

Virgile Collin-Lange, PhD Student.  
University of Iceland. Department of geography and tourism studies, Office 361, Askja  
Sturlagata 7, 101 Reykjavík  
Phone: (+354) 525-4379 / (+354) 6907541  
Email [vrcl@hi.is](mailto:vrcl@hi.is)

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Ljósheimar 6  
104 Reykjavík  
Phone: (+354) 6987541

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Berist samgönguráðuneyti og samgöngunefnd

Ég heiti Virgile Collin-Lange og er doktorsnemi í landfræði við Háskóla Íslands. Ég hef unnið að rannsóknum á ungum ökumönnum á Íslandi frá árinu 2007, m.a. hef ég skoðað hvernig þeir nota og upplifa bíla. Nýleg ákvörðun um að hækka aldurstakmark til að taka ökuleyfi á Íslandi og að endurtaka þurfi próf reglulega tengist því rannsóknarefni mínu með beinum hætti.

Niðurstöður könnunar sem ég lagði fyrir tæplega 600 unga ökumenn á aldrinum 16 til 21 árs á höfuðborgarsvæðinu sýndu að þeir voru ekki mótfallnir hugmyndum um breytingar á lögum svipaðar þeim sem nú hafa verið kynntar. Raunar komu fram hugmyndur um hertar reglur um umferðaröryggi.

Ég hef ritað tvær fræðigreinar um þetta efni og biða þær birtingar hjá alþjóðlegum fræðiritum.

- Collin-Lange, V. (forthcoming) Entering the system of automobility: Car ownership and use by novice drivers in Iceland. *Journal of Transport Geography*.
- Collin-Lange, V. (forthcoming), "My car is the best thing that ever happened to me": Automobility and novice drivers in Iceland. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*

Meðfylgjandi eru afrit af þessum greinum og ég vil gjarnan bjóða fram krafta mína til handa ráðuneytinu í þessu máli sem og öðrum sem framundan kunna að vera og tengjast mínu fræðasviði.

Virðingarfyllst,

Virgile Collin-Lange





## VIRGILE COLLIN-LANGE

### CURRICULUM VITAE

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#### Persónuupplýsingar

Fæðingardagur: 17/05/1983  
Þjóðerni: Franskt  
Tungumál: Franska (móðurmál), enska (reiprennandi), íslenska (sæmílega)  
Núverandi staða: Doktorsnemi í landfræði við HÍ

Heimilisföng: Háskóli Íslands Ljósheimar 6  
Land- og ferðamálafræðistofa 104 Reykjavík  
Askja ICELAND  
101 Reykjavík  
Ísland

Símanúmer: 525 4379 354 697 541  
Tölvupóstfang: vrc1@hi.is

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#### Menntun

2007-: Háskóli Íslands  
Doktorsnám í landfræði: *Automobility of Icelandic Novice Drivers*

2006-2007: Háskóli Íslands  
Mastersnám: *Automobility of Icelandic Novice Drivers.*

2004-2005: Université de Reims Champagne Ardennes, Frakkland/Háskóli Íslands  
Erasmusnám B.Sc í landfræði. I. einkunn

2002-2004: Université de Reims Champagne Ardennes, Frakkland  
DEUG gráða í landfræði. I. einkunn

1999-2002: Lycée Jean Jaures, France.  
Stúdentspróf, bókmennta- og listbraut

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#### Styrkir

Júní 2007-júní 2008 Rannís  
September 2008: Transport, Traffic & Mobility (T2M), Young Researcher Mobility Fund.



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## **Fyrirlestrar á ráðstefnum**

- September 2008:*        **Transport, Traffic & Mobility (T2M)**, Ottawa, Kanada  
*Automobility & Environmental Consciousness*
- Febrúar 2008:*        **Car and the City**, Reykjavík  
*Automobility of Icelandic novice drivers.*
- Júlí 2007:*            **Lancaster Sociology Summer Conference 2007**, Bretlandi  
*Automobility of Icelandic novice drivers.*
- Júní 2007:*            **Nordic Geographer Meeting 2007**, Bergen, Noregi  
*The practice of automobility as a spatializing routine:  
The case of Icelandic novice drivers*

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## **Kennslureynsla**

- Vor 2008:*            **Háskóli Íslands**  
*Aðstoðarkennari í ferðamálafræði*
- Vor 2009:*            **Háskóli Íslands**  
*Aðstoðarkennari í ferðamálafræði*
- Vor 2010:*            **Háskóli Íslands**  
*Aðstoðarkennari í ferðamálafræði*

---

## **Leiðbeinendur**

- Aðalleiðbeinandi:*    Dr Karl Benediktsson, prófessor við Háskóla Íslands  
(525 4286, [kben@hi.is](mailto:kben@hi.is))
- Með-leiðbeinendur:*    Dr Edward H. Huijbens, forstöður maður Rannsóknamiðstöðvar ferðamála  
(4608930, [edward@unak.is](mailto:edward@unak.is))
- Dr Timothy Richardsson, prófessor við Álaborgarháskóla, Danmörku  
([tim@plan.aau.dk](mailto:tim@plan.aau.dk))



## **Félagsstarf**

*Síðan október 2009:* Stjórnarmeðlim félags doktors- og nýdoktorsnema við Háskóla Íslands

