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Understanding flight free travel

Charlie Zajicek

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of MSc(R) Global Environmental Challenges in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, February 2022

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Abstract

Over the last 50 years air travel has become the norm, to the extent that air travel now accounts for around 12% of household emissions in the UK (Carmichael, 2019). A relatively new movement has emerged around flying less and not flying, whose practitioners choose to stay on the ground instead of travelling by air because of aviation's impact on climate change. While much is known about why air travellers are resistant to flying less, very little is known about people who choose to fly less. This thesis analyses meanings of flight free travel from a mobilities and social practices perspective, to compare conventional understandings of air travel with understandings of flight free travel. A mixed-methods approach is used to show how popular representations of flight free travel are characterised in UK newspaper media and how these changed between 2003-2019. This is complemented by a thematic discourse analysis of all blogs on Flight Free UK, a prominent flight free campaigning website. The results of both studies indicate that the practice of flight free travel shares many of the same meanings as the practice of air travel, however, flight free travel is also deeply tied into environmental and moralising narratives that don't exist in understandings of air travel. Insofar as these meanings of flight free travel and air travel are shared, this study suggests that flight free travel is starting to be understood in terms of conventional travel – a finding that supports evidence that staying on the ground narratives are beginning to destabilise contemporary cultures of aeromobility. Future research might consider further exploring the interlocking elements of flight free travel with childcare, work practices and moments of disruption, to develop possible sites for intervention.

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Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: CHARLIE ZAJICEK DATE: 21/02/2022

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When governments signed the Paris Agreement in 2015, they agreed to limit the rise of global greenhouse gas emissions to 2°C, making efforts to limit the rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels (UNFCCC, 2015). Governments settled on a plan of delivering increasingly ambitious national emission reduction plans every few years. While the Paris Agreement was a landmark moment in the global effort to tackle climate change, the implementation of the Paris Agreement has, so far, been weak (United Nations Environment Programme, 2020; UNFCCC, 2021). On current policies, the world is heading for a temperature increase of around 2.7°C by 2100 (Climate Action Tracker, 2021). The difference between 1.5°C and 2°C of global temperature rise is well documented in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s Special Report on 1.5°C, which reveals that the 0.5°C warming would see a dramatic increase in climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, water, food security and economic growth. The same research reports that on current trajectories, the world will hit the 1.5°C limit by 2030 (IPCC, 2018).

The Paris Agreement's greenhouse gas emissions accounting mechanism is complex. Nationally-determined emission reduction plans – or 'NDCs' – only cover emissions that originate from a country (UNFCCC, 2015). This means that NDCs do not include emissions from international aviation and shipping, which are notoriously difficult to regulate since they often fall into the gap between country pledges. These sectors contribute vast amounts of greenhouse gas emissions: aviation contributes around 2% of global greenhouse gas emissions (European Commission, 2019); while international shipping is responsible for around 2.5% of total emissions (European Commission, 2016).

These percentages may seem low, but they mask some important truths. First, emissions from both sectors are predicted to rapidly accelerate by 2050: shipping by between 50% - 250% and aviation by 200%, from a 2015 baseline (European Commission, 2016, 2019). The estimated rise in aviation emissions will come from increased passenger demand, which, pre-COVID-19, was predicted to rise on average 4.1% a year between 2015-2045 (ICAO, 2018). In this scenario some have estimated that the share of aviation emissions in global emissions could increase to 27% by 2045 (Pidcock and Yeo, 2016). Second, while aviation may only be around 2% of global emissions, it's a much larger proportion of household emissions. In the UK, aviation emissions account for approximately 12% of total household emissions, making up a disproportionately large share of our personal 'carbon footprints' (Carmichael, 2019). It is worth noting that this doesn't hold true for all UK citizens, or indeed citizens in other countries. Most flights are taken by a relative minority. Recent research from climate charity Possible revealed that:

- 15% of the population in the UK takes 70% of flights;

- 22% of the population in Canada takes 73% of flights;
- 8% of the population in The Netherlands takes 42% of flights;
- 1% of the population in India takes 45% of flights; and
- 5% of the population in China takes 40% of flights (Hopkinson and Cairns, 2021).

In the UK, around half the population does not fly abroad at all in a normal year (Department for Transport, 2020) and the UK's frequent flyers tend to be higher earners (Büchs and Mattioli, 2021). A survey from the Civil Aviation Authority found that the two most influential variables for predicting the number of leisure trips were home ownership abroad and a household income of over £115,000 (Rutherford, 2011). These findings point to air travel as an equity issue – it's a wealthy minority who fly frequently that are having a disproportionate impact on greenhouse gas emissions (Gössling *et al.*, 2012; Hopkinson and Cairns, 2021).

There are mechanisms being developed to tackle aviation and shipping emissions. The United Nations has put the International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO) in charge of tackling emissions from aviation and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) for shipping. ICAO is taking steps to reduce aviation emissions through emissions trading, carbon offsetting and using more efficient fuels and fleets (ICAO, 2019). One of these measures is CORSIA, the Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation. CORSIA aims to “stabilise CO₂ emissions at 2020 levels by requiring airlines to offset the growth of their emissions after 2020” (European Commission, 2019). If successful, CORSIA will be a positive step towards reducing international aviation emissions in line with Paris Agreement goals, but there is uncertainty around the effectiveness of CORSIA's carbon accounting mechanism, how it will be implemented and whether it can deliver emissions reductions fast enough (Bannon, 2019; Higham, Ellis and Maclaurin, 2019; Transport & Environment, 2020). Moreover, progress in real-terms emissions reductions so far has been slow (Bows-Larkin, 2015) and even accounting for a slow recovery from COVID-19, recent research has suggested that CORSIA “will surpass the climate target set to support the 1.5 °C goal between 2025 and 2064 with a 90% likelihood” (Grewe *et al.*, 2021, p. 2).

The driving force behind the growth in greenhouse gas emissions is global consumption of goods and services (Alfredsson *et al.*, 2018). In the UK, emissions from consumption outweigh emissions from production (Ritchie and Roser, 2017; Committee on Climate Change, 2018). In theory, if overall levels of consumption of goods and services could drop and the country were to shift towards more sustainable consumption, this could go a long way to reducing carbon emissions (Southerton and Welch, 2018). This thesis is set against a backdrop of an emerging movement of people voluntarily choosing to ‘go flight free’ for environmental reasons (Timperley, 2019). Against a lack of policies to

make consumption more sustainable, this voluntary movement embodies the sort of shift that is required for sustainable and equitable consumption. As such, my thesis seeks to connect the debates on sustainable consumption and air travel, to understand how a voluntary shift away from air travel and towards flight free travel might take place. Specifically, the aims of the thesis are as follows:

- How does flight free travel differ from air travel?
- To what extent is flight free travel becoming conventional travel?
- What can we learn from people who have gone flight free and apply to air travellers?
- What role might policy play in flight free travel?

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction

This literature review begins with a discussion of the key themes in the studies on why people are resistant to flying less. This is followed by a section that seeks to expand the discussion into travel more broadly, which uses the mobilities turn to conceptualise travel demand as part of a wider socio-technological system. I suggest that this systemic view allows for a better understanding of travel patterns, of which air travel is a component. I discuss how adopting a social practice-based methodology can make sense in a mobilities framing and work as a possible route for identifying areas for policy intervention. The final section returns to the studies on air travel and identifies a key gap in studies that focus on flight free travel specifically. I conclude that a mobilities focused study on the meanings of flight free travel could both address this gap and provide key insights for intervention.

Why don't we fly less?

The bulk of research in relation to reducing air travel consumption focuses on the attitudes and barriers faced by people who fly, in the context of reducing their air travel. These can be split roughly into studies that look at business air travel reductions and studies on leisure air travel reductions.

When it comes to reducing air travel for business, there are several perceived benefits to being able to fly for business that can outweigh the negatives. Air travel is often characterised as essential, where the necessity of air travel is closely associated with career development (Gössling *et al.*, 2019; Higham, Hopkins and Orchiston, 2019). Specifically, academics and businesspeople can feel that cutting air travel may have negative repercussions for networking opportunities and career progression (Storme *et al.*, 2013; Higham, Hopkins and Orchiston, 2019; Nursey-Bray *et al.*, 2019). There may be some truth to this. At least one study has looked into how academic productivity changes with air travel consumption, finding no relationship between common productivity metrics such as 'h-index' but a positive correlation between emissions and salary, even when seniority is taken into account (Wynes *et al.*, 2019). While air travel may present a route for building 'network capital' (i.e. being able to build and sustain strong social relationships) (Elliott and Urry, 2010), 'conference culture' is especially harmful from an environmental point of view (Lassen, 2006; Høyer, 2009).

Knowledge of the environmental impact of flying tends not to be enough to stop business travellers from flying (McDonald *et al.*, 2015). One study reveals that professors working on climate issues tend to fly more than any other academics (Whitmarsh *et al.*, 2020). The strongest indicators for air travel behaviour in this study were seniority (the more senior, the more travel opportunities), location (European researchers fly less than those in the rest of the world), and family (those with children

tend to fly more). These structural factors illustrate that having information alone on aviation's environmental impact is generally not sufficient to reduce business air travel.

While the focus on business air travel is important, in the UK context, less than 10% of residents' annual flights abroad are for business purposes, according to the most recent UK Government Travel Trends survey (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Between 1999 – 2019 the share of business flights as a proportion of total international flights taken by UK residents dropped from 15% to just under 10%, as the share of flights taken for visiting friends and relatives rose from 12% to 25% and flights taken for holidays stayed relatively level at around 63% (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Business travel is thus a small – albeit significant – segment of a larger population that flies in the UK. To gain a more complete understanding of air travel patterns, it's vital to look at tourism and leisure travel alongside trends in business travel.

Studies on flying less in a non-business context tend to focus on tourists' perceptions and attitudes of air travel in the context of climate change, with an emphasis on the barriers. There is a widely acknowledged 'value-action gap' between tourists' environmental attitudes and their behaviours, in that when it comes to air travel behaviours, seeming pro-environmental attitudes do not translate into pro-environmental choices (Cohen, Higham and Reis, 2013; Hibbert *et al.*, 2013; Kroesen, 2013; Büchs, 2017). Some studies explain the value-action gap by appealing to the apparent dissonance between pro-environmental attitudes in everyday life and on holidays, or at home and away (Barr *et al.*, 2010; Cohen, Higham and Reis, 2013). These studies describe how everyday behaviours can 'lock in' environmentally harmful practices through routine actions, which might be considered normal or a right. The right to travel by air is a sentiment echoed by respondents in other studies, where voluntarily reducing air travel is perceived as something that can infringe on personal autonomy and freedom, both in terms of having freedom to travel anywhere and in being free from purportedly interventionist government policies (Becken, 2007; Hares, Dickinson and Wilkes, 2010; Higham *et al.*, 2016).

Lack of information also features as a prominent barrier to reducing air travel (Becken, 2007; Hares, Dickinson and Wilkes, 2010; Cohen and Higham, 2011). Respondents in these studies feel that they are unaware of the true environmental costs of air travel and so do not think about reducing air travel as part of their pro-environmental actions. When people feel that they have some level of understanding of the environmental impacts of air travel, these tend to be accompanied by what's sometimes referred to as the 'flyer's dilemma'. This is the tension between the freedom or benefits of travelling by air, against the negative environmental consequences associated with personal responsibility (Higham, Cohen and Cavaliere, 2014).

A further barrier to reducing flying concerns perceptions of fairness. In the UK, people tend to see fairness as a prerequisite before making a decision to fly less, and people are more willing to reduce their air travel if they perceive an action as fair (Randles and Mander, 2009; Higham *et al.*, 2016; 10:10 Climate Action, 2019; Moberg *et al.*, 2019). The notion of 'fair' action relates to perceptions of responsibility. The literature reveals a tension between perceptions of who is responsible for acting on climate change and what is considered sufficient action, particularly when it comes to individual versus societal responsibility. While respondents in some studies believe that governments should bear the brunt of responsibility for acting on climate change and it shouldn't be up to citizens to limit their choices and personal freedom, other respondents in the same studies present precisely the opposite view – that it's up to individuals to reduce air travel (Becken, 2007; Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh, 2007; Randles and Mander, 2009; Cocolas *et al.*, 2020; Mkono and Hughes, 2020). This same stream of research finds evidence of people refraining from taking interest in reducing air travel on the grounds that others might not follow, appealing to the perception that they'd be in a minority. This is sometimes referred to as the 'free-rider effect', which usually manifests as: 'why should we change our own lifestyles when others aren't changing theirs?' (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh, 2007; Dubois *et al.*, 2019). Many who feel some level of responsibility and continue to fly feel guilty about it, and can develop denial mechanisms to rationalise their guilt (Randles and Mander, 2009; Cohen, Higham and Cavaliere, 2011; Kroesen, 2013; Mkono and Hughes, 2020). Those with pro-environmental attitudes often justify their air travel behaviour by appealing to other 'green' actions, such as recycling or turning lights off – in this way, their flyer's dilemma is supposedly cancelled out (Dickinson, Robbins and Lumsdon, 2010; Corner and Randall, 2011).

Reducing air travel is often perceived as a sacrifice (Higham, Cohen and Cavaliere, 2014; Kantenbacher *et al.*, 2019; Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs, 2019). The level of sacrifice can depend on perceptions of responsibility and is both consequentialist and deontological. One consequentialist example finds evidence of people only seeing the sacrifice as worthwhile if the emissions impact is sufficiently large (Shaw and Thomas, 2006). At the deontological end of the spectrum the act of giving up flying can be a moral obligation, but a sacrifice nonetheless (Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs, 2019). These studies suggest that when it comes to action to reduce air travel, there is a real variation between perceptions of personal and societal responsibility, and how the two relate to one another.

Freedom, responsibility, fairness, guilt and lack of information all feature as reasons for not flying less – both from business and leisure perspectives. Yet as this literature picks out, the reasons for not reducing air travel only provide half the picture. In focusing on air travel reductions, reasons for travelling by air are more likely to be presented as a trade off against reasons not to travel by air, so air travel behaviours are only defined in the context of reducing them. To get a complete

understanding of why people are resistant to reducing their air travel, it is important to understand motivations for flying in the first place.

Why do we fly?

The post-disciplinary 'mobilities turn' presents a way of looking at the world that focuses on the movement of information, networks, connections and relationships between people, places and things (Sheller and Urry, 2006). The mobilities turn came about as a reaction to so-called 'static' social sciences approaches that would treat relationships between people and places as fixed. The central claim to the mobilities turn is that movement is central to social life, and that the movement of information, ideas and people can give rise to power structures and new ways of shaping society (Urry, 2007). Where the bulk of the literature in the previous section focuses on people's perceived barriers to flying less, a mobilities-based approach starts by looking at the whole system of air travel, to understand the underlying social and cultural drivers behind air travel.

One of Urry's aims was to move social science analyses away from a purely 'society-first', or 'transport technology-first' approach into an integrated version (Urry, 2007). A transport technology-first version of social science might start by explaining our relationship with the world in terms of technological advances, whereas a mobilities-first approach would start by looking at the whole system of interdependencies between technological advances, changing social practices, and development of physical infrastructures. The mobilities paradigm thus emphasises the role of systems and how they change and interact with one another, not on any one fixed part of a system. In this way objects are not fixed physical entities; they are constantly evolving and changing depending on how we interact with them. This notion of object can account for the role of places both as physical and social entities – they are not simply 'black boxes' where demands and motivations are fixed (Sheller and Urry, 2006). A black box approach might focus solely on travel 'demand', where demand is treated as something fixed or one-directional (e.g. an input leads to an output). In the mobilities world, demand can be thought of as a fluctuating part of a complex sociotechnical system.

Mobilities studies show that travel and tourism have become intricately entwined with social life (Adey, Budd and Hubbard, 2007; Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007; Urry, 2011; Rau and Sattlegger, 2018). For example, unpacking the social drivers for visiting friends and relatives can reveal five core practices through which 'VFR mobilities' are constituted: social relationships; the provision of care; affirmations of identities and roots; maintenance of territorial rights; and leisure tourism (Janta, Cohen and Williams, 2015). The tied meanings of air travel and leisure tourism shows how travelling by air can have implications for structuring relationships, cultural understandings and identities. This is supported by studies where people have been found to be resistant to the prospect of having to

change their air travel behaviour because it is a key part of their lifestyles – or identities – to which they've become accustomed (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh, 2007; McDonald *et al.*, 2015). In this way, air travel mobilities can co construct, create and reinforce dominant narratives – or norms (Gössling *et al.*, 2012; Gustafson, 2014; Janta, Cohen and Williams, 2015; Higham, Hopkins and Orchiston, 2019; Hopkins *et al.*, 2019). For academic air travel, these might be something like understanding international travel as a sign of being a successful academic and 'part of the club', and for leisure air travel these may be more to do with notions of holiday, time and adventure.

There are a number of mobilities-based studies that demonstrate how the way we travel and move can shape our understandings of time (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007; Gustafson, 2014; Strengers, 2015; Schindler, 2020). Travelling abroad on business trips can be rewarding in terms of prospects for enhanced social status, facilitating more enriching experiences and generating more career development opportunities – but it can also have negative consequences on family life. This can trigger an 'intensification' of time where people can feel an obligation to prioritise quality time, which means working efficiently in 'work time' and having undisturbed time in 'family time' (Gustafson, 2014).

'Face time' – being physically present for a work meeting – can be perceived to convey more meaning than virtual presence (Strengers, 2015). This study finds that the finite periods and fixed agendas of virtual meetings are often associated with a loss of informal time, which can be beneficial for building rapport and professional relationships. As such, virtual meetings tend to be seen as complementary, not alternatives, to meeting in person. Respondents in Strengers' study reveal that real-life sensations of touch, smell and sound can convey different meanings that can't be replicated online. However, as virtual meetings become more commonplace and institutional expectations change, there is some evidence that cultural notions of 'necessary' air travel may be shifting (Higham, Hopkins and Orchiston, 2019).

Schindler explains how air travel might be the fastest form of travel, but it constantly forces us to slow down (Schindler, 2020). For example, time may appear rushed in the run up to boarding an aeroplane, where passengers are physically in motion between the stop-start queues, security, and gift shops. This contrasts to the sedentary time spent sitting in a seat, where one's activities are dictated by external factors such as seat placement, background noise, refreshments and whether the plane is in 'night mode.' The way that travel can influence our understandings of time makes planning travel and scheduling into everyday routines particularly important (Lassen, 2006; Cass and Faulconbridge, 2016; Cidell, 2017; Sersli *et al.*, 2020; Storme *et al.*, 2020).

Cidell argues that a truly systemic understanding of air travel should take into account other forms of travel, such as car travel to the airport (Cidell, 2017). This paper takes the example of the US hub and

spoke network of large and small airports to show that there are a series of car-related factors (e.g. price and availability of parking facilities and total trip length) that can dictate air travel choices. This supports other studies that point to the importance of available infrastructure in shaping mobilities, where people can feel their decisions are limited by the availability, cost or relative convenience of alternative forms of transport. (Barr, 2015; Roos Breines, Raghuram and Gunter, 2019). A lack of alternative infrastructures can reinforce a sense in which people can feel like they're locked-in to environmentally harmful behaviours, even if they want to change them (Barr and Prillwitz, 2014; McDonald *et al.*, 2015).

In John Urry's influential work *The Tourist Gaze*, he builds on the mobilities turn to conceptualise tourism studies not only comprising of tourists and places, but of networks and travelling to places through machines, buildings and reproductions (Urry, 2011). In this way not only can the way people move around the world structure societal understandings of time and identity, but also understandings of travel, holidays and tourism. A tourist gaze is a socially patterned way of seeing the world structured by class, gender, ethnicity and age. Urry suggests that it is how we experience travel and what separates the everyday from the unusual, work from play, and the banal from the exotic. It comes about through our embedded everyday travel practices. Yet as Larsen et al. have argued, these dualisms can at first glance underplay the importance of the social dimensions of travel, for example for those 'at home while travelling' (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007). Popular representations of travel in mass print and broadcast media, as well as advertising, have a significant influence in shaping discourses on what makes a holiday and how they should be planned, in a process Urry calls 'mediatisation'. *The Tourist Gaze* – since it's based on shared cultural histories – goes some way to explaining how holiday discourses around escape, romance and adventure have become normal in the UK. It is a good example of how 'normal' tourism behaviour is shaped by societal understandings of travel, and how shifting understandings of travel can in turn reproduce and reconstruct what is considered normal tourism behaviour.

This section has provided some examples for how the way we move around the world has implications for how we order and structure everyday life. Looking at air travel through a mobilities lens reveals stories to be told that go beyond restricting demand and determining barriers, perceptions and attitudes. In shifting the focus from solely picking out demand reduction, a mobilities approach can explain why we fly, which is more to do with socio-technological systems that perpetuate demand such as expectations of employers, understandings of free time, available choices, identity and media narratives. In moving away from the individual as the object of analysis, a mobilities approach sets up a systemic way of thinking about how change happens in social life.

Intervening in air travel – a social practices approach

Behaviour change is a vast topic in the academic literature, and a full discussion of the pros and cons of the various theories is beyond the scope of this thesis¹. Instead, the purpose of this section is to show how a practice-based approach to policy intervention might provide a novel and coherent account of air travel mobilities, within the context of sustainable consumption.

Sustainable consumption encompasses the idea of changing the way we consume to move from behaviours that harm the planet, to behaviours that preserve the planet and the systems that support it (United Nations, 2021). Sustainable consumption theories span the realms of sociology, social psychology, behavioural economics and anthropology (Jackson, 2005), and most policy interventions designed to shape sustainable consumption target individual or household behaviours (Jackson, 2005; DEFRA, 2008; Batel *et al.*, 2016; Dubois *et al.*, 2019; Sparkman, Attari and Weber, 2021).

Many of these studies focus on influencing individual people's attitudes – the logic being that attitudes inform behaviours, which inform choices, so influencing attitudes might engender a change in choices. Elizabeth Shove calls this the 'ABC model' (attitudes, behaviours, choices) (Shove, 2010). Shove argues that the existence of the value-action gap indicates that the ABC model isn't fit to account for social change. For her, the value-action gap is only an issue if we believe that values and attitudes *should* translate into action. In the same way that John Urry uses mobilities to argue against a static sociological system of input leading to output, Shove makes the point that our actions are 'located as outcomes of sociotechnical change, not as external drivers of it' (Shove 2010, pp. 1278). Once we conceive of consumption not in terms of individual choices but as part of a system that perpetuates practices, the primary focus of study also shifts (Southerton, Warde and Hand, 2004). Social practices, not individual choices and attitudes, can then become the primary 'unit of enquiry' (Shove, 2014).

Social practices are the everyday patterns and routines that shape our lives, set in histories, infrastructures, cultures and skills (Reckwitz, 2002). The way social practices – which include eating, commuting and showering – are constituted depends on the relationships between practice-as-performances and practice-as-entities (Schatzki, 1996; Warde, 2005; Shove, 2010; Evans, McMeekin and Southerton, 2012). Practice-as-performances are the everyday performances whose repetitions constitute a deeper embedded practice-as-entity, which is something describable, made up of three elements: materials; competencies; and meanings (Warde, 2005; Watson, 2012; Spurling *et al.*, 2013;

¹ See (Jackson, 2005; Keller, Halkier and Wilska, 2016) for overviews of behaviour change theories for sustainable consumption and (Davis *et al.*, 2015) for an overview of behaviour change theories for public health interventions.

Shove, 2014). In this way people as ‘carriers’ of practices; they need to have an understanding of how to carry out a practice before engaging in the practice.

To give an example, Hand et al. explain how everyday performances of showering can prop up a shared understanding of the materials and skills that make up how we ‘do’ showering (Hand, Shove and Southerton, 2005). Technological developments such as the switch from hand pumps to power showers reconfigured the available infrastructures, which changed everyday performances of showering. This in turn shaped both the materials and skills needed to have a shower, as well as the way these new performances of showering constituted a new shared cultural understanding of showering as an entity – only this time the entity of showering took on new meanings and ‘bundled’ with other practices of health, convenience and cleanliness.

There is a series of studies that explain how a social practices approach can helpfully inform transport research (Watson, 2012; Cass and Faulconbridge, 2016; Lamers, van der Duim and Spaargaren, 2017; Sersli *et al.*, 2020; Kent, 2021). Lamers et al. use the example of expedition cruising to show how research into tourism can be deepened through a social practices lens (Lamers, van der Duim and Spaargaren, 2017). The authors suggest that there are three main ways in which this happens. The first is that practice-based studies of tourism can increase our understanding of how a tourism practice gets formed. Second, focusing on the meeting points between practices (e.g. tourism products and mobilities (McLaren, 2018)) can tell us how a practice is constituted now and these have the potential to give us the tools for making key policy interventions. Third, by looking at how tourism practices have changed we can gain insights into the way sustainability practices interact with other practices.

Cass and Faulconbridge follow a similar approach to assess commuting practices in two UK cities, in order to better understand how a transition away from commuting by car and towards commuting by bus or bicycle might take place (Cass and Faulconbridge, 2016). They find that this ‘modal shift’ requires materials of bus services and cycling equipment, competencies of reading timetables and riding a bike safely, and meanings of productive time and being environmentally friendly. Similarly to the showering study, this study reveals how practices such as shopping and doing the school run can shape the spatial and temporal elements of commuting. For example, the proliferation of large supermarkets in the outskirts or towns can give rise to more car-dependent shopping, and strict working hours can limit the option of being able to cycle to the shops.

Social practice theory has also been used to explore how women take up or continue cycling with childcare responsibilities (Sersli *et al.*, 2020). The authors identify four elements of ‘the mobility of care’: shared meanings of parenting and cycling such as being independent and teaching life skills; competencies including keeping children safe on busy roads and being able to use a baby bike seat;

materials like bicycles and safe cycling infrastructure; and temporal constraints when aligning daily schedules between children, friends and family. The authors use 'practice/mobility bundles' (Spurling and McMeekin, 2014) to draw attention to the systemic processes that make cycling difficult with children, which include gendered patterns of care, the availability of childcare, and parenting norms. In studying tourism practices and how they interact with other social practices, these studies are examples of how social practice theory can provide rich insights for transport research that go beyond demand, and individuals' attitudes and behaviours.

In the broad context of sustainable consumption, studying the development of social practices can give clues for how something that's environmentally problematic (e.g. frequent flying) has become normal (Mylan and Southerton, 2018). Randles and Mander provide a summary of frequent flying from a consumption and social practices point of view (Randles and Mander, 2009). They explore frequent flying through people's narratives of air travel events and find that flying is often valued as a means to an end, where the end is a holiday or suspension of everyday life. Indeed, respondents in this study overwhelmingly conceived of flying as a necessary thing to endure, often eliciting feelings of discomfort from cramped seats, bad meals and irritating neighbours. When it comes to using alternatives, respondents appealed to the favourable journey time when travelling by air, as dictated by constraints such as pre-defined school holidays and annual leave allowances.

One of the long-standing critiques of social practice theory is it's difficult to see how the approach can highlight prescriptive opportunities for policy intervention (Jackson, 2005; Kurz *et al.*, 2015; Keller, Halkier and Wilska, 2016). Tim Jackson writes:

"...the ways in which social practices evolve, and of the interaction between policy and social practice is as yet so limited that it would be difficult to see how policy could make use of this position – beyond taking social norms a bit more seriously as influences on behaviour. Since policy-makers are themselves a group of individuals immersed in social practice, the idea of using policy to influence social practice has about it something of the impossibility of lifting ourselves up by our own bootstraps." (Jackson 2005, pp 63)

This argument can be translated into two parts: a charge against the location of the policy intervention (for social practice theorists this is within a governance system); and a charge about how the complexity of social practices doesn't represent what is considered conventional policymaking.

