

# **Definitions of Life Style and its Application to Travel Behavior**

by

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# **Contents**

## **Introduction**

### **1. Definitions of Life Style**

- 1.1 Origins of the Life Style Concept**
- 1.2 Introduction to Marketing**
- 1.3 Contemporary Definitions**

### **2. The Main Elements of Life Style**

- 2.1 Common Properties**
  - 2.1.1 The Unifying Aspect**
  - 2.1.2 The Differentiating Property**
  - 2.1.3 The Behavioral Implication**
  
- 2.2 Conditional Properties of the Life Style Concepts**
  - 2.2.1 Cognition and Emotion**
  - 2.2.2 Social Environment**
  
- 2.3 Summary**

### **3. Applications to the Transportation Area**

### **4. Towards a new Concept of Life Style**

- 4.1 Definition**
- 4.2 Domain Specific Lifestyle**

### **5. Conclusion**

## Introduction

In its pursuit of sustainable development the Danish government has decided to severely reduce the outlet of CO<sub>2</sub> throughout the next three decades (Miljø- og Energiministeriet, 1996). Since in Denmark transportation constitutes one fifth of all energy expended, separate standards for the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> have been set for this area. The goal is to maintain a 1988 level of CO<sub>2</sub> outlet until the year 2005 and furthermore to achieve a 25% reduction before the year 2030. This aim holds for both the transportation of goods and the transportation of people. In the following we are only concerned with the transportation of people.

For this area a very simplistic model can describe the factors influencing the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> produced. The model explains the outlet of CO<sub>2</sub> as a function of the transportation technology applied, the number of users, and the amount of consumption per user. The focus of the study that this paper is based on is on the third determinant of CO<sub>2</sub> production, namely the level of consumption of CO<sub>2</sub>-producing transportation technologies.

The goal of the study is to uncover the Danish consumption of personal transportation, to classify the different types of this consumption and to describe it in a way that goes beyond socio-economic and demographic factors. The knowledge attained will be used to give advice on possible strategies for achieving behavior change in the field of transportation.

The uncovering, classification and description of travel behavior will be based on a life style approach. One of the reasons for this is that life style changes are referred to as the ultimate means of travel behavior change by the Danish government. As a necessary supplement to technological changes, alterations in life style are mentioned as a long run prerequisite for behavioral change (Arbejdsgruppen om energiforbrug, l. o. a., 1995).

“In addition this will require a change in transportation habits, and in the long run a completely different life style might be necessary” (Miljø- og Energiministeriet, December 1995 p.92. Translated)

“There is need for a long-term effort to achieve changes in life style and transportation behavior and in the structural development, that lead(s) to an increasingly higher need for transportation and environmental strain” (Miljø- og Energiministeriet, June 1995 p. 478. Translated)

It is furthermore recognised that the knowledge needed to bring about life style changes is not yet there.

“Choice of means requires knowledge about the motives and other circumstances that determine the behavior of people, e.g.. industrial political framework conditions, education and conditions of life style” (Miljø- og Energiministeriet , June 1995 pp.37/38. Translated).

This emphasis on life style as a key factor in behavioral change in the transportation area brings into focus three issues that need to be addressed in the study.

Since the concept of life style is not defined in the above mentioned agendas first of all required is a clarification of what is meant by life style - especially since the concept is

theoretically ambiguous and generally ill-defined. This clarification of the life style concept will be achieved by means of a literature review. Another key issue is the claimed relationship between life style and travel behavior. The literature on this topic will also be reviewed and later followed by empirical analysis. Finally the notion of behavioral change needs to be addressed. It must be clarified how a change in travel behavior and changes in life style are interrelated and can be brought about.

In this paper the first two issues are addressed. Definitions of life style will be discussed in order to define the concept of life style and in order to explore its claimed relationship with travel behavior.

## 1. Definitions of Life Style

It is not clear when the term *life style* was first mentioned in the literature, but the first definitions of the term go back to the 1920's. When the sociologist Max Weber and - shortly after him - the psychologist Alfred Adler introduced the term, they also gave birth to its ambiguity. Later on the concept was introduced to marketing by William Lazer and hereafter modified several times. Today the concept is still not well-defined.

### 1.1 Origins of the Life Style Concept

According to **Alfred Adler** every individual has his own distinct life style that can be more or less similar to life styles of other individuals, but never quite the same. Life style develops through the endogenous *styled creative power* of the individual during the first years of childhood and is neither due to heredity nor the environment.

