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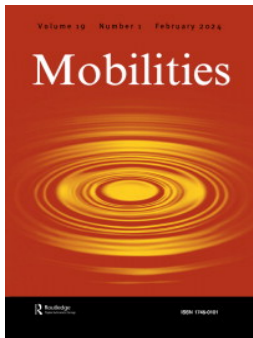
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# Understanding train tourism mobilities: a practice theories perspective

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## ABSTRACT

By integrating mobilities research with practice theories, this paper uncovers the interdependencies between tourism, transport and mobilities that allows for a more comprehensive analysis of individual mobile practices and their connections with other mobilities and tourism practices at a destination. By analysing train travel as a performance, practice entity (materials, meanings and competencies) and practice bundle, we also bridge the structure–agency gap in transport and tourism research. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork on three longdistance branch lines in Northern England, we unpack train mobilities in the tourism context to show the interconnectedness of and the competition between seemingly unrelated practices. Our findings reveal the structures and dynamics that shape rural train travel within the tourism context. Moreover, train mobility is transformed through various micro-changes that occur through tourists' performances and changes in the practice elements, such as the presence of skilled or unskilled travellers. We furthermore show that train tourism is an interlocked system of what we have termed 'multimodal mobility bundles' involving the interplay and competition between different mobilities and practices and the role of governance in shaping these dynamics.

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Train mobilities; practice theory; train tourism; tourist experience; mobility practices;

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most consequential forms of contemporary mobility and a system that produces, shapes and is shaped by various mobilities within different social relations (Sheller 2021). The study of tourism mobilities accordingly pays attention to the dynamic interplay between places, individuals, technologies, and the natural environment, articulated through various performances and practices (Sheller and Urry 2006; Sheller 2021). This interplay, however, often overlooks the crucial role of transportation in tourism, despite the evident interconnectedness between mobilities, transport and tourism (Hopkins 2020). Transport studies and transport geography tend to focus on technical, engineering, and economic perspectives of movement, while tourism studies generally concentrate on what happens in the destinations. This disconnect also

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impacts the tourism sector's sustainability efforts, as sustainable tourism initiatives frequently fail to consider the environmental effects of transportation to and from the destination (Hopkins 2020), even though sustainable tourism is only possible if connected to sustainable mobility (Tomej and Liburd 2019).

Notable exceptions in bridging the gap between transport and tourism research are the studies on slow travel and slow tourism (for instance, Dickinson and Lumsdon 2010) and the research on tourism mobilities (Edensor 2007; Endo 2020; Hannam, Butler, and Paris 2014) from the new mobilities paradigm perspective (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006). Scholarship within this domain, however, often scrutinises a particular transport mode in the context of tourist experiences and motivations to travel. For example, in their book on slow tourism mobilities, Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) examine the experiences of rail, coach, bicycle, and water-based travel as well as walking independently of each other; other studies have similarly focused on one mode of movement, be it campervan travel (Wilson and Hannam 2017) or cruise tourism (Van Bets, Lamers, and van Tatenhove 2017). Even when two or more modes of transport are discussed in the same study, such as for example maritime cruises and coach tours (Rhoden and Kaaristo 2020), this is done for the comparison purposes of different types of travel and not to study the interconnections between different mobilities within a tourism context.

Moreover, transport studies and tourism research highlight the structure/agency dichotomies, marking disciplinary distinctions at the interface between tourism and transport that we argue are not helpful if we want to integrate mobilities and transport research into tourism and develop a more nuanced understanding of their role in social life. Hence, there is a pressing necessity to think differently about mobility and transport in the upcoming decades as also argued by Sheller and Urry (2006, 20) who maintain that 'a paradigm shift is needed [...] to understand the complexity and practices that drive transportation shifts'. Such a shift is, in fact, offered by the advocates of practice theories who overcome the actor-structure divide by analysing social practices as complex relational socio-technical systems that form the 'plenum' of social life (Schatzki 2012, 21).

This paper follows the suggestion by Sheller and Urry (2016) to integrate mobilities research with practice theories. We use train tourism to illuminate the links between transport modes, different mobilities and tourism practices, and we do it by providing in-depth analyses of the actor- and context-related elements of tourism practices. This approach is useful in developing a more nuanced understanding of the underlying structures and dynamics that shape a given mobility practice, train travel in our case, and its interconnectedness with other tourism practices. Some research has already been done in this line of thinking, for instance, Kent (2022) provides an extensive review of the applicability of practice theories in transport research, Mock (2023) discusses shared mobility practices, Watson (2012) delves into decarbonising transport systems, and Fuentes and Svingstedt (2019) examine how to recruit more tourists to slow mobilities' practices. Less work, however, can be found on train mobilities, specifically in the tourism context, although as we will show, train tourism is a prime example of interconnected tourism mobilities and practices. Train travel has also evolved significantly in the UK, showcasing its dynamic nature from inception to modern days. Nevertheless, some research has begun on trains using the practice theories lens, including Mertena, Kaaristo, and Edensor's (2022) comparative study of the skills needed to practice train and canal boat tourism mobilities, Brady's (2021) study of the communities of practice on Chinese railways, and Cass and Faulconbridge's (2017) work on various everyday mobilities, including travelling by trains.

This paper explores the understudied aspects of train travel for tourism by integrating the perspectives of practice theories (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012) and the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry 2006). The study aims to answer two research questions: first, what are the structures and dynamics that shape the practice of train travel in tourism, and second, how is train travel interconnected with other mobility practices in tourism? The paper starts by examining the literature on social practices theories, followed by an overview of train mobilities in the UK, especially in

tourism. After detailing the study methodology, ethnographic fieldwork on trains in northern England, UK, we present the empirical findings: insights into train mobility practices by analysing train mobilities as a performance, practice entity and as part of train tourism bundles. Our contribution is two-fold: first, we utilise social practice theories to illuminate the dynamic nature of train mobilities. This means analysing train travel as a practice entity and a performance, showing how mobility practices emerge, develop and lose their popularity if abandoned by practitioners. Second, the paper enhances our understanding of tourism mobilities, highlighting the nexuses of practices and arrangements. By theorising train tourism as a system of interconnected 'multimodal mobility bundles' the study shows how seemingly unrelated practices are interconnected while also revealing the competition between practices and the significance of governance.

