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Governing Mobilities on the UK Canal Network

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Abstract

This paper examines mobility governance in an environment where varied mobility practices occur. Drawing on a quasi-ethnography of canal users in England and Wales, we discuss how multiple mobilities (including boating, walking, cycling and running) are practised in the relatively confined and linear spaces of canals and adjacent towpaths, and often at the same time. We demonstrate how these different yet intertwined modes of movement, and their associated tempos, are governed through creative interplays of freedom and control, and hierarchy and etiquette. These findings give rise to wider questions regarding the potentialities of governmobility – i.e. a system in which mobilities are able to govern themselves. Our conclusion, therefore, explores how the governance of mobilities on the UK canal network might offer insight, or a 'watery blueprint', for mobility governance in other shared spaces. This includes exploring the debates between giving citizens greater freedom and agency to negotiate their own mobility juxtapositions and tensions, versus imposing upon them stricter rule-based systems of mobility regulation.

Keywords: canals, governmobility, smart pluralism, tempo, spatial interaction

1. Introduction

There are around 5,000 kilometres of navigable inland waterways in the UK (British Waterways 2004), with the canal network being built from the mid-18th century onwards to move freight during the Industrial Revolution (Bagwell and Lyth 2006). Towpaths bordering canal-sides originally allowed boats to be pulled along from the bank, usually by horses, although this method of mobility was eventually superseded by mechanised boat propulsion. Canals were still used for moving freight well into the 20th century, but this had almost disappeared by the 1960s, when the network began a slow transition from an industrial landscape to an 'experiencescape' (Olsson 2016), geared towards leisure activities. This typically involved a process of canals falling into disuse and disrepair, closure and dereliction, and then in many cases subsequent restoration and eventual reopening, followed by adaptation to recreational usage (Vallerani and Visentin 2018).

Today, the waterways in England and Wales, largely managed by the Canal & River Trust (CRT), are attracting an estimated 349 million visits a year (CRT 2019a, 59). This is to undertake leisure boating activities, along with visiting canal-side attractions, angling, magnet fishing, cycling, walking, jogging, observing wildlife, or simply to be beside a waterway. These interactions involve different durations and tempos of movement, from extended excursions by canal boat, to shorter journeys along the same stretch of towpath, such as a daily walk with the dog or a regular commute. Aside from visitors, there are also people who live immediately adjacent to canals and those who work on the waterways for organisations like the CRT, or who operate commercial boats that carry tourists and day-trippers or, in some limited cases, freight. In addition, around one fifth of the approximately 34,000 licensed boat owners on the canal network see their vessel as a home and primary residence (CRT

2018a). These ‘liveaboards’ are split between those who rent or own fixed residential moorings, and ‘continuous cruisers’ who live a lifestyle that is defined by constant mobility on the waterways, with a legal obligation of not staying in one locality for more than 14 days at a stretch (CRT 2012).

With such a multiplicity of people using the canal system, it is rendered a place of intersection and potential tension between those multiple mobilities it affords and supports. Previous studies of the usage of, and interaction on, the UK’s inland waterways have focused mostly on liveaboard boaters’ notions of time and political (dis)organisation (Bowles 2016; 2019), as well as their sense of community (Smith 2007) and gender relations (Roberts 2019). In addition, canal boating has also been researched as a nostalgia-evoking mode of slow heritage tourism (Fallon 2012), or a form of leisure mobility directed by watery materialities (Rhoden and Kaaristo 2020) that provides ontological comfort (Kaaristo and Rhoden 2017). However, there has been little dedicated examination of those different mobilities being played out within the limited space of the canal network where land and water meet, which incorporates a wide variety of canal users, including those on the towpath. The primary purpose of this paper, therefore, is to better understand mobility intersections within this unique spatial setting.

Our key contribution is in showing how the UK canal network surfaces a pluralistic approach to mobility governance that could have relevance for other contexts. The paper starts by examining literature in two key areas: first, unpacking the intersections of mobility and tempo, with a particular focus on canals; and second, considering the challenges of governing mobilities when humans move through space(s) in multiple ways. After detailing the study methods, we present the empirical findings from a quasi-ethnographic study of the UK’s canal users. Our analysis falls

into two key strands: the first outlining the complex and sometimes conflicting intersections of mobilities and tempos in canal space, and the second focusing on the mobility governance practices that emerge to apprehend these intersections, based on interplays of freedom and control, and systems of hierarchy and etiquette. We conclude by discussing a 'watery blueprint' for mobility governance, and consider how this might apply to sites beyond the canal network.

2. Mobility and Tempo

A constituent element of mobility is tempo, defined as the speed, pace and intensity of various activities that can change according to social situations (Adam 2004, Cresswell 2010). Such an understanding acknowledges that the tempo of movement, just like movement itself, is experienced and lived, practised, represented and imagined (Sheller and Urry 2006). The UK canal network presents unique challenges in terms of its spatial and material configuration which have significant implications for the tempos of mobilities that play out there. In terms of their infrastructural materialities, for example, canals are narrow and shallow (typically 1 to 1.5 m deep) linear ribbons of water, where the maximum width for boats is between 2.15 and 4.35 m (IWA 2016). A maximum speed limit for boats of 4 mph (6.5 kmph), equalling a brisk walking pace, results from these dimensions and is intended to minimise backwash and bank erosion as well as any disruption for other boats. Accordingly, boat travel remains 'conspicuous among other means of mechanized transport in that, in an age pursuing increased velocity, it can still be claimed as slow' (Wilkie 2015: 136) – a tempo that is charged with values. On the one hand, therefore, slowness can

be associated with failure and ineffectiveness, yet on the other, it resonates with ideas of nostalgia, sustainability, and a resistance to modernist ideologies of efficiency through speed (Smith 2007; Bowles 2016).

