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Limits of Technocratic Politics in Environmental Policy. Some Preliminary Results of a Case Study in Local Traffic Policy in Germany. *Paper prepared for the ASA Annual Meeting, August 12-16, 2000, Washington, D.C.*

In Germany, and this is presumably true for most industrialized countries of the northwestern hemisphere, environmental protection has made substantial progress since environmental degradation emerged as a social problem in public discourse during the 1960s and -70s. This holds true even though the adequacy of the achieved will most certainly be subject to dispute in the light of the magnitude of environmental problems yet unresolved. Controversial assessment of environmental policy performance results not only from divergence in evaluative standards applied. Scope for controversial judgement arises from the fact that environmental policy is highly selective. Environmental protection, in fact, refers to a multitude of differently structured problem areas which make a variety of different demands on the political system. Since the capacity of a given set of political institutions to cope with these problems varies considerably, environmental policy tends to deal only with a particular set of problems in certain ways. Correspondingly, progress in environmental protection tends to be limited to distinctive types of problem areas, neglecting others of similar or even greater importance.

In the following, I would like to focus on a specific type of environmental problem area. The type I am interested in can be distinguished by the fact that in these cases environmental pollution emerges from action patterns essentially rooted in social concepts of a meaningful life. In the German case it is striking that the way of life as a source of environmental pollution has largely been absent from the agenda of environmental politics.[1] Yet, there is reason to assume that

1 As far as I can see, the tax on energy consumption adopted by the socialdemocratic-green coalition has been the first systematic attempt at politically addressing this problem area.

problem areas of this type may well pose a bottleneck to the process of ecological modernization. At least two considerations support this assumption. First, empirical evidence suggests that in certain areas (i.e., energy consumption, traffic, CO_2-emission) the share of environmental pollution resulting from life-style related action patterns is in fact on the rise in comparison to other major sources of pollution such as industrial production.[2] Second, on systematic grounds problem areas of this type must be considered crucial to ecological modernization in so far as they constitute an arena, in which the cultural core underlying conflict over environmental issues becomes virulent. In this respect it is important to remember that the societal relation to nature has become a relevant social problem only for the reason that the cultural foundations supporting modern society have lost some of their unquestioned social validity (Brand 1982, Cotgrove 1982, Huber 1989, Inglehart 1977, Milbrath 1984, Weßels 1991). The potential for conflict arising from this development takes on an especially explosive character when way-of-life related environmental poblems and thus implicitly core questions of cultural meaning become the issue. On the micro level processes of ecological modernization amount to demands for the ecological rationalization of life-styles, which bear the potential for conflict with established social and personal identities. Conflict over environmental policy turns into conflict over identities, affecting the validity of concepts of a meaningful life. Ultimately, substantial progress in environmental policy requires a solution to the resulting problem of mediating conflicting horizons of cultural meaning.

These considerations constituted the vantage point for a research project guided by the question of how the German political system deals with environmental problems of this type. The research approach draws on the expectation that despite all its peculiarities a detailed case study will allow some general insight into contemporary liberal democracy´s institutional capacity for ecological modernization. For this purpose I have been working on a case study in local traffic policy in an East German city. Local traffic policy was chosen as a policy area on the grounds of its excellent suitability as a representative case of this type of environmental problem area with a major root in the life-world. Accordingly, the study is focused on the political regulation of passenger transport. Individual mobility, so the assumption, is grasped inadequately simply as an instrumental activity of physical movement in geographic space. Apart from its immediate instrumental purpose individual mobility at the same time must be understood as an expression of a

[2] Data supporting this thesis can be found in Statistisches Bundesamt 1998, Umweltbundesamt 1997.

socially meaningful concept of life. The issue of commercial transportation was thus omitted as an activity guided primarily by standards of economic rationality.

The empirical research was conducted drawing on qualitative methodology; that is: 36 in-depth interviews of up to four hours length, most of which were recorded on tape, with relevant political and administrative actors, complemented by participant observation, document analysis, and analysis of local news media.

In the course of what in Germany has been coined „the Transition" (die Wende) – referring to the erosion of the border regime dividing East and West Germany ultimately leading to the breakdown of the German Democratic Republic and the process of German reunification - East Germany experienced a rapid increase in individual motorization. Car ownership is probably the area, in which the process of assimilition of living conditions to West German standards has progressed most rapidly. Whereas in 1989 in the GDR 238 cars were registered per 1000 persons in comparison to 475 in the Federal Republic, in 1993 car ownership had already reached the level of 400 per 1000 compared to 497 in the Western states at that time.[3] This development confronted the East German inner cities with problems well known from the West German experience.[4] Expanding automobility met urban structures not designed for taking on large amounts of car traffic. The result being the extensive occupation and corresponding devaluation of urban space by overflowing car traffic, the impairment of the functionality of the transportation system (traffic congestion, deterioration of the conditions of use of public and non-motorized transportation), and increasing externalities (air and noise pollution, accidents, and so on).

