



Navigating Change

The PhD Journey and Life After

Conor O'Driscoll

Who Am I?

Me Before Academics

- An 18 year old who loved sports, playing playstation, and going for pints.
- A casual interest in (post-) WW2 history, and wanted to study history/PE Teaching in University.
- Enrolled in a BA (Arts) because I did not get enough points for PE.



Me During Academics

- Studied Economics for the first time in University (2017) as part of my Bachelor of Arts in UCC,

alongside:

- Geography
- History
- Philosophy

Subject: EC2116 - Introduction to Statistical Economic Analysis

Credits for Subject:

5

Final Mark:

50

Out Of Mark:

100

Result:

PASS

- My end-goal was to become a teacher.
- I was always weak analytically, but possessed a tremendous sense of self-belief.

Why Does This Matter?

- On the one hand, my track record really did not suggest that I would become good at economics, geography, or economic geography.
 - **BUT** it did show that any *thing* I did choose to pursue, I learned to perform at high levels.
- In this way, mindset and mental health have always been extremely important to me.
 - Get on with it.
 - You can do it.
 - Don't sweat the things you cannot control.
 - Trust the process.
 - You cannot finish a marathon without taking 52,400 (ish) steps.

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My PhD: The Ups, Downs, and Everything In Between

Did I Have An End Goal?

- Not really.
 - I had a vague idea that I would like research from my BA but had no specific “plan”.
 - I didn’t have anything better to do (COVID-19 etc).
- Did I ever doubt my ability? In general, no. *I knew I could do it eventually...*
 - Imposter Syndrome was a regular feature in everyday events, but never really crept into the “long term”.
- As I began to work through the PhD (i.e., maybe around 7 months in), I began to be attracted to this idea of “how good could I be at this?”.

My PhD In Short – As I Experienced It

- My PhD was incredibly rewarding and enjoyable, but it was also really intense and difficult at times.
 - Loving what you do ~75% of the time is as good as it can get.
 - If there is no inherent challenge, things get boring quite quickly.
- 6 research papers and 1 industry report.
- 7 pieces of research dissemination.
- Chief Editor of *The Boolean* (2021-2023).
- Wide-ranging teaching experience (4 different roles).
- Some odd jobs (i.e., RA work) here and there.



Rising To The Challenge...

REGIONAL STUDIES
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2023.2199779>

 Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

 RSA Regional Studies
Association

 OPEN ACCESS  Check for updates

How the relationship between socio-demographics, residential environments and travel influence commuter choices

Conor O'Driscoll^a , Frank Crowley^a , Justin Doran^a  and Nóirín McCarthy^a 

ABSTRACT

Individual socio-demographic characteristics influence the composition of residential environments, employment considerations and transport-dedicated resources, all of which influence individual travel behaviours. To analyse these interrelationships, we employ generalised structural equation modelling using individual-level data from the 2016 Irish Census on workers across the Republic of Ireland alongside highly spatially disaggregated residential built and social environment data. This allows us to consider the non-linear relationships between multiple variables known to influence travel behaviours and provide direction for future policymaking. We find that regardless of socio-demographic compositions, increased developmental compactness and infrastructure quality are associated with increased public and active travel.

KEYWORDS

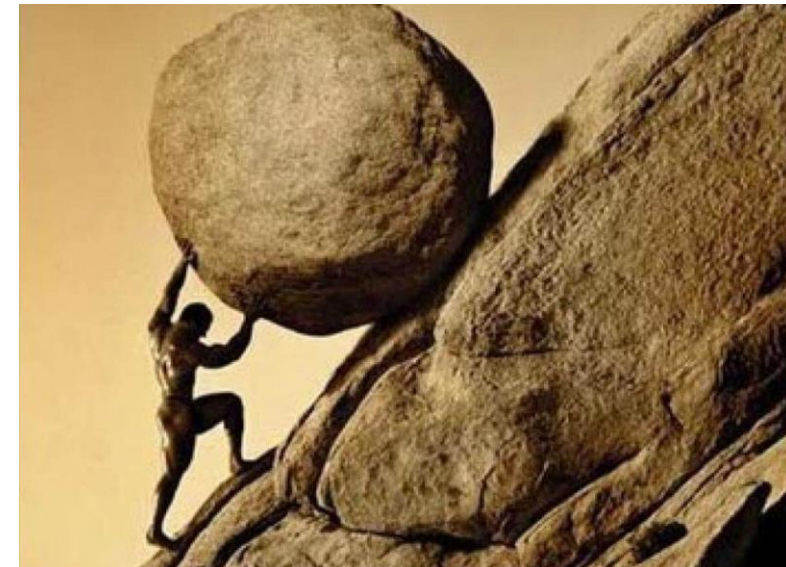
commuting; land use; transport infrastructure; deprivation; travel behaviours; generalised structural equation modelling