"We must refute the causal significance of situation, milieu, or experiences of the child. (...) The same experience has never exactly the same effect on two individuals; and we learn from experience only to the extent that the style of life permits." (Adler 1956, p. 178)

To Adler life style is the wholeness of individuality which is hard to grasp.

"(...) We are not satisfied with the Gestalt alone or, as we prefer to say, with the whole, once all the notes are brought into reference with the melody. We are satisfied only when we have recognized in the melody the author and his attitudes as well, for example, Bach and Bach's style of life." (Adler, 1956, p.175)

Besides being the root of individuality, life style creates the unity of behavior - of 'thoughts, emotions and actions, both conscious and unconscious' - which reflects the 'direction selected by the individual for his striving.' In other words, it is a guiding principle that molds all experience and commands all forms of expression in pursuit of the unique goal of superiority of the individual (Adler, 1956, p.175).

The concept of life style was not as central and important to sociologist **Max Weber** as it was to Alfred Adler. Weber talks about the *mode of life* or the *style of life* as one of three determinants of social strata development.

"The following are the most important sources of the development of distinct strata: (a) The most important is by the development of a peculiar style of life including, particularly, the type of occupation pursued. (b) The second is hereditary charisma arising from the successful claim to a position of prestige by virtue of birth. (c) The third is the appropriation of political or hierocratic authority as a monopoly by socially distinct groups."

(Weber, 1956, p. 429).

According to Weber, life style is closely linked to the type of occupation pursued, it is acquired through formal education, and it can be expected from everybody 'who wishes to belong to the circle' (Weber 1958, p.178). As opposed to the definition of Adler, a certain life style applies to a whole group of people instead of one individual only. It is no guiding principle for the structure of life, but the structure itself. To change it seems to be up to the will power of the individual.

Moreover it is worthwhile noticing that life style groups are not social strata per se, although life style is the most important factor in the development of social strata. Only combined with inherited social standing and monopolistic authority life style demarcates the fuzzy borders of the social stratum, which implies that life style is distinct from these two factors.

All in all, according to Weber, life style is one of the demarcations of social standing. It is achieved by living your life in a certain way that is not inherited but learned and similar to other people.

## **1.2 Introduction to Marketing**

In 1964 the sociologist **William Lazer** (1964) introduced the life style concept to marketing and consumer research. According to Lazer life style is a distinctive or characteristic mode of living that is applied by a group of people. It is a systems concept in so far as life style is shaped by the forces of living in a group with its specific culture, values, resources, symbols, license, and sanctions. In other words life style is the outcome of individuals joining a certain life style segment, an aggregate behavioral pattern of a group that is - among others - reflected in aggregate consumer purchases and manners of consumption. For the understanding and analysis of life styles many different disciplines must be applied, namely marketing, sociology, anthropology, psychology, demography, and social psychology.

A lot of different definitions of life style have since entered the field of marketing, mostly as a post-assigned label for an inductively selected bundle of behaviors and cognitions. The focus on consumption, though, is a common topic of life style approaches in marketing.

## **1.3 Contemporary Definitions**

According to contemporary dictionaries life style is:

- “The particular way of life of a person or a group” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990)
- "An individual's way of life" (The Longman New Universal Dictionary, 1985)
- "a. A term originally used by Alfred Adler (1870-1937) to denote a person's basic character as established early in childhood which governs his reactions and behavior". **b. gen.** "A way or style of living". (The Oxford English Dictionary, 1989)
- “The habits, attitudes, tastes, moral standards, economic level, etc., that together constitute the mode of living of an individual or group (1925-30)”. (The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 1987)

Obviously, in the time passed, no consensus about the meaning of life style has been reached. The definitions are all vague and focus on different aspects of the distinctive modes of living of human beings.

## 2. The Main Elements of Life Style

In the absence of a generic definition of life style we will now summarize the main elements of life style that emerge from the study of life style literature. Based on this a new definition of life style is proposed and related to travel behavior.

### 2.1 Common Properties

The three common properties of life style are those that characterize every attempt at describing life style. These attempts can be either theoretical or empirical or both and will be called *life style approaches* in the following. Even though the common properties are shared by all life style approaches each life style approach can apply the common properties in different ways.