In the context of the West German experience, problems resulting from the continuous increase in car traffic had in the past been addressed by the provision of additional infrastructure and redesigning urban structures to meet the needs of increasing automobility. The major drawback of this strategy of problem resolution by means of growth lay in the fact that in the race against increasing car traffic cities rarely managed to provide an adequate supply of infrastructure to assure the smooth functioning of the transportation system for any length of time. More often,

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[3] Bundesminister für Verkehr (1999). These figures were calculated on the basis of total population. By 1997 motorization had reached a level of 504 per 1000 persons for Germany altogether (ibid). Data distinguished according to East and West was not available.

[4] Typical accounts of the West German experience can, for instance, be found in Kiepe 1992, Monheim/ Monheim/ Dandorfer 1990, Schaller 1993. The East German situation is outlined in Häußermann 1997, Lennsen 1996, and Müller 1992.

they were soon faced by similar problems on an advanced level, while increasingly reaching fiscal and spatial limits to the continuation of this mode of problem resolution. At the same time, due to the increased questioning of the traditional model of societal development, tolerance of the undesireable side-effects accompanying the continuous expansion of automobility had been on the decline.[5] In the light of these circumstances, the perception of traffic problems started to change in the course of the 1980´s. Whereas the traditional approach tended to assume the demand for infrastructure as being an independent variable to be served by traffic planning, an understanding of traffic planning began to gain ground, which drew on the insight that mobility behavior was not adequately conceived simply as given precondition, but had to be understood as a result of traffic policy as well. From this perspective it was argued that the task for traffic planning ought not be the adaptation of infrastructure to given demand, rather furthering the development of the transportation system in accordance with political priorities.[6] Due to the multitude of problems facing the cities in the course of ever increasing car traffic, there had been a growing consensus on the programmatic level that the reorientation of mobility patterns away from car dominance toward increased use of public and non-motorized means of transportation was required.

In the examined case, these lessons drawn from the West German experience provided the foundation for local traffic planning. In the light of the obvious problems resulting from the massive expansion of auto-centred mobility, a traffic concept was developed, directed toward fostering forms of mobility considered compatible with the goals of protecting urban structures as well as the environment. Specifically, measures were suggested to support public and non-motorized forms of mobility while imposing certain restraints on inner-city car traffic. In this respect, a restrictive parking concept for the old city centre was developed. This parking concept not only played a key role in the inner-city traffic concept but turned out to be a major issue of political controversy as well. While on a programmatic level the restrictive parking concept was adopted

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5 In Germany, auto-critical discourse experienced a significant boost in the course of the discovery of the phenomenon of „Waldsterben“. In the first half of the 80´s the endangered state of a significant share of Germany´s forests became an issue of severe public concern. Air pollution was considered to be the major cause, especially $NO_{x,}$ which were to large degree related to auto emissions (Roqueplo 1986, Reichert/ Zierhofen 1993, Zierhofer 1998). In the early 90´s the auto again became an object of dispute due to the role ascribed to it as a major culprit in contributing to the problem of climate change by its continuously increasing share in overall carbondioxide emission (eg. Rat von Sachverständigen für Umweltfragen 1994).

6 A good example for this line of reasoning is Kirchoff/ Kipke 1993.

by the municipal council actual traffic policy has taken a different turn. In terms of its actual political implementation this parking concept fell victim to political obstruction.

The case of downtown parking

During the years 1991 to 1993 the city´s so-called „Traffic Development Plan“ (TDP) was worked out. At the base of this concept lay the assessment that the inner-city traffic situation posed a major impediment to the development of an urban centre attractive to customers, residents, and visitors alike. This was ascribed to the fact that car traffic was occupying approximately half of the total area of the inner-city, which included the disordered use of virtually all open spaces for parking purposes, as well as to the high volume of inner-city traffic. The latter, in this view, posed a barrier to pedestrian traffic, partitioning the downtown area, and presented a source of endangerment and pollution. On grounds of this diagnosis, downtown development was seen to require to curb inner-city car traffic by limiting the accessibility of the old city centre as well as imposing measures of calming and ordering remaining traffic. By alleviating the strains of car traffic upon the inner-city enhancement of its attractiveness to customers, visitors, and residents as a place to dwell and congregate was to be achieved.

Within this concept the issue of inner-city parking represented a core component. The supply of parking facilities was considered to be a significant factor determining the volume of inner-city car traffic, thus, crucially affecting the development of urban structures and choice of means of transportion. With reference to the objective of developing the traffic system according to criteria of „environmental“ and „urban compatability“ the limitation of parking space for certain types of demand in the inner-city were proposed. Accordingly, the demand for parking space of residents and commercial traffic traffic (eg. delivery and other services) was to be satisfied in the confines of the old city centre. The provision of parking space for residents was considered essential for the attractiveness of the inner-city as a residential location. Providing for the needs of commercial traffic was viewed as essential for maintaining the functionality of the city centre as a commercial location. In contrast, customer and visitor traffic, due to the large traffic-inducing effect of high rates of alternation, were to use parking facilities, which were to be built on the fringes of the inner-city, or resort to public transportation. The resulting distance of 200-300 yards to be covered afoot to the old centre was considered reasonable. Parking facilities for work traffic and traffic related to downtown educational facilities would not be provided for

within the confines of the inner-city at all. These segments of demand were expected to resort to public or non-motorized transportation to reach inner-city destinations. According to this concept, parking space for 1250 vehicles was to be provided for in underground garages (exclusively for residents and commercial traffic) within the old centre and parking space for 6000 additional vehicles was to be supplied in parking garages on the fringes of the inner-city. The old city centre was to be reserved for pedestrian traffic. By ousting car traffic from public space the attractiveness of the old city centre was to be enhanced, thus fostering the development its potential as an urban centre.

