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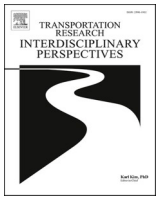

The luxury of choice: Understanding the Brussels mobility conflict through socio-economic positions, value orientations and mobility behaviour

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ABSTRACT

Urban sustainable mobility transitions are facing opposition, which undermines their odds of succeeding. Within a context of environmental distress, this poses an extra challenge to both policy makers and academics involved with sustainable mobility. Contemporary insights attribute these conflicts to rational self-interest or structural socio-economic factors. Approaching the issue from a political sociology perspective, our contribution introduces an additional motive for conflict: personal value orientations. The allocation of urban space can serve different purposes, such as car-centred accessibility or multimodal liveability, and is likely to be judged differently depending on one's values. Our aim is to empirically verify which elements predict positioning within the conflict; and to what extent value orientations contribute. To this end, we elaborate on the controversy surrounding the Good Move-mobility plan in the Brussels municipality of Schaerbeek. Data were collected by a random walk-inspired method of door-to-door surveying (N = 178). Our findings paint a nuanced picture: Bicycle use is the strongest predictor for positioning within the mobility debate, while other modes don't amount to such a clear impact. Socio-economic and value-based indicators proof to be relevant as well. Moreover, the distinct demographic profile of urban cyclists underlines the interconnectedness between these variables.

1. Introduction

Cities are at the forefront of humanity's struggle with climate change. According to the IPCC (2022), urban areas are responsible for 67–72 % of global CO_2 emissions, while they also bear the biggest risks, being more vulnerable to temperature rises and flooding. Nonetheless, urban living also forms an opportunity: dense cities can increase space efficiency and thereby reduce the environmental footprint of humanity. In this respect, transport is a crucial domain. Decades of car-centred mobility policies have led to a disproportionate and unhealthy allocation of scarce urban space, space that could instead be used to mitigate climate change effects and increase urban liveability (IPCC, 2022; Nieuwenhuijsen & Khreis, 2016; Urry, 2004). Proponents of sustainable mobility advocate for a modal shift from car-use to a variation of cycling, walking and public transport (Banister, 2008 & 2011). This idea resonates in many cities through, for example, new bike lanes, pedestrianization and restricted parking space (Nieuwenhuijsen & Khreis, 2016). However, reversing car dominance proofs to be tricky, sparking backlash in cities such as New York, London, Berlin and Madrid (Hernández-Morales & Wilke, 2023; Wild et al., 2018). The prominence of such contestation leads to the observation that, while these conflicts are always rooted in a local context, they seem to be part of a broader socio-political evolution. We refer to these phenomena as *urban mobility conflicts*, highlighting the special character of these competing transport demands within an urban context.

Mobility problems are often subject to post-political and value-neutral analyses (Kębłowski & Bassens, 2018; Lubitow & Miller, 2013; Wild et al., 2018). Nonetheless, two opposing perspectives emerge within these debates: Does scarce urban space need to serve cars, which some deem essential to attain basic living standards, or should that space prioritize people, by improving the living environment and promoting a healthy, sustainable lifestyle? Through the lens of Inglehart's Silent Revolution (1977, 1997), it can be argued that the first position is involved with materialist concerns, while the second focuses on post-materialist quality-of-life issues. This value dimension reveals a societal cleavage; a structural tension within society that has both normative and behavioural components (Bartolini & Mair, 1990 in: von Schoultz, 2017). There are three reasons to explore mobility conflict via this theory. Firstly, from a social perspective, it links individual preferences to socio-economic conditions: Value orientations accentuate that economic and physical security are imperative for the priorities that one holds in life (Inglehart, 1977 & 1997; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). As

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such, it could bridge the gap between individual and structural accounts of mobility attitudes. Secondly, postmaterialism is linked with the increased political salience of environmental concerns, which underly sustainable mobility policies. And lastly, when applied to the city, this value cleavage can account for the tensions that are observed within socio-economically diverse, gentrifying neighbourhoods (Freeman, 2005; Hyra, 2015; Shaw & Hagemans, 2015). In sum, value orientations form a promising avenue for the study of public backlash against sustainable mobility.

This contribution elaborates on the public backlash against the Brussels Good Move-plan (GM). This is a sustainable urban mobility plan (SUMP) that was implemented by several of Brussels' municipalities in 2022, stirring up debate ever since (Cokelaere, 2022; Köllinger, 2023). The plan strived to reduce car circulation throughout densely-populated neighbourhoods. However, not everyone seemed to be convinced that these climate-friendly policies were of universal interest. Like elsewhere, the plan generated opposition. In Brussels, the resistance prevailed – at least momentarily – as some municipalities acquiesced to partially (or temporarily) revert the plans, while others reconsidered their future commitments. To document this backlash, quantitative data were gathered through a method of randomized door-to-door surveying in the municipality of Schaerbeek (N = 178). In this way we aim to answer the following research questions: (i) Which indicators are the best predictors of attitudes towards the GM plan? (ii) To what extent do materialist/postmaterialist value patterns contribute to this? Thusly this contribution tries to uncover what drives the Brussels mobility conflict, and how a materialist/postmaterialist value dimension contributes to this. We find that cycling is the strongest predictor of positioning within the conflict, while other mobility modes fail to achieve this. The materialist/postmaterialist cleavage proofs useful as a framework to analyse the Brussels' mobility conflict, all the more as mobility behaviour itself showed to be conditioned by value disparities and socio-economic inequalities.

This paper is structured as follows: First, we dive into the existing literature to contextualize contemporary urban mobility policies (Section 2.1), after which we discuss how they relate to urban conflict, identifying possible drivers of contestation (Section 2.2). Secondly, the data-collection and analytical methods are described (Section 3). We then illustrate our results (Section 4), and lastly, discuss our findings (Section 5).

2. Literature review

2.1. Car dominance and an urban shift towards sustainability

Mobility policy is at the heart of making cities more sustainable and liveable. While automobility's success has generated unprecedented flexibility, it has also made itself indispensable, insofar as our transport behaviour steers the organization of our daily activities and built environment (Urry, 2004; Van Eenoo & Boussauw, 2023). Studies on automobility's negative externalities are ample. The car contributes to environmental degradation through toxic emissions and inefficient land use (Banister, 2011; Urry, 2004). It also bears responsibility in the social and commercial erosion of town centres through the decoupling of residential and commercial areas (Urry, 2004). And lastly, our car-centric society also generates inequality and segregation by enabling middle-class urban flight and suburbanization, which, in turn, contribute to urban economic marginalization (Kesteloot, 2000; Nall, 2018).

