



## Special issue on New frontiers of transport research

Gerardo Marletto<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> DEIR/CRENoS, University of Sassari, and CREI, University of Rome "Roma Tre"

### 1. Special issue introduction

All Authors who have contributed to this Special Issue were invited to explore potential new frontiers of transport research.

Papers share two overall features: 1) they all deal with policy and institutional matters, and 2) they mainly focus on the issue of sustainability.

Three cross-cutting themes emerge from the papers.

The first theme is about the specific attention one should pay when designing transport institutions and policies in order to:

- steer diverging and converging interests in a shared decision-making process (De Brucker et al.);
- engage various actors in a mixed (top-down and bottom-up) and reflexive framework aimed at making a long-term process viable (Kemp et al.);
- open to the understanding of those wider forces which - together with official actors - shape the policy-making and planning processes (Hansen).

The second theme is about the relevant role played by social actors:

- as stakeholders of multi-criteria evaluation procedures (De Brucker et al.);
- as participants to "transition arenas" where systemic solutions to foster transport sustainability are dynamically managed (Kemp et al.);
- as drivers of both incremental and radical change in transport regimes (Marletto).

The third theme is about the behavioural change needed to achieve a significant reduction of greenhouse gasses emitted by transport activities:

- Harwatt et al. compare the impact of two policy schemes on transport behaviour : personal carbon trading and fuel price increases;
- Marletto stresses that transport behaviour is constrained by other two structural dynamics: the influence of the car lobby on transport policies and the existing urban structures that are essentially tailored to the car;
- Hansen goes further by connecting transport behaviour to deeper and place-specific cultural variables.

In general terms, all papers implicitly claim that a wider approach to transport research is currently needed. They ask for multidisciplinary: architecture, economics, history, psychology, sociology, urban planning – and so forth – should all be involved. They ask for theoretical pluralism: prevailing or more diffused approaches should never overshadow new or heterodox research streams.

As an economist, I would say that this sounds as a warning to my discipline that too often indulges in the sins of reductionism (that is, economics prevailing on other social disciplines) and mainstreaming (that is, conformism prevailing on eclecticism). Does the recent Nobel Prize to Elinor Ostrom (a political scientist who has contributed to heterodox economics) signal that the time of arrogance has come to an end?

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