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## **Vinnureynsla**

- Mái 2006 - :* **Kópavogsbær**  
*Stuðningsfulltrúi fatlaðs drengs*
- Júní 2008 - :* **Terra Nova**  
*Leiðsögumaður*
- Mái 2009 - :* **Ferðakompaniíð**  
*Leiðsögumaður*
- Mái 2009 - :* **AD Travel**  
*Leiðsögumaður*
- Júní 2007 - :* **SBA Norðuleið, Akureyri**  
*Leiðsögumaður*
- Feb. 2006 - júní 2007:* **Reykjavíkurborg**  
*Leiðbeinandi í dagvistun fyrir fótluð börn*
- Feb. 2005 - ágúst 2005:* **Lónið – Hótel Loftleiðir**  
*Þjónn*
- Júní 2002 - júlí 2004:* **Marché Plus, Reims Frakklandi**  
*Gjaldkeri*
- Sept. 2000- júní 2004:* **Reimsborg**  
*Leikskólaleiðbeinandi*  
*Þjálfari í frjálsum íþróttum*





# **Entering the system of automobility: Car ownership and use by novice drivers in Iceland**

Corresponding Author:

**Virgile Collin-Lange**

Department of Geography and Tourism

University of Iceland

361 Askja, Sturlugata 7

IS-101 Reykjavík, ICELAND

Tel: 00354 6097541

**[vrc1@hi.is](mailto:vrc1@hi.is)**

# **Entering the system of automobility: Car ownership and use by novice drivers in Iceland**

## ***Abstract:***

This article investigates how young individuals access the regime of automobility. Their entry depends on their willingness to adopt the values and practices associated with this regime, but also to use it as a form of empowerment. Instead of looking at the systemic nature of the regime of automobility, this article concentrates on its human component, by looking at young drivers and aims to bring new perspectives on automobility as well as add to an understanding of its nature. The focus is put on the access to cars by young people in the greater Reykjavík area and the shift in modal choice that occurs when they enter the regime of automobility. This is made through a survey submitted to 553 grammar school students. The results show that young residents in the capital area are fully aware of the regime of automobility in which they evolve. They make sensitive choices according to the condition of this regime, and acknowledge that they are reinforcing it. Yet they are also criticizing both their status within this regime and the regime itself. The results from this study of Icelandic novice drivers as well showed that other kind of information could be extracted from novice drivers' experience of mobility and their modal choices and that novice drivers are a good source of informations, beyond accident and road safety studies. Novice drivers represent an opportunity to learn about past, present and future mobilities. They could be considered as a tool to assess transport systems by looking at why they are leaving one transport mode to another and how they expect for their future modal choices to be. The findings suggest a need for change in terms of safety measures and transport planning

## ***Keywords***

Automobility, modal choice, road safety, novice drivers, Iceland.

## **Introduction**

“Car culture in Iceland is so extreme that people own more than one car,  
they don't walk anymore and never take the bus”

(Male, 18 years old).

With somewhat fewer than 210 000 passenger cars in Iceland for a little more than 319 000 people (Hagstofa Íslands, 2008), the relationship of Icelanders with their cars seems to be quite distinctive. Iceland is among those countries where the use of the private car is most widespread. Young people in Iceland are no exception. They seem to be fully aware of the opportunities rendered by the automobile, and their pervasive use of cars begs a closer look. The situation in which they find themselves is an interesting source of information for researchers and planners. It globally shows the importance of planning and its consequences on modal choices. In addition to this, novice drivers as well show that they are a good source of information beyond accident and road safety studies.

The concept of *automobility* (Sheller and Urry, 2000; Urry, 2004) has been defined as a “patterned system which is predicated in the most fundamental sense on a combination of notion of autonomy and mobility” (Böhm et al., 2006: 4). It constitutes “a complex amalgam of interlocking machines, social practices and ways of dwelling”, including “humans, machines, roads and other spaces, representations, regulatory institutions and a host of related businesses and infrastructural features” (Edensor, 2004:102). This idea of system has been reconsidered and developed further through the concept of a “regime” (Böhm et al., 2006: 5), which helps to emphasize “the systemic aspect of automobility but also to bring out the relations of power that make this system possible” (Böhm et al., 2006: 6).

The aim of this article is to investigate how individuals enter the regime of automobility. Their entry depends on their willingness to adopt the values and practices

associated with this regime and embody its ideals of freedom, privacy, movement, progress and autonomy (Böhm et al., 2006: 2). Instead of looking at the systemic nature of the regime of automobility, this article concentrates on its human component, and hopes to bring new perspectives on automobility and add to an understanding of its nature. Focusing on the entry of individuals into the regime brings into the spotlight a particular moment where individuals consider their own personal mobile experience and its conditions. It exposes the weaknesses of the actual expression of regime as well, and opens up new possibilities of automobility beyond its current form. This has great importance, because previous research has not focused on this particular point. Although some researchers have mentioned this issue (Sheller and Urry, 2000; Sheller, 2004; Thrift, 2004), research focused on the human body and its association with the car. They describe the hybridization of the driver with his car, creating a new sort of being, the “car-driver” (Sheller and Urry, 2000: 3). This idea of hybridization weakens the systemic nature of automobility because it does imply that there is no reproduction. By definition, a hybrid is not able to reproduce. Dant (2004) points out that the car-driver is better considered as an assemblage rather than a hybrid. This again brings a human side to the idea of automobility.

This focus on the human component of the entry of the regime of automobility is analysed through the example of young Icelanders. The emphasis is put on the access to cars by young people and the shift in modal choice that occurs when they reach driving age. The reasons behind this shift are then explored. The work is based on a survey undertaken in 2007 among high school students in Reykjavík. The respondents were asked about their modal choice and their opinions about transportation options. The holding of driver's licences, as well as the level of car use and car ownership, was also elicited in the survey. Apart from adding to a general understanding of the regime of automobility, the information is of practical significance for transportation planning, including public transport options, and has implications for the design of road safety strategies.