...Burning The Candle At Both Ends

<div> <div>Today</div> <div>< > November 2022</div> <div> <div>🔍</div> <div>?</div> <div>⚙️</div> <div>Week ▾</div> <div>📅</div> <div>✓</div> </div> </div>						
	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
	13	14	15	16	17	18
GMT+01						
9 AM			EC1117 Tutorial #1, Pha 9 – 10am		EC1121 Tutorial #2 WWA 9 – 10am	
10 AM		Monthly Progress Meeti	EC1500 Tutorial #1 Luca 10 – 11am		Boolean Final Copyediti 10am, Student Hub 3rd f	EC1209 Tutorial #4 AL L 10 – 11am
11 AM		EC1111 Tutorial #1 AL L 11am – 12pm			EC1213 Tutorial #3, Con 11am – 12pm	EC1209 Tutorial #5 AL L 11am – 12pm
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3 PM			EC1209 Tutorial #2 AL L 3 – 4pm		EC1500 Tutorial #3 Kane 3 – 4pm	
4 PM		EC1213 Tutorial #1, WGI 4 – 5pm			EC1111 Tutorial #2 AL L 4 – 5pm	EC1111 Tutorial #3 AL L 4 – 5pm
5 PM			EC1209 Tutorial #3 AL L 5 – 6pm			
6 PM			1:1 Conor EC1121 Group 6 – 7pm			
7 PM						

Raise The Bar or Just Get By? It Depends...

- These anecdotes produce results of a very different flavour.
 - On one hand, I published in a 4* journal – *I can publish in “good” journals.*
 - On the other hand, I worked like a dog and came out better at the end – *I can get through any challenge.*
- But not everyone wants a challenge, and not everyone wants to “push themselves”.
 - A PhD is just a (poorly paid) job, at the end of the day.
 - You get out of a PhD exactly what you put in.
 - Prioritise you, your preferences, and your strengths.



A Brief Reflection

What Am I Thankful For?

- I was lucky to have such a wonderful supervision team.
 - A great relationship throughout.
 - A very quick forming of “routine” and work models.
 - I never felt inhibited – our model really allowed me to thrive.
- The CUBS PhD group completely changed my experience.
 - Without them the experience would have been considerably worse.
- I am thankful that I “backed myself” and that I continue to do so.
 - You *need* to do the same.



Recommendations

- Be honest about your priorities – why are you doing a PhD?
- Beware of admin and side-projects.
 - Don't be afraid to say no!
- Long-term planning *should* be vague. Focus on the short-term.
 - Don't worry about the “thesis” – worry about the papers.
- Go to more conferences, summer schools, and just get out there more.
 - Socialise with your peers!!

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The ViVa

An “Unknown Quantity”

- All you can do is read, read, read.
 - Know your work backwards and do not panic.
- My extern gave me a relatively hard time in the room, but the outcome was perfectly reasonable.
 - A surreal experience in the moment, but I have a positive relationship with her today.
- Papers are not as important in the ViVa as they are for jobs...
 - The thesis is a different entity.
 - Papers have word limits, thesis chapters do not...

Supervisors

I was incredibly lucky

- A positive relationship is really important to ensure a smooth journey.
 - Positive does not have to translate to “BFF’s”, it just means that you “understand each other”.
 - Get into a rhythm.
- Transparency ensures that everyone is on the same page, and gives you more “independent licence”.
 - Communicate and set [clear expectations](#).
 - Be honest, and don’t obsess over impressing.
- Listen and absorb their advice. They have “been in your shoes”.
 - Trust them when they say it will work out.



