Could sustainable transport policies lead to behavioural change? – A user's point of view

Céline Polain
Junior Researcher
Unité d'Anthropologie et de Sociologie
Université catholique de Louvain (Catholic University of Louvain)
Place Montesquieu 1/1
B-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium)
polain@anso.ucl.ac.be

Dr. Pierre Lannoy
Post-Doctoral Researcher
Unité d'Anthropologie et de Sociologie
Université catholique de Louvain (Catholic University of Louvain)
lannoy@anso.ucl.ac.be

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Abstract

Implementing sustainable transport policies can among others be achieved by encouraging shifts from car to public transport. Several cities have therefore carried out free public transport experiences, especially in Belgium.

The federal research on which we will base our account is intended to assess the (expected) results of a free transit policy on a focus group: students from higher institutions located in Brussels. Dutch speaking students can indeed benefit from free season tickets within Brussels whereas French speaking students do not have this opportunity.

Through this natural laboratory situation, we wish to analyse from a sociological perspective, by means of qualitative and comprehensive methods, the cognitive logics guiding mobility behaviours of students and particularly, the reasons why free public transport could or not change their behaviours.

Our account is divided into four parts, which will analyse:

- The context, the objectives and techniques of the survey,
- The role of environmental concerns in users' talks,
- The role of price concerns in students' arguments,
- Users' global assessment of a "free transit policy" and their behavioural (expected) changes.

Sociological types emerging from the different lines of arguments used will be described.

Transport experts generally consider the second and third topics analysed as essential components of any efficient free public transport policy. We will however show that few students regard these as crucial when reasoning about mobility behaviours. More practical factors are referred to. The last point will present a "mixed" assessment of this kind of policy, mentioning some unexpected arguments.

Introduction: the context of the research

Free public transport policies have been implemented in several cities shaped variously and according to several kinds of goals. Our account will highlight the current experience of this kind of policy for students in Brussels. This account will be based on a research carried out in partnership by three Belgian universities (K.U.L. – Leuven, UCL - Louvain-la-Neuve and V.U.B. – Brussels). The U.C.L.'s team is responsible for the sociological perspective on the topic[1]. This research is funded by the Belgian Science Policy.

In order to introduce the results of our research, the introduction will describe the context in which the research takes place. First, we will evoke some past or current experiences of free transit policy. Secondly, we will detail the aims and

1. Steenberghen, T., Macharis, C. & Lannoy, P. (2004-2006). *Impact of « free » public transport on travel behaviour, a case study (CP-63)*. Brussels: Belgian Federal Public Planning Service – Science Policy (Second Multiannual Scientific Support Plan for a Sustainable Development Policy).

procedures of the Brussels' case, and describe how supply and demand for public transport in Brussels currently appear. Thirdly, a definition of the "student" term will be given and the importance of the student population in Brussels will be examined. In a fourth point, we will specify the methodological perspective adopted in this research.

AIMS AND WAYS OF IMPLEMENTING FREE PUBLIC TRANSPORT POLICIES THROUGHOUT LAST DECADES

Free public transport policy does not appear as a new political initiative. Different towns and regions throughout the world (e.g. Commerce (U.S. - Cal.) in 1962; Rome (Italy) in 1971-1972; Châteauroux (France) 2002-now; Hasselt (Belgium) in 1997-now) attempted to implement such a policy.

As such, these experiences:

- Were not formulated and justified in terms of sustainable transport policy development as such, but were implemented as a part of a "left-wing" city governance scheme aiming at improving the area environment quality and/or to give a renewed role to the town-centre;
- Because of their very nature, their public was defined as the whole travelling and commuting population of the area – without any consideration of age, gender, occupation or revenues.

In other cases, some categories of users (children, students, and elderly people) are generally benefiting from reduced transit fare conditions. Concerning university students as such, some free-fare or reduced-fare transit services (known as U-Pass) have been implemented, for example in the United States (Brown et al., 2003), in Germany or in Canada (Heath & Gifford, 2002). They generally generated an increased public transport ridership among students.

Such a free public transit policy has also been proposed in other Belgian cities. The university city of Leuven has implemented free public transport for students, by means of an agreement between the city and the university. Compared to these cases, the Brussels' situation is different because not all students are benefiting from the free transit measure. The Brussels' policy rationale and the methodological design adopted to grasp its effects will be described in the next paragraphs.

