

Vehicles of resistance?

Non-commercial carsharing and the socio-ecological mobility transition

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For our profit!
Not theirs!

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Rosa hands me a sponge and the spray for the removal of stains on fabrics: “Just look at the seats and if you see a stain, put some spray on it, leave it for a short while and then scrub it off with the sponge.” There are three cars with five seats each, so I quickly start my work. Everybody else attending the car cleaning party also is eagerly working on their task. Robert and his two kids are cleaning the windows, windshields and door seals. Rosa is removing coarse soiling from the wheel rims and the outer body. Rudi and Kurt are taking turns in vacuuming the interior space and everybody has an eye on the waiting line for the car wash, which is much busier than I expected for a sunny Saturday afternoon in early November. While cleaning cars can be perceived as a dull task, doing it together in a group and perhaps also because of the curious looks from the other people at the gas station, cleaning the cars feels like more than just a duty and attains meaning and even a tinge of fun.



While cleaning, the attendees also use the time to inspect the condition of the cars. We find a few scratches that are new and discuss where they might be coming from: a door unintentionally slammed into some obstacle or carelessly loading or unloading something into or from the trunk. Nobody seems to be impressed by these marks and there is no search for somebody who can be held responsible. I personally wouldn't be upset about scratches in a car, but I am wondering that the others also don't. Most people who care for thoroughly cleaning their car would also tend to care about the scratches, one would assume. After finding some more scratches Rudi provides an explanation for why they don't care: "It is only an object of utility. This doesn't matter." A car is supposed to be used to transport things and that necessarily leads to signs of usage, nothing to worry or to be upset about. Robert nods in agreement: "As long as the car is safe to drive, these beauty errors don't bother anybody. I certainly don't mind and if somebody does they should get their own car."



That Saturday, after cleaning three of the eight cars, the small group meets up in a café for some warm drinks, cake and ice cream – “the social and more important part of the cleaning party” according to Rosa and the participants. At earlier parties the members managed to clean more than only three cars and due to the low participation Rosa is organizing an additional appointment on the next weekend for the shirkers (‘Drückeberger’), also in order to clean the other five cars before the winter. When I asked Robert, if there is always only four people at these parties, he said: “It depends. Sometimes there are more, sometimes nobody shows up. But it is a pity that there aren’t more people. Well, I think they just don’t get the social aspect of the carsharing association.”

What is non-commercial sharing?

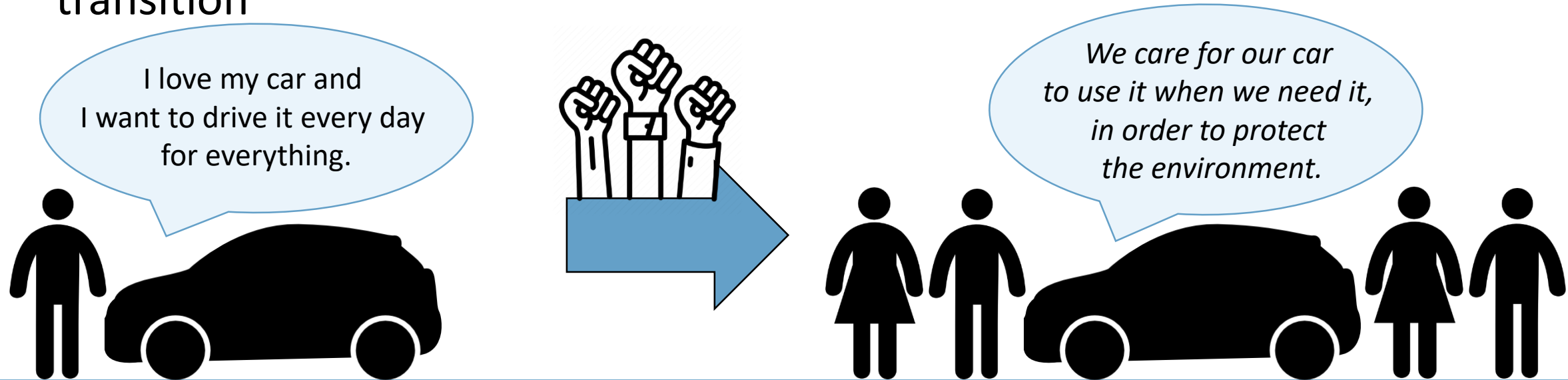
- Purchase and/or usage of an asset of mobility (e.g. car, cargobike) through an institutionalized process within a local group
 - ‘Private’: Without a third party acting as an intermediate profiteer
 - ‘Organized’: Involving a non-profit, an association, NGO or a social enterprise
- Neighbor(hood) cars, free cargo bike sharing, bike pools, etc.
- Institutionalization and habitualization as *necessity* for societal change

The need for a socio-ecological mobility transition

- Mobility as core element of capitalist societies keeping the process of capitalist expansion and accumulation afloat.
- Constant growth of mobilities increasingly impairs the natural and social environment
- Transition towards more social and ecological practices of mobility is urgently necessary
- **How are non-commercial carsharing practices influencing local processes of change in the mobility system?**

The core argument

- Hegemonic practices of automobility are altered through processes of everyday resistance, re-embedding and commoning and the emergence of an alternative mobility culture, challenging capitalist mobilities in everyday life and fostering a socio-ecological mobility transition



Reconstituting automobility

- The meaning of the car shifts from status symbol to object of utility
- The meaning of (auto)mobility shifts from freedom to necessity
- The coercive aspects of automobility are recognized
- Automobility ceases to be the sole means of liberation, but rather becomes ridden with ambivalence, fostering a reduction of car use

Re-embedding automobility

- Non-commercial carsharing is practiced with and because of an awareness of the environmental damages of automobility
- Manifold critiques of automobility, mainstream sharing and consumerism become articulated
- Non-commercial carsharing re-embeds automobility in a two-fold process of contextualization and counter-movement
- Non-commercial carsharing shows a tendency towards counter-hegemony

Community and collective identity

- Organizing non-commercial carsharing produces sociality and community
- Non-commercial carsharing is characterized by collective care, responsibility and voluntary labor
- Works against individualizing tendencies of capitalism and enables the collective alteration of the reproduction of social structures through collective agency.