Practice theorists have responded to Jackson's criticism by arguing that the ABC model has never managed to design intervention approaches on the speed and scale that the climate crisis demands, and that just because social practice theory doesn't sit within conventional policy frameworks, this

doesn't mean it should be ignored (Shove, 2010; Evans, McMeekin and Southerton, 2012). Evans et al. assess a series of policy interventions concerned with the practices of eating, mobility and sheltering, to show how social practices can work as a primary unit for policy intervention – providing the intervention is 'programmatically' (i.e. exploits the interdependencies between practices and tackles several elements together) (Evans, McMeekin and Southerton, 2012). The provision of infrastructure is as a key factor in shaping social practices, for example, as well as the potential for moments of disruption to reconfigure practices (Southerton, Warde and Hand, 2004; Watson, 2012; Keller, Halkier and Wilska, 2016).

Practice theorists can also look at the role of recrafting practices, substituting practices, and changing how practices interlock as a framework for intervention (Spurling *et al.*, 2013; Spurling and McMeekin, 2014). These three intervention techniques tend to be presented as follows:

1. recrafting a practice to change the elements that make up the practice (either material, competence or meaning) (Figure 1)
2. substituting a practice in a way that changes the means of doing a practice, 'to change the balance of competition between them' (Spurling *et al.*, 2013) (Figure 2)
3. changing how practices interlock in bundles, for example if changing mobility practices is a goal, recognising the recrafting the bundle of practices relating to commuting, caregiving and scheduling (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Recrafting practices (Source: Spurling *et al.* 2013)

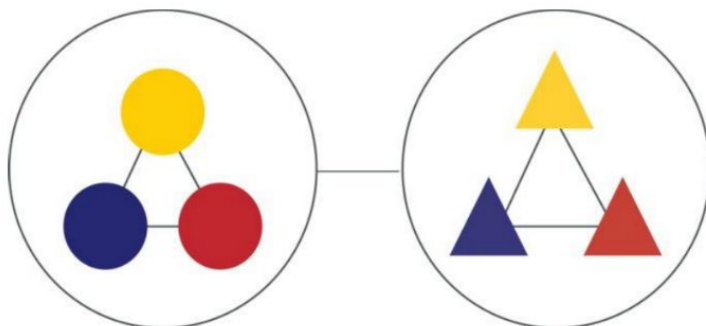


Figure 2: Substituting practices (Source: Spurling et al. 2013)

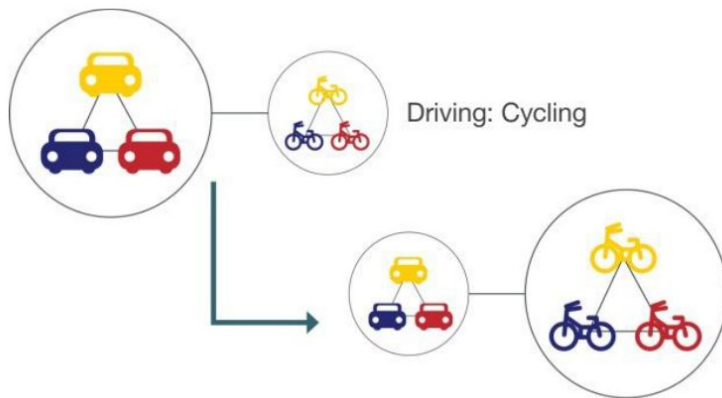
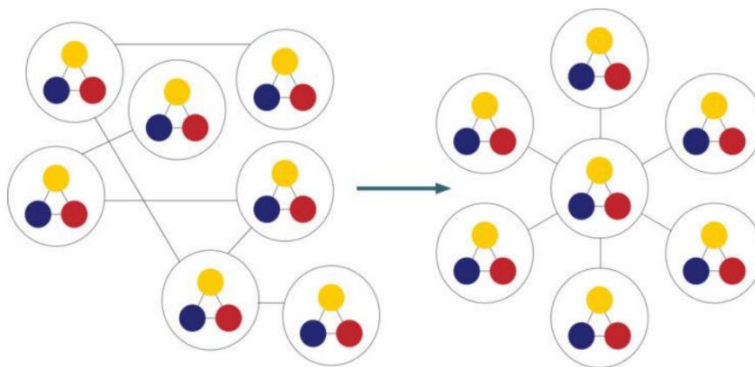


Figure 3: Changing how practices interlock (Source: Spurling et al. 2013)



In this way policymakers adopting a social practices intervention approach could shift from asking “How do we change individuals’ behaviours to be more sustainable?” to “How do we shift everyday practices to be more sustainable?” (Evans, McMeekin and Southerton, 2012; Spurling et al., 2013; Spurling and McMeekin, 2014; Kent, 2021). The targets for intervening in a practice then become changing systems of governance, disrupting power relations and influencing societal discourses, rather than targeting individual attitudes.

When it comes to substituting practices, studying the ‘defection’ and ‘recruitment’ from practices can help inform policy design (Watson, 2012; Cass and Faulconbridge, 2016). In Watson’s comparison of cycling in Groningen and London, he appeals to the varying understandings of ‘velomobility’ in both cities to show that sustainable transport transitions require both recruitment of one sustainable practice (e.g. cycling) and the recruitment of a sustainable practice against the rate of defection from an unsustainable practice (e.g. driving) (Watson, 2012). For policy intervention, one of the key insights is that influencing mobility policy might not happen in the mobility sphere at all, it can equally be to do with the spatial planning of workplaces and cycling infrastructure, or the social organisation of work

(Spurling and McMeekin, 2014; Rau and Sattlegger, 2018). Evans et al. explain how the Cool Biz initiative was set up by Japan's Ministry of Environment to reduce energy use in buildings, by limiting the use of air conditioning to only kick in above 28°C (Evans, McMeekin and Southerton, 2012). The Japanese Government implemented a new dress code to allow for breathable textiles, and at the same time worked with designers and influencers to promote the new textiles. Ultimately successful, the policy intervention was programmatic insofar as it addressed the material and cultural elements together, which helped to reconfigure heating in buildings as a practice-as-entity.

These all look like promising avenues for how a practices approach might account for policy intervention, but the example above may beg the question: can 'promotion' fit in with a social practices ontology, with its historical routes in social marketing?

In Sersli et al.'s study on the recruitment of women with childcare responsibilities to cycling practices, they suggest one intervention 'might thus involve promoting family-based exploration of the city using the bicycle network' (Sersli *et al.*, 2020, p. 6). This sort of promotion or marketing is something that traditionally sits in the psychological/behaviour change models of policy intervention that target individuals, which tend to follow social marketing or 'nudge' methods (Capstick *et al.*, 2014). The intervention elements in substituting a practice, for example Greater Manchester's Cycling Hub – which is targeted at the practice of commuting rather than behaviour change more broadly (Southerton and Welch, 2018) – in part uses information campaigns to reach people with the knowledge required to engage in the practice. Similarly with the Cool Biz example, part of shaping cultural understandings and meanings comes about through advertising and marketing campaigns, but a strong reading (e.g. Shove, 2014) of social practice theory does not allow for psychological models that set individuals or individual attitudes as targets for intervention (Kurz *et al.*, 2015).

However, adopting a softer form of social practice theory can allow us to borrow from these approaches – indeed this can be particularly helpful in describing meanings of practices, which incorporate psychological aspects of emotion and motivation (Kent, 2021). In this way: the more psycho-social elements can be captured in practice-as-a performance; theorists can avoid cultural biases when discussing the meanings of practices; while a target for policy intervention can still be the wider practice-as-entity (Verbeek and Mommaas, 2008). For sustainable consumption, adopting this softer form of practice theory can allow for a simultaneous retention of both the role of a system in shaping practices, and the role of the individual in their capacity as performing a practice/the thing consuming (Warde, 2005; Halkier, Katz-Gerro and Martens, 2011; Evans, 2018).

Borrowing from both social practices and social psychology disciplines may help to set out an interdisciplinary policy approach that takes the best bits from both – particularly when it comes to

policy interventions. There are further reasons for why it can be useful to retain some notion of ‘the consumer’ for a social-practice focused policy intervention. In communications terms, Rowson and Corner posit that climate change is not just an environmental issue, it’s a societal issue (Rowson and Corner, 2015). In other words, climate communication focusing on climate change alone may only ever reach a small segment of people, since it is limited to people who engage with ‘climate change’. Instead, they find that framing climate-related messages in other – more relevant and everyday – terms (e.g. threats to food supply; risks of flooding; threats to holiday destinations) is more effective for engaging a broader range of people. The authors advocate for reframing climate change along seven dimensions (science, behaviour, technology, law, democracy, economy and culture) in order to ‘highlight the systemic nature of the challenge’ and emphasise the connections between them. This is an important finding as it is based on quantitative psycho-social methods, but overlaps with the realms that social practice theory and the broader sustainable consumption literature operate in (e.g. technology, culture, democracy). It also hints at the potential of using communication research to complement social practice theory.

To take another example from social psychology, there is a growing body of evidence showing that who delivers a message is as – if not more – important than the message itself. Messengers need to be seen to be trusted purveyors of information, but trusted messengers change depending on the audience (Corner, Shaw and Clarke, 2018; Westlake, 2018; Wang, Corner and Nicholls, 2020). Everyone has a role to play in shaping the behaviours of people in their social network and in this way, individual change and system-wide change can be thought of two sides of the same coin (Climate Outreach, 2021). This view emphasises the multidirectional relationships between all levels instead of a one-way flow of information advocated in a traditional information-deficit model of behaviour change.

Providing information alone is not sufficient for effective environmental intervention as social and cultural factors also exert major influence on people’s values, attitudes and choices (Burgess, Harrison and Filius, 1998; Abrahamse *et al.*, 2005). Even if this type of psycho-social research comes from a different ontological position as practice theory, many of the same structural social and cultural elements emerge as factors that shape sustainable consumption. A line of similarity might be drawn between the multidirectional relationships and practice-mobilities bundles, for example. It seems at the very least useful that some aspects of ‘the consumer’ are retained in a social practice-based intervention model.

This section started by showing how practice theory can be applied to transport research. Focusing on practices, rather than individuals or behaviours as the primary units of research, can shed light on the

sociocultural elements that constitute and reinforce a practice. This is especially relevant for understanding how high carbon air travel practices have become normal. Practice theory also presents an innovative approach for policy intervention through recrafting, substituting and interlocking practices. Insofar as practice-as entities persist through meanings, competencies and materials, there may be valuable additions to be borrowed from psycho-social behavioural models, such as the ability to keep some focus on the individual as an agent for change – which is needed to include promotion and marketing when intervening in the meanings of practices. While this is inconsistent with a strong reading of practice theory, seeing this argument through a softer version of social practice theory may open new – less stringent – ontological avenues, where we might include the best bits from practice theory and psychological approaches.

Slow travel and going flight free – a different approach?

This chapter started with a summary of the studies that feature some main reasons for why people are resistant to flying less. This was followed by a section on mobilities, which outlined the socially patterned nature of air travel and the benefits afforded by approaching travel research from a system, rather than individual perspective. This was followed by a section on social practice theory, which showed how social practices can give insights on the key sociocultural elements that constitute and reinforce air travel as a practice, and therefore presents an innovative route for policy intervention. In this final section, I go back to the prevailing literature around air travel and delve into one of the major gaps: studies about *flight free* travel. In the spirit of studying the defection, recruitment and development of practices, I summarise the key themes in the research of the people who go flight free, or those who choose not to fly. This final section of the chapter explains why flight free travel is an area with huge research potential but has received limited attention to date.

While there are many studies on the reasons for air travel, there are far fewer on people who have already reduced or given up air travel. On making the switch from air travel to going flight free, one study finds that leaders who give up air travel for climate reasons have a significant influence on the behaviours of their followers (Westlake, 2018). Another presents the reasoning of a self-selected group of Swedes who have given up flying and finds that the most common reason for shifting from flying to not flying is having enough knowledge – specifically knowledge related to the proportion of environmental impacts from flying compared to other activities (Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs, 2019). Büchs illuminates the role of values in shaping the behaviours of non-flyers and finds that non-flyers are quicker to accept that their behaviour impacts climate change, feel a moral responsibility not to fly, and actively distance themselves from the perceived social norm of frequent flying (Büchs, 2017). Identifying with these values could build momentum for reducing air travel for people who share similar values (Büchs, 2017; Morten, Gatersleben and Jessop, 2018).

This notion of a shared identity is backed up by research with a self-identifying group of 'slow travellers', which finds that forging an alternative identity is one of the key features of engaging in slow travel (Dickinson, Robbins and Lumsdon, 2010; Dickinson, Lumsdon and Robbins, 2011). Slow travellers tend to conceive of holidays in a different way – they value the means of transport as much as the destination. In these studies, slow travelling is a reaction to an everyday life that emphasises convenience and speed. For this group, slow travelling is very much a part of their identity – this cultural significance is a finding echoed by others (Shove and Warde, 1998; Hibbert *et al.*, 2013). Dickinson notes that "time discourses are context contingent and can be used in an air travel context to make slow travel seem difficult and by slow travellers to make it positive" (Dickinson, Lumsdon and Robbins 2011, p. 291). Slow travellers tend to appeal to the deeper experiences they have to people and place, often because travelling by train, bike or boat is thought to be less predictable and can offer a greater sense of adventure. Not technically a practice-based study although rooted in the same approach, Laura Watts offers an ethnographic travelogue of a train journey from Lancaster to St Ives to explore the 'art and craft' of train travel, demonstrating the skills and understandings required to do train travel, and how these influence socio-temporal relationships (Watts, 2008).

In recent years the discourse of 'flight shame' has become mainstream, with climate activists like Greta Thunberg choosing to not fly and instead sail, drive or take the train to international meetings (Timperley, 2019). A recent report analysed the effects of the flight shame discourse in Germany and found that while it may be too early to ascribe a causal change in air travel practices, the public discourse of flight shame has increased popularity and support for stronger policies to limit air travel (Gössling, Humpe and Bausch, 2020). This emerging discourse of flight shame, combined with the growth in non-flight holidays (The Economist, 2021) and the disruption to the aviation industry caused by COVID-19 (Gössling, 2020) suggest that understanding the practice of flight free travel is more important than ever.

There has been very little research into flight free travel from a socio-psychological standpoint, and only one study from a social practice and mobilities point of view. A recently launched report studied the changing discourses of air travel in Sweden from 1950-2019, identifying the emergence of a new 'staying on the ground' discourse (Ullström *et al.*, 2021). This paper shows how meanings of air travel changed over the period, from aspirational luxury, to hypermobility, and is now in a new phase of 'staying on the ground'. The authors explain how flying is problematised through narratives of moralisation and persuasion. Moralisation narratives are upheld through storylines of 'living ones values', 'moral responsibility' and 'urgency', and persuasion narratives are characterised through storylines of 'exploring new values', 'experiences' and 'appreciation of the journey'. This study is a

vital contribution to understanding flight free travel from a social practice and mobilities perspective, but it is limited in that it only uses data from Sweden.

Studies on non-flyers are important contributions to the mobilities and social practices literature seeking to shape sustainable transport policies, but this is an area that would benefit from much deeper research. In social practice terms, studying the recruitment of non-flyers by the practice of non-flying could reveal important insights into how practitioners understand flight free travel. It would be interesting to see how notions of time and holidays change for people engaging in the practice of non-flying in the UK, whether these are shared with the slow travel movement and to what extent their understandings of non-flying differ from those of air travellers. Equally, meanings of flight free travel could be explored by studying popular representations of the practice. In this way, a full understanding of flight free travel could be gained by studying its meanings from both the point of view of its practitioners, and through its representations.

Finally from a policy perspective, given that one of the possible ways of intervening in practices is following moments of disruption (Evans, McMeekin and Southerton, 2012), a practice-focused study on flight free travel could provide insights on how decisionmakers might use this moment during COVID-19 to intervene in sustainable travel practices away from flight first, towards flight free travel.

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

Based on the literature review, this chapter addresses two core research questions:

1. What are the popular representations of flight free travel and how have they changed over time?
2. How do people do flight free travel?

This chapter sets out a methodological approach to answer these two questions, which is split into two sections. I explain how the first question can be answered by conducting a content analysis of media representations of flight free travel within a discourse analysis approach. This section adopts an explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2015), starting with a quantitative frequency analysis of UK media articles on flight free travel to show how the popularity of flight free travel changed over time, and followed by a qualitative discourse analysis to get a sense of the broader representations of flight free travel and the underlying narratives being evoked. The second section adopts a qualitative discourse analysis approach to understand how people do flight free travel. I explain how a thematic narrative analysis of biographical accounts of flight free travel can provide insights into its sociocultural meanings, using all blogs on Flight Free UK as a data source. The chapter concludes with a short reflection on research ethics considerations.

What are the popular representations of flight free travel and how have they changed over time?

To understand how popular representations of flight free travel have changed over time, I chose to focus on UK media representations using a mix-methods media content analysis. Popular media can influence public policy in two ways: through framing issues and through its role as gatekeeping who can speak about certain issues (Green-Saraisky, 2015). In this way analysing media representations can provide empirical evidence about a society's discursive framings and offers insights related to understandings and meanings of flight free travel, as well as the operation of power within a group (Hyland, K. and Paltridge, 2011; Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2012).

There is some disagreement as to what constitutes best practice methodology for media content analyses (Macnamara, 2005). Traditionally, a content analysis tries to uncover reality as it exists, based on a positivist epistemology and a priori codebooks. However, content analyses include both qualitative and quantitative elements: quantitatively using codebooks to count frequencies; then qualitatively interpreting the data by applying the codebooks to text or images. In this way, content analysis shares similarities with discourse analysis (Hardy, Harley and Philips, 2004). There are four common core features of discourse analysis:

- “The talk or text is to be naturally found (in the sense of not invented, as it might be in psycholinguistics, pragmatics or linguistic philosophy; some analysts admit interview data into this natural category, while others do not);
- The words are to be understood in their co-text at least, and their more distant context if doing so can be defended;
- The analyst is to be sensitive to the words’ non-literal meaning or force;
- The analyst is to reveal the social actions and consequences achieved by the words’ use – as enjoyed by those responsible for the words, and suffered by their addressees, or the world at large.” (Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2012, p. 432)

Studies show that mass media content and discourse analyses can both work alongside one another (Patterson *et al.*, 2016), or integrated together (Kirilenko and Stepchenkova, 2012; Green-Saraisky, 2015; Ma and Kirilenko, 2019). For the purpose of this study I used the latter notion to carry out a content analysis within a discourse analysis approach (Hardy, Harley and Philips, 2004). This mixed methods approach is neither constructivist nor realist, but uses realist elements to build the structure for a constructivist study. Essentially, this means that meanings are there to be uncovered in the data, but the codes for situating those meanings and making sense of them are mostly based in quantitative categories from the data.

Taking inspiration from a media content analysis of online news representations of binge drinking in the UK (Patterson *et al.*, 2016) and broadly following methods set out by Macnamara (2005), I adopted an explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2015) method, starting with a quantitative element to show how the popularity of flight free travel changed over time and followed by a qualitative element to explore the broader representations. Explanatory sequential design can be especially useful for revealing unexpected results through its quantitative element, which is complemented by the qualitative element, and as such can provide a deep understanding of the research topic. The method’s main limitation is the relatively long amount of time needed to sequence, collect and analyse both elements (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006). I followed the four steps of explanatory sequential design:

1. “Collect and analyze quantitative data in the first phase.
2. Examine the results of the quantitative analysis to determine (a) what results will need further exploration in the second, qualitative phase and (b) what questions to ask participants in this qualitative phase.
3. Conduct qualitative data collection and analysis in a second phase to help explain the quantitative results.

4. Draw inferences about how the qualitative results help to explain the quantitative results.”
(Creswell, 2015, pp. 37–40)

In the analysis process, I prioritised the qualitative element of the study (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006), since it fitted better with answering the research question and its discursive aspects.

Frequency analysis

Data collection

To collect the data, I started by selecting media forms, selecting issues or dates, and sampling from within that group (Newbold, Boyd-Barrett and Bulk, 2002). To develop a baseline and systematically create codes, I carried out a quantitative frequency analysis of articles on flight free travel using Westlaw, an online news database run by Thomson Reuters. At this stage I experimented with LexisNexus and Factiva, two other well-known news databases, but these were unsuitable due to licensing constraints and their relative lack of functionality.

Westlaw is an online archive of national newspapers and newswires, regional newspapers, international newspapers, as well business, trade and industry publications. It also includes many online versions of these publications, although not all popular publications are represented such as The Sun or The Times. For this reason I followed a purposive sampling method (Macnamara, 2005) and chose the publications that had the highest readership on the software and covered a range of formats and audiences. I chose a series of right and left-leaning tabloids, broadsheets and online media. My rationale for this was to make the resulting sample generalisable to include as wide a range of audiences as possible in the UK, whose population encompasses a diverse range of social, economic and political views. The publications were as follows:

- The Guardian (including Observer)
- The Mirror (including Daily Mirror, Daily Mirror Online, Sunday Mirror, Mirror Online, Sunday Mirror Online)
- The Independent (including Independent Online, Independent on Sunday)
- The Economist (including Economist.com)
- The Telegraph (including Sunday Telegraph, Telegraph Online)
- The Express (including Express Online)

After an iterative use of search terms to identify relevant articles on flight free travel that returned a manageable number of results (under 1000), I settled on the following search term: (holiday* or vacation*) and ("flight free" or "no fly*" or "non fly*" or "non flight" or "no plane*" or "without flying"). This search returned 919 results between January 2000 – January 2020. There were very few results before January 2000, so this became the lower limit. As I conducted the search in February

2020, January 2020 became the upper time limit. I then scanned through the headlines of the articles to determine whether an article was relevant. I found that a search using the word 'travel' instead of 'holiday' or 'vacation' returned far fewer relevant results, so my focus for answering this research question moved from flight free travel to flight free holidays. Some examples were as follows:

Table 1: Example of search terms used to find relevant articles on flight free travel

Search term	Number of results	Relevance	Comments
holiday AND (no fly OR flight free OR no plane)	957	Fair	Lots of defence/war articles
holiday* and (no fly* OR flight free OR no plane or staycation* or swap plane or without flying) [with 'travel' as subject and no promotions]	1463	Fair	Too many results/results too vague
holiday* and (no fly* OR flight free OR no plane* or staycation* or swap plane* or without flying or slow travel) [no promotions]	4937	Poor	Too many results, many articles were advertisements
(holiday* or vacation*) and ("flight free" or "no fly*" or "non fly*" or "non flight" or "no plane*" or without w/5 flying) with travel	673	Good	Slightly too few results
(holiday* or vacation*) and ("flight free" or "no fly*" or "non fly*" or "non flight" or "no plane*" or "without flying")	919	Very good	Manageable number, search returning relevant articles on flight free travel

Data analysis

I exported the list into Microsoft Excel to start the frequency analysis. This next phase involved a basic sorting process to screen out the irrelevant results to make the results more reliable. I skimmed through each article to look how the search terms featured and defined relevant articles as those that featured a flight free holiday or mentioned a flight free holiday from the UK. I counted the articles that

returned the relevant search results, not the number of hits per article. Everything that did not fit this description of relevant was irrelevant. Common reasons for screening out entries were:

- duplicates
- articles about people’s holidays getting disrupted, where they could change their ‘flight free of charge’
- articles about *flight free* zones – many to do with terrorism or flight free zones when the royals go on holiday.
- promotions or paid for content – especially with respect to cruises. In Westlaw it’s difficult to tell with absolute certainty if an article is paid promotion, so I only deleted when obvious, for example ‘PAID ADVERTISEMENT’ appeared in the headline, or ‘in partnership with READER OFFERS LTD, The Telegraph is offering readers 15% discount...’
- letters – I didn’t include letters as they’re traditionally the views of readers, not editorial staff
- duplicate entries – a few papers syndicated the ‘TOP 10 CRUISES for 2011’ so I deleted these.

After two rounds of this sorting process, I was left with 303 relevant articles across the six sources. The articles were split as follows:

Figure 4: Frequency of articles on flight free holidays between January 2000-January 2020

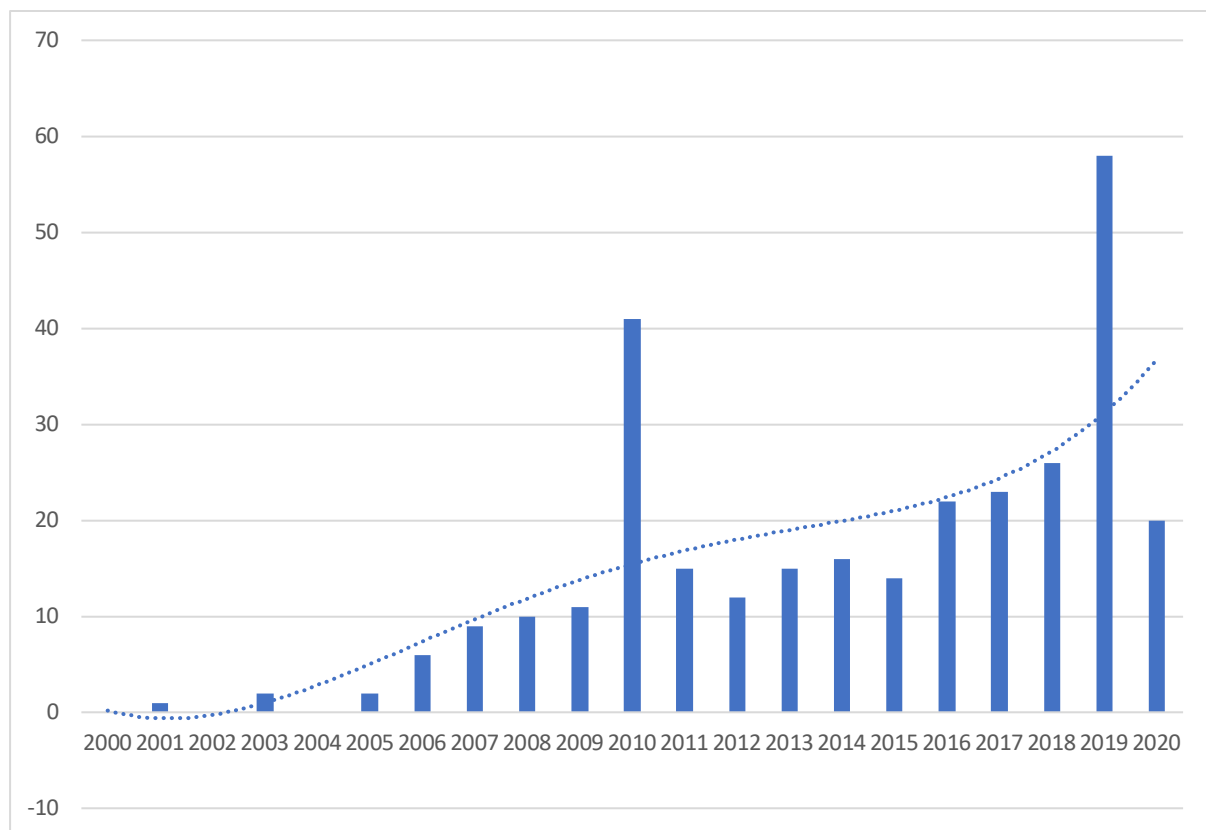
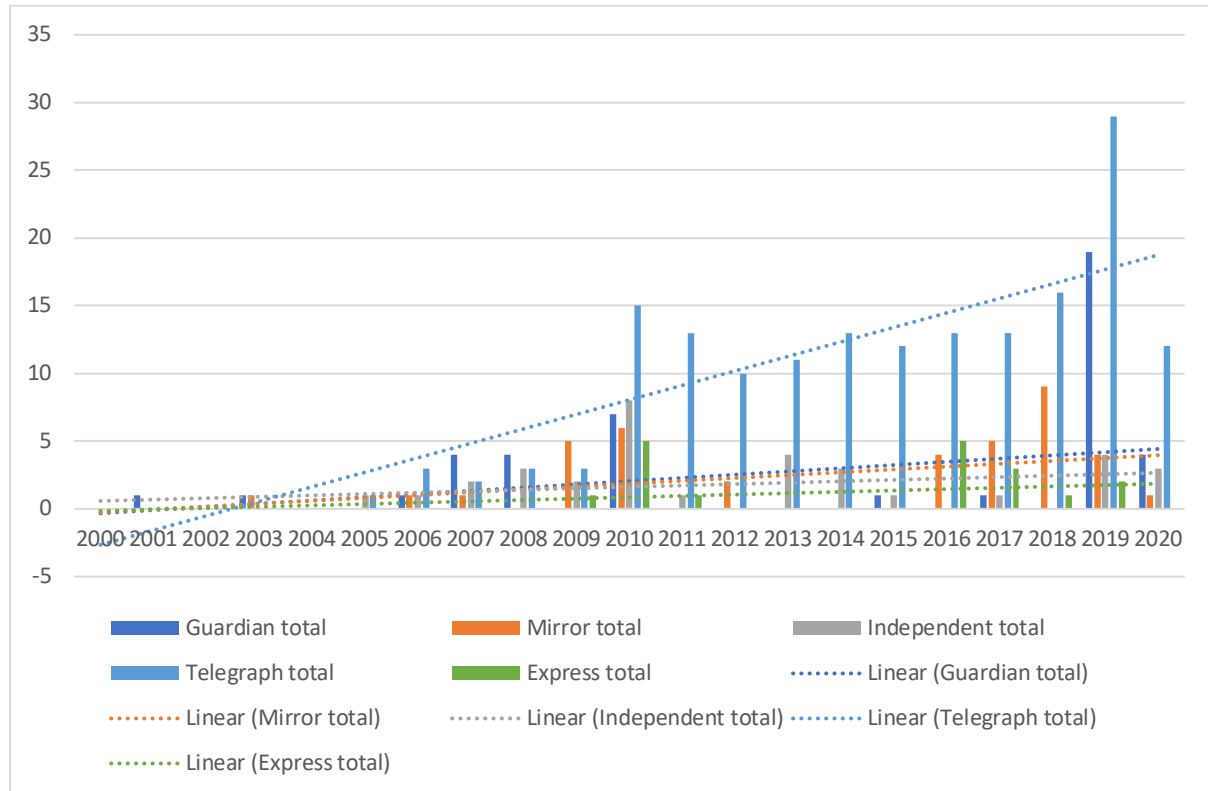


Figure 4 shows two spikes in coverage in 2010 and 2019. To see whether this was consistent across the publications, I mapped the frequency of coverage according to outlet (Figure 5):

Figure 5: Frequency of articles on flight free holidays between January 2000-January 2020 by publication



To build a codebook for the content analysis, I took a sample of the main spike years. This included all the articles for each of the spike years, which provides for the best possible representation (Macnamara, 2005). This sampling was necessary in order to get a set of manageable and statistically significant results (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). I screened out results from 2020 as the data needed to be comparable across years and I only had data for one month in 2020. I then picked out the spike years of 2010 and 2019, as well as 2007 as it's where coverage starts building momentum, and 2014 as there is a small spike in coverage from the Telegraph. The data from 2007, 2010, 2014 and 2019 left me with 112 articles in total from the Telegraph, the Mirror, the Express, the Guardian and the Independent. There were no articles from the Economist that hit the search term, so I screened it out as a source.