The Traffic Development Plan was adopted by the municipal council by a large, party encompassing political majority as the programmatic foundation of local traffic policy. While all political actors acknowledged the status of the concept as the binding directive for local traffic policy, actual traffic policy did not necessarily conform to the conceptual ideas proposed. At the time data collection had been completed, a coherent scheme for implementation had not yet been devised nor had the necessary regulatory instruments been put into place. Rather, political decisions had been made actually contradicting the envisioned traffic concept.

When licensing issues had emerged in the course of inner-city investment projects, aimed at erecting commercial and residential facilities in the old city centre, decision-makers were faced with the requirement of translating policy propositions into specific political decisions. For example, building permissions issued would have had to have been designed to regulate the construction of parking facilities in accordance with the TDP. In fact, quite the contrary occurred. Rather than restraining customer and work traffic, as the plan had proposed, building permissions were issued demanding the construction of underground parking facilities open to the general public, ultimately obstructing the initial programmatic objectives.

How is this to be explained? While the general objectives of the TDP with respect to inner-city development were widely shared, advocates of proposed parking policy encountered the fact that when it came down to actual operationalization a workable coalition supporting restraints on the provision of inner-city parking facilities could not be established.[7] Neither in the ranks of local administration nor among the municipal council could sufficient support be mustered.

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[7] Reference to the concept of „advocacy coalition“ (Sabatier 1993/ Jenkins-Smith) is not coincidental. As will become apparent below, this case can adequately be conceived in terms of conflict between actor networks inte-

Without getting into the detailed reconstruction of the political decision-making process I will develop the following argument. The viability of the inner-city traffic concept is indeed crucially dependent on public acceptance and compliance. However, inasmuch as citizen preferences appear an impediment to the concept´s realization, this is not adequately understood as lying outside of the range of the political process as it may seem from an actor´s perspective. In fact, the political process itself, through its specific handling of the issue, contributes to the inhibition of preference reflection, which could promote the establishment of public problem perception, potentially conducive to alternative policy options. In a first step toward developing the argument I will now turn to some considerations on how interests operative in the policy area affect the scope of political action.

Restrictive parking policy in the light of economic interests

From a structural perspective, the political attractiveness of a political option will depend on its potential for promoting opportunities for obtaining or maintaining positions of power. Accordingly, chances for restrictive policies on car traffic will not least depend on the degree of approval to be expected among the political audience. Obviously, the configurations of political interests facing political decision-makers will be of significance. Looking at the configuration of interests characteristic to the case under study, on first glance there indeed appears to be little reason to assume that restrictive traffic policies addressing the automobile might have proved a promising strategy for maintaining or establishing significant levels of public support. In the following, I would like to take a closer look at the relation between prevailing interest structure and the scope for political action. First, I will deal with the issue of economic interests affecting traffic policy. Then, I will take a closer look at some aspects of the preference formation on the part of the citizenry.

Policies imposing restrictions on car traffic in general and parking in particular met the fierce resistance of local business representatives. From this vantage point traffic policy was foremost economic policy and was evaluated accordingly. The supply of auto infrastructure was considered to be an essential locational business factor. In the view of inner-city commerce and trade representatives, the attractiveness of the city centre and thus its economic potential were

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grated by a common belief system which does not necessarily correspond with the boundaries of organizational affiliation.

inextricably intertwined with its accessibility by car. They pointed out that inner-city commerce was under immense competitive pressure from suburban commercial facilities, which had comparative advantages in this respect. The basic assumption was that since a significant share of customers clearly preferred the use of the automobile to satisfy shopping- or business-related transportation needs restrictive traffic policies affecting the inner-city would result in further disadvantages to this location. In consequence, economic development of the inner-city was believed to be in jeopardy, which would ultimately affect the whole city. Accordingly, policy makers were faced with demands for promoting the development of automobile infrastructure.

The difficulties advocates of the TDP experienced in establishing operative political support for the implementation of the restrictive inner-city parking policy had its main reason in political sensitivity for the proposed scenarios of economic decline. This circumstance might appear easily explicable in terms of fiscal and legimatory dependency of local government upon the well-being of the local economy.[8] However, on closer examination this line of reasoning does not prove fully satisfactory (Elkins 1996). While functional dependency does indeed provide policy-makers with a strong motive to be concerned about the requirements of the local economy, in the light of the complexity of urban economic development there, in fact, remains a high degree of uncertainty as to which specific line of action would actually meet this general requirement. Whereas the protagonists of automobility viewed the attractiveness of the inner-city as symbiotically linked to its automotive accessibility, advocates of restrictive traffic policy pursued a different line of reasoning, which, prima facie, could claim equal plausibility. They questioned the assumption that the inner-city had any chance of successfully competing with suburban commercial facilities on grounds of automobile infrastructure at all. In order to hold its share against suburban competition, in this view, the city centre would be well advised to focus on the development of the comparative advantages specific to this location. Accordingly, specific opportunities for economic development lay in relief of the downtown area from the pressures of automobility. It was assumed that an urban centre alleviated from the strains of automobility would bear considerable attractive potential as a place of public dwelling and encounter.