CONDITIONS OF THE CURRENT FREE PUBLIC TRANSPORT POLICY IN BRUSSELS

In Brussels' case, the free public transport experience currently developed concerns only a part of the population travelling in Brussels. Only students studying in a Dutch-speaking higher education institution located in Brussels have the possibility of being repaid for their School season ticket (this initiative was indeed introduced by the Dutch-speaking linguistic community only). Even more: students who can benefit from the measure have to be registered for a first degree – in other words a first registration – and have to be less than 26 years old.

Repayment is carried out by an association (Quartier Latin) which obtains subsidies from the Dutch-speaking community's institutions. A student meeting the conditions buys his/her season ticket before the 1st of November. The measure was implemented for the first time during academic year 2003-2004 and was prolonged during this academic year.

The measure has been decided by the Flemish Community authorities because of a double observation: most of the Dutch-speaking students studying in Brussels do not live in Brussels and so, have a poor knowledge of Brussels when coming to the capital; secondly, when studying in Brussels few students often travel to the centre of Brussels (most of the Dutch-speaking institutions are not located in the centre of the town) and their knowledge and attraction to Brussels do not evolve positively. The measure was then aimed at attracting Dutch-speaking students to Brussels, as well as occasionally their parents. There are no agreements either with the Brussels' transit agency, or with the universities and high schools. This is a one-sided initiative with marked political objectives.

As a result, in the same city, students from Dutch-speaking higher education institutions do benefit from the free public transport measure, whereas students from French-speaking institutions do not benefit from it. This has brought about the choice of Brussels for a case study on the effects of free public transport. This will allow to compare the travel behaviours of students benefiting or not from the "free" measure and to analyse temporary effects on travel behaviours. Before this, we need to describe how the public transport supply is organised in the Brussels' area and how specific is the student population. The way we decided to work to collect data and to analyse them will be explained in the last paragraph.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT SUPPLY AND DEMAND IN BRUSSELS

The public transport network in Brussels comprises 3 underground lines, 17 tramway lines and 47 bus lines. The estimated patronage figures total up to 212 millions passengers a year. Statistical analysis tended indeed to show that public transport is used to a greater extend within Brussels than elsewhere in the country (Hubert & Toint, 2002; Sterck, 1993).

Different season tickets are proposed by the Brussels' public transport agency, the M.I.V.B./S.T.I.B. One of those is called "School season ticket" and is available for students who are less than 26 years old. This season ticket is the one that is proposed to students. The price of the season ticket varies according to the number of children within the family and according to the number of M.I.V.B./S.T.I.B. season tickets already possessed within the family. The School season ticket is valid during one year, week-ends and holidays included.

It may also be noticed that public transport in Brussels is already free for persons younger than 12 years and older than 65 years. Some companies also propose a substantial repayment for employees who bought a season ticket. What is more, some "free public transport days" are organised, in such occasions as "patrimony days" (on approval), New Year's nights, or "Free-Car Cities Days".

Free public transport can then be experienced in several circumstances by all users and by students in particular. Let us now define the profile of investigated students.

Being a student in Brussels presents some important peculiarities. The definition of the 'student' we endorse in this study is dictated by criteria adopted by the authorities fund-

ing the free transit measure under scrutiny. As a consequence, we consider as student any individual studying in a higher education institution. This means that we do not take elementary and secondary school students into consideration but only students registered in universities, colleges and institutions of higher education. Students are then older than 17 years, but as we take also into account students that are not studying full time, persons we are interested in may be of any age older than 17 years. It has then to be noticed that our interest being focused on students benefiting (i.e. younger than 26 years) and not (i.e. of any age) from the free public transport measure, the age of respondents is not limited to 26 years.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The methodology used could globally be defined as an inductive and comprehensive one. Inductive methodologies start from particular elements, field realities to come to generalization, theorization of the results. The comprehensive approach (Kaufmann, 1997; Petit, 2002) will focus on the justifications used, rather than on the description of behaviours. In this case study, the comprehensive approach will be aimed at understanding, as a whole, the elements that influence logics of action followed in the everyday mobility and to understand the significance an actor gives them.