Building on these ideas, those permanently or temporarily dwelling on canal boats have been shown to be attuned to a slower pace of life, which subverts a dominant culture of acceleration. A concomitant leisurely tempo of activity or 'boat time' (Bowles 2016), often dependent on natural diurnal rhythms, is seen as characterising life and travel on inland waterways (Kaaristo 2020). This contrasts with institutional time-maps of the workplace or navigation authorities, invariably governed by rigid temporal routines and deadlines (e.g. 9 am to 5 pm workdays, or CRT rules regarding continuous cruisers moving moorings every two weeks). Yet, boat time is also characterised by a stop-start tempo, where extended periods of mooring in one location, or slow and steady movement, are interspersed with intense periods of frenetic human activity (for example, when operating locks which are used to transition boats between different water levels). This emphasises boat time's elastic qualities (Bowles 2016), as well as echoing Seamon's (1980) notion of 'place ballet', involving various accumulating and compositing mundane bodily practices and activities that happen periodically in a given place. Where such changes in tempo become regularised in any way, patterns or rhythms of movement can emerge (Edensor 2012; Flemsæter, Stokowski and Frisvoll 2020) 'as we pivot between stillness, slowness and acceleration' (Molz 2009, 284). This also links to theorisations on walking, which emphasise the assemblage that emerges between the walker and their environment, thereby binding together humans, non-humans, materialities, temporalities and place (Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Edensor 2010; Kärrholm et al. 2017).

Tempo is always relational – it depends on the particular actors as well as the wider socio-cultural and material settings in which different mobilities occur (Molz 2009). Previous studies have examined various mobility conflicts in recreational areas, which tend to focus on the perceived place appropriateness of the tempo related to a given mobility form. These disputes typically involve opposed groups of stakeholders who champion their chosen mobility, such as snowboarders and skiers (Edensor and Richards 2007), cyclists and walkers (Ravenscroft 2004) or hikers and mountain-bikers (Heer, Rusterholz and Baur 2003). For waterways, there is similar work on tensions between anglers and canoeists (Church, Gilchrist and Ravenscroft 2007), as well as itinerant liveaboard boaters and sedentary land-dwelling communities (Bowles 2019).

Much of this work on mobility conflict concerns the 'goal interference' (Jacob and Schreyer 1980, 369) of different users of recreational space, along with perceived interpersonal and value conflicts between these users, and debate over what activities are compatible with the surrounding environment (Vaske, Needham and Cline Jr 2007). There is obvious potential for tension, for example, between walkers and cyclists, who exhibit distinctly different tempos of movement through space, yet often adopt the same basic routes (Brown 2012). However, conflict has also been identified between those pursuing similar or related mobility forms, such as off-road enthusiasts with four-wheel drive cars and those who use off-highway motorcycles and quad bikes (Albritton, Stein and Thapa 2009). Sometimes, these mobility conflicts can lead to alliances of stakeholders who seek to promote or oppose a particular form of mobility through political lobbying. In England's Lake District, for example, power boating and off-roading groups are in conflict with those stakeholders favouring quieter and slower recreational activities within this national park space. The latter are

able to muster ‘strong policy and political support against sports seen as Johnny-come-lately (despite over 60 years of powerboat operation)’ (Collins 2011, 447).

4. Governing Mobilities

A key question arises over how the mobility intersections in complex places like canals might be effectively governed, so as to temper any potential mobility conflicts or disputes. In such instances, an institutionally led imposition of rigid rules and regulations on mobilities has clear parallels with a top-down approach to planning and place governance, which has been largely discredited in more critical circles (e.g. Bennison, Warnaby, and Medway 2007). An alternative strategy would be to develop amongst relevant stakeholders a framework of understanding by which multiple mobilities can harmoniously coexist. This bears similarities to collaborative planning, featuring processes of democratic and participatory decision-making and consensus building (Healey 2003).

However, building consensus in this manner can be an illusory diversion. Instead, it might be more constructive to embrace the divergence of stakeholder viewpoints rather than trying to harmonise them in a middle ground of compromise. This acknowledges that not all governance methods and mechanisms can be as democratic, collaborative and sustainable as is often desired (Mehmood 2018). Acknowledging this, Brand and Gaffikin (2007) reveal the challenges of exposing collaborative planning, with its prioritisation on consensus, to lived practice. They establish ‘an apparent paradox in the promotion of collaborative practice rooted in values of cohesion, solidarity and inclusivity in a world that can be seen as ever more individualist, socially fragmented, [and] competitive’ (ibid., 283). As a solution, they suggest (ibid., 308) that ‘instead of planners being in the business of advocacy and

knowledge transfer, they can be in the business of knowledge exchange within the framework of smart pluralism, whereby each faction learns that its interest can be best advanced through persuasive engagement rather than coercive dominance.'

Recognising the multitude of mobilities and tempos that take place on the UK canal network, there is potential overlap here between 'smart pluralism' and notions of 'governmobility'. The latter is based on Foucault's (2000) concept of governmentality, which emphasises the governance of people's conduct and behaviour through active and willing participation as well as through sovereign power. Thus, governmobility allows for a recognition that society and place are increasingly being produced and staged through various mobilities, such that mobilities are not just something that are governed, but become a means of governing themselves.

> [M]obility and circulation are seen as vital ingredients in urban and regional development at almost any level. The vibrant atmosphere of people passing has become an objective in itself in town planning. […] [T]here is an emergent biopolitics of mobility making people govern themselves, moving to get calm and coping with uncertainties through mobility (Bærenholdt 2013, 28).