In the next phase of developing a codebook, I scanned through the articles for relevant text and repeating ideas related to flight free holidays. This was part deductive from the literature review in Chapter 2, and part inductive from a review of the articles (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). This mixed methods approach allowed me to go back and forth between the repeating ideas in the quantitative analysis and compare them against the themes in the literature review, which helped me to sort the

codes that were most relevant to the research area and improve generalisability. The preliminary codebook was as follows:

- Environment/climate change
- Cruise/ferry/boat
- Train
- Car
- Appreciating the scenery
- Convenience
- Less stress/hassle/more relaxing
- Ash cloud
- Slow travel

I added a code for whether the article was about flight free travel, or if it just mentioned flight free travel. An article about flight free holidays implied a piece where flight free holidays were the main topic, whereas a mention of a flight free holiday implied a broader piece on holidays, where flight-free holidays were presented as means – a possible option alongside flight-based holidays. I did this to gain insights into both how the flight free travel was presented by itself, and how it was presented alongside other forms of travel. The total split was as follows:

Figure 6: Articles mentioning flight free holidays against articles about flight free holidays

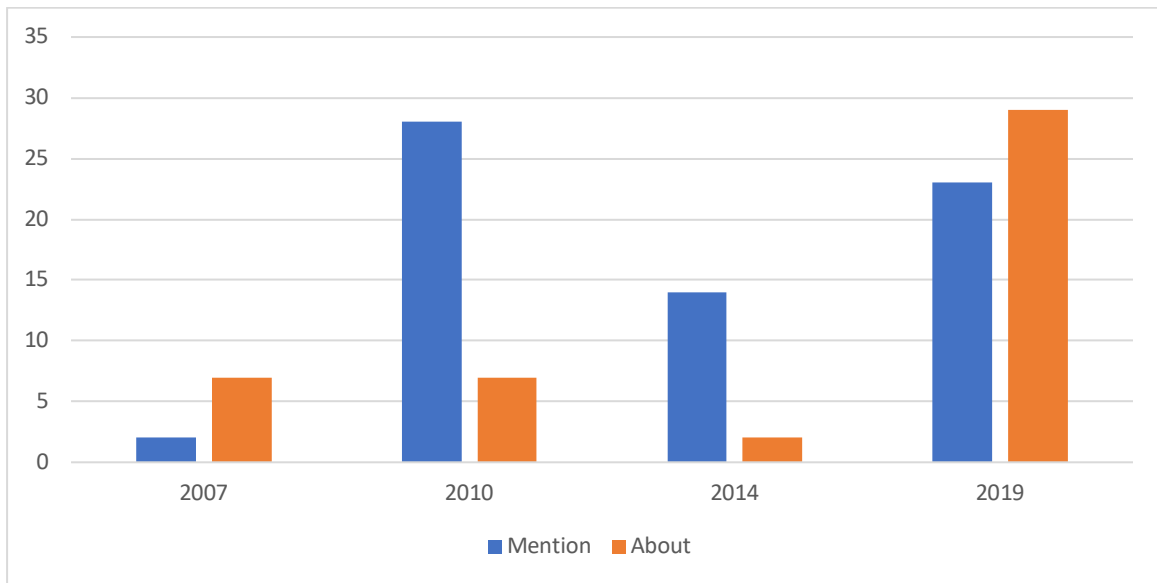
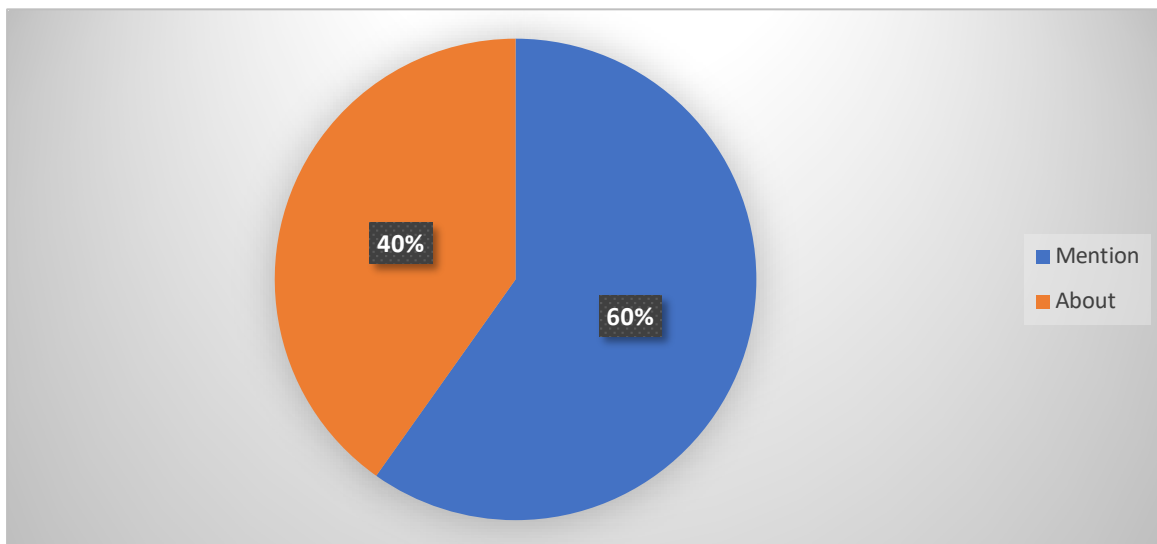


Figure 7: Cumulative split of mention versus about



To check whether the codes were accurate and to identify gaps, I re-read through the articles and built a long list of codes and themes:

- All-inclusive: referring to flight free holidays as preferable due to their being 'all-inclusive'. These pieces tended to be cruise-related and they sell the idea of having holidaymakers' logistics taken care of.
- Appreciating the scenery: articles that mentioned the special quality of flight free holidays as allowing travellers to better appreciate the scenery.

- Ash cloud: articles that referred to flight free holidays in the context of the 2010 eruptions of Eyjafjallajökull, which caused multiple ash clouds across Europe and downed air traffic for extended periods.
- Car: articles that referred to the means of going on a flight free holiday by car.
- Cheaper: articles that made the case for flight free travel as cheaper than air travel.
- Convenience: arguments that framed flight free holidays as or more convenient than flight-based holidays.
- Cruise/ferry/boat: articles that referred to the means of going on a flight free holiday by sea or by water.
- Environment/climate change: articles that mentioned flight free holidays in the context of climate change or the environment.
- Flight shame: pieces that referred to the environmental guilt that people feel when travelling by aeroplane.
- Forced disruption: pieces referring to flight free holidays being forced upon someone, rather than an actual choice.
- Green hypocrisy: these articles tended to be pejorative or confessional, framed around guilt.
- Greta Thunberg: pieces that mentioned the Swedish climate activist, Greta Thunberg.
- Journey as part of the holiday: articles that framed flight free holidays as having a special ability of allowing us to 'see the journey as part of the holiday'.
- Less stress/hassle/more relaxing: referring to the stressful aspects of air travel and the comparatively relaxing aspects of flight free travel.
- Man in Seat 61: articles that referred to Man in Seat 61, the popular train-only travel website.
- Noise pollution: pieces that picked up on the relative lack of noise pollution from flight free travel.
- Reliving history: pieces that framed flight free travel as a way of tapping into one's history, whether lived or learned.
- Romance: articles that used romantic language to frame flight free holidays.
- Safety: articles that pointed to the relative safety of travelling flight free.
- Sense of adventure: articles that alluded to the sense of discovery and new experiences afforded by not travelling by plane.
- Slow travel: articles that referred to 'slow travel' explicitly, which tended to be characterised by the benefits of slowing down and experiencing more when travelling flight free.
- Train: articles that referred to the means of going on a flight free holiday by train.

To better understand these data, I separated this long list into analytic themes, possible explanations for those themes and means. These roughly translated into the broad conceptual themes behind an author’s depiction of a flight free holiday, their arguments for it, and their means of travelling. The analytic themes were the implicit topics that represented a shared group of repeating ideas relevant to the more abstract representations of flight free holidays, following the grounded theory coding process of moving from raw text, to relevant text, to repeating ideas, to themes (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). This left me with the following table:

Table 2: Analytic themes, explanations and means of flight free holidays

Analytic theme (what)	Possible explanation (why)	Means (how)
Convenience	Cheaper, Less stress/more relaxing, All-inclusive, Noise pollution, Often faster, adaptation	Train, Cruise/ferry/boat, Car
Necessity	Ash cloud, Forced disruption, Noise pollution, Terrorism, compensation	Train, Cruise/ferry/boat, Car
Adventure	Journey part of holiday, liberation, more autonomy, new experiences	Train, Cruise/ferry/boat, Car
Safety	Less stress/more relaxing, No airport anxiety, Comfort	Train, Cruise/ferry/boat, Car
Environment/guilt	Environment/climate change, Greta Thunberg, Green hypocrisy, Flight shame	Train, Cruise/ferry/boat, Car
Romance/beauty	Reliving history, Absorbing culture, Slow travel, Appreciating the scenery, art, food, the way it’s written	Train, Cruise/ferry/boat, Car
Information	Man in Seat 61, Mythbusting	

Many of the categories had crossover with one another and the explanations relating to each category also featured in multiple themes, however for the purposes of seeing how coverage of flight free holidays changed in the time frame, these seven analytic themes seemed to represent a good starting point for the qualitative analysis. It is worth noting that this list is not exhaustive for media representations of flight free travel. Rather it is intended to provide a possible canvas for answering my specific research questions.

To find out how themes of articles related to flight free holidays changed over time, I coded each article according to the seven themes by reading through each article and marking a ‘1’ or ‘0’ in a

spreadsheet if the language in an article corresponded to a theme. I then ran frequency analyses by theme, year and publication. This gave me an initial sense of the language that each publication was using, and how these themes changed quantitatively over time. During the frequency analyses I made a note of preliminary insights that linked the analytic themes together by year and publication, to get an initial sense of explaining the spikes in coverage. These went on to inform the full qualitative analysis and are presented at the end of Chapter 4.

The quantitative element of the research design allowed me to develop a codebook, contextualise media representations and find the spike moments in coverage, which would not have been possible following a solely qualitative method. To find out the more abstract representations I needed to look at the qualitative themes.

Qualitative analysis

Given my overall focus on understanding representations of flight free holidays, I conducted a qualitative discourse analysis to look at the underlying narratives being evoked behind the frequency analysis. Taking methodological inspiration from a discourse analysis on representations of binge drinking in the UK (Patterson *et al.*, 2016), approaching the data in this way allowed me to gain insights into the more abstract discursive framings of flight free holidays. While the seven themes in Table 2 gave some sense of the discursive framings, they were still conceptually overlapping in a way that was not especially helpful for informing broad understandings of flight free travel.

To develop a framing that would better inform interpretations of flight free travel, I first read each of the 112 articles and coded specific quotes and paragraphs of text against the seven analytic themes that came out of the frequency analysis (see Table 2), which I copied and pasted into a long text document in preparation for developing overall representations (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). I went back and forth between reading the articles and the seven themes to pick out thematic commonalities at a more abstract level, which led me to settle on three main representations: ethical; cultural; and practical. The process for getting here involved systematically going through the seven analytic themes and checking each one against every other for conceptual connections – these connections formed the three main representations, split as follows:

Table 3: Representations and themes of flight free holidays

Representations	Themes
Ethical	Responsibility, Guilt, Leadership
Cultural	Adventure, History
Practical	Necessity, Convenience, Getting information

It is important to note that there were some differences between the quantitative themes in Table 2 and the themes in Table 3. The differences came about during the process of going back and forth between the seven analytic themes and the emerging representations. Since I was prioritising the qualitative element, working from the three representations allowed me to reframe the relevant themes from the frequency analysis into themes I judged more relevant to the broader representations, as a means of presenting a more coherent discussion.

Given that the themes in the representations did not match fully onto the quantitative themes from the frequency analysis (e.g. leadership, history and responsibility emerged as new and relevant themes) I was not able to use the frequency analysis results as a wholly reliable source for how the representation themes changed over time. Going back over all articles and coding according to those new themes would have given me a better idea of exactly how the themes per each representation changed over time, but I did not have time for another round of coding and frequency analysis. Moreover, I was more interested in the representations of flight free holidays rather than exactly how they have changed over time. I judged there to be enough crossover between the themes in Table 2 and Table 3 to provide a good enough sense of how representations changed over time. This is captured at the end of Chapter 4.

How do people do flight free travel?

To find out how people do flight free travel, I conducted a qualitative discourse analysis of biographical narrative accounts of flight free travellers, which can provide insights into sociocultural meanings of flight free travel (Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2012). I took inspiration on methods from studies that have linked mobilities with social practices of travel (Cass and Faulconbridge, 2016; Sersli *et al.*, 2020) – specifically those that use the idea of ‘practice-mobility bundles’ (Spurling and McMeekin, 2014) to see how various practices form, such as flight free travel and holidaying, flight free travel and working, or flight free travel and childcare.

Data collection

The first step in this process was to find a data source from people who went on flight free holidays. I had initially planned on conducting in-person interviews or focus groups with flight free travellers but due to disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic, I decided to conduct a thematic narrative analysis of existing online data (Sahlstein Parcell and Baker, 2017). Looking at the sources available, I chose to focus on online blogs as the main data source (Hookway, 2008). ‘New media’ such as blogs are also becoming increasingly important in framing climate issues (Neill and Boykoff, 2011).

After searching online forums, websites and mailing lists I found Flight Free UK, a campaigning organisation and website set up in 2018. The aim of the organisation is to spark a behaviour change shift and encourage people to give up flying because of aviation's impact on climate change. Unlike the media outlets used to answer the previous research question, this website caters for a specialist audience of those already interested in environmental issues, and as such there is an explicit motive across all the content. I also investigated using the Man in Seat 61 'Guestbook' discussion board, but chose not to use this source as: the content was specifically focused on rail travel and not flight free travel; and the comments tended to focus on thanking the website author for the tool and not the experience of flight free travel itself.

I found 110 blogs in the 'Be inspired' section of Flight Free UK's website, which is a webpage that pulls together curated guest content from across the flight free network. The 110 blogs were all the blogs written between 2018 - June 2020 inclusive, which is the timespan from the first blog on the website until the end of the data collection period in June 2020. This also seemed a manageable number for a qualitative analysis. I used Nvivo 12 to host and sort the data, a well-known qualitative data analysis software. I chose Nvivo to use its features for coding nodes and visualising data, and exported the 110 blogs as readable pdf files to Nvivo to generate the full dataset.

Data analysis

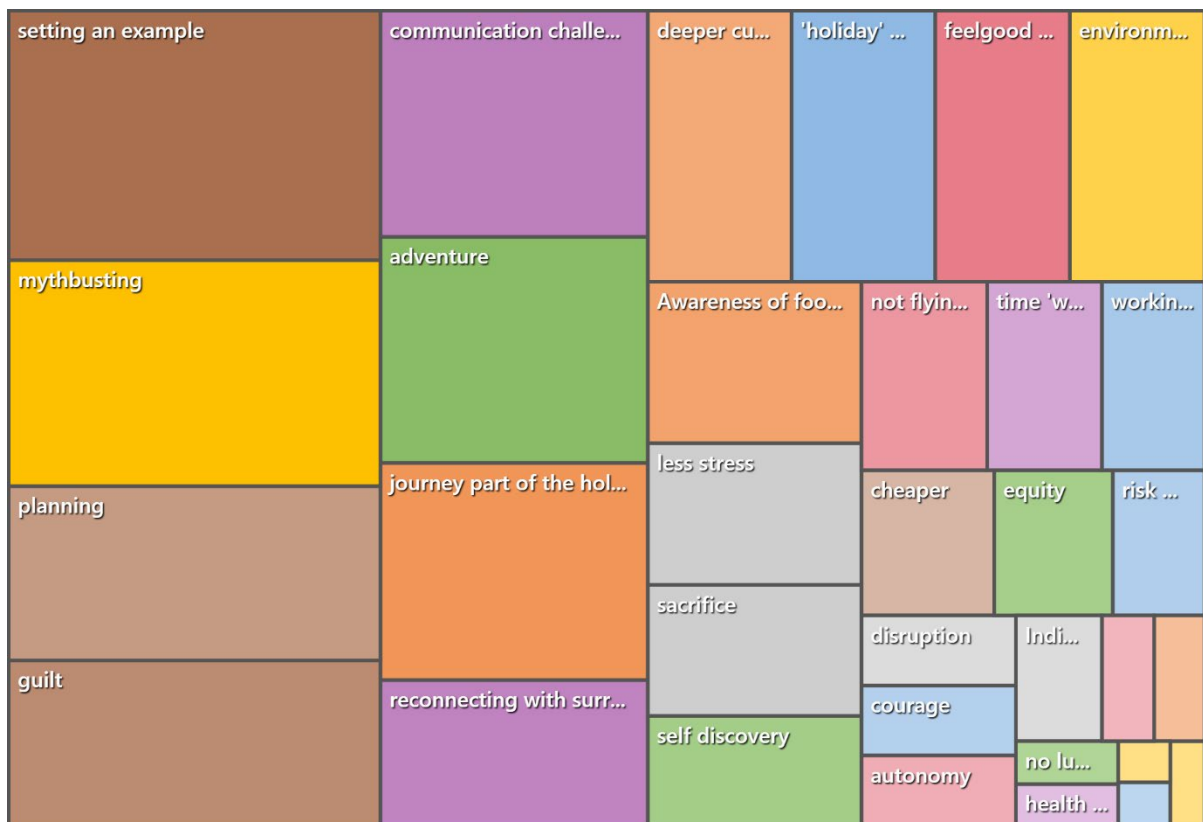
I coded the data combining inductive and deductive techniques, following a similar process to identify themes as when answering the previous research question (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). I developed the codebook iteratively using Nvivo's 'nodes' functionality, starting from the codes I used for the media analysis and then developing and editing them into a much richer and comprehensive set of 33 codes, by going back and forth between the content of the articles and the codes to identify gaps (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). The full codebook was as follows:

- Individual vs collective
- Awareness of footprint
- Equity
- Courage
- Environmental responsibility
- Setting an example
- Sacrifice
- Guilt
- Risk of societal collapse
- Sense of entitlement

- Communication challenges
- Mythbusting
- Cheaper
- Working while travelling
- Journey part of the holiday
- Time 'well spent'
- Less stress
- Adventure
- Autonomy
- 'Holiday' experience at home
- Feelgood factor
- Reconnecting with surroundings
- Planning
- Self-discovery
- Implications for networking
- Romance
- Deeper cultural connections
- Safer
- Not flying doesn't mean not travelling
- No luggage limits
- Disruption
- Negatives of over tourism
- Health risks

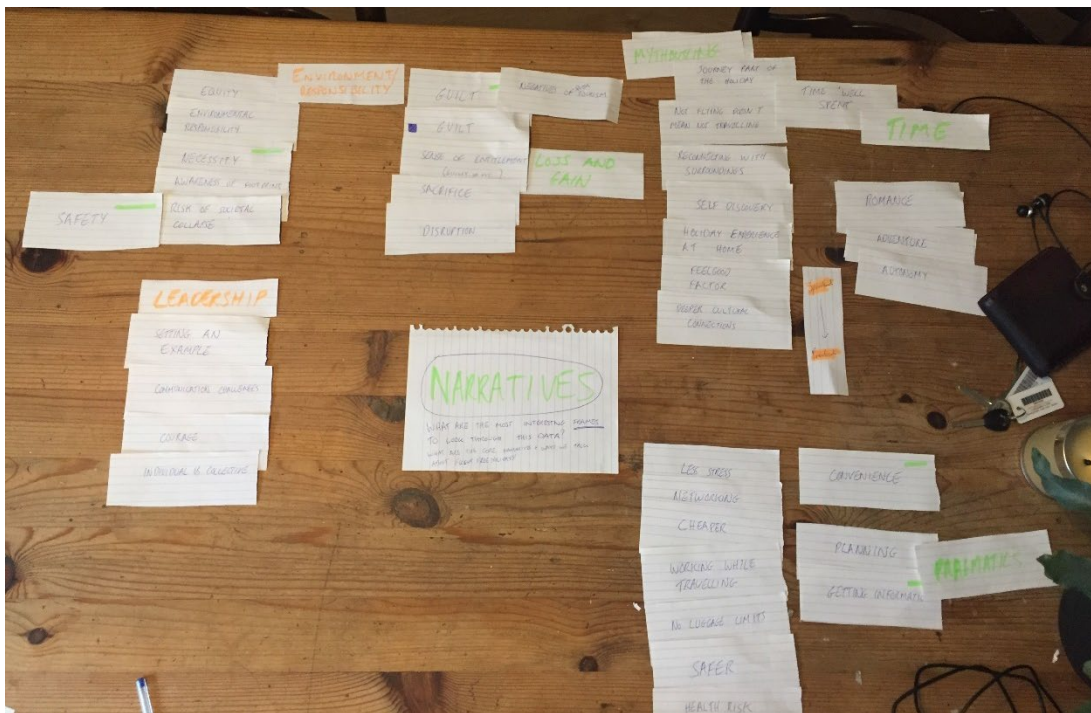
I then coded sections of text in each blog according to the list of codes above. This allowed me to identify the most common codes (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Most common codes in the 110 flight free travel blogs



Using this hierarchy of codes gave me a sense of the realms of discourse, but no indication as to the broader understandings of flight free travel. To get a sense of the cultural meanings behind the codes I wrote out all the codes and began a process of thematically grouping them into broad meanings, following the central role of meanings as the cultural conventions, expectations and social structures that make up social practices (Shove, 2014). I sorted these codes to look for the limits of the narratives, the tensions at play, links to dominant meanings identified in the literature review, and any recurring language (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Example of thematic sorting process



Given that I focused on biographical narrative accounts to give insights into sociocultural meanings of flight free travel (Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2012), my focus here was largely on meanings (Kent, 2021), as opposed to the materials or competencies of social practices. Materials and competencies were only discussed to the extent that they were woven into these meanings. I settled on four broad meanings of flight free travel: the ethical choice; leadership; freedom; and convenience, while noting down any relevant materials and competencies associated with the meanings (Table 4).

Table 4: Materials, competencies and meanings of flight free travel

Materials - the objects, tools and infrastructures	Competencies - the skills and knowledge needed to do the practice	Meanings - cultural conventions, socially shared meanings and expectations
Train, train stations, rail tracks, ticket booths	Finding the right planning tools	The ethical choice
Bicycle, bike paths, bike clothing	Mindset shift – from sacrifice to opportunity	Leadership
Car, petrol stations, motorways	New communication skills – being able to explain why to friends and family	Freedom
Ferry, ferry terminals	Travelling with children	Convenience

Bridleways, footpaths	Awareness of the relative environmental impact of air travel	
Planning websites e.g. Man in Seat 61, Loco2	Scheduling	

Ethics considerations

Given that all data gathered is in the public domain and online, I adopted a 'fair game-public domain' position (Hookway, 2008) to waive consent and I saw no ethical implications for conducting this research. The reliability of the data could have been improved by having multiple coders for the quantitative elements (Macnamara, 2005), but this study was an individual piece of work.

Summary

This chapter has set out the methodological approaches used to answer the two research questions. I explained how an explanatory sequential design was used to gain insights into popular representations of flight free travel and how they changed over time. This mixed-methods approach, starting with a quantitative frequency analysis of popular media pieces on flight free travel and complemented by a qualitative discourse analysis, both helped to reveal unexpected elements and enabled an examination of the broader discursive framings of flight free travel. To answer the second research question, I showed how a thematic narrative analysis of biographical accounts of flight free travel was used provide insights into how practitioners understand flight free travel, using all blogs on Flight Free UK as a data source.

Chapter 4: Popular representations of flight free travel and how they have changed over time

Introduction

This chapter presents findings from a quantitative frequency analysis showing how the coverage of flight free holidays changed in popular UK media between 2000 – 2020, via a sample of the spike years of 2007, 2010, 2014 and 2019. For each spike year, I present the results of a frequency analysis, pull out key trends and offer a set of preliminary insights to explain those trends.

