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Connecting past, present and future

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Abstract
This essay argues that more attention needs to be paid by planners and policy makers to past everyday life in envisioning present and future models of living. By focusing on the decisions and strategies adopted by individual families in carrying out their everyday lives we suggest that it is possible to gain a better understanding of the ways in which people react to changing circumstances and adapt their behaviours when necessary. The paper focuses on four separate areas: what are the methods and concepts that we can use to operationalize this material and make it relevant to the present? What historical sources can be used to reveal aspects of the everyday and what are the limitations of these resources? How can this material provide new insights into issues such as historical determinism and inertia within social systems? And what are the implications of this for tackling pressing current and future problems such as climate change and inequalities at both the global and local scales?

Introduction
We cannot escape the past. It is always with us in our memories, in the physical landscape and environment that endures, and in the legacy of past policies and planning decisions at both local and global scales. At a personal level we are constantly learning from past actions and experiences, trying hard not to repeat previous mistakes, but in terms of policy formulation all too often the decisions that are taken today – and which shape the future – seem to ignore the lessons of the past. In this essay we argue that planning and policy making would benefit from a greater appreciation of the role of the past in shaping the present, and through recognition of the potential benefits of some ways of living that have slipped from view. This may help to avoid the sorts of unintended negative consequences that have sometimes arisen from past decisions. Clearly how the past is viewed in relation to the present and future will depend on the policy goals that exist at the time. These will differ as governments (both local and national) change and as external events beyond the control of individual governments shape national policies. In this essay we mainly draw examples from the United Kingdom and the USA, and make the assumption that two key policy goals of any administration must be to create a society that is more equitable and one where resource conservation and environmental protection are central goals. Clearly such aims will interact with other goals – most obviously that of economic growth and full employment – but we assume that they are not incompatible and, indeed, that in many ways they are dependent on each other. We suggest that by paying closer attention to some aspects of past societies it may be easier to combine the goals of greater societal equality, protection of the environment and economic prosperity.

The principles advanced in this essay could be applied to many aspects of society, economy and culture, but we limit ourselves to drawing examples (based on our own research) from two arenas – transport and energy - that have been ever present, that raise important issues of social equity and environmental protection, and which are likely to become increasingly important as the twenty-first century progresses. All societies and economies require the ability to move goods and people around with ease, transport itself is a major energy user, and the development of energy security in the context of declining traditional (carbon-

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based) resources together with the need to reduce carbon emissions, is a crucial policy issue for both the present and the future. Transport and energy are required at all levels of society from large corporations to individual households. They are a fundamental part of the everyday fabric of society, and attitudes and values developed at the level of governments or large multinational corporations seep back and influence the behaviour of individuals and households. We use selected examples drawn from nineteenth and twentieth-century British history to show that in the connected arenas of transport and energy use some of the structures and systems that were common in the past could usefully be replicated today and in the future. We first review some of the existing connections between historical research and visions of the future, second we assess the sources that may be used and some of their limitations and, third, we examine selected past predictions of future technologies. In conclusion we return to the practical advantages of focusing policy on aspects of the everyday in the past, present and future.

History and the future

In this essay we argue that by focusing on the decisions and strategies adopted by individual families in carrying out their everyday lives it is possible to gain a better understanding of the ways in which people react to changing circumstances and adapt their behaviour when necessary. For instance, it is often suggested by politicians and policy makers that the public are resistant to change and that the adoption of transport or energy policies that restrict (for instance) car use or household energy consumption to conserve resources and reduce carbon emissions would be unacceptable to many. However, by collecting oral histories of past travel behaviour it can be demonstrated that when transport systems have changed in the past people have altered their travel behaviour with ease (for instance shifting from trams to motor buses in British cities in the mid-twentieth century). Similarly, evidence from diaries demonstrates that travellers in the past have been very adaptable and resilient in the face of transport difficulties and have altered their behaviour as circumstances changed around them (Pooley et al, 2005; Pooley and Pooley, 2015). Although transport and energy infrastructures have changed dramatically over time the basic needs and priorities of individuals and families have not, and people rapidly adapted their behaviour to cope with fresh circumstances. Historical evidence from such individual data also suggests that the transport and energy systems that people utilised in the past could be more equitable than some of those available today. All but the very wealthy travelled and heated their homes in similar ways and thus transport-related social exclusion was less marked than it is in Britain today when if you do not have access to a car life may become very difficult (Pooley 2016a; 2016b). Historical evidence suggests that policies that reduced the energy demands of transport and other everyday activities could be implemented without undue public opposition and that they could also help to reduce inequalities within society.