Neither did the manifest interests of business representatives provide certainty to the orientation of political decision-makers. In principle, it is not at all clear how interests based on the

particular perspective of any specific business or line of business might reach a degree of rationalization that would qualify them as an adequate vantage point for policies satisfying the `requirements of the local economy´. Of course this circumstance does not safeguard against the short-circuited equation of empirical interest and economic necessity. The situation was further aggravated by the fact that in the case studied the empirical interests of economic actors showed a degree of inconsistency, hardly suitable for providing orientation anyway. Whereas, on the one hand, representatives of inner-city commerce championed the construction of downtown parking facilities, on the other hand, resulting costs to investors were lamented as an excessive burden on investment. In order to alleviate this conflict of interest local business representatives suggested the exemption of small investment projects from legal obligations to provide parking facilities. Such a measure fed the suspicion that ultimately a strategy of externalizing costs was being pursued, which would have amounted to easing the financial burden for provision of the desired parking facilities upon existing businesses at the expense of the ones to be newly established. Furthermore, considering the types of business run at downtown locations, their accessibility by public transportation, and the high cost of the construction of underground garages in the old city centre, from the viewpoint of business being newly established, parking facilities at this location didn´t at all appear to be indispensible to economic prosperity. As a case in point, when in the instance mentioned above local government decided that the respective downtown building permission was to require construction of underground parking facilites open to the general public this had to be enforced *against* the empirical interest of the investor.

Granted the plausibility of the proposed argument that the general fact of functional dependency of the local political system upon the well-being of the local economy doesn´t provide a sufficient explanation for the tendency of the political majority to abstain from carrying through with the restrictive parking policy, then the question arises, which other factors have to be drawn upon. The constitutive uncertainty, characteristic of the situation actors are faced with, is bridged by drawing on „implicit theories“ [9] which are produced and reproduced in collective processes of interpretation. Only by asserting a specific conception of reality against potential alternatives does the range of potential options undergo a process of closure. In this manner, a specific policy option, as opposed to others, is vested with plausibility; action gains certainty in orientation.

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[8] This line of reasoning with regard to structural conflict between environment and economy in the context of capitalist sociation is pursued by Ewringmann/ Zimmermann 1978, Hucke/ Ullmann 1980, and Nissen 1993. For a more general argument in this respect: Offe 1984.

The idea that downtown parking facilities were indispensible to the economic prosperity of the location essentially rests on specific assumptions regarding citizen behavior. The core assumption was that citizens are set on car use and, therefore, lack any significant degree of tolerance for restraints upon their automobility. From this view, this circumstance restrains the scope of political action in so far as from a political perspective disregard for these preferences bears considerable economic and legitimatory risks which seriously question the political viability of restrictive inner-city parking policy.[10] In the following I would like to subject the role of citizen preferences in this policy area to closer inspection.

Restrictive parking policy in the light of citizen preferences

In the case of traffic policy public acceptance indeed plays a crucial role with regard to the effectiveness, even the feasibility of political regulation. This becomes apparent when one takes a closer look at the structure of the problem source.

The life-world as a constraint on political problem management

Research on governance suggests that the manageability of political problems[11] crucially depends on the structure of the problem area which is to be addressed (Mayntz 1987 and 1990, Mayntz and Scharpf 1995, Offe 1990). From this vantage point, a highly consequential feature of the causal structure of the problem of mobility-induced environmental degradation needs to be pointed out. In contrast to many other areas of environmental policy, in this case, the target group of political intervention is not formally organized actors. Rather, mobility-induced problems arise as aggregate effects of largely autonomous action on the part of a vast number of individuals going about their everday lives. This has significant consequences for political problem management.

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9 The term has been suggested by Hofmann 1993 and 1995.

10 A recent survey conducted on behalf of the research institute of Germany´s Environmental Protection Agency (Umweltbundesamt) found that 68% of those questioned supported the closing off of the city centre to car traffic (Kuckartz 2000: 57). Whether this finding adequately mirrors political preferences on the issue may be difficult to decide conclusively. In any case, the prevalence of uncertainty in this respect is emphasized.

11 I am referring to the German concept of „politische Steuerung“ which is not easily translated precisely. Literally the term might be translated „political control“ or „political steering“. However, this translation tends to suggest misleading connotations of state omnipotence. Actually it is an abstract term referring to any attempt at deliberately influencing social processes by political intervention.

While formally organized actors in many instances may have considerable potential to obstruct regulatory efforts, they nonetheless do accomodate such endeavors in as much as they in principle show a high degree of structural susceptability to the standard instruments of the regulatory tool box, which are law, money, and information (Offe 1990). As will be argued in more detail below, this does not hold true in the same way for individual action guided by life-world rationality. Neither can regulatory efforts in this case take advantage of the structuring capacities of existing associative arrangements. In case of conflict, there is no manageable number of collective actors which can be engaged in corporatist negotiations. Rather, regulators have to deal with a highly segmented field. Regulatory aspirations are faced with the task of affecting rationales guiding the action of a vast number of individual actors. These rationales will typically be highly heterogenous and can be expected to show only very limited responsiveness to the standard repertoire of available policy instruments.