Some scholars believe that the urban environment itself can curb these negative externalities. For them, the city has the ideal scale to foster a modal shift towards sustainable mobility modes such as biking, walking and public transport (Banister, 2008 & 2011; Nieuwenhuijsen and Khreis, 2016). Many contemporary cities' transport policies subscribe to these principles (Banister, 2011; Kębłowski et al., 2019; Nieuwenhuijsen & Khreis, 2016). Lower levels of car circulation have evident ecological benefits. Furthermore, it creates a more attractive living environment, which can increase a city government's tax base (Freeman, 2005). Policy-makers and proponents of sustainable mobility perceive such changes often as value neutral and in everyone's interest (Kębłowski & Bassens, 2018; Lubitow & Miller, 2013; Wild et al., 2018). However, opposition to such plans has occurred in several cases across different countries (Wild et al., 2018). Although these urban mobility conflicts stem from local contexts, their prominence suggests they may be part of a broader trend.

2.2. Explanations for the urban mobility conflict

2.2.1. A matter of personal interest?

Studying mobility preferences is an inherently interdisciplinary endeavour. To fully understand the prominence of urban mobility conflicts, different perspectives have to be taken into account. A first explanation focusses on the individual level and originates from a utilitarian assumption: People prefer mobility policy that advances their personal self-interest. In that regard, transport research has firmly established a link between mobility attitudes and behaviour (Anable, 2005; Groth et al, 2021; Paydar & Kamani Fard, 2025; Ramezani et al., 2025; Rao et al., 2025; van Wee & Kroesen, 2022). Besides, mobility behaviour also inspires social identifications and habits: These impact how people look at the distribution of street space as well as their openness to modifying their mobility behaviour (Allert & Reese, 2023; Anable, 2005). This entails that one's preferred or most convenient transport option structures their judgement of different mobility modes. As such, interventions in the streetscape are likely to be judged through this lens.

Individual psychological factors are unneglectable, however, people can't be separated from the context in which they live. In this regard, residence accessibility and its impact on transport behaviour highlights the importance of individualized contextual elements (Paydar & Kamani Fard, 2025; Ramezani et al., 2025). Generally, urban residents enjoy a broad range of mobility options, due to comprehensive public transport networks and short distances (George et al., 2025). Nonetheless, the urban abundance of transport options bares a risk of conflict: The scarcity of urban open space creates a zero-sum game between different spatial functions: Assigning extra space to one implies taking it away from another (Petzer et al., 2021). Accordingly, users of different mobility modes –whose attitudes are reinforced by their transport routines- are expected to disagree over the ideal allocation of public space. Thus, self-interest appears as an evident motive for the urban mobility conflict. For example, people who use a car can be expected to oppose measures that restrict automobility, as these measures challenge their car-dependent lifestyle.

2.2.2. The social dimension of the urban mobility conflict

The second explanation arises from a critique of the paradigm that underlies these sustainable urban redevelopments. The sustainable mobility paradigm aims to limit inner-city car traffic and increase urban density, liveability and accessibility (Banister, 2008 & 2011). However, critics lament it for framing environmental solutions in a technocratic manner, based on rational solutions and technological practices that are value-neutral and serve universal interest (Kębłowski et al., 2019; Kębłowski & Bassens, 2018). Fundamentally, they stress the necessity of a more structural analysis of the issue. They argue that when mobility is perceived as a sum of individual travel needs, the sustainable transition is reduced to a normative issue; overlooking why some cannot conform to the desired behaviour (Kębłowski & Bassens, 2018; Wild et al., 2018). Considering the resistance that sustainable initiatives have provoked, this might be a valid critique. Indeed, research highlights that residents often don't experience these transitions as neutral (Goossens et al., 2020; Wild et al., 2018). In that light, transport scholars have found that mobility behaviour is structured by socio-economic indicators: Higher levels of education and income are good predictors of a multimodal

lifestyle (Groth et al., 2021; Ramezani et al., 2025). Additionally, sustainable mobility transitions are also linked to gentrifying tendencies (Lubitow & Miller, 2013; Stehlin, 2015; Wild et al., 2018).

This brings the urban mobility conflict within the scope of urban studies, where 'green gentrification' is referred to as the "*the convergence of urban redevelopment with ecologically-minded initiatives*" (Checker, 2011; p. 212). Gentrification is considered *a dirty word* because it is associated with the displacement of vulnerable long-time residents from certain urban areas (Freeman, 2005; Smith, 1996). In essence, market forces drive up housing prices of in-demand neighbourhoods, pushing away any working-class public that initially lived there. The relationship between sustainable transformations and gentrification isn't seen as causal, but rather as interactive: different evolutions link up and strengthen each other (Checker, 2011; Stehlin, 2015). For example, research indicates that green gentrification is dependent on the neighbourhood's initial potential (Anguelovski et al., 2018; Rigolon & Németh, 2020). Therefore, greening seems more like a catalyst of gentrification than a cause; sparking revitalization in those neighbourhoods that already had middle-class appeal. Nonetheless, sustainable redevelopments continue to face opposition due to the perceived link with gentrification (Anguelovski et al., 2018; Goossens et al., 2020; Lubitow & Miller, 2013; Stehlin, 2015; Wild et al., 2018). As such, this connotation provides long-time residents with a motive to reject these initiatives.

The relationship between socio-economic status and mobility behaviour/attitudes isn't straightforward. When we look at the relationship between mobility lifestyle and socio-economic status, car-oriented individuals do not have a clear socio-economic profile (Ramezani et al., 2025). Other studies find that low-income occupations often foster car-dependency (Liotta, 2025), while higher income-levels are linked with car driving as well (Roos et al., 2020). Nonetheless, a multimodal lifestyle is more common among more affluent and highly-educated groups (Groth et al., 2021; Ramezani et al., 2025). Therefore, some studies identify educational attainment as more important; especially when mobility behaviour is motivated through environmental concern (George et al., 2025; Groth et al., 2021; Hudde, 2022; Meyer, 2015; Roos et al., 2020). For instance, highly-educated individuals are more diligent to adopt sustainable transportation habits like cycling or public transport (Hudde, 2022). This is attributed to their increased environmental awareness (Meyer, 2015), as well as their preference to live in well-connected central neighbourhoods (George et al., 2025; Roos et al., 2020). Therefore, mobility preferences indeed seem to be structured by a socio-economic dimension. Still, it remains unclear what influence it bears on someone's position within the mobility debate. Given that cycling and public transport are cheaper transportation options than a car, it would seem logical for vulnerable groups to welcome sustainable redevelopments– yet that does not seem to be the case. Clearly, the socio-economic dimension is a valuable indicator. However, as people judge and prioritize things differently, socio-economic status alone explains the mobility conflict insufficiently. Therefore, it could proof fruitful to look into an intermediate variable that connects indicators of individual preference and those that are of a structural, socio-economic nature.

