

Rural mobility, more than efficiency, ... building communities!

Bruno Van Zeebroeck

Transport & Mobility Leuven

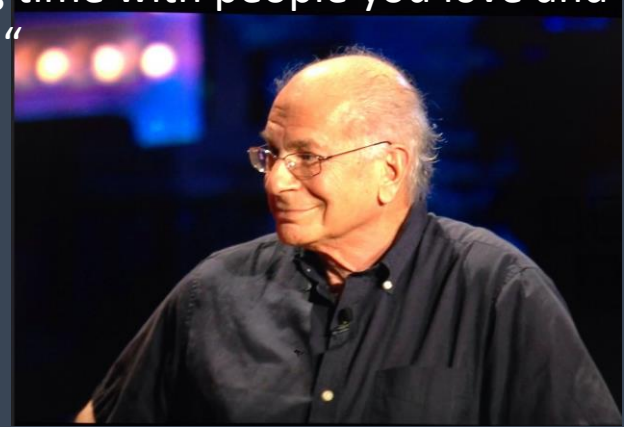
Okinawa Islands



• Source: Wikimedia commons – T Kambayashi

- record share of centenarian
 - Diet
 - Physically active
 - Ikigai: sense of purpose of living
 - Moai: informal social group of people

Kahneman: “it is only a slight exaggeration to say that happiness is the experience of spending time with people you love and who love you “



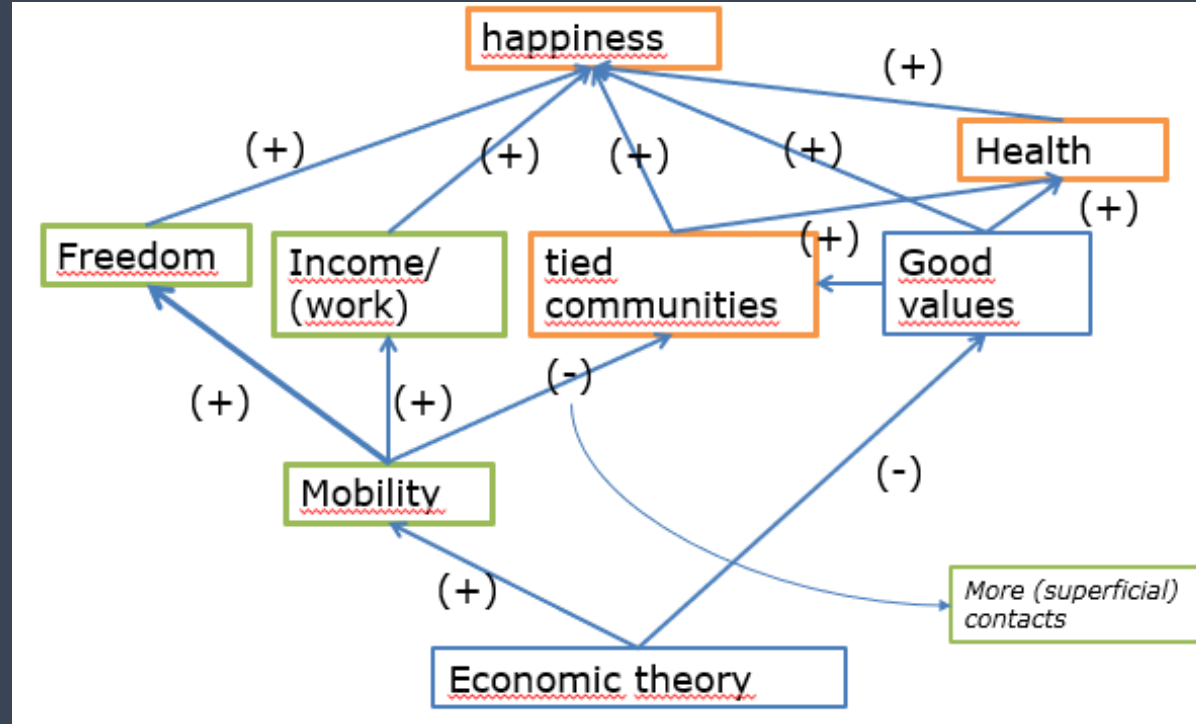
Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/erikbenson/9585678357>