Consequently, there is a clear connectedness between different mobility forms and how these interact with bodies within space to form biopolitical assemblages (Ek and Hultman 2008).

A good example of the potential for governmobility to operate, at least at a local level, is so-called shared space planning schemes. These were initially pioneered in the Netherlands from the late 1960s, before being adopted in other European countries (Hamilton-Baillie 2008a). They involve a radical removal of the materialities of conventional mobility regulation and segregation (e.g. traffic lights, road signs, pedestrian crossings) in the built environment. Instead, design-led

management interventions are adopted, involving material changes to paved surfaces, which can serve as visual and haptic cues that engender the emergence of mobility governance via 'informal social protocols of public space' (Hamilton-Baillie 2008b, 162). The effects of shared space schemes on mobility interactions were brought into sharp focus by the redesign of a five-way intersection in Oosterwolde in the Netherlands in 1998:

> All the former standardized priority markings and highway kerbs were removed, to be replaced by a simple paved square on a slightly raised platform, recalling its history as the focal point at the head of an ancient canal system. Cars, bicycles, trucks, pedestrians, wheelchair users negotiate their way across the space employing an intricate and unspoken set of protocols reminiscent of the ice-skating rink (ibid., 169).

The reference to canals in this quote should not go unnoticed. On canals, we will argue, the governance of mobilities is constantly brokered through an intersection of numerous socialities, materialities and tempos. These appear to take precedence over any rigid rules about mobility governance as laid down by institutional authorities. Similar to the ice-skating analogy in the above quote, our analysis brings to the fore issues of freedom vs. control and systems of hierarchy and etiquette in the governmobility of UK canals.

5. Methods

Our research involves a mobile (Büscher, Urry and Witchger 2010) quasi-ethnographic enquiry undertaken throughout 2017 and 2018. Aligning with the purpose of the paper outlined above, this enquiry was designed to better understand

mobility intersections on the canal network. We drew together a variety of secondary and primary data, with each data collection stage informing the next. Secondary data was gained from policy documents of the CRT and Inland Waterways Association, covering different canal usages and users, along with media stories about canal mobilities. Primary data collection commenced in spring 2017 with a group interview between researchers and two senior CRT employees. This explored the challenges in managing mobilities on the canal and incorporated a 'go-along interview' (Kusenbach 2003), involving an accompanied walk with these CRT representatives north-westwards along a busy 1.5 km stretch of the Regent's Canal from the London Canal Museum to Camden. Walking and talking to collect data brought to life various mobility governance issues, as we encountered and observed the interaction of walkers, runners, cyclists and residential boaters along the way. Data was captured through audio recording, fieldnotes and photography. The researchers also walked the 10 km length of the Ashton Canal running eastwards from central Manchester, as well an 11 km stretch along the Bridgewater Canal north-westwards from Castlefield Basin in Manchester's centre to Worsley. This provided a contrast between canal mobility interactions in the city and those encountered in quieter suburbs, where there were markedly less pedestrians and cyclists. Our observations were again recorded through fieldnotes and photography.

In order to better understand boating mobilities, in July 2017 the researchers undertook three days of fieldwork on a hired narrowboat on the Llangollen Canal in North Wales, a popular rural destination for holiday boaters. We made individual fieldnotes on our observations of canal-based life and our impromptu interactions and conversations with other canal users, and recorded our journey in photographs. Finally, in February 2018, we undertook a semi-structured group discussion with 10

participants, purposively recruited to fulfil the widest possible range of canal user types (see Table 1). Discussion topics centred on participants' mobilities on and near canals, and their resultant interactions with other canal users. The discussion lasted two hours and was audio recorded and transcribed. Participants are referred to in the paper by either their real names or pseudonyms (as requested).

Table 1: Group discussion participants.

Name	Type of canal usage (self-defined)	Age	Sex	Main canals
Gabrielle	Living on the canal, travelling, walking, canoeing, boat maintenance, socialising, photography	61	F	Bridgewater
Shirley	Working on a restaurant boat	30	F	Bridgewater
Sarah	Walking, photography, route planning	35	F	Ashton, Rochdale, Bridgewater, Shropshire Union
Bryony	Cycling, walking, bird watching, volunteering	48	F	Ashton
Hailey	Walking (with children), cycling	39	F	Bridgewater
Robert	Living on the canal, boating, cycling, walking	49	M	Leeds & Liverpool, Peak Forest, Bridgewater
Darren	Restoration, maintenance, cycling, walking, boating	44	M	Ashton, Rochdale, Cromford, Inglesham, Uttoxeter, Birmingham Canal Navigations
Daniel	Walking, running, fishing, cycling	39	M	Macclesfield
Andy	Leisure, dog walking	54	M	Ashton
Ben	Cycling, running, walking	38	M	Bridgewater

Following Heracleous (2006), analysis began by viewing all data (secondary sources, transcripts, fieldnotes, photographs) as text. An iterative form of template analysis took place, building up and modifying key themes with each stage of data collection (King 2012). Emphasising a need for quality and reflexivity checks, thematic coding was initially undertaken independently by each researcher. Subsequently, employing the principles of confirmability testing and inter-coder reliability (Shenton 2004), researchers met and collectively reviewed their independent data interpretations, allowing for further thematic modification to emerge as a final, iterative step in the template analysis process. The resultant themes are unpacked below.

