it might feel like an abstention compared to today's easily accessible beach holiday in Greece.

Wrought in stone and cement: infrastructure

As described above, states provide the necessary funding to maintain or expand the airports that make travelling to Greece possible in the first place. Imperial mobility is therefore not only a question of psychological desire, it is also materially enshrined, enabled and consolidated by the physical infrastructure. In turn, the availability of infrastructure increases its use and thereby consolidates everyday practices and mindsets. 'If you sow streets, you'll harvest traffic.' This fact has been confirmed by numerous studies.[75] Investments into new motorways, government regulations that force homebuilders to construct garages, and construction companies to build shopping malls away from town centres, are all measures that pave the way for car-centred modes of mobility for decades to come.

Building infrastructure makes possibilities a reality. It is another factor that explains the inertia surrounding our current transport system. Evidently, the dominance of our current mode of mobility is thus not built merely on consensus. If the local train no longer stops in your town, you have no other choice but to take the car — if you have one. If Germany stops running its night trains, taking a flight will be the logical solution for many. This was the situation in Latin American and African countries when, in the 1990s, respective governments began privatising and subsequently dismantling what had been effectively run passenger rail services.[76] In the US, General Motors was actively engaged in strategically dismantling public transport systems.[77] Behind any mode of mobility, there are thus stakeholders and interests at play that create the corresponding infrastructure and needs, secure the status quo and do everything in their power to prevent change.

Who is in the driver's seat?

In spite of the well-known implications, private and public stakeholders promote and stabilise the fossil fuel-based mode of mobility through transport, tax, austerity, resource and trade policies. States build and maintain the road network and, through commuter tax reliefs, scrapping premiums, incentives for electric vehicles and other subsidies, systematically grant priority to motorised individual transport and air travel. Ultimately, to secure their access to the resources needed to ensure their mode of mobility, the self-proclaimed 'democracies' of the Global North are ready to resort to military means. Wars over oil are also fought for the sake of our cars and planes.[78] Close ties exist between the automotive, aviation, oil and arms industries.[79] The world's two largest aircraft manufacturers are also arms producers. The Airbus Group makes 20 per cent of its turnover from arms sales; at Boeing, the share is 50 per cent. Both companies are large-scale exporters of weapons systems to Middle East conflict zones.[80]

The automotive industry, logistics companies, ports, airports and other transport sector related fields of activity are able to wield enormous power to defend the sector's continued growth. The air freight and container vessel industries are the backbone of capitalist globalisation. This partially explains why nations still refuse to tax the fuels used in these industries, and climate treaties largely ignore their emissions. Doing so would strike a blow to the heart of globalisation. Jobs are often used as the ultimate argument to put to bed any ideas of a possible socio-ecological transformation. For fear of losing secure and stable employment opportunities — a justified concern — unions also end up defending the status quo. We are regularly reminded that the automotive sector is one of Germany's key industries. Yet, according to Winfried Wolf (2009), the automotive industry has not created any new jobs for over 25 years in Germany. In spite of increasing production, corporations have actually slashed jobs due to the domination of just a few corporations and mechanised and digitised mass production (Digitalisation).[81]

Smokescreens?

Despite being aware of the problems inherent to the system for decades, the five reasons we have identified so far (exclusivity, opportunities to spatially and temporally outsource impacts, deeply anchored normative concepts and habits, inertia related to the existing infrastructure and the vested interests of powerful stakeholders) are not the only ones standing in the way of a transformation of our current mobility model. A further factor is the claim that 'green' technological modernisation and emissions trading can solve all of our problems. This illusion helps maintain motorised individual travel and flight mobility and ensures the further globalisation of the existing system of trade.

> ***I am therefore excited about current transportation innovation. From the rollout of electric buses to the growing success of personal electric vehicles to advances in efficiency and new fuels. […] We must view transport through the double lens of increasing human mobility and decreasing emissions, which means decarbonising transport.«***[82]
>
> (Christina Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC] in her opening speech at the International Transport Forum, 2016)

Often, this is merely a case of new wine in old bottles. Old concepts such as private mass motorisation become the basis of new technologies. But as long as resource-intensive privately owned cars remain the norm, or the aspiration of many, it matters little whether that vehicle has an electric engine.[83] Moreover, it does not help much if the electricity for these vehicles comes from coal-fired power plants — as is the case for over 40 per cent of Germany's electricity.[84] Recently, Austria, like many other states, has begun promoting private electric car mobility. While the country offered a €4,000 premium to people who bought an electric vehicle by the year 2018, it offers no such incentive to people who decide not to buy a car at all. Austria aims to provide free parking spaces for 'eco-friendly' cars as well as allow them to be used on bus lanes.[85] So, while the state promotes car mobility and the automotive industry, it is applying measures that actively limit the space available for public and non-motorised forms of mobility.