The chapter is split into four sections. In the first section I introduce the key themes. The second section discusses how themes changed over time. The third section summarises how themes changed according to publication and the fourth section links the main themes in the articles into the frequency of the three broad cultural, ethical and practical representations, to give a sense of how the broad representations of flight free holidays changed over time.

There are four principal points that emerge from the quantitative analysis. First, there was a spike in disruption-related articles due to the Iceland volcano eruptions in 2010. Second, flight free holidays were often associated with cruises, which goes against the narrative of flight free travel as environmentally friendly travel. Third, articles on flight free holidays became more common and more closely associated to the environment over the period. Fourth, types of media (e.g. broadsheet or tabloid) appeared as a stronger indicator of a publication featuring flight free holidays than, for example, political leaning. These warrant further consideration and are built on in Chapter 5 through a qualitative lens.

Key themes

All of the results in this section were coded by the analytic themes set out in Table 2 (see Chapter 3). Of the 112 articles on flight free holidays, 53 were coded against the theme of romance/beauty, which was the most common theme. Articles coded to romance/beauty used romantic language to frame flight free holidays. This reflects the ‘romantic gaze’ (Urry, 2011) as a sort of aesthetic compass, where natural places such as landscapes, rivers and mountains can become objects of aesthetic interest. Insofar as Urry’s definition refers to natural landscapes, the romance/beauty theme also reflected articles that featured romance in the form of holidays facilitating intimate relationships with loved ones, friends, places and cultures (Trauer and Ryan, 2005).

44 articles were coded against the theme of environment/guilt – these articles framed flight free holidays in environmental terms. The association between holidays and environmental awareness is well-covered in the literature. Specifically related to flying, there is a host of research on the guilt

associated with the environmental costs of air travel and 'flight shame' (Randles and Mander, 2009; Cohen, Higham and Cavaliere, 2011; Kroesen, 2013; Gössling, Humpe and Bausch, 2020; Mkonon and Hughes, 2020) as well as studies that reference the relative environmental merit of not flying or flying less (Büchs, 2017; Cohen and Kantebacher, 2020).

Of the 112 total articles, 41 were coded against the theme of convenience, which presented flight free holidays as more convenient than flight-based holidays. Convenience is a common feature in the air travel literature, although it's mostly used to describe air travel as more convenient than non-air travel, often characterised in terms of time and cost savings (Becken, 2007; Higham, Cohen and Cavaliere, 2014; Cocolas *et al.*, 2020). While time and cost savings featured in articles coded with convenience, some articles also included a broader notion of convenience to do with comfort (Shove, 2003) and saving trouble (Warde, Shove and Southerton, 1998).

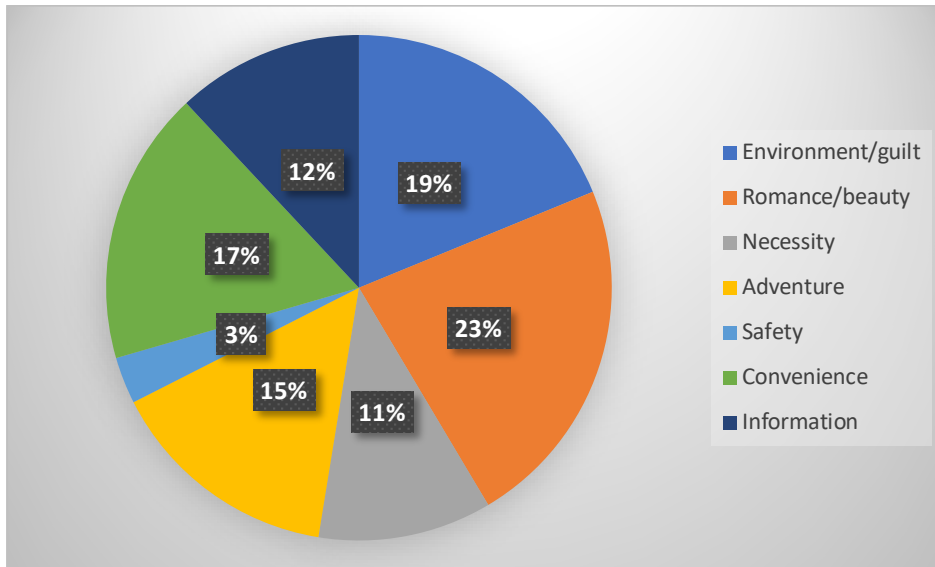
35 articles featured adventure, describing flight free holidays as a means of discovering new experiences and finding adventure. Adventure is a theme that features prominently in *The Tourist Gaze* (Urry, 2011) and a common representation used for marketing holidays (Page, Steele and Connell, 2006). Adventure is also closely tied to narratives of risk-taking, where these narratives can be enforced by backpacker travel consumption of experiences, food and clothing (Elsrud, 2001). The articles that featured adventure as a theme broadly reflected these notions.

Of the 112 articles, 28 included the theme of information. These articles included references to the practicalities of organising a flight free holiday such as timetables, ways of booking and learning from other people's experiences. The need for sufficient information required to go on holidays is reflected in the literature, where for example, the rising popularity of low cost air travel can be, in part, attributed to increased internet access, which has been argued can allow for more choice and 'specialized cultural knowledge' (Casey, 2010, p. 184). Likewise, getting information via personal accounts of travel has been shown to increase the perception of that information as credible (Akehurst, 2009; Tan and Chen, 2012).

26 articles were associated with necessity, framing flight free holidays in terms of disruption and having to change plans, such that the only way to go on holiday is to not travel by air. The literature shows that air travel is often described as necessary, both for business (Storme *et al.*, 2013; Higham, Hopkins and Orchiston, 2019; Nursey-Bray *et al.*, 2019) and for leisure (Kroesen, 2013; Gössling *et al.*, 2019). Necessity relates to the social practices/intervention literature in terms of looking at moments of disruption as potential moments to reconfigure practices (Evans, McMeekin and Southerton, 2012).

Just 7 articles featured safety, which was the least common theme. These articles tended to frame flight free holidays in terms of their relative perceived safety. Articles that represented flight free holidays as safer often featured the dangers of mechanical malfunctions when flying (in line with the findings of Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs, 2019), as well as a general perceived risk of terrorism and crime (Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009; Cohen, Prayag and Moital, 2014).

Figure 10: Overall split of themes



How themes changed over time

2007

In the first spike year, most coverage was associated with environment/guilt, specifically using the lens of slow travel, a popular theme in non-flight travel literature (Dickinson, Robbins and Lumsdon, 2010; Dickinson, Lumsdon and Robbins, 2011). The Guardian contained the most references to the seven analytic themes, followed by the Telegraph, the Independent and the Mirror. There were no articles from the Express.

Figure 11: Overall split of themes in 2007

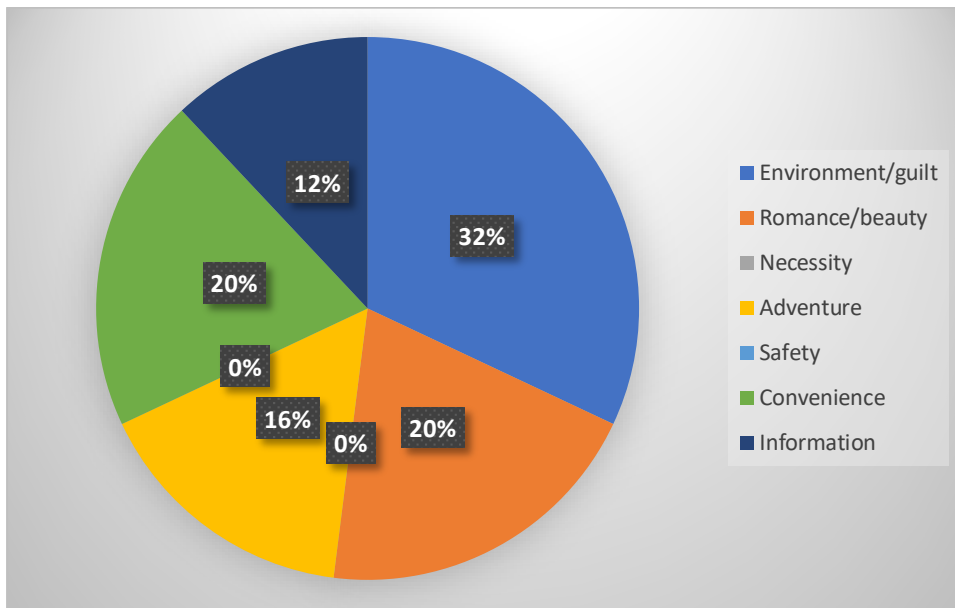
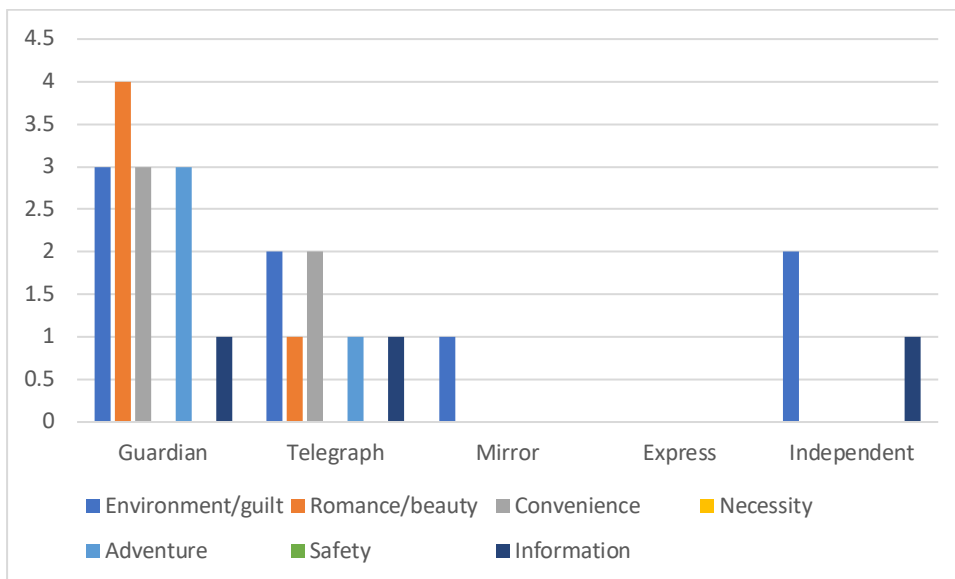


Figure 12: 2007 themes by publication



2010

Necessity was by far the most common theme in the second spike year, which stands out as an anomaly against the other years. The Telegraph wrote the most about flight free holidays in 2010, followed by the Guardian, the Independent, the Mirror and the Express. From a short review of the articles associated with necessity in 2010, most referred to flight free holidays in the context of the eruptions of Eyjafjallajökull, a volcano in Iceland, which caused a grounding of around 107,000 flights in just eight days and represented 48% of total air traffic over the period (Bye, 2011). The same year saw British Airways staff mount a series of strikes about pay and perks (Reuters, 2010), which caused

further disruption and meant tens of thousands of holidaymakers were unable to fly. Against the backdrop of these uncertainties, coverage of flight free holidays spiked.

Figure 13: Overall split of themes in 2010

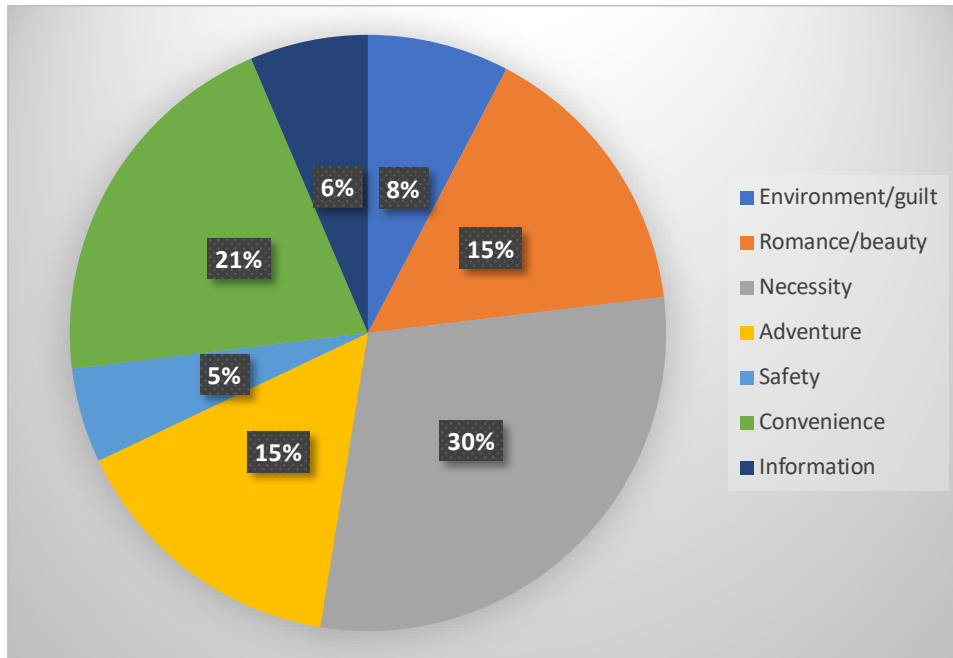
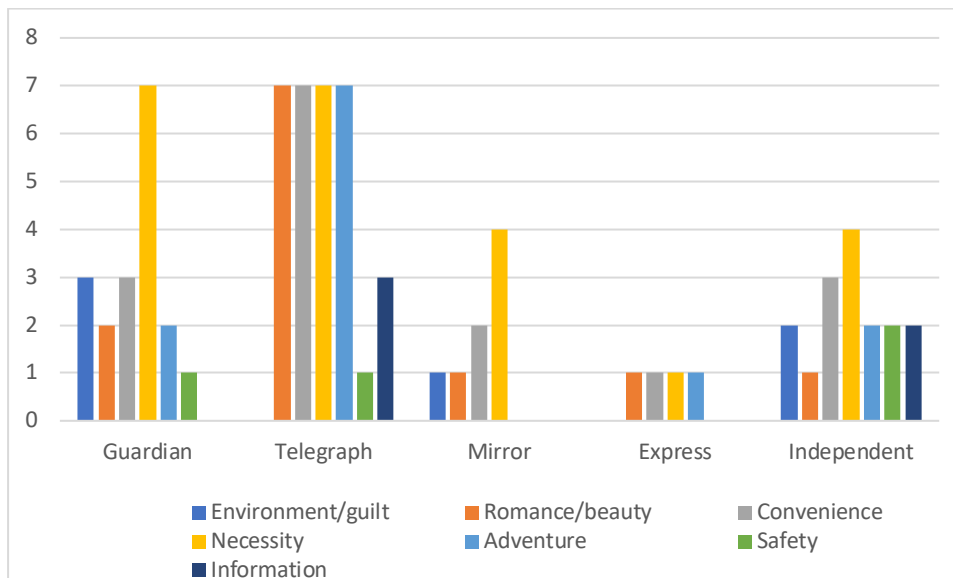


Figure 14: 2010 themes by publication



2014

Romance and adventure were the most common themes in 2014, although overall coverage dropped from 2010 levels. This year stood out among the others as there were no references to the environment, information, safety or necessity. Almost all coverage came from the Telegraph and there was some from the Independent. No other publications wrote about flight free holidays in 2014. What

is striking about Figures 16 and 19 is the extent to which flight free travel appeared to drop off the media agenda compared to 2010. This may indicate that – outside of extraordinary circumstances – flight free travel wasn't represented as significant, and even when it was there is no link to the environment.

From a cursory glance over the articles on flight free holidays in 2014, it was clear that articles appeared to frame flight free holidays in terms of romance and beauty, backing up the work of John Urry in *The Tourist Gaze* (Urry, 2011) and research on use of romance in holiday narratives (Trauer and Ryan, 2005). Most of these articles focused on cruises as the means of taking the flight free holiday, which suggests that that not all representations of flight free holidays are associated with being environmentally friendly. Indeed, some of the most efficient cruise ships emit three to four times as much carbon per passenger mile as an aeroplane (Newman, 2019). The publication that covered cruises the most was the Telegraph and its articles about cruises tended to mention flight free holidays – they weren't often about them.

There was an association between articles that featured romance/beauty and those that featured convenience, where convenience was framed in terms of all-inclusive holiday deals. These depictions of travel related to understandings of the Grand Tour, where all-inclusive services helped pave the way from 'incidental' to 'specific' tourist industries (Towner, 1985). This connection is drawn out in the following chapter.

Figure 15: Overall split of themes in 2014

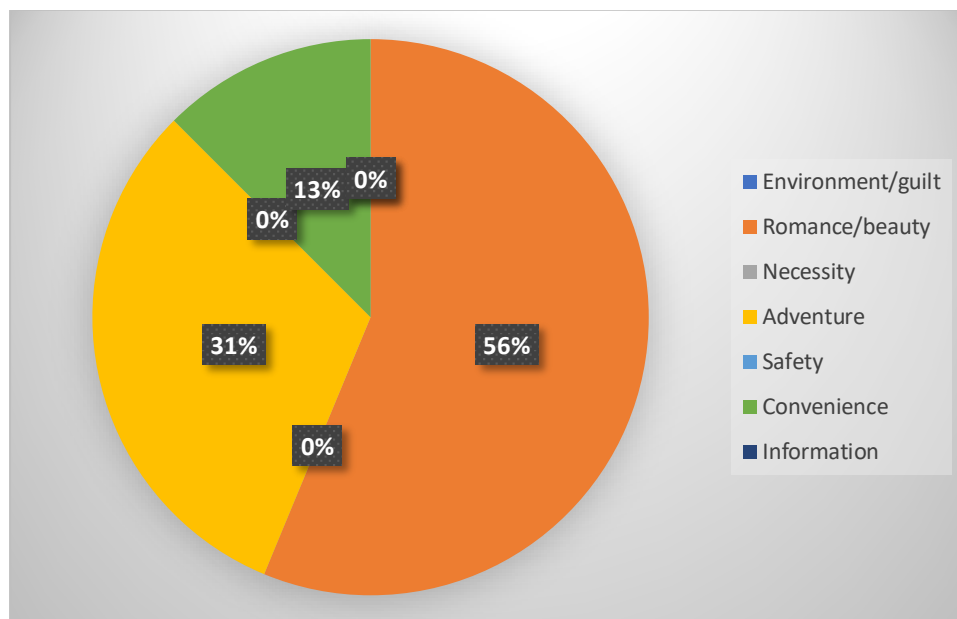
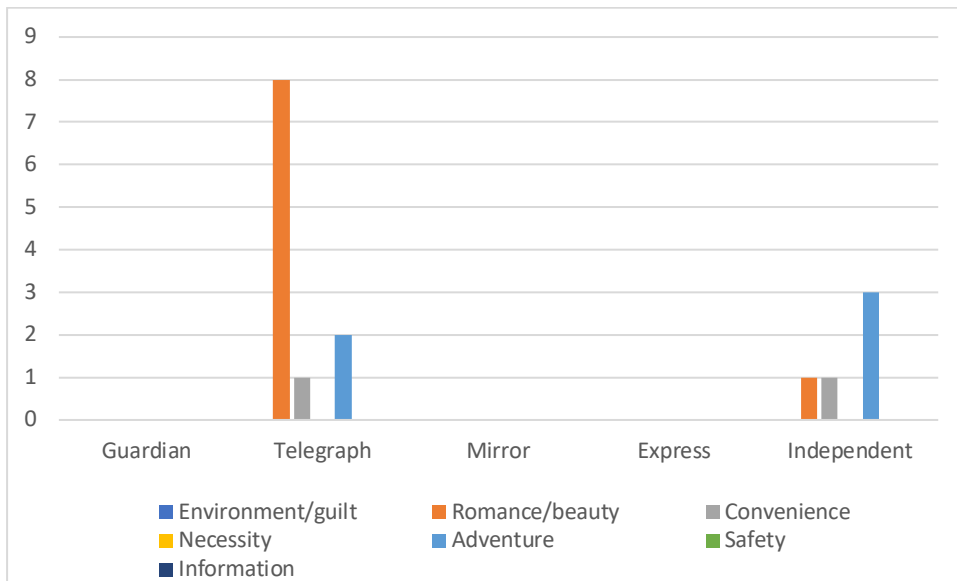


Figure 16: 2014 themes by publication



2019

2019 contained the most articles on flight free holidays in the four spike years. The Guardian and the Telegraph were the two publications that wrote most about flight free holidays, followed by the Independent, the Mirror and the Express. The most common theme was environment/guilt. This is significant in that in 2007 and 2014 there was relatively little coverage of flight free holidays, while the spike in 2010 appeared closely tied to extraordinary Iceland volcano events. Coverage in 2019 was associated with environmental themes across the publications, especially in broadsheets (see Figures 17 and 18).

This spike coincided with the airing of a David Attenborough documentary ‘Climate Change: The Facts’ (BBC One, 2019), the April 2019 actions of Extinction Rebellion (Slawson, 2019) and the advocacy of Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, who was named Time Magazine’s 2019 person of the year (Alter, Haynes and Worland, 2019). Many of the articles appeared to refer to these three events.

Figure 17: Overall split of themes in 2019

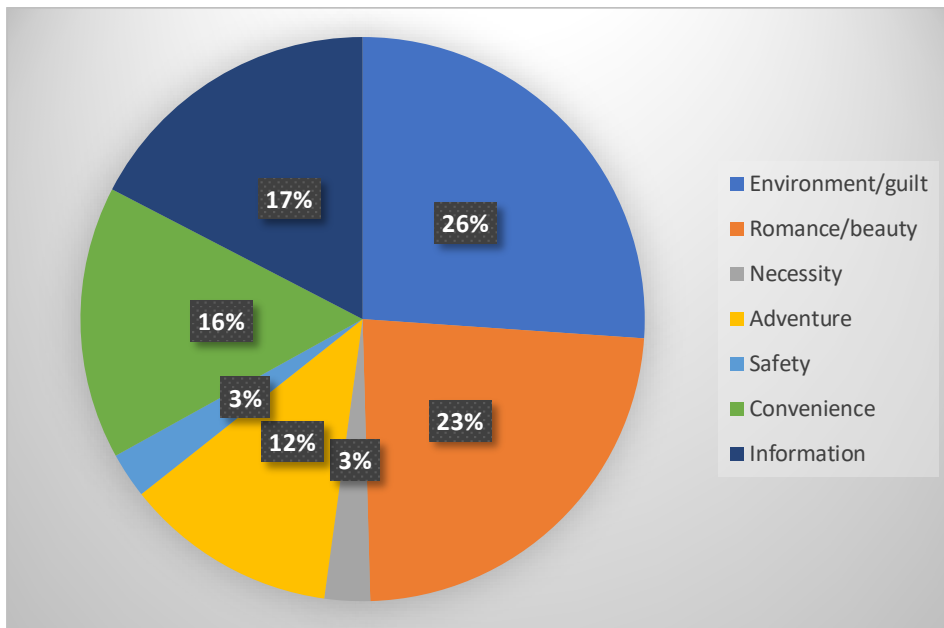
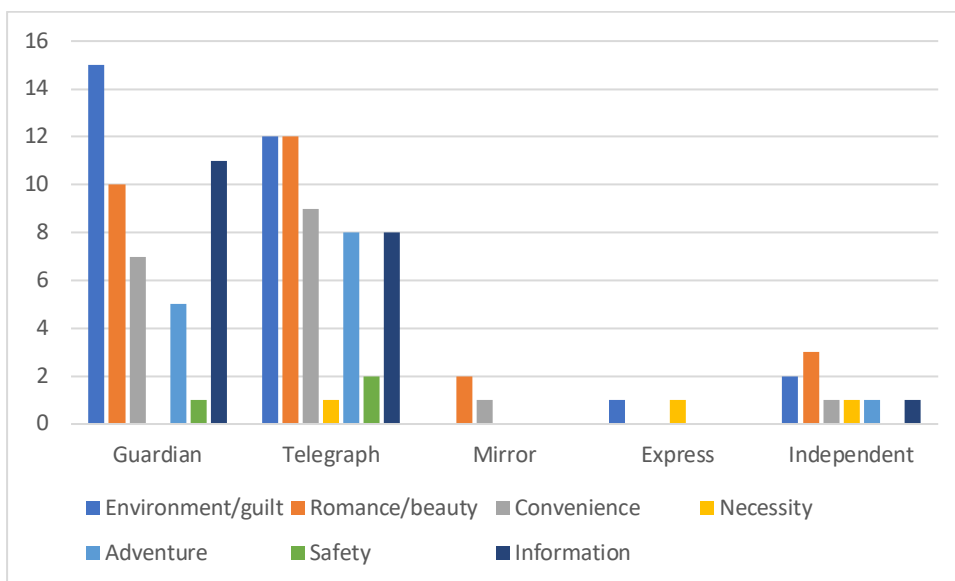


Figure 18: 2019 themes by publication



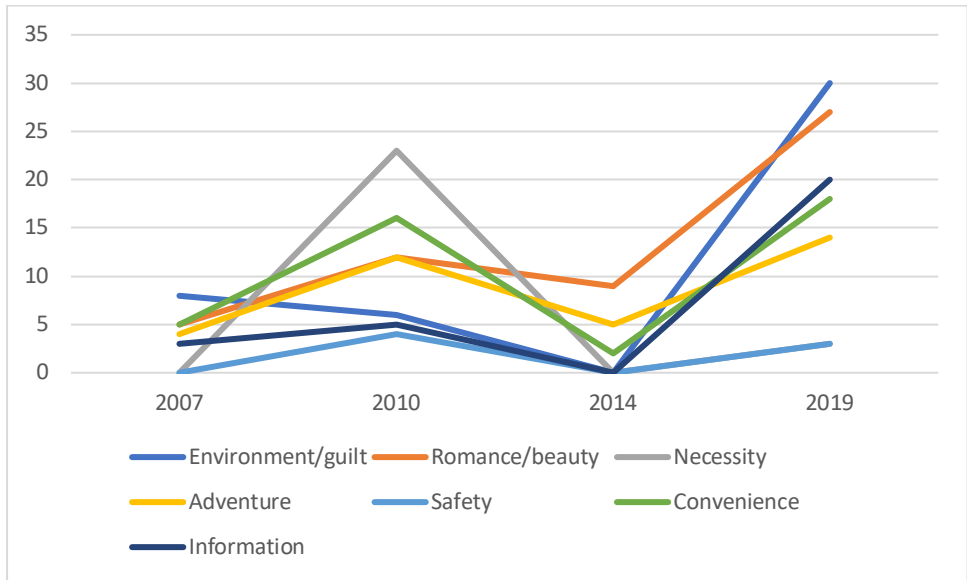
Preliminary insights

During the frequency analysis I noted extra themes that linked the analytic themes together by year and publication, to get some sense of explaining the spikes in coverage. Here are preliminary insights that can be gleaned from the analysis, which will be explored further in the qualitative data analysis (Chapter 5).

While romance/beauty was consistently the most popular theme, adventure and convenience also featured in every spike year, as shown in Figure 19. In 2010 there was a spike in articles that framed flight free holidays in terms of necessity, and safety featured least as a theme. Overall coverage of

flight free holidays dropped in 2014, which was followed by a significant rise in the coverage of flight free holidays in 2019 – reflected by an increase in instances of almost every other theme.

