Information about transportation supply and environmental issues as a factor encouraging travel behaviour change

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Abstract
The inspiration for this work stems from a paradox: while a consensus about the harmful effects of the car and the urgency of actions to reduce its use seems to be established, people still refrain from changing their behaviors. In this context, our objective is to examine the link between the mobility practices and modal choice and the environmental values in order to grasp the potentials of changes.

This paper relies on two sociological researches based on qualitative semi-directing interviews and carried out in Paris Region, France: our PhD thesis (Rocci, 2007) which deals with limiting factors to behavioral modifications; and the present research which deals with the role of information and communication for changing, in relation to both the supply of transportation and the environmental awareness and knowledge.

An originality of both researches is that some people have been interviewed several times to better identify the contextual and temporal factors of change (or not change) and to follow the process of behavioral change (between the intention to the action). The qualitative method based on in-depth interviews brings complementary insights to those provided by quantitative studies.

From these researches it appears that the information, and more specifically information as training, plays a significant role in change.

Indeed, individuals' mobility practices and modal choices are determined by the strength of habits. Several studies show that car drivers are not always aware of all the alternatives to the car. As regards the people interviewed, the reduction of the individual use of the car seems to be more likely to be considered if an alternative exists and if the people know it exists and how to use it. Then, the person needs to be initiated into the new mobility practices and to get used to a new way of moving. One of the main levers for change would result from the ability of an individual to move and travel in terms of skills, knowledge of the functioning of the modes and the mobility system of the city, but also in terms of willingness to change his/her habits. In this way, we can call it a "mobility capital" as compared to P. Bourdieu's social capital or economic capital. Some authors deal with this concept such as V. Kaufmann (2002) or S. Allemand (2004).

Individuals often opt for the mode of transport which appears easier to use and to access, the one which is the least demanding in terms of mental and physical burden. A simple mobility means not having to think and to seek information about how to travel. It must be natural, and incorporated in the habits. A mode not usually used will appear too complicated and uncertain because unknown. Not experimenting a mode of transport amplifies the negative representations and thus the imagined constraints.

Thus, we believe that information and training are essential to encourage changes. It seems important to supply people with better information. First, they provide knowledge and tools necessary to increase their "mobility capital" and to expand multimodal practices. Second, they make people aware of environmental issues. Finally, they promote the acceptability of public policy which limits car use, and changes.
This paper will examine on the one hand, how people get the information to build their modal choice and their routes (peers, social networks, information technology, etc.); and on the other hand, what are the effects of information on environmental awareness and practices, and how the criterion of environment is included in modal choice.

We will analyze through the qualitative method of semi-directed interview how the information can modify attitudes and even sometimes behaviors. Indeed, it appears that the method of the interview can have a feedback effect on the discourse, the intentions and occasionally the behaviors of the respondent, as the interview becomes a source of information and raises self-reflection. Sometimes, the interview can be an opportunity for the interviewee to obtain information on the ecology topic and/or about some transportation options and their functioning. From a methodological point of view, this refers to the Voluntary Travel Behavior Change (VTBC) experiment interventions (Ker, 2004, Stopher & al., 2004, Ampt & al., 2006, Bonsall, 2007, etc.). In most cases, VTBC raises awareness, improves availability of information and support for people to try alternatives to individual use of their car, working through empowerment and motivation (Br?g, 1999).

References:
Ker I., TravelSmart Household TravelSmart: Peer Review and Evaluation - Context, Methodology and Values. CATALYST for Brisbane City Council, Queensland Transport and Australian Greenhouse Office, 2004.