Research into environmentally less harmful technologies is undoubtedly necessary. Yet we must not forget that efficiency gains, as the section on flights highlighted, are slow. Moreover, rebound effects (Glossary) often cancel out any positive impacts. For example, certain new technologies and innovations can cause issues in other areas, such as electric vehicles that depend on the availability of rare earths, or agrofuel production that competes with food cultivation (see infobox on "Agrofuels").[86]

The aforementioned UN aviation emissions agreement is another example of current strategies that aim to solve ongoing transport and climate crises by using emissions offsetting to externalise impacts. The agreement leads consumers to believe that their flights are

sustainable. The dominant approaches therefore leave the imperial mode of living untouched and actually grant it a new source of legitimacy.

Accelerated mobility is an essential ingredient of an economic model built on growth, the constant development of new markets and 'progress'.[87] However, it has only become predominant because it is anchored in our everyday lives, plans and desires. This offers an indication as to why resistance to this model and alternative approaches face an uphill task and highlights the obstacles any transformative pathway must overcome. True transformation will depend on the Global North bidding farewell to its growth-based economy as well as to a number of privileges. This is about more than just modernisation; we need to overcome the imperial mode of mobility.

Solidary forms of mobility

So how can we break the persistent hold, which the imperial modes of production and living have over mobility? What could be the relevant strategies, levels and stakeholders? What shape could a non-imperial form of mobility take? How can we design an inclusive and just mode of mobility that does not depend on the excessive exploitation of labour or the environment and does not export its impacts?

To overcome today's mode of mobility and its blatant lack of solidarity, we will need to begin with the aforementioned points, which offer the system such stability. For this, we will briefly sketch out a number of strategies, actions and measures aimed at change, and describe three possible areas of transformation. Ultimately, we will need to topple the social norm of individual, motorised mobility and permanent access to goods from around the world. Furthermore, new everyday practices, norms and sustainable infrastructures must be established. This will have to happen against the resistance of those who profit from the current system, a list that not only includes our industries but also societies that benefit from flying and driving as well as the consumption of generally affordable goods.

"Anti-everything"? Strategies for transformation

Cutting down on damaging activity at the individual level and choosing sustainable consumption patterns is a frequently discussed strategy. Important as they are, such approaches alone are nowhere near enough. So far, however, practical ideas and demands that aim for a deceleration at the individual and societal level, as well as a rejection of hypermobility and modern nomadism, only appeal to a very small, sated and generally affluent consumer class.[88] Meanwhile, there is a relentless global trend towards fossil fuel-based motorised mobility, which has lost none of its appeal. People who opt for 'conscious' forms of consumption limit their contribution to choosing between different sustainable products, while multiple forms of broader democratic control remain untapped.

These can include strategies of resistance: against the increased power of industry vis-à-vis the public or against measures that further entrench motorised fossil fuel-based mobility systems (such as the expansion of airports). This is just as essential at the local as at the national level. One example for the networking of local protest groups was the globally coordinated week of actions that took place in autumn 2016 at airports in London, Mexico City, Istanbul, Nantes and Vienna: "Stay Grounded. Aviation Growth Cancelled Due to Climate Change".[89] In order for social movement struggles to be successful, it is vital to share experiences, experiment with transnational solidarity and participate in shared communication.

Resistance and an 'anti-everything' attitude alone will not transform the dominant mode of living. To make socio-ecologically viable forms of mobility conceivable and increase their attractiveness, we will need to experiment with and develop alternatives. Such approaches should, for example, help people realise that while car-free streets or neighbourhoods may be inconvenient to some, they offer peace and a better quality of life to many.