The structure of the field of intervention has consequences for the possibilities of local traffic policy. To the extent that policy-makers abstain from falling back on the traditional strategy of dealing with the problem by means of infrastructure development directed toward accomodating increasing levels of motorized individual traffic, local traffic policies tend to draw upon the repertoire of instruments provided by the traffic sciences for the purpose of ordering, restraining, and substituting car traffic (FGSV 1990 and 1993, Steierwald 1994, or the respective articles in Apel et. al. 1992). These approaches to the issue consist of a set of infrastructural and regulatory measures which are essentially aimed at ordering the use of urban space by motorized individual traffic, on the one hand, and affecting choice in favor of public and non-motorized means of transportation on the other. The latter is to be achieved by improving the conditions of use of the favored means of transportation while restraining the automobile. Essentially, the crucial task at hand is to redirect mobility behavior. The standard policy instruments available for this purpose adhere to a behavioristic logic of conditioning action, aimed at channeling action into the desired tracks by means of incentives and sanctions. In the field of traffic policy, these instruments typically include the provision of infrastructure which is sought to control mobility behavior by means of conditioning the structure of available opportunities. Furthermore, legal regulations and pecuniary incentives are employed as means of inducing desired behavior through sanctions. The problem with this standard approach arises from the fact that its effectiveness ultimately depends on the willingness to cooperate on the part of the policy addressees. A prerequisite that can hardly

be sufficiently assured by these same means. Readiness to cooperate is required in two respects: First, effective control by means of infrastructural and regulatory policies presupposes that the actors affected make use of remaining freedom of action in line with policy objectives. For example, actors can obstruct regulatory efforts by mass deviance. In this case, the implementation of traffic policy is prone to failure due to excessive strain on local control capacities. A case in point can be regularly observed in the East German states with regard to attempts at regulating parking behavior. If a significant number of drivers do not accept parking regulations their enforcement costs are potentially driven up to intolerable levels.[12] Regulatory objectives can be undermined as well if actors simply boycott destinations when faced by restrictions on automotive accessibility deemed unacceptable. Second, effective problem management by means of infrastructural and regulatory policies implies the readiness of actors - in the sense of an enlightened binding of the self (Offe 1989 drawing on Elster 1984) - to accept the imposition of effective policies in their role as politically enfranchised citizens, thus, enabling their political viability to begin with. Any attempt at „repressive" intervention, so to speak, not backed by a sufficient degree of legitimacy, runs the risk of ultimately failing at the ballot box.[13]

The basic political problem at the core of traffic policy lies in the fact that hegemonic mobility patterns are in a multitude of ways closely interwined with life practices and rooted in concepts of meaning constitutive to life-worlds[14] while this life-world dimension at the same time evades immediate instrumental political control. In this respect, policy-makers simply do not command sufficiently effective means to strategically generate the motivational prerequisites of effective political intervention. Having to deal with a self-willed life-world, policy makers face a regulatory problem the management of which they are ill equipped for.

Selectivity in the formation of political preferences

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[12] Another illustrative case was observed in the State of Thuringia, Germany. According to an account by the research institute of the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation on four Saturdays before Christmas in 1990. On these days, when a large number of customers traditionally frequent the inner-city for shopping purposes, park and ride opportunities were offered. A shuttle service connecting parking facilities with the inner-city was offered for the basically symbolic fare of DM 1 (approximately $ .50) per car load. Supplementary storage services were provided and information was disseminated through advertisement, with reference to the problematic inner-city traffic situation. On the four Saturdays in question the offer was used by only 70 drivers, even though inner-city traffic had practically collapsed.

[13] This problem even leads advocates of rational choice to the conclusion that the efficacy of incentives directed at enhancing environmental quality depends on the level of „environmental morality" (Diekmann/ Preisendörfer 1992: 249).

It has been argued that economic interest in the generous provision of downtown parking facilities arise from assumptions on the mobility behavior of the citizenry. Empirical observation indeed seems to support this assumption. On first glance, there seems to be little indication for any noteworthy level of political support for restrictive policies affecting car traffic. Although the situation may seem perfectly clear, I will argue that with regard to the potential for public acceptance of restraints on car traffic the issue is in fact far more complex. The car obviously is the widely preferred means of transportation. Yet, due to widespread experience of undesirable consequences of unrestrained automobility, preferences are not at all free of ambivalence. Ambivalence, in turn, provides a potential starting point for mobilizing support for political alternatives to auto-centred traffic policy. There are a number of factors, though, which inhibit citizens in taking a reflective stance on their preferences in the field of traffic policy.

