

## Impact of residential relocations on travel mode choices: A qualitative analysis

### The problem

Transport and mobility are jeopardizing the EU's ability to achieve many of its environmental policy targets. A number of "hard" and "soft" policy measures have been introduced in order to change consumers' travel mode choice. However, such measures have often been overwhelmed by the rapid rise in demand for transport.

The need to enhance the effectiveness of political instruments to tackle this problem is expressed since long, and a special focus is given on *soft policy measures* (e.g. OECD, 2004). Daily travel mode choice, however, has proven to be relatively resistant to change by information and communication strategies applied in a general form, since it is deeply embedded in lifestyles and tends to become automated by time.

The present project proposes the analysis of biographic change moments (in this case residential relocations) as moments best suited to apply soft-policy measures since biographic changes are assumed to exert an important influence on behavioural de-routinisation. As a pre-study for a later experimental intervention design, a qualitative investigation was carried out.

### Methodology / aims

23 households who had moved into a specific central town quarter of the city of Leipzig within the last six months before taking part in our investigation have been interviewed in non-standardised qualitative interviews, methodologically following the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

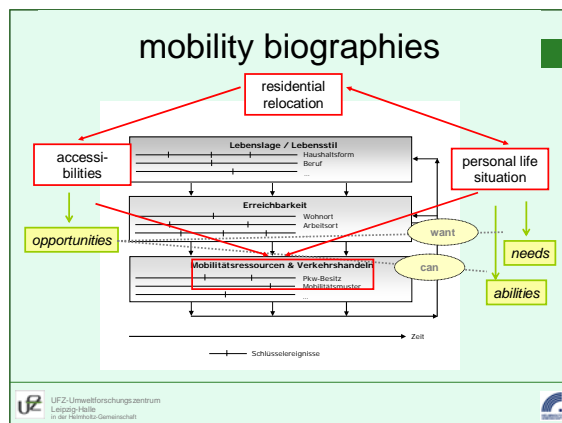
Questions referred to

- the influence of residential relocations on daily *travel mode choice*,
- travel behaviour *de-routinisation processes* before, during and after the residential relocation, and
- *information search activities* about different transport alternatives at the new living place in those three phases.

### Theoretical background

As a theoretical background, the "mobility biographies approach" (Lanzendorf, 2003) was taken. Under stable context conditions, daily travel mode choices are often made in a non-reflected, routine mode. Significant context changes, however, may weaken such routines and initiate new conscious reflection. In the case of

residential relocations, this reflection may be based on a change in accessibilities (=mobility opportunities) as well as a change in concomitant life changes (like moving in with a partner, moving because of a job change, searching for a larger apartment because of growing children.) In this last case mobility needs and mobility abilities may change.



## Results

We could show that one important independent variable for explaining information search activities is the *spatial type of relocation*. If a person moved from one part of the town to another and had already been well informed about transport infrastructure before the move, he/she shows little interest in receiving more transport-related information and only rarely changes her transportation behaviour. If, on the other hand, a person moved from one town to another or from a rural / suburban region to a certain town district, he/she spends more time in getting informed about transportation options available at the new living place.

However, this information search is *only translated into behaviour change* if this person is unsatisfied with his/her current transportation behaviour and actively strives for a change, or if it is difficult or

impossible to continue the former behaviour at the new living place because of incompatible mobility needs and opportunities.

Besides, *concomitant changes in the personal life context* may exert an important influence on behaviour change. Events like a job change or moving in with the partner are in some cases more influential than changes in spatial context and transport opportunities at the new living place.

With respect to *cognitive fixations (routines)* on a certain travel option, we could show that the longer the time span between our interview and the residential relocation the more spontaneous and stable had been the answers on travel mode choice. People who had recently moved reported more often on uncertainties with respect to the choice of a certain travel option in a specific situation. I.e., there are hints on a de-routinisation process around the time of the relocation though they had been less evident than expected.

Summing up external and internal driving factors, *five different mobility change types* could be identified who ideally would need different approaches was the moment of residential relocation used for the application of interventions aiming to stimulate more sustainable transportation behaviour at the new living place.

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