Calls for a greater connection between past, present and future in policymaking are not new, but they do remain limited. The on-line platform History and Policy (www.historyandpolicy.org) has existed since 2002 and provides a vibrant forum where historians can engage with current policy issues (Thane, 2009). Other more recent publications have also argued for the need for historians to become more engaged with the present and future, including in the fields of transport and energy policy (Divall, 2011; Divall et al., 2016; Guldi and Armitage, 2014; Merriman et al., 2013). However, there is little evidence in Britain that engagement by politicians and policy makers is more than superficial. This contrasts with the situation in some parts of continental Europe where, for instance, in the Netherlands historical researchers are embedded in one the country's main planning structures (Toussaint, 2016). One of the more common ways in which historical material has traditionally been utilised in planning and policy making is in the forecasting of long-term economic and demographic trends to produce different future scenarios. Past time series of data may be used to extrapolate future trends while changing key parameters such as birth and death rates or economic growth to produce different scenarios (Amer et al, 2013; Booth, 2006; Granger and Newbold, 2014). However, such techniques can only provide a macro-scale perspective and are often undermined by rapidly changing circumstances or by the unpredictable behaviour of individuals and organizations. In the following section we consider some ways in which the everyday past may be more directly accessed.

Researching everyday pasts

Evidence of everyday pasts is omnipresent in the historical archive. Journals, oral histories, advertisements, news media, magazines, instruction manuals, policy documents, film, art and literature, are a few of the many available sources from which details about everyday life can be gleaned. From these sources we can collect anecdotes about the use of technologies, personal habits, routines, cultural norms, and preferences, as well as expectations about the future. Diaries, for example, contain musing on mundane details, from information about the daily commute through to reflections on the evening meal. Oral histories capture memories of the past documenting personal reflections and anecdotal evidence of emotional engagements with living environments. Instruction manuals record appliances and point towards their intended use. Popular advertising, lifestyle magazines and marketing material reveal cultural meanings attached to products.

Cultural artefacts similarly act as a depositary for evidence about past models of everyday life. Novels, biographies, and political tracts are littered with references to everyday practices. Henry David Thoreau, in his experiment in living captured in the American classic *Walden* (1854), for example, went into detail about the preferred temperature of his dwelling comparing this to the contemporary heating practices of the luxuriously rich, which were 'not simply kept comfortably warm, but unnaturally hot […] they are cooked, of course a la mode' (Thoreau, 1983, p. 13). In addition to written sources, visual culture is equally revealing about the ways everyday lives have been structured. Photography, both professional and amateur, documents the changing space of the home, capturing arrangement of objects and trends of decoration. Film captures social practices unfolding over time. The post-war British genre of Kitchen Sink Realism, for example, tells us much about the social customs and living practices of a factory worker in 1950s Nottingham, as it does about the genre of British *New Wave* cinema.

Each of these sources has limitations, posing challenges for a historian of everyday life. Policy documents chart transformations at a governmental level, but as top-down documents they reveal little about how people experienced and lived these changes. Instruction manuals, advertisements, and industry periodicals, provide information about how manufacturers intended their appliances to be used, but as Ruth Schwartz Cowan's theory of the 'consumption junction' demonstrates, consumers did not always use products as intended (Cowan, 1987). Furthermore, in the words of Joy Parr, it is the 'embodied histories' that are excluded from the historical archive. Tacit knowledge, Parr points out, is recorded through the body in lived practices rather than in textual or representational forms (Parr, 2010). Historical sources privilege certain senses, with sight traditionally being prioritised over touch and smell. This hierarchy feeds into the type of historical documents available, with academic traditions being 'deeply invested in texts and in textual critique as the arbiter of research results' (Parr, 2010, p. 3). To overcome this weighting, Parr has created a website, the Megaprojects New Media series (http://megaprojects.uwo.ca), to explore new ways of capturing 'embodied histories' lost to text.

Genre and form also structure information about everyday practices, determining what data is included and omitted. Biographies, personal diaries and film, for instance, exist within established traditions where literary conventions determine what information is included in each type of source, from the intimate, to the heroic and fantastical. The daily commute, for example, is more likely to be discussed in a diary than personal hygiene. However, instances of note such as sickness or travel disruption take on additional resonance as breaks from the ordinary making them more likely to be recorded. Confronting the range of influences that structure how information about the everyday is preserved, therefore, is the first step in piecing together the relevant information so that past-everydays can become valuable resources for thinking about the future

The final constraint is practical. Sifting through historical sources requires time and labour. Moreover, there is a tendency towards diminishing returns when hours are spent transcribing illegible handwriting to find only the occasional detail about a journey to work or bath-time routine. Even once this information has been

retained, there continue to be challenges in extracting information in a coherent and systemic manner. The digitalisation of historical archives and the emergence of new research methodologies from the field of the Digital Humanities are making these practical limitations easier to handle. Functions, such as word searches, data mining and frequency charts, pose new avenues for historians looking to locate trends and patterns in large bodies of material.