Preferences for automobility, documented in the course of everday life practices of the citizenry, are not at all imperturbable. While citizens obviously draw advantages from automobility, many a time it is indeed experienced as a source of problems as well. Disadvantages accompanying the automobile take on various forms. To many people, the time and money which has to be spent on obtaining and maintaining the vehicle is not just source of pleasure. Nor are the conditions of use always such that driving is solely experienced as a source of enjoyment. It seems as if enjoying the advantages of automobility is regularly obstructed by fellow road users. When on the road everyone else appears to be on their way as well. Wanting to drive, one is regularly forced to a standstill (traffic jam). Wanting to stand still, one is regularly compelled to keep going (in search of vacant parking space). Obstruction appears to be ubiquitous. Somebody is always going too slow or too fast, is driving too close behind or is not up close enough, is being too impatient or taking too much time, is taking one´s parking place right under one´s nose or engaged in some other type of deviant behavior which spoils the pleasure of driving, up to the point of endangerment to life and limb. Widespread aggressiveness encountered on the road may be taken as an indication that going by automobile apparently is often a source of frustration as well. Moreover, the car is experienced as a problem especially when one is not using it, but is subject to the consequences of its use by others. Noise and air pollution, endangerment of non-motorized participants in traffic, obstruction due to extensive occupation of public space by cars (eg., parking on boardwalks and open spaces), and the like are part of the experience of many a city

[14] Support for this line of reasoning can be found in CITY:mobil 1999, Götz 1998 and 2000, Heine/ Mautz 2000,

dweller. Finally, there is the broad issue of externalities, in terms of urban development (arrangement of urban structures to accomodate automobility), social externalities (being differently affected according to specific social structural criteria, devaluation of public space as a location for communication, etc.), and environmental externalities (resource consumption, sealing of surfaces, partialization of ecological habitats, carbondioxide emission and climate change, etc.), which to varying degrees represent problems connected to automobility. Considering the manifold advantages and disadvantages related to automobility it does not seem inappropriate to characterize preferences as ambivalent in this respect.[15] Ambivalent in as much as the pursuit of the advantages of automobility does not necessarily go along with willingness to readily accept the individual disadvantages it entails. It is this ambivalence in preferences which inheres potential responsiveness to alternatives to auto-centred traffic policies. However, the political problem is that ambivalence does not easily and immediately translate into support for restrictive traffic policies. The difficulties are manifold. For the purpose of the argument I would like pursue two lines of reasoning. First, preference formation as well as political problem perception is biased by the dominating public presence of auto-oriented interests in public perception (1). The ubiquitous presence of auto-oriented interests undermines the social validity of opposing facets in interest-orientation. The ubiquity of automobility inhibits the belief in the viability of restrictive traffic policies, thus discouraging public support. Second, major reasons which potentially support policies aimed at curbing unrestrained automobility are not immediately accessible from the stance of participant experience (2). In the horizon of common values restrictions on motorized individual transportation can be reasonably justified only on grounds of the consequences of unrestrained automobility. The shortcomings of subjective experience make it diffucult to take these consequences into account adequately, thus, inhibiting the opportunity to view restrictive traffic policies as a reasonable approach to the solution of traffic-related problems. Mobilizing potential for support would require that citizens are provided an opportunity to transcend the limitations of subjective experience.

Tully 2000.

[15] Additional empirical data indicating ambivalence is provided by Billig 1994, Praschl/ Risser 1994, Preisendöfer 1996).

(1) Selectivity in public visibility of traffic-related interests

Interests critical toward the automobile show structural disadvantages compared to auto-oriented interests with regard to formation and articulation. Consequentially, selectivity prevails which accounts for differential public presence of these interests and provides auto-oriented interests with advantages in competition for scarce political attention. In the following, I will outline some of the factors responsible for selectivity.

Obviously, a significant factor generally accountable for differential public presence and significance of interests are differences in organizability and capablity of conflict (Offe 1972). For the effective representation of interests resources are required and groups endowed with resources consequentially have better opportunities of giving their interests an organized form of expression as compared to groups lacking a comparable resource base. Moreover, an interest group which commands effective sanctioning potential has a better chance of attracting political attention to their interests than a group which lacks effective means in this respect. In local conflict on traffic policy business representatives, who command a comparatively large resource base and sanctioning potential, champion auto-oriented interests, whereas representatives of auto-critical interests, such as environmental associations and local initiatives, have to deal with considerable insufficiencies in this respect. They are comparatively weak on resources and, at the most, have some influence on public opinion, a resource, however, which cannot sufficiently be controlled and thus employed in a strategically effective manner.

Public visibility of auto-critical interests suffers from collective goods problems and related problems of organizing common interests as well (Olson 1965). This model is sometimes drawn upon as a factor to explain the persistence of auto use in the light of resulting damage to public goods. Accordingly, the stability of automobility is ascribed to a lack of individual incentive to curb auto use in case it cannot be guaranteed that others do so as well. To the contrary, since auto use is essentially a „positional good“ (Hirsch 1976) its utility even increases to the extent that others abstain from its use (less traffic congestion, destinations are reached faster, reduction of externalities etc.). Another, maybe even more significant aspect of the collective goods problem is usually not considered. Public perception of interests in the field of traffic policy is shaped by the fact that the preferences for automobility are more easily publicly stated than in the case of opposing interests. Preferences for automobility are visibly stated by simple use of the vehicle, as

a non-intended side effect, so to speak, of action guided by other objectives. The aggregate effect of mobility behavior of individual drivers, in the form of an empirically manifest volume of traffic, results in an impressive daily demonstration of auto-oriented interests. In contrast, with respect to interest articulation auto-critical preferences have the crucial disadvantage that they typically lack a comparatively undemanding way for effective public expression. In contrast, their public articulation requires coordinated effort at collective action. They can thus only be expressed at specific occasions and at comparatively high cost.