6. Intersecting Mobilities and Tempos on the Canal

The multiplicity of mobility forms on and adjacent to the narrow and linear spatiality of canals can raise tensions around relative tempos. Boaters, for example, identify how their low speed of movement becomes particularly evident when compared with quicker forms of transport like travel by car, regularly witnessed by boaters when the canal runs alongside a road: 'One thing that you notice when you've been travelling on a boat for a while is [that] you're shocked by the speed the vehicles are going at' (Gabrielle, 61).

Whilst this comparison with quicker tempo mobilities (Molz 2009) can positively reinforce a sense of leisurely slowness to boat travel, it can also create tension for boaters. This transpires if actual or perceived faster tempo mobilities get too close: 'You shout "Slow down!" at everybody. Slow down to the cyclists, to the

dog walkers, to the other boats going past, who are kind of inching past your boat' (Robert, 49). Such interactions appear to puncture any notions boaters may construct of life as slowed down (Bowles 2016), in itself a historical irony as canals were originally built to speed up the movement of freight (Bagwell and Lyth 2006). As a CRT representative explained, their aim of bringing a wider range of users to canals can stoke these tensions:

> From a boater's perspective, a lot of them are on the canal to slow down, unwind, chill out, and suddenly there's a pace issue, because there's something going past far too quickly for them. Even if they're on their boat chugging along, there's something going past that's about the real world, commuting and stuff like that. I think there's an issue over, 'They're bringing the real world to my little space and it's not the same as it was before', and 'What are you [the CRT] going to do about it?' (CRT representative).

By contrast, the tempo of a canal boat's progress can appear relatively slow to towpath users, particularly runners who may speed up their pace in an imagined competition between man and machine:

> Ben (38): I really thought when I was running if I was actually able to beat a boat.
>
> Gabrielle (61): Well, that's dead easy.
>
> Ben: I know it's easy. […] But again, it's those things just to keep the mind ticking over, to keep you amused; but it's almost like a psychological battle, like you're beating a huge beast, a huge machine and then you're running faster than a train, like Superman, but obviously you're going at five miles an hour.

As indicated above, cycling is viewed by many boaters as being too rapid in tempo for canal towpaths. This in parts reflects their narrowness, which can be as little as 1-2 m wide (IWA 2017), originally just enough for horses to pass each other whilst hauling working boats. These spatial constrictions are heightened further at

canal pinch-points such as locks, tunnels and bridges, bringing different actors (e.g. people, dogs, wildlife) and actants (e.g. bicycles, water, boats) into very close proximity, and opening the way for an increased interaction of different and potentially conflicting mobilities and tempos in space. In this regard, many canal users find the tempo of towpath cyclists challenging, with one participant pointing out that 'You can't have a speeding cyclist on a multi-use route, where you've got dog-walkers, people pushing prams, children playing' (Hailey, 39).

This reflects research that some ways of cycling contravene 'appropriate behaviour' (Larsen 2017, 879), particularly when multiple actors and actants occupy the same time-space context. However, whilst such mobility intersections can be highly problematic and contested, it is notable that another participant, a keen angler, sees cycling as a mobility with the least disruptive impact on their own activity. This is because cyclists' rapid and fleeting interaction with the canal-side is less likely to disturb fish than the slower passing noise of walkers, or the disturbance caused by a steadily passing boat:

> I mean, if you go somewhere quiet, it is a slower pace. The nice thing about it is you notice movement in a different way because you don't notice small movements when you are somewhere where everything is moving. So where I tend to go in Marple and Macclesfield, on the other side of the towpath is woodland, so you've got a lot of birdlife, you've got rabbits, you've got fish coming up for air, so you want it slow. If people are going to come past, you want [them] to go past quick […] so the guy on the bike would quite suit me if he went flying past (Daniel, 39).

From another perspective, cyclists can feel that pedestrians, especially those wearing headphones or looking at their smartphone, impede their own mobility on canal

towpaths. The following interactions from the group discussion capture the tensions arising when cyclist and pedestrian mobilities intersect in this manner:

> Ben (38): One of the biggest challenges I experience every morning is headphones. When I come into Castlefield Basin you can ring a bell for as long as you want and they [pedestrians] just will not get out of your way.
>
> Andy (54): The number of times I've had somebody shout because they're on a bike. If you had a bell, you know…
>
> Ben: But if they've got headphones in, you don't have that conversation, and they won't get out of the way.
>
> Bryony (48): You've got them looking at the iPhone as well and they can't walk in a straight line then either.
>
> Ben: That's a completely different pace and a different rhythm to what you should be doing on a canal. These people are just getting in my way.

Intersecting canal mobilities are not all directly connected to human agency. There are also non-human actors and actants involved in these intersections, such as dogs, fish, other wildlife, boats, bikes and prams, as well as the technologies of mobile phones and headphones, which create physical and digital hybrid spaces (Holton 2019) where canal users emerge as 'socio-technical assemblages' (Kärrholm et al. 2017, 22). These interactions are subject to different and fluctuating levels of control, dependent on the degree of human attention and the biddability of human and non-human mobilities in response to this – e.g. how obedient a dog is, or how easy or difficult it is to steer a boat. Accordingly, mobility intersections on the canal are often characterised by a degree of uncertainty (Rhoden and Kaaristo 2020). Illustrative of this are discussions recounting everyday mobility interactions between dogs, dog walkers, other pedestrians, cyclists and joggers:

Daniel (39): You'll sometimes get a big dog come bounding over, and you've got the kids and you stand in front of them, and the owner will come and say, 'The dog is all right', you know? The owners just don't seem to get why you would be intimidated by a huge strange dog bounding over to a four-year-old on a towpath.