2.2.3. An underlying cleavage of value orientations

To uncover the differences between the opposing sides of the urban mobility debate, we return to the concept of displacement. Gentrification scholars highlight that displacement cannot be reduced to a purely financial process, for it also has cultural and political dimensions: Culturally, it reflects a shift in neighbourhood norms, values and behaviours towards those of new inhabitants (Hyra, 2015). Politically, it translates into unequal political participation and increased support for progressive liberal parties (Boterman & van Gent, 2023; Hyra, 2015; Ley, 1994). In that sense, neighbourhood change is rather determined by those moving in than by those leaving (Freeman, 2005). These middle-class newcomers are often ascribed to the "cultural new class": a vocational group within postindustrial society that refers to tertiary-educated professionals in the arts, media, teaching, academic positions and public sector (Ley, 1994). Their culturally progressive preferences and value orientations are a key element that distinguishes them from other groups (Ley, 1994). The cultural new class joins those that have remained in the city throughout the 20th century after waves of sub-urbanization, deindustrialization and urban dilapidation. For urban demographics this entails that different socio-economic backgrounds coexist in certain urban areas. Gentrification literature describes how this can instil tensions: Disparities between the preferences of old and new inhabitants can generate a contest over the character of a neighbourhood (Goossens et al., 2020). This is reflected in debates on the allocation of public space as vulnerable long-term inhabitants often experience sustainable transformations as "not meant for them" (Goossens et al., 2020; Lubitow & Miller, 2013). In sum, it seems that the sustainability paradigm, which is critiqued for a value-neutral assessment of mobility problems, is itself subject to a normative dimension (Kębłowski & Bassens, 2018).

This brings us to a third potential explanation for the urban mobility conflict, which is located at the level of value disparities. People's value orientations reflect their basic life experiences, facilitating them to function under given existential conditions (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). In that sense, they give theoretical substance to a link between individual preferences and socio-economic background. Inglehart (1977, 1997) finds proof for a value shift from so-called materialist towards postmaterialist value patterns due to ameliorating societal circumstances. The development of values is attributed to the physical and economic (in)security which one experiences during their upbringing: If such security lacks, the attainment of basic needs will be prioritized, fostering materialist values. In contrast, growing up in a secure environment shifts focus towards immaterial needs like quality of life and self-expression –i.e., postmaterialist values. On a societal level, mass education has fulfilled these survival needs, generating an intergenerational value shift. Still, societies comprise different value orientations: "The materialism/postmaterialism dimension has become the basis for a new axis of political polarization in Western Europe" (Inglehart, 1997; p. 242). Others identify the materialism/postmaterialism contradiction as the basis of an axis of political and societal conflict, capturing non-economic issues of lifestyle, environment and community (von Schoultz, 2017; Bakker et al., 2012; Hooghe et al., 2002). Moreover, it has been documented how a surge in postmaterialist orientations can provoke a materialist backlash among less secure segments of the working class (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). This paper argues that the materialism/postmaterialism framework makes a valuable addition to the mobility debate: It bridges the gap between individual mobility preferences and socio-economic background, while providing a motive for societal conflict.

Content-wise, urban mobility conflicts often revolve around traffic interventions that are framed as improvements of the quality of life and environment (Anguelovski et al., 2018; Nieuwenhuijsen & Khreis, 2016). Such aims address rather abstract issues that appeal to post-materialist values (Inglehart, 1977 & 1997). At the basis of this are the risk perceptions that accompany value patterns: Postmaterialist values give way to humanistic risk perceptions that translate into an increased awareness of impersonal and abstract long-term risks like climate change (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). In contrast, materialist survival values stimulate egoistic risk perceptions that emphasize direct threats to one's existential security (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). As a consequence, "*a postmaterialist hypothesis would predict that people in wealthier societies can afford the luxury of environmental concern*" (Kopnina & Williams, 2012; p. 119). A popular expression of the French yellow-vest movement adequately illustrates this disparity in risk perceptions: "Some are concerned with the end of the world, while we are concerned with the end of the month" (Rérolle, 2018). In that regard, an overlap between the substance of the Brussels urban mobility conflict and the materialism/postmaterialism cleavage seems logical.

Linking back to interdisciplinary transport studies, it has been found that multimodal behaviour can be inspired by different motives depending on the financial constraints that a group experiences. More vulnerable groups exhibit a multimodal lifestyle out of sheer financial necessity in comparison to the highly-educated middle class (Groth et al., 2021; Ramezani et al., 2025). Instead, this group motivates their multimodal behaviour through convenience and environmental concern, paying less attention to cost- and time-effectiveness (Groth et al., 2021; Ramezani et al., 2025). Their visions on multimodality and neighbourhood differ as well: While the former group emphasizes accessibility by all different modes and doesn't care for neighbourhood attractivity, the latter prefers sustainable mobility options over driving and appreciates a pleasant urban living environment (Ramezani et al., 2025). Cultural studies highlight that in postindustrial societies, actions are increasingly justified through lifestyle and ideals rather than sustenance (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Considering the highlighted socio-economic differences, there seems to be a contradiction between those who motivate their behaviour as a lifestyle choice, and those who see it as a tool to preserve their standard of living. Thusly, the root of the urban mobility conflict becomes clear: Does scarce space need to serve materialist concerns of people that need accessibility to protect their livelihood, or should that space prioritize postmaterialist concerns, that seek to advance a pleasant living environment and a healthy, sustainable lifestyle?

2.2.4. Synthesis

Following different scholarly insights, we can state that socio-economic status and personal interest only offer a partial explanation for the perceived contentiousness. Meanwhile, there are evident overlaps between the urban mobility conflict and the materialism/post-materialism value cleavage. These value disparities substantiate the existence of a social dimension within the conflict, without reducing it to a matter of social class and neglecting individual agency; Socio-economic background influences value patterns, which on their turn inspire individual preferences. We argue that attitudes towards urban mobility transitions are structured by an underlying dimension of materialist and postmaterialist value patterns, as conceptualized by Inglehart (1977, 1997), meaning that materialist needs have to be attained before postmaterialist needs can be prioritised. Projecting this onto our case, would entail that groups who are yet to achieve security will be less likely to prioritize the environmental and quality-of-life concerns at the core of these redevelopments. Links with gentrification and associated cultural displacement give further weight to the plausibility of a value cleavage underlying this mobility conflict.

