

rebalance

New Mobility Cultures & Policies

# CULTURAL AND POLITICAL MANIFESTO

**Making Mobility Meaningful to People**



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## 1 OUR CLAIM: A RADICAL CULTURAL CHANGE IN MOBILITY IS ON ITS WAY!

- **A cultural change in mobility is already happening. In Europe, as well as in other parts of the world**, awareness is spreading. Many people already realise that we live through a frenzy of production and growth, a stressing simulation of vitality we should set out to overcome. Fast may be fun but it is not always better (or fair). In our vision, a cultural change favouring a more balanced way of living and working is in line with the aspiration of a well-developed, **rebalanced society**.

Faster and seamless transport systems and real time digital communication generate an illusion of freedom but threaten to alienate people's lives. The experience of distance and duration provides quality and meaning. Delivering useful and cost-effective transport and communication services to people is no longer enough. The increasing recognition of the *dark side of mobility* is not a marginal novelty, but a major cultural shift, which is already having a huge impact on policymakers' and industry's long-term decisions. Cheap and easy-to-manage mobility services are now on offer, leading to **mobility-saturation** and to a growing impact of mobility on **CO2 emissions**, both in terms of its share and its absolute number.

- **The relationship between modernity and mobility is double-edged.** Expanding opportunities, unleashed creativity and freedom are accompanied by growing constraints. Nowadays, we face the **terminal paradoxes of modern values**: fluidity against traffic congestion, social distancing and isolation whilst moving together through massive flows, freedom of movement as opposed to personal surveillance, social inclusion versus segregation in exclusive enclaves. We are witnesses of an important cultural shift: mobility is increasingly perceived as weighing heavily on the quality of life, just as the pursuit of infinite productivity and efficiency.
- **We still live in a culture of optimizing time. To be active, efficient and make the most of our time is perceived as a positive value.** Our culture promotes **action over reflection**, and youthful energy over the wisdom of seniority. People are often, forcefully, led to travel and work harder and more



efficiently until they **burn out**. At the same time, self-help and self-improvement are becoming a booming business. People feel rushed and pressed for time and share a widespread perception that leisure time is scarcer and more hectic. However, the overall leisure time has not declined in quantity. This gap between objective time and how we subjectively experience it highlights the importance of the quality - or character - of time, and not simply its sheer available amount. We claim that the **Age of Speed** had a beginning, and we discuss its history, because we are now witnessing its end.

- **Technology may produces place detachment and time alienation.** We realise that technology has profound and uncertain impacts in the way we live, work and move. **Disruptive technologies** are redefining the ways we communicate with each other. Transport and communication systems and services are becoming decarbonised, further customised and more intelligent. New business models, new transport patterns and new communication modes appear. Business travel is declining. The distinction between private and public transport will soon be blurred, as well as the difference between transport modes, consumers and producers. Automobile industries become providers of mobility services. We acknowledge the convenience of autonomous vehicles and intelligent traffic management systems, and the need for a full decarbonisation of transport, but we do not see the immediate benefits of living in a smart and optimised city, populated by sensors and robots transporting us from place to place. It is not technological innovation *per se* that is to blame for our **collective sense of loss of time**, but rather the *culture of speed* that surrounds the use of these technologies. In the meantime, we are entertained and infantilized by technologies when being transported from A to B.
- **Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are transforming our way of life in the 21st Century just as the car industry has done in the 20th Century.** Mobile phone devices, and the applications that run on them, passively record location information with high spatial and temporal resolution. Cellular antennas, Wi-Fi access points, and GPS receivers measure the geographic position of users to within a few hundred meters or less. **Digitalisation** has a great potential through technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), digital twins, blockchains, internet of things (IoT). Satellite navigation and earth observation hold the promise of making urban mobility smarter. Transport operators, as well as passengers, will soon have the chance to use European Digital Identity Wallets. While the collection,



storage, and analysis of this data presents very concrete and relevant **privacy concerns**, it also offers an unprecedented opportunity for researchers to quantify human behaviour at large-scale. With billions of data points collected on millions of users each day, new research into **mobility science** has begun to increase, sometimes replacing sparse, traditional data sources and helping to answer old questions while raising new ones.