Topic/course of study			
1.	It is a supervisor's responsibility to select a promising topic.	1 2 3 4 5	It is a student's responsibility to select a promising topic.
2.	In the end, it is up to the supervisor to decide the interpretation.	1 2 3 4 5	A student has a right to interpret results in a way that disagrees with their supervisor.
3.	A supervisor should direct a student in the development of an appropriate program of research and study.	1 2 3 4 5	A student should be able to work out a schedule and research program appropriate to his/her needs.
4.	A supervisor should ensure that a student has access to all necessary facilities.	1 2 3 4 5	Ultimately, the student must find the necessary facilities to complete his/her research.
5.	The supervisor should teach all required skills.	1 2 3 4 5	The student should seek new skills independently.
Contact/Involvement			
6.	Supervisor-student relationships should be purely professional.	1 2 3 4 5	Being able to talk informally with your supervisor is essential for successful supervision.
7.	A supervisor should initiate frequent meetings with a student.	1 2 3 4 5	A student should initiate meetings.

The Publication Process: Some (Brief) Thoughts

Research Papers as Currency

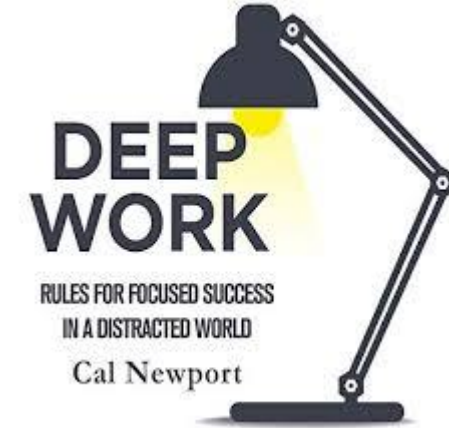
- Writing is probably my favourite part of the research process, which is fortunate.
 - But I only produce *good* writing when I have solid “blocks” of time.
 - As PhDs, you have many “blocks” but are still developing your skills.
- When writing, **Nail** that introduction and don’t overthink “contributions”.
 - Contributions are more about “the bigger picture” than they are about “X (2020) calls for this work”.
 - What needs to be present in each section? Clarity or prose? Economists like clarity...
- Focus on paragraphs and sections, not sentences.

[EXPAND HERE - ADVANTAGES BEING ERODED].

[...]

[CITE]

Efficiency, Efficiency, Efficiency



- Make space for the most difficult or time-consuming tasks in your schedule.
 - Manipulate your calendar, lock yourself away, do whatever you need to do to get some peace.
- Establish what you are good at in this process, and exploit this.
 - Are you a starter or a finisher?
 - Schedule more time for the tasks which require “deep focus”.
- Get it done.





Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Transport Geography

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jtrangeo

Assessing modal tradeoffs and associated built environment characteristics using a cost-distance framework

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Public transport
Cycling
Walkability
Urban form
Travel time