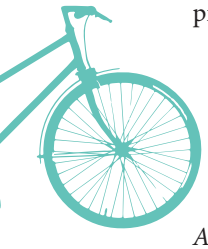
Moreover, we need a thought-through strategy of transformation, in order to get from the status quo to another future in a just way. The dismantlement of the automotive industry demands the development of new concepts of decent work. Workers and unions in particular could shift their current focus on maintaining jobs and, possibly in co-operation with the environment and climate movements, push for the expansion of sustainable economic sectors, a reduction of working hours and a new distribution of work.[90] Workers in the automotive industry could, for example, find employment in local car-sharing initiatives, in an expanded public transport system or renewable energy cooperatives. Such approaches are necessary to reduce people's fear of losing their jobs, their sense of insecurity and to block the rise of right-wing support. Transformation strategies, however, will also need to consider limiting advertisements for environmentally harmful forms of transportation, and, where applicable, renationalising privatised mobility infrastructures (such as railways or trams) through the joint efforts of citizens' initiatives, bringing them back into public or collective ownership.

Finally, the strategy at the discursive level is also important, i.e. talking, discussing and educating. Jointly discussing society's social and ecological limits, which have thus far been completely ignored by political decision makers, is key. What is a sustainable number of cars and at which speed should we allow them to drive? Are particular forms of mobility socially beneficial or not? Which vehicles fulfil important functions in a city, such as ambulances and removal vans, and which might be counterproductive? Is flying always necessary, or could we maybe choose a different holiday destination? Or take the train? There is no one answer to any of these questions, nor are they equally applicable to everyone, which is why they should be put to debate. Citizens' councils (Summary and outlook), neighbourhood assemblies, schools and parliaments are just some of the places where these questions should be discussed. Civil society organisations, social movements and progressive institutions as well as some universities have been debating these issues for decades. In the following section, we summarise some of these approaches and demands as well as some alternatives that are already being practiced.

Three areas of transformation

An apple from New Zealand or from my neighbour's garden? Reducing freight transport

Freight transport currently accounts for around 30 per cent of global transport sector CO_2 emissions and 7 per cent of total CO_2 emissions.[91] Instead of aiming to triple the volume of transport by 2050, we need to regionalise economic activity and greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.[92] Here the aim is not nationalist-style protectionism; our apple is still local, regardless of whether it comes from Germany or neighbouring Poland. Moreover, governments will have to cut transport sector subsidies and finally move to tax heavy oil and kerosene. Any remaining emissions-intensive air and truck freight transport should be transferred to the railways or more eco-friendly shipping channels.[93] We need an economy of short distances and as much local production as possible (Agriculture and food).



» *The only way to reach revolution is per bicycle.*

(José Antonio Viera-Gallo)

Avoiding motorised individual transport and switching to other forms

In passenger transport, too, we need to reduce the share of motorised transport and transition to more environmentally sustainable options. A state subsidised railway system could, for example, replace a large share of short-haul flights.[94] Every year 23.5 million passengers take internal flights within Germany alone (figures taken from 2012).[95] 84 per cent of flights from Austria land within Europe.[96] Environmental associations and other institutions have long been calling for the privileges awarded to flight operators to be abolished. A kerosene tax would raise the price of flights. While this could mean that everybody would fly less, it might also once again restrict jet-setting to the world's wealthiest — at least if nothing is done to close the gap between rich and poor. Proposals on higher taxes for frequent flyers are still rarely discussed and their feasibility requires further analysis.[97] Some view modern Zeppelins or sailing ships as a slower yet environmentally friendly alternative to long-haul flights.[98]

Both from an environmental and social point of view, the promotion of car-centred cities is highly debatable. Urban planning should set aside more space for pedestrians, bicycles and trams, decrease the number of parking spaces and make parking more expensive.[99] This would then automatically lead to greater numbers of people using more environmentally friendly, safer and quieter means of transport. The appeal of alternatives would increase and cities would no longer have to rely on individuals voluntarily 'giving up' their cars. Besides having a positive effect on the climate, this would provide serious health benefits and improve people's well-being, as well as reduce fine dust and noise pollution.[100] Speed limits for cars, lorries and ships could also significantly reduce their energy needs and emissions.[101] In rural zones, however, concepts for car-free living are far more difficult to realise. From a transport and energy perspective, today's urban centres are by far the more appropriate fields for policy action, even though this contradicts the widespread desire to own a detached house in the leafy outskirts of the city.[102] But approaches for rural areas do exist, ranging from the expansion of public transport for more frequently used routes, car pools and 'village cars' to taxis provided at the same price as public transport, possibly in combination with (electric) bicycles.[103]

Furthermore, companies or institutions (such as universities) could digitise their communication and thereby reduce the need for physical transport. Employees would then no longer need to fly to a meeting with business partners overseas, but could organise a video conference instead. As a side effect, this would also reduce the stress related to permanent business trips and commuting. Digital and smart systems also increase the ability of public transport to flexibly react to changes in demand or make it easier to implement the car sharing initiatives mentioned below. Nonetheless, we should not underestimate the dangers of surveillance, system failures, attacks by hackers and the resource-heavy nature of digital systems (Digitalisation).[104]