Accordingly, we hypothesize *that postmaterialist values positively condition support for the Brussels sustainable mobility plan GM* (H1a). Conversely, *materialism associates with low support* (H1b). For self-interest regarding mobility, it is hypothesized that GM attitudes are influenced by transport behaviour, meaning that *possessing and driving a car coincides with low support* (H2a), *while cycling and public transport usage associate with positive attitudes* (H2b & H2c). For socio-economic status it is hypothesized that *more vulnerable profiles tend to disapprove of the plans, while the more well-off are more supportive* (H3). As such, it will be possible to identify whether postmaterialism plays an underlying role in this urban mobility conflict, while taking account of other important and/or related variables. The next section discusses the research methods on which this contribution relies.

3. Methodology

3.1. Case selection

GM is a mobility plan of the Brussels Capital Region and an example of a SUMP (Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan), which the European Commission defines as "a strategic plan designed to satisfy the mobility needs of people and businesses in cities and their surroundings for a better quality of life" (European Commission, 2023; Köllinger, 2023). In October 2022 the Brussels municipality of Schaerbeek experienced that reconciling mobility needs with a better quality of life is not self-evident. A protest occurred after the plan was introduced in the Bear Pit neighbourhood (Fig. 1). Curiously, elsewhere in the municipality the plan had been introduced without stirring such commotion.

Schaerbeek is part of Brussels' so-called "first crown", which surrounds the historic centre and urbanized during the 19th century. After 20th century suburbanization, this area attracted a predominantly poor, non-native population (Deboosere et al., 2009; Kesteloot, 2000). Nonetheless, Schaerbeek contains socio-economic contrasts: it is situated where Brussels' "poor crescent" near the old industrial neighbourhoods of the canal flows over into the more affluent eastern municipalities. While the Bear pit neighbourhood is one of the poorest of Schaerbeek, taxable income levels continue to rise in neighbourhoods adjacent to the Josaphat parc in the east (BISA, 2024). The presence of such gentrifying tendencies as well as a mobility conflict make Schaerbeek a valuable case. Also its size and location make it scientifically salient: being part of a moderately-sized urban region in continental Europe, it broadens a research field in which the Anglo-Saxon perspective is dominant. Considering this, these Schaerbeek neighbourhoods were a suitable setting to conduct this study (Fig. 1).

3.2. Approach

Data were gathered through a form of door-to-door surveying. This was inspired by the random walk method, which allows for probability sampling through the randomization of walked routes (Herman, 2015; McManus, Erens & Bajekal, 2006). Such fine-grained approach was important to respect the local character of the conflict. Moreover, this method enhances inclusivity, for it succeeds in reaching diverse groups that are often hard to include through other means (McManus, Erens & Bajekal, 2006). Taking all into consideration, the random walk is a great option for local research in a superdiverse urban context. By implication, alternative methods like online surveys and probabilistic panels were less suitable.

In practice, a randomized route was generated throughout the relevant neighbourhoods (Fig. 1), including guidelines of where to knock. The survey was conducted during the first week of March 2023 in Schaerbeek by 4–6 interviewers through a computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI), coding responses on a tablet. The survey lasted 5 to 10 min per person. For practical reasons, data-collection was limited to office hours (9–17 h). In neighbourhoods with a high absence rate, we opted to look in local businesses and cafés. To avoid the inclusion of non-locals in the sample, the survey was ended when respondents indicated that they did not live in the neighbourhood. Ultimately, we ended up with 178 respondents.

Table 1 highlights that our random walk-method captured the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of Schaerbeek into our sample. Nonetheless, the sample does consist of more male respondents and is on average older than the Schaerbeek population. And while a comparison with public data on the municipal or neighbourhood level isn't available, our sample does feature a rather high proportion of highly-educated respondents (67 %). This might be a consequence of the method of data-collection, where male, older and highly-educated individuals are more open to door to door questioning. Another explanation would be that this is part of the bias that sampling during office hours creates. Data collection occurred in the aftermath of the COVID-pandemic, when working from home had become conventional. As such, many respondents saw the survey as a stimulating 10-minute break. This may have mitigated the effect of questioning during office hours on sample representativity. Nonetheless, this doesn't exclude the possibility of a class-based bias: Low-skilled jobs often require physical presence at the job site. Still, in general, the self-collected data express proportions that are similar to the (accessible) official data: Azaléa is the oldest and most affluent neighbourhood, while Bear pit and Royal St. Mary score lower

