ROAD SAFETY - THE ROLE OF RISKS PERCEPTION: CURRENT KNOWLEDGE AND IMPACTS ON COMMUNICATION AND POLICY

Special Session

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Outlook of the presentation

- Risk Perception in the Road Safety Policy (Iorio)

- Risk Perception and road related risks in PIARC TC C3 studies (Arditi)
“Man was born in labour, and birth itself means a risk of death”

So, if risk is embedded in our existence, the role that risk perception, the risk acceptance play by moulding the individual reaction is a crucial contextual element for policy makers. Social and cultural background are key factors as well as demography, education, welfare income and likelihood of enforcement, as well as the familiarity with the risk.
Feeling the law binding

• The difficulty of targeting road safety measures and road safety awareness campaign is linked to the different reactions of class of road users

• Young Rules are often seen just an unnecessary constraint to the incredible freedom that instead youth should have by default.

• Experienced drivers Rules are a binding frame, create a further burden, seen as pointless because the experience curb the hazard and the unexpected event.
Using behavioral studies for targeting policies and campaign

- Casualties due to drink driving or to misuse of powered two wheels are related to the increasing number of young motorists. Youngsters are very vulnerable in any case because they are the percentage of population with higher risk acceptance.

- Yet it is the group most difficult to target with customized awareness campaign or education.
Efficacy through “playing the users”

b. Understanding the phenomena and appropriate perception of user’s risks in order to underpin the proper overall function and bring a coherent approach. The misperception or underestimation of risks could be considered a key factor impacting a good approach to driving.
The perception of risk has two major consequences identified as fields of interest for the operation of roads:

- The field of major events
- The field of Human behavior
Risks are frequent in every field and situation, including the management of road infrastructures

BUT

not all risks affect and interest people: the attention focuses selectively on specific hazards, while other risks are fully neglected.

Sometimes the neglected risks rose suddenly in the limelight as a function of specific events and/or media campaigns.
WHAT IS THE ACCEPTABILITY OF A RISK?

The anthropologist Mary Douglas speaks about "social" acceptability.

They are socially standardized conventions determining what risks are acceptable.

It is the culture that leads to define the risks considered acceptable and risks to be feared and therefore refused.

The specialists of the risk perception attempted to systematically identify what makes a risk more acceptable than others and also addressed the issue of different thresholds of tolerance.
Disproportionate perception of specific events

Covello researching in psychological sciences has identified “47 known factors that influence the perception of risk”

- Catastrophic Potential
- Understanding
- Familiarity
- Media Attention
- Dread
- Impact on Children
- Scientific Uncertainty
- Controllability
FAMILIARITY

People is more concerned about unfamiliar risks: people is not familiar to fires in tunnels while almost every week, driving in a major town, we can experience to see a car accident or a hurt motorcyclist laying on the ground.
People are more concerned about risks that are imposed rather than voluntarily accepted; we can consider that over-speeding related accidents are extent the consequence of a voluntary exposition, while it is not the case of being hurted by dangerous hot smoke travelling in a tunnel in the event of a fire.
SCIENTIFIC UNCERTAINTY

People are more concerned about poorly understood activities (exposure to radiation) than those that may be understood (slipping on ice)
CONTROLLABILITY

People are more concerned about risks not under personal control. When a major fire ignites in a tunnel, the physics of the phenomena could be out of human control.
MEDIA ATTENTION

The attention of media is a key element for the modulation and amplification of the risk perception on the public opinion; even a minor event related to fire trigger the attention of media worldwide and quickly go front-page. A pre-war vintage example: in March 1929 a New York rail fire in tunnel (9 fatalities) went front-page in the “Il Mattino illustrato”, newspaper of Naples (Italy).
Snapshots of news from the web of BBC and VOA are reported. These two articles present a multiple crash in Italy (2003) subsequent to a sudden, thick fog. A fog accident in Italy reaches both the British and US media. Links do not bring to statistics but to other "media impacting" events, i.e., fire in tunnels.
The event of 2003 was extremely severe resulting in several fatalities. However, “extremely severe consequences to human life” are not the only triggers for media attention. For instance, a pile-up collision resulting in a single fatality in Austria garnered broad media attention (e.g. on Spiegel). A similar interest from media wouldn’t have occurred for a single fatality related to “ordinary” road accidents.
CONCLUSIONS

Culture leads the perception of risks and influences the social definition of risks considered “acceptable” and those “feared” and consequently refused. Culture become the

**DRIVER FOR**

- Human Behavior
- Social Acceptance
a. **The field of major events:** Road Authorities and Operators need to make choices and investments discriminating among hazards with a reasonably high probability and other risks. The perception of risk and the social amplification of major events can have an impact on the assessment process, bringing the overall action to unpredictable results in terms of assessment, provisions or remedial plans.
b. The field of human behavior: Understanding the phenomena and appropriate perception of user’s risks in order to underpin the proper overall function and bring a coherent approach. The misperception or underestimation of risks could be considered a key factor impacting a good approach to driving.
Thanks for your attention

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