Qualitative methods are consequently those that correspond in a more obvious way with such a comprehensive approach, as these data collecting methods allow the individuals to freely express themselves relative to their logics of action. It becomes then possible to avoid immediate answers and to go deeper in the attitudes, representations, perceptions and feelings of a person.

When using this kind of methodology, reaching a representative sample is not considered as a relevant epistemological criterion. The point is rather to look for diversity of profiles. Data collecting is suspended when saturation point appears, that is when no more new element can be found with additional interviews.

Qualitative interviews are carried out on a semi-structured way (May, 2001). This means that open questions are asked to respondents who answer then freely. Most of the questions asked are those mentioned in an interview guide which is composed of about fifty questions gathered to more general topics[2].

The search for respondents was conducted via three main channels: personal acquaintances of the researchers, some organizations linked with the student life and the phone number and e-mail address of respondents of the quantitative research who accepted being re-contacted for an in-depth survey. It may be noticed that difficulties were experienced when finding respondents.

At this stage of the research, 33 interviews were achieved (16 French and 17 Dutch-speaking ones). A complete transcription of the interviews was implemented (at this stage 12 French-speaking and 9 Dutch-speaking transcribed interviews; see reference section for a complete list of interviews).

With those transcriptions, we have sketched an analysis of the materials. The method followed was based on structural method. This kind of method considers the talk of the respondent as being structured in a particular and systematic way. The main goal is then to identify and to analyse sets of themes and lines of arguments followed by students (Hiernaux, 1995; Piret et al., 1996).

Given the fruitfulness of the data collected, a first step was to get the global elements of the interviews and their relations. In order to come to sharper results, a second step allowed us to raise particular logics of some respondents concerning sets of themes linked more particularly to financial, economic aspects. This work would allow us to examine whether different types of respondents – which arise from quite close lines of arguments – could be described. These two analysis levels would then allow us to get the dynamics emanating on a global and particular scale within the interviews.

Through these analyses, we hope to grasp some elements allowing understanding to which extend free public transit policies may lead to modal transfer, and thus may contribute to sustainable aims as urban policy. The Flemish Community's policy was however not presented in the first place as a sustainable transport oriented policy, but we will concentrate on the effects of the measure as such. The point is here to analyse a particular kind of policy and to analyse the daily reasoning of individuals with reference to this policy.

Now the context of the research has been clarified, the following paragraphs will be directed at describing the results of the interviews, and in particular those related to environmental and price concerns and, considering these concerns, to consequences of this kind of measure on mobility behaviours. A first paragraph is however intended to describe the mobility schemes adopted by students that were identified in the interviews.

The figure of the student and his/her attitude in relation to the different means of transport

Starting from our definition of the student (see above), we may infer – as a hypothesis – that this category of the population already had a past experience linked with mobility, as they had to travel to school, to leisure, but also that being in a period of status transition, students are more prone to travel behavioural changes than other segments of the population (Cortes, 2002).

Concerning the population we are focusing on, it is important to notice that:

- The student population in Brussels is not socially homogeneous: a difference appears according to the linguistic community funding and managing the educational institution they are affiliated to. Indeed, higher educational institutions are not managed by the federal authority but by linguistic communities. Dutch-speaking higher insti-

2. We used an interview guide with open questions such as: «If several means of transport can be used, what makes you choose one means of transport or another?»; «Which are the aspects that seem pleasant/unpleasant to you when you are using public transport, the car? Tell me one lived experience or another.»; «Do you think free season tickets to public transport in Brussels seems/would seem to be a good/bad initiative? Why?»

tutions are less numerous in Brussels than French-speaking ones. More precisely, the number of universities in Brussels does not vary from one linguistic community to the other, but there are some more French-speaking higher colleges. However, French-speaking universities in Brussels attract far more students than Dutch universities. It is estimated that there are twice as many French-speaking students as Dutch-speaking ones in Brussels (cf. figures published by the statistical services of Flemish and French communities).