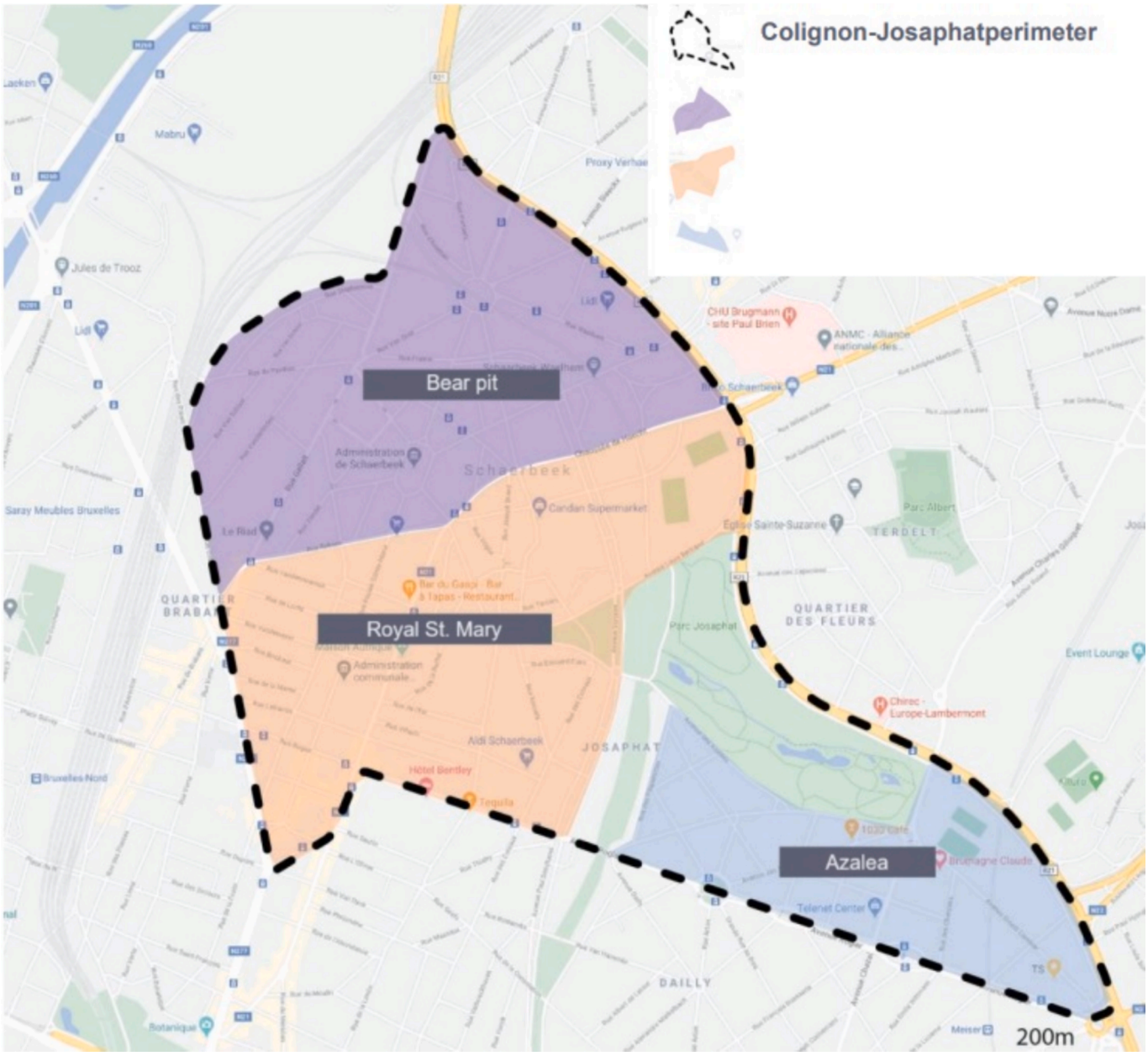

Fig. 1. GM-plans Schaerbeek.. Source: Municipality of Schaerbeek, https://goodmove.1030.be/nl/home/.

Table 1
Schaerbeek neighbourhoods compared (survey vs. official data).

	Female % (data)	Female % (BISA, 2024)	Avg age (data)	Avg age (BISA, 2024)	Fin. secu-rity (data)	Income lvl 1–5* (BISA, 2021)	Foreign born % (data)	Foreign nat. % (BISA, 2024)	N
Azaléa	55,3%		48,51		89,8%		30,6%		49
– *Josaphat*		*48,07 %*		*37,12*		*4*		*36,6%*	
R. St. Mary	41,1%		41,40		79,6%		44,6%		56
–*Colignon*		*50,54 %*		*35,38*		*2*		*35,05 %*	
–*Chaussée de Haecht*		*50,49 %*		*35,13*		*1*		*44,20 %*	
Bear pit	41,7%		46,90		63,4%		43,8%		73
–*Brabant*		*51,46 %*		*34,71*		*1*		*43,36 %*	
–*Colignon*		*50,54 %*		*35,38*		*2*		*35,05 %*	
Schaerbeek	45,1%	49,58 %	45,71	36,09	75,9%	2	40,4%	38,48 %	178

Note (I): Boundaries of GM-neighbourhoods differ from the exact local administrative units.
Note (II): Fin. security indicates % of "yes"-response to the question "Do you have the impression that you get by with your monthly income?".
*Income classes: 1: < 25,400; 2: 25400–29500; 3: 29500–32200; 4: 32200–39300; 5: >39300 (BISA, 2021).

on both these measures.

3.3. Questionnaire development

This article uses a multiple regression analysis to test its hypotheses. In this way it becomes possible to assess the influence of several independent variables on one dependent variable. In this case, the dependent variable is the approval of the contested mobility plan, measured through a rating that ranges from complete disapproval (0) to total approval (10). This score indicates how respondents position themselves within the Brussels mobility conflict. The following paragraphs discuss the independent variables.

Value orientations are complex and multidimensional. To allow for quantitative analysis, a single bipolar dimension between materialism and postmaterialism is constructed to test H1. The materialism/postmaterialism dimension was captured through categorical principal component analysis (Cat. PCA). Hereby a continuous variable is generated through eight binary indicators (Table 2), based on Inglehart's 4-item and 12-item scale (1977). An experimental balance was sought between them: on the one hand, it was important to capture enough information to generate a precise image of the value cleavage. On the other hand, respondents had to be convinced to participate on the spot, necessitating a concise questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate which government policy priorities where most important to them. They had to choose three from a total of eight items, consisting of four materialist and four postmaterialist policy priorities. The method through which values are measured has been the subject of academic discussions (Davis et al., 1999; Clarke et al., 1999). Still, a ranking method is preferred over a Likert-style rating: All indicators are generally identified as important, making it crucial to differentiate between priorities (Inglehart 1997; Inglehart & Abramson 1999). Our output highlights that the current method is perhaps not ideal: Not all items contribute equally and the internal cohesion of the factor is flawed (Table 2). Nonetheless, we have maintained the factor for three reasons. Firstly, the items orient themselves in a way that is consistent with what the theory suggests. The most meaningful options on the materialist side were "maintain order" and "fight crime", while "more humane society" and "give people more say" prevailed on the postmaterialist side. Secondly, the reliability approaches the – suboptimal – threshold of 0,5, meaning that the dimension isn't meaningless. Besides, the exclusion of the weakest items only meant a negligible improvement of reliability. Lastly, we wanted to stay close to the conventional measurement of materialist-postmaterialist values.

Mobility self-interest is operationalized by a proxy variable that indicates the use frequency of different transport modes. To test H2, Likert-scales ranging from 1 "never" to 5 "daily" measure the frequency of car use (H2a), bike use (H2b) and public transport use (H2c). A dummy-variable for car possession (1 = "yes"; 0 ="no") corrects for the phenomenon of car-sharing. Two dummies measure socio-economic status (H3). The first was "having the impression of getting by with your monthly income" (1 ="yes"; 0 ="no"), indicating financial security, while keeping room for discreetness in a setting of door-to-door questioning. The second was education level, measured by the highest degree obtained. (1 ="higher education"; 0 ="none, primary or secondary education"). Three other variables where included: Age (continuous) is a socio-demographic control variable, but the intergenerational aspect of value change gives it special relevance. Political left–right orientation (0 ="extreme left"; 10 ="extreme right") poses an alternative to the value cleavage that is tested. Time living in neighbourhood (categorical: 1 ="1 year or less"; 2 ="1–5 years", 3 ="6–10 years"; 4 ="10 years or longer") makes for a proxy of habit while also highlighting the demographic changes that occur in gentrifying neighbourhoods. Categories were reduced to compensate for a limited sample size and increase analysis power. The descriptive statistiscs of each variable can be found in Table 3.

Table 2
Indicators materialism/postmaterialism.(factor loading).