## 2. Social theories of practice for mobilities research

Practice theory, a framework that understands social life as interconnected and materially mediated meaningful and competent series of practices, offers a radically new way of understanding both small-scale contextualised activities as well as large social phenomena (Nicolini 2016). While there are several strands of practice theory (for an overview, see Bargeman and Richards 2020), in this paper, we employ the line of practice theories developed by Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012), as inspired by Giddens (1984), Reckwitz (2002) and Schatzki (2002) to understand how mobility happens, changes and interconnects with other tourism practices. The following three key ideas constitute the theoretical pillars for our subsequent analysis.

First, in the practice theory framework, social *practices*, not individual practitioners, form the unit of analysis. Focusing on *context* and social practices, instead of analysing individuals' motivations and behaviour, is a more fruitful approach to show that socio-material environments co-constitute human behaviour (Bargeman and Richards 2020; Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). While human agency – practitioners' doings and sayings (Schatzki 2012) – is an important element of practice, actors are not seen as sovereign leaders of practice, guided entirely by their free will; instead, they are *carriers* of social practices (Reckwitz 2002) and the conventions and standards of the practice as well as the structural context steer human behaviour (Lamers, Van der Duim, and Spaargaren 2017). With the focus shifting to practices, the practice and whoever governs it becomes the site of investigation in the pursuit of understanding social reproduction and social change (Spaargaren, Lamers, and Weenink 2016).

Second, practices are composed of elements and can be analysed at three levels: practice-as-performance, practice-as-entity and practice as a system or practice bundles. To exist, practices need to be performed, which is what Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012) call 'practice-as-performance'. This level of analysis focuses on doings and sayings in a practice's reproduction (Schatzki 2019). Through routinised and organised activities of multiple people, practices come into being, endure and, if deserted by practitioners, disappear (Fuentes and Svingstedt 2019). For example, the practice of train travel persists only through the succession of embodied actions, habits and routines enacted by different train users. The attention is on the individual agency and agents: their regular, skilful bodily activities; habits and routines, and spontaneous and creative performances (Nicolini 2012). However, individual performances and actions only constitute a small, visible part of a practice. To understand the underlying structures and dynamics of a given practice, the analysis should go beyond practice-as-performance and focus on practice-as-entity and the broader systems or bundles of practices.

According to Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012), practice as an entity is composed of three interconnected elements: materials, competencies and meanings. *Materials* refer to anything physical, ranging from objects, tools and infrastructures to the built and environmental settings as well as the human body. The practice-based approach foregrounds the material dimension of practices, emphasising that social life consists of nexuses of activity chains and material events/processes that are integral to any practice (Schatzki 2019). Different materialities not only make

individual practices durable but also connect practices with each other across space and time. *Competencies* encompass skills, knowledge and techniques required to carry out practices. These bodily abilities ensure that practices are enjoyed, executed effortlessly and with confidence (Mertena, Kaaristo, and Edensor 2022). Finally, *meanings* comprise shared cultural conventions, expectations, norms and symbolic significance of participation. To sum it up, we can talk about train travel as a practice entity in abstract terms because there is a shared social understanding of what this practice entails – a rail network, train carriages, certain bodily activities, skills, norms and rules.

Practices and arrangements connect to form practice-arrangement *bundles* that, in the words of Schatzki (2019, 36), 'are the central unit of conceptuality in analyses of social life and social phenomena'. As with practices, practice bundles are reproduced via regular and habitual performances and embedded in systemic elements like infrastructures, technologies, laws, norms and meanings, and actions of various organisations, forming, what Watson (2012) calls *systems of practices*, and Schatzki (2019) refers to as *practice plenum*. This interlocking of practices explains their dynamics and roles in daily routines (Kent 2022), for example, the use of public transport for tourism purposes. Moreover, as Spurling and McMeekin (2015) note, transport mobilities co-evolve with other practices facilitated by transport, including socialising, working, shopping and travelling for leisure, and to analyse transport as part of a practice bundle is to recognise that there is little value in thinking about demand for mobility in its own right. Consequently, to understand why certain transport modes gain or lose popularity requires investigating the practice bundles in which transport is entangled (Kent 2022).

The third notion is that practices and practice bundles depend upon *carriers of practice*, who can be more and less faithful to it (Fuentes and Svingstedt 2019). Practice theories, therefore, analyse how practices grow and circulate; how they reach and capture new recruits and why practitioners might defect a practice. Spaargaren, Lamers, and Weenink (2016) emphasise that people as practitioners are co-producers of the practice – they attract new recruits and pass on meanings and competencies to novices often forming communities of practice (Mertena, Kaaristo, and Edensor 2022). Focusing on recruitment and defection shows that practices and practitioners mutually influence and alter each other. For example, the practice and practitioners of train travel were very different during Victorian times compared to what they are today (De Sapio 2012; Löfgren 2008). How practices succeed in recruiting new practitioners also highlights that some people are 'un-recruitable' and therefore excluded from certain practices (Walker 2015). Being recruitable depends on access to resources (e.g., time, money, necessary equipment), other commitments, physical abilities and health, expertise and capabilities. Besides, some practices might be perceived as more attractive because they enable a desired lifestyle or status or are more affordable.