- As far as the driving of a car is concerned, young people in Belgium are allowed to get their driving licence from the age of 18 years. Sociologists (Bassand & Kaufmann, 1996:31) analyse the obtaining of the driving licence as highly symbolic, as a passage rite towards adulthood. Driving a car could then reveal to be quite attractive for young people like university students. But some other studies (Büttner & Grübler, 1995; Sandqvist, 2002) show that a generation gap exists between adults and younger people, the latter being generally more concerned by the environmental drawbacks of car use and less eager to obtain a driving licence.
- These results seem indeed to be confirmed in our research as two kinds of attitudes are developed by students: appreciation of motorized vehicles and hybrid appreciation. In the first case, students give preference to the car or moped and speak of these means of transportation very positively (DW_3,4,11,12,14)[3]. Hybrid valorisation induces the development of a combinatory scale of use of the different means of transport, the efficiency being linked to the use circumstances (DW_1,2,5,6,8,9,10,13,16,21). It is then interesting to notice that some students adopt behaviours that are not consistent with their attitudes. Some students appreciate indeed the motorized vehicles but as they often do not possess one, they are forced to take other means of transportation.
- But it has also to be noticed that students are often financially dependent on their parents. Some transport modes may then be more difficult to use because of their cost. Mobility may even be reduced in order to spare some money. On the other hand, students can benefit from reduced fares due to their particular financial situation. Considering these aspects, it may be expected that students could be more sensitive to the price factor. Persons with lower incomes – young and older ones – are indeed more concerned by price of public transport and may be lead to modify their mobility behaviours according to this criterion (e.g. Hine & Mitchell, 2001; Jemelin, 2004).
- Students are indeed presenting themselves in the interviews we have conducted as being in a transitional situation. The self-image they generally adopt is that of a "broke" person, financially dependent and constrained. But usually the student also does not want this situation to be linked with insincerity or dishonesty.
- As for the financing of the means of travel, we observe that season tickets are in most of the cases paid by the parents (DW_1,5,12,13; not the case for 8,10), whereas the use of a car will result in a greater involvement of the students paying the costs (DW_3,4,11,14).
- Another peculiarity of this sample consists of the advanced training students are following. This may be considered as a sample bias, as it may be expected that their way of thinking and behaving could be influenced due to their particular occupational environment. The higher education they are following may also be the cause of a specificity as to their attitudes and behaviours (Costes, 2002).
- In the whole country, statistical analysis show that young people travel more than older persons (Hubert & Toint, 2002). As for their everyday mobility, it may be expected that four kinds of activity spheres (Kaufmann, 2000:30) will push students for travelling: the study sphere; the involvement sphere; the domestic sphere and the spare time sphere. Daily journeys allow linking these different spheres between them, as those spheres are often spatially differentiated (Flamm, 2004; Juan et al., 1997).
- Studies on travel behaviours of students have shown that the mobility profile of students had to be linked with spatial conditions and transport supply, but also with socio-cultural factors, such as their incomes, their social sphere and their judgements and representations on the future social integration (Costes, 2002).

Now having a more precise description of the student's situation, we will highlight the way price and environmental concerns are tackled in the students' talks. The aspects linked to cost and price of means of transport will be studied later on. For the moment, we will focus on the place of environmental concerns in the lines of arguments of students. More precisely our point will be to define the role of environmental arguments on the mobility behaviours of students and the emphasis placed on this kind of concern when assessing the free public transport measure.

The role of environmental concerns

The free public transport policy being also in keeping with sustainability objectives, we could expect that environmental arguments would be stated and possibly mentioned as a positive aspect of this kind of measure.

According to our analyses, the place of environmental arguments seems to be limited in the lines of arguments held. Moreover, when those arguments appear, they are not mentioned with reference to the free character of the measure implemented, but are rather linked to the valuation of means of travel.

More precisely, these arguments are mentioned when questions which have to do with the advantages of public transport and disadvantages of the car are asked. For students who usually travel with public transport, the environmental argument is then perceived as a positive aspect of

3. This notation refers to the interview codes (see reference section).

their current mobility (DW_2,6,7,10,13,16,20), whereas car users may mention the argument, or even show an uncomfortable feeling due to their mobility habits (DW_3,11). It has however to be noticed that environmental arguments were not mentioned by all students (about a half of the respondents did not mention any environmental arguments).