Andy (54): Well, I don't let my dogs do that, because I understand. If somebody else's dog that I've never seen before comes bounding towards me, I've no idea what the temperament of that dog is. So I'd like to think 99 per cent of the time I am responsible, but sometimes you get caught out, especially bikes coming from behind, you don't know they're there and obviously my dog will turn and bark, not attack, just bark… same with joggers.

Further complexity is evident in how different mobilities and tempos intersect with a canal's changing physical dimensions or other materialities. During fieldwork on the Llangollen Canal we experienced short periods of frenetic activity where our tempo of bodily movement was, at least for a few minutes, more urgent, even if the progress of the boat through the water had come to a near stop. This was particularly the case when arriving at busy locks with boats queuing to go in each direction. Here we found ourselves performing a form of 'place ballet' (Seamon, 1980; see Figure 1); regularly jumping between boat and towpath and grabbing ropes as well as running ahead to wind lock paddles up and down and open and close lock gates. After negotiating several locks, we became accustomed to these sudden and frenetic changes in pace. They revealed a rhythm of temporal contrast in canal boat mobility, 'where the experience of time contains long, slow continuities followed by sudden ruptures' (Bowles 2016, 104). Locks became a purposeful, if irregular beat to the backdrop of our sedate four mph tempo, serving to reinforce rather than detract from the gentle pace of life on the water.

Figure 1: Activity at a busy lock on Llangollen Canal, 2017. Source: Authors' own image, 2017.

In summary, there are multiple intersecting mobilities and tempos occurring on both the water and land of the canal network, involving a wide variety of actors and actants. The frequency of such interactions is notably dependent on the popularity of the stretch of canal concerned. The findings above indicate that holiday boating hotspots in rural locations such as the Llangollen Canal can be busy, as can urban towpath commuter routes such as the Bridgewater Canal in Manchester. The complex interplay of mobilities and tempos is heightened by the narrow and linear dimensions of canal space where individual perceptions of mobility are relational with, for example, boaters thinking vehicles and cyclists go too fast, or runners suggesting boats appear to move slowly. In this way, different forms and tempos of canal mobility 'weave distinct place temporalities' (Vannini 2012, 241) amongst those that experience and witness them. Furthermore, whilst boaters may feel a heightened appreciation of their steady tempo of travel by comparing it with faster mobilities on the towpath or beyond, such comparisons can also disrupt their experience of a slower pace of boat time. Put otherwise, canals present an assemblage of 'portable technologies, infrastructure, virtual and networked spaces, and bodies that flow through various mobilities' (Hannam, Butler and Paris 2014, 178) with various tempos.

7. Governance of Mobilities and Tempos on the Canal

Our analysis suggests the presence of various governance practices to apprehend the intersecting and sometimes conflicting canal mobilities and tempos. Broadly, these practices are rooted in interplays of freedom and control, and systems of hierarchy and etiquette.

7.1 Freedom and Control

'The question of mobility's relation to freedom is crucial in emerging debates about what constitutes a "good" society and good governance' (Sheller 2016, 41). It is also complicated: on the one hand, mobility often equals freedom (Sager 2006), on the other, the 'realization of one freedom can constrain realization of another' (Qizilbash 2005, 154). There are different understandings of the levels of freedom and control present in the governance of canals. Many canal users, for example, see waterways as spaces of greater freedom within the context of modern life, more removed from state intervention and rules, and from the Foucauldian (2000) gaze of surveillance technologies:

> It sort of fits with the idea of the canal as being a space where actually state and law don't really encroach too much, which is, to be honest, one of the reasons I like the canals. […] It's sort of under the radar, when you're on a boat or on a canal, there isn't that much CCTV, there aren't that many police officers wandering up and down, 'Can you move on, please?' […] Actually, [homeless people] can get away with camping in those places, it's sort of a liminal space (Robert, 49).

These articulations of freedom as a form of self-governance contrast with the views of those within the London 'liveaboard' community. For them, the CRT (or CaRT as many of them somewhat pejoratively call it) is utilising the 'tracks left by people on the move [to] open up opportunities for surveillance thus offsetting the freedom gains of being mobile' (Sager 2006, 466). In these cases, the navigation authorities are seen as exerting too much top-down control in the governance of (im)mobility on the London canal network, where:

> […] boaters encounter rigid and more precise time in the form of the 'fourteen day rule' [and] must move to a new 'place' every two weeks, with the enforcement of this rule by CaRT. Frequently, boaters find themselves acting in opposition to a waterways authority that is attempting to enforce this fixed and arbitrary temporal pattern (Bowles 2016, 107).

Conversely, many canal users argue that notions of freedom in canal governance had become more prevalent with the winding up of British Waterways in 2012, and the CRT's formation. This change in canal management was equated with the transition to a more relaxed governance of canal mobilities. For example, British Waterways (2004) had developed codes of conduct for towpath users, including the now discontinued requirement of permits for cyclists, as well as a 'Two Tings' campaign (London Cycling Campaign 2007) to ensure cyclists made other canal users aware of their presence via use of a bell. In some instances, this gave rise to an assumption that cyclists had a right of way on the towpath. The CRT subsequently identified that this formal approach to mobility governance was not well received because it 'felt a little aggressive and it did lead us to conflict, quite literally' (CRT representative). Recently, therefore, a more easy-going strategy for conveying mobility protocols has been adopted: 'We put bunting and balloons up and we've

done things where we've had like a cake stall and just, you know, it's like having a chat, a towpath tea party' (CRT representative).