This leads to the final point: practices *compete for carriers* (Larsen 2017; Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012) and, hence, should not be examined in isolation. Watson (2012) notes, practices of mobility (e.g., automobility, train travel, cycling, walking), must be studied in relation to their competing practices to understand why some become deeply anchored and embedded in society while others fall in popularity or even disappear. According to recent data, rail use has increased faster than any other mode of transport in the UK since 2002 (Department for Transport (DfT) 2022), seemingly suggesting that train travel is a successful and popular practice. Yet, closer examination reveals that of all travel in England in 2019, train travel accounted for just 2 per cent of trips; besides, almost two-thirds of all rail journeys started or ended in London. On the contrary, the car was the dominant mode of transport, accounting for 61% of all trips (National Travel Survey Factsheet 2019). Research on rural UK also confirms the dominance of car use, while trains and other public transport show low use (Hopkins 2020). The practice of train travel has not therefore been as successful in recruiting new practitioners as other forms of transport, most notably the car. Hence, to understand why railway systems fail to recruit more

participants, this paper explores the understudied aspects of train mobilities and the socio-technical system of interlocked practices that supports it.

### 3. The changing practice of train (tourism) mobilities in the UK

Practice theories can help us to explain how the mobility practices have a trajectory or path of development, a history that depends upon time, space and social context. As Sheller and Urry (2016, 14), suggest, 'by integrating mobilities research with social practice theories, a new field of investigation is made possible for research to study how social practices around mobility changed in the past, are changing in the present and might change in the future through transforming wider sets of social practices beyond transportation choices and behaviour.' The practice of train mobility has significantly changed from Victorian railways to contemporary trains in the UK and varies between geographical and social settings (De Sapio 2012; Urry 2007). As we will later show, individual mobility practices are always interconnected with broader systems of practice and any intervention in any single practice has ripple effects throughout the whole system of practices of which it is a part.

In the nineteenth century, the advent of the railway in the UK, marked a transformative era in modern life. The expansion of railway transport facilitated a new connectedness with formerly distant places, enabling economic growth and contributing to industrialisation (Urry 2007). This period also marked the rise of the railways as the first form of mass transport for tourism (Conlin and Bird 2014). Railways enabled a remarkable growth of spas and seaside resorts in England, establishing new relationships between town and country. They brought people from the main industrial cities to coastal areas, where new resort towns, such as Blackpool or Scarborough, were developed solely to serve tourists, most of whom arrived on trains (Conlin and Bird 2014). In the nineteenth century, the railway, therefore, represented a dominating system of mobility firmly embedded in social life and interlinked with other social practices (Urry 2007).

Throughout the twentieth century, train travel in the UK continued to develop, reflecting and adapting to the changing social and economic situation. During World Wars I and II, trains played important roles in logistics for the war effort. The railways continued to be an integral part of everyday life practices: a means of transportation for work and leisure and a symbol of modernity and progress. A major shift in the practice occurred in the 1970s as train mobilities in the UK, as in other Western countries, began to lose their importance in modern life including tourism, giving way to cars and aeroplanes. On the ground, automobility started to quite literally 'drive' out competitors, such as feet, bikes, buses and trains, irreversibly locking in the social life to private motorised modes of transport (Urry 2007). Automobility, therefore, introduced a systemic shift in social practices, bringing with it new sociabilities, family life, shopping, commuting as well as leisure and tourism practices and becoming a self-sustaining, dominant system of transport. This trend continued until the 1990s, when growing sustainability concerns rekindled some interest in trains as an eco-friendly alternative for driving and flying short distances.

Today, the practice of train travel carries the meaning of environmental, social and economic benefits (Mogaji and Erkan 2019). In tourism, travelling on regular railways can be understood in the context of 'slow tourism', promoting a more relaxed pace of travel, highlighting the journey as an integral part of the experience, and taking time to engage with local life (Dickinson and Lumsdon 2010). This kind of train tourism, that Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010, 105) define as 'the fusion between travelling to a destination by rail and the train as the destination', can be therefore understood as part of the larger phenomenon of 'transport tourism', defined as 'a mode of recreational activity where mobility is the central part of tourism product and experience and can therefore be considered a tourist attraction in and of itself' (Rhoden and Kaaristo 2020, 309).



In the 21st century, the practice of train travel has undergone two major transformations. The first is the remarkable rise of internet usage and information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as smartphones. This has led to several digital advancements in the rail sector, for instance, the introduction of e-tickets by some railway companies, journey planning applications, and onboard amenities such as Wi-Fi, mains and USB charging points. Consequently, passengers' activities on board have also changed, with more people, including leisure travellers, using ICT devices to pass the travelling time (Lyons, Jain, and Weir 2016). The second transformation was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It resulted in a rise in homeworking and online shopping, which shifted the balance between commuting, business (the key passenger markets pre-pandemic) and leisure travel (a growing market post-COVID). This has led to deep and potentially permanent structural changes in the UK rail sector, requiring a new commercial model to adapt to the changes (Pickett, Hirst, and Tyers 2022).