This kind of argument does however not really have an impact on the traveller's behaviour. If we base ourselves on the previous observations, environmental arguments appear often rather as being of secondary importance relative to modal choice. Other kinds of arguments play indeed a more significant role in the modal decisions detailed by the students during the interviews: the access to different means of travel; the housing's location and accessibility to networks; the knowledge of networks; the perception and relations with space; the perception and relation with means of transport; the budgetary situation of the user, which is linked to his/her situation in the lifecycle and the perception and relation with prices of means of travel (Nordlund & Garvill, 2003:346).

Even if environmental arguments seldom appear as a structuring axis of the lines of arguments, an awareness of environmental issues seems well to timidly exist. This may explain why environmental benefits of the free public transport measure are then ignored. More practical logics seem to be at work if free public transport and advantages of such a policy are tackled, such as the opportunity to "jump" on any public transport service when needed or to save money (see the point about behavioural changes due to the free public transport measure).

This seems to show that even if environmental impacts of the free public transport measure could well exist – we do not conduct this kind of analysis –, these are not the main benefits perceived by individuals. This observation is not on the same wavelength as the political expected benefits.

On the other hand, the absence of link between this free public policy and sustainable, environmental aims in students' interviews are maybe also due to the very context of the measure analysed. Repaid season tickets were indeed proposed by Flemish institutions to mainly reach other goals than environmental ones. Environmental aims of the policy appeared thus maybe not very clearly in this case. This may possibly explain why students seldom mention environmental arguments as being an asset of the measure.

It has however to be added to this point that our interview guide did only indirectly ask the question of the environmental benefits of the measure and of means of transport, in general. Direct questions could have given other results, but this would also have encouraged respondents to tackle an aspect they would not have raised spontaneously. In other words, this way of proceeding allowed us to grasp the importance a respondent gave to the environmental problematic.

Environmental concerns appear then not to be crucial in the respondents' lines of arguments when tackling personal mobility behaviours or the free public transport measure, even if those arguments are now and then mentioned. As the free public transport policy is also based on the price factor to alter the mobility behaviours, the place of this type of argument has also been more precisely analysed. In order to observe how these transport prices and costs are perceived by students, we focused on the reasoning they held to estimate and judge prices.

The role of price concerns

A first point was dedicated to the prices of means of travel and their assessment and judgement by students. As well as for the car as for public transport, perception of prices depends on the context of use and do not take all costs into account. It seems that no real precise knowledge, calculation, comparison process and then modal decision happen. This is why we privilege the term of *perception* of prices.

These observations have also to be linked to the fact that the price of means of transport is quite complex to calculate. Some studies have tried to calculate the costs of the means of transport by listing all costs involved (cf. Frenay, 1994; Flamm, 2004). Three kinds of costs appear: fixed, variable and collective ones. This may explain that assessing the price of the different means of transport proves to be difficult for respondents.

Studies indeed show that when individuals subjectively assess the cost of a car, it often tends to be minimized in comparison to the price of public transport for the same journey (e.g. Hine & Scott, 2000).

Moreover, when assessing the price of the car, other studies also indicate that only some variable costs are taken into account (mainly, fuel). Assessment of the price of public transport is also often dependent on the quality of service. When supply appears to be good, costs are estimated to be fair; in the opposite case, costs are considered as expensive (e.g. Hine & Scott, 2000; Frenay, 1994).

The conclusions of these studies have indeed been confirmed in our case study. Assessment of the costs of a car is often based on variable costs, such as fuel; sometimes insurance of a car is also taken into consideration (DW_3,7,8,11,13). But other assessment criteria are also sometimes mentioned, such as the financial situation of the user, the size of the car, the number of users for the same journey, the distance to cover (DW_1,4,10,12,14).

Regarding public transport, evaluation of price is often based on the type of ticket used, on the perceived service quality and on the user's financial situation. In other words, price is perceived in a different way according to the fact of travelling with a season ticket – which is expensive at the beginning but which can be profitable if regularly used – or a travel ticket – which is often perceived as expensive (DW_1,3,5,6,7,8,9,10,12,13). Reductions to some public transport are also taken into account (DW_1,2,4,14). Train is especially perceived as an expensive means of transport by Belgian students in Brussels (DW_2,4,6,9,12,21,23). The perceived quality of service also plays an important role, as this perception works as a justification or not of the price asked (DW_3,7,8,11,12,16,21). Students also insist on the fact that prices are differently perceived according to the financial abilities of the user (DW_4,9,11,12,13,21).