Using instead of owning!
Expanding attractive collective transport systems

The fewer cars are on the road and the more people each of the used vehicles transport, the better. On average, a privately owned car sits unused for 23 hours a day.[105] At the local level, concepts that give car use priority over ownership have become more popular. One example is the *Lastenradkollektiv* in Vienna and similar projects in other European cities. They provide cargo bikes or bicycle trailers free of charge or at reasonable prices for the transportation of items such as a washing machine or a couch.[106] Car sharing, ride sharing and carpooling are among the more well-known examples. However, cheap car sharing vehicles should not become an alternative to public transportation services.

Instead of privatising and dismantling public transport, it is vital to maintain and expand it. Cities would have to invest in trams, electric buses, as well as the underground and city trains. According to Wolf, underground networks are generally not the best solution. They are extremely expensive to build and often help clear the roads for cars. One tried-and-tested system are busways, and several major cities have implemented separate bus lanes. They bypass traffic jams and offer a cost-effective and fast alternative to the car.[107] At the regional level, it is important not only to increase the speed of intercity connections and offer attractive long-distance overnight trains, but also to reverse the gradual dismantlement of regional rail networks.[108]

Furthermore, we need to subsidise public transport to the extent that it remains affordable for low-income earners. Allowances, free public transport for the unemployed and asylum seekers or transport systems that are generally made available free-of-charge could achieve this and have already been rolled out in several European cities. Achieving a socio-ecological transformation of our mode of mobility will thus require

a diverse set of strategies and fields of action. But one thing is certain: it will require the democratic participation of many and tremendous pressure from the grassroots.

Do you agree?
Then get involved! More information is available on our website *www.attheexpenseofothers.org*.

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GLOSSARY

This glossary provides short explanations of some of the terms used in the text. However, the list is by no means exhaustive.

Agroecology describes a social movement, academic discipline and agricultural practice. They all share the notion of adapting agriculture to prevailing natural conditions, cycles and local needs. As an approach, agroecology combines traditional and local knowledge with modern scientific methods.

Biodiversity: biological diversity, diversity of species.

Biosphere: the earth's 'life zone', i.e. the totality of all organisms, living creatures and ecosystems on the planet. Often we consider terms such as 'nature' to be a realm entirely separated from humans, and words such as 'resources' implicitly view nature merely with regard to the benefits it provides to people. The term biosphere attempts to avoid these shortcomings.

Capitalism: under capitalism, the market principle largely defines the social fabric. The means of production are concentrated in the hands of a few, thus forcing the majority of people to work. Competition and profit orientation lead to an intensification of the global exploitation of people and nature.

Carbon Capture and Storage: the process of capturing and storing CO_2. The aim is to capture, liquefy and store underground the CO_2 from industrial processes — in spite of considerable risks and the fact that the technology still needs to be further developed.

Climate justice: a political concept that serves to highlight that the climate crisis does not affect all people equally. While the global upper and middle classes, in particular, contribute towards climate change, those who suffer its consequences most acutely tend to contribute the least to global warming.

CO_2: carbon dioxide.

Colonialism: the violent subjugation of foreign territories (in particular in the Americas, South and South East Asia as well as Africa) by European countries. The structures and relations of power that developed during this era persist until today (see also 'neocolonialism').

Commons: goods such as water, seed or software that are used by a community. It describes forms of property, organisation and production that are not based primarily on private or state ownership and competition, but on community ownership, co-operation and participation.

Data mining: the systematic statistical analysis of large amounts of data or 'big data'. The method aims to produce (economically exploitable) knowledge or predict future developments.

Ecological footprint: the space that would be required to maintain the lifestyle and living standard of one person (under the current conditions of production) for all of humanity permanently.

Externalisation: the process of outsourcing social and environmental impacts to other places, or leaving them for future generations to solve. For the imperial mode of living and production, this constitutes a fundamental process.

Food sovereignty: the right of all people to decide over the processes of food production, distribution and consumption. Key to this concept is the development of a socially just and sustainable form of agriculture.

Genetic engineering: the transfer of isolated DNA sequences across different species. Genetically modified seed has drawn criticism because of the way it affects biodiversity, the unknown impacts it has on health and the environment, its emphasis on monoculture production without reducing the need for pesticides and seed patenting instead of promoting free seed exchange.