Figure 19: Article themes over time

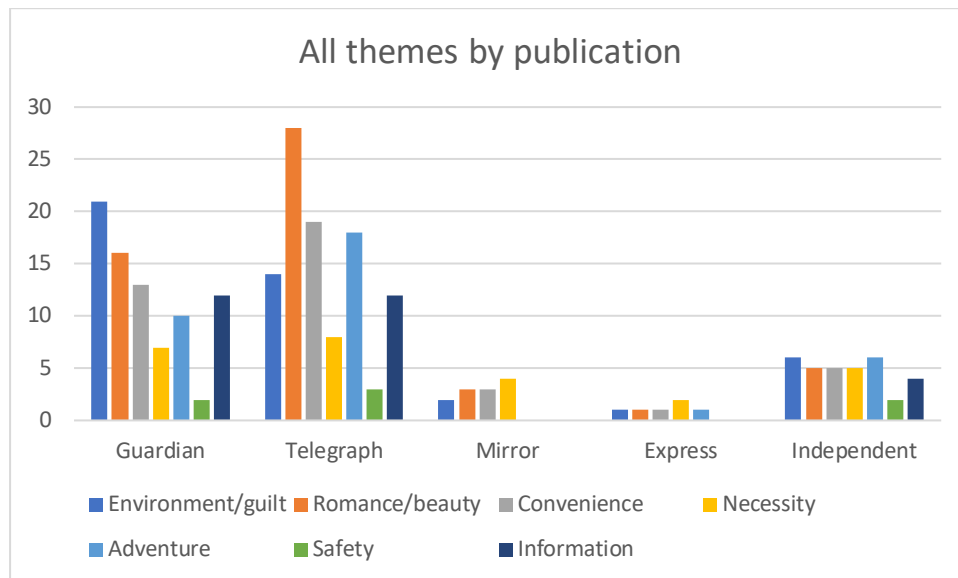


Over the sample period, environment/guilt appeared more often and became more strongly associated with articles on flight free holidays. This suggests that not only did coverage of flight free holidays increase over the last 20 years, but it became more tied into environmental themes – mirroring a rising public engagement with environmental issues in the UK (Chilvers and Pallett, 2018; Buck, 2019).

There was also an association between articles about flight free holidays and those that mentioned the environment and information, in that almost all articles about flight free holidays used an environmental lens, where these were often accompanied by information. In this way, articles connecting environmental issues with information on flight free holidays could be interpreted to seek to engage with the meanings, understandings and skills associated with flight free holidays. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 6.

How themes changed by publication

Figure 20: All themes by publication



The Express

Of the papers analysed, the Express was the paper that covered flight free holidays the least. Only one of these articles mentioned flight free holidays in environmental terms and there were none about flight free holidays. This is perhaps indicative of the Express' editorial stance towards environmental issues at the time: in 2009 the paper published a front page that led with '100 reasons why global warming is natural: 'No proof that human activity is to blame'' (Tobitt, 2021). The Daily Express has since changed its policy on environmental issues, launching a Green Britain campaign in partnership with renewable energy entrepreneur Dale Vince in early 2021 (Ingham, 2021).

Figure 21: The Express mention vs about

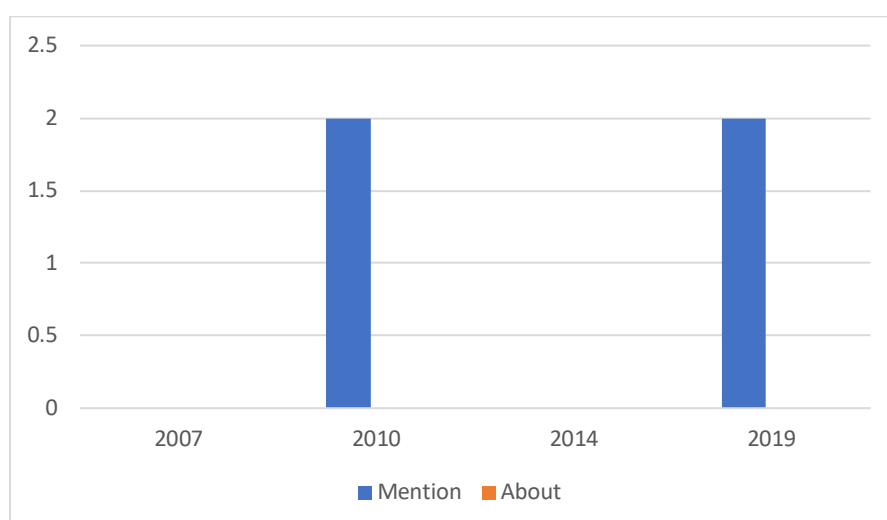
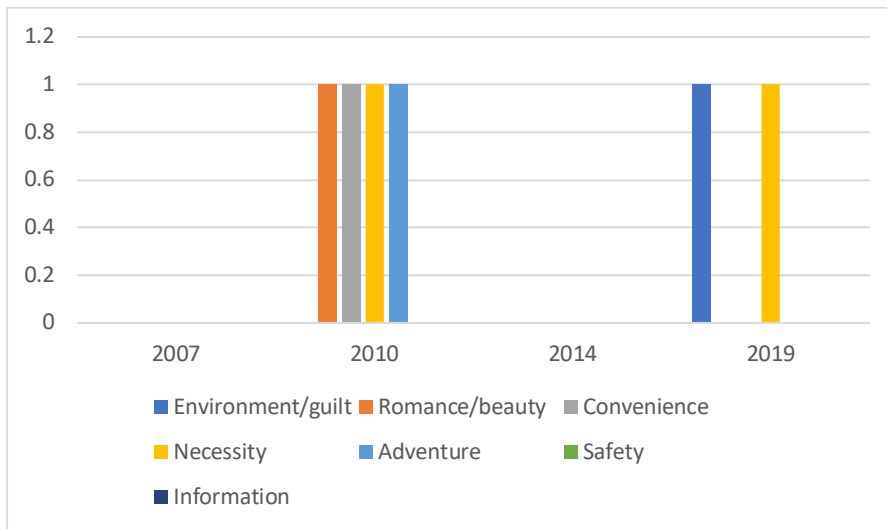


Figure 22: The Express themes over time



The Guardian

The Guardian’s coverage of flight free holidays shifted from a small number of cross-thematic articles in 2007 and 2010, to no articles in 2014, and then to a large number of environment and information-focused articles in 2019. The Guardian was the publication that featured environmental angles the most, reflecting its relatively high coverage of climate discourses related to catastrophes and crises between 1998-2007 (Doulton and Brown, 2009). There were no references to flight free holidays in 2014 and the Guardian’s coverage rarely featured cruises.

Figure 23: The Guardian mention vs about

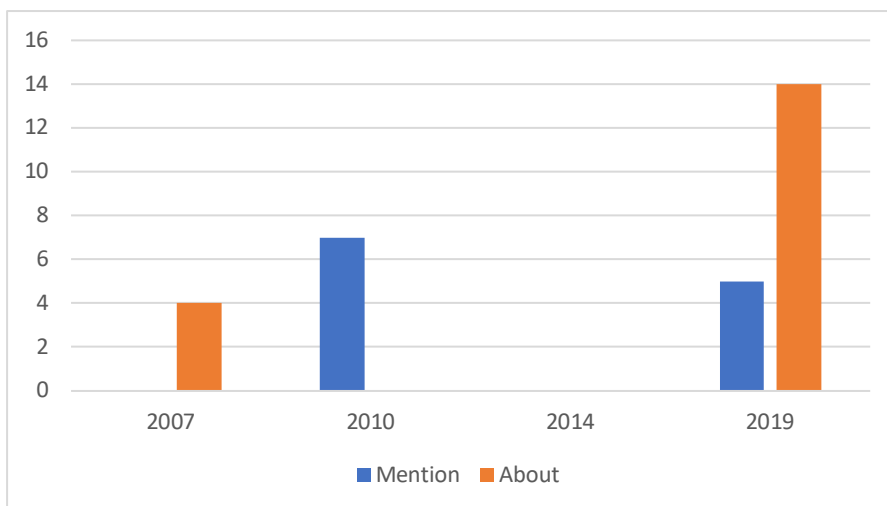
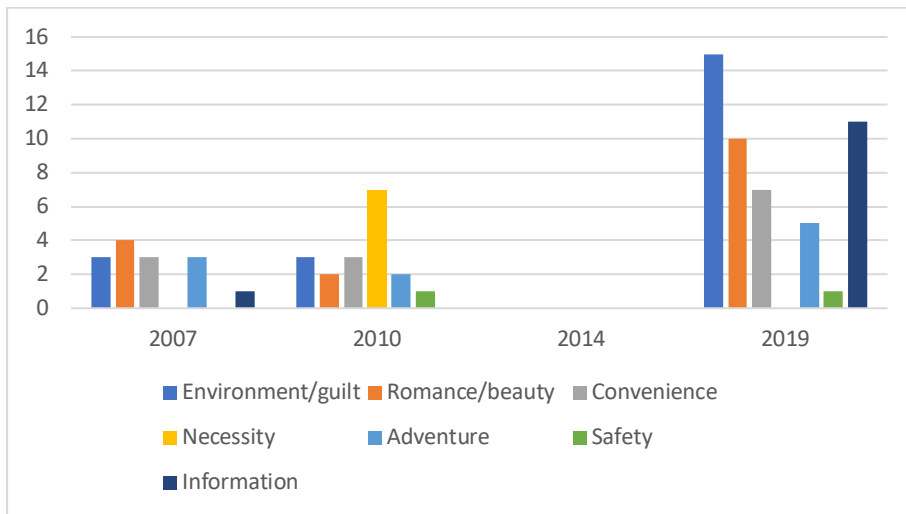


Figure 24: The Guardian themes over time



The Independent

The Independent covered flight free holidays consistently across the themes. As with the other papers, there was a spike in convenience, safety and necessity in 2010, accompanied by a gradual shift towards writing about flight free holidays, not simply mentioning them across the time period. Environment featured to a minor extent but consistently across the timeframe, again perhaps reflecting the prominence of climate discourses in the paper in the noughties (Doulton and Brown, 2009). There was a small peak in 2014 for adventure, with three articles dedicated solely to cruise holidays. The association between adventure and cruises is reflected in cruising literature, which shows that ‘learning/discovery and thrill’ is a key motivation for those embarking on cruise holidays (Hung and Petrick, 2011).

Figure 25: The Independent mention vs about

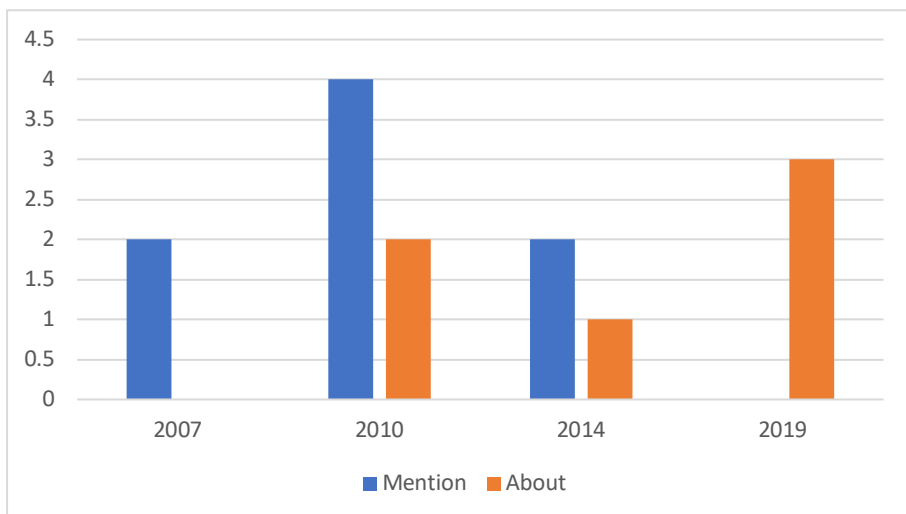
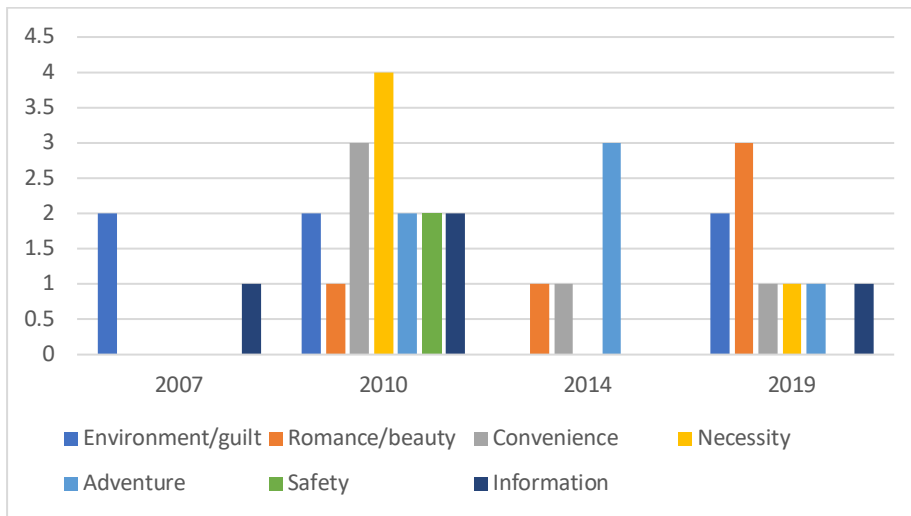


Figure 26: The Independent themes over time



The Mirror

The Mirror – like the Express – featured very few articles that mentioned flight free holidays and only one about flight free holidays. It is worth noting that the Mirror and the Express are generally understood to sit at opposing ends of the political spectrum (Ashcroft, 2012), although they seemingly shared the same low level of interest in flight free holidays over these four spike years. All The Mirror’s articles mentioning flight free holidays were about cruises and environment featured twice.

Figure 27: The Mirror mention vs about

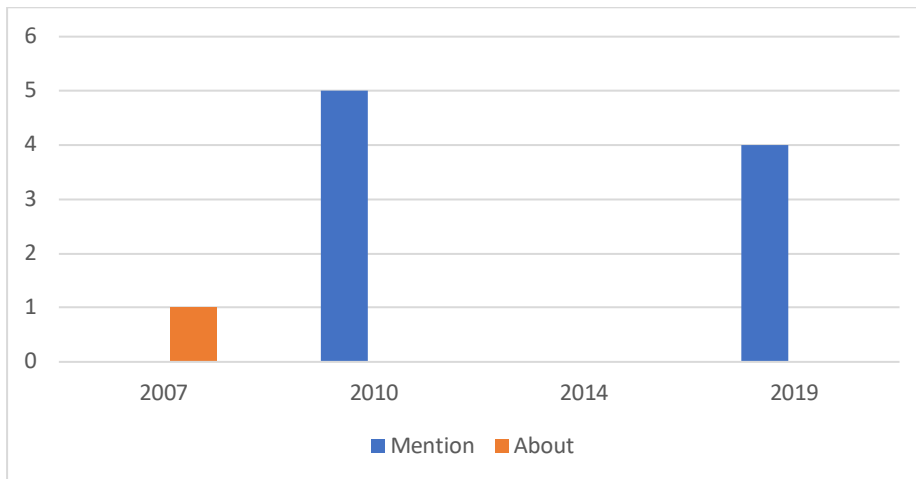
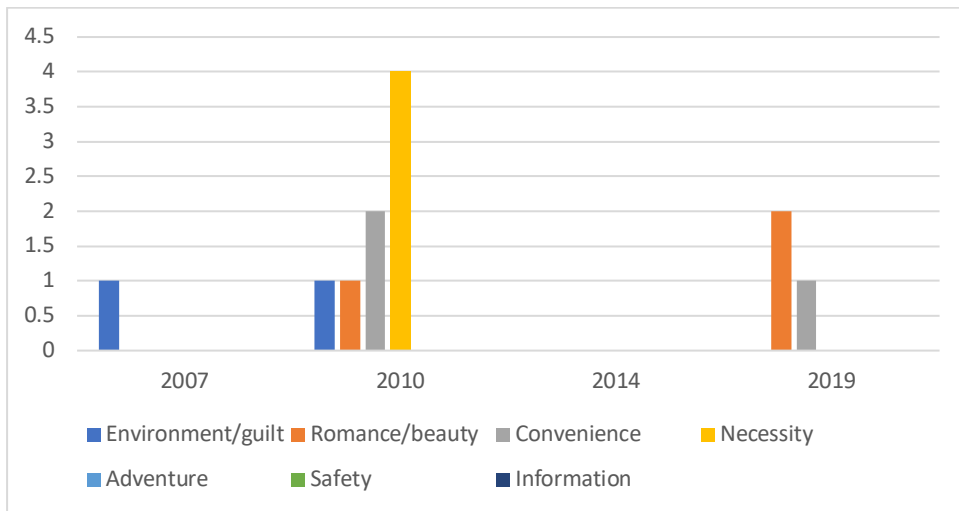


Figure 28: The Mirror themes over time



The Telegraph

The Telegraph was the publication that mentioned flight free holidays most. Most of these articles were associated with themes of romance, convenience and cruises, but the environment also featured strongly. The link between cruises, romance/beauty and convenience is reflected in the motivations of people who cruise, where notions of escape and relaxation feature as a primary motivation for cruising (Hung and Petrick, 2011).

In 2019 there was an increase in coverage about flight free holidays from an environmental and romance framing, which was associated with a rise in articles emphasising information. This fits in with the Telegraph’s narratives of framing climate change through a rational lens, where it has been shown that between 1997-2007 the publication favoured the authority of economists and cost-benefit analyses when it came to climate issues (Doulton and Brown, 2009).

Figure 29: The Telegraph mention vs about

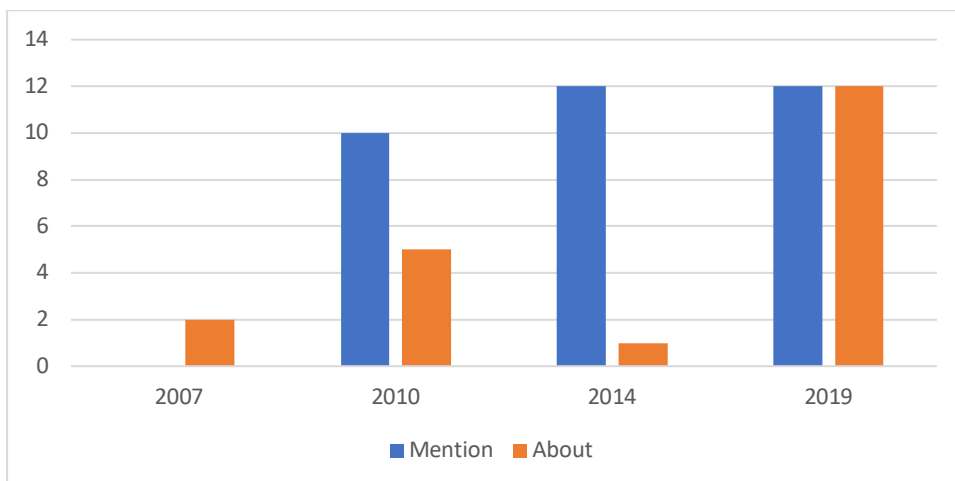
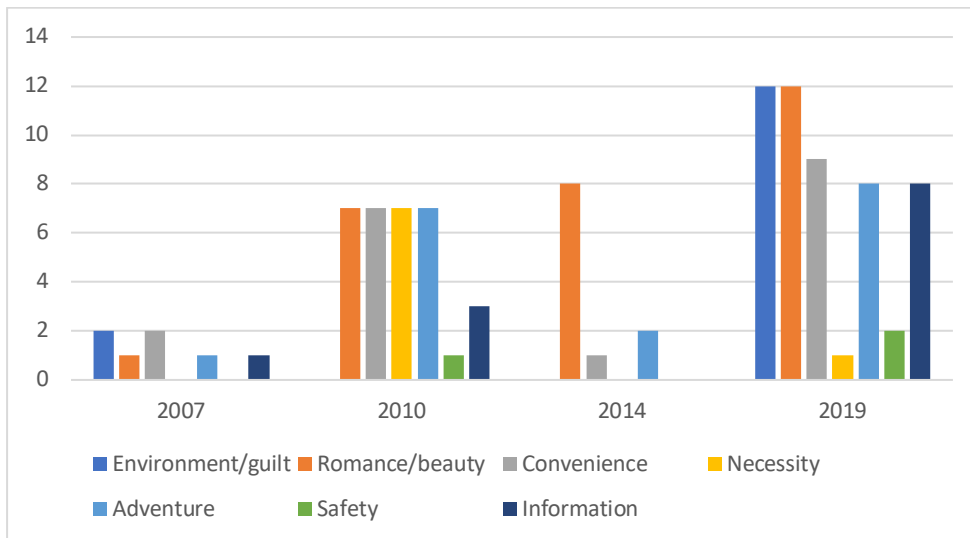


Figure 30: The Telegraph themes over time



Preliminary insights

While environment/guilt featured strongly in the Guardian and to a lesser extent the Telegraph, the opposite was true for the Mirror and the Express. This split also held true for general coverage of flight free holidays, where most articles were written by the Telegraph and the Guardian, while the Mirror and the Express wrote the fewest. This might suggest that it is publication format, rather than political stance, that is a stronger indicator for whether an article on flight free holidays is framed according to an environmental lens or not. This finding would support research on thinking about effective climate communication in terms of ‘types of media’, specifically how engaging with ‘new media’ types offers potential new audiences for building consensus on climate issues (Neill and Boykoff, 2011). As media narratives can both shape and reinforce readers’ views on issues (Gavin, 2018), a shift in coverage could be reflected by a shift in popular narratives, since these outlets are reaching audiences beyond the usual suspects of people already interested in environmental issues. Using media narratives and persuasive storytelling as a means of communicating environmental issues is a key line of enquiry in the literature (Jones and Peterson, 2017), and exemplified by the Express’ Green Britain campaign.

The tabloids’ articles mentioning flight free holidays tended to focus on how to get compensation because of external disruption from the ash cloud in 2010 (Daily Express, 2010; Pettifor, 2010), or the collapse of Thomas Cook in 2019 (Ho, 2019). The Mirror’s two pieces about flight free holidays were framed once as a motivation for ‘a world without planes’ and once calling out the ‘wrongs of green hypocrisy’. The second piece argued that Tim Yeo, the then Conservative chair of the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, was a hypocrite for calling for an end to domestic flights, while allegedly accepting a series of complimentary long-haul flights to go to conferences. Invoking hypocrisy can be both effective or harmful for adoption of pro-environmental behaviours, but the

outcome can depend on both situational (public vs private) and individual (mindset) factors (Gamma, Mai and Loock, 2020).

Representations over time

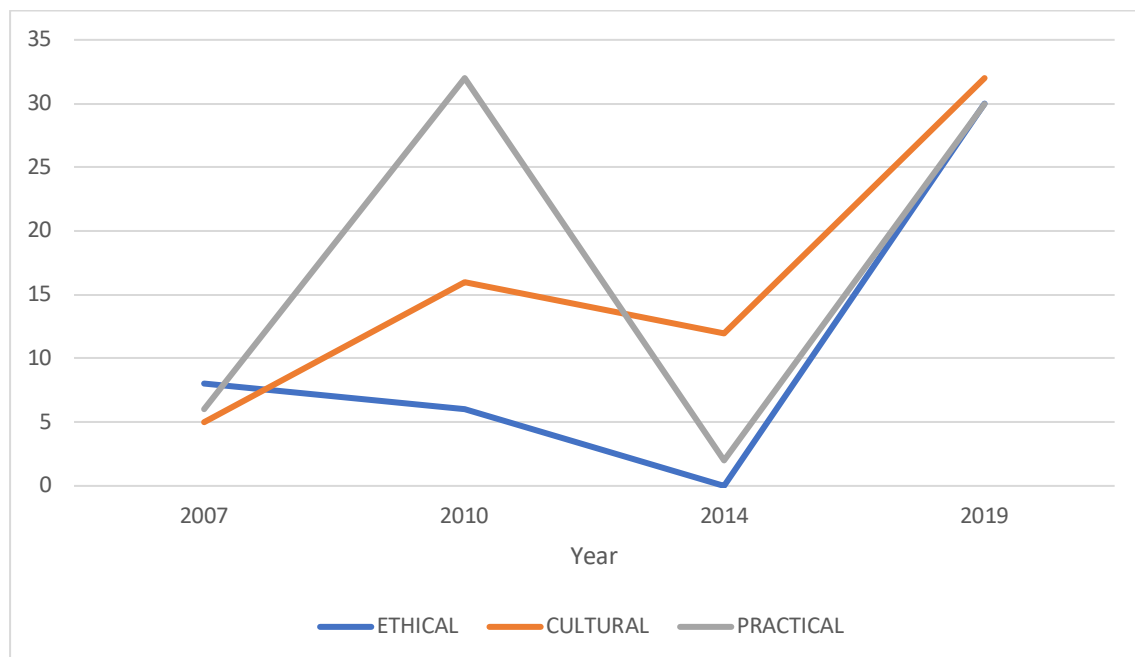
In the final stage of the quantitative analysis, I grouped the themes into the three main representations (Table 3) to get a sense of the changing shape of the overall representations over time. Of the 112 articles reviewed across 2007, 2010, 2014 and 2019, 44 aligned flight free holidays with ethical representations. These are representations that feature a perceived moral obligation to do the right thing. There were no standout spikes according to publication format or political stance. All ethical representations had an environmental angle.

65 articles aligned flight free holidays with cultural representations. Cultural representations focus more on aesthetics and taste over ethics, and as such these representations of flight-free holidays tended to differ according to publication. The Telegraph wrote the most cultural-aligned articles.

70 articles aligned flight free holidays with practical representations. Practical representations focus on the practical aspects of flight free travel such as how to plan and take a trip.

Figure 31 shows how the balance of ethical, cultural and practical representations of flight free holidays changed over time. There is a correlation between ethical and cultural representations over the four spike years, whereas practical representations are much more variable.

Figure 31: Representations of flight free travel over time



Summary

The results of this quantitative analysis give a sense of the trends in coverage of flight free holidays. A short read through the articles points towards a set of preliminary insights to build on in the qualitative analysis. First, a spike in disruption-related articles due to the volcano eruptions in 2010 suggests that flight free holidays were represented through necessity that year. Second, flight free holidays were often associated with cruises, as shown by coverage in 2014 and the popularity of coverage from the Telegraph. Cruises are equally if not more environmentally harmful than air travel, so representations of flight free holidays are not always associated with the environment. Third, articles on flight free holidays became more common and more closely associated to the environment over the period, reflecting a growing public awareness of environmental issues over the timeframe. Fourth, publication format instead of political leaning appeared as a better indicator for whether a publication featured flight free holidays or not. In the final section I introduced how the themes relate to overall representations, outlining the changing balance of overall representations over time.

In the next chapter I expand on these preliminary insights, taking a deeper dive into the representations through a different form of data to look at the underlying narratives and motivations being evoked.

Chapter 5: Representations of flight free holidays in popular UK newspapers

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of a qualitative discourse analysis on representations of flight free holidays, to provide insights into the popular discursive framings, understandings and meanings of flight free travel (Hyland, K. and Paltridge, 2011; Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2012). The chapter is split into three sections that correspond to the ethical, cultural and practical representations introduced in the previous chapter. I provide evidence for each representation using quotes from a range of newspapers and link the findings into the academic debates set out in Chapter 2. Each section is split into the dominant themes according to that representation. These are informed by the analytic themes from the frequency analysis, but slightly altered to reflect the qualitative nature of the data, as set out in Table 3.

This chapter shows how ethical representations stem from a perceived moral obligation to do the right thing. These are made up of three themes: responsibility; guilt; and leadership. Ethical representations are always associated with the environment, where narratives of environmental responsibility are closely tied to themes of guilt and leadership. Cultural representations of flight free holidays appeal to societal understandings of romance, freedom, adventure, and history. Practical representations split into themes of forced disruption and going flight free out of necessity, as well as themes of convenience and getting information. I argue that the occurrences of many of the same representations – especially cultural representations – in both flight free and conventional understandings of holidays reflects a closing of the conceptual gap between conventional holidays and flight free holidays.