A considerable corpus of literature exists about young drivers. Most previous academic studies have focused on modal choices (Müller et al., 2008) and safety issues, such as driving experience (McKnight and McKnight, 2003); risk perception (Machin and Sankey, 2008, Deery, 1999), vehicle choice (Hellinga et al., 2007); young driver mortality rate and driver licensing system (Kingham et al., 2008) and the minimum driver licence age (Kingham et al., 2004) and predispositions for road incivility (Wilson et al., 2006, Bianchi and Summala, 2003, Ferguson et al., 2001). This research has highlighted the higher exposure of young people to traffic accidents and the multiple factors that cause this. Inexperience, hazard and risk perception, vehicle choice and what has been called the “genetics of driving” (Bianchi and Summala, 2003), were tagged as the most common factors. “Genetics of driving” refers to the driving history of the parents, that has turned out to be a key factor in shaping the future of young people as drivers (Wilson et al., 2006, Ferguson et al., 2001). The OECD synthesis report on young drivers summed up all the findings within the field and made several recommendations on the matter. Even if this report is highly focused on licensing, accident and risk exposure of young drivers, it also opened new considerations such as the important of the availability of modal choices (OECD/ECMT Transport Research Centre, 2006).

Some work has also been carried out in Iceland in this field (Briem et al., 2004, Rannsóknir & greining, 2004). Briem et al. (2004) looked at psychological factors in car accidents among young drivers and found that the psychological environment of young people is more important than age and gender in shaping their future driving life. They point out that those individuals involved in road incivilities and related accidents tend to have the same profile. They also mention an improvement of methodologies and teaching techniques in Iceland and link it to a reduction of traffic accidents among young people. Mogensen et al. (2000) showed that the role of the parents and friends is very important for driving behaviour. Another study (Rannsóknir & greining, 2004) found that the social environment affects the behavior of young drivers. There are great differences in the behavior of novice drivers depending on whether they are driving with family members or with friends. This study also concludes that most driving incivilities are part of games that usually involve the driver and his/her friends. Most existing

research is thus about the road behavior of young people. The reasons behind car ownership and use among young people are seldom addressed. The current study centres on these issues.

### ***The context***

As was indicated at the beginning of the paper, car ownership is very common in Iceland. In 2006, the country ranked number two internationally for the number of cars per 1000 inhabitants. An economic boom, which started with the new millennium, but which ended abruptly in late 2008, resulted in a considerable increase in the registration of new cars. While car imports were more or less suspended following the collapse of the national economy in October 2008, the country maintains its high ranking for car ownership. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2008 there were no fewer than 657 cars per 1000 people in Iceland (Hagstofa Íslands, 2009).

At the end of 2008, there were 209,740 passenger cars registered in Iceland (Table 1). Including vans, trucks, lorries and buses, the total number of motor vehicles was 243,516 for a population of 319,756 (Hagstofa, *Statistics Iceland*, 2008). In 2008, there were 225,777 people aged between 17–75 years of age. Nine out of every ten people in this age group do have a driver licence and the figure for car ownership is similar. These figures speak of a pervasive culture of car ownership and use.

#### **Table 1: Cars and driver licenses in Iceland in 2008**

The reasons for the importance of car use are partially related to the country's geography and history. No alternative transport systems, such as railways, have been developed in Iceland, due to the sparse population and difficult terrain. The car replaced the horse in the last century as the main means of mobility. Urbanisation occurred comparatively late, but today, about two-thirds of the population live in the Greater Reykjavík area. The capital's inhabitants seem to have simply transposed their countryside transport habits to the city. Space was not until recently considered as a scarce resource. Land use planning in the 1960s privileged the car as a main mode of transport. This resulted in a sprawling capital area.

A comprehensive master plan for the city of Reykjavík, covering the period 1962–1983, was decisive for establishing the hegemony of car transportation (Reykjavíkurborg, 1966). As Reynarsson has pointed out, “the main assumptions of the 1962 plan was that every household should have its own automobile. This became the case.” (Reynarsson, 1999: 12). Influenced by modernist planning ideas of the postwar era, the Danish experts who completed the plan developed “an American-based traffic modelling (CAST) scheme” (Reynarsson, 1999: 19) for the city. Other municipalities also started to use this master plan as a model, and likewise developed a transportation system dominated by private motoring.

Recently, city planners and others have begun to acknowledge the limitations of the city’s traffic system. Traffic jams, accidents, noise and air pollution have become issues of concern, along with the large proportion of space allocated to the car system. Recent master plans have addressed this in very general terms (Borgaskipulag Reykjavíkur, 1988, Borgarskipulag Reykjavíkur, 1997, Reykjavíkurborg Skipulags- og byggingarsvið, 2001) but in practice there has been little change to the overall transportation pattern in the city.

### ***The survey***

For data collection, a questionnaire was prepared and submitted to students at high schools in the greater Reykjavík area. Students usually enter high schools at the age of 16 and leave them usually at the age of 20 after they have completed the final exam. As the survey was concerned with novice drivers, the lower age of the respondents was set at 16, which is also the legal age to start driving school in Iceland, and the upper age limit at 21. ~~At this age, most young Icelanders have finished high school and can be seen as fully entering “adult life”.~~ The aim of the questionnaire was to collect data about the relationship between young Icelanders and the automobile, and to capture their opinions about driving. A major part of it was intended to collect quantitative data, such as the extent of driver licences and car ownership, distances and duration of travel between home and school, and the frequency of car use during a week. The

questionnaire also included several qualitative questions and a final part where the respondents could write freely about their experience of cars and driving.

