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TGRG page

Conference Report: RGS-IBG Annual Conference, London, August/September 2005

The Conference saw four TGRG-sponsored sessions. Based loosely around the theme of *Transport flows and spaces*, the sessions dealt with a range of topics and research agendas being pursued by geographers across Europe. The first session was begun by Tobias Behnen (University of Hanover) who contrasted the claims made by airlines about the locations of airports to which they fly, with the 'geographic truth'. Unsurprisingly various discrepancies were highlighted, with Ryanair being among the worst offenders. Dominic Stead (Technical University of Delft) then analysed time-series data relating to transport attitudes in Europe, and Alex Chlan and Ivo Drahotsky (University of Pardubice) focused in on transport trends in the Czech Republic. Susanne Boehler and Sylvie Grischkat (Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy) examined the relationship between mobility behaviour and climate change, and strategies which could be derived to influence people's actions in such a way as to produce greater sustainability. The session was concluded with two very welcome contributions from a cultural geography perspective. Eric Laurier (University of Edinburgh) discussed some of the methodological issues he and colleagues have encountered while researching 'life inside the car', and Juliet Jain (University of the West of England) drew on the concept of 'nodes of connection' to explore the idea of individuals functioning as 'mobile nodes'.

The second session, entitled *Mobility and accessibility*, contained five papers, including the now-established *Brian Hoyle Lecture in Transport Geography*. Colin Pooley (University of Lancaster) critically evaluated oft-made assumptions that societal changes have resulted in unprecedented changes in personal mobility, by drawing upon primary research to show not only that such changes are spatially and socially uneven, but also that many aspects of everyday mobility have changed little over the past 100 years. Building upon an approach already trialled in Denmark, Thomas Nielsen (Aalborg University) undertook an exploratory mapping of commuter flows in England and Wales, paying particular attention to the sphere of influence of metropolitan areas. Turning more specifically to the requirements of those without access to private transport, John Nelson (University of Newcastle) examined flexible solutions—such as DRT—to transport demand in the context of deregulation, and John Preston (University of Southampton) continued the theme by highlighting the shortcomings of existing approaches to alleviating transport-related social exclusion. This year's Brian Hoyle lecture was delivered by John Farrington (University of Aberdeen). A thoughtful reflection on the concept of accessibility provided a philosophical and theoretical context for some of the foregoing—and, indeed, subsequent—policy discussions, and demonstrated the power of accessibility as a means of addressing issues of social inclusion, social justice and sustainability. As always, the Hoyle lecture prompted a lively discussion, and the TGRG would like to extend its warm thanks to John for sharing his ideas in this extended paper.

It is worth diverting to mention that the Brian Hoyle Lecture is now a regular feature of the TGRG-sponsored sessions at the RGS-IBG Annual Conference. First given in 2001 by John Adams, and then (following an interruption in the Annual Conference schedule) in 2004 by John Preston, the lecture provides an opportunity for the TGRG to invite a distinguished scholar to present a thesis in an hour-long slot rather than the usual 15 minutes. It is not, in fact, a requirement that the speaker must be called John. Brian Hoyle, in whose honour the lecture series is named, is a former Reader in Geography at the University of Southampton. He played a key role in the development of the TGRG (as both a Chair and a Secretary); his contributions to the launch of the *Journal of Transport Geography*, and the publication of *Modern Transport Geography* (he was co-editor of both editions) helped transform the Group into a major international research cluster. His many writings (which include 15 authored or edited books) stem from research into ports and port-cities, waterfront revitalisation and transport/development relationships.

The third session, *Freight transport flows and spaces*, included Markus Hesse's (Free University of Berlin) paper on the location of distribution hubs, the creation of logistics regions and the extent to which these represent the construction of space. Hesse elucidated his argument with reference to case study material from the Hamburg metropolitan area and the *Ruhrgebiet*. The fourth and final session was based on the idea of *Delivering policy* across transport spaces. Graham Parkhurst (University of the West of England) used a study of the London to South West multi-modal study to investigate the process of policy determination and delivery, teasing out the role of key actors and putative regionalism in the south west of England. Iain Docherty (University of Glasgow) gave a

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paper critiquing the Scottish Executive's transport policy since devolution in 1999. His assertion was that although question marks exist over the ability of ministers to fund their plans, the biggest threat to the development of a first class transport system in Scotland is not financial but intellectual and institutional.

Danny MacKinnon (University of Aberdeen) began the last hour of proceedings with an analysis of labour relations in the privatised railway industry in Great Britain. This showed that the era of large pay rises for certain sectors of the industry appears to be over, and that claims by unions that wages differ enormously across the country are perhaps overstated. Richard Knowles (University of Salford) mused over the apparent disintegration of the UK government's much-vaunted integrated transport policy as he predicted a bleak future for light rail, at least in England. Once a central plank of Labour's transport strategy, a host of new LRT schemes have been cancelled or postponed as a result of the Department of Transport's funding withdrawals and policy shifts. Lucy Budd (University of Loughborough) provided a geographical introduction to the space of air traffic flows, drawing upon various geographical discourses to show how air space is regulated, perceived and experienced. The restructuring of Nottingham East Midlands airport's airspace was used as a case study example. Finally, Bill Lythgoe (University of Leeds) reported on his work to examine the influence of station catchment areas on the demand for rail travel. A model was developed to take into account a range of factors, and the sensitivity of this and future derivatives was discussed.

The four sessions represented a great success for our Research Group, on which we aim to build at next year's event. In addition to our own sponsored sessions, Iain Docherty and Derek Hall will be convening sessions with sister RGS-IBG research groups to reflect the resurgence of transport and mobility concerns within geography and the wider social science arena. We look forward to seeing you in London in 2006!

Jon Shaw
Department of Geography and Environment,
School of Geosciences,
University of Aberdeen,
Elphinstone Road,
Aberdeen AB24 3UF,
United Kingdom.
Tel.: +44 1224 272 328; fax: +44 1224 272 331.
E-mail address: j.shaw@abdn.ac.uk