Whilst this approach to mobility governance gives a greater sense of freedom to canal users, control can still be implemented in a soft and indirect manner. The CRT is transitioning towards what might be termed a smart pluralist approach to managing multiple and potentially conflicting canal mobilities, involving 'persuasive engagement rather than coercive dominance' (Brand and Gaffikin 2007, 308). A good example is the 3-step towpath code: '1. Share the space, 2. Drop your pace, 3. It's a special place' (CRT 2018b). Rather than implementing this mobility code through the imposition of strict speed limits, or systems of spatial/temporal segregation and zoning for cyclists, joggers, walkers and other towpath users, the CRT have chosen to relay the code through communications campaigns.

The goal is mutually respectful mobilities in shared space (Hamilton-Baillie 2008a; 2008b), imparted through nudge tactics that promote certain behaviours without using either incentives or injunctions that restrict freedom of choice (Hansen and Jespersen 2013). An example is a pop-up towpath trompe l'oeil picture of a sleeping policeman in a relatively old-fashioned uniform; next to a sign, asking passers-by to drop their pace (see Figure 2). This material installation, at the same time a visualised form of wordplay as well as an embodiment of nostalgia for a 'simpler' era of law and order, provides a semiotic cue for towpath users to slow their tempo of movement. It relies on the hope that its gentle messaging will be enacted, rather than direct enforcement. This fits with the governmobility principle of 'making people govern themselves' (Bærenholdt 2013, 28) and the biopolitics of trying to slow down the movement of bodies through space.

Figure 2: CRT pop-up towpath art. Source: CRT 2018b. Copyright granted by kind permission of the Canal & River Trust.

The promotion of mutual respect between mobility forms is also illustrated in a video disseminated on the CRT website and via social media. It depicts a dramatised collision between a runner and cyclist, revealing the potential danger of not being 'both mindful and considerate on towpaths' where tempos are concerned, and emphasising the canal is 'no place for personal bests' (CRT, 2018b). Inspirational signage and street art on and around the towpath further imply the benefits of a slower tempo. Examples are a stencilled message on the ground inviting people to 'Slow down and look around, it's nice here', as well as posters declaring 'Be more tortoise and less hare' (CRT, 2018b).

These material and virtual communications, focused on nudging canal users towards more considerate behaviour where mobilities are concerned, go hand in hand with a low level of rules-based interventions. They support the idea of the canal as a nexus of self-governed mobility freedom, in which top-down, institutional control is minimised and balanced against individual empowerment. Accordingly, the canal network is not littered with the materialities of overt mobility regulation and segregation, such as speed limit signs, or towpath speed reduction bumps. As the CRT (2017) explain, 'We don't specify speed limits on the towpath. We ask that everyone uses common sense, with primary consideration for pedestrians and those handling boats, as they are often the most vulnerable.' At most there are sporadic signs politely asking cyclists to slow down where the towpath narrows (under bridges for example), along with the material interventions of man-made chicanes and railed bottlenecks to

encourage a general reduction in the tempo of mobilities and a heightened degree of mutual mobility awareness (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: CRT signage and railed bottleneck on the Ashton Canal in Manchester. Source: Authors' own image, 2017.

Notably, however, we identified how the CRT's tenor of freedom in the processes of mobility governance, coupled with its apparent vision of mobility harmonisation, can also be confused or undermined by previous actions. In Figure 3, for example, the polite CRT signage thanking cyclists for slowing down is contradicted by an old British Waterways sign demanding that they dismount. Equally, whilst the CRT are encouraging cyclists and all canal users to drop their pace through soft communication approaches aimed at shifting mobility behaviours, the charity Sustrans (promoting sustainable transport) sometimes pays for the resurfacing of towpaths. As one participant notes: 'Sustrans likes to put tarmacadam down, and that can encourage cyclists to go too fast. A surface which might facilitate riding faster than you need is hazardous to all users' (Daniel, 39). This demonstrates how seemingly innocuous changes to the material fabric of canal space, such as a different towpath surface, can have considerable implications for mobilities and their governance. Smooth tarmac felt beneath tyres or feet can bring with it a particular haptic sense of reduced friction (Wilson and Hannam 2017) and a corresponding sense that faster tempos are appropriate.

Figure 4: Monolith sign on Regent's Canal identifying travelling times by bike and foot. Source: Authors' own image, 2017.

Conflicting messages and interpretations around mobilities often arise unintentionally. For example, the CRT has erected directional monolith signs on its London towpaths to better integrate them into the city's transport network. These indicate cycling and walking times between points, displaying the number of minutes on foot or by bicycle instead of the distance (see Figure 4). This has raised concerns from the Inland Waterways Association (a volunteer body representing mostly boaters' interests), suggesting that the signs might encourage some cyclists to 'consider "beating" the timings, which already necessitate pedalling approximately 10-12 mph – too fast on a towpath' (Waterways 2017, 11). This conflicts with the 'Share the space, Drop your pace' message the CRT promote, and contrasts with other CRT signs thanking cyclists for slowing down (see Figure 3).

The interplays (and potential conflicts) of freedom and control in governing canal mobilities outlined above appear to be negotiated through canal users' understandings of hierarchy and etiquette, with the former being very much rooted in the latter. We now turn to consider this in detail.

