

7.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE OF TRAVEL POLICIES

Travel policies of organisations mostly follow this pattern: the cheapest and fastest way to travel will be refunded. This often supports the current norm of flying for convenience, and forces people to take the plane even if they don't want to. However, individuals and organisations are now increasingly challenging this way of doing things, and many bottom-up initiatives within organisations are currently developing more sustainable travel policies.

As the detrimental climate effects of flying become more evident, many organisations and businesses are starting to consider what role they can play through fostering sustainable travel practices. 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). Such travel policies can complement top-down approaches like taxes, restrictions or bans, by raising awareness about the negative impact of flying and by initiating changes in norms and behaviour within organisations. They can also be seen as a bottom-up political action to create conditions for institutional change (e.g. regulations and norms) more generally.

The development of progressive, broad and strict travel policies has begun to occur in many places. However, it seems that academic and research institutions are particularly ahead on these development, and even more so, departments working on climate change and sustainability. However, we also find examples of progressive travel policies in a wider range of sectors, including municipalities (e.g. Malmö), cultural centres (e.g. Helsingborg concert hall), the media (e.g. Politiken, one of the largest Danish daily newspapers), public organisations (e.g. BBC Worldwide) or private firms (e.g. Lush, Novo Nordisk).

The types of travel policies, however, vary considerably. Many organisations have some kind of general environ-

mental certification, such as EMAS or ISO 4001. The problem with many of these certifications is that they do not specifically address flying or transport, nor strategies to cut emissions. Other organisations focus on economic incentives, like internal offsetting or subsidies (e.g. UCLA). Offsetting emissions from flights is one of the preferred measures. It imposes higher costs, but means no real change in behaviours and policies. According to several studies it is basically useless in terms of emissions reductions (see **Info Box 5**).

A progressive travel policy is a policy that aims to reduce emissions. Within organisations which have an active policy with respect to travelling, there are typically 3 types of policies (according to degrees of enforcement):

- *allowing* employees to take the time needed to travel by train (and pay any extra costs),
- *actively encouraging* environmentally friendly travel or less travel, or
- *imposing* more sustainable travel arrangements – that is, enforced internal rules.

In the following, a focus will be put on the latter kind of policies.

Ghent University is an example of an organisation which has adopted an organisation-wide travel policy with some absolute and enforced internal rules that imposes certain limits on staff's travel. For example, it has banned reimbursements for plane travel to any location that is accessible by a six-hour train ride. Similarly, BBC Worldwide's travel policy stated in 2009 that staff are only permitted to fly if train travel adds more than three hours to the journey.¹ Another example is the German initiative *Einfach Jetzt Machen*² featuring companies that promise to avoid domestic flights and flying for distances shorter than 1000 km. A best practice example of an organisation that has developed an elaborate, strict and awareness-raising travel policy, comes from LUCSUS (Lund University Centre for Sustainability).³ A two year process led to the adaptation of a travel policy in December 2018. The adopted travel policy aims to reduce emissions while also creating awareness and ownership to one's own process of reducing flying, and involves, amongst other things, a structured decision tree to help employees in this process. Other organisations focus on aspects such as including visiting guests in addition to staff and management in their travel policies. Some also focus on work-life balance, i.e. they encourage and reward avoided personal flying by giving extra days off for travelling slow during holidays (e.g. Weiber Wirtschaft or 1010uk.org).

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF PROMOTING CHANGE IN TRAVEL POLICIES

For many organisations, travelling is by far the largest contributor to their carbon footprint, and implementing progressive travel policies could make a substantive contribution to reducing them. Hence, the motivational aspect is clearly present, and in practical terms, it is also a feasible measure. Instead of waiting for collective top-down measures (arguing that general regulation is more effective) or that others should go first, developing an organisational travel policy is available to everyone.

In practice, progressive travel policies are often initiated by the staff themselves in what can be termed an internal bottom-up process. This can have the advantage, compared to more managerially imposed internal policies, of creating more ownership of the organisation's travel policy. Existing examples show that only a few employees can achieve much within their organisations. However, for this to happen, it is necessary to overcome the belief that individual/small scale solutions do not matter.

Additionally, the managerial level of organisations have discovered that developing progressive travel policies is an opportunity for them to be 'climate leaders'. Organisations can inspire and influence others simply by being examples and role models in their respective sectors and showing what is possible. Ideally, they also engage more actively, in ways such as making the issue of travel policy more visible and creating pressure in their sector for other organisations to follow suit. Interesting examples

include initiatives like *Einfach Jetzt Machen*,⁴ individuals pledging not to fly for work,⁵ or, in the academic sector, *#flyingless*⁶ and *No Fly Climate Sci.*⁷ Another example of bringing visibility to the way we travel is the idea of the European Society for Conservation Biology, which gives an award to the person(s) who have travelled in the most environmentally friendly way to their biannual conference.

