Briefing paper - Institutional change of travel policies

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1 Short summary of the strategy/measure

Travel policies mostly follow this pattern: the cheapest and fastest way to travel will be refunded. This supports the current norm of flying for convenience, and often forces people to take the plane even if they don't want to. Little has so far been done by societal organisations (i.e. businesses, public sector, NGOs) to change this environmentally harmful practice although it could make a large difference to their carbon footprint. However, some organisations are now starting to put in place more progressive travel policies, often initiated from below (it seems). These vary from voluntary measures (e.g. you can take the train if you want) to strict rules (e.g. ban on short haul flights).

Which policies to recommend or pursue, depends on the perspective or vision one has with respect to what such kind of policies should achieve. This in turn depends on the implicit or explicit theory of change (practice theory, behavioural theory, social psychology, institutional theory). Generally, whether strict or not, organisations' travel policies are meant as a way to start a change of norms and behaviour, and more broadly to raise awareness as to how harmful this activity is. Most of the time, those initiating fly-less travel policies admit that such policies will not be enough for the change needed, and that much more needs to be done. Still, individual action and organisations' policies can work as a bottom-up political action to create conditions for institutional change (e.g. regulations and norms) more generally.

2 State of the art

Does this measure already exist? Where/who? (a selection):
1. Universities and departments (e.g. Lund (LUCSUS), Copenhagen, UCLA, Ghent)
2. (Environmental) research centres (e.g. Tyndall centre)
3. Municipalities (e.g. Malmö)
4. Cultural centres (e.g. Helsingborg concert hall)
5. Media (e.g. Politiken - DK daily newspaper)
6. Public organisations (e.g. BBC Worldwide, UK Environment Agency, AT Environment Agency)
7. Private firms (e.g. Lush, Novo Nordisk)

Types/categories of travel policies:
The main (identified) forms of travel policies, which can also be seen as "degrees" of enforcement:
1. *allowing* employees to take the time needed to travel by train (and pay any extra costs),
2. *actively encouraging* environmentally friendly travel or less travel, or
3. *imposing* more sustainable travel arrangements.

Elements of travel policies

- Relative vs. absolute: Some companies introduce absolute rules, e.g. Ghent University who banned reimbursements for plane travel to any location within a six-hour train ride. Others encourage staff to reduce their emissions (decision tree), and focus on calculating personal efforts, e.g. Tyndall Centre.
- Individualist vs. communal: In Lund you have to justify to yourself any travel made, but this could be made more formal/communal.
- Focus on reduced emissions (relative) vs. what would be a good way to behave/a sustainable way of travelling.
- Some focus on economic incentives, like internal fee payment/offsetting or subsidies (e.g UCLA). Offsetting emissions from flights is indeed one of the most often used measures by institutions - it just means a little bit higher costs, but no real change in behaviours and policies, and is according to several studies basically useless in terms of emissions (see e.g. Öko-Institute 2016).
- Levels of priorities: video conference over travel; train/boat/bus over flying
- Travel policy include guests as well as staff and management
- Work vs. holiday/private travel: While most companies focus on work travel policies, others encourage and reward avoided personal flying (e.g. give extra days off for travelling slow during holidays). An example is WeiberWirtschaft, Berlin. Also promoted by UK charity 1010uk.org.
- Get environmental certifications (ecolabels etc): However, those are often not explicit about flying.

Best practices/ideas - examples:

Many organisational travel policies are of a voluntary kind, and hence theoretical rather than actualised. We need good model policies for others to learn from. Are the absolute rules (bans) the best practices? They will clearly be the most effective in terms of direct emissions cuts. Some examples:
- Some organisations are considering a ban on domestic/short-haul flights or even avoiding planes within Europe (suggested criteria: <1000 km, <12 hours) (e.g. Sweden and Switzerland discuss introducing bans on short haul flights for MPs/government).
- Some already introduced such bans (BBC Worldwide in 2009: staff can only fly when travelling by train adds more than three hours to the journey; companies signing up to https://einfach-jetzt-machen.de/ promise to avoid domestic flights and flying for shorter than 1000 km).

Fame and shame:
- Some organisations have prize awards for the most environmentally friendly means of travel to a conference, e.g. the European Society for Conservation Biology.
- Should we make competitions where universities/organisations/companies are assessed against each other on the best travel policy (benchmarking, "naming and shaming" etc.)?
- Shaming campaigns, e.g. #flyskam? A candidate for shaming could be the European Commission, who don't allow invited guests to take the train if the journey is too long!

