

Je suis un Shoupista

Renowned US academic **Donald Shoup** is retiring after over 40 years of rethinking how parking works. **Andrew Potter** pays tribute to parking's rock star

Donald Shoup, one of the greatest influencers in modern parking thought, retired last month. He steps out of the limelight knowing that he has changed the course of policy and, thinking on how we approach parking and in particular, how we use economic principles to manage it. Distinguished Professor of Urban Planning, Donald Shoup, described as a "parking rock star"^[1], has been teaching at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) for over 41 years. However, it is for his expertise and prophetic approach to car parking policies for which he has become internationally known. His micro-economic approach is sufficiently defined as a philosophy that it has gathered its own set of disciples calling themselves 'Shoupistas'.

Over his career, Shoup has promoted a large number of policies and philosophies that have challenged conventional thinking and he has been effective at changing the way legislators think and eventually define laws. He is perhaps best known in the UK for advocating and promoting 'performance pricing'. This idea was to address the considerable lost time spent by those circling the block in US cities hunting for an empty on-street parking bay.

Shoup argued that if cities set the lowest parking prices possible to ensure that there was always at least one space available on every block, or a target occupancy rate of 85%, that was the optimum between ensuring a parking space is readily available, and ensuring that the parking facility or street accommodates as many customers as possible for the local areas it serves (such as retailers). This would reduce fuss, wasted time searching, being late for appointments and all the adverse traffic, distraction, congestion and pollution impacts of drivers cruising round looking for parking.

Godfather, rock star, guru

Performance pricing was initially set out in a paper in 1997 and developed later into the 2005 parking blockbuster *The High Cost of Free Parking*. Major US cities, including New York, Seattle and Los Angeles, are now using historical data on parking occupancies at a local or street level to set the parking tariff to maintain occupancy within thresholds around 85%. Auckland in New Zealand has included performance pricing as a principal cornerstone of its Draft Parking Discussion Document^[2].

The most notable adopter of performance

Donald Shoup has influenced parking and transport thinking around the globe



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**Ringfence the money.
Spend it flamboyantly,
locally**

Donald Shoup

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pricing has been San Francisco, which has pioneered large-scale transition from philosophy to practice through the SFpark trial, which started in April 2011 (see page 22). Over 7,000 metered on-street parking bays in seven separate zones had sensors installed in the carriageway to report on their occupancy.

The city uses the collected data to establish whether or not the parking block was above or below the target occupancy for set periods of the day. Where occupancy was seen on average to be above 80% over the previous few months, and thus empty parking bays were limited, the hourly parking tariff was adjusted up by 25c. If the average occupancy was lower than 60% the tariff was reduced by 25c or, if lower than 30%, by 50c. For those blocks with an average occupancy between 60-80%, no change was made. Similar charging periods and tariff change rules were adopted in a number of municipal parking garages (multi-storey car parks).

The pilot has undoubtedly been a success and is encouraging other cities to embrace the idea. One of the overwhelming attractions of allowing users to effectively define the price of parking is that, once the rules of operation are established, the tariff applied is divorced from politics. There are no more accusations that the parking charge is being raised or manipulated to make good some hole in council funds. And as the SFpark trial showed, in many areas the tariff charged has gone down over time.

Performancing pricing in reality

Shoup has been instrumental in promoting and persuading residents and businesses that parking charges were good for them. This is a major step in a country where parking is rarely charged for. Parroting Monty Python's man-in-a-bowler-hat who said that the best way to raise revenue was to "tax foreigners living abroad"^[3], Shoup advocated that charges for parking could be seen as a political success story if the objections to paying for parking could be counterbalanced by a group who would support it. Thus a cornerstone of Shoup's advocacy is that revenues earned are visibly and immediately re-invested in the local area.

Part of his argument for winning over politicians was to show that a small local section of the population would see a significant personal benefit paid for by a wider group who would be making

individually too small a payment to be interested and too disparate to organise any opposition. So it was in Old Pasadena in California, one of the first successes of Shoup's advocacy. Car park charging was originally brought into the city in 1992 in the form of kerbside meters, with the meter revenue being reinvested into the local area. Merchants initially "feared that meters, rather than freeing up space for customers, would discourage customers from coming at all"^[4] but the meter revenue in excess of \$1m annually was used to rejuvenate the community, and created a lasting positive effect on the town.