The survey was distributed in randomly selected classrooms in eight high schools of the capital area. Some of those were located in the city centre, whereas others were in the suburbs. The profile of the schools is varied. Some have a vocational or technical component, whereas others offer general preparation for University studies without a specific vocational emphasis. The questionnaire was answered by 553 young people, including 304 females which represent 54% of the respondents and 249 males which represent about 45%. In general, the quantitative results do not show noticeable gender differences. Thus, in the tables that follow, no distinction is made between females and males. The socio-economic background of the respondent was not investigated specifically, but some information could be gathered through different questions. One was concerned with the three main destinations of the respondents. The answer from this question shows that slightly over 50% of the respondent listed work as one of their three main destination (see table 7). This shows the importance of work among high school student and this is generally common for high school students to have a small job on the side while studying. In 2007, 73,1% of students aged between the 16-24 years old had a job along with their studies (Hagstofa Íslands, 2010).

It took on average around 10 to 15 minutes for the respondents to answer the questionnaire. Some of the questions appeared to be more difficult, such as the question which concerned the number of kilometres between the home and the school. Many respondents had to ask their fellow students, their teacher, or the author about distances. It appeared that, before asking, many had a tendency to exaggerate the distance between their home and school.

The last question was an open one, intended to capture the young people's personal thoughts about automobiles and their use, as well as the meanings they attached to their increasing mobility. This took a long time to complete, as they had a lot to say about their cars, the relationship that they have with them, driving and road safety.



## **Results**

### **Driving licence and modal choices**

The majority of the respondents have obtained a driver licence (table 2), including a few who have lost it again having committed some traffic offences. Nearly two of every five did not have a licence exactly when they were answering the questionnaire, but were intending to acquire their licence very soon and were either already attending driving school or intending to do so soon. Finally, less than 2% of the respondents neither had a driver licence nor had any interest in obtaining one.

**Table 2: Holding of driver licences**

The automobile is the first modal choice for the trip between home and school. Almost two out of every three students use the car for their school journey, including both those who drive themselves and those who get a lift with others, e.g. parents (table 3). In comparison, only a fourth makes use of public transportation, half as many walk to school, and only a few ride a bike. In order to better appreciate the modal choice, the respondents who had a driver licence were asked what had been their mode of transport before they obtained their licence. The answers indicate that nearly 40% were then taking the bus, a little fewer were getting a lift with others, and about one out of every four walked to school. These results are interesting when compared with the modal choice after the acquisition of the driver licence. First, they show that the car is an important mode of transport even before the driver licence acquisition. Second, it is clear that bus use drops dramatically with the acquisition of the licence. The bus is the most common mode of transport before, but barely a tenth of the respondents continued to take the bus having gotten the licence to drive. The same applies to walking. As soon as these young people get their driver licence, their modal choice changes in favour of the automobile. A great majority almost seems to have developed an aversion to walking or taking the bus.

**Table 3: Modal choices for the trip between home and school**

### **Car access and ownership**

Concerning car access and ownership (table 4), it is noticeable that nearly three out of every five respondents own their own cars, including even some of those who do not have a driver licence. For example, even 4% of the 16-year olds in the sample own a car. Looking at the reasons for car ownership was one of the goals of the survey.

**Table 4: Car access and ownership**

The answers to the question: "Why do you own a car?" are interesting. They can be divided into four types. These are not mutually exclusive. Figures are given in parentheses just in order to give an idea of the relative weight of each types The most common answer is that they own a car simply "to go from place A to place B" (60%) Many respondents noted that they were just stating the obvious. Several people in this group even stated that this question was stupid, as the answer was evident. The second group concerns the allegedly inefficient public transport system in Reykjavík. Many answers explained that the timetable and frequency are inadequate (15%). They also declared that using the bus to go from one place to another is difficult because of the planning of the bus system. The third group includes those who described that owning a car is, for young people, a synonym for freedom, independence, autonomy and increased potential for mobility (9%). In this same group, several formers bus riders explicated how obtaining a car had been for them a way to simplify their life. in the fourth group of answers, the pleasure, enjoyment and emotional satisfaction of owning a car and driving it is emphasised (12%). Included in this group are those who describe the car as a plaything, or even as a tool with which to dare the police and the others.

### **The distance between home and school**

As explained above, the schools were located in various parts of the capital area. Some of them are in the city centre or in close vicinity and some are in the suburbs of Reykjavík or adjacent municipalities. The location of the school does not make any

difference to the responses. The students at high schools are not obliged to go to the closest one, but can apply to the school that corresponds to the educational expectations. One question focused on the distance between home and school. It appears that the largest group of students – more than a third – live between 1 and 5 kilometres from school (table 5). The second largest group resides between 6-10 kilometres from their school. A bit more than a tenth of the respondents live 1 kilometre from school or closer. More than half of those choose to walk to school (see table 6).

**Table 5: Distance in kilometres between home and school**

The results show that beyond one kilometre or so, distance between home and school is not a factor in modal choice for the home-school trip. Young Icelanders mostly use private motoring as their main transport mode – no fewer than 63.5% of all respondents use cars for their journey between home and school (as drivers or as passengers). Only in two distance categories is the car not the main transportation mode. Only 3 persons out of 545 indicate that they bike to school.