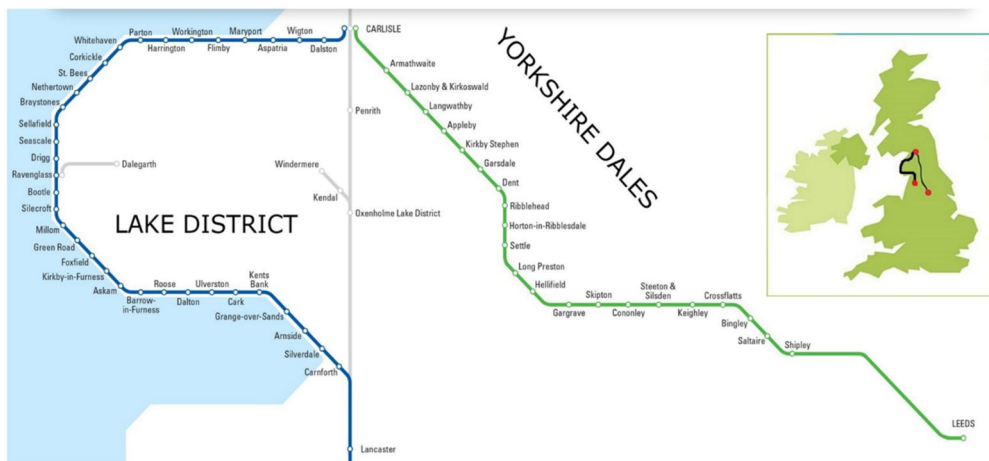
Extant research on UK train mobilities has focused on topics such as train services, timetabling, privatisation, economic development, network characteristics and patterns of movement in transport geography (Shaw and Docherty 2014). Mobilities literature is concerned with the mundane embodied experiences and representations of train passengers, most often commuters (Binnie et al. 2007; Bissell 2010; Mogaji and Erkan 2019 to mention just a few). The limited studies on train tourism in the UK have analysed leisure travellers' time use onboard (Lyons, Jain, and Weir 2016), tourists' segmentation or profiling on regular trains (Dallen 2007), skills needed for train tourism (Mertena, Kaaristo, and Edensor 2022) and the importance of volunteers for heritage railway tourism (Rhoden, Ineson, and Ralston 2009). The under-researched aspects of train mobilities have been pointed out by Jensen and Larsen (2021, 2): namely that 'we must explore how people become devoted "carriers" of rail tourism and what meanings, knowledge, aspirations and bodily transformations are associated with being a rail tourist'. Furthermore, the current studies fail to analyse how train use is interconnected with other tourism practices and mobilities. Therefore, our present study serves as a starting point for a more nuanced understanding of train mobility as a practice, how people become carriers of train tourism, and the interlocking of practices into bundles as we will demonstrate in the analysis section below.

#### 4. The field site and research methods

The investigated train route consists of three branch lines located in northern England, UK: the Leeds-Settle-Carlisle line (journey time 3 hours 40 minutes), the Cumbrian Coast Line stretching from Carlisle to Barrow-in-Furness (journey time 3 hours) and the Furness Line from Borrow-in-Furness to Lancaster (journey time 1 hour) (see Figure 1). The train route is operated by regular diesel trains and marketed as a scenic and historic tourist attraction. It also provides access to various leisure sites, hiking, cycling and birdwatching in the remote, rural regions of the Yorkshire Dales, along Cumbria's coastline and the Lake District. The users of this train route are locals who use it for commuting during certain hours of the day/week, as well as domestic and international tourists who use it for day trips and longer holidays mainly during weekends and off-peak hours during the week. The field site is part of a successful partnership between volunteer, tourism and transport enterprises that develop and promote tourist activities, routes and rural destinations accessible by train and buses in the region. Their joint efforts to increase the use of public transport for tourism set a good example for other rural areas in the UK and Europe where car-dependent tourism poses a significant sustainability challenge (Tomej and Liburd 2019).

Schatzki (2012, 24) contends that to study practices, 'the investigator has no choice but to do ethnography, that is, to practice interaction-observation'. The data collection, therefore, was guided by mobile methods (Büscher, Urry and Witchger 2010), mobile ethnography and sensory ethnography (Pink 2015). These research methodologies employ a combination of methods to fit





**Figure 1.** Field site: Leeds via Settle to Carlisle, Carlisle via Barrow-in-Furness to Lancaster. Source: First author.

specific circumstances, persons and projects and to capture the essence of the lived experience and practice. The first author used two data collection methods, participant observation and semi-structured interviews, to conduct fieldwork along the branch lines, travelling on trains, informally chatting and formally interviewing train-travelling tourists, and becoming a tourist herself. During participant observation, fieldwork diaries were used to capture data when travelling along the studied train routes. In the diary, the first author reflects on her personal embodied experiences of being a tourist-train-traveller and reflects on the rhythms of the trip and the route. This approach generated rich data as the experiences of train travel were captured subjectively in terms of felt time, space and movement as well as notes on observed passengers.

Recognising the need to include the experiences of others, the first author also conducted 46 ethnographic interviews with 80 domestic tourists (37 men and 43 women, aged between 19 and 82) on trains (some were interviewed in pairs or groups). Most participants were day-trippers from nearby cities while five were on longer holidays in the region. Their train journeys were almost always complemented by other tourism mobilities, such as cycling, hiking or sightseeing; some used their cars to get to/from the train station. For these interviews, the main criterion for starting a conversation was to make sure passengers were tourists. Different material objects of tourism, such as walking boots, hats, rucksacks, walking sticks, maps, bicycles, photo cameras, etc. (Haldrup and Larsen 2006) allowed to make this distinction while moving through the carriages. Influenced by Pink's sensory ethnography (2015), the interview process was understood as a shared conversation that records not only information conveyed verbally (by audio recording) but also how the person speaks, their facial expressions, body language, emotional reactions to surrounding sounds, scents, fleeting by landscapes (notes in the field diary). Hence, these conversations became a collaborative and reflexive process, a multisensory event, during which the interviewer and interviewee together created a shared place and knowledge. All necessary ethics requirements were adhered to when conducting the study, and ethical approval was obtained from the university. The interviews were recorded, subsequently transcribed, and, together with fieldnotes analysed using thematic analysis. The authors first coded the initial transcriptions separately, they then met and compared the codes, conducting the second stage of the analysis together.

## 5. Analysis: the practice of train tourism mobilities

As follows, we will examine train tourism mobilities in Northern England, framed through the lens of practice theories. First, we will consider mobility performances on board regular diesel

trains, examining the variety of embodied actions that constitute the tourists' mobile experiences. Following this, we will analyse train mobility as a practice entity, focusing on the materials, meanings and competencies that shape long-distance tourist train journeys along the three branch lines. We will show how these three elements interact and collectively contribute to the construction of train travel as a unique tourism practice. Lastly, we will explore how mobility practices link up with a variety of other practices, forming multimodal mobility bundles. By taking a practice theories perspective to mobilities research allows us to fully appreciate the complexity of mobilities and demonstrate that all mobilities are inextricably linked to a multitude of activities and practices.