HUMANS NEED RELATIONSHIPS



But what happens in our societies

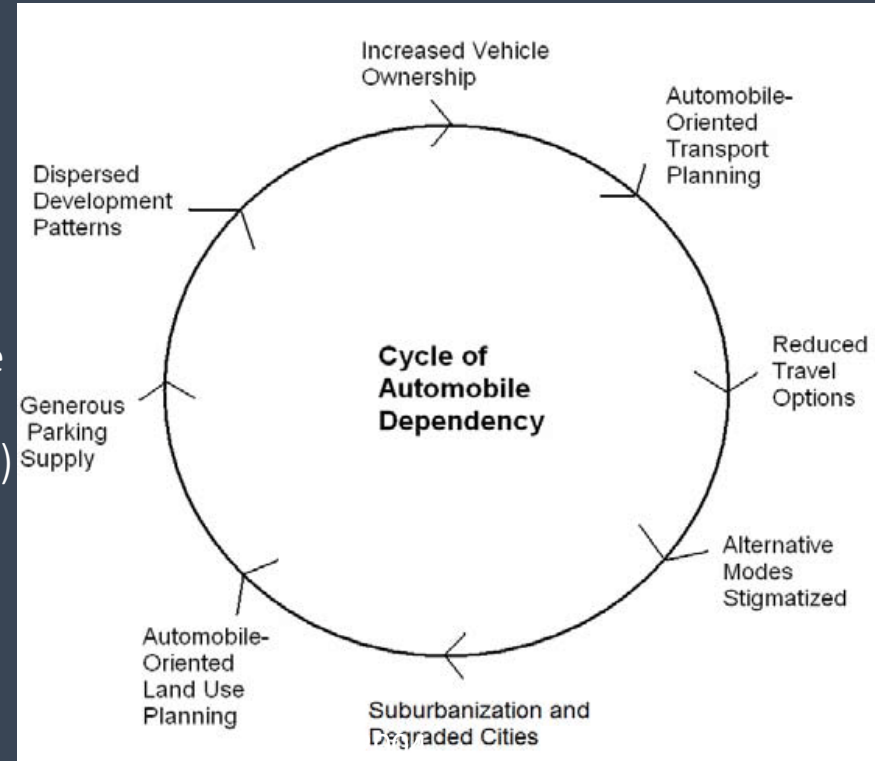
- Economics promotes efficiency and growth
 - Mobility (better allocation of resources)
 - which increases freedom and job opportunities
- BUT decreases opportunities for good social relations and tied communities
- **Equilibrium between efficiency and tied communities?**



Layard, 2003

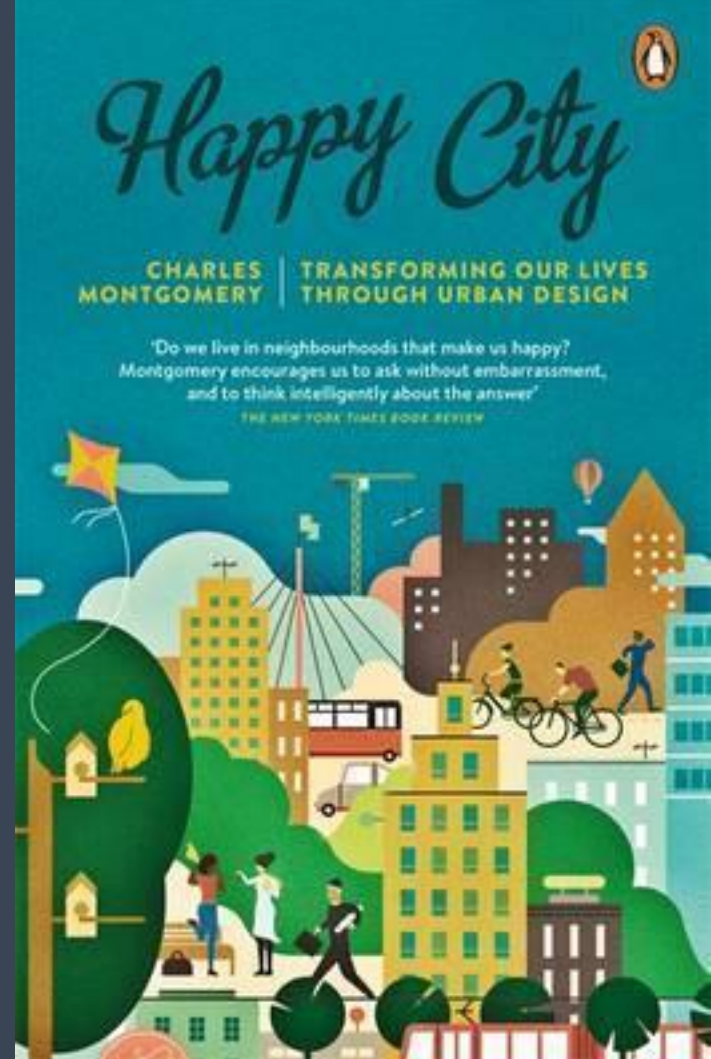
Rural communities got the economics lesson of efficiency

- More cars,
 - more mobility,
 - more freedom,
 - opportunities to work in the city,
 - opportunities to go to shops in the city, to use services in the city,
 - opportunities for citizens to go and live (sleep) in the country side...
- Shops and services in the country side disappear,
- **Community live disappears**
- Cardependancy, no way back!!



In some cities and neighbourhoods, the paradigm changes

- Car is made less attractive
 - Traffic speed is reduced (walking and cycling)
 - Car free spaces - green spaces
-
- OPPORTUNITIES for the CREATION OF SOCIAL RELATIONS



What happens in the rural areas

- search for efficiency via SMART projects (digitalization)
- adding more mobility and guarantee mobility for everyone
 - Ex Demand Responsive Transport to order your shared taxi via an app to go the (unpersonal) service provider (post, doctor, supermarket,...) in the nearest city center.
- WONDERFUL and SMART!!
 - PEOPLE DON'T NEED ANYONE or ANYTHING ELSE!