Price of tickets is also often compared with the price of other services that are frequently used or that are similar. The perception of prices appears here to be very relative, some same criteria leading to different evaluations and judgements of prices. Comparison processes are then a quite usual way of basing the price assessment and judgement,

and may be considered as a pragmatic calculation process (DW_11,13,14,20,21,23).

Giving a global assessment of the price of means of transport proves thus to be unsuitable. Costs are perceived as relative, depending on the assessment criteria used, which are closely linked to the context of use.

The profit-maximising aspect constituted a second kind of reasoning on prices. Investing in one means of transport or another – thanks to a season ticket or the purchase of a car or a bike – will lead to a profit-maximising reasoning by using intensively, or even exclusively the means of travel invested in (DW_1,3,6,8,10,13,20,23). Regarding the car, a paradox arises: students often consider having a real modal choice when they can benefit from a car at least regularly; however, once having invested in a car, they adopt a profit-maximising reasoning. Consequently, the car opens modal choice, but at the same time, the car limits it.

As far as modal choice is concerned, studies tend indeed to show that the idea of individuals knowing all means of travel at their disposal, considering these as equal possibilities and always having a choice between several transport alternatives has to be questioned (e.g. Kaufmann, 2000; Flamm, 2004).

A third aspect of this point was to examine whether the perception of price could influence the willingness to pay for public transport. The theme of fraud or "fare dodging" constitutes another way of getting information about perception of prices. More precisely, it seems interesting to explore this theme as the fact of avoiding paying the ticket could reveal a quite expensive perception of prices. If this is the main reason to fraud, a free public transport policy could then appear as an appropriate sustainable policy. But one can expect other aspects to be linked to the fare dodging, which could question the efficiency of the policy. Analysing fare dodging reveals then also to show the perception of prices and the suitability of free public transit policies in a different light.

First of all, the interviews seem to reveal that "fare dodging" (avoiding paying for a ticket) – we prefer using this term than this of fraud – appears to be a quite widespread practice (DW_2,3,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,20). Several students report having already avoided paying their fare, knowing persons who have done this or thinking that fare dodging is quite widespread among passengers. "Fare-dodgers" mention this as an argument to justify their practice, whereas persons paying for their journey judge badly those who do not pay.

Fare dodging is often related to the user's impression of how often fares are controlled and also to the ease of getting round the controls. The user's impression of an increase in the frequency of controls, as well as experience of having been controlled (or acquaintance who have been controlled) or not influence the attitudes of students with regard to their use of public transport. Several students speak of a greater inclination to buy a ticket or a season ticket more regularly, or even to avoid using public transport by means of fare dodging since controls appeared to become a reality (DW_1,3,6,9,10,12,13,16,20,21,23).

But the ease of getting round controls is also questioned here. Controls are not carried out in any systematic way within the M.I.V.B./S.T.I.B. network, particularly in contrast to the train network. Also, the control infrastructures at the entrance to the stations of the network are easy to go round. This situation is perceived as inviting fare dodging (DW_2,6,7,9,11,12,14,21,23). However, since a few months, the bus network compels the user to show his/her ticket at the entrance. This change is not always positively perceived, notably due to delay problems it may cause.

Students appear however aware that fare dodging is "bad", that the norm would be to pay for one's journey (DW_6,9,10,13,14). When they are fare dodging they are consequently in a cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) situation: this socio-psychological term designates a psychological process which appears when two cognitions clash, these cognitions being inconsistent with each other. This results in a psychological or even physiological discomfort.

The student tries to reduce it by mentioning "understandable" motives or reasoning for fare dodging which will in a way justify their dodging behaviour, and so excusing it. Price is often mentioned as being one of these "understandable" motives (DW_8,10,14,16), but is not the only one. Practical arguments are also mentioned to explain the fare dodging behaviour (DW_4,6,7,9,11,12,20), as well as the financial abilities of the user (DW_4,6,7,8,13,14). All these categories of arguments are then used as "understandable" motives to use a service without paying for a ticket, reducing the cognitive dissonance of respondents.