Global North/Global South are not geographic terms and describe the distinct position of countries in the global political and economic order. The terms also highlight the different experiences with colonialism and exploitation that underpin today's order.

Globalisation: the age of globalisation describes the recent great increase in mobility of information, goods and people. While this mobility has existed for thousands of years, its intensity has increased sharply since the middle of the 20th century.

Good life for all: the realistic utopia of a peaceful and solidary society that includes all people living in harmony with the biosphere. Today, pessimism and fear rule, making the concept seem utopian. From the standpoint of civilization and technology, however, it is a realistic vision.

Indigenous peoples: the descendants of a region's original inhabitants. The term stresses the self-identification of culturally, socially and economically distinct groups in society that may even have their own language. Human rights specifically for indigenous peoples guarantee their right to self-determination and to land.

Industrial agriculture: aims for efficiency in production instead of caring for animals, the environment and people. Monoculture fields and mass production as well as the use of chemical fertilisers characterise the system. It promotes large agricultural corporations instead of smallholder farming. Often, instead of catering to regional demand, this form of agriculture is strongly export-oriented.

Industry 4.0: the Fourth Industrial Revolution after mechanisation, mass production and automation. It aims to 'intelligently connect' digital technology and the physical systems of production. The German government, industry associations, unions and researchers drive this process forward.

Institutions: long-term established organisations that shape society such as parties, unions, churches, international organisations or education establishments. Some definitions will also include institutions with unique characteristics, for example, companies, the (mass) media, as well as parliaments, courts and ministries.

Land grabbing: a colloquial term for the heightened economic interest in agricultural land and the global increase in large-scale land buy-ups. Frequently, while legal, they lack democratic control over land access.

Market-based: according to economic logic or the fundamental principles of the market, i.e. driven by prices, supply and demand, etc.

Modern slavery: all forms of forced labour, human trafficking and debt bondage that (illegally) continue even over 150 years after the abolition of slavery. Globally, an estimated 30 to 50 million people work in slave-like conditions, in particular in agriculture, households and care, as well as forced prostitution.

Neoclassical economics: mainstream economic school of thought taught at universities since the middle of the 20th century. The concept is based on assumptions such as profit and utility maximisation, perfect competition and complete information. It omits or only insufficiently considers aspects such as questions of distribution, differing degrees of power, ethical concerns and environmental issues.

Neocolonialism highlights the economic and politico-structural dependencies that persist in spite of the formal independence of former colonies. Certain trade agreements, for example, force countries of the Global South into the role of suppliers of cheap raw material.

Neoliberalism: an ideology and economic policy model that purportedly promotes a 'free market' and insists that it is best for society to limit political interference in business and the economy as far as possible. Examples of neoliberal policies include demands for liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation. Originally, the term described ordoliberalism, the theoretical basis of the social market economy.

Network effects: an effect particularly prominent on internet platforms and in digital services whereby the attractiveness of a particular site increases with the number of its users (as seen with Facebook, Airbnb, Wikipedia and others).

Precarious employment: a job is considered precarious when the worker earns below a certain threshold, is not sufficiently protected and their salary does not allow them to participate fully in society. Gainful employment is also deemed precarious when it stops being meaningful, lacks social recognition and offers people no security to plan for their futures.[1]

Privatisation: the transfer of community property (owned, for example, by the state, communities or indigenous peoples) into private hands (owned, for example, by individuals, companies or corporations).

Racism: a balance of power that exists within society globally that sees people differentiated and hierarchized based on physical and/or cultural attributes and/or their origin or nationality. Being 'white' and 'Western' is judged to be superior to being 'black/non-white' and 'non-Western'.[2]

Re-feudalisation: the global trend towards the unequal distribution of money and power that resembles feudal medieval societies in which only a tiny elite enjoyed a comparatively high standard of living.

Rebound effect: the phenomenon of absolute energy and resource consumption not dropping in spite of efficiency gains in production, management and logistics. When productive efficiency increases, this leads to goods becoming cheaper, potentially causing consumption of that good to increase.

Sharing economy: a broad term for a growing economic sector that emphasises the shared use of goods or services (either on or offline). For successful companies in this sector, profits and not sharing are the main goal.

Sinks: parts of ecosystems that people use as deposits, for example, the atmosphere, seas or the soil under landfills.