#### 2.1.1 The Unifying Aspect

Every life style approach tries to capture some *consistency* and *unity* between *different* aspects of the object(s) that the life style is being applied to. As Ansbacher puts it: "The word 'style' includes the characteristic of cutting across ordinary boundaries and uniting what might otherwise be quite separate entities" (Ansbacher, 1967). For instance, to Alfred Adler the unity caused by life style is to be found within the individual. The different aspects unified are the different behaviors of the individual since life style is *the* unifying principle upon which all the behavior of the individual depends and with which it is consistent. In contrast, to Weber and Lazer the unity caused by life style is to be found within a group of people sharing the same life style. The different aspects unified are the different people that unite in one life style segment.

The unifying aspect is found within a certain life style.

### **2.1.2 The Differentiating Property**

The differentiating property allows and requires that one life style can be distinguished from the other. In other words, there are multiple life styles which are comparable but not identical. According to Adler this property characterizes every single individual since every individual has a distinct life style. In contrast, Weber and Lazer apply the differentiating property to differences between groups of people.

The differentiating aspect is found between different life styles.

### **2.1.3 The Behavioral Implication**

Life style is closely related to patterns of behavior. Ansbacher argues that this might be the case because the term is so easily convertible to the term *style of living* which could imply that the response to stimuli and the usage of objects - and therefore behavior - will be in accordance with the life style. Linking this behavioral aspect to the above mentioned unifying aspect would imply that the response styles of people should be fairly similar within a certain life style. Equalizing life style and *style of living* could also imply that a pattern of behavior is life style instead of being the result of it.

The imperative question is then just how close the relationship between life style and behavior really is. Is life style behavior or is it merely reflected in behavior?

According to **Adler** life style is not the same as behavior. Life style guides behavior which consists of thoughts, emotions and actions. Still, observing behavior seems to be the only way of drawing a picture of the life style of the individual, since the life style is hard to detect in any other way. Recall that life style consists of the guiding principle that directs all the actions of the individual in pursuit of the life goal of the individual. The individual is mostly unaware of this guiding principle and the goal pursued, which makes the principle and goal hard to detect and describe. So, since life style cannot be studied directly, it can only be detected by inference. In this process it is crucial to remember that according to Adler, behavior consists not only of overt behavior, such as actions, but also of feelings and thoughts by which means the individual attaches subjective meaning to his actions.

"In considering the structure of a personality, the chief difficulty is that its unity, its particular style of life and goal, is not built upon objective reality, but upon the subjective view the individual takes of the facts of life." (Adler, 1956, p.183)

Therefore in order to disclose life style it is necessary to try to understand the behavior of the individual from the subjective viewpoint of the individual.

The behavioral implication of **Weber's** fairly vague definition of life style is obvious but it is hard to say whether Weber would go as far as to say that life style is behavior. Probably he would include other elements than actions in his definition of life style, because to him not

only what you do but also what you are is important. This holds true, of course, only for acquired informal positions like being a mother, since inherited positions or expressions of monopolistic authority are distinct from the life style concept. As far as behavior is concerned, though, Weber definitely sees the behavioral pattern within certain groups as a part of life style. Therefore it is worth noticing that Weber divides behavior into action and reactive behavior. Action is behavior to which the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning, whereas reactive behavior is devoid of meaning as it is not related to an intended purpose. Therefore, similar to the behavioral implication of the life style concept of Adler, Weber suggests that understanding the behavior of the individual from the subjective viewpoint of the individual is needed in order to disclose life style.

The behavioral implication of the life style concept of **Lazer** is straightforward. According to him behavior within a certain life style group will be distinct from that of other life style segments on an aggregate level. In other words belonging to a certain life style group also means having a certain pattern of behavior which in important respects resembles that of the other members of the life style group.

All in all, Adler says that life style produces consistent behavior within the individual. Weber says that behavior determines what life style group you can acquire membership of. Finally, Lazer says that belonging to a certain life style group influences behavior.

## **2.2 Conditional Properties of the Life Style Concepts**

The conditional properties of life style are some central issues of which most life style approaches incorporate at least one. They are based on the theoretical roots of life style in the field of psychology and sociology and are addressed in the attempts of Cathelat (1990) and Askegaard (1993) at classifying life style approaches.