Past futures

Records of past futures also reveal avenues not taken. Multiple futures co-existed in the past. Some were borne out and others failed to materialise. National forecasts, such as the 1952 U.S. report *Resources for Freedom* (otherwise known as the Paley Report), predicted that by 1975 U.S. aggregate energy consumption would be roughly double the amount consumed in 1950 (*Resources for Freedom*, 1952, p. 103). This turned out to be a conservative estimate as American energy consumption rose from 34.6 to 71.9 trillion Btu in 1975 (EIA 2014). In contrast, its suggestion that by 1975 the maximum plausible market for solar energy could be as large as 13 million installations in homes (10% of the nation's energy system) was an example of a possible future that has so far not come to pass (*Resources for Freedom*, 1952, p. 217). Other futures played an active role in shaping energy infrastructures. During the 1950s and 1960s, for example, private utilities in the United States published exaggerated forecasts for electricity consumption, circulating alarmist predictions about how consumption would soon outstrip supply. These predictions influenced the rapid construction of new generating capacity, which was soon made obsolete as electricity consumption fell during the 1970s (Smil, 2005, p. 156).

Futures thus shaped the present through the building of infrastructures and the normalisation of social practices. These futures, however, were far from inevitable as multiple versions competed for ascendency. The adoption of electricity rather than gas for the majority of domestic appliances cannot be explained as part of the universal progress of modernity. Instead, it was attributable to a range of social, economic, and cultural forces. For example, in the 1930s the electric refrigerator sold poorly, as consumers preferred the traditional icebox. As the icebox appeared in the early days practical and cost effective, it was the electric industry's aggressive advertising method that allowed the electric refrigerator to replace the icebox in American homes (Robinson, 1997). A wide range of cultural factors, therefore – from building structures, consumer preferences, and climate – meant that everyday technologies did not find universal success, as countries and regions differed in the adoption of certain technologies. Today this variation remains defined with, for example, 82% of American households owning a tumble dryer, compared to 57% in Britain and 5% in Italy (Fischer, 2013).

Many futures thus remain confined to the archive. Science fiction futures (strikingly captured in the 1960s TV series the *Jetsons*) never materialized, and neither did Maynard Keynes' 15-hour working week. Products, such as the 1950s all-electric doghouse, never found a mass market – closing down a potentially lucrative energy market in pet upkeep. The failure of particular technologies and futures demonstrate the contingencies built into our own path dependencies. The decision to cook with gas or electricity remains driven as much by historical inertia as personal choice – as costs and infrastructures conflict with cultural preferences and cooking habits. This exposes the tension between the inevitability and malleability of the futures that came to structure everyday life. Futures have a momentum but can also be shaped. This position was best put forward by the energy policy analyst Amory Lovins in his famous account of 'soft and hard' energy paths. In 1976, Lovins explained how two potential futures existed: a 'hard' energy path that continued current policy, or a 'soft route' based on energy efficiency and renewables. To affect this change what was needed was a reshaping of cultural values and lifestyle choices (Lovins, 1977).

Conclusions

Recent events in Britain and elsewhere have demonstrated that the ambitions and policies adopted by governments are often disconnected from the everyday values and actions of individuals and families. This is evident, for instance, in the increasing public distrust of political parties and of expert opinion, and in the

British vote in June 2016 to leave the EU (European Commission, 2010). Most policy is formulated at a macro-scale be it concerned with climate change, global inequalities, trade agreements or coping with the movement of large numbers of migrants from conflict zones. In contrast, individual people live their lives at the micro-scale, negotiating work, housing, family and community on a daily basis and with little real engagement with national and global concerns beyond passive observation through news media. For instance, research on attitudes towards greater use of walking and cycling for everyday transport has demonstrated that people are most likely to see benefits in terms of their personal health and improvements to the local environment, and are less likely to adopt sustainable travel because of concerns about global climate change (Pooley et al., 2013). Similar attitudes have also been shown for other aspects of energy consumption and carbon reduction (Lorenzoni et al., 2007). We suggest that the analysis of past transport and energy scenarios may help to identify ways in which this apparent disconnect may be at least partially remedied. For instance, it is clearly sensible to encourage people to undertake more short trips on foot or by bike whenever feasible rather than using a car. In the past walking was by far the most important form of everyday transport for most people, and in the mid-twentieth century in Britain cycling was commonly used by many men in particular as their preferred form of everyday transport. The reasons for this are not hard to deduce. First, there were far fewer alternatives: many people had little option but to walk in nineteenth-century Britain. Second, the physical structure of urban areas meant that most people lived close to their workplace and that many of the goods and services that people needed could be found relatively close to their homes.

Clearly it is not sensible or possible to return to nineteenth-century patterns of life, but we do suggest that transport and energy systems that minimize inequalities between users and maximize sustainable energy use – and which to some extent replicate past structures – are both feasible and desirable. For most individuals the factors that are important to them and their families have changed little over time, and greater appreciation of some of the benefits of past patterns of everyday living may help to produce more equitable and sustainable systems of transport and energy use today and in the future.

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