- **Technological development seduces us into thinking that technology will perform better than humans while ultimately risk to restrain human freedom of choice.** Algorithm economy threatens to replace human ability to choose, and to restrain human freedom. Autonomous vehicles will be intelligent robots carrying any person safely to his or her destination, through the fastest or preferred path, as selected by us or by the system, informed by real-time traffic alerts and multimodal digital mobility services. Connected Cooperative Automated Mobility (CCAM) services and Urban Air Mobility (UAM) services are now emerging. The European Parliament has begun to study the rights and duties of *electronic beings*. Transhumanists see humans as erratic; they propose to upgrade all human beings, so they only make rational and objective decisions. But we need emotions and human judgment! AI may contribute to solve environmental problems, and improve public health, but it may also compromise human freedom and privacy.
- **The first law of geography is being subverted.** Social and economic relations do not necessarily decrease with distance: remote places, if well connected to networks, may enjoy more relations than neighbouring places. Transport is becoming a highly networked, borderless system. Flows of people, information, freight cargoes, material resources and energy are increasingly interconnected and interdependent, to the point that physical distances are subverted and the connection to networks plays a greater role in interaction than the geographical distance itself. **Space is shrinking and time is accelerating; everything can be contiguous and simultaneous.** Freight transport and logistics follow similar logics to data or energy transmission, with a different shade from people mobility. We envision a world of borderless, flexible **spatial alliances**: new kinds of spatial organisation for production and distribution, more time- and space-responsive forms of decision-making, new systems of supply-chain management, and new labour contract arrangements that alter commuting patterns. These will create problems, as well as new opportunities for people's welfare.



- **We are entering a time of more radical dyschronicity.** We are witnessing the first autonomous drones able to carry people. New generations of high-speed trains (Maglev, Hyperloop) and supersonic passenger airplanes are also seeing the light. Communication systems will transmit larger volumes of data at a faster speed. More than simply being "accelerated", time has many different and unconnected rhythms. We live jumping from moment to moment, from peak to peak; an atomization of time with no direction, order or end able to add meaning to our lives. Our lives lack continuity, synchronicity. Compulsive consumption of mobility services has intensified. Massive data is provided by consumers themselves ("you are the product") since all human activities having a digital component leave a **data trace**. Electronic commerce is also becoming compulsive, replacing shopping trips with fast delivery at home. The time between our desire and its satisfaction is minimised, as the buying process becomes seamless.
- **Mobility amounts to more than strict physical displacement.** It suggests a bodily awareness of being entangled in natural rhythms, where sensations carry meanings, aesthetic senses. Mobility is a concept-assemblage, composed by body motility or motricity, mobility by transportation means, and digital mobility by mobile devices. Today, mobility implies encounters and co-presences mediated by portable technologies that mobilize a particular form of cinematic and narrative sense-making between people participating to the digital public space and common storytelling scenarios.

## 2 OUR VISION: A WORLD FREE FROM MEANINGLESS MOBILITY

- **We advocate a rebalancing of mobility.** Thinkers and artists have expressed and illustrated the need to recalibrate fast and slow, stress and calm, freedom and safety or security, creativity and care, cultural diversity and social inclusion. **Leisure is not laziness.** Work is not a punishment if it is socially useful and meaningful to the worker. We see postmaterialist values emerging: communitarianism and solidarity, and an increasing environmental awareness. Rebalancing extreme values is necessary for the welfare and flourishing of life. This attention to balance was already present in Western culture since Aristotle's *mesoteti*, or medium-term understanding of virtues. *Aurea mediocritas* avoids the excesses of too passive or too active ways of living:



**nothing in excess** was the motto. The visions of *Vita contemplativa* and *Vita activa*, up to now confronting ways of understanding the human condition, must be remodelled.

- **We believe "Care" should be a core value in transport policies.** Care has been long devaluated, notably through its association with women's contribution to society, often relegated to the realm of those considered as *unproductive professions*. Care is a social capacity involving the nurturing of all aspects tied to welfare and to the flourishing of life. Care is about recognising our interdependence. Open public spaces and public transport are necessary to build caring communities because they are (or should be) egalitarian and accessible to all and able to provide conviviality, enhancing familiarity with others. Putting care at the centre means recognising our weaknesses and interdependencies.
- **We believe that mobility should always be meaningful, not forced and compulsory,** made of cities with inclusive and mixed-uses areas, open communities who invest in physical proximity and digital communication over compulsive mobility. We advocate more creative workplaces and educational facilities able to provide more flexible working schedules and learning models. Designing user-friendly and safe transport does not imply introducing standard services which are indifferent to travellers or to their journey. Vehicles and facilities should be designed to facilitate travellers in engaging, during their travelling time, in other valuable activities. Besides, transport services should not just provide safety and reliability, but also offer comfort, hospitality and conviviality. We consider how, by providing faster and cheaper mass transport, we are not necessarily improving our living conditions in the long run. Saving time to millions of people commuting every day from home to work, or among remote cities across the world, is not necessarily turning our cities into better places to work, to live and to thrive in.
- **We support the "Slow Movement" vision,** promoted by entrepreneurs, social activists, journalists and artists, who promote the rebalancing concept of *tempo giusto*: a mindfulness-inspired approach to dedicate the right amount of time to each activity, being aware of the meaning of each moment. The praise for slowness is often made to balance speed, not to replace it. The *Slow Food* movement gained recognition in the 1980s emphasising the values of physical proximity and quality, supporting place-attachment over network