### **2.2.1 Cognition and Emotion**

When defining life style one question to be asked is whether man is seen as a thinking and feeling creature. This question is central when classifying life style approaches. Cognition and emotion are mostly part of approaches based mainly on psychology, and are sometimes integrated in approaches based on sociology, but are never integrated in behavioristic approaches to life style.

According to Adler cognition and emotion are part of life style and guided by the individuals goal in life. Weber talks about attaching meaning to behavior, which could be interpreted as the cognitions and emotions attached to the actions common for the group. Compared to Adler, though, these cognitions and emotions are less individualistic and guided by social interaction. Lazer's concept of life style does not put emphasis on cognition and emotion.

### **2.2.2 Social Environment**

A second question to be asked about life style approaches is whether the social environment of man is important in determining life style. This question is also central when classifying life



style approaches. Social interaction is mostly part of approaches based mainly on sociology, and is sometimes integrated in approaches based on psychology.

Adler, for instance, recognizes the influence of the social environment but according to him it does not shape life style - it is molded by life style. To Weber and Lazer on the other hand the social environment is the most central factor in life style, since life style is a product of social interaction and a shaper of social order.

### **2.3 Summary**

Based on the preceding findings I suggest a framework for describing existing and future life style concepts. According to this framework every conceptualization of life style can be described and distinguished from other conceptualizations by considering its view of the nature of man. In other words, in what way does a given life style approach encompass the three common main elements of all life style concepts, namely the unifying quality, the differentiating quality and behavior. What does life style unite and what does it make distinct? In what way is behavior related to the life style concept?

Moreover, does the given concept integrate the two other main elements of life style and if so, in what way? Is man seen as a thinking and feeling creature? Is the social environment important?

It is important to notice, however, that even though certain definitions and conceptualizations of life style can be fairly similar, huge differences can exist in the operationalization and methodology applied when transferring the concept to the empirical level. Vice versa, life style approaches can be very different from each other at the theoretical and conceptual level but then show no differences at the operational and methodological level. In particular applied research often neglects to define life style properly or ceases to follow up the definition by a valid and reliable measure of the concept in question. This is one of the major obstacles of classifying and describing life style approaches and forces any classification to focus on either the conceptual or operational level of life style studies.

### **3. Applications to the Transportation Area**

Only very few attempts have been made to link life style to the transportation area. Of these studies only a few are based on theoretical considerations of life style and even these few leave some doubt about the validity of their operationalization. In most studies focus is on indicators and operationalizations of life style instead of explicitly defining the concept. One of the most striking facts about the operationalizations in this field is that life style is most often reduced to little more than a bundle of demographic and socio-economic factors (e.g., Sharp, 1987, Kitamura, 1988). Additionally, some studies include measures of a few behavioral patterns (e.g., Allman et al., 1982). This is not caused by unawareness of the problem. In 1988, Kitamura referred to the lack of perceptual or attitudinal data in the description of life style segments since only few travel related life style studies go beyond demographic, behavioral, and socio-economic factors (e.g., Reichman, 1977, Havens, 1981, or, recently, Berge et al., 1994).

The problem of the transition between the conceptual and operational levels reflects the need for further basic research into life style and travel related life styles. It is a symptom of the lack of definitions that are broad enough to reflect life style but also rigid enough to guide conceptualizations that can be transferred to the operational level in a valid way. Wells and Tigert (1971) describe the process of operationalizing life style as "intuition, hunches, conversations with friends, other research, reading, head scratching, day dreaming, and group or individual narrative interviews". It does not seem as if we have come much further than that in the area of travel behavior.

## **4. Towards a new Concept of Life Style**

In the following a new definition of life style and its link to travel behavior is presented. The major improvement compared to other approaches is that it is both broad and rigid. Moreover it is theoretically founded and based on prior research in the field. It tries to overcome some of the problems discussed in this paper by offering a conceptualization which can be founded both theoretically and empirically and that can offer good guidance for quantitative empirical studies of travel related life style.

### **4.1 Definition**

The following is based on the assumption that all human beings actually have a life style, in other words that life style is not just some objective descriptor applied in order to typify people. According to this assumption life style is meaningful to the individual; it has a purpose. It is seen as the individual's means of shaping parts of his/her personal and social identity. This does not mean, though, that the directedness of life style is always known to the individual.