7.2 Hierarchies and Etiquette in Canal Space

Etiquette is 'the systematic, formal expression of recognized and accepted relations of rank' (Becker 2000, 172) or hierarchy; whilst hierarchy itself constitutes organisation 'into levels that are ordered with reference to criteria of a normative character, and fully or partially subordinated by relationships of power, influence or control' (Pumain 2006, 1). In this sense, hierarchies are evident in the interrelated mobilities

and tempos of different actors on the canal network. Boaters, for example, see themselves as taking priority over other canal users in terms of their rights to move through the space, highlighting that canals were originally constructed to convey watercraft. A recent memorandum of understanding between the CRT and Sustrans reinforces this perspective, by creating (im)mobility-based distinctions which state that 'the needs of the slowest users and people using the waterspace, for example boaters and anglers, have to come first' (CRT, 2019b). Equally, most pedestrians assume they have priority over cyclists. This may reflect the fact that the CRT's predecessor, British Waterways, required towpath cyclists to have a permit (Cycling UK, 2017). Even amongst boaters, there are distinct hierarchical factions based around the particular form of mobility they assume (e.g. boats powered by engine vs. heritage vessels pulled by a horse) or their purpose (e.g. working boats vs. leisure boats).

One liveaboard boater reports how all canal users are generally accepting of these hierarchies, noting how they are typically translated into a system of mutually understood etiquette over which mode of mobility has priority when narrow canal and towpath spaces become congested:

> I think most reasonable people on the canal, whether they're cyclists, walkers or boaters, know what the hierarchies are. Pedestrians have right of way over cyclists, but I think most cyclists know that, whether they do that or not. All regular boaters know that work boats have a priority, horse-drawn boats have a priority, unmanned boats have a priority. So, if you see someone you move aside with your engine and you let them go past (Robert, 49).

Throughout our fieldwork, we evidenced many instances of mobility hierarchies and etiquettes playing out positively, such as cyclists keeping left on towpaths, dismounting at bridges, and ringing their bell to warn pedestrians – a

seeming recognition that those on foot take priority over those on wheels. At the same time, it was evident that these hierarchies are not entirely rigid and fixed, but open to negotiation and flexibility (and sometimes inversion) over time and space, and in accordance with any attendant materialities. For example, walkers and joggers on the towpath would often step aside, especially where the towpath narrows under bridges, to try to let cyclists by before a bell is rung. Equally, bikers, joggers and pedestrians faced by approaching parents with children and/or pushchairs tended to pass on the water side of the towpath; a seemingly instinctive action to help ensure child safety. Such flexible and spontaneous practices emulate the self-governance principles of governmobility.

Despite this, there are instances where recognised systems of hierarchy and associated etiquette may be challenged by the aforementioned freedoms of mobility governance inherent in the CRT's message of 'Share the space, Drop your pace.' This arguably presents a vision of mobility harmony on the towpath where even ducks are afforded the same rights as pedestrians and cyclists, and established hierarchies are subverted – a point reinforced by a light-hearted communications campaign involving the painting of designated duck lanes on canal towpaths in cities (Gander 2015). For towpath users, this message of shared and equal mobility rights is further emphasised by an absence of official or written rules dictating how they should interact, other than the CRT's 3-step towpath code (see above) and some sporadic signage.

The above conditions mean that the widely understood mobility hierarchies and associated notions of etiquette underpinning mobility self-governance can, in certain contexts, break down. Cyclists are often identified as a principal instigator of such situations; with some reportedly unwilling to accept that they should show a duty of care to other canal users, particularly by giving way to pedestrians on narrow

sections of towpath (Townsend 2019). We experienced this mobility conflict first-hand as we walked along a narrow towpath section under a bridge on the Regent's Canal in London. As we emerged, a cyclist arrived at speed from the opposite direction and attempted to force his way past us without stopping, only to be visibly upset at being thwarted by the size of our party occupying the narrow space. The incident reflected the fact that this stretch of the canal was in a busy urban location and therefore a site of constant mobility interactions, unlike quieter parts of the network. It is a reminder that moves towards mobility self-governance can also bring an attendant lack of clarity over accepted protocols when differing mobilities suddenly converge.

Nevertheless, even under such conditions of mobility conflict, social relations, which are central to the notion of governmobility (Bærenholdt 2013), can work together to defuse these tensions though adaptive mobility interaction. In one instance, a participant recalled how regular towpath pedestrians have learnt to tacitly communicate with each other on a day-to-day basis to avoid a dangerous cyclist in Manchester:

> On the Bridgewater [Canal] there's this really fast man who basically barges everyone off the road on a bike. He's kind of famous, everybody who walks around there all sort of look at each other and go, 'Has he been yet?' Because he's that bad, we all know we have to jump out the way because he doesn't have a bell, he doesn't wear a helmet, and he just bombs it (Sarah, 35).

Similar instances of mobility adaptation were evidenced during our fieldwork on the Llangollen Canal when we negotiated 'The Narrow', a 500-metre stretch of the system through which only one boat can pass at a time. In the absence of any clear rules on how to proceed, we had to actively negotiate our passage by talking and communicating with those on boats coming in the opposite direction:

> The Narrow is not regulated in any way by the CRT. I thought there might be some volunteers keeping an eye on things or managing and directing the boat traffic, but no. They only give you the main framework of rules, a sign stating that for the next 500 metres two boats cannot pass each other. Everything else was left to us to work out ourselves so we had to rely on our ability to negotiate with others. The main thing is that someone from your crew has to run in advance to make sure there are no boats coming from the other direction and stop them if they are (first author's fieldnotes, 18.07.2017).

In summary, both watery and terrestrial canal mobilities are characterised by a constant interplay of various modes of movement. We have seen that when an institutional stakeholder cedes or democratises control in mobility governance to individual actors, it can create a welcome sense of freedom. However, such freedom can also create ambiguities over what tempos of mobilities are appropriate and reasonable, and this in turn may result in momentary breakdowns in the smooth flow of mobility interaction. These breakdowns are usually resolved through cooperation and communication, both tacit and spoken, between various mobility actors. In turn, such a process helps reaffirm and valorise widely accepted protocols of mobility hierarchies and associated etiquette.