connectivity and globalisation. Instead of competing in the global economy with everybody, everywhere, all the time, many innovative firms begin to differentiate themselves by being more environmentally and socially responsible.

- **We agree with the new "Mobility Paradigm"** proposed by John Urry (2007) and other academic thinkers from different disciplines: mobility is not just a demand derived from social and economic activities; it has a meaning in itself. People are actually living when travelling! A richer experience may well justify a longer route. More flexible and autonomous working models may reduce forced mobility and peak hours. Mobility does not always need to be decreased, or slowed down, but should also begin to translate into an increase of personal and social welfare. Better communication does not always imply more mobility or physical proximity; digital connectivity may often provide for more meaningful and useful communication strategies. We believe that a **new human geography of proximity and connectivity** is possible. The concepts of *proximity* and *connectivity* are not necessarily in contradiction. Beyond the slow/fast and collective/individual dichotomies, a new human geography can be imagined, also surpassing the local/global conflict. Places may restore their cultural landscapes and ecologies, while people and activities become connected and transmit information from anywhere via high-speed communication networks.

### 3 OUR POLITICAL PROPOSAL: MAKING MOBILITY MEANINGFUL TO PEOPLE

- **We propose to go beyond the notion of useful and sustainable transport services, towards meaningful mobility for people.** The paramount aim of transport policies should not only be to achieve a competitive and sustainable transport system: we advocate a **human-centred mobility**, with cities promoting traffic calm zones, sponsoring walking as the main mode of transport and designing public transport systems which favour hospitality and conviviality. We realise that public facilities, such as public transport and public spaces, bring together people from different origins, backgrounds and income levels, each with a different purpose. We endorse people-centred, sensitive-driven, transport policies. Walking is healthier; it induces richer social interaction and enhances the use of public



spaces. Domestic flights are starting to be banned when alternative train services exist. Night trains are making a comeback across Europe. Hospitality and conviviality are critical for the quality of a transport system, in the same measure of efficiency and sustainability.

- **We argue that seamless transport should not be our paramount goal.** Seamlessness is politically perceived in positive terms, as if people should be transported as easily as freight, energy or information flows. An ideal seamless transport requires full predictability, no surprises, no interaction with strangers, and a disregard of the paths being crossed when moving from A to B. Delays, break downs, interruptions are often costly and negative. We feel the overall aim should be to reduce forced mobility, and the resulting **time wasted in meaningless travel**, not to concentrate on making this forced mobility seamless or painless. Seamless interconnectivity between long distance and 'first and last mile' connections for efficient freight transport might be fundamental for the smooth functioning of logistic systems, but it is not always crucial for the people involved.
- **We strongly support land-use and time-sensitive policies aiming to reduce the need for forced and compulsory mobility.** We should not consider mobility just as a derived activity. Improving human welfare is not linked to developing cheaper and faster transport services, but to a reduced need for wasted, forced, low-added value, meaningless mobility. Avoiding urban sprawl and exclusive or specialised zones, planning more compact cities, shaping transport facilities, and promoting 15 minutes neighbourhoods, will help reduce forced and repetitive commuting whilst increasing proximity. Digital connectivity, teleworking and more flexible working places will also contribute to lower undesirable mobility.
- **We welcome a promotion of more Active Mobility.** The social value and political relevance of public health benefits due to active mobility may compensate the costs of increasing time spent travelling in many circumstances. The quality and inclusiveness of the public transport system, including public spaces and facilities, indicates how healthy a given community is. Walking is healthier and exposes communities to a greater proximity: it is in stations, at bus stops and inside vehicles that people from different income-levels, age, gender and cultural origin meet.



