

Research needs a broad perspective

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Our society is currently undergoing major changes in terms of mobility. Policy makers, scientists, and the automobile industry are all asking the same question: Where is this journey taking us? How do the people behave under those rapidly changing conditions? What kind of values do users associate with mobility, and which societal norms does one have to consider while shaping mobility for the future? Christoph Fritsch of Produkt + Markt shares his thoughts on the current mobility change.

Market research answers questions from providers of mobility solutions of any kind and thus also optimises mobility concepts. However, since the current changes in mobility concepts have proven to be so profound that we cannot yet fully foresee its consequences, information must be gathered from a wide range of sources. Research plays an important role in this – it needs to grasp the complexity of the topic in order to be able to ask the right questions.

Modern societies are characterised by differentiation. Our social activities – work life, education, or leisure – are not spatially centred anymore. Only mobility allows us to live our modern way of life.

Hardly anything is as natural to us as being mobile: in the morning there's our daily way to work, a quick pit stop on the way to drop off the kids at the daycare centre. On the way back we make a quick run to the DIY store, and when we arrive at home, the mobile massage studio is already waiting for us in our living room. At the same time, mobility also provides us with lots of magical experiences: The flight to our holiday destination makes the happiest time of the year even a little more exquisite, and even weeks later, the memories of that Segway tour during the weekend trip to Prague put a big smile on our faces.

Increasing flexibility, structural change, and technical innovation define the playing field on the one hand as the main drivers of the change in mobility; ecology, comfort, individuality as well as the networking megatrend on the other. Occasionally, mobility is only recognised as a result of a combination of infrastructural features. Many people even reduce mobility change merely to a decision for or against a certain mode of transportation or engine concept. For sociologists, however, mobility is in fact a cultural phenomenon.

A current survey by Produkt + Markt shows: Attitudes towards mobility and individual decisions are complex. On the one hand, the majority of car owners consider promotional programmes for electric cars to be a step in the right direction. On the

other hand, electric vehicles are not really winning any ground in Germany. Among new registrations, the proportion of e-cars is merely in the per mille range. The number of people considering the engine concept of the future to be cars with fuel-efficient petrol engines has even increased in the past five years.

Choosing our mode of transport turns out to be a complex decision influenced by various factors. First and foremost, there are infrastructural features that need to be mentioned: the availability of public transport or condition of the road network; additionally, the number of parking spots, tolls, and other regulatory aspects also play an important role. Other crucial factors are external events that negatively affect the available portfolio and that are beyond the consumer's control.

Yet, a deep dive into the aspects of society and the individual are a lot more interesting and actually far more important for a true understanding of mobility concepts of the future.

Two examples: In Japan, miniature cars – also known as K-cars – account for one third of new registrations, also because their owners are exempted from proving to have a parking space. In the USA, on the other hand, this class of vehicle is virtually not marketable. In US mobility culture, values like freedom and individuality are particularly represented by the size of the vehicle.

Cykelslangen is a bridge in Copenhagen. Bright orange and 190 metres long, it stretches across the harbour and connects the city districts of Vesterbro and Amager for cyclists. Cykeslangen is an architectural experience. It quickly becomes clear that cycling is much more than just a mode of transport in Copenhagen, neither is it compulsory nor an end in itself. Cycling is a vital part of the local mobility culture, a lifestyle, and it is a way to express social commitment as well as social responsibility.

The researcher needs this broad perspective and thus the leap into the everyday lives of the target group – from the deep-seated motifs and attitudes to the concrete pains and gains of mobility at the actual moment of the event. This is his only chance to grasp the cultural phenomenon of mobility holistically.

About the author



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