Commoning mobility

- New collective ownership relations emerge from non-commercial carsharing.
- Non-commercial carsharing is a process of commoning mobility consisting of commoning meaning, movement and practices
- Individual car ownership is replaced by shared car ownership, collective management and collective care.

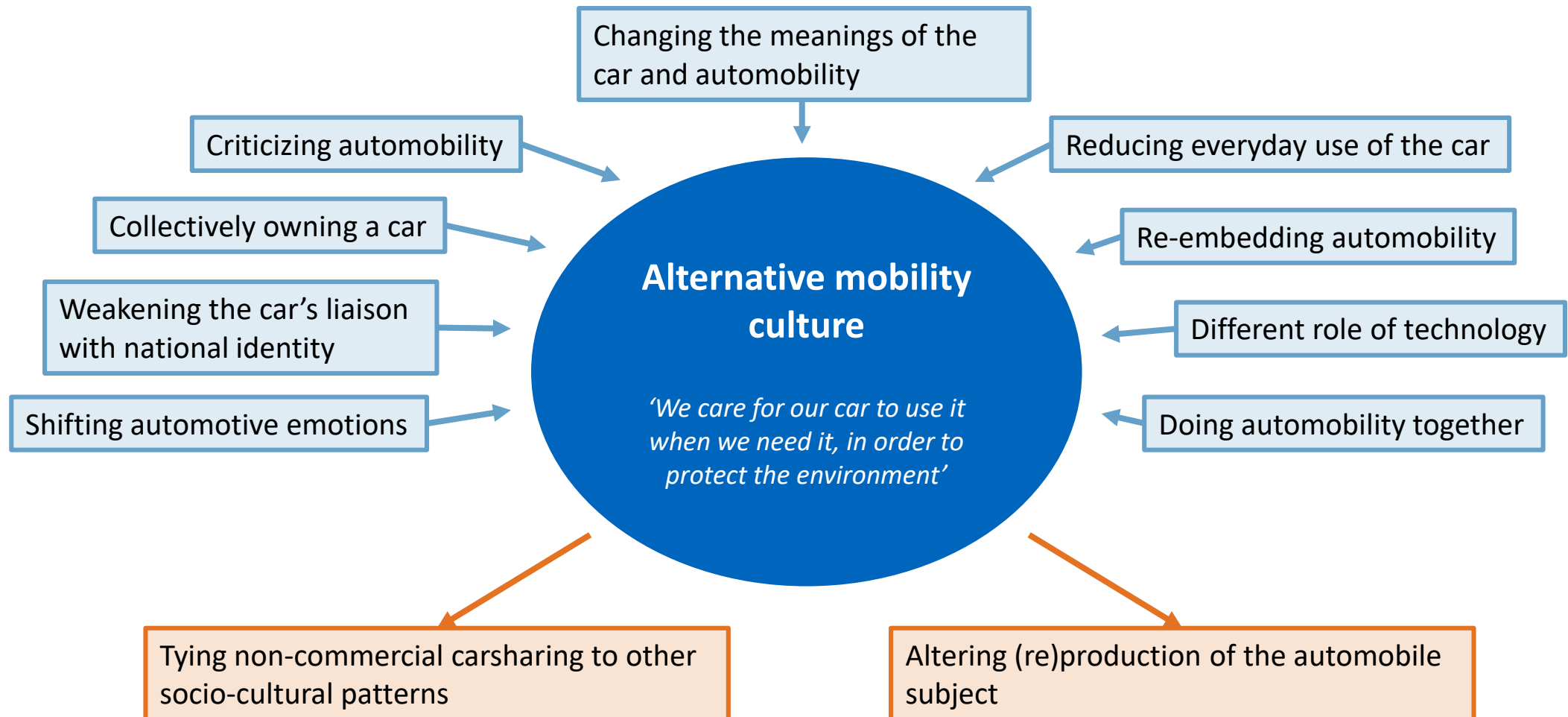
A process of everyday resistance

- Redefining the meanings of the car to object of utility from status symbol and (auto)mobility to necessity from freedom
- Transforming automobility into an ecological problem that needs to be countered with individual action
- Challenging individualizing tendencies of automobility and providing (collective) identity and agency as 'carsharers'
- Transferring cars into shared ownership and commoning meaning, movement and practice of (auto)mobility

Re-embedding and commoning

- Re-embedding
 - Social and ecological context of automobility is brought into consciousness
 - Counter-movement against the dis-embedding aspects of the system of automobility, first individually then collectively.
- Commoning
 - A reconsideration of the value of mobility
 - Emphasis of political content and individual processes of everyday resistance and re-embedding are brought on a collective and institutionalized level.

An alternative mobility culture emerges



Fostering the socio-ecological mobility transition

- Non-commercial carsharing points out a potential pathway for a socio-ecological just and post-capitalist mobility transition.