**Table 6: Modal choice & distance between home and school**

### **Most common destinations**

The respondents using a car were asked to list the three places that were their most common destinations, ranked by the frequency of trips. Answers to this question also revealed whether they held a job or not. Working while attending school is very common in Iceland. Ten destinations were proposed beforehand (table 7). If they chose “other destination” the respondents were asked to explain.

**Table 7: Three main destinations**

The three main destinations are school, work and ‘diverse activities’. Justifications of this choices have been made in some cases in response to the last question of the survey. These top three destinations are closely followed by sport and visiting friends. Sport is very important and can be found in one of the three main destinations in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> rank.

Answers regarding the category "other" also gave valuable information. Some choosing this category as one of their principal destinations specified *rúntur*, which is the Icelandic version of car cruising. It shows the importance of this activity for young driver who when asked, eventually consider it as one of their main destinations.

As mentioned before, the respondents were not asked directly whether they were working or not. However, about 15% of the respondents stated their workplace as one of their three main destinations, and it was mostly ranked second. Work for wages is indeed an important part of the life of young drivers. However, none of the respondents said that they were working because they financially needed it for living. It should be recalled that the survey was undertaken in 2007, when the Icelandic economy was booming. The ones who mentioned it said they were working in order to be able to afford their car. For example: "It is important to own a car but the gasoline is all time expensive and you have to work a lot for it. You are tired after a working day and it has consequences when you go back to school" (male, 18 years old). The respondent is stressing the importance of owning a car and the consequences of a working life while at school.

The car gives those young people the opportunity to cope with their personal activities, like going to school, to do sports, pursuing their interests in music, and visiting friends. They also use it much in a certain contexts, such as that of the *rúntur*: it is a social tool.

### **Car cruising: The *rúntur***

Car cruising can be defined as driving in a specific area for an extended period without a specific purpose (Best, 2006: 198). The Icelandic *rúntur* is a specific form of car cruising. Any driver in Iceland has (literally) been down this path at some stage in his/her driving life. It is an important phenomenon in many towns in Iceland, especially but not exclusively among young people. The *rúntur* can be defined as a socio-spatial activity that primarily consists of driving around and looking for friends. Young people consider this as a way to express their newly-acquired freedom afforded by the driver licence but also to access spaces that they are not suppose to access because of their age. thus because The legal drinking age in Iceland is 21 which restricts the access to

bars and clubs to anyone under the age of 21. The *rúntur* can be distinguished from regular driving, because the goal is not to go anywhere in particular, but eventually to be seen by others. There is usually a popular route (a strip) along which most cruisers will drive slowly, bumper-to-bumper, through town. In the survey, several people directly mentioned the *rúntur* in their answers about their reason for car ownership. Knowing the importance of this phenomenon in Iceland, three questions about it were included in the questionnaire. In the first of these, the participants were asked directly whether they took part in the *rúntur*. No less than a third of them do so on a regular basis. The second question was whether they were doing this alone or in group. Nine out of ten said they went cruising with friends, and very few that they went cruising alone (table 8).

### **Table 8: Car cruising**

The third question was “Why do you go cruising?” The respondents could write their own answers, which turned out to complement previous answers to the question about the reason behind car ownership. These answers can be grouped in several categories. Figures are given in parentheses just in order to give an idea of their relative weight in the answer.

First, many respondents emphasise the pleasure and fun of the *rúntur* and of driving more generally (64%). This pleasure must be shared. That is why friends are important when going cruising. Chatting is part of the fun, and being on the *rúntur* gives the opportunity to talk about important matters with friends. In this category, I also put those who describe the enjoyment of speeding, daring and making fun of the “fat cops”, to use the words of some respondents.

The second category includes those who explained that they go car cruising because they have nowhere to go and nothing to do on Saturday evening, and they are just killing time by driving 21%. They explain that there is no fun staying at home on weekend nights, and that because they do not want to be at home with their parents or at their friends' parents, they take the car and go for a ride downtown.

The third category of answers depicts the *rúntur* as a social and technological experience 15%. For the social part, cruising is a way to visually experience the weekend nightlife. Many respondents explain that they just go cruising in order to watch

the city centre and the people there. The *rúntur* is like a field trip; a social learning experience. As for the previous category, friends are important, but even more important are potential encounters: other friends and relatives, and most important, potential sexual partners. Many boys explain that they go cruising to meet and pick up girls. Some girls also mention the possibility to meet boys while cruising. Cruising is also a technological experience; a way to strengthen the connection of the young driver to his/her machine and to improve skills and abilities, such as gear changes in slow traffic.

Two things could be added, concerning all the categories in general. In their answers, many respondents wrote “ice-cream trip” and explained that the car trip was a pretext for buying ice cream, and vice-versa. This is usually another word for *rúntur*. The second thing concerns what could be called the “soundscape of car cruising”. Many respondents point out the importance of music. Car cruising seems to be a musical experience. In one of the numerous answers describing car cruising in this way, it was stated that *Bohemian rhapsody* by Queen is the perfect piece of music for the *rúntur*. Car cruising is thus important for young people for several reasons. The activity appears to be a popular way to experience the city’s nocturnal landscape and people.

### **Opinions about cars and transport**

In the last question before the “free expression” part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked about their degree of agreement with several different statements XXXX. The questions were divided into two different types; first, general statements about the car, driving and road safety; and second, personal statements, for instance “I am using the car too much”. I will here draw attention to the general conclusions, but not review all statements in detail. No noticeable difference was found between males and females, except for a question related to safety. It seems that young males are more inclined to driving at illegal speeds than are young females.