Ethical representations

Ethical representations stem from a perceived moral obligation to do the right thing and can be split into three themes: responsibility; guilt; and leadership. All ethical representations had an environmental angle.

Responsibility

The first theme in ethical representations of flight free holidays is responsibility, where there is a perceived moral responsibility to reduce the amount one flies because of aviation's environmental impact. In a feature piece about a 'slow travel' journey from the UK to the Amalfi coast by bus, the Independent journalist Emily Clark writes:

I'm mostly cutting out flying for environmental reasons – the emissions from just a few flights can easily double your annual carbon footprint. – The Independent

Environmental responsibility is a prominent theme in the literature (Becken, 2007; Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh, 2007; Randles and Mander, 2009; Cocolas *et al.*, 2020; Mkono and Hughes, 2020). There is a sense in which people need to know the facts to have a moral responsibility, reflecting an information-deficit view of environmental responsibility (Hall, 2013) and exemplified by an interview with Roger in the Guardian:

A 37-year-old research fellow at the University of Southampton, Roger has been climate "aware" for years – his PHD was in carbon emissions from aviation – but it wasn't until 2018, when a ground breaking report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was published, that he decided to give up flying for good. "It said that emissions needed to be drastically cut in the next 11 years to avoid the worst effects of climate change. I thought it was time to do my bit."

Roger's case is somewhat at odds with the findings in the literature, as simply providing someone with this information is for the most part, not enough to shift behaviour, let alone more entrenched everyday practices (Whitmarsh *et al.*, 2020). It may have been information from the IPCC report that tipped Roger into not flying, but he was approaching the issue from a certain angle, having completed a PhD on aviation emissions – and was likely deeply familiar with meanings of flight free travel. In the same article, there's an interesting comment from the article's author, Helen Coffey, which has potential implications for framing flight free issues:

Like everyone I speak to who's gone flight-free, Roger is thoughtful, humble and engaging when talking about an act of self-sacrifice that, for many of us, seems far beyond our reach. If I expected some air of self-congratulation or self-righteousness – a judgemental comment about my lifestyle as a travel journalist, perhaps, or an embarrassing amount of hand-wringing earnestness – I was left disappointed.

It's worth reflecting on the non-judgemental approach that Roger took while explaining his reasons for going flight free, which helped to engage the author of the article in an unexpected way. The author went into the interview with a view of the sorts of people who go flight-free as 'self-righteous'. Roger's approach broke down the author's preconceptions, thereby moving her view of people who go flight free from moralising to 'humble and engaging'. This shift from a seeming pejorative to a values-based tone demonstrates the central role of communication in shaping understandings of flight free travel, and supports work on the role of using values-based language to engage people with different

opinions on this issue (Büchs, 2017; Morten, Gatersleben and Jessop, 2018). In the same way that air travel mobilities can co construct, create and reinforce dominant narratives (Janta, Cohen and Williams, 2015; Higham, Hopkins and Orchiston, 2019; Hopkins *et al.*, 2019), finding the ways in which these narratives puncture can help to form new narratives, representations and ultimately understandings. In the case above the author's narrative becomes punctured and her interaction with Roger contributes to a new understanding of the people who do flight free travel as 'non-judgemental'.

Environmental concerns feature strongly in ethical representations of flight free holidays, especially for articles written in 2019. One of the preliminary insights in the previous chapter was that flight free holidays became more closely associated with environmental themes over the period. This is reflected in the qualitative data. The combined effect of the big 2019 moments is captured in the following quote from the Telegraph:

I've long prided myself on being an early adopter of (useful) new technology. But I have to confess to being a shamefully late adaptor to climate change issues... Similarly, I've managed to blot out consideration of the cumulative depth of my carbon footprint. This year, I've finally woken up. I've been roused by a combination of factors: the Extinction Rebellion protests; the campaigning of Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg; the BBC programme Climate Change: The Facts, presented by David Attenborough; and an interview I conducted in April with the writer Robert Macfarlane, whose latest book, Underland, is concerned with the "deep-time legacies" we humans are leaving on our planet... I recycle all I can, avoid single-use plastics and I'm eating less meat, but I've generated a hell of a lot of carbon myself. And it's not as if people haven't been pointing out to me why I need to stop. One was the writer and television presenter Nicholas Crane, whom I worked with while I was on the staff of The Daily Telegraph. He decided in the mid-Nineties, after careful consideration of the science, that he ought to do all he could to avoid using aircraft. In a piece for Telegraph Travel in 2006 he wrote: "I took flights to South America, to Africa, to the Caribbean. I once flew to Australia for just a week... As I type these words, it's impossible not to be wracked with guilt." I know the feeling.

Guilt

Guilt is the second theme in ethical representations of flight free holidays. In the quote above the author describes his shift towards flight free holidays as an awakening, based on a better understanding of the science and brought about by a series of high-profile public campaigns. He explains how in the past he'd never really confronted the environmental impact of air travel, but upon learning about it he felt an immense sense of guilt. The confessional tone in which the writer mentions

everything else he's doing to reduce his carbon footprint suggests that he sees his actions as not matching his level of responsibility. The close relationship between moral responsibility and guilt is demonstrated in an article by former Guardian environment editor John Vidal:

I personally feel intense flygskam ['flight shame' in Swedish], even vliegschaamte ['flight shame' in Dutch]. My days of having both long- and short-haul passports, and reporting on climate change and ecological disasters from all corners of the world have ceased. I am now a self-styled "vleig-itarian", committed to just one pleasure flight a year. Offsetting emissions may not be perfect, but it's a good habit and it clearly helps people develop in better ways.

As an environmental journalist writing for a progressive publication, the author identifies an 'intense flight shame' with his personal air travel. The implication is that he has a moral responsibility to reduce his air travel because he's particularly well informed about its environmental impact. Vidal raises carbon offsetting as a 'good habit' to alleviate some of the guilt. In the literature, this is one example of a denial mechanism used to rationalise environmental guilt and counter the 'flyer's dilemma' (Randles and Mander, 2009; Cohen, Higham and Cavaliere, 2011; Corner and Randall, 2011; Kroesen, 2013). Representations of flight free holidays featuring guilt often acknowledge a tension between action and responsibility, framing personal actions to reduce flights as a trade-off – ultimately not perfect but an action worth doing to fulfil some sense of responsibility. People often appeal to notions of environmental prudence in other aspects of their lives as a way of balancing out their air travel decisions (Dickinson, Robbins and Lumsdon, 2010; Corner and Randall, 2011).

The phenomenon of flight shame – where travellers feel ashamed of flying because of its environmental impact (with many choosing to go flight free) – has become increasingly popular in recent years, helped by high profile proponents who are seen to practice what they preach including activist Greta Thunberg and climate scientist Kevin Anderson (Timperley, 2019; Gössling, Humpe and Bausch, 2020). The occurrence of guilt in representations of flight free holidays also supports the notion of an emerging 'eco-guilt' culture in tourism contexts (Mkono and Hughes, 2020).

Leadership

The third theme in ethical representations of flight free holidays is leadership, where there is a moral responsibility to lead by example. To be informed about the environmental impacts of air travel and not act to reduce the amount one flies is, in this theme, hypocritical:

Indeed, the only good traveller is, arguably, a non-traveller. But while the huge, sluggish, backward-looking industry gets its various houses in order, it behoves the consumer/traveller to make the tough decisions. – The Telegraph

If we're honest with ourselves, we may acknowledge our way of life isn't helping. But with China opening a new coal-fired power station every four days and oil leaks spilling billions of gallons, surely our actions are mere drops in the ocean? Well, not exactly. The energy challenge - along with the other environmental crises we face - is indeed huge and intangible. But it hasn't appeared from nowhere. The root causes boil down to the way we've chosen to organise our lives and run our society, so, ultimately, many of the answers must start there too. – The Independent

These quotes suggest that personal action to tackle climate change is not the only relevant action that needs taking, but it's where action should start. The first quote refers to a 'backward-looking' travel sector that needs to shift and the second points to the seeming disparity of personal action against the backdrop of 'a new coal-fired power station every four days'. Both excerpts link individual action to wider societal systems, positioning the individual not as the only one responsible for acting on climate change, but the place to start to lead by example. This finding supports a growing stream of research on environmental leadership. For example, Birtchnell uses the influence of Ghandi to show how 'elites' who lead can synchronise, reconfigure and produce 'elements... of all sorts of different practices' (Birtchnell, 2012, p. 501) – in Ghandi's case drawing attention to embedded colonial textile production practices to reimagine more local and sustainable textile production processes, thereby challenging and reconfiguring the global textile supply chain. Environmental leadership is also a key theme in the small number of articles on flight free travel, where it has been shown that leaders who give up flying tend to influence the behaviours of their followers (Westlake, 2018), and overcoming social pressure is a key theme shared by flight free travellers in Sweden (Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs, 2019). These excerpts link individual action with wider system-level change not in the sense of millions of small actions aggregating, but in a sense where individual actions call into question and challenge a system-level orthodoxy.

While personal leadership is important, leadership is also framed as something that authors want to see from the top. There is a sense in which leaders speaking about climate issues should be seen to be setting an example:

In Amsterdam this month Prince Harry helped launch Travezyst, a sustainable holiday collaboration aimed at protecting "people, places and wildlife". "We can all do better," he told us. Well, quite. He could have boarded one of EasyJet's planes for his trip to Nice, and not Elton John's. And he might have taken the Eurostar to Amsterdam, instead of a plane.

It infuriates me – but unless I change the way I travel, I'm no better than these sanctimonious virtue-signallers. So I've made my pledge. Until the aero boffins develop a zero-carbon

alternative (and I don't mean some dubious offsetting scheme devised to lessen the guilt of frequent travellers), I am limiting myself to one return flight a year. – The Telegraph

Leadership is closely tied to the tensions between personal responsibility, societal responsibility and guilt, working both as a push and a pull. As a pull, individual leadership is framed as important as it emphasises the individual's role in a system, where actions at an individual level can influence the way society is organised. Leadership narratives also apply to influential people speaking about environmental issues – these figures are expected to lead from the front and if they don't, they risk coming across as hypocritical. The perception of being hypocritical has the potential to double-down the efforts of some who choose to reduce their air travel, a push factor in not wanting to come across as a hypocrite: 'unless I change the way I travel, I'm no better than these virtue-signallers.' This finding reflects what Gamma et al. call 'the eco-citizenship effect' of inducing hypocrisy, where individuals seek to realign their self-integrity with socially accepted norms (Gamma, Mai and Loock, 2020) – the implication being that the associations between environment, responsibility, flight free travel and leadership may be becoming the norm.

Cultural representations

Cultural representations of flight free holidays appeal to cultural ideals related to adventure (Elsrud, 2001), romance (Lozanski, 2011) and history (Evans, 2018). These representations focus more on aesthetics and taste over ethics and are split into themes of adventure and history.

Adventure

Flight free holidays are often framed as allowing us to experience a greater sense of adventure than conventional flight-based holidays. Adventure is one of the core aspects commonly associated with tourism (Urry, 2011) and air travel (Randles and Mander, 2009), and a popular representation used when marketing holidays through physical sports and risk-taking (Page, Steele and Connell, 2006). However, adventure in the context of representations of flight free travel tends to be more associated with gaining new cultural experiences, as found by (Ullström et al., 2021):

But my advocacy of trains over planes had less to do with the train's being a smaller generator of carbon and more to do with its being a greater generator of stories. – The Telegraph

Going by train affords the opportunity to read, connect with other travellers and take in the view; the limiting of choice sparks creativity and encourages the discovery of experiences right on your doorstep. – The Independent

Here the experiences from flight-free holidays are presented as more valuable than experiences from flight-based holidays. The sense these quotes portray is that by travelling flight-free, flight free

travellers are restricting their choice and forcing themselves to travel more slowly to get to their destination. A key concept is to see the journey as part of the holiday:

Our mission is to rediscover the joy of slow travel, to experience the transition of landscape, people, culture and language, to move through the world and not just over and above it... For us slow travel is all about appreciating the subtleties of the journey, the nuanced changes in the food served, the music played, the quirks of regional dialects and customs and, of course, the ever-changing scenery rolling by. This is what we are seeking and are excited about - the experience of genuine travel, not an abrupt series of disjointed holidays in different parts of the world interspersed by soulless airport departure lounges and hours in the air only to be dumped, disorientated, in a new destination. – The Observer

The author above implies that there is something lost in the cultural shift towards air travel as a norm: there is a need to 'rediscover' slow travel along with the experiences of moving through the world and not over it. Valuing the journey as part of the holiday is a prominent theme in the slow travel literature (Dickinson, Lumsdon and Robbins, 2011; Ullström *et al.*, 2021). Part of this psychological shift is possible through the way flight free travellers consider the means of transport as – if not more – important than the destination, in contrast to more conventional 'destination-first' tourism (Dickinson, Robbins and Lumsdon, 2010). This said, conventional definitions of destination in terms of geography are only one way of thinking about the notion. As set out in a review of theoretical approaches to concepts of tourism destination, treating destination as a cultural concept could improve the way places are associated with symbols, technology and relationships (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011). The sociocultural importance of destination is also picked up in aeromobilities literature (Adey, Budd and Hubbard, 2007; Cidell, 2017). I expand on this in the final chapter.

Valuing the journey as part of the holiday also supports the idea that slow travel carries cultural significance and being a slow traveller is important for forging a shared group identity (Shove and Warde, 1998; Hibbert *et al.*, 2013). Slow travel is often depicted as 'genuine', participative travel:

Private "cruise" trains can...sometimes be a bubble, tourists on the inside, real life on the outside and in many cases I'd rather be on a regular scheduled train with the locals. Indeed, I've known trains in Africa and Asia where the "scenery" is as much inside as outside, for example families making themselves at home on sleeper trains in India or Vietnam, giving an insight into local life. When I use regular trains to see a country rather than through above flights or tour buses I feel I'm a participant not a mere spectator... I still wonder whether I get best value from a sleeper by sleeping or staying awake. – The Telegraph

This tension between the traveller's role as a participant versus a spectator is a key feature in the tourist gaze literature (Larsen, 2001; Urry, 2011). Part of the appeal for many holidaymakers is to gain new experiences and have an adventure, which can rely on a delineation between the ordinary and the extraordinary. This process often has the effect of 'othering' cultures, which can have roots in neo-colonialism (Lozanski, 2011). We see this tension played out in the quote above where the author prefers travelling with 'the locals', and 'the "scenery" is as much inside as outside'. Language that others can strengthen a narrative of 'us versus them' (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007), which – instead of broadening the debate around an issue – can reinforce dominant representations and understandings.

In many adventure-related articles, there is a heightened sense of freedom to be found in flight free holidays. Travelling flight-free can allow for more autonomy to make last-minute decisions:

There's something satisfying about moving overground, watching the landscape change around you. And when you board a plane, you hand over control to the airline. No-fly travel is more autonomous; you can book at short notice, be spontaneous. Bespoke itineraries, with any number of stops, can be built. – The Guardian

Freedom is a common reason for justifying air travel (Becken, 2007; Hares, Dickinson and Wilkes, 2010; Higham *et al.*, 2016), yet here it's being used as an argument against air travel. This suggests that representations of flight free holidays are closely linked into themes of freedom and autonomy, but these representations of freedom and autonomy are also deeply tied into cultural themes of time, control, spontaneity and rhythm, as reflected by mobilities studies on how the movement of information, ideas and people influence understandings of time (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007; Gustafson, 2014; Strengers, 2015; Schindler, 2020).

History

History emerged as another important theme in cultural representations of flight free holidays. These pieces framed flight-free holidays using romantic and nostalgic language, appealing to moments from the past to act as cultural tips of the hat to a bygone age:

A Gothic cathedral, cobbled streets and a story-book castle with towers, a moat and a drawbridge – what's not to like about Ferrara? The medieval town is one of the highlights of a cruise along the Canal Bianco with barge specialist European Waterways. The cruise takes in a night in Venice and dinner at a stately riverside home where Lord Byron, no less, penned verses. – The Telegraph

But history isn't just something in the past, it's something to be experienced in the present too. By reliving the journeys of a pioneer, we might ourselves become explorers:

Long before Portuguese wanderlust, Marco Polo achieved the astonishing in completing a trade mission (probably in 1271-1275) from his Venetian home to the court of the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan - whose palace was near what is now Zhangjiakou in northern China. Polo's path took him across Iran and central Asia - much like the London-to-Beijing odyssey run by Oasis Overland... It tracks the Silk Road through Asia and ends in the Chinese capital. – The Telegraph

To The Holy Land and Beyond. Oceania's newly refurbished ships Nautica, Sirena and Riviera take to the seas in 2020, with cruises that include three sailings to the Holy Land and beyond. The Wonders of the Ancients cruise aboard the 684-passenger Nautica sails from Dubai to Rome, taking in Aqaba (for Petra), Safaga (for Luxor) and Haifa (for Jerusalem), as well as Heraklion, the Amalfi Coast (Italy) and Salalah (Oman). Similar cruises are available in 2019, including the 23-day Empires of Antiquity, which adds Athens, Rhodes, Santorini, Cyprus and Messina (Sicily) to that itinerary. – The Telegraph

This emphasis on movement links well into the mobilities literature, supporting one of the key tenets of mobilities that the movement of things and ideas, through travel and tourism, shapes everyday social life (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007; Urry, 2011). In the quotes above this is captured by the idea that to truly follow in Marco Polo's footsteps we must move as he did, and we then become adventurers or romantics. Both quotes have an orientalist flavour, appealing to those who want to track the Silk Road and explore 'Empires of Antiquity', 'Wonders of the Ancients' and 'The Holy Land'. As in the adventure theme, this language is an example of creating dualisms between experiences and cultures, thereby othering groups and reinforcing dominant narratives (Said, 2003).

In a similar vein, the articles suggest there is something romantic and evocative about reliving the footsteps of an explorer, following the Silk Road through Asia or finding oneself having dinner in Venice in the same place where Byron – a leading poet from the Romantic movement – wrote verses. Many cultural representations contain this romantic framing, using history as a lens:

There's an old-fashioned charm about them [trains]... You could fall in love: Brief Encounter wouldn't have worked on an EasyJet flight. – The Telegraph

You can't beat a bit of old-school glamour. I know something about that. So does the Venice Simplon-Orient-Express, in spades. I took that beautiful, immaculate, magical train from

London to Verona in 2003 with my girlfriend. We'd only been going out for six months. The vintage train, the glamorous atmosphere, the superb food and wine, the perfect service. Somewhere in a snow-swept Brenner Pass in the corridor of a vintage wagons-lits, I proposed. At least that's what Nicolette says. As I remember it, she proposed to me. Whatever. Here I am 15 years later with a wife, two small kids, two cats, a dog called Pip and a large mortgage. Sometimes old-school glamour has a lot to answer for. – The Telegraph

These historical references to the Orient Express and Brief Encounter (a 1945 film) appeal to cultural sensibilities around love and romance. Given that these cultural representations often refer to historical events, traditions and customs found in representations of travel that go back to the Grand Tour (Towner, 1985), we might infer that traditional representations of travel are being repurposed in the name of the pleasures and cultural experiences to be found in flight free travel. This points to an emerging tension in representations of flight free holidays. On one hand, there are ethical representations that stem from moral arguments around environmental responsibility and guilt. These representations seek to define flight free holidays as 'the right thing to do' or 'the ethical choice' – often from a negative point of view that focuses on the environmental burden of flying. Cultural representations tap into historical narratives to draw on the positive aspects of flight free holidays, similar to the way in which air travel narratives of 'aspirational luxury' emphasise ideas of cultural exchange, relaxation and exploration (Ullström *et al.*, 2021). Cultural representations have very little focus on duty and responsibility and emphasise self-realisation and freedom.

At the same time, an individual's history is not a shared global history. Historical framings might be intended to bring up a series of romantic emotions, but the same framing they can be perceived by someone from a different cultural background as offensive. It's unclear how engaging references to Byron, the Silk Road and the Holy Land would be to people from culturally diverse backgrounds, which demonstrates the cultural specificity of these representations of flight free holidays, and perhaps reflects the readership of the Telegraph, which was the publication that used cultural lenses the most (see previous chapter). The Telegraph is widely viewed as a conservative publication (Ashcroft, 2012), and colonialism is often implicated in liberalism's constructions of the liberal self in notions of independent travel (Lozanski, 2011).

Ethical and cultural representations run somewhat in tandem over time (see Figure 31), and many of the articles appealed to both types. In this sense the ethical representations can be thought of as the 'why' of flight free holidays and the cultural representations are the 'what' – setting out the cultural meanings. These representations are completed by a complementary third practical representation, which sets out the 'how'.

Practical representations

Practical representations of flight free holidays have a special focus on the practical aspects of flight free travel such as how to plan and take a trip. I have grouped these articles into three themes: necessity; convenience; and getting information.

Necessity

The first theme in practical representations of flight free holidays is necessity, which include articles that frame flight free holidays in practical terms to do with disruption and having a choice forced onto them. The 2010 ash cloud disruption caused people to think about new ways of going on holiday by train, car or ship to destinations they had previously flown to:

Ash clouds, airline strikes, soaring oil prices and rising extra charges - four reasons why travellers should let trains and ferries, rather than planes, take the strain this summer. Southerners planning business trips or city breaks in northern France or Belgium switched long ago to Eurostar; while it has been steadily increasing its daily services to Paris (now 18) and Brussels (nine), all but a handful of flights to the two capitals have been scrapped. But aviation's spring of discontent has also been a catalyst for flight-free travel beyond the South East England/ northern France axis. Rail Europe has seen the number of people using its website rise by 600 per cent. – The Telegraph

FERRY firms are still rubbing their hands with glee even though the volcanic plume of doom has fallen dormant for now. The no-fly zone diverted thousands of passengers from air travel to the ferry ports and many are expected to return to this slower but significantly more comfortable form of leaving the island. – The Mirror

British Airways strikes, volcanic ash clouds, economic gloom: it's been a rough year for the travel industry but for no-fly operators things are looking up... Bookings for Eurotunnel rose 30 per cent during the ash crisis. – The Independent

These quotes illustrate that despite the disruption, people still had a desire for holidaying abroad in 2010. Because of the disruptions, choosing not to fly became the easier, preferred and sometimes only option for many UK holidaymakers to get abroad that year. For this reason the authors of these articles tended to switch the focus of their articles from 'travelling by air won't be possible this year' to 'how can we still go on holiday this year?', seeking to explain how was still possible within the new limits of travel choices. While the volcano eruptions were moments of disruption and moments of disruption can reconfigure social practices (Evans, McMeekin and Southerton, 2012), this reconfigured notion of holidays in 2010 was only temporary, as rates of flying dropped for the first two quarters of

2010 but rebounded in the second two (Smith and Barnes, 2010). Instead, it is possible that this disruption laid the seeds for a gradual shift in representations of flight free holidays towards environmental and cultural frames.

It's interesting to contrast representations of flight free travel as something that's necessary with studies showing that people often justify air travel on the grounds that it's necessary for work (Kroesen, 2013; Gössling *et al.*, 2019). What this shows is that there is a scale of understanding for what constitutes necessary travel, stretching from forced movement to something more like convenience, which is tied to a series of sociocultural understandings and expectations of travel (Barr and Prillwitz, 2014). This supports research on how understandings of 'necessary' air travel may be shifting, as technology such as video conferencing becomes more commonplace (Higham, Hopkins and Orchiston, 2019).

Convenience

Convenience is another common theme of practical representations of flight free holidays. This is often described using the positives of not travelling by air. Avoiding air travel can mean avoiding airports and the associated hassle:

For families, flight-free travel is more practical. Transfers before dawn, never-ending security lines, and military-style packing regimes make for a questionable start to any holiday. And that's before you climb into a small aluminium tube with the most hyperactive beings you know. – The Telegraph

Crowded departure lounges, lost luggage, looming air-traffic controller strikes and the threat of having your mobile phone confiscated if the battery goes flat is enough to make you give up and stay at home, but there's one way to avoid such holiday hassles — take a cruise from a UK port. – The Independent

The airport experience is essentially a series of queues punctuated by demands to remove your belt and be patted down by a burly man. Research has suggested negotiating one is more stressful than moving house. No plane means no airport, no boozing stag dos and no dawdling travellers fumbling with their laptops at security. – The Telegraph

In practical terms, flight free holidays are framed as allowing holidaymakers to avoid what's portrayed as a universally dreaded 'airport experience' – they are in this way more convenient. This representation is at odds with findings in the air travel literature that finds evidence of people choosing air travel because it is more convenient (Becken, 2007; Higham, Cohen and Cavaliere, 2014). The quotes above suggest that this flight free version of convenience is more linked to comfort and

less to journey time or cost. In this way we might conclude that traditional holiday representations of convenience are being repurposed and re-represented towards cultural notions of comfort, when it comes to flight free travel. This supports work that shows how convenience is central to societal notions of time, space and consumption (Shove, 2003; Wajcman, 2015; Southerton, 2020), and thus the theme links strongly into cultural representations too.

To successfully plan a flight free holiday, people need time:

"It was more difficult to avoid flying when we were working, but now we have more time to travel and to plan the journey. We get cheap rail travel in England and France, which is a bargain as long as you book in advance. We try to spend two long holidays there each year, and once we're down there we can get around by bus or train and we plan to buy bikes next time." – The Telegraph

This quote suggests how a couple's travel patterns changed after retiring and having more time to spend travelling. The link between time, scheduling and getting information is well covered in the mobilities literature (Lassen, 2006; Cass and Faulconbridge, 2016; Cidell, 2017; Sersli *et al.*, 2020; Storme *et al.*, 2020). The existence of this representation supports the idea that competencies – in this case the skills and knowledge needed to perform a flight free holiday such as using the Man in Seat 61 – can inform and shape broader understandings of flight free holidays. This point is demonstrated in the quote above, where having the time to plan a journey influences not just the meaning of the holiday, but the materials too (shifting to public transport and bicycles).

However, some representations of flight free holidays use the same notion of convenience found in articles that set out people's justifications for air travel, only to try and flip the narrative and provide evidence of the opposite. For example, flight free holidays are sometimes framed as rivalling flight-based holidays both in terms of time and cost:

Suggest trains as an international travel alternative and most people will cite two factors. The first is money. It's cheaper to fly, they claim, thanks to low-cost airlines and overpriced rail fares. Yes, it can be – but it often isn't. A long weekend in Amsterdam next month, departing at a sociable 1104am on October 24 and returning on the afternoon of October 27, costs £126.50 on the Eurostar. The cheapest flights for the same dates are with EasyJet – they cost £125, not including what it costs to get from London to Luton Airport and from Amsterdam Schiphol to the city centre. The second factor is time. Why take six or seven hours to reach Provence when a plane will do it in two? But add an hour or so to reach the airport, two hours

waiting in the terminal, and another hour or more retrieving your luggage and navigating immigration, and there's little real difference. – The Telegraph

This quote is a good example of a narrative that seeks to provide evidence to break down and reframe the skills and information required to go on a flight free holiday, from a purely practical viewpoint. This is an example of what Ullström et al. call the 'persuasion narrative', where flight free travel is framed as something positive for the individual (Ullström et al., 2021).

More broadly, this chapter has shown how representations of flight free travel and air travel can share several meanings of adventure, romance, history, autonomy and convenience. While there are differences in meanings between the two, such as the strong association between the environment and flight free travel (which doesn't exist for air travel), these shared meanings are significant. They suggest that the delineation between conventional holidays and flight free holidays is blurring as the conceptual gap between the two is narrowing. Underlying both representations of flight free travel and air travel are implicit affirmations of time, experience, value and taste, but insofar as these themes are being used and recast in the name of flight free travel, flight free holidays are becoming understood as conventional holidays.