- **We stand for Mobility Justice: mobility impacts on groups, classes and sectors differently.** It is likely that society will become divided between those able to control their own time and mobility (the *kinetic elite*) and those unable to do so; between those *unplugged* and those in *always-on* modes, attached to standardised schedules. **Mobility injustices** will spontaneously tend to grow. However, assuring affordability (from free to universal mobility) and new transport technologies should allow all people to choose how to move by themselves. In this respect, **emerging technologies** will play a crucial role in terms of inclusion and exclusion.
- **Transport Policies issued by European institutions should explicitly reflect Public Interest, including its social and cultural dimensions.** An increasing number of Courts of Justice rulings in different European countries, not always fully consistent, are defining what we should regard as **public interest** when designing transport policies. Since free mobility is a fundamental right, restricting people's mobility should be justified as an acceptable exception, for instance on the grounds of public health or security.
- **We propose nudging and moral persuasion to promote new social norms favouring the reduction of meaningless mobility,** replacing physical mobility with proximity and connectivity, and adjusting mobility-linked activities. Education, communication and nudging, including engaging citizens in co-design processes, should be the main strategies to induce people to consider the impacts of their mobility decisions, and equip them with the tools to judge these impacts by themselves.
- **We propose that appraisal methods used to assess transport policies become more deliberative tools, able to rebalance social, environmental and economic values.** The best transport policies are not always those saving more time, for as many people as possible, at the minimum cost. The public interest of a given transport policy cannot be fully assessed by applying a **Cost-Benefit Analysis** if it only considers social benefits related to saving time and operational costs. Since Cost-Benefit measurements provide for a reasonable and objective reference, this 'number' should be enhanced by considering relevant public health and conviviality, as well as equity impacts. Social Choice Theory and Multicriteria assessment frameworks must be further investigated to complement the utilitarian



approach of the Cost-Benefit Analysis, making explicit what a given policy actually means for people, communities and institutions.

- **We encourage policies that aim to shift from the current approach based on traffic flows towards an approach based on moving people and goods more sustainably.** Many European cities, regions and countries are global frontrunners when it comes to **transport innovation** and **sustainable mobility planning**. European policies aim at the implementation of ambitious climate targets, towards achieving a more sustainable mobility, with a higher quality of life and an improved connectivity, affordability and accessibility of mobility services for urban and surrounding rural areas. Current policies aim to shift from the existing approach based on traffic flows towards an approach based on moving people and goods more sustainably. Since 2002, the CIVITAS Initiative has been supported by the successive R&I Framework Programmes and has powered innovative actions at local and regional levels.
- **We encourage Urban Sustainable Mobility Plans that do not intend to provide as much mobility as possible but to improve the city as a whole, balancing traffic flows and places.** We celebrate that sustainable mobility policies are already being applied in most European cities. Introduced in 2013, Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) and Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans are a cornerstone of EU urban mobility. Traffic calming policies are being increasingly implemented in European cities, reducing noise, stress and pollution whilst improving wellbeing (these being the main goals of Urban Sustainable Mobility Plans). Current Urban Sustainable Mobility Plans do not intend to provide as much mobility as possible but to improve the city as a whole, balancing traffic flows and places. Upgraded SUMPs will favour active, collective and public transport and shared mobility (including catering for urban-rural links), integrating resilience strategies as well as Sustainable Urban Logistics Plans (SULP) based on zero-emission vehicles and solutions. Still, these upgraded SUMPs do not sufficiently recognise the social and cultural dimensions of mobility, and the fundamental difference between passengers and freight transport.
- **We support the "Vision Zero" policy that aims to eliminate road fatalities and injuries to almost zero.** As walking, cycling, electric scooters and other new forms of micro-mobility increase, a higher number of



vulnerable people are expected to travel through the streets of our cities. **Vulnerable road users** account for most of urban road fatalities. Autonomous vehicles and online traffic management might have a positive impact on reducing accidents, but the most effective measures are definitely linked to speed restrictions.

- **We know that policies aiming to rebalance mobility may fail.** Most people feel disadvantaged and fearful of losing the fundamental rights associated with the freedom of unconstrained mobility. Current change attempts in the European mobility sector, in favour of sustainable development, have spurred emotional debates on speed limits or massive protests on rising fuel taxes. European Courts of Justice may rule against policies rebalancing mobility if their Public Interest is not well defined or justified. We recognise that the fear of losing given rights can be exploited by politically. The change we advocate will hardly happen spontaneously.

Sign the Manifesto: <https://rebalancemobility.eu/sign-manifesto/>