**Figure 1: Opinions about cars and driving (see attached excel document ICNODI)**

Young people are aware of the expenses associated with the automobile. No fewer than 89% agree or strongly agree with the statement that cars are expensive to maintain. The respondents also acknowledge the responsibilities accompanying the automobile, as only 21% of them agree with the statement that it is okay to drive over the speed limit and 56% disagree or strongly disagree with that statement (23% neither agree nor disagree). Furthermore, 54% think that the police should be more strict with drivers. The last figure I want to point out regarding the general statements is that 52% of my respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that the public transport system in Reykjavík is bad.

The personal statements provide important information about the feelings of young drivers about driving: Some 85% strongly agree or agree that it is important for them to have a driver licence and 60% consider that it is important to own a car. Concerning an even more personal statement, 54% agree or strongly agree that they feel independent because of the car. Additionally, 70% strongly agree or agree that personal car ownership will give them independence, and 69% strongly agree or agree that the car gives them freedom.

The last part of the questionnaire gave the respondents the opportunity to write anything they wanted about cars and driving. The answers were prolific and varied, showing that young people have much to say about these issues. There are some general traits and main themes concerns, such as the gain in potential freedom and mobility; the necessity to have a car in modern life; their relief to finally have the driver licence and/or a car; the importance of car cruising; and how much these youths love their cars. Perhaps one of the most surprising recurring comments is the young people's concern about safety.

First of all some respondents claimed that they were tired of being the group which was the focus of traffic safety measures and police controls. Some described how some aged drivers and owners of big SUVs were all the time committing driving incivilities and getting away with it, even when the police witnessed it. Many had strong thoughts on the subject: "Policemen should be more strict with drivers who drive recklessly" (female, 19 years old) or "I think that policemen should be more dedicated to

seize driver licences. There are too many stupid people that should not be driving out there” (male, 18 years old). The respondents acknowledge the fact that they might be young and inexperienced on the road, but they at least know the traffic rules – rules that are, according to them, easily forgotten by older and more experienced drivers. Many of them explain that it would be beneficial to rise the age of the driver licence to 18 years and say that they feel that at 17 one is a bit too young and not ready to drive.: “Car are important but I think that raising the driving age of about 2 years because of the number of car accident among young people” (female, 18 yr old). It follows the recommendation of the OECD report on the raising of the driving age. (OECD/ECMT Transport Research Centre, 2006) and shows that if the measure was ever taken in Iceland, it might not be as unpopular as it seems. Some of the respondent explained that they are cautious because they are novices and point out that after 10 years of driving experience people start to be less careful, especially if they own a big car, such as an SUV. Many of them give the example of their parents and even in some cases denounce their bad road behaviour. Some of them even suggested that drivers should at least retake the theoretical driving test every five years in order to refresh their knowledge: “It would be nice to renew the driver license more than one time and not only after the first two years or when people get too old to drive. People forgot very rapidly traffic rules” (male, 19 yr old). Those statements contrast with the image of young drivers given by previous studies especially the one concerning Icelandic novice drivers (Mogensen et al., 2000; Briem et al., 2004).

## **Discussion**

The objective of this paper was to investigate how individuals enter the regime of automobility through an analysis of young people in Reykjavík, Iceland. Their entry in the regime exposes a particular moment, where individuals consider their own personal mobile experience and its conditions. Additionally, an examination of their entry casts light on the weakness of the regime and opens up new perspectives on the concept of automobility in itself and a new outlook on young drivers.



One of the main outcomes of the results is the respondents' emphasis on realism and responsibility. Young people in the Reykjavík area seem to be very practical and critical when it comes to cars. As the results of the survey showed, cars are their main transportation mode. Young people are fully aware of their benefits, yet they are also conscious of their costs. Many of them declared that they were using cars not by choice but by necessity, and that if they had another efficient choice they will certainly opt for it, thus questioning the past planning decisions. They are keen to make what seem the most appropriate choices concerning their own mobility according to the conditions in which they find themselves: an overarching car-culture. Entering the regime of automobility and using a car in this context is a form of spatial empowerment as it allows them to enter and become actors in spaces designed, organized and shaped for a certain type of spatial movements.

It gives the novice drivers the opportunity to go wherever they want whenever they want. It empowers them socially as well. Cars in Iceland like in many other places have great social value, and hence they are used as a tool for social interaction and to access social spaces, such as the ones of *rúntur*. The *rúntur* is a mobile experience and is part of the driver's history and identity, its construction and affirmation. It is an occasion for encounters and for the sharing of places. It is a way to signify one's belonging to the regime of automobility. This raises some interesting questions about the transmission of car culture and automobility.

Car ownership and use is symptomatic of the social aspects of automobility in Iceland. When opting to use a car, young people adopt a whole set of values attached to the car and by extension the values of automobility. When asked why they owned a car, many of them mentioned "freedom". Cars are represented as the epitome of freedom, autonomy and mobility (Sheller and Urry, 2000; Urry, 2004; Edensor, 2004). One could claim that young people are simply reproducing, socially and spatially, behaviours that they do observe from their parents and pairs; that their entry in the regime of automobility is conditioned long before their actual access to it. A parallel could be made with the idea of Bianchi and Summala about the "genetics of driving" (2003). This

idea should not only concern road incivility, but could also be used to investigate the systemic nature of automobility and the realities underwriting modal choice.