Organisations can become ambassadors for broader policy changes that are necessary to reduce flying on a societal level. Changing internal practices helps raise awareness. Staff who are forced to change their travel practices at work might transfer their new experiences and awareness to their private lives. Organisations can also push for regulations that makes progressive travel policies mandatory for everyone. They can work politically to address obstacles that become obvious as they try to change travel habits at the organisational level. Such obstacles include public travel refund laws, travel policies of funding institutions, and the general shortcomings of alternative modes of transport (see **chapter 6**).

For example, public sector bodies and other organisations receiving public funding in Germany (e.g. universities, NGOs) cannot freely choose their own travel policies, as they must follow the centrally decided travel policy (the *Bundesreisekostengesetz*⁸). Centrally changing public sector travel regulations would have a huge impact on overall emissions since these policies often inspire other organisations' travel policies.

Finally, developing and promoting progressive travel policies need to happen within a broader discourse, which also questions the necessity of business trips. In person work meetings could be converted to online conferences (see **chapter 6**). This also means that competences and infrastructures must be formed within organisations (skill and knowledge sharing) that enable employees to participate in meetings virtually. It also means a change of norms regarding how to conduct business meetings. For the organisation travelling less it can save costs, and for employees, it would afford more time at home and less stress. There is also a gender dimension to this: as men generally fly more, reducing flying can also make care work conditions more even.

Fostering train travel can result in a direct advantage for staff: the time on a train can be used for work or exchange with colleagues (working conditions there are generally better than on planes), trips are only taken as necessary (the overall amount of travelling is reduced, therefore there is an improvement of the work-life-balance), and with trains you usually arrive directly into city centres causing less stress with security checks. Regarding train travel, the development of awareness and competences amongst employees has to be supported (e.g. regarding how to get from A to B, how to find the cheapest option, how to plan meetings in a way that everyone can attend by taking the train, how to work on trains, etc.).

The main disadvantage with respect to achieving wide implementation of sustainable travel policies is that they are (so far) voluntary measures. Implementation depends on the goodwill of organisations, meaning it can end up being the progressive and ecological ones who lead the way, while big business continue with their emissions intensive and high-speed practices. There is also a potential for sustainable travel policies being misused for greenwashing and PR.

STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING PROGRESSIVE TRAVEL POLICIES

Promoting the implementation of sustainable or fly-less travel policies can be a way to engage actors who want to make a contribution to reducing their carbon footprint without having to wait for policy changes from above. Putting in place or changing organisational travel policies is a bottom-up measure which can be combined with other public policy initiatives, thus supplementing the top-down measures discussed in previous chapters.

Strategies for fostering progressive travel policies should focus on two main issues:

1. supporting the introduction of progressive travel policies within organisations, that is, travel policies which enforce flying less policies;
2. supporting organisations who aim to spread good practices, inspire peers, and who push for stronger regulation to address aviation growth and, more generally, the climate crisis.

Campaigns might focus on how companies and other organisations can reduce their environmental footprint through progressive travel policies. Although the most progressive travel policies seem to have been developed through internal bottom-up processes by a few engaged people, we could also envision a larger role for local trade unions as an alternative way of pushing for more progressive travel policies from within organisations.

Shaming campaigns, like the Swedish #flygskam, can have large impacts on behaviours and impact the public discourse. Still, there might be as much to gain from highlighting and promoting best practices, and facilitating learning between organisations and initiatives. By exposing best practices, organisations can inspire and learn from each other. A range of examples exist from which to draw inspiration and build upon. Campaigns could also appeal to organisations who want to be in the forefront in terms of addressing climate change, and help distinguish those who make genuine contributions from those who might use the travel policy as a greenwashing strategy. In this case, commitment at the management level is imperative. The *Let's Stay Grounded!* campaign aims to collect pledges from organisations to change their travel policies by reaching out to NGOs, universities, cities, mi-

nistries, trade unions and companies and proposing concrete measures to reduce flights in their institutions. Best practice examples will be shown on the campaign platform.⁹

In particular, campaigns could identify and support those organisations who work beyond their own organisation by sharing examples and pushing for change at the policy level. A concrete case to draw inspiration from, in this regard, is the former smoking policy in Denmark: workplaces of a certain size were obliged to formulate a smoking policy (the public did not interfere with the content of this internal policy, it just demanded that a policy was formulated). We could explore whether something similar might be a first step on the way to more top-down restrictions on organisations' travel habits.