Getting information

Up to this point, most representations have been concerned with reasons for holidaying flight free, whereas this final theme is concerned with getting information on how to take a flight free holiday. This theme gives a key insight into how holidays are represented more broadly: to plan a holiday people need access to relevant information; the knowledge to take a holiday without going by air. The Man in Seat 61 – a prolific train travel blog – features prominently in this theme:

The “official website of the man in seat 61” – and that man is an English chap called Mark Smith. His site is dedicated to giving advice to train travellers around the world and, thanks to Smith's career as a railwayman and rail agent, he knows what he's talking about. Learn about the best routes, the finest seats and be inspired by this award-winning site. – The Independent

Mark Smith's website seat61.com is a mine of information about train travel throughout the world. – The Telegraph

Thanks to websites such as the heroically detailed Seat61.com, there is plenty of information out there on how to get to wherever you want, plane free. – The Guardian

The underlying sense from these quotes is that having information on how to travel flight free can help to break down practical barriers. This reflects the prominence with which flight free travellers use information to make their travel choices (Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs, 2019). In a similar way

for broader representations of travel, getting information from personal accounts of travel and carefully edited sources has been shown to increase the perception of the credibility of that information (Tan and Chen, 2012). This is particularly true when the content is written on user generated blogs (Akehurst, 2009), such as the Man in Seat 61.

While having information is not a sufficient condition to travel flight free (Whitmarsh *et al.*, 2020), it certainly seems like a necessary condition. People need to understand how to plan a flight free holiday to go on one, just as they need to understand how to use Skyscanner or similar air travel price comparison websites to go on a holiday by aeroplane (Randles and Mander, 2009). The difference is that flight free holidays has not previously been understood in the same way as conventional holidays, to the extent that air travel is perceived as a norm (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh, 2007; McDonald *et al.*, 2015). However, as suggested above, the evidence of shared meanings between representations of air travel and representations of flight free travel could indicate that this is changing.

Summary

This chapter showed how popular representations of flight free holidays can be split into ethical, cultural and practical representations. Ethical representations stem from a perceived moral obligation to do the right thing in environmental terms, cultural representations appeal to social and societal notions such as romance, adventure and history, and practical representations focus on necessity, convenience, and how to take a flight free holiday.

Ethical representations are always associated with the environment, where themes of environmental responsibility are closely tied to themes of guilt. Tensions between personal responsibility, societal responsibility and guilt are linked to leadership, which can work both as a push (through charges of hypocrisy) and a pull (through recognising one's influential role in a system). Ethical representations suggest that adopting a non-judgemental framing of flight free holidays could be effective for breaking down preconceptions, engaging a wider range of audiences and broadening the debate on flight free travel.

Cultural representations of flight free holidays focus on themes of romance, history, freedom and adventure. Underlying cultural representations are implicit affirmations of time, experience, value and taste. I showed that appealing to cultural norms can be a powerful way of engaging people if they are communicated in a way that aligns with existing values, although this method can also risk alienating others who do not share the same values or history. Sometimes the use of cultural representations to frame holidays is built on a delineation between the normal and the extraordinary, which can create an 'us versus them' narrative (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007), and can be rooted in colonialism

(Lozanski, 2011). In the context of flight free holidays, this may in turn be harmful to building consensus on new meanings of holidays to incorporate understandings of flight free holidays across different cultural groups.

While ethical and cultural representations of flight free holidays appeal to the 'why', practical representations respond to the 'how'. I showed how different notions of necessity are used for characterising flight free holidays and air travel holidays, the former using a definition of forced disruption and the latter using a definition more akin to necessity in terms of time, work and cost. Convenience emerged as a key theme, which is used both practically in terms of total journey time and cost, but also in a more cultural way that appeals to comfort. Practical representations of flight free holidays also show that while having information is not a sufficient condition to travel flight free, it seems like a necessary condition.

Insomuch as these cultural themes of flight free travel are also present in meanings of air travel, I suggested that the conceptual gap between conventional holidays and flight free holidays could be closing. This would point to the conclusion that flight free holidays are starting to be understood as conventional holidays. I explore this issue in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: How do people do flight free travel?

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of a thematic discourse analysis of all blogs on flightfree.co.uk between 2018-2020. For the purposes of answering the research question about how people 'do' flight free holidays, the results focus on the three elements of social practices: meanings; competencies; and materials (Shove, 2014), as set out in Table 4. Given that this discourse analysis uses biographical narrative accounts to give insights into sociocultural meanings of flight free travel (Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2012), my focus here is largely on meanings (Kent, 2021), as opposed to the materials or competencies. Materials and competencies are only discussed to the extent that they are woven into these meanings. The meanings in this chapter build on the representations of flight free travel discussed in the previous chapter. The main difference is that this chapter presents meanings of flight free travel from the perspectives of those who exclusively travel flight free; reflecting experiences as opposed to representations.

This chapter focuses on four overarching meanings of flight free travel: the ethical choice; leadership; freedom; and convenience. In each section I draw attention to the similarities and differences between the elements of air travel practices and flight free travel practices. By presenting the results in this way my aim is to characterise a social practice of flight free travel. This is expanded on in the final chapter, with a discussion on how the interlocking elements (Spurling and McMeekin, 2014) of flight free travel practices might be used to inform intervention debates.

Meanings of flight free travel

The ethical choice

Many who write about their experiences of going flight free see themselves as having a moral responsibility to give up or reduce their air travel, because of its contribution to climate change. This can bring about an imperative to act:

*When I found out about the environmental impact earlier this year, I decided not to do it again.
– One of the 100,000 – Maria Ardley*

It dawned on me that the carbon savings I'd made through my lifestyle choices to stop eating meat or reduce the plastic I bought would be obliterated if I were to hop on just one flight. I made the decision to quit flying then. – Why I am flight free

Learning about your carbon footprint and how to reduce it is really interesting... Choosing not to fly can be one single decision that can take a massive lump out of your footprint... It makes me feel good that I'm acting according to my beliefs. – A Champion for Earth

This finding is in keeping with the literature on people who have gone flight free (Büchs, 2017; Westlake, 2018; Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs, 2019), in that it is knowledge of the environmental impacts of air travel that's enough to stop some people flying. There is a related assumption that information implies some level of responsibility:

We know that information is vital to people making a climate friendly choice. "It's not because we don't care, it's because we don't know," says Maja Rosén of the Swedish flygfritt campaign. – Individual action vs. system change

I knew flying was bad for the environment but I didn't know how bad. Then I saw the numbers, and that's not something you can unlearn. – Evelina Utterdahl: Earth Wanderess

While this sentiment is reflected in the academic literature (Becken, 2007; Hares, Dickinson and Wilkes, 2010; Cohen and Higham, 2011) studies also find that this is not always true, as demonstrated by the air travel 'value-action gap' (Kroesen, 2013). These quotes give a sense that everyone would act in a certain way if they were confronted with the facts – 'that's not something you can unlearn'. However, social and cultural factors also exert a major influence on people's values, attitudes and choices (Burgess, Harrison and Filius, 1998; Abrahamse *et al.*, 2005).

What is perhaps more plausible is that these information-focused ethical arguments against air travel only engage a select group of people who share similar values, as demonstrated by the general high level of awareness about the environmental impacts of air travel that does not translate into stopping air travel (Cohen, Higham and Reis, 2013; Hibbert *et al.*, 2013; Kroesen, 2013). These blogs were written by those already engaged in environmental issues and looking for ways to reduce their impact on the environment: the implication is that the association between flight free travel and environmental harm may only be salient for people who already identify as pro-environmental. This supports work that shows the importance of group membership and having shared values, or cultural understandings, when it comes to influencing non-flight travel and sustainability practices (Büchs, 2017; Morten, Gatersleben and Jessop, 2018; Sparkman, Attari and Weber, 2021).

As found in the literature review and in Chapter 5, there is a tension between levels of personal and societal responsibility. On the one hand, shifting to flight free travel is described as a personal journey and not an explicitly prescriptive one that others should follow. These writers are keen to emphasise

the importance of non-judgemental language when framing experiences of flight free travel, although the implication is that the facts speak for themselves:

This isn't about shaming people or making them feel bad, it's saying, find out, investigate the facts, and come to your own conclusion. – A Champion for Earth

On the other hand, there is also pejorative language that doesn't employ non-judgemental principles:

We applaud your recent announcement that you will have no more than two children for the sake of the planet, but we plead with you that your commitment to environmentalism could be demonstrated further through your lifestyle and actions. – An open letter to the Duke and Duchess of Sussex

It's all very well giving up meat, buying second-hand clothes and not driving a car, but if you're also a regular down at Heathrow Airport (the UK's single biggest emitter of carbon dioxide) then you definitely can't call yourself an environmentalist. – The elephant on the travel desk

This tension between judgement and non-judgement gets to the heart of who can be a flight free traveller and who cannot, from the view of the bloggers. According to the non-judgemental framing anyone can be a flight free traveller, but the second set of quotes seems to equate flight free travel with environmentalism, which would limit flight free travellers to environmentalists. In closing the door to flyers and not allowing them into a definition of environmentalists, this pejorative view could be reinforcing the boundaries of who can and can't be a flight free traveller, creating a gatekeeping narrative (Green-Saraisky, 2015) where environmentalists are principally understood in terms of their actions and morals. This framing has been found to actively harm, rather than strengthen, consensus on environmental issues (Webster and Shaw, 2019).

When flight free travel is understood as the ethical choice, flying takes on new meanings of guilt, debt, overconsumption, and something that perpetuates inequality. Narratives of guilt are often presented as a confession, which is reflected in other studies (Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs, 2019; Mkono and Hughes, 2020):

This is my confession. I have lived a life of over consumption and excess. My ancestors would despair at my short-sighted recklessness. I am guilty of ecocide. Before including flights, I am personally responsible for over eight tonnes of CO2 emissions every year (the European average). That's eight times more than where we need to be. – Holidays on Mars

Full disclaimer: I have taken 71 flights since I started With Many Roots and began a remote lifestyle back in 2014. I acknowledge, I have a huge carbon debt...my flight shame is my own and I am acting on it. It's time to start repaying... – One of the 100,000 – Sophia Cheng

Continuing to fly – upon finding out about the environmental impact of air travel – is presented as hypocrisy, which is supported by other studies (Hopkins *et al.*, 2019; Wynes *et al.*, 2019):

I can't handle the hypocrisy of campaigning against climate change while continuing to commit one of the biggest environmental sins out there. – Confessions of a travel writer

... it would be highly inconsistent to continue to fly while my work focused on climate change mitigation. – Addressing academia's carbon footprint

As with the ethical representations of flight free holidays in chapter 5, this is another example of the eco-citizenship notion of hypocrisy, where individuals seek to realign their self-integrity with socially accepted norms (Gamma, Mai and Loock, 2020). Clearly this notion of 'norm' relates to the norms of the group to which this person belongs, following what Gamma *et al.* call an 'individual construal mindset', which is essentially the level at which people perceive something as urgent.

Leadership

As found in the relatively small number of studies on flight free travel, leadership is closely associated with meanings of flight free travel, whether through leaders influencing the behaviours of their followers (Westlake, 2018) or the importance of being able to overcome social pressures when communicating decisions to go flight free (Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs, 2019). These leadership narratives tend to be built on considerations of equity, which focus on whether we share the same responsibility for acting on climate change or if some have more 'carbon debt' than others. These arguments often refer to intergenerational equity, geographic equity and equity of consumption – appealing to sociocultural notions of fairness and responsibility, which are prominent themes in the literature (Becken, 2007; Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh, 2007; Randles and Mander, 2009; Cocolas *et al.*, 2020; Mkono and Hughes, 2020). The following quotes demonstrate these notions:

Intergenerational equity

But to say, in effect, 'I'm going to continue consuming the world's capacity to provide people with a good life in the future, but that's OK because I myself don't plan to have children'... isn't that a little bit shortsighted? It certainly draws attention to the injustice between generations. – Independent Influencers

Geographic equity

I have emitted more greenhouse gases from my many flights than a family in the global South will in their combined lifetimes... I know this, and honestly? I feel incredibly guilty about it. – Why I am flight free

Equity of consumption

We don't want to be poor citizens making these efforts while the richest keep flying regularly. It's a matter of fairness. – One of the 100,000 – Jusep Moreno

Learning what I have learnt has made me extremely concerned about our reliance on fast high-carbon travel, and the responsibility of the present generation, and particularly the world's 'rich', to change course. – Long Train to China

As with ethical meanings of flight free travel, equity arguments draw on the links between individual and collective responsibility (Moberg *et al.*, 2019; Mkono and Hughes, 2020). For many of these bloggers, tackling climate change is a collective responsibility that leads to an individual responsibility to act. In this way individuals are not only as a part of a large whole, but they have a pronounced duty to the whole:

We can't carry on thinking of ourselves simply as individuals, living in our own little bubbles. We are all a part of a much bigger community, for better or for worse, and we really do all need to stop flying, start following a plant-based diet and join the protests to make our government take immediate action. – We need to talk about the climate crisis

It is never one or the other – it is always both. Individual action can lead to system change, and system change can influence us as individuals. – Individual action vs system change

These quotes demonstrate a narrative that system change cannot be distinguished from individual change, since both are intrinsically linked through our actions. This is a finding backed up by the growing literature on environmental leadership, showing that tackling climate change is not a question of individual or system change; it's both (Climate Outreach, 2021). The reciprocal notion of leadership also fits within the ontology of social practice theory (Birtchnell, 2012), where both individual change and system change sit within a complex and moving socio-technical system comprised of overlapping practices, made up of materials, understandings and skills (Shove, 2014).

By acting against the conventional grain of air travel and choosing to go flight free, flight free travellers seek to live up to their values (Ullström *et al.*, 2021), shoulder environmental responsibility, become leaders and set an example to others:

Therefore, the only way to inspire behaviour change is to become a leader. But most importantly, a leader who is liked, respected and who sets the example... Individual change is something we can control, and the choices we make are all votes for the world we want to see.
– *How to lead your tribe*

By changing our lifestyles we demonstrate to others that it's possible as well as desirable, and this leads to our individual actions having an impact beyond simply reducing our own emissions. – *Individual action vs system change*

These sentiments echo findings in the Chapter 5 media analysis about the importance of leadership – or more accurately becoming a leader – when it comes to influencing others' pro-environmental actions. Influencing 'actions' is not traditionally something that sits in social practices ecosystems, however this can make sense if we think of leadership as something more psychological, accounting for the emotions and motivations that make up the meanings of flight free travel (Kent, 2021). This generative notion is also captured in some work on sustainable consumption (Warde, 2005; Halkier, Katz-Gerro and Martens, 2011; Evans, 2018), where a system can shape the practices of individuals, and individuals can shape practices more broadly through their everyday performances. But becoming a leader is not without obstacles. It can take courage to stand out from the crowd:

It is challenging, and it's a challenge for me to explain to people in a compassionate and understanding way that my choices might be different, and why. And explaining to people so they understand, then trust them to act in a way they see fit. – *A Champion for Earth*

As with most things, making the first move requires the most courage. Technology helped me overcome being far away from my family (it always has helped, but especially over the holidays). Once I figured out which conferences and events I could attend the following year by train or public transport, the rest became pretty simple. – *My no-fly year*

In the second case, the author had to learn new ways of communicating to maintain their family relationships. In this way the elements of the practices of travelling and family changed and reconfigured. This required new materials (presumably video meeting software like Zoom) and competencies (learning this technology, finding the best train/public transport scheduling programmes) that became fused with a new meaning of flight free travel. A major theme reflected across most of the blogs and found in the literature (Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs, 2019), is the

social pressure of communicating the decision to go flight free, especially to friends and family. This suggests that one of the core skills to flight free travel is being able to overcome the social and cultural implications of deviating from the norm:

Possibly the hardest thing has been talking to my friends about it... I have found it hard when people from my cycling club keep asking me if I want to go to Mallorca/France/Spain/Canaries on a cycle trip. I don't want to ruin their fun so now I say "I would love to join you but I have committed to reducing my flights this year." – From eight flights to one

It can be tricky to bring up the subject of climate change. When everyone at a party is chatting about the latest TV drama or the colour of their new curtains, it can be difficult to steer the conversation towards the elephant in the room. – How to lead your tribe

It's clear that flight free travel requires new communication skills, and these communication skills can in turn reshape understandings of leadership.

Freedom

Flight free travel is associated with freedom in three different but related senses: temporal freedom; psychological freedom; and spatial freedom. Temporal freedom in that travelling flight free is framed as productive 'gift time' that can be used for working or other tasks; psychological freedom as flight free travel is framed as a means of self-growth and exercising autonomy; and spatial freedom because moving slowly or overland is understood as 'grounding' travel experiences.

Flight free travel can distort and reconfigure understandings of time in several ways, supporting various mobilities studies (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007; Gustafson, 2014; Strengers, 2015; Schindler, 2020). Rail travel is generally something associated with more 'productive' time – that is time where one can get on with work, uninterrupted.

On a three-hour rail journey, with power sockets and WIFI, you can get some serious work done. Then lunch while you're changing to the ferry, then another three hours uninterrupted work time with plug sockets and WIFI. If you can convince your employer that's 'working from home', you don't need that day off. – "I don't have time!" – a rail and sail journey to Dublin

If the journey becomes part of the trip, not just a means to get to a destination as quickly as possible, it can even be seen as “productive” time – reading, working on a laptop, etc. You can be more focused on a train than in the office where there are often too many distractions. – Addressing academia’s carbon footprint

The great advantage that the train has over flying is that you can work, or at least I can. I get a seat in the quiet carriage, use 4G wifi from my phone so that I can email whatever the state of the train’s wifi, and buy some food for the journey. – London to Leverkusen by train... in an afternoon

It seems that being able to work while travelling flight free relies on having enough space, a decent internet connection, a power source, quiet surroundings and being situated in one place for uninterrupted periods. This illustrates the importance of available material infrastructure in shaping mobilities (Barr and Prillwitz, 2014; Barr, 2015; Roos Breines, Raghuram and Gunter, 2019). In the first quote the author links working while travelling to working from home, suggesting that one need not take a day off if employers can be convinced that they’ll be able to work effectively on the train. The implication is that time spent travelling flight free is time well spent, as one can free up a day’s holiday and get to a destination ‘on work time’. Furthermore the ‘journey’ is being repurposed as ‘part of the trip’ and not just a means of getting to the destination – a key finding shared in the only current major study on flight free travel narratives (Ullström *et al.*, 2021) and the slow travel literature (Dickinson, Robbins and Lumsdon, 2010). There is a sense in which ‘destination’ is different for flight free travellers and air travellers, where flight free travellers tend to adopt a cultural definition of destination and air travellers tend to use an economic-geography version of destination (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011).

In treating a flight free trip as part of the holiday, practitioners can make a psychological shift that allows them to feel more relaxed and effectively gain holiday time, supporting the idea of travel time as a ‘gift’ (Jain and Lyons, 2008) and what Dickinson describes as “time discourses are context contingent and can be used in an air travel context to make slow travel seem difficult and by slow travellers to make it positive” (Dickinson, Lumsdon and Robbins 2011, p. 291):

The 11 ½ hours door to door journey was solid good work/relaxing time, with easy connections, good wi-fi all the way and no hassles. Easyjet takes two hours in the air, but add another 2 ½ hours at least for checking in, which is stressful, and wasted time hanging around in queues rather than working or relaxing on the train. – Train-setting across Europe

I persuaded the kids that the travelling was part of the trip, which it is, and the train down from Scotland was quick and easy... You have to make the journey part of the holiday, rather than something to endure like flying. It's a different mindset. – Destination: South of France

It's human nature to focus on the destination, a trait perpetuated by air travel. We want to be there as quickly as possible; we demand instant gratification. Life is too short to waste time in stasis, transiting between places.. the journey is how we grow, how we learn. In focussing purely on the destination we miss out on a huge chunk of life. – The beauty of slow travel

This last quote picks up on the aspects of psychological freedom. According to the author, the relative slow pace of overland travel permits practitioners to 'grow' in a way that air travel does not. This shift in mindset to seeing the journey as part of the holiday is something that reverberates throughout the blogs and is strongly associated with the meanings that make up flight free travel. Psychological freedom sometimes requires a new skill to turn a seeming sacrifice of not travelling by air into an opportunity:

I don't feel I need to travel somewhere that's thousands of miles away to satisfy my urge to roam – I can even go somewhere here in Nottingham... So yes, there is a sacrifice but there's also a reward. – A Champion for Earth

Try to see it less as a sacrifice, and more of an opportunity. A chance to see things you wouldn't otherwise see and do things you wouldn't otherwise do. – Winter Sun

It's wonderful to think of Machu Picchu being spared one set of footprints yet still held as a treasured thought. It's actually more satisfying to think of what I have NOT done through my decision to stay home... – Tossing out the bucket list

The notion of limiting one's air travel as something that's sacrificial is well-documented in the literature (Higham, Cohen and Cavaliere, 2014; Kantenbacher *et al.*, 2019; Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs, 2019). Making the decision not to take a plane can force flight free travellers to think creatively about how to get a 'holiday' experience closer to home – it is in this an 'opportunity'. Ultimately this mindset shift concerns learning a new skill to be able to do flight free travel, which involves thinking of the relationship between time and travel in a new way, using equipment and technologies to facilitate social connections (Jain and Lyons, 2008). This is enjoyable:

It's about reassessing our priorities, not just following the herd. Understanding that yes, we do have time to take the train. And yes, we can afford to travel in more sustainable ways. – "I don't have time!" – a rail and sail journey to Dublin

It's a different kind of life – it's an interesting life... once you've made the decision not to fly, there's a whole new world to explore. – Podcast interview: Molly Scott Cato

In some ways, reducing my options by deciding I wouldn't fly actually made the decision easier. It gave me more mental freedom – In the name of love

This differs from meanings of air travel. According to the landmark study on air travel practices from Randles and Mander, only a small fraction of flyers interviewed in the study enjoyed the means of travel (Randles and Mander, 2009), whereas these findings show that virtually all representations of flight free travel are framed as enjoyable. Where air travel narratives are framed in terms of enjoyment, this is usually in terms of destination rather than the means of travel (Ullström *et al.*, 2021). I explore this finding in more detail in the final chapter.

Travelling flight free is also framed as giving practitioners the spatial freedom to reconnect more meaningfully to their surroundings, as they 'feel distance' and 'not flying doesn't mean not travelling':

Slow travel not only allows time to build anticipation and excitement, but allows us to connect far more meaningfully with our surroundings. – Be more Greta, Part 2

We don't feel distance when we fly. This way I will really know how far I'm going... – One of the 100,000 – Sarah Nicolls

I have to reassure you: giving up aeroplanes doesn't mean giving up travel. Since going planeless, I have travelled further and more often than ever before. I've hitch-hiked the length and breadth of Britain, cycled to the Sahara, sailed the Jurassic Coast, taken buses to Vienna and Amsterdam and trains through France, Germany and Spain, made Christmas pilgrimages to the great cathedrals of Winchester and Canterbury and driven to Calais to play cricket against Afghans. – An experiment in No Aeroplanes

But not flying doesn't mean not travelling. There are many other means by which to see the world. Overland methods can give a greater and more authentic travel experience than flying: going slow is good for the soul, and you learn far more about how landscapes and cultures connect when you travel overland. – Is the rising social stigma around flying misplaced?

Slow travel is set to make a comeback. Travel that reconnects you with place and culture...Travel, real travel, promotes empathy, compassion and tolerance of others, emotions that are severely under threat in modern society. – Train travel is a gem waiting for rediscovery

The quotes point to an underlying understanding associated with flight free travel that's worth unpacking: flying is not 'travelling'. Here, 'travelling' is a more complex, deeper concept to do with space, growth, cultural understandings, emotions and time (Larsen, 2001; Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007; Rau and Sattlegger, 2018). The assumption of the final quote above is that slower travel is in some sense more authentic than aeroplane travel as it has power to ground experiences. These excerpts demonstrate the prominence with which flight free travellers associate moving slowly with moving meaningfully. By reconnecting with surroundings and establishing a better sense of where they are, flight free travellers better connect with themselves on an emotional level too:

More than that, I learned a huge amount about myself. Those endless days on the road with only the buzzards or perhaps a deer for company were precious time alone with my thoughts, and I had the mental space to reassess what was important. – A very British adventure

I realised the joy of travel is about mindset. If you see a particular experience as exciting then it is, no matter how nearby or familiar it is. – In the name of love

Insomuch as flight free travel is characterised as allowing practitioners to better connect with themselves and cultures, it shares many of the same characteristics as broader mobilities of travel. In Janta et al.'s study on air travel mobilities for visiting friends and relatives, social relationships, affirmation of identity and maintenance of territorial rights emerged as three out of five key practices (Janta, Cohen and Williams, 2015). Likewise it has been argued that air travel provides many of the same socio-cultural connections that shape, reproduce and reconstruct our understandings of travel and tourism (Adey, Budd and Hubbard, 2007; Urry, 2011). This is to say that flight free travel can be understood within a broader framework of travel mobilities, which includes air travel. Following Cidell's call that a truly systemic understanding of air travel should to take into account other forms

of travel (Cidell, 2017), it seems that a truly systemic understanding of non-air travel should take into account other forms of travel too – especially air travel. Once both air travel and non-air travel mobilities are understood in the context of travel mobilities, the overlapping sociocultural meanings and potential points for intervention become more apparent. This is a point I reflect on in more detail in the final chapter.

Flight free mobilities also share many of the same understandings as air travel mobilities, in that both shape understandings of time and both are framed as the means to deeper cultural connections – through grounding experiences and self-growth. The main difference is that for flight free travellers, the means of flight free travel is understood to be an end in itself – either as part of the holiday, a way of connecting to one’s surroundings or as ‘gift time’ that can be used for working and socialising. Conversely air travel is mostly seen as a means to an end, where cultural connections and squeezing of time are more closely associated with the physical destination than the journey. This complements the findings in Chapter 5, in that the multitude of shared meanings between air travel and flight free travel once again suggests that flight free holidays are becoming conventional holidays.

Convenience

Contrary to the common argument that not travelling by air is inconvenient (Higham, Cohen and Cavaliere, 2014; Higham, Hopkins and Orchiston, 2019), flight free travel is often presented as more convenient than air travel, as found in Chapter 5. While it is a broad term, convenience captures practical understandings related to time, speed and cost, as well as more abstract notions related to space, infrastructure and wellbeing. Convenience is a popular topic in social practices literature in that many day-to-day practices are rooted in understandings of convenience and related meanings of scheduling, planning and timekeeping (Warde, Shove and Southerton, 1998; Southerton and Shove, 2000; Shove, 2003). Although the flight free notion of convenience tends to focus on comfort and avoiding stress rather than more practical meanings (as with air travel), flight free travellers still use both the practical and more abstract sense of convenience when describing flight free travel.

From a practical perspective flight free travel is sometimes framed as being quicker than going by plane over short distances, when the full journey time is considered:

So on the face of it, flying seems far quicker, but when you factor in the actual journey time, it's not quite so much. When you fly short distance, more of your time is spent on the ground than in the air... The overland journey time is pretty much what it says, which makes planning

anything around your travel a lot easier. – "I don't have time!" – a rail and sail journey to Dublin

Flight free holidays can cost less than one might think:

Airlines advertise Bristol to Edinburgh fares of just £21 each way, but those fares aren't available on a Friday in the school holidays... There are also extra fees each way to reserve your seats or check a bag. And flexible tickets cost much, much more. On this occasion, the train wins on price. – Can the train beat the plane?