3 Advantages

- Feasibility: Easy to implement and get acceptance. Seen as less coercive when it comes from the company management than if imposed from the state/government (and even more so if the policy is voluntary)

- A soft way to raise awareness about routines we have stopped questioning, and to make people try out other ways of travelling
- New travel practices in work life might also have effects on how we live and travel in our daily (private) lives
- Organisations can inspire each other
- General policies can change with private examples leading the way and showing what is possible
- Can contribute to pressure governments to cut the unfair privileges of aviation
- Can have a huge impact if centrally decided public sector travel regulations (e.g. the German Bundesreisekostengesetz) are changed, since these often inspire firms' travel policies/refund policies, and also apply to organisations receiving public funding (e.g. universities, NGOs)
- It could be an advantage for organisations to have staff traveling by train, since working conditions there are generally better than on planes.
- Fly-less policies might potentially be attractive if they also include travelling less (e.g. by using video-conferencing instead), especially for employees with care responsibilities (e.g. small children). There is also a gender dimension to this: as men generally fly more, reducing flying may make conditions more even
- A bottom-up measure which can be combined with any other initiative of a more public policy kind

4 Disadvantages

- Focused primarily on awareness raising & behavioural change (rather than on structural change)
- Individualist focus
- Voluntary - hence dependent on the good will of organisations - probably of progressive and ecological ones, while big business continue using speed and emissions intensive practices
- Can be misused for greenwashing and PR
- Many of the new travel policies put in place, for example in universities, are to a large extent based on criteria or elements that are usually associated with a neoliberal management culture focusing on performance, benchmarking and transparency. They include voluntary measures and nudging rather than absolute bans. It might be worth discussing how these kinds of measures are perceived with respect to a radical agenda and policy for system change and social-ecological transformation.

5 Questions for discussion

- How to get governments, municipalities, universities, (environmental?) NGOs, trade unions and other organisations to take the lead and serve as role-models by implementing travel policies that support the most sustainable way of transport?
- Does sustainable travel necessarily mean higher travel costs and more time spent on travelling in total? Some evidence against this (e.g. BBC Worldwide), although it seems to be the general perception.
- What do we see as the best-practices? Voluntary schemes or drawing hard lines? Is one kind of travel policy more appropriate for some sectors than the other?

- How can changes in travel policy be fostered? It seems like it is often that individuals initiate this from below, rather than the management doing it from the top. What about the role of the trade unions in establishing progressive travel policies? How to encourage those who already travel environmentally friendly to share their experiences and be more proactive in policy development (vs. afraid of moralising)?
- Should we promote mandatory travel policies, where the management is obliged to elaborate a travel policy based on discussions with their staff? And more broadly: How to get the trade unions more involved in this topic?
- What about travel agencies? They are notoriously bad at providing good information on non-flying travel alternatives. Do they need to be part of a strategy for promoting this measure?

6 Literature & links

- Burian, Isabell (2018): *It is up in the air. Academic flying of Swedish sustainability academics and a pathway to organisational change*. LUCSUS Master Thesis, no 2018:013, Lund University.
- Kimberly, N. & S. Wynes (2019): *Changing Behavior to Help Meet Long-Term Climate Targets.* World Resources Institute. https://www.wri.org/climate/expert-perspective/changing-behavior-help-meet-long-term-climate-targets
- Öko-Institut (2016): How Additional is the CDM? https://www.oeko.de/publikationen/p-details/how-additional-is-the-clean-development-mechanism/
- Wynes, Seth et al. (2019): Academic air travel has a limited influence on professional success. *Journal of Cleaner Production, Vol. 226, pp. 959-967.*

Web-links to interesting examples of organisations' travel policies:
- Lund: http://www.kimnicholas.com/academics-flying-less.html
- Tyndall: https://tyndall.ac.uk/sites/default/files/tyndall_travel_strategy_updated.pdf

Web resources:
- Academics flying less: https://academicflyingblog.wordpress.com, https://noflyclimatesci.org/
- Environmental Studies Association of Canada: https://esac.ca/climate-change-academia/
- https://esac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/REPORT-Climate-Change-and-Academia-ESAC-CSDH.pdf
- Newspaper coverage of travel policies:
- https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/oct/05/network-travel-and-transport