### **5.1. Train mobility practice as performance**

For train travel to persist, it must be performed by individuals – carriers of practice. Zooming in Nicolini (2012) on this level reveals a variety of everyday 'doings and sayings' that are linked by 'arrays of understandings, rules and end-task-action combinations [and emotions and moods] that are acceptable for or enjoined of participants' (Schatzki 2015, 15). In what follows, we unpack some of these organised activities of train tourists to show how they produce and reproduce the mundane practice of train travel.

Travellers learn to perform tourism mobilities effortlessly and confidently through regular, skilful bodily enactments (Edensor 2007). The actions required to prepare for the train journey include planning a route and examining timetables, navigating to a train station, buying a ticket and finding the right platform. Time spent on the trains encompasses diverse doings such as gazing out windows, chatting with travel companions, observing other passengers, taking photographs, and following the route on the map. Leisure travellers habitually create personal spaces in train carriages using belongings, bodies and seat arrangements. These activities are usually perceived as acceptable during off-peak times when trains are empty, and the atmosphere is 'a lot more relaxed and hassle-free' as Andrew, 25, explains.

The dynamic changes on crowded trains, where passengers are expected to conform to common-sense rules and 'appropriate' behaviour (Schimkowsky 2022). Not complying with the code of conduct on trains – for instance, blocking seats with bags when trains are crowded – can elicit irritation and annoyance among fellow passengers and create a tense atmosphere. A group of retired hikers complain about a couple that occupied a whole table in a crowded carriage:

John (63): These people keep all their luggage on that seat to make sure they get that table! I don't like people like that. [There is a lot of bitterness in his voice; he talks in a hushed tone and continues observing the couple]. We are not like that, we don't want to be associated with them.

Richard (72): Yes, we have to share this space with others, there is no escape until you get off.

The affective atmospheres (Bissell 2010) and activities also change when commuting mobilities intersect with tourist routines, rendering trains impersonal and crowded, as described by most tourists. Debbie, 46, on a cycling day out with her friends, remarks 'commuters are more focused on themselves, getting to work, starting the day on time. They are not up to chatting. They look busy'. Mark, 44, travelling with his disabled mother, is concerned that they might not get seats on the return journey 'because when the shift finishes at Sellafield [the Sellafield nuclear site] this train will be full [...] every seat'. Consequently, the same route changes from a busy commuting route in the morning to a slow leisure line dominated by tourists during the day and then back to a commuting train during the late afternoon. There is also a difference between weekday and weekend trains. Comparing a busy morning train to work with a Saturday train, John, 63, remarks, 'no way I would do this interview during the week. It's only because it's Saturday and there is no rush; we are totally relaxed'. Hence, passengers co-create these affective mobile atmospheres, shaping and influencing mobility as a practice.

Another common activity on trains is gazing out of the window. Through skilful gazing (Mertena, Kaaristo, and Edensor 2022), tourists perceive and sense the changing pace of the route (e.g., the slower-paced realm of rural places or the peacefulness and solitude of the upland panorama) and various rhythms of the natural environment (e.g., different weather conditions, times of the day), enjoying the changing scenery and sense of movement of travelling through the landscape. For many tourists, gazing at the passing views becomes an aesthetically pleasant time-creating and time-passing activity that they anticipate and purposefully include in their day trips:

We use the train because we like to sit and look out of the window at the view. You know that the route is taking you to somewhere nice, and you are getting to see what's coming ... (Susan, 57)

Finally, any doings and sayings are accompanied by an embodied dimension of practice-as-performance, which is also interconnected with pursuing certain ends and purposes (Schatzki 2012). Many tourists say they enjoy train travel for its rocking movement, the leisurely atmosphere of off-peak trains, the recreational activities the train affords and 'the laid-back state of mind' (Carol, 73). James, 42, a cyclist notes:

I just like getting on a train, I always have ... I can read a book, I can have a drink, I can stare out of a window ... I can just let my thoughts wander.

However, not everyone on the train is a contented carrier of this practice. Chris, 29, for example, notes that he never looks forward to train rides because nothing excites or interests him on a train. He explains during the interview, 'Hadh't I spoken to you, I would have just decided to sleep to kill this time'. Chris clarifies that he is a student without a car and, therefore, no viable alternatives to get to places. This supports Walker's (2015) argument on the social distribution of practices and how access to certain resources, skills, and abilities can impact participation in desired practices. Chris is not an exception; other leisure travellers similarly imply that they are loyal users of trains but not because they enjoy the practice. Mike, 45, explains that the train journey (Leeds - Gargrave) is a means to an end for him, and he only takes the train because of his plan to walk a section of the Pennine Way (a non-circular walk):

Mike: So, to me, this journey is a means to an end. It's kind of unpleasant, noisy ... I'd like to go and close the window there. [He checks his watch] It's only 10 minutes and we will be off.

Nevertheless, Mike is an experienced train traveller, and the train is firmly rooted in the habits and routines of his everyday life: he used to live in Preston and take the train to Leeds often. Now, he lives in London and uses the London Underground Metro system (The Tube) to get to work. He also likes long-distance hiking and cycling in the countryside, and these trips are also facilitated by trains.

Like Mike and Chris, many tourists consider train mobilities an integral and habitual part of their lives, using trains for commuting, leisure and other trips, while some rely on cars for commuting and trains for leisure. Roy, 59, for example, explains that he always takes trains because he used to work on railways before retiring. For him, travelling by train is a habitual everyday practice.

Roy: My father worked on railways and for 20 years, I worked on railways, it's in me blood. Actually, I have always travelled on railways with my whole family. I go on holiday by train, I go everywhere by train.