Calculation (as a mental operation) and possibly strategic (as a practical behaviour) aspects are then developed by "fare dodgers". These aspects may be analysed as an "understandable" reasoning allowing reducing cognitive dissonance. They work in an individualistic way: one's strictly personal financial gain is calculated, by trying to take advantage from the supposed or known flaw of the transport system.

Calculations are of a monetary and risk nature. Monetary calculations are based on the price of a journey using public transport compared to the price, either of another object, or of the amount of the fine. The profit maximising reason for fare dodging is therefore revealed as another way of reducing cognitive dissonance. Risk calculations are aimed at evaluating the probability of controls, according to criteria such as the knowledge of the line used, the perceived control frequency, the period of the day… (DW_1,3, 11,13,14,21)

Strategies are then found by "fare dodgers" in order to avoid controls. These strategies are based on observation, or even on "extrasensory" perceptions which will allow ticket inspectors to be avoided (DW_1,3,9,10,13,14).

But students who fare dodge are often frustrated because these "understandable" motives and reasoning are not always "understood" when they are controlled. A dilemma exists between control as an unpleasant public sanction and as being normal, sincere or at least a necessary evil. Students prefer usually that no control occurs, or at least dealing with an easy-going, understanding ticket inspector.

This psychological discomfort manifests itself in a more or less important stress when fare dodging, linked to the fear of being discovered when dodging fares. As for the fact of paying, it ensures travelling with a clear conscience, without worrying (DW_2,8,9,10,12,13,14,23).

Three kinds of (non-)paying profiles were noticed: absence of "fare dodging", occasional and regular "fare dodg-

ing". In the first profile, journeys are always paid because of a lack of knowledge of the public transport system (DW_3,4,11), because of moral principles that are not consistent with the act of fare dodging (DW_2,6,11,21,(23)) or simply because the user owns a season ticket (DW_1,8,12,20,23). Occasional fare dodging is practiced when risk calculations seem low or in some cases of "absolute necessity". The student knows the risk he/she runs and does not feel at ease when dodging fares (DW_(1),9,10,14). Regular fare dodging is quite marginal. This kind of fare dodging gives again rise to low risk calculations, which are reinforced by a good knowledge of the line and an experience showing that few controls have occurred (DW_(3),13). It has to be pointed out that we here speak of fare dodging profiles and not of "fare dodgers" profiles as these are practices that can evolve: a student can move from a type to another, depending, for example, on whether he/she has obtained a season ticket.

Basically, through all these aspects it appears that moral considerations come into play. Buying a ticket could be analysed as a token of sincerity and controls as a public checking of (in)sincerity of the user but the interview in itself could also be compared to another "morality test".

In conclusion, it appears unsuitable to ask students to give a general perception of prices of means of travel. This must be analysed within the context of use of the transport. The profit maximising aspect of the right of access on one means of transport or another has also to be taken into consideration. The car raises however a paradox as possessing a car is considered by the students as really widening the modal choice, whereas a car would lead the student to use it intensively or even exclusively, then reducing modal choice.

The fraud – or "fare dodging" – problematic shows above all that even if price may be considered as a significant reason to fare dodge, other reasons are also put forward. But the fact of avoiding paying for a ticket is felt as an unpleasant situation: students are thus aware of the rules and feel uncomfortable being out of norms and likely to be publicly uncovered. This is linked to a psychological and moral discomfort. Many laudable reasons are then put forward to justify oneself and to prove one's sincerity. This confirms a cognitive dissonance process caused by fare dodging, dissonance that students try to reduce by mentioning various "understandable" motives to dodge fares. Various kinds of calculations and strategies are also used to avoid controls.

The "fare dodging" problematic seemed also interesting to explore as it could be analysed as a form of free public transport practice, except for its illegal character. The effects of a free (and legal) transport system are then deepened in the following section.

The global assessment of a "free policy" and the behavioural (expected) changes

Two analysis levels were defined: global and behavioural effects of such a measure. The first point allows indicating changes that occurred on a social, urban and mobility scale. The behavioural changes will point out the expected or observed effects on behaviour of the user investigated and the perception of other users. As some students do benefit from the measure, whereas others do not, behavioural effects were differentiated according