In terms of cost, my journey and my husband's flight plus an overnight hotel at Stansted were within about £10 of each other. – Overnight by coach

These writers appeal to the 'hidden costs' of air travel such as getting to and from the airport, paying for luggage and reserving seats. On the train there are more flexible luggage limits, which can make it easier to travel with children:

We all know how much luggage you need as a family, and one of the great advantages to travelling by train is that there are no extra costs for taking luggage. There aren't the same limits on baby milk or food which makes the journey so much easier. – Going with children by train

Initially the kids were put off by the thought of the long journey by train, and missing out on the perceived glamour of flying... The train was fantastic: so much legroom, great café on board, no hassles and better customer service. You could see the countryside flash by at 270 kmh and we chatted to the French families sitting across the table from us. My daughter said afterwards, "The train was actually quite good..", which counts as high praise from a teenager! – Destination: South of France

This narrative demonstrates the relative lower competency bar for travelling with children flight free compared with travelling by air. In a similar vein to the interlocking mobilities of parenting and bicycling (Sersli *et al.*, 2020), here is an example of the bundling together of parenting and travel practices (Rau and Sattlegger, 2018), where the social-relational aspects of the form of travel have a significant bearing on the chosen mode of transport. Moreover, using parent-child mobilities, as

demonstrated above by the relative ease of travelling with children flight free compared to travelling with children by air, has been shown to be a possible route for interventions towards a more sustainable transport system (McLaren, 2018).

Sometimes flight free travel is the only option left. Moments of disruption can force people away from aeroplanes and into cars, trains and ships:

Then, my situation at work changed. A trip I had scheduled later in the year had to be cancelled, which left me frustrated and annoyed at having to modify my plans, but after two weeks of feeling that life was playing a bad trick on me I had a realisation. For a good part of a decade, I had wanted to take a year off flying. Now, I had been forced to cancel future air travel. After begrudgingly fighting against the altered circumstances, I eventually realised I had been wishing for this all along! – My no-fly year

It was supposed to be a celebration. An adventure in trains, boats and buses. An active and empowering choice made for the planet, but not a sacrifice or restriction – a year full of exploring, trying new things and doing things differently. Well, we are certainly doing things differently. Who could have predicted this [COVID-19]? Certainly not the aviation industry. – The Flight Free 2020 that wasn't

These quotes suggest that moments of disruption can open space to consider flight free travel a realistic choice, as found in both the literature (Evans, McMeekin and Southerton, 2012) and in Chapters 4 and 5 with respect to the 2010 Iceland volcano eruptions. This points to a potential avenue for further study: how can moments of disruption (e.g. COVID-19) be harnessed to lock in a longer-term shift in air travel practices? This is a question that is being explored by air travel researchers (Gössling, 2020; Gössling, Scott and Hall, 2020), but would benefit from explicit research through a social practices lens.

Flight free travel also includes a narrative of convenience in terms of comfort and relative low stress (Shove, 2003):

The queue for the Eurostar was a bit of a crush but we were through passport control relatively quickly – much easier than at an airport. It was very comfortable on the Eurostar even though we didn't get a table seat, and it's lovely to be able to walk to the cafe car. Changing at Marseille was easy, and we boarded a spacious and air conditioned Thello train... It's so much

less hassle than arriving early at an airport and having to wait for hours. – Destination: South of France

I much prefer coach travel. It's easier and less stressful than flying. You get on the coach on Friday evening after work, and by Saturday afternoon you'll be at the resort, giving you time to collect your skis and sort yourself out before your first day on the slopes. – Hitting the slopes by coach

A work trip by train is less stressful and more productive than the equivalent journey by plane. – What about tourism?

There is a sense in which the less stressful aspects of flight free travel can shape understandings of space and time: space, because one physically has more space to move around and get comfortable on a train; and time, because time spent travelling overland is presented as more productive time not 'having to wait for hours'. This notion of convenience incorporates the scheduling and arrangement of everyday practices (Warde, Shove and Southerton, 1998), which is borne out in the blogs in the need for the right tools when planning a flight free holiday. The Flight Free UK blogs are full of examples, hints and tips for making the planning process easier:

It's a nine hour crossing so we booked a cabin, but you could save some money by taking the reclining seat option. – A flight free holiday in Mallorca

I'd often dreamed of European train adventures, but courage never matched imagination until I discovered the website seat61.com. – Sleeper train to Sicily

There's loads of advice from 'The Man in Seat 61' (seat61.com) – he's called that because any seat beyond 60 is upstairs on the TGV. It's a very useful site for planning trips, and gives really helpful walk-through instructions including how to change trains and where to buy your Metro tickets. Rome to Rio is another useful site, if you turn off the plane option, although I find their bus info less reliable... I booked our Eurostar tickets as soon as they went on sale (you can set an alert), and our tickets on the West Coast Mainline from Manchester to London cost just £50 with a Family Railcard. – Destination: South of France

As with the media articles, specialist websites like the Man in Seat 61 and Loco2 were popular in the blogs. Man in Seat 61 offers a flight free alternative to lastminute.com, and Loco2 is an overland version of Skyscanner. Planning – both being able to find the right tools and use them – is therefore a key skill needed to do flight free travel, which supports other studies on the central role of planning in travel practices more broadly (Lassen, 2006; Cass and Faulconbridge, 2016; Cidell, 2017; Sersli *et al.*, 2020; Storme *et al.*, 2020). It is important to emphasise that convenience narratives are also commonly associated with air travel (Cidell, 2017; Cocolas *et al.*, 2020; Hopkinson and Cairns, 2021). Yet as mentioned in Chapter 5, convenience is characterised in a different way when it comes to flight free travel and air travel. The former tends to focus on comfort, while the latter tends to focus on practical notions related to travel time and cost.

Summary

This chapter has presented four meanings of flight free travel: the ethical choice; leadership; freedom; and convenience. I showed that there are several shared understandings between air travel practices and flight free travel practices, but there are also several differences. In common, freedom, autonomy and convenience are meanings that have come to be attached to the practice of flying, where flight free narratives are repositioning these meanings in favour of flight free travel, thus challenging conventional meanings of flying. Leadership, moral responsibility and ethics are also central to meanings of flight free travel, but less associated with understandings of air travel. Insofar as these meanings of flight free travel and air travel are shared, this chapter has suggested that flight free travel is starting to be understood in terms of conventional travel – a finding that supports evidence that the ‘Staying on the ground narrative’ is beginning to destabilise contemporary cultures of aeromobility’ (Ullström *et al.*, 2021, p. 14).

In the only study of ‘staying on the ground’ narratives, the authors show how flying is problematised through narratives of moralisation and persuasion in Sweden (Ullström *et al.*, 2021). Moralisation narratives are upheld through storylines of ‘living one’s values’, ‘moral responsibility’ and ‘urgency’, which are all captured under ‘the ethical choice’ meaning presented in this chapter. Insofar as persuasion narratives are characterised through storylines of ‘exploring new values’, ‘experiences’ and ‘appreciation of the journey’ in the same study, these are also all meanings found in the results of the qualitative analysis in this chapter. The existence of these narratives in my data not only strengthens the findings in the Ullström *et al.* study, but contributes other meanings of leadership, freedom and convenience to understandings of flight free travel.

Flight free travellers also need to learn new skills to do flight free travel, such as communicating a decision to go flight free, planning a flight free trip, and shifting mindset from seeing flight free travel as a sacrifice to an opportunity. This is all wrapped up in the narrative of seeing the journey as part of the holiday, which has the combined effect of stretching time away from a travel constraint and towards meanings of convenience and relaxation such as 'time out' and 'time well spent'. In the final chapter, I look at what these findings mean for the emerging series of studies on flight free travel, and what they might mean for policy intervention.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

With global air traffic reeling from the effects of COVID-19 (Gössling, 2020) and government action short of where it needs to be to meet Paris Agreement goals (Climate Action Tracker, 2021), understanding shifts towards sustainable transport practices is more important than ever. This is especially true with respect to air travel, which accounts for 2-3% of global carbon emissions (European Commission, 2019) and up to 12% of household emission footprints in the UK (Carmichael, 2019). By studying dominant representations and narratives of flight free travel, this thesis has set out to articulate the overarching meanings of flight free travel in the UK, to provide insights into how it is understood at a societal level and how it links with the meanings of other socially embedded practices. In this final section I summarise the key findings and explore their significance in the context of policy intervention, providing suggestions for possible further areas of study.

Representations of flight free holidays

Chapter 4 presented four trends in coverage of flight free holidays between 2003-2019. In 2010 there was a spike in articles about flight free holidays, which came about due to a grounding of aircraft from the Iceland volcano eruptions the same year. This meant that travellers who wanted to take a holiday needed to find alternative routes and means, such as cars and trains. The other major spike in coverage occurred in 2019, where environment featured as a key theme in most of the articles. This correlated to the airing of a prominent David Attenborough documentary, Greta Thunberg's campaigning and the actions of Extinction Rebellion. The results showed that overall coverage of environmental themes in articles on flight free holidays increased over time, reflecting a rising public awareness in climate issues.

Coverage over the period also showed that flight free holidays were not always associated with the environment. Indeed, two of the three most prominent themes were convenience and romance, which tended to appear in terms of (environmentally controversial) cruises. The lack of coverage from tabloids suggested that it was publication format rather than political leaning that was a better indicator as to whether a publication covered flight free holidays.

Chapter 5 employed a qualitative thematic analysis to show how popular representations of flight free holidays could be split into ethical, cultural and practical representations. Ethical representations were always associated with the environment, where themes of environmental responsibility were closely tied to themes of guilt. Tensions between personal responsibility, societal responsibility and guilt were linked to leadership, which can work both as a push (through hypocrisy) and a pull (through recognising one's influential role in a system). Ethical representations suggested that adopting a non-judgemental framing of flight free holidays could be effective for breaking down preconceptions,

engaging a wider range of audiences and broadening the debate on flight free travel. The use of impartial and non-pejorative language supports work on the role of using values-based language to engage people with different opinions on environmental topics (Büchs, 2017; Morten, Gatersleben and Jessop, 2018), and is a promising avenue for those seeking to engage air travellers on flight free issues. This is an area that would warrant further research, particularly from the perspective of interdisciplinary intervention-focused studies seeking to combine insights from social psychological and social practice theories.

Cultural representations of flight free holidays focused on romance, history, freedom and adventure. Underlying cultural representations were implicit affirmations of time, experience, value and taste. I suggested that appealing to cultural norms could be a powerful way of engaging people if they were communicated in a way that aligned with existing values, although this method could also risk alienating those who do not share the same values or history; sometimes creating an 'us versus them' narrative (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007). This may in turn be harmful to building consensus on new meanings of holidays to incorporate understandings of flight free holidays across different cultural groups.

While ethical and cultural representations of flight free holidays appealed to the 'why', practical representations responded to the 'how'. I showed how different notions of necessity were used for characterising both flight free holidays and conventional (air travel) holidays, the former using a definition of forced disruption, and the latter using a definition more akin to practical notions related to time and cost. Convenience emerged as a key theme, which was used both practically in terms of total journey time and cost, but also in with respect to cultural understandings of comfort. Practical representations suggested that while having information was not a sufficient condition to travel flight free, it seemed like a necessary condition. The need for sufficient information required to go on holidays is reflected in the literature, where the rising popularity of low cost air travel can be in part attributed to increased internet access, which allowed for more choice and 'specialized cultural knowledge' (Casey, 2010, p. 184). Similarly, getting information via personal accounts of travel has been shown to increase the perception of that information as credible (Akehurst, 2009; Tan and Chen, 2012).

How people do flight free travel

To understand how people do flight free travel, I analysed the broad meanings associated with flight free travel, using narrative accounts of the people who travel flight free. Chapter 6 presented four meanings of flight free travel as understood by those practitioners: the ethical choice; leadership; freedom; and convenience.

Flight free travellers often appealed to moral arguments to justify non air travel, where staying on the ground was framed as the ethical choice. This finding is in keeping with the only other study on discourses of flight free travel, which found that staying on the ground narratives work through moralisation; where flying is framed as ethically wrong, and persuasion; where practitioners emphasise the positive benefits of staying on the ground (Ullström *et al.*, 2021). Persuasion narratives were also reflected in my findings, although presented as convenience (flight free travel as more convenient), leadership (the pull of becoming a leader), and freedom (moving from wasted time to time well spent). Insofar as flight free travel was understood as the ethical choice, there was a series of related meanings around responsibility, guilt and hypocrisy. The existence of these meanings in both narratives of flight free travellers and air travellers (Barr and Prillwitz, 2014; Gössling *et al.*, 2019; Wynes *et al.*, 2019) suggests that feelings of environmental guilt and responsibility are not fully alleviated by going flight free, although they are partially.

Becoming a flight free traveller is associated with going against the norm and becoming a leader. Leadership can work both as a pull through fulfilling a perceived environmental responsibility, and a push through fear of hypocrisy. It has been found to be a key factor in influencing shifts in behaviours from air travel to non-air travel (Westlake, 2018). Leadership narratives also tended to focus on equity arguments that draw on the links between individual and collective responsibility (Moberg *et al.*, 2019; Mkono and Hughes, 2020). My results support the finding that free travellers seek to live up to their values (Ullström *et al.*, 2021) and set an example to others.

Flight free travel was also associated with freedom in three different but related senses: temporal freedom; psychological freedom; and spatial freedom. Narratives of temporal freedom suggest that travelling flight free is productive 'gift time' that can be used for working and other tasks. Narratives of psychological freedom characterise flight free travel as a means of self-growth and exercising autonomy. Spatial freedom was presented in the sense that moving slowly or overland can ground travel experiences.

Flight free travellers need to learn new skills to do flight free travel, such as communicating their decisions to go flight free, planning a flight free trip, and shifting their mindsets from seeing flight free travel as a sacrifice to an opportunity. This was all wrapped up in a narrative of seeing the journey as part of the holiday (Dickinson, Robbins and Lumsdon, 2010; Dickinson, Lumsdon and Robbins, 2011), which has the combined effect of stretching time (Schindler, 2020) away from a travel constraint and towards notions of convenience and relaxation such as 'time out' and 'time well spent'. There is a sense in which 'destination' is different for flight free travellers and air travellers, where flight free travellers tend to adopt a cultural definition of destination and air travellers tend to use an economic-

geography version of destination (Saraniemi and Kylänen, 2011). In this way, for flight free travellers the means of travel is at least as – if not more – important than the end geographical destination, which is the opposite for air travellers (Randles and Mander, 2009).

Flight free travel was often represented as more convenient than air travel, where this notion of convenience captures practical aspects related to time, speed and cost, as well as more abstract notions related to space, infrastructure and wellbeing. By articulating how flight free travel might fit within the temporal schedules that shape everyday lives, the role of planning emerged as central to convenience narratives. Insofar as flight free travel was often understood as easier for travelling with children, future research might consider exploring the role of flight free travellers (in a broad sense) in sustainable mobility shifts within parenting norms (McLaren, 2018; Sersli *et al.*, 2020).

By comparing meanings and representations of flight free travel to air travel, I demonstrated how both practices share many of the same meanings, which suggests that the delineation between flight free holidays and conventional air travel holidays could be fading. In common, both appeal to notions of freedom, autonomy and convenience. Leadership, moral responsibility and ethics are also central to flight free travel, whereas less associated with understandings of air travel. Insofar as these meanings of flight free travel and air travel are shared, I suggested that flight free travel is starting to be understood in terms of conventional travel – a finding that supports evidence that the ‘Staying on the ground narrative has begun to destabilize contemporary cultures of aeromobility’ (Ullström *et al.*, 2021, p. 14). These findings have several implications for the debates set out in Chapter 2.

Common reasons to not reduce flying involve perceptions of air travel as necessary for work (Gössling *et al.*, 2019; Higham, Hopkins and Orchiston, 2019), a lack of knowledge over the environmental impacts of air travel (Becken, 2007; Hares, Dickinson and Wilkes, 2010; Cohen and Higham, 2011), perceptions of fairness and levels of responsibility (Randles and Mander, 2009; Higham *et al.*, 2016; 10:10 Climate Action, 2019; Moberg *et al.*, 2019), or perceptions that the ‘sacrifice’ of giving up air travel and the related freedom is too great (Shaw and Thomas, 2006). These narratives were not present in the people who travel flight free in my study. Indeed, flight free travellers often repurposed these meanings to apply them to flight free travel, where:

- flight free travel was understood as necessary on ethical grounds
- having information about air travel’s environmental impact could be enough to stop flying
- equity arguments were used to draw links between individual and collective responsibility, where tackling climate change was framed a collective responsibility that led to an individual responsibility to act

- practitioners reconfigured work practices to fit around transport choice, to show that one can succeed at work without travelling by air
- the ‘sacrifice’ of giving up air travel was either acknowledged or framed as an opportunity to discover new ways of travelling that may be more rewarding and more freeing.

In this way these flight free travellers were inadvertently responding to the common barriers for flying less identified in the air travel literature. Yet uncovering the broad meanings of flight free travel gives more than just insights on perceptions and attitudes; it can allow for a much broader systemic picture of how a practice is constituted through its interlocking socio-cultural elements.

The mobilities literature explains how the way we travel has important implications for structuring everyday social lives (Adey, Budd and Hubbard, 2007; Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007; Urry, 2011; Rau and Sattlegger, 2018). Flight free travel is no different, as its social dimensions persist through an emerging group dynamic where practitioners are seen to be acting in accordance with their values (Büchs, 2017; Ullström *et al.*, 2021). In the same way that air travel mobilities can co construct, create and reinforce norms (Gössling *et al.*, 2012; Gustafson, 2014; Janta, Cohen and Williams, 2015; Higham, Hopkins and Orchiston, 2019; Hopkins *et al.*, 2019), flight free mobilities are starting to influence popular travel discourses of freedom, adventure and convenience – all of which overlap with understandings of air travel.

For example, where freedom is associated with a right to travel and freedom from interventionist policies when it comes to air travel (Becken, 2007), flight free travellers used freedom in a more psychological sense to free up time as a means of self-growth and exercising autonomy, and for ‘grounding’ experiences. Likewise, adventure is one of the core aspects commonly associated with tourism (Urry, 2011) and air travel (Randles and Mander, 2009), and commonly represented through risk-taking (Page, Steele and Connell, 2006). Adventure in the context of representations of flight free travel tends to be more associated with gaining new cultural experiences (Ullström *et al.*, 2021). Both air travel and flight free travel are also framed in terms of their relative convenience, as explained above.

The principal difference between understandings of the air travel and flight free travel is in flight free travel’s strong association with ethical narratives, which doesn’t exist for meanings of air travel. In the only study of ‘staying on the ground’ narratives, the authors show how flying is problematised through narratives of moralisation and persuasion in Sweden (Ullström *et al.*, 2021). Moralisation narratives are upheld through storylines of ‘living one’s values’, ‘moral responsibility’ and ‘urgency’, which are all captured under ‘the ethical choice’ meaning presented in this thesis. Inasmuch as persuasion

narratives are characterised through storylines of ‘exploring new values’, ‘experiences’ and ‘appreciation of the journey’ in the same study, these are also all meanings and cultural representations found in this thesis. The existence of these narratives in my data strengthens the findings in the Ullström et al. research. Moreover, my findings point to flight free mobilities as forging new travel discourses of leadership, environmental responsibility, and ethics. Future research might look at these findings in the context of popular representations of travel advertising, which has experienced a recent surge in environmentally-focused campaigns – often through a lens of ‘greenwashing’ and carbon offsets (Guix, Ollé and Font, 2022).

These sections have shown how flight free travel is represented in the UK, how it is understood at a societal level, and how it links with the meanings of other socially embedded practices for the people who travel flight free. Insofar as social practices have potential to provide a novel approach for intervening in air travel mobilities, for the remainder of the conclusion I look at what my findings might mean for policy intervention.

Potential implications for policy intervention

The new understandings of flight free travel presented in the previous sections point to several implications for policy intervention. This final section explains these possible sites for intervention, following the three social practices intervention framings of recrafting practices, substituting practices, and changing how practices interlock (Spurling *et al.*, 2013) – where intervention is something continuous (Spurling and McMeekin, 2014) and programmatic, which tackles several elements together (Evans, McMeekin and Southerton, 2012).

Recrafting practices works by addressing practice elements in order to reduce the resource intensity of practice performances. To this end, my findings offer up several possible areas for intervention:

- facilitating the uptake of skills required to do flight free travel. The findings in this thesis showed that flight free travellers’ use of specialist booking platforms like RailEurope and first-hand blogs such as Man in Seat 61 were essential for being able to travel flight free. Interventions could take the form of concerted information-focused media campaigns or targeted online advertising from flight free travel companies, for example.
- providing alternative materials for carbon-intensive travel. Flight free travellers often appealed to the relative comfort and ‘surprising’ number of routes that could be reached by train, which showed that there were alternative materials available that were being used. To scale up uptake, decisionmakers could look at improving flight free transport links to holiday destinations and developing better local travel infrastructure for walking and cycling. One

such example under development is Midnight Trains, a sleeper train service that aims to treat travellers to a 'hotel on rails' while en route to European holiday destinations (Global Railway Review, 2021).

- shaping marketing and media campaigns to change understandings of air travel as normal, cheap and accessible; to environmentally problematic, inconvenient and uncomfortable, while promoting flight free travel as cheap and accessible. To some extent the growth in coverage on flight free holidays in mainstream newspapers discussed in Chapter 4 shows that this is underway, but to accelerate the process decisionmakers might explore ways of working with rail companies to promote staycations, something the VisitScotland website does well (VisitScotland, 2021). Decisionmakers could also look at running public campaigns to de-risk perceptions of trains as unsafe in light of COVID-19: in May 2021, Transport for Wales estimated train passenger numbers were a fifth what they were pre-pandemic (Flint, 2021).

Recrafting practices mostly reflects the way that policy currently works, in that policy for behaviour change tends to focus on changing either material elements (e.g. subsidising electric cars and building more charging points) or understandings (marketing campaigns to get people to buy electric cars) (Keller, Halkier and Wilska, 2016). Changing one element is necessarily one-dimensional, but it is difficult to think of a sweeping policy to improve electric car material infrastructure without thinking of an associated shift in meanings (e.g. electric cars as environmentally friendly) and skills (e.g. changing driving styles to respond to the technologies to fulfil a car's intended sustainability characteristics (Ozaki, Shaw and Dodgson, 2013)). This example shows that interventions seeking to recraft air travel will not be effective if they are thought of in isolation, or as one-dimensional. In this way policies seeking to recraft practices will only ever get so far. A more systemic approach is needed.

Substituting practices works by replacing less sustainable practices with more sustainable practices, and it approaches intervention from a more zoomed out, systemic perspective. Can substituting air travel practices with flight free travel practices then offer up potential routes for intervention? Does flight free travel meet the same needs and wants as air travel? The answer is – partly. My findings suggest that air travel practices share many of the same meanings and needs as flight free travel practices. These include cultural meanings to do with convenience, freedom, adventure and autonomy, as well as practical aspects to do with planning a holiday and understanding how to do them. At the same time flight free travel practices are associated with a strong sense of ethical purpose, which is mostly based on perceptions of environmental responsibility. This suggests that flight free travel practices are competing for much of the same time, space and resources of air travel practices, in that 'both meet the same needs when performed' (Spurling *et al.*, 2013, p. 11). My study supports an emerging strain of research into the defection from air travel practices to the recruitment

of non-air travel practices (Westlake, 2018; Wolrath Söderberg and Wormbs, 2019; Ullström *et al.*, 2021). Thinking about changing the elements of the practice with the objective of encouraging the recruitment of flight free travel against the rate of defection from air travel (Watson, 2012), decisionmakers could focus on the forms of flight free travel that compete with the time and space needed to do air travel. This includes work practices, where new provisions could be made for the extra time needed to reach destinations. For example, employees choosing to go on a flight free holiday might be supported by employers who allow them to treat travel days as workdays, so time is productive time and no time is 'wasted'. Equally, employers could mandate the extra time for flight free travel by increasing annual leave allowances – this is a policy that's starting to gain traction in the UK with the campaign on Climate Perks (Possible, 2021).

One of the tools that policymakers might use for intervening in the defection and recruitment of travel practices is to look at the tensions in this shift and working out how they might be overcome. My study demonstrates that going flight free is not without difficulties – communicating the decision to friends and family was both presented as a necessity and a difficulty. Likewise, the need to shift from seeing flight free travel as a sacrifice and turn it into an opportunity was another tension. Inasmuch as air travel was viewed as a means rather than an end (Randles and Mander, 2009), emphasising the journey as part of the holiday narrative, and the accompanying 'saved time' elements of flight free travel, could be possible routes for overcoming these tensions and normalising flight free holiday travel – especially when it comes to communicating flight free travel. Substituting practices seems to give a few more possible tools for intervening in air travel practices, although it is limited in that it sticks to *travel practices*. One of the key features of social practices is in their inherent links to other practices. For example, influencing mobility policy might not happen in the mobility sphere at all, it can equally be to do with the spatial planning of workplaces and cycling infrastructure, or the social organisation of work (Spurling and McMeekin, 2014; Rau and Sattlegger, 2018).

Changing how practices interlock is the third forum for intervention, which looks at how flight free travel practices schedule and sequence with other practices. One key theme that emerged from my study involved in the practice of flight free travel and the relative ease of travelling with children, when compared to air travel. This suggests that policies seeking to spark a shift to flight free travel practices should consider everyday family practices and recognise the importance of social relations in structuring travel patterns (Rau and Sattlegger, 2018). This reinforces the need for policymakers to look at transport planning through 'mobilities of care' when planning for long-term, programmatic interventions (Sersli *et al.*, 2020).

Flight free travel practices can also affect the scheduling and sequencing of holidays and work through shaping understandings of time, as shown by representations of flight free travel as time that's well spent and productive. In my study the temporal dimensions of flight free travel affected the way that practitioners thought of holidays, where a journey became part of the holiday. This allowed them to tap into the cultural dimensions of holidays such as relaxation, comfort and adventure. Restrictions on time and money were common justifications for air travel, which is often understood as being quicker and cheaper (Cohen and Higham, 2011). My findings suggest that making provisions for the extra time needed to reach destinations could be a possible route for intervention, but so also could disrupting the sequencing and scheduling of holiday and work practices. Chapters 4 and 5 showed that disruption from strikes and the Iceland volcano eruption in 2010 caused a temporary reconfiguration of holiday practices, where the only way to go on a holiday abroad became flight free. No longer were train holidays the expensive, long and cumbersome alternative to air travel. As the only means for going on a holiday that summer, travel writers had to take them seriously and look at their benefits. This moment of disruption caused flight free travel practices to bundle with holiday practices in an unexpected way, which – at least for a time – triggered a series of new representations of flight free travel. We might consider this shift in terms of the links between practice-as performance and practice-as-entity (Shove, 2014) to suggest that the performances of holidaying changed and with that came a change in the practice-as-entity of flight free travel:

- materials shifted away from aeroplanes towards cars, ferries, bicycles, trains and their related infrastructures
- knowledge and skills shifted away from using Skyscanner and other flight free travel booking tools
- meanings changed: flight free holidays were the only way of having a holiday so in 2010, they became conventional holidays.

Looking forward in intervention terms, using these moments of disruption may be key for reshaping high consumption travel practices. We see this now with the COVID-19 pandemic, which is forcing people to rethink the way they travel and go on holiday (Gössling, 2020). This is a moment where policymakers might learn from flight free travel discourses in order to facilitate a sustainable transition towards less air travel, particularly in light of the sudden popularity of staycations (The Economist, 2021). To this end, my thesis has offered several insights for how these discourses emerge and where their meanings bump up against the meanings of conventional travel practices.

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