But grains of hope exist: Bürgerbus (D, NL)

- Germany (Baden Württemberg) and the Netherlands (Groningen-Drenthe)
 - Volunteers drive a mini bus (8 person)
 - Just for fun ...
- Maybe lack of flexibility



Source: Smarta, Webinar2 presentation

But grains of hope exist! : RezoPouce France

- REZOPOUCE in rural areas in France
 - organized hitch hiking
 - Subscription and provision of some material
 - revive local communities is a major aim
 - The main REZOPOUCE selling proposition is “provide a service to your community”
 - Each form of payment is excluded as it reduces the opportunity of providing a service
 - It is always easy to recruit drivers, more difficult to recruit passengers
 - During COVID lock down, drivers insisted for continuing to provide services, so they became package deliverers

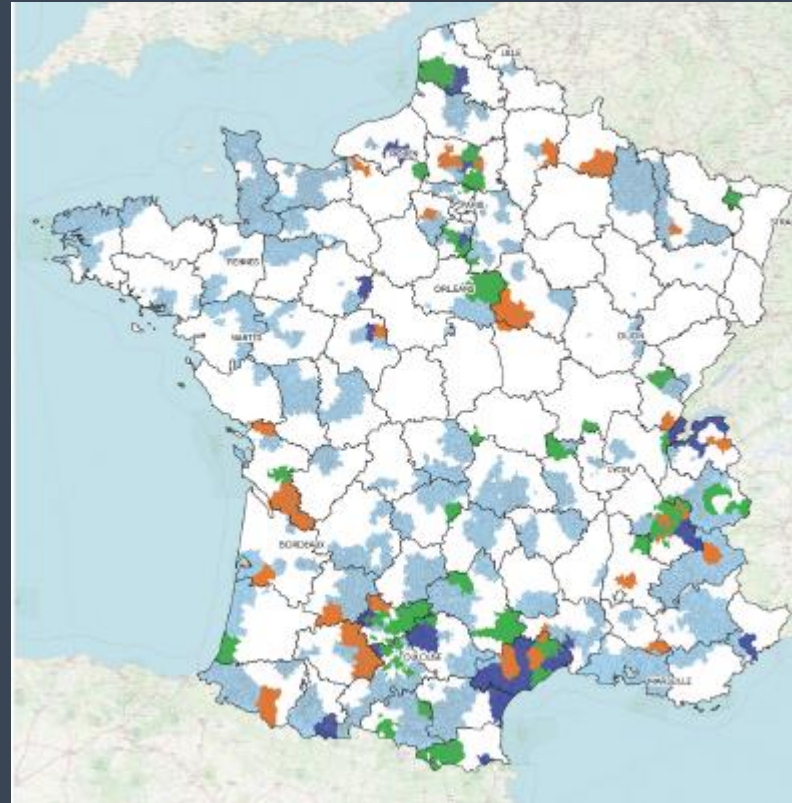


But grains of hope exist! : RezoPouce France

- The concept is operated for a decade in France, only now an app is introduced
 - The app is probably rather a gadget than a necessity
 - 1 out of 6 drivers picking up people are registered
 - More efficient than the app is just putting your thumb at the stop
 - 5 min average waiting time, 90% is taken within 10 min
- More info:<https://ruralsharedmobility.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SMARTA-GP-Rezopouce.pdf>

But grains of hope exist! : RezoPouce France

- The path is not always easy
- To withstand the pressure towards the individual car is of course not easy, but REZOPOUCE, the organization providing know how to municipalities is conquering slowly rural France (map right).
- Around 1% a year of population subscribes (up to 2% first year)



Grains of hope Mobi hubs (NL); bringing services back to people

- Easy transport risks to take services further away from rural communities
 - The story of the doctor in Groningen
 - The doctor going back to the village creates an opportunity for social traffic
 - The waiting room became a kind of local café without beer where the local stories are exchanged
 - Other examples: library, shops
- The idea behind mobihub =
 - **CREATING SOCIAL TRAFFIC**, opportunities to meet one another and create tied communities
 - Empowerment and ownership; initiative = people
 - Replanting of flowers in mobihub Delfzijl



Conclusions: rural mobility, more than efficiency

rural mobility, building communities

- Importance of good social relationships can hardly be overestimated
- Rural mobility services need to maximize opportunities for community building
 - Burgerbus: Volunteers driving small scale bus services and build community
 - RezoPouce: Hitch hike for “social traffic” and community building
 - Mobi hubs: generating opportunities for “social traffic” and community building (and economic activities)
- Find the balance between (with some exaggeration),
 - Rich, efficient and lonely
 - Less rich and efficient but with a stronger community feeling
- Could individual car use be made less attractive to boost community building initiatives?

- Thanks for your attention, thoughts, suggestions, critics,...
- bruno.vanzeebroeck@tmleuven.be
- www.tmleuven.be