8. Conclusion: A 'Watery Blueprint' for Mobility Governance?

The interaction of multiple mobilities on the canal network creates an environment in which each canal user's mobility practices are inevitably intertwined with those of others. Freudendal-Pedersen and Kesselring (2016) argue that a major pre-condition for rethinking mobilities is a trustful and, ideally, power-free communicative setting. However, our analysis of the canal network suggests that mobility intersections cannot be power-free; rather they are governed through the relations between relevant

actors, based on collective understandings of hierarchy and associated etiquette. These understandings can be tested and challenged with every new mobility interaction that brings different actors and actants, with their corresponding modes of mobility and tempo, into the same space. This creates a domain of pluralistic exchange, and specifically one in which there is an ever-present sense of mobility uncertainty. Arguably, however, this uncertainty is a positive rather than disruptive force, as it can create a heightened sense of vigilance and associated care for other actors and actants. It reveals how the canal network provides the relational conditions for a form of governmobility, which delivers a 'tacit notion of controlled citizenship and civil society' (Bærenholdt 2013, 30) via the emergence of actors' self-governance in their mobility interactions.

Critical to this governmobility is the minimal use of interventions that are intended, or might be perceived, as signals to be mobile in a certain regulated way. Indeed, when such interventions do take place, they can often disrupt governmobility as a workable means of harmonious interaction. Examples would be the British Waterways' 'Two Tings' campaign, along with the CRT's efforts to add directional monolith signs onto the London canal network, with both these measures arguably increasing tensions between cyclists and other canal users. Far more effective are nudge campaigns, which help maintain a degree of uncertainty in mobility power relations, by giving all relevant actors (including ducks) shared status in their movement through canal space. In this manner, the 'Share the space' campaign acknowledges and supports a requirement for smart pluralism in effective governmobility.

As noted above, conventional strategies for governing mobility have been based on segregation, linked to understandings about how different mobilities (e.g.

those of cars, pedestrians, cyclists and others) should, and should not, interact. This has created a dominant design narrative for urban landscapes 'of underpasses and overbridges, barriers and signals' (Hamilton-Baillie, 2008b, 165). Conversely, governmobility on the UK canal network appears largely reliant on ever-emergent, flexible and spontaneous mobility negotiations and improvisations, which are linked to, but not constricted by, mutually understood systems of hierarchy and etiquette. There are obvious parallels here with the principles of shared space planning for pedestrian and traffic integration in cities and towns (Hamilton-Baillie 2008a; 2008b). However, our analysis of the canal network highlights a more bottom-up and nuanced approach to addressing a multiplicity of mobilities within space, as compared to the more radical design-led management approach that shared space schemes tend to adopt. Unpacking canal mobilities, therefore, reveals complex intersections of modes of movement and tempo, which together appear able to interact in relative harmony to create a space of perceived universal and agreed positive value.

A key question arising from the above analysis is whether there are lessons to be learnt for mobility governance in other contexts. Specifically, does governmobility on the UK canal network offer a 'watery blueprint' for the potential benefits of giving citizens greater agency and freedom to negotiate and accommodate their own mobility juxtapositions and tensions, rather than imposing upon them strict rule-based systems of mobility regulation. Such a smart pluralistic viewpoint recognises that there cannot be a single one-size-fits-all solution to governing mobility. Instead, place managers might do well to embrace the techniques of persuasion, facilitation and mediation – helping to minimise the frictions of multiple mobilities within space(s) by providing a broad framework of good practice for mobility engagement. On the one hand, this approach might work well in particular types of urban and rural space, especially in

cities witnessing an increase in walking, running and cycling (Department for Transport, 2019), all of which are operating within a growing technology-enabled environment. This would appear to be even more pertinent in an era of Covid-19 (a development at the time of writing), which has seen an emergence of pop-up walking and cycling facilities in urban areas as citizens adopt mobilities that allow them to better maintain social distancing – an outcome that is more difficult to achieve on public transport (Rajasooriya, 2020).

On the other hand, the appeal of frameworks of persuasion and agentive freedom, rather than strict regulation, to govern multiple mobilities in space and time raises important questions and challenges. The first of these concerns safety, especially if interacting mobilities can inflict serious physical harm upon each other through inequalities of mass and momentum, as is the case with cars and pedestrians (Kaparias et al. 2012). Debates around this issue are already evident for shared space schemes. Moody and Melia (2014, 384) suggest that some of the positive claims made on behalf of such initiatives 'have overstated the available evidence' and that caution is needed in their implementation, 'particularly in environments of high traffic flows'. A second question arises regarding the balance between freedom and regulation in the management of mobilities and who benefits from this – citizens or government institutions? In particular, drawing on Foucault's notion of biopolitics (2000), over-facilitating freedom in mobility governance might be criticised as responsibilising and moralising individuals in ways that allow the state and associated institutions to relieve themselves of the burden of establishing and enforcing clear mobilities policies, thereby abrogating their responsibilities in problematic ways.

Despite these challenges, our analysis of the governance of mobilities on the UK canal network raises ideas that could have relevance for other contexts. In this

respect, further research is encouraged on governmobility practice and potential in similar multi-user spaces, particularly those where cars have been limited or eliminated. Examples might include urban green spaces and parks, rural recreational areas, and combined cycle and pedestrian routes. Further, the implications of our findings may move beyond issues of mobility governance to cover matters of urban (re)design, and/or the re-purposing of existing infrastructure, for a better accommodation of different mobilities. In this regard, the UK canal network provides a helpful insight into what can be achieved.

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