Campaign efforts should also address large corporations and national public sector bodies, who would have significant aggregate effects on emissions if they changed their travel policies.

An important part of a 'changing travel policy' campaign is to link to wider questions of systemic change. This would entail not only promoting restrictions on short-haul flights, but to raise awareness about travelling more generally. To what extent is business travel necessary?

There is a range of actors to involve in the promotion of more progressive travel policies. One group to reach out to is journalists—to encourage critical journalism that can write about the whole range of issues related to the topic. Another actor is trade unions. In particular the issues of health and stress related to travel, should be a topic of common interest, but also trade unions should be involved in contributing to establish more progressive travel policies.

Travel agencies are notoriously bad at providing good information on non-flying travel alternatives. It is a skill to learn to travel differently and take the train again, a practice which was normal for business trips until the 1970s. In this regard, sustainable travel agencies have an important role to play.

There is also a need for more research. For example: does sustainable travel necessarily mean higher travel costs and more time spent on travelling in total? This seems to be the general perception, but there is also evidence pointing against it. Maybe it is as simple as this: slower travel = less travelling = lower costs?

Another area in need of further development, is emission calculators related to travelling. Both better data and improved methods are necessary to ensure that calculating the climate impact from aviation take into account non-CO₂ related impacts. The issue links to another accounting and reporting issue, namely, what kind of emissions do companies and organisations account for in their environmental reports: only direct emission, or also indirect

emissions? In France, for example, companies with more than 500 employees are required to report their carbon emissions, but only the direct ones. A campaign for progressive travel policies, should challenge this rule and general practice.

FURTHER READINGS

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.

de Decker, Kris (2017). *Why do Business People Travel?* <http://www.demand.ac.uk/why-do-business-people-travel/> (with a lot of other resources in the literature list)

Kimberly, N. and 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>

LUCSUS - Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies (2018). *LUCSUS Travel Policy*. https://www.lucus.lu.se/sites/lucus.lu.se/files/lucus_travel_policy.pdf

Wynes, S. and et al. (2019). *Academic Air Travel Has a Limited Influence on Professional Success*. In: *Journal of Cleaner Production* 226: 959-967.

1 The Guardian (2009)

2 Einfach jetzt machen (n.d.)

3 LUCSUS (2018)

4 Einfach jetzt machen (n.d.)

5 Loving the Atmosphere (n.d.)

6 Academics Flying Less (n.d.)

7 No Fly Climate Sci (n.d.)

8 Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz (2005)

9 Stay Grounded (2019c)



INFO BOX 5: EMISSIONS OFFSETTING— A MODERN SALE OF INDULGENCES

Offsetting emissions from flights is a popular measure amongst organisations trying to implement more sustainable travel policies. However, offsets generally means no real change in behaviours and policies, and is virtually useless in terms of emissions reductions.¹

Offsetting projects can involve generating energy from methane (which is produced in large quantities in industrial livestock farming) or building hydropower plants that claim to prevent production of energy from fossil fuels. Forest conservation projects and operators of tree plantations can also sell such offset credits representing supposedly achieved emission savings for the aviation industry.

Studies show that a majority of projects miscalculate their savings. Öko-Institut investigated the effectiveness of existing offsetting projects for the European Commission and concluded that only 2% of the offset projects have a high probability of resulting in additional emissions reduction.² If for example a hydropower plant is being built anyway, such a project should not be eligible for selling carbon credits, which in turn allow others to pollute more.

Additionally, offsetting projects are largely located in the Global South and often lead to local conflicts or land grabbing. This is especially the case with land or forest-based projects like REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation).³ Often, small-holders and indigenous people are restricted to use the forest in their ancestral way in order to store the predicted amounts of carbon in the trees. Ultimately, offsetting is unjust and a form of carbon colonialism.

To enable a small share of the world population to fly indefinitely with a clear environmental conscience, others bear the costs: people whose emissions are often already very low, whose historical contribution to climate change is negligible, and who are already experiencing the impacts of the climate crisis. Some have argued that if we make offsetting possible only as a 'last resort,' and try to offset emissions locally (for example in the local town or even inside the organisation), we do not contribute to further injustice. However, the fact remains that offsetting then becomes a license to pollute and help preserve the status quo. In this way, offsetting *prevents* the necessary fundamental changes of our mobility system.

¹ Stay Grounded (2017)

² See e.g. Cames et al. (2016)

³ WRM (2014)