By focusing on the mundane tourist activities on trains, we have shown how the practice of train travel is formed, negotiated and sustained over time. The closer exploration of the practice-as-performance reveals the practice's multifaceted nature and the underlying dynamics that shape train mobility during different times of the day and week. Passengers with different understandings and end-task-action combinations (Schatzki 2015), as well as emotions and moods, contribute to the complex interplay of social, cultural and material elements of long-distance rural trains. Although we have zoomed in on train travel as a performance, this section already

begins to illuminate the links between transport, activities at a destination and everyday life. These interconnections will be further analysed in [Section 5.3](#). In the next section, however, we will examine train mobility as a practice entity existing of a distinct combination of materials, competencies and meanings, zooming out from the immediacy of performing the practice.

## ***5.2. Practice-as-entity: the materials, competencies and meanings of train mobilities***

Three constituting elements comprise the practice of train mobility as an entity: materials, competencies and meanings (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). Watts (2008) describes train travel as a creative practice shaped by the interaction of passengers and their environment, where travellers engage with various materials and activities. By focusing on the long-distance rural trains as the unit of analysis, we will show how micro-changes in practice elements, or their configuration change the practice.

We start with the materialities, which are the route (including the natural and built environment along it), the physical train, as well as the bodies of train travelling tourists. The natural setting and the built environment along the three rural branch lines form a distinctive feature of the practice characterised by rolling countryside, natural pathways through the hills of the Pennines with 14 tunnels and over 20 viaducts and bridges, beautifully maintained Victorian-style railway stations, a breath-taking seascape of Cumbria's coastline, several Victorian seaside resorts and views of Lake District's mountains and hills. The three lines are operated by Northern Rail, with the rolling stock consisting of diesel multiple-unit trains (older and newer carriages) that, compared to modern electric trains or tilting trains along mainlines, are outdated – they are louder, slower and rougher. Peter, 45, on a fishing holiday remarks:

The trains on the main line feel different than the trains on the branch lines. I mean this train feels more like a bus: it's a lot smaller, it's a bit more rickety, it's obviously more parochial. I can feel that it's slower and it stops more.

Visually the older and newer diesel train carriages appear quite similar, fully carpeted with panoramic windows, and yet they contain different sensory stimuli, in terms of temperature, sounds, smells and kinaesthetic sensations that impress differently on the travelling bodies. Many interviewed tourists describe older carriages as less sociable, less comfortable, and sometimes smelly and dirty. Many note that they prefer newer cars with air conditioning, power-operated interior doors and soundproof windows because they offer a more neutral environment conducive to rest and relaxation. Still, not everyone feels the same – frequent travellers are familiar with and habituated to older diesel trains and, therefore, less perceptive of their dated built environment. Robert, 67, who is a train enthusiast explains,

I mean, these are old carriages; they are all shabby, but it doesn't really bother me or influence how I feel. I have decided to go along this line and, as far as travelling is concerned, it is fine.

Whether tourists enjoy the train technology or not, they still use it based on the value they perceive in it: defined by Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012) as the 'meanings' element of practice. Train tourists recognise the train's functional value providing access to various leisure activities. David, 75, highlights the versatility of these routes for various interests: hiking, cycling, bird watching, history and steam railway. The branch lines are also valued for their scenic qualities – the Leeds-Settle-Carlisle route, for example, is advertised as the most scenic railway line in England (The Settle-Carlisle Railway n.d.), while the Cumbrian Coast Line is promoted as offering the views of the Lake District and the coastline (Scenic Rail Britain n.d.). Therefore, the train journey itself becomes the focal point of interest and a mobile attraction.

Train travel also holds a distinct meaning for train enthusiasts who utterly enjoy it as a hobby, a way of spending their free time. Many of these people say that 'railway is in [their] blood' (Brian, 72) meaning that the excitement and love for railway can be inherited, learned in

childhood from parents who worked on the railway or were enthusiasts themselves. These people perceive trains as their destination and places along the route are just transfer points. These passages demonstrate how factors like the train's route, the built environment of the train (rural branch line versus fast mainline, older versus newer carriages) and the meanings and values that tourists assign to train travel influence onboard activities and the affective atmospheres, thereby changing the practice of train travel.

This leads to the final element of practice, competencies. This is an element that is recognised (Löfgren 2015) but not extensively studied in mobilities research, especially when it comes to 'commonplace skills' (Mertena, Kaaristo, and Edensor 2022, 2) required in everyday mobility practices and routines. To skilfully engage with the above-mentioned materials, the train travelling tourists require skills, accumulation of knowledge and experience, and familiarity with the route. These competencies are needed to plan the day successfully according to train arrival and departure times, know which destinations are accessible by trains, plan activities while waiting, deal with delays and cancellations, find better connections, know which trains less busy and which train operators are not strict about bikes. Two cyclists on their way to Settle – Roy, 59, familiar with train travel while his friend, Steven, 45, is not – reflect on the practice of travelling by train:

Roy: I know my way around. I've done it that many times ... I'm used to it all and it's not a big deal for me.

Steven: Without Roy [the experienced tourist] being here today, I would have been like 'Wow' ... where is what, stressing out ... Because you are not used to it. This is the first time I've been on the train for 25 years. I probably couldn't even read the timetables, Roy is doing all that, you know.

The competencies for successful train travel are often learned through observation, imitation or trial and error. Reflecting on her cycling holiday, Susan explains that she did not anticipate the little difficulties she faced travelling for the first time alone with a bike on trains between Oban (Scotland) and Whitehaven (a seaside town on the Cumbrian Coast Line), cycling the Coast-to-Coast route and camping. The skills she had to learn included booking the correct route, getting her luggage and the bike on and off the trains as well as lifting the bike onto the bike rack in the train and securing it. Julie, 54, and Charles, 66, an experienced train-travelling couple, explain that over the years they have developed skills, knowledge and experience of travelling by train, which is why they enjoy their journeys. Their competencies include the ability to navigate train schedules and routes, knowledge of how much time it takes to move from one platform to another when connecting trains and developing tactics for securing the best seats for both comfort and views. The practices of skilled and unskilled practitioners, therefore, vary significantly. Skilled travellers use trains confidently, seamlessly integrating them into their leisure routines and turning train travel into a safe, pleasant and relaxing leisure practice. Novices, on the other hand, may feel uncertain and tense, requiring constant double-checking, especially if they are unfamiliar with the region they visit. This underscores the argument by Mertena, Kaaristo, and Edensor (2022) that skills in tourist travel are honed over time, transforming initially challenging experiences into routine practices that are enjoyed.