Materialism	Postmaterialism
- Maintain order in the nation (0,710)	- Progress towards a less impersonal and a more humane society (−0,690)
- Fight crime (0,614)	- Give people more say in government decisions (−0,425)
- Fight rising prices (0,318)	- Improve the environment (−0,235)
- Maintain a stable economy (0,049)	- Protect freedom of speech (−0,062)

Source: Swyngedouw et al. (2004) – *Reliability: Cronbach's alpha: 0,471; Eigenvalue: 1,700; Accounted variance: 21,256%.*

3.4. Analysis

A multiple regression was used to examine how the different variables account for variance in the judgement of GM of respondents. The analysis existed out of 3 models: The first model includes variables of socio-economic background as well as a control variable (age). The second model adds value orientation-variables, initially consisting of both the materialism/postmaterialism factor and the political left–right orientation. However, the latter was excluded due to a low response rate, which impacted analysis power. The third model adds mode-use indicators (frequency of car use, bike use and public transport use), car possession and time spent living in the neighbourhood. As such, it controls for mobility self-interest and habit. By adding variables in different stages, it is possible to assess how effects evolve across the different models. While this method doesn't allow for conclusions regarding causality, it gives the opportunity to reflect on a potential causal chain, which could pave the way for future research.

A subsequent analysis focusses on the correlations of mobility behaviour with other variables, to further understand the outcomes of the initial analysis. This highlights the socio-demographic profiles of car driving, cycling and taking public transport, with which we assess whether variables of mobility self-interest are neutral indicators, or if they themselves are subject to an underlying social or value dimension.

4. Results

4.1. Multiple regression analyses

Table 4 displays the different steps of our multiple regression

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of variables used in analysis.

	Frequency	Range	Mean (SD)	Mode	% missing
GM-attitudes	163	0–10	5.233 (3.460)	0	8.4 %
Age	174	18–94	45.713 (16.497)	53	1.1 %
Education level	176	0–1	0.67 (0.417)	1	2.2 %
Financial security	174	0–1	0.759 (0.429)	1	3.3 %
Left-right self-placement	154	0–10	3.682 (1.839)	5	13.5 %
Factor postmaterialism	178	−2.5–1.39	0 (1.003)		0 %
Car possession	178	0–1	0.652 (0.478)	1	0 %
Car use frequency	178	1–5	3.045 (1.503)	4	0 %
Cycle use freq.	178	1–5	2.669 (1.794)	1	0 %
Public transport use freq.	178	1–5	3.663 (1.323)	5	0 %
Time living in neighbourhood	178	1–4	3.152 (1.055)	4	0 %

Note: See Appendix for survey questionnaire.

Table 4
Multiple regression analysis (y = Evaluation of GM 0–10).

	Model 1 B (SD)	Std. Beta Coeff.	Model B (SD)	Std. Beta Coeff.	Model 3 B (SD)	Std. Beta Coeff.
Intercept	4.707***		5.257***		3.638*	
	(0.883)		(0.882)		(1.468)	
Age	−0.045**	−0.216	−0.050***	−0.239	−0.010	−0.049
	(0.015)		(0.015)		(0.016)	
Education level	2.062***	0.281	1.622**	0.221	0.469	0.064
(ref. = low-edu.)	(0.545)		(0.553)		(0.545)	
Financial security	1.605**	0.199	1.553**	0.193	1.384*	0.172
(ref. = low fin.)	(0.599)		(0.585)		(0.547)	
Factor postmaterialism			0.743**	0.215	0.187	0.054
			(0.254)		(0.251)	
Car possession					−0.246	−0.034
(ref. = no car)					(0.632)	
Car use					−0.079	−0.034
					(0.205)	
Cycle use					0.711***	0.369
					(0.149)	
Public transport use					0.318	0.122
					(0.179)	
Time living in neighbourhood					−0.625*	−0.191
					(0.262)	
R2a	0.179		0.216		0.349	
N	160		160		160	

Note (I): Levels of significance: *p < 0,050 **p < 0,010 ***p < 0,001.
Note (II): The sample size is reduced due to non-responses on some variables.
Note (III): Power analysis of resulting R2a given N = 160: p < 0,050 = 0,998; p < 0,010 = 0,989; p < 0,001 = 0,940.

analysis. First, the social dimension of the urban mobility conflict is highlighted. Both education level and financial security make a significant difference. Possession of a degree in higher education increases support for GM (0–10). Still, the standardized Beta coefficient remains modest (0.281). Financial security displays a similar tendency: Those who make ends meet are more supportive of the plan than those who can't. However, the standardized Beta is smaller and less significant than for education level. In the following models, the effect of financial security remains significant, while it diminishes for education level. These results indicate the importance of the socio-economic dimension to the GM-debate.

Within the second model, the value dimension of materialism/postmaterialism obtains a significant, positive coefficient. This means that the more postmaterialist one is, the higher one rates GM, and vice versa for materialism. Political left–right self-placement wasn't included due to a low response rate. However, when it was included, it didn't exceed the impact of the materialist/postmaterialist factor.[1] In that sense, it seems that GM is captured better by this value-based cleavage than by the traditional political left–right dimension. The Beta coefficient shows that all variables in this model have a similar impact, ranging between 0.193 and 0.239. While the coefficient and significance of socio-economic indicators drops slightly across the first two models, it does seem that the effects of socio-economic status and value orientations coexist. The significance of the value dimension finally disappears after including mobility variables in the last model. Nonetheless, an underlying value dimension seems to be relevant in explaining the urban mobility conflict.

Of the control variables, age has a significant negative coefficient, indicating that older age is associated with a lower rate of acceptance of the plan. However, this disappears in the last model. Time living in the neighbourhood is included as well, and shows significant results. The tendency that both variables cover seems to be alike: the older people are/the longer people have lived in the neighbourhood, the more they oppose GM. This might indicate the importance of habits.

[1] Results of the initial analysis including left–right self-placement are available through the original author (Cian.De.Greve@vub.be).

Curiously, of the mobility self-interest variables that are added, only cycling leads to significant results: frequent cycling is associated with better GM evaluations. Furthermore, cycling has the strongest impact of all variables studied, with the strongest level of significance ($p < 0.001$) and the highest standardized Beta (0.369). Indicative of its strength, other variables' significance disappears/ lowers substantially once cycling frequency is included. Only "financial security" and "time living in neighbourhood" remain modestly influential. Even more intriguing is that other mobility indicators fail to reach significance. Use of public transport comes close and has a modest standardized Beta, while car possession and car use fail to amount any noteworthy effect. Even when car use is the only mobility variable that is included, it doesn't reach predictive value. These are important findings: Cyclists' behaviour explains their attitudes towards a plan that improves cycling circumstances, but in contrast, car use does not seem to predict opposition to a plan that constrains space for cars. Consequently, it contradicts the idea that mobility self-interest is an absolute determinant of GM attitudes. This requires further discussion, therefore we analyse the different socio-demographic profiles of each mobility group in the following section.

