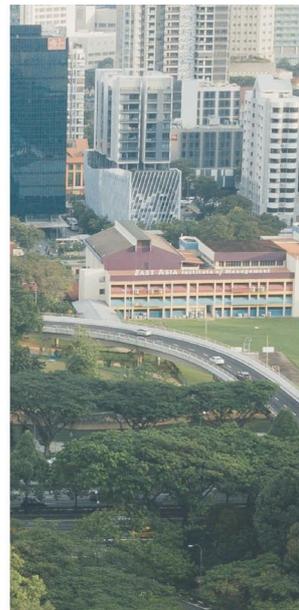


CULTURAL AND POLITICAL MANIFESTO

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 of unsustainable mobility patterns is spreading. Many people live in a frenzy of mobility that should be somehow contained. Faster may be fun but it is not always better. A cultural change favouring a more balanced way of living and moving is in line with the aspiration of a well-developed, **rebalanced society**. The increasing recognition of the dark side of mobility is not a marginal novelty, it represents a major cultural shift, already having a huge impact on policymakers' and industry's long-term decisions.
- **The relationship between modernity and mobility is double-edged.** Expanding opportunities, creativity and freedom of movement are accompanied by growing constraints. Nowadays, we face the **terminal paradoxes of modern values**: the wish for more fluidity creates worse traffic congestion, we feel social distancing and isolation whilst moving together through massive flows, freedom of movement is often possible because of centralised surveillance, social inclusion happens in more segregated or exclusive enclaves. We are witnesses of an important cultural shift: mobility is increasingly perceived as weighing heavily on the quality of life, in line with the stress generated by the pursuit of ever-increasing productivity and efficiency. 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. However, it is not technological innovation *per se* that is to blame for our **collective sense of loss of time**, but the *culture of speed* that still prevails.
- **We still live in a culture of optimizing time. To be active, efficient and make the most of our time is always 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, although it has substantially changed in terms of “detachment” from work, as we are always connected. This gap between objective time and how we subjectively experience it highlights the importance of the quality - or character - of time, and its meaning, not simply its sheer available amount.

- **Technology produces place detachment and time alienation.** We realise that technology has profound and uncertain impacts in the way we live, in particular in how we work and move, how we relate to others. **Disruptive technologies** are redefining the ways we communicate with each other: remote places are connected instantaneously and more specialised and exclusive transport and communication modes emerge. New business models, new transport patterns and new communication modes emerge. The distinction between private and public transport is increasingly blurred, as well as the difference between transport modes, consumers and producers. Automobile industries become providers of mobility services. Compulsive consumption of mobility services has intensified. Massive data is provided by consumers themselves since all human activities having a digital component leave a data trace. Electronic commerce is replacing shopping trips with fast delivery at home. The time between our desire and its satisfaction is minimised, as the buying process becomes seamless.
- **Disruptive technologies subvert the first law of geography.** 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 running alongside information and energy networks. Flows of people, the transport of goods, are increasingly interconnected and interdependent with information and energy flows, to the point that physical distances are subverted and the connection to networks plays a greater role in social and economic interaction than the geographical distance itself. **Space is shrinking, everything can be contiguous and simultaneous.** 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.



- **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.
- **Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are transforming not just our way of life now, but human condition in the long term.** 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 meters or less. Our lives are digitalised through technologies such as the internet of things (IoT) and Bigdata, artificial intelligence (AI). Transport operators, as well as passengers, will soon have the chance to use European Digital Identity Wallets. The collection, storage, and analysis of this data presents **privacy concerns**, since it offers an unprecedented opportunity to monitor and forecast human behaviour at large-scale, and support or even replace human decisions.
- **Technological development seduces us into thinking that technology will perform better than humans yet it also brings great risk to restrain human freedom of choice.** Algorithm economy threatens human ability to choose, and thus restrains human freedom. Autonomous vehicles will be electronic beings, intelligent robots carrying any person safely 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; they may contribute to solve environmental problems, improve safety, security and public health, but may also compromise human freedom and privacy.

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 should be socially useful and meaningful to the worker. We see postmaterialist values emerging: communitarianism and solidarity, as well as 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 that the social role of caring should be a core value in transport policies.** Care is not adequately valued, 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. The quality and inclusiveness of the public transport system, the hospitality of transport terminals and vehicles, the room for conviviality they provide, indicate how healthy a given community is. Walking is healthier and grants communities a greater proximity: it is in stations, at bus stops and inside public transport vehicles that people from different income-levels, age, gender and cultural origin spontaneously meet.
- **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 that, 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 agree with the new "Mobility Paradigm"** proposed by John Urry (2007) and other 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.
- **We support the "Slow Movement"**, promoted by entrepreneurs, social activists, journalists and artists, based on 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.



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. Hospitality and conviviality are critical factors 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, but they also confer meaning to the trip. We feel the overall aim should be to reduce forced and compulsory mobility and the resulting **time wasted in meaningless travel**, not just 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. 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 a reasonable pace for our activities provides quality and meaning to our lives. Delivering useful and cost-effective transport and communication services to people cannot be a paramount political objective.
- **We 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 and neighbourhoods to reduce forced and repetitive commuting whilst increasing proximity. Digital connectivity, teleworking and more flexible working places will also contribute to lower undesirable mobility peaks.

- **We welcome the 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. **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. 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.
- **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*. Mobility injustice 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. The user-pays principle can provide for useful market incentives but may generate unfair impacts across sectors and groups. Spatial Justice involves territorial cohesion and requires policies to provide for a minimum accessibility from any place to Services of General Interest.
- **We propose that appraisal methods used to assess transport policies are no longer predominantly based on time savings.** The General Interest of a given transport policy cannot be fully assessed by applying a **Cost-Benefit Analysis** if it does not consider the room for conviviality provided by transport services, the quality of transport in a deeper sense, as well as equity impacts among social groups and different generations. Cost-Benefit Analysis **should provide a proxy measure of the General Interest.** Since freedom to move is a fundamental right, restricting people's mobility should always be justified as an acceptable exception, on the grounds



of the General Interest. An increasing number of Courts of Justice rulings in different European countries, although not always fully consistent, are defining what we should regard as **General Interest** when designing transport policies. The transport policies that best serve the General Interest should not always be those saving more time, for as many people as possible, at the minimum cost, particularly in cities and regions where transport networks are well-developed and time-savings may be marginal. 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. Ethical concerns should be more manifest in transport policy appraisal.

- **We encourage policies that aim to shift from the current approach based on making traffic flows more efficient 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. However, making mobility more meaningful, less forced and compulsory, is not sufficiently emphasised.
- **We welcome the widespread adoption of 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 SUMP's 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 people are expected to travel through the streets of our cities.
- **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 General Interest is not well defined or justified. The culture of speed, and optimisation, still prevails. The change we advocate is political and cultural, and will not happen spontaneously.

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

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