By reviewing the three key elements of practice – materials, meanings and competencies – we have illuminated the structures and dynamics that shape long-distance rural trains in the context of tourism. Moreover, our findings confirm Shove et al.'s (2012) argument that practices change as soon as one or more elements or their configuration changes (e.g., the route, the train technology, skilled or unskilled travellers). This finding is significant because it raises the question of whether certain practices might be intentionally steered in the future to attract more tourists. We will return to this point in the conclusion. In the next section, however, we will 'zoom out' (Nicolini 2012) on the train travelling practice and analyse the multimodal mobility bundles that, as we argue, compose train tourism.

### 5.3. The multimodal train tourism mobility bundle

Examining train mobilities as bundles of practices and material arrangements (Schatzki 2019) allows us to ascertain how the practice of train tourism interconnects with other modes of transport and various tourism practices, such as hiking, cycling, sightseeing, and therefore to appreciate the complexity embedded in mobility systems (Sheller and Urry 2016). Below, we show the relative stability and instability of these connections which also allows us to see how different mobility practices compete for recruits and what causes defection from the practice of train travel.

The practice of travelling by train bundles with a variety of other transport modes, most notably car and bicycle, thus forming *multimodal mobility bundles*. In some tourism contexts, for example, cycling tourism, journeys by train and bike can be inextricably connected because they support and sustain each other. On the studied long-distance branch lines, the practice bundles of train travel and cycling are one of the most enduring ones, attracting many cyclists travelling alone, as couples or in small groups of friends. Alternatively, day-trippers can explore the region by joining non-circular cycling tours that are organised to start (and end) at or near train stations and, therefore, are synchronised to match the train arrival and leaving times.

In addition to cycling, train travel also bundles effectively with other leisure mobilities such as walking and hiking. Many tourists use the branch lines to meet with friends and go on walks, as Mark explains, or visit towns in Yorkshire Dale or seaside resorts along Cumbria's coastline. Some hikers along the Leeds-Settle-Carlisle route are members of charity organisations and ramblers' groups, such as Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line or The Lancaster-Skipton Rail User Group. These organisations arrange various activities for their members and the public, such as free guided walks in the Yorkshire Dales and Lake District or bird-watching tours. The groups actively promote the use of public transport by building partnerships with public transport providers and events in the region. Like cycling tours, guided walks start (and end) from train stations along the train lines and are coordinated with train arrival times.

Committed practitioners such as Roy, 59, and Mark, 44, even organise their leisure trips exclusively around the train network. Both are loyal carriers of train practice and most of their leisure plans depend on whether leisure destinations and activities are accessible by train. Train travel is firmly integrated into their lives with other practices synchronised and coordinated around the train transport system:

Mark (advising leisure destinations accessible by train): If you like seaside landscape then Millom, Seascale [train stations] are nice. Whereas if you prefer mountains then only Ravenglass [a train station] because everywhere else the mountains are too far in to walk from the stations. I normally travel to Seascale. This is where I meet my friend and then we go walking.

Northern Rail and DalesBus have also developed discounted fares, such as Rail Rover tickets, Settle-Carlisle Day Ranger or DaleBus pass as well as concession tickets, that enable flexible exploration of the region at holidaymakers' own pace and therefore facilitate a set of leisure practices which, in return, helps to recruit new practitioners. These arrangements encourage tourists to join ramblers' or cyclists' groups as Ann, 64, one of the guides remarks:

On this train, there must be about four or five walking groups. We are all doing different walks and we will get off at different stations, but we often meet on the train and have a chat. It is part of the hiking experience. I enjoy meeting familiar and new people on the train because we have similar interests.

On Saturdays, on-train guides work on the Leeds-Settle-Carlisle route. Their presence is part of a bigger project that aims to save this historic route, which has been almost closed twice, in the early 1960s (The Beeching Report 1963 to restructure British Rail (Beeching 1963)) and later in the 1980s. The initiative to save the line from closure began a successful partnership between Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line, Settle-Carlisle Railway Trust, and Development Company (volunteer, tourism, and transport enterprises) that jointly started to promote the route as a scenic



journey that provides access to many tourist activities in the region. The partnership has created conditions to integrate the train route into the tourism of the region and, by doing so, increase its use. The recognition is that developing and promoting tourist activities accessible from train stations will enhance the use of trains and increase tourist flows to the region.

While train travel along the branch lines is interconnected with other practices and arrangements (Schatzki 2012), forming multimodal mobility bundles, and encouraging train use, the practices within the bundles are not always smoothly coordinated. Tourists mention frequent train delays and cancellations, crowded trains during certain times of the day and week or infrequent trains during holidays and weekends. These occurrences can disrupt travellers' plans to visit certain places or be somewhere on time before an attraction closes. Besides, different train companies have different rules and regulations concerning bicycles; some are strict, requesting bikes to be booked in advance while others are flexible. Northern Rail, for example, does not accept bicycle bookings and typically allows only two bikes per train. The train conductor has the discretion to permit more bikes, creating uncertainty for cyclists, especially those new to the practice. Joshua, 19, explains that beginning to travel by bike on trains can be intimidating because 'the risk of not being able to get on' and recalls that he used to be 'always scared about what would happen if I don't get on' before he developed competencies for handling these situations. Ryan, 26, another cyclist travelling with Joshua, adds that return trips can become particularly stressful:

You've been out all day and you tired, cold and wet and you going back filthy and it's like ... I got to get on this train because the next one is in two hours or, even worse, this is the last one that comes in ...

