

Social Lab 10

Critical Mobility Manifesto

Sustainable, equitable and just mobility is key to the future wellbeing. Therefore, mobility is a precious and precarious asset. Today, personal transportation is dominated by automobility, an unjust and dangerous social and spatial order that privileges car-centered modes of mobility. The results are to be seen everywhere, from congestion to pollution, from road violence to appropriation of public space. Current forms of modern life, from work to leisure, are created and animated by and through nodes of automobility.

Principles of future mobility designs often argue for less cost, less space, less energy and less emission. However, on a lifeworld level, things remain as is. We take another route by changing how we talk about and do mobility. We do not only observe, understand and describe, but aim for change.

Instead of more or less, we believe that mobility is a public good. Common property or public goods have been important aspects of communities. Physical entities, like land, air and high seas have been part of the commons, just as concepts such as knowledge, security and environment have also been called commons – our pool of common resources. If such commonly-held resources are overused, depleted or destroyed by the few, the whole community suffers. We hold that mobility, the utilization of (urban) space by movement, is such commons.

The backbone of an ecosystem of mobility as commons is public modes of transport. While mobilities are commons, they are also what economists call rivalrous: they are public goods. Mobilities decrease in availability when overused or depleted. Public transport should be looked at as public good: as our institutions of knowledge – museums, libraries; our institutions of safety – the police, firefighters; or our institutions of wellbeing – the air, the greens. Research and innovation should refocus on citizens as opposed to ‘users’; on inclusiveness as opposed to market thinking; from Hollywood imaginaries to real life solutions.

We need new approaches to arrive at a fair and just, inclusive mobility for all. We need a critical approach to automobility and deconstruct our current, automobility dominated urban environs. As a new way of thinking, we suggest commoning as a practice to assemble more inclusive, fair and sustainable ecosystems of mobilities. Commoning is a socially inclusive approach based on principles of experience, inclusion, non-violence and reciprocity. Responsible research and innovation in mobility may learn from commoning principles:

1. Clearly defined boundaries: R&I in mobility must be aware of its boundaries, ethical and social responsibilities, must assess social impacts and aim for engaging and involving citizens.
2. Congruence between appropriation, provision rules and citizens’ needs: Appropriation rules restricting time, place, technology, and/or quantity of resource units through R&I and its outputs are to be attended and publicly discussed when establishing provision rules requiring labor, material, and/or money in R&I. Externalities and social impacts are to be internalized in the R&I process by engaging in participatory processes and research designs.
3. Collective-choice arrangements: Individuals and groups affected by the operational rules can participate in modifying the operational rules of R&I. Citizens and other stakeholders should be able to set research agendas and rules of engagement, and may be part of the decision process at every stage of the innovation process.

4. **Monitoring:** Citizens and other stakeholders should be made part of monitors who actively assess R&I conditions (especially public funding endeavors), and should be made accountable to the appropriators or are the appropriators. For this, citizens and other stakeholders should be able to understand stakes in the R&I process.
5. **Graduated sanctions:** Appropriators who violate operational rules are to be assessed graduated sanctions by other appropriators, by officials accountable to these appropriators, or both. R&I should be accountable to society at large.
6. **Mechanisms:** Appropriators and their officials should have rapid access to low-cost local arenas to resolve conflicts among appropriators or between appropriators and officials. This may require new methods, modes of collaboration and investment in research to develop such new methods as well as fostering societal exchange between Appropriators and officials with (civil) society and citizens.
7. **Minimal recognition of rights to organize:** The rights of appropriators to devise their own institutions are not challenged by external governmental authorities. This involves alternative models to assess the (social) impacts of R&I beyond scientometric indicators.
8. **Nested enterprises:** Appropriation, provision, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution, and governance activities should be organized in multiple layers of nested quadruple helix R&I structures.

As base, we propose the mobility commons – an ecosystem to be used by all for the benefit of all. This aligns private and public interests with principles of sustainability, justice and fair access. Mobility for all is inclusive, plural and is opposed to enclosure, dispossession. Public space should be reclaimed for cultural openness, shared experience and personal interaction. Investments in mobility should be guided by values of fairness and justice: interventions are to increase access levels of the disadvantaged as opposed to being channeled towards the (mobility) privileged.

Commoning research and innovation in mobility offers new ways for citizens to engage with and make decisions about co-creating their common future by participating in research and innovation activities. This may help avoid being locked into market-oriented practices induced by the system of automobility.

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