Even if they are avid participants in the regime of automobility, young people are extremely critical toward it. They question as well how the regime expresses itself. This is based on two things: first, their own position within the regime, and second, their own personal mobile experience. Young people are very conscious of the position they occupy in the regime. Their comments concerning road safety, for example, underlined this: a group of individuals subjected to special surveillance, who have to prove that they do have the right to be part of the regime, even if they have a driver licence or adopt and practice its values and norms. In addition, their comments about road safety demonstrate that they feel excluded and that their personal mobility is somehow restrained. This shows that the regime is very exclusive, even with regard to its own members, and that all drivers are not equal. On a more practical note, their comments also shows the limitations of road safety studies and campaigns in Iceland and probably in some other places around the world, insofar as there may be too much focus on young drivers and not enough on others. Novice drivers' demand for stricter rules and police is a call for a more responsible automobility and for more equality within the regime; equality that would improve the safety of all. Their personal mobile experiences reflect how one's entry in the regime of automobility is conditioned.

Concerning their own personal experience, their goal is to be able to go from A to B in the most efficient way possible. This journey is conditioned by numerous factors, both personal and structural ones (age, gender, work, geographical location, availability of transport etc.). In the present situation, in which they find themselves, the car simply offers them the best opportunity to be autonomous and mobile, in other word to be *automobile*. Other transport modes are denigrated, yet this does not mean that they are not open to them. Most of the respondents had been bus users before starting to drive and today many of them harshly condemn the public transport system of Reykjavík for its inefficiency. They switched from one transport mode to another because the previous one was not sufficient enough for them anymore. This is part of their mobile experience.

Their criticisms are also focused on their actual practices and their place within the regime. Many of them pointed out that they think that there are too many cars in Iceland; that people are using them too much, including themselves; and that too many people are driving alone; yet they are also calling for a change. This opens up new perspectives on automobility in Iceland and in other places.

Because of their status of new comers, novice drivers are a good source of information. Yet, most studies have mainly focused on their accident rates, analysed their road incivility and pointed out their inexperience. The goals of those studies were to find ways to increase road safety. They looked at ways of improving car transportation by making it safer for all its users, which is an honourable cause. Those studies have only looking at ways to reinforce an exclusive car orientated form of automobility. They enlightened some of the weaknesses of the car system and tried to propose solutions yet they have failed to question the car system in itself.

Too few researches have been made on young's people and driver modal choices and the reason behind it. The results from the survey showed that important information can be obtained by looking at young driver modal choices and as it is the case here, their driving habits. Those informations could be used to improve the car system in itself or even help to develop other transport modes. The results from this study of Icelandic novice drivers showed that other kind of information could be extracted from novice drivers' experience of mobility and their modal choices. Because of their status of newcomers and their shift from one transport mode to another, novice drivers represent an opportunity to learn about past, present and future mobilities. More researches should be made on novice drivers and their mobile experience. The findings from the survey showed that novice drivers could be considered as a tool to assess transport systems by looking at why they are leaving one transport system or mode to another and what do they expect for their future modal choices. Looking at those issues could lead to reconsider the current regime of automobility and maybe help to develop other forms of it.

Young people crave for autonomy and mobility. As discussed above, those who were the focus of this article have adopted mobile practices centred on the car. This is how they do express automobility in the current moment. Even so, they are asking for other solutions and are considering their future mobile options. This tells us that there might be other ways to express automobility and that the regime should not only revolve around one transport mode. Perhaps we should start to talk in the plural about *automobilities*.

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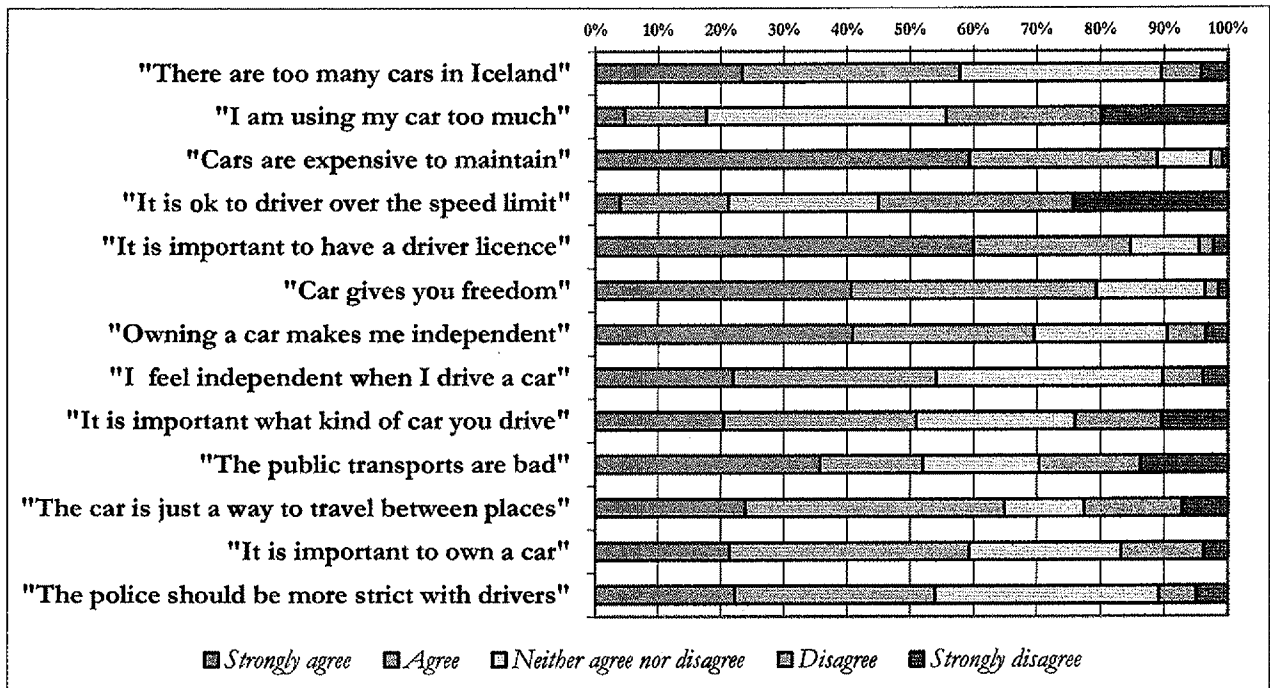
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**Figures** Figure1: Opinions about cars and driving. (See attached excel file ICNODI)