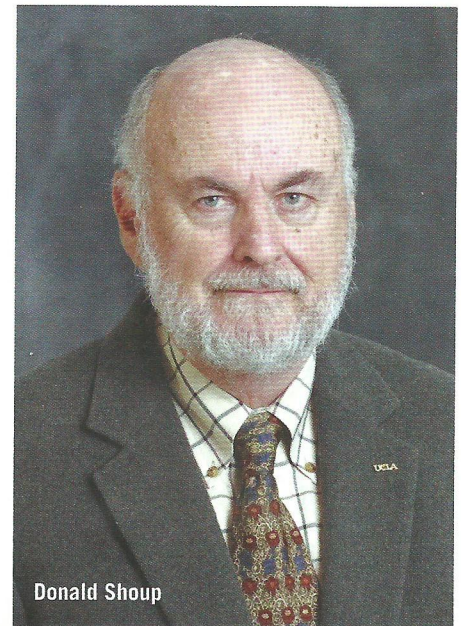
In Ventura, another Californian city, premium on-street parking came under a market-based programme. As Shoup advocated, prices are set and adjusted to maintain availability. Furthermore, since the introduction of charging in late 2010, the revenue gained from implementing paid-parking has been spent explicitly on a stated set of uses including urban realm, infrastructure and maintenance, street cleaning and enhanced police services. But perhaps the most attractive aspect of the parking infrastructure and its 'sale' to locals is to use the meters located throughout the charged area to provide free Wi-Fi for local merchants and residents^[5]. Allied to this market-based approach, Shoup had argued that putting a realistic charge on the cost of providing parking creates surplus to enable those that don't use parking to be rewarded. He drafted California's law that requires large employers that offer free or subsidised parking to its employees to provide them the option to take the cash value of the subsidy if they do not take up the parking^[6].

Parking requirements

Shoup has been behind a major campaign that has been progressing for most of his career and that may again be pertinent to the UK. First aired in 1978 in the short article "Problems with Parking Requirements in Zoning Ordinances"^[7], Shoup set out his concerns about the use of minimum parking standards and the overstated requirements that provide surplus parking even at the busiest times.

Excess off-street parking has created costs on the economy and environment. Every building surrounded by large parking lots as required by planning law has rendered distances between them un-walkable and, therefore, themselves encouraged car ownership and use. Furthermore, the costs of providing this parking space, in land and maintenance, is passed on to the purchasers or tenants who must bear this cost, whether or not as residential occupiers they have or own a car or as businesses wish to provide it for their customers.

Shoup has written with a clear view of his audience and an objective to ensure his reader understands and is persuaded. His humorous delivery and clever composition of argument have been referred to by many making comments on a website paying tribute to his career^[8]. Brian D Taylor,



Donald Shoup

Professor of Planning at UCLA, says: "What is unique about Donald's writing is he makes you feel smart as you read it."

Shoup's articles have covered: charging policies to address the abuse of Disabled Placards (the equivalent of our Blue Badges); approaches to making car parks and their buildings more attractive within the urban form; policy instruments to encourage and assist land assembly for development; discounting charges for on street parking for shorter vehicles; and methods to address persistent parking offenders. We will doubtless see the influence of Shoup's support and promotion of these ideas in the future.

Becoming Emeritus

Many academics and parking practitioners attended Shoup's function celebrating his retirement from full-time academic life, appropriately held on top of UCLA's Parking Structure 32 in Westwood on 30 May. The gathering expressed enormous gratitude for his humour, patience and resilience and paid tribute to his work to change the tide of parking thought and practice. Many will also hope, that like all good rock stars, there might yet be a few more comeback tours.

Andrew Potter is technical director at WSP|Parsons Brinckerhoff. He presented on his US experience researching the attitudes of users and resilience of parking demand at campuses and other institutions at Parking & Property 2015 on 13 May.
andrew.potter@pbworld.com

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