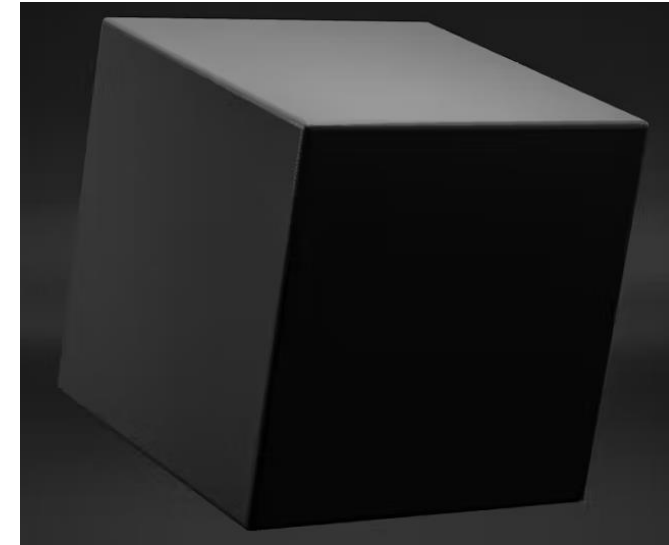
ABSTRACT

The relationship between the built environment and transportation mode choice is well-studied, but less attention has been spent on the way that urban environments influence the relative travel costs for different modes. This paper uses a 'cost-distance' framework to assess the tradeoffs between transportation modes for commuters in the Dublin metropolitan area and employs random forest models to investigate non-linearities in the relationships between relative mobility by mode and built environment characteristics. The results suggest that more 'walkable' built environments increase the efficiency of active transport modes; however, we also find that these environments are negatively related to cost efficiency for public transport, likely due to congestion effects for buses. Beyond these theoretical insights, the results also provide a spatially targeted set of priorities for policymakers looking to improve the efficiency of sustainable transportation modes. These methods could be applied to any global region with access to the requisite data.

Research Dissemination

Just Do It

- Failing to engage in research dissemination is shooting yourself in the foot.
- The world is changing, public engagement *matters*.
 - You need to explicitly incorporate it into the “lifecycle” of a project.
- Research Dissemination is probably the best way to develop your “story telling” skills.
- Job committees are easily impressed, especially if you are smart with framing.
 - *RTE Brainstorm* is the **national broadcaster**, not just *any* blog.



The Job Market

Timing is *Everything*

- By January 2023: ~20 applications, no call-backs. By May 2023: 5 applications, 4 interviews, 3 offers.
 - Listen to Frank when he says it'll be grand.
- Jobs become available somewhat regularly, but there are two highly concentrated periods around Christmas and the early-to-mid summer where “the floodgates” open.
- Wait until your CV is sufficiently “beefy”.
 - I only started getting calls when I had an official Viva date.
 - Be strategic with where you apply – distribute your effort accordingly.

You Need To Want It

- Preferences should be at the forefront when considering jobs, but “Fit” is really important too.
 - You can always adapt to a role if the content is interesting, but “fit” is harder to sell.
- If you are lucky, the effort you put into applying might get you “in the door”. Once in, you have a real opportunity to “blow everyone away”.
 - Study the interview panels’ relevant publications.
 - Translate their work to yours – where is the complementarity? What do you bring to the table?
 - Get an overview of the wider department/faculty – How and where do you fit?
 - Be specific – Who? What? When? How? They need to see you fitting in.
 - Have a compelling Research Agenda

The Importance of Persistence and Making Your Own Luck

- When navigating the job market, the most you can do is make yourself (appear) to be the best possible candidate for the job.
- By maximising your own chances, you are also providing yourself with the opportunity to “be lucky”.
- Luck and storytelling had an important role to play in me getting my own job...
 - Told a good story
 - Was a good fit “on paper”.
 - But so was John....

Where Am I Now?

Still Bluffing, Still Learning, Still Enjoying Myself

- I worked really hard to get where I am today, but I was also helped at key moments by a bit of luck.
 - 25 year-old Tenured Assistant Professor in Economic Geography.
 - I teach one and coordinate another Statistics BSc course, teach MSc Economic Geography, teach a BSc methods course, and supervise BSc and MSc thesis students.
- I am busier now than I was for a majority of my PhD.
 - Learn to act independently!
 - Learn to be strategic and economise on effort.
 - Commit to giving yourself space to do “deep work”
 - Keep coming back...

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Beschikbare uren voor onderwijs		Available hours for education	
Resterend: 207		Remaining: 10	
Totaal: 771		Total: 992	
Conor O'Driscoll	↕↕ Gem. uren ↕↕	Conor O'Driscoll	↕↕ Avg. hours ↕↕
1a	32	1a	148
1b	226	1b	273
2a	131	2a	329
2b	149	2b	194
Zomer	26	Summer	40

Career (and Life) Considerations

What Do You Want To Be?

- Everyone has different aims, goals, and ambitions. Figuring out how and where you “fit” is important.
 - Rich and Famous?
 - Academic? Private Sector? Bakery Owner?
- You are not an academic in a vacuum. You have a life, friends, family, and hobbies.
 - Take weekends off, go for those pints...
- Some things in this journey you can control, but other things you cannot.
 - Some of the best papers ever written in Economics have been rejected from multiple journals...



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