**Figure 1: Icelandic novice drivers opinions**



**Data set for figure 1 in %**

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
"There are too many cars in iceland"	23,4	34,5	31,6	6,3	4,2
"I am using my car too much"	4,7	13	38	24,4	19,9
"Cars are expensive to maintain"	59,4	29,5	8,4	1,8	0,9
"It is ok to driver over the speed iimit"	4	17,2	23,8	30,7	24,3
"It is important to have a driver ilicence"	60	24,7	10,8	2,2	2,3
"Car gives you freedom"	40,7	38,7	17	2,1	1,5
"Owning a car makes me independent"	40,9	28,6	21	6	3,5
"I feel independent when I drive a car"	22	32,1	35,7	6,3	3,9
"It is important what kind of car you drive"	20,5	30,5	25	13,6	10,4
"The public transports are bad"	35,8	16,2	18,4	15,8	13,8
"The car is just a way to travel between places"	23,9	41	12,6	15,3	7,2
"It is important to own a car"	21,4	37,9	24	12,9	3,8
"Tthe police should be more strlct with drivers"	22,2	31,8	35,2	5,8	5



## Tables

**Table 1: Cars and driver licenses in Iceland in 2008**

Cars* per 1000 inhabitants	657
Cars per 1000 inhabitants aged 17–75**	929
Driver licences per 1000 inhabitants aged 17–75	903

\* Up to 8 passengers, including jeeps.

\*\* Minimum age of driver licence is 17. After age 75, drivers have to renew their licence annually.

Source: Hagstofa Íslands, 2008

**Table 2: Holding of driver licences**

	n	%
Does have a driving license	320	57.8
Had a driving license, but lost it	5	0.9
Intending to get a driving license soon	218	39.5
Not interested in having a driving license	10	1.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>553</i>	<i>100</i>

**Table 3: Modal choices for the trip between home and school**

	Drive self		Get a lift		Bus		Bike		Walk		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	
<b>All respondents:</b>	219	40.0	132	23.5	131	23.7	3	0.5	88	12.3	540
<b>Those with a driver licence:</b>											
Before	.	.	138	36.2	145	38.4	7	1.8	89	23.4	379
After	214	67.0	48	15.0	30	9.4	0	0	27	8.4	319

**Table 4: Car access and ownership**

	Own car		Parent's car		No car		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Those with a driver licence	197	62	109	35	9	3	315
Those without a licence	28	41	14	21	26	38	68
<i>Total</i>	229	59	123	32	39	9	391

**Table 5: Distance in kilometres between home and school**

Distance Home-School	< 1 km		1-5 km		6-10 km		11-15 km		16-20 km		> 20 km		Total	
	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
<b>All respondents</b>	63	11.6	185	34	173	31.8	71	13	26	4.8	27	5	545	100

**Table 6: Modal choice & distance between home and school**

	< 1 km		1-5 km		6-10 km		11-15 km		16-20 km		> 20 km		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Drive self</b>	19	30.2	66	35.7	75	43.4	32	45.1	13	50	9	33.3	214	39.3
<b>Get a lift</b>	9	14.3	45	24.3	49	28.3	17	23.9	4	15.4	8	29.6	132	24.2
<b>Take the bus</b>	0	0	41	22.2	47	27.2	22	31	9	34.6	10	37	129	23.7
<b>Bike</b>	1	1.6	2	1.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.6
<b>Walk</b>	34	54	31	16.8	2	1.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	67	12.3
<b>Total</b>	63	100	185	100	173	100	71	100	26	100	27	100	545	100
<b>Total Cars</b>	28	44.4	111	60	124	71.7	49	69	17	65.4	17	63	346	63.5

**Table 7: Three main destinations**

	1 <sup>st</sup> rank		2 <sup>nd</sup> rank		3 <sup>rd</sup> rank	
	N	%	n	%	n	%
<b>School</b>	272	61.5	45	10.3	19	4.3
<b>Shopping mall</b>	8	1.8	26	5.9	26	5.9
<b>Grocery store</b>	7	1.6	17	3.9	45	10.3
<b>Friends' home</b>	52	11.8	73	16.7	59	13.4
<b>Sport</b>	42	9.5	76	17.4	41	9.3
<b>Workplace</b>	22	5	89	20.4	87	19.4
<b>Downtown</b>	6	1.4	22	5.0	20	4.6
<b>Family</b>	1	0.2	23	5.3	40	9.1
<b>Diverse activities</b>	15	3.4	49	11.2	83	18.9
<b>Other</b>	17	3.8	22	5	22	5.5
<b>Total</b>	442	100.0	442	100	442	100

**Table 8: Car cruising**

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>All respondents:</b>		
Do go cruising	414	77.2
Do not go cruising	122	22.8
<i>Total answers</i>	<i>536</i>	<i>100</i>
<b>Those who go cruising:</b>		
With friends	400	96.6
Alone	14	3.3
<i>Total answers</i>	<i>414</i>	<i>100</i>