4.2. *The socio-demographic dimension of mode use frequency*

What stands out in Table 5 is that cycling has a distinct socio-demographic profile: it correlates significantly with younger, higher educated, more financially secure and more recent residents. In contrast, car driving nor public transport usage yield such clear distinction. For these transport modes, only length of neighbourhood residency has significant correlations: driving goes with a longer time of residency, while public transport correlates with a shorter stay. The fact that their use frequencies can't be differentiated for level of education or financial security, implies that the car and public transport have socio-economically heterogenous user-bases. Interestingly, correlations between these mobility modes show that car and public transport usage have a significant negative relationship. Meanwhile, cycling frequency says nothing about the usage of other mobility modes. Considering the better-off socio-economic profile of cyclists in Schaerbeek, this can be interpreted as that they possess the 'luxury of choice', combining their

Table 5
Demographic profile of the different mobility modes (correlations).

	Car use	Cycle use	Pub. trans. use	Car poss-ession	GM Attit.	Age	Fin. secu- rity	Edu. level	Mat./ Postmat.	Neighb. time
Car use	1	−0.089	−0.271***	0.659***	−0.157*	−0.009	0.126	−0.076	−0.169*	0.224**
Cycle use	−0.089	1	−0.028	−0.050	0.507***	−0.175*	0.179*	0.430***	0.371***	−0.263***
Public trans. use	−0.271**	−0.028	1	−0.178*	0.179*	−0.100	0.003	0.029	0.166*	−0.190*

Level of significance: *p < 0,050 **p < 0,010 ***p < 0,001.

bicycle with other modes of transport.

Another noteworthy element is that each mode of transportation correlates significantly with both the attitudes towards GM and materialist/postmaterialist value patterns. For GM attitudes, cycling and public transport use correlate positively, with cycling scoring the strongest. Conversely, car usage correlates negatively with GM scores. For materialist/postmaterialist value patterns we see a similar tendency: correlations with cycling and public transport are positive, of which cycling is the highest and most significant, while car usage shows the opposite.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Several cities experience a backlash in response to their efforts towards sustainable mobility (Wild et al., 2018). Through a quantitative random walk-method in Schaerbeek, this study aimed to provide new insights into the sentiments that underly such a mobility conflict. The following question was posed: What variables are the best predictors of attitudes towards the GM plan? In an effort to reconcile different perspectives on the matter, we arrived at three elements: mobility self-interest (mode use frequency and car possession), socio-economic status (education level and financial security) and personal value orientations (materialism/postmaterialism). The latter poses an alternative take on the issue and inspires a second research question: To what degree does a dimension of materialist/postmaterialist value patterns explain such attitudes? Our attempt to answer these questions resulted in some important, and even surprising findings.

Firstly, socio-economic differences hold predictive value in the Brussels urban mobility conflict. Indicators of a more well-off socio-economic position increase support for GM. Both education level and financial security confirm this tendency, with the latter doing so most convincingly. This warrants the confirmation of H3: lower socio-economic profiles tend to disapprove of the sustainable mobility plan, while the well-off position themselves more positively towards GM. Secondly, mobility self-interest is an inconsistent predictor of one's positioning within the Brussels mobility conflict. Its impact differs strongly across transport modes: where car driving and public transport usage fail to reach significant predictive value, cycling succeeds convincingly. Furthermore, cycling is the most powerful predictor: the more one cycles, the more one supports GM. Therefore, we can confirm H2, but only for cycling. This means that, contrary to popular belief, the Brussels mobility conflict isn't a scramble between chauffeurs and cyclists. Much rather, it seems to be a conflict between those who cycle and those who don't.

Nevertheless, nuance is necessary, as cycling is found to have a clear socio-demographic profile: cyclists are generally younger, higher educated, more financially stable, and more recent neighbourhood residents. This is in line with earlier findings of an unequal cycling boom (Hudde, 2022). The socially dispersed character of cycling highlights that seemingly neutral indicators are conditioned by social reality. In that regard, correlations with socio-economic indicators for car possession and usage are curiously weak. Both high and low income-levels have a motivation to sway for automobility (Groth et al., 2021; Ramezani et al., 2025): On the one hand, more affluent groups can choose to adopt multimodal behaviour; riding their bicycle due to their environmental self-consciousness (Meyer, 2015), as well as driving a car out of convenience (Roos et al., 2020). On the other hand, low-income groups are more dependent on cars for occupational and residential reasons (Liotta, 2025), while also placing more value on the car as a status symbol (Kopnina & Williams, 2012). Consequently, the car's lack of predictive value might be explained through its broad appeal. Illustrative of this is that cycling and car usage don't correlate with each other, meaning that cyclists in Schaerbeek don't necessarily reduce their driving habits; they possess *the luxury of choice*.

Third, in accordance with this paper's argument, value orientations help furthering our understanding of the urban mobility conflict. The distinction between materialist and postmaterialist values holds predictive value for residents' attitudes towards sustainable mobility in Schaerbeek. In order to explain contemporary urban political conflict, these value disparities can be linked to demographical trends: After a decade-long economic marginalization of urban centres, a new middle class is attracted to urban living. This creates a context in which different socio-economic backgrounds share the same neighbourhood, but desire different allocations of public space. Results show that this value dimension exists within the attitudes toward GM. Its significance only disappears once cycling frequency is added. However, this intra-urban value cleavage might also account for cycling, as it fits into a healthy, flexible and sustainable lifestyle that is coherent with postmaterialist priorities. Our data seem to confirm this. The scientific value of materialism/postmaterialism lies in the fact that it provides insight into the societal dimensions that underlie these mobility conflicts. On these grounds, H1 is (partially) confirmed.

Reflecting on a potential causal chain, the clear demographic profile of cyclists suggests that cycling is an outcome of socio-economic indicators and value patterns rather than the other way around. In this way, cycling might be an intermediary variable between structural elements and attitudes towards sustainable mobility initiatives. However, these are just assumptions and the entanglement between these variables requires for future research.