This echoes Blue et al. (2016) who note that the trajectory of any practice is likely to affect the trajectories of other practices and impact aspects of daily life. Consequently, Joshua notes that 'If I can get a lift, I get a lift and go by car', highlighting that practices compete for the limited attention of potential practitioners.

To conclude, in this section, we have conceptualised train tourism as a multimodal mobility bundle and, by doing so, revealed how train travel interconnects with other mobilities and tourism practices at a destination. We have also acknowledged the interdependencies between tourism, transport and mobilities, as this allows for a more comprehensive analysis of train tourism. We have shown that train-travelling tourists bundle different routes, practices, and modes of movement during their leisure trips. A train journey is very often complemented by other mobilities such as walking, hiking, or cycling practice; a ride on a contemporary train can be supplemented by the unhurried tempos of a heritage steam train and a walk; or a day out can be a combination of a car drive to a train station, a train journey, and a walk. Overall, in this section, we have demonstrated that the more leisure practices are interlocked in a train tourism bundle, the greater the demand for train mobility. However, the railway system must be reliable, functional and easy to use to minimise defection from trains to other mobilities.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper integrates mobilities research with practice theories to demonstrate the interconnectedness between mobilities, transport and tourism and, by doing so, develops a more nuanced understanding of the underlying structures and dynamics that shape train mobilities and their interlocking with other practices in social life. Zooming in (Nicolini 2012) on train mobility as a performance and a practice entity allows us to conceptualise train travel as a social practice that involves a specific set of doings and sayings; train travel consists of various materials, meanings and competencies and when one or more elements are modified, the practice of train travel changes. The material elements of train mobility have undergone a series of transformations over the past two centuries. The meaning also shifted from being a fast mass transport (including for tourism) to becoming a slow mobility facilitating slow tourism. These modifications



changed the practice drastically along with the competences that it requires. Furthermore, the empirical research along the Leeds-Settle-Carlisle-Barrow-Lancaster railway routes uncovers various micro-changes that occur through tourists' performances of mobility and changes in the practice elements. For instance, the purpose of the travel, whether for leisure or commuting, modifies the value passengers attach to trains. Similarly, the physical environment of newer or older carriages affords different activities, which in turn affects the overall atmosphere onboard. Moreover, we demonstrate that the practices of skilled and unskilled practitioners differ significantly, altering the practice-as-performance.

For practices to sustain they must recruit and retain practitioners. Regardless of whether people enjoy train travel or not, they remain loyal carriers of the practice if the train is integrated into their daily routines, leisure practices and responsibilities. Individual transport experiences and motivations become the outcomes of engagement in the practice rather than a precondition for it. These insights demonstrate that practices co-evolve and interlock with one another to create mobility demand, forming bundles that organise social life. They also show how the nexuses of practices and arrangements compose tourism. Train travel interconnects with other tourism practices like cycling, hiking or socialising and other transport modes like bicycles, ultimately forming *multimodal mobility bundles*. This may seem contradictory as the term 'train tourism' signals unimodality while involving multiple modalities. However, as we show in this paper, multimodality is more common than unimodality when it comes to human mobility, and therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that while the train may be a dominant mobility in train tourism (or the bicycle in cycling tourism), it is just one of the mobilities forming the tourism bundle. It might therefore be more precise to use a term 'train-centred tourism'. These bundles are relatively stable through successful governance – collaborations between volunteer, tourism and transport organisations, which jointly develop and promote tourist activities and destinations accessible from train stations along the researched train routes. However, the instabilities and coordination issues among practices within the bundles also need to be underscored. Train delays and cancellations impact tourists' leisure plans, and inconsistent bicycle rules and regulations cause uncertainty among cyclists, leading to some train users abandoning the practice if an opportunity arises.

Inevitably, the question arises whether it would be possible to steer practices. While practices can and do change when certain elements are altered, driving them toward a particular direction would be complicated due to their embeddedness in material infrastructures and dominant socio-cultural conventions (Mock 2023). Practices are always in the process of (re)formation (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012), which makes them resist either intact preservation or clear-cut modification. However, as Mock (2023, 381) argues, 'regulations, i.e. rules imposed by public authorities, must go beyond the "soft" policy instruments [-] and embrace instruments that restrict or eliminate choices' This view is supported by Blue et al. (2016), who demonstrate that even deeply embedded practices, like smoking indoors in public places, can indeed be altered through regulation and policy. This is relevant for considering potential policy implications for enhancing train tourism, for which our research suggests two approaches. First, enhancing inter-connectedness between practices compatible with train travel is crucial. This can be achieved through initiatives like park-and-ride schemes near train stations and fostering partnerships to promote rural destinations accessible by train. Second, it is vital to dissolve connections with incompatible practices, particularly car use in rural tourism. This could involve reducing socio-technical infrastructures that enable car-dependent tourism and implementing legislation to curb car use in these areas. Such policy interventions could aim to gradually shift mobility patterns as well as reflect the ongoing debate in practice theories about the possibility and methods of influencing social practices, which is critical to our understanding of human behaviour and its impact on the environment.

Referring to limitations and suggestions for further research, our investigation reveals that more research is needed to understand how transport mobilities are interconnected with other

practices in everyday life and tourism. This requires further exploration of train tourism along different routes, including main lines, and in other regions in the UK. However, it is also important to note that the mobilities literature already has a strong representation of the Global North, emphasising Western understandings of mobility and research approaches conducted by English-speaking scholars. More work is needed to more fully represent perspectives on and from mobilities research from the Global South and other under-represented perspectives. Future research could focus on how different socio-cultural contexts influence the bundling of practices more generally and the formation of tourism bundles more specifically.

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