This new conceptualization of life style picks up on all of the main elements of early life style concepts; namely, cognition, emotion, action, social environment, differentiation, and unification. At the same time it tries to make up for the broadness by narrowing down life style defining it as constituted by only some specific thoughts, feelings, and actions, more precisely those that constitute the personal and social identity of human beings. Life style is the pattern of these thoughts, feelings, and actions.

All in all life style can be defined as ***the individual's pattern of those cognitions, emotions, and actions that contribute to the personal and social identity of the individual.***

According to this definition no single action can constitute life style, but it can be part of a life style. No collection of mere actions can be a life style either, since the above-mentioned understanding of life style is based on the assumption that the individual attaches subjective meaning to his actions. Therefore the attached cognitions and emotions are indispensable when judging whether a certain action is part of the life style of the individual or not. Furthermore, cognitions and emotions can be part of a life style even when there is no link to behavior. Another important implication of this definition is that life style cannot be the sum of all cognitions, emotions and actions. Certain actions are not necessarily part of life style; they are dispensable since they do not force an individual to adjust his perception of his personal and social identity. The same actions could, nevertheless, be part of the life style of

somebody else since for this person, refraining from them would require a change in self-perception and social identity.

As far as unification and differentiation are concerned this life style concept is individualistic in so far as every individual can have a distinct life style. But since life style is a stylization of life and therefore only a fragment of the manifold facets of life, identical life styles can probably be found. At the very least similar life styles will exist.

One of the implications of this definition is that life style is a rather stable construct. Since identity is a slowly changing phenomenon, the thoughts, emotions, and actions important to the self-perception of the individual will be relatively stable, too.

#### **4.2 Domain Specific Lifestyle**

With this definition at hand the argument for the existence of domain specific life style elements is fairly straight forward. The individual engages in a lot of different areas in life that contribute to the formation and maintenance of identity. These areas are connected with certain thoughts, feelings and actions that can be crucial for some individuals' identity. An individual can, for instance, have thoughts, emotions and actions in the area of transportation that are indispensable in terms of the self perception of the individual. For example someone perceiving himself as a successful business man who feels that going to work by car supports that identity whereas going by bus would contradict that identity. So travel related life style factors probably exist, since the area of transportation probably can support identity formation and maintenance.

According to this travel related life style can be defined as ***the individual's pattern of those cognitions, emotions and actions connected with personal transportation that contribute to the personal and social identity of the individual.***

The assumption is that the travel related life style factors support an over-all identity which probably covers some sub-identities according to the different roles that the individual engages in. Travel related life style factors might be more connected to some specific role identities than others; for instance, the work role identity might be more strongly dependant on life style factors from the area of transportation than the role identity of being a parent.

On the other hand it does not seem useful to talk about a role as a traveller - a travel identity. Therefore, the travel related life style factors probably do not add up to a travel related life style of its own. In other words, transportation can support building identities but it probably cannot shape an identity of its own.

### **5. Conclusion**

In order to be able to apply life style concepts to the area of transportation and travel demand more research on life style needs to be conducted. Life style research suffers from a lack of definititional consensus and a lack of explicit and detailed definitions. Most definitions of life

style are so broad and vague that they cannot provide any guidance for operationalizing life style. Therefore, a lot of applications of the life style concept to the area of transportation do not manage to operationalize life style in a valid way and go beyond describing demographic and socio-economic factors and patterns of behavior.

A new definition of life style is needed. The definition should distinguish life style from being a mere bundle of demographic, socio-economic factors and behavioral patterns. It should be broad and encompass the main elements of life style, namely the unifying quality, the differentiating quality, behavior, cognition and emotion, and social environment. At the same time, though, it is absolutely crucial that the definition is rigid and states the boundaries of life style in terms of the nature of those factors that constitute life style. These factors and their boundaries must be theoretically founded and empirically investigated in order to construct a concept of life style that can offer good guidance for traditional quantitative empirical studies of travel related life style or life style in general.

In the preceding an outline of a new concept of life style that fulfils these requirements is presented. The concept needs further theoretical foundation and must be followed up by some empirical investigation of the relevance of certain transportation issues in the construction of identity, in other words those transportation issues that may contribute to life style. This empirical investigation might require a new methodological approach instead of applying the purely quantitatively oriented methodology of traditional life style studies in search of relevant life style indicators. Only after the identification of the relevant life style factors in the field of transportation the traditional quantitative approaches to life style will be fruitful to life style research in travel demand.

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