5.1. Policy implications and critical reflection

For policy makers there are some important implications. Firstly, it is important to increase awareness of these different value orientations. The relevance of a materialist/postmaterialist dimension makes clear why mobility policy isn't perceived as a neutral or technical matter. As such, a broader coalition favouring sustainable mobility could be forged by making these policies appealing across the value cleavage. For instance, the security gains created by reducing car-centric infrastructure could be emphasized more. If not handled well, a materialist backlash can threaten the environmental aspirations of cities, as occurred in Brussels. Additionally, alternative transport options need to be accessible to the most vulnerable. In the example of Schaerbeek, there is a relatively weak public transport connection to the city centre, while the uneven topography imposes a physical barrier to widespread cycling adoption, especially among vulnerable groups that don't cycle for their enjoyment (see Groth et al, 2021). Thus, public transport investments seem crucial to attain a modal shift here. In that regard, the uncertainty surrounding the Metro 3-project is highly unfortunate. Secondly, the role of cycling in one's perception of sustainable mobility suggests that stimulating bike ridership across different socio-economic groups, could increase support for future interventions. Initiatives that socialize a

broader public with cycling, for example through educational programs, could lower psychological or habitual obstacles to cycling. There might also be an opportunity in subsidizing (shared) e-bikes, which could make active modes accessible to more vulnerable groups, lowering the physical barriers imposed by Schaerbeek's geography. Lastly, the early concessions made by policy makers might have undermined any long-term process of attitudinal change fostered by the mobility plans themselves (Van Wee & Kroesen, 2022).

Acknowledging the shortcomings of this contribution leads to the following remarks and suggestions. First, the predictive value of the models in their entirety remains rather low. As our results indicate, many variables influence the urban mobility conflict. Possibly, we missed other relevant indicators such as social identification with transport modes (Allert & Reese, 2023). However, the data that we did collect, didn't necessarily translate into reliable indicators (i.e. the materialism-postmaterialism factor). The measurement of value orientations is a contested issue within academics, further research needs to improve this. Secondly, attitudes towards the GM plan aren't necessarily a perfect reflection of people's attitudes towards sustainable mobility, as people can judge these plans for various other reasons, such as NIMBY effects, policy quality or political identification. Still, as GM's notoriety made it a well-known policy theme, it increased the survey's accessibility. Thirdly, the sample size is not optimal. Future research relying on a similar method should take into account the peculiarities of door-to-door surveying. For example, our sample is older and contains more male respondents than the official data for the Schaerbeek municipality. Despite the post-COVID trend of working from home, a class-based bias remains because low-skilled jobs often require presence on the job site. The urban working-class is a group that is expected to be materialist and car-dependent. Therefore, an improved representation of low-skilled respondents probably would have lead to clearer effects. In this way, sample quality may have affected the findings. Special attention should be placed in reaching the urban-working class, for example, through a more flexible planning of fieldwork. As a fourth remark, a comparison across different cases could increase the validity of these findings. Lastly, further research could focus more in depth on the arguments and motivations of proponents vis-à-vis opponents. Such a qualitative study could foster a deeper, more substantial understanding of the value disparities that are indicated by this contribution.

Ethics statement

At the time of conducting this fieldwork (March 2023), approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) was not required for undergraduate research in the social sciences at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). The data collected were non-personal and anonymized. Prior to participation, respondents were informed about the purpose of the survey, their anonymity and their rights. After this, respondents had to explicitly give permission, which they could revoke at any point throughout the survey. Respondents had the opportunity to receive and give feedback afterwards.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Cian De Greve: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The author declares that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix:. Survey questionnaire

Introductory and neighbourhood questions.

1. How long have you been living in this neighbourhood?
   - o Less than 1 year
   - o Between 1 and 5 years
   - o Between 5 and 10 years
   - o More than 10 years
   - o (Don't know)
   - o (Does not live here => end of survey)
2. Are you aware of the Good Move plans?
   - o Yes
   - o No (–> end of survey)
3. How do you feel about the Good Move plans? (0–10 If you were to rate the Good Move plans, what score out of 10 would you give them? (0 = completely against, 10 = completely in favor)
   - o 0 Completely against
   - o 10 Completely in favour
   - o (Don't know)
4. What is your age?
5. To what extent are you satisfied with your current living environment?
   - o Not satisfied at all
   - o Not satisfied
   - o Neutral
   - o Satisfied
   - o Very satisfied
   - o (Don't know)
   - o (No response)

Mobility questions.

6. Do you or someone in your household own a car?
   - o Yes
   - o No

How often do you use the following modes of transportation?
Options:

- o Never
- o Almost never
- o Monthly
- o Weekly
- o Daily

7. Bicycle (including electric)
8. Car
9. Motorcycle, scooter, moped
10. E-step, hoverboard, etc.
11. Public transport

Value orientations.

12. Which of the following goals should the government prioritize? (Choose 3)
    - o Maintain order (m)
    - o Give people more say in government decisions
    - o Fight rising prices (m)
    - o Protect freedom of speech
    - o Improve people's living environment
    - o Maintain a stable economy (m)
    - o Fight crime (m)
    - o Progress towards a friendlier and less impersonal society

Socio-demographic questions.

13. Do you have dependent children? If so, how many?
    - o Yes (How many?)
    - o No
14. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
    - o (None)
    - o Primary education
    - o Lower secondary education
    - o Secondary/high school education
    - o Higher education outside university
    - o University education
    - o Doctorate
    - o (Don't know)
    - o (No response)
15. What is the highest level of education your parents have completed?
    - o (None)
    - o Primary education
    - o Lower secondary education
    - o Secondary/high school education
    - o Higher education outside university
    - o University education
    - o Doctorate
    - o (Don't know)
    - o (No response)
16. Do you feel you can make ends meet with your monthly income?
    - o Yes
    - o No
    - o (Don't know)
    - o (No response)
17. Are you the owner of your residence (apartment, house)?
    - o Yes
    - o No
    - o (Don't know)
    - o (No response)
18. In which country were you born? (free answer, self-coding)
19. In which country was your father born? (free answer, self-coding)
20. In which country was your mother born? (free answer, self-coding)

Political questions.

21. In politics, the terms "left" and "right" are often used. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10? (0 = radical left, 10 = radical right)
    - o 0 Radical left
    - o 10 Radical right
    - o (Don't know)
    - o (No response)
22. If regional elections were held next Sunday, which party would you vote for?

– French-speaking parties

- o DéFI
- o DierAnimal
- o Ecolo
- o Les Engagés
- o MR
- o PS
- o PTB

– Dutch-speaking parties.

- o Agora
- o CD&V
- o Groen
- o N-VA
- o One.Brussels-Vooruit
- o Open VLD
- o PVDA
- o Vlaams Belang
- o (Don't know)
- o (No response)

Post-survey module (interviewer assessment).

1. Coding respondent's gender
    - o Male
    - o Female
    - o X

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