Socialisation institutions: the reciprocal and open process, which shapes people and turns them into members of a society that is, in turn, shaped by its people, is called *socialisation*. In many societies, this process begins in families and schools, which would in this case be *institutions of socialisation*.

Transformation, socio-ecological: a fundamental transformation of political and economic systems away from fossil fuels and the growth logic and towards an economy that ensures a decent life for all. This goes deeper than a reform, yet is less abrupt than a revolution.

Transnational consumer class: includes the global middle and upper classes that follow a consumption-oriented lifestyle. When considering this concept, it is important to remember that discriminating structures such as racism and sexism persist.

Transnational corporations: since the end of the 20th century, the largest and most profitable companies are no longer bound to a particular country. Rather, they act as a network and secure advantages in production (cheap labour and resources or lower taxes) on a global scale across numerous countries.

Virtual emissions: emissions produced in third countries that are 'imported' by importing goods from these countries for further processing or consumption. Whereas production-related emissions in the Global North have stagnated or even declined, the imported emissions from the Global South are rapidly increasing.

White and black do not describe the colour of a person's skin but political and social constructs that underpin both discrimination and privilege in our racist societies. The term 'white' is mentioned here explicitly to underline its dominant position, which otherwise often goes unmentioned.[3]

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THE PROJECT AND THE AUTHORS

The I.L.A. Werkstatt, a project organised by the non-profit association Common Future e.V., began on 1 April 2016 and ended on 31 May 2017 under the leadership of Dr. Thomas Kopp.
The I.L.A. Werkstatt is an interdisciplinary collective of 15 young researchers and activists. We jointly developed this text over the course of a year. As a group, we hold university degrees in economics, development and agricultural economics, political science, political economy, international relations, pedagogy, environmental sciences, sustainability studies, history and law. In addition to participating in the I.L.A. Kollektiv, we study and work at universities, in non-governmental organisations, social movements as well as in and alongside trade unions. We are part of a diverse set of emancipatory movements within the broader field of global justice. This text aims to make the concept of the imperial mode of living accessible to a wider public and contribute towards a community-oriented mode of production and living.

If you have questions regarding content, feedback on specific chapters or would like to request a speaker or arrange a workshop with us, any of the members listed below would be happy to help. Please direct your queries to ila_info@riseup.net.
Further information is available at: www.aufkostenanderer.org.

Introduction:
Samuel Decker, Hannah Engelmann, Magdalena Heuwieser, Thomas Kopp, Anne Siemons

Historical overview:
Samuel Decker, Jannis Eicker, Ia Eradze, Anil Shah, Lukas Wolfinger

Digitalisation:
Anil Shah, Lukas Wolfinger

Care:
Carla Noever Castelos, Anne Siemons

Money and finance:
Samuel Decker, Jannis Eicker, Christoph Podstawa

Education and knowledge:
Hannah Engelmann, Ia Eradze, Maja Hoffmann

Food and agriculture:
Franziskus Forster, Stella Haller, Therese Wenzel

Mobility:
Maximilian Becker, Magdalena Heuwieser

Summary and outlook:
Samuel Decker, Jannis Eicker, Franziskus Forster, Magdalena Heuwieser, Maja Hoffmann, Thomas Kopp, Carla Noever Castelos, Anil Shah, Anne Siemons

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Today it feels like everybody is talking about the problems and crises of our times: the climate and resource crisis, Greece's permanent socio-political crisis or the degrading exploitative practices of the textile industry. Many are aware of the issues, yet little seems to change. Why is this? The concept of the imperial mode of living explains why, in spite of increasing injustices, no long-term alternatives have managed to succeed and a socio-ecological transformation remains out of sight.

This text introduces the concept of an imperial mode of living and explains how our current mode of production and living is putting both people and the natural world under strain. We shine a spotlight on various areas of our daily lives, including food, mobility and digitalisation. We also look at socio-ecological alternatives and approaches to establish a good life for everyone – not just a few.

The non-profit association ***Common Future e. V.*** from Göttingen is active in a number of projects focussing on global justice and socio-ecological business approaches. From April 2016 to May 2017, the association organised the I.L.A. Werkstatt (Imperiale Lebensweisen – Ausbeutungsstrukturen im 21. Jahrhundert/ Imperial Modes of Living – Structures of Exploitation in the 21st Century). Out of this was borne the interdisciplinary I.L.A. Kollektiv, consisting of 17 young researchers and activists. Their goal: dedicating a whole year to the scientific study of the imperial mode of living and bringing their results to a wider audience.

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