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## Social trends – Youth and cars, a passion on the wane

Posted on 29/09/2011 - by [Andrea Bertolini](#)



**Getting a driver's license? No thanks, I have other priorities...** This, in recent years, has become the attitude of many young people, as they have ignored, or at least deferred, what for previous generations had been a canonical right-of-passage: obtaining a driver's license. A first indication that *mores* are indeed changing came last year from the US—ironically the country which was the cradle of the automobile as a mass phenomenon and where driving a car has been for decades the top dream of all teenagers.

No more: according to a study by Lester Brown, published by the *Earth Policy Institute* in January 2010, among several reasons for car sales to remain below the high figures which prevailed in the US during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is “a declining interest in cars among young people.” “This helps explain why, despite the largest US teenage population ever, the number of teenagers with licenses, which peaked at 12 million in 1978, is now under 10 million. If this trend continues, the number of potential young car-buyers will continue to decline.”

With enormous, and decidedly negative, consequences for the car industry and the entire, huge economic and financial sector which rotates around it. “**Young people are the auto industry's latest headache,**” writes Allison Linn in *MicroSoftNews* (November 2010).

**This trend, well supported by statistics, is by no means confined to the US.** A recent study of Canada's *Victoria Transport Policy Institute* (August 2011) found that “automobile travel appears to be declining in importance among young people in most developed countries, apparently due a combination of high costs, increased urbanization, improved travel options and changing preferences.”

**Further confirmation now comes from research conducted by Alex Rayner of the *Guardian*** (25 Sep. 2011). “In Britain, the percentage of 17- to 20-year-olds with driving licences fell from 48% in the early 1990s to 35% last year.” While some experts believe this is due mainly to the sorry state of the economy and the seemingly endless increases in the cost of gas, for others the explanation is that “the golden age of motoring is over”.

**In developed nations, at least, younger generations (what German**

**engineer and futurologist Stefan Liske calls “digital natives”) are spearheading radical life-choice trends.** Since most of us no longer live in isolated country hamlets but in urban environments, many young people’s decision to refuse or at least delay owning a car makes sense: in a city, public transportation, walking and biking all represent viable and attractive alternatives to owning a car, what with all the problems associated with it (expensive and limited parking, costly insurance, slow-moving traffic, stress, etc.) and rising concerns over pollution, healthy living and generally “greener” lifestyles.

When it comes to deciding how to spend one’s resources, most young people seem to have no doubt: the latest iPhone or iPad is preferable to the bulky automobile. Gone (forever?) are the days when a young person’s highest ambition was to drive up and down Main Street in a souped-up car, to see and be seen. That socializing experience has been replaced by the constant virtual proximity to friends offered by Facebook and the like. A step in the right direction? Who knows... **But it is clear that to more and more young people today, such cultural icons of the post-war generations as fast cars and shiny fenders must increasingly appear as prehistoric yearnings.**

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