It might be objected that auto-critical participants in traffic are free to express their preferences by use of alternative means of transportation in the same manner as auto users do. This objection overlooks two aspects. On the one hand, there is no real *individual* freedom of choice in means of transportation. Individual options, in terms of quantity and quality, depend on collectively provided infrastructure. Furthermore, the conditions of use of different means of transportation are in many ways negatively correlated, so that a lot of times disadvantages have to be taken into account when one fails to opt for the privileged means of transportation. To a certain extent it can thus be expected that the choice of transportation mirrors the actual conditions of using different means of transportation.

It is, furthermore, a curious observation that preferences for automobility enjoy greater visibility just for the reason of the greater resource and problem intensity of this means of transportation. For instance, given the same transportation performance, the consumption of physical space significantly exceeds the requirements of alternative means of transportation. Consequentially, at a certain volume of traffic the automobile dominates the sensual perception of urban space. This is further reinforced by the fact that the related problem intensity moves the automobile into the centre of political and public attention. The situation is paradoxical in that the problem intensity of an auto-centred traffic system by means of the structuration of attention promotes its own stability.[16]

[16] An excellent example are regular traffic reports on the radio, in which communication on the problems of auto hegemony contributes to the continuous reaffirmation of the social significance of automobility (Freund/ Martin 1993: 81).

(2) *Limitations of the participant perspective as a constraint on political preference formation*

Citizens opt for automobility on the grounds of the life-world perspective of a traffic participant. They make choices based on experiences and the resulting expectations of specific opportunities, in the light of which the car appears an attractive option compared to available alternatives. In contrast, an auto-critical stance can be justified only on grounds of the consequences of an auto-centred traffic system. These consequences, however, have the crucial disadvantage with respect to their potential relevance to action that they do not arise as the result of individual action, rather as an aggregate effect of the actions of a vast number of individuals. Furthermore, in terms of genesis and often of effect, these consequences evade the life-world horizon of particpant experience: The structural functional problems of an auto-centred traffic system, the problem of traffic induced by growth of infrastructure capacity, and the whole issue of externalities arise from complex technical, social, and natural interrelations which are in principle inaccessible from the participant perspective.[17] Consequentially, when confined to the stance of a participant, citizens lack the opportunity to adequately take the consequences of automobility into account in preference formation. To the extent that the consequences of automobility are accessible to life-world experience at all, citizens react with demands drawing on intuitive plausibility derived from the participant´s perspective. For instance, experience arising from the relative scarcity of infrastructure leads to demands for its further development. Experience of traffic-related noise pollution motivates the pursuit of problem shifting strategies (construction of by-passes or selective calming of traffic, both resulting in traffic relocation), or moving one´s residence to less affected areas (usually heightening the burden put on others). Contrary to the intuitions of traffic participants, most of these approaches to problem solution result merely in the shifting or even further aggravation of the problem. On the other hand, citizens are barred from developing an adequately complex understanding of the problem to the extent that they lack opportunities to transcend the limitations of the participant´s perspective. In the end, preferences emerging from the confines of the participant perspective tend to fuel a development of which it is not at all clear that it actually is desired in its entirety.

It can be assumed that the differential visibility of interests regarding traffic policy has consequences in terms of their public and political significance. Just the factuality of dominance

of auto-oriented interests in public perception can be expected to have structurating effects upon citizen´s expectations. It can be expected that the motivation to publicly express preferences potentially in conflict with auto-oriented interests will not just be low. Rather, it must be reckoned with that actors will tend to attach little significance to preferences that appear to lack social validity due to their apparent lack of generalizability. At best, such preferences might stay limited to the status of private concern. In lack of any apparently realistic chance of being considered they might just be surpressed from perception altogether, in the sense of reducing cognitive dissonance. In turn, from a political actor´s perspective, the resulting absence of indicators signalling significance of auto-critical preferences will let the political opportuneness of restrictive traffic policies affecting the automobile in the light of hegemonic automobility appear more than questionable.[18]

The potential of public deliberation and the limitations of technocratic politics

As pointed out above, in the field of local traffic policy the effectiveness of political intervention crucially depends on the willingness to cooperate on part of the affected citizenry. The standard repertoire of local traffic policy, however, cannot assure citizen compliance. This indeed poses a problem to effective political action in this policy area to the extent that preferences do not simply accomodate policy objectives. In the case under study, traffic policy was ultimately premised on the assumption that, due to citizen preferences for automobility, the restrictive parking policies would entail considerable economic and legitimatory risks, the taking of which political decision-makers shied away from. Contrary to the actor´s perspective, it would be mistaken to simply take citizens´ preferences, seen to constrain the scope of political action, as exogenous to the political process. Rather, to a certain extent, they must be understood as a result of just this process.[19] „Individual preferences do not arise outside and apart from their social context, but are influenced by both the process and substance of policy making“ (Reich 1988: 138). Both political process and policy substance affect „(t)he way in which issues are publicly represented, influence the way

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[17] Some of the structural features inhibiting adequate problem perception from a life-world perspective are pointed out in Bechmann 1994: 14-15.

[18] The differential visibility of traffic policy interests may be an element for the explanation of the empirical phenomenon that respondents often overestimate the preferences of others with regard to automobility. When surveyed, local elites tend to think that the auto-orientation of citizens is more significant than citizens themselves claim it to be when questioned. In turn, citizens questioned typically assume that local elites are more oriented towards automobility than these claim to be.

[19] This has repeatedly been pointed out in debate on policy analysis and theory of democracy (eg. the articles in Reich 1988, Sunstein 1991, Giegel 1999).

people come to think about the problem, its possible solutions, and the values at stake in the decision“ (ibid: 141). Essentially, the „framing“ of the policy object is at issue.[20]

As pointed out in preceding analysis, ambivalence in preferences may potentially provide ground for establishing support for alternative approaches to traffic policy. However, conditions of preference formation are not per se conducive to promoting reflection on them. When confined to the stance of a participant and faced by the ubiquity of auto-oriented interests it is difficult to imagine how a generally affirmative stance toward automobility could translate into support for restrictive traffic policies.

From the vantage point of this analysis the task for an ecologically-oriented traffic policy would be the systematic promotion of reflection on political preferences. This would require enhancement of public deliberation. Chances of activating the transformational potential inherent in the ambivalence of preference structures are ultimately contingent upon the quality of public discourse. Regarding the process of political preference formation public delibertion bears considerable potential for

- the broadening of the value base taken into consideration,
- providing legitimacy to preferences formerly marginalized,
- promoting more complex views on the nature of the problem and possible solutions that transcend the limitations of the particular experience of any individual citizen,
- fostering the laundering of preferences
- mobilizing support.

Finally, public deliberation bears the potential for frame transformation – that is the transformation of the conceptional framework, in terms of which the issue is perceived and evaluated – which might allow for the resolution of ambivalence in preferences towards increased acceptance of alternative approaches to traffic policy.

From this perspective an ecologically-minded approach to traffic policy would be well-advised to further public deliberation and attempt to enhance its quality. In the examined case empirical observation suggests that actual traffic politics follow a quite different course. Local traffic politics

[20] On the concept of frames Schön/ Rein 1994.

are characterized by strategies of depoliticizing the political decision-making process. Both the municipal administration as well as the political advocates of the restrictive traffic concept concur in producing the technocratic closure of the political process. There are two sides to this:
1. Closure is pursued in the social dimension: From the administrative viewpoint the inherent dynamics of the political process bear contingencies with considerable potential for the disruption of administrative action. In this perspective the imponderabilities of the political process are rooted in its relation to the public sphere. Under public scrutiny politics adheres to different rules than is the case outside of the spotlight of public attention. Whereas in the back rooms of the political planning process administrative rationality standards run the show, on the public stage (due to party competition, formation and articulation of interests, and emerging actors´ configurations and lines of conflict) politics unfold their own dynamics beyond administrative control. Consequentially, the political process threatens to yield policy results which from the administrative viewpoint collide with what is considered to be the factual requirements for securing the common good. In order to control the contingencies of the political process administrative actors engage in practices of informal negotiation while shielding the political decision-making process from the public sphere. In this manner public deliberation is regularly inhibited.
2. Apart from the social dimension closure is brought about in the substantial dimension as well: As in most cases when restrictions on car traffic become the issue, local traffic policy proves to be a highly controversial political terrain. Advocates of confining inner-city car traffic encounter fierce resistance by representatives of inner-city commerce, who tend to assume a symbiotic relationship between economic prosperity and unrestrained access by car. In the light of political controversy members of the administration and the municipal council advocating the restrictive parking concept seek to hold their ground by framing controversial policy options in terms of technical and formal (that is legal, fiscal, and economic) constraints. In this manner the proponents attempt to push their favored political option through by denying the existence of feasible alternatives. This strategy may indeed prove successful in particular instances. Its problem lies in the fact that the justification of restraints on automobility is being tied to the question whether bounds of technical feasibility can be brought to bear. However, paradigmatic change in traffic policy can ultimately be justified only on normative grounds. An answer to the question of why the redirection of mobility should be sought in the first place can obviously not be given in technical terms. Only by reference to the systematic violation of collectively shared normative claims could demands for protecting the environment as well as social and urban structures, requiring

restraints on automobility, gain impact. By focusing the debate on technical constraints political deliberation is again inhibited in unfolding its potential for preference transformation.

This analysis reveals a paradoxical constellation: In order to shield political action in the field of traffic policy from the obstructive potential of political controversy, members of the administration and municipal council, seeking to implement the restrictive traffic concept, engage in a strategy of technocratic closure of the political decision-making process. In doing so, they inhibit the process of political deliberation, which, due to the nature of the problem, must be considered as the single promising mechanism for generating the acceptance needed to alleviate the problem. In the end, a situation emerges in which the political system on grounds of its internal logic systematically contributes to the obstruction of its own scope of action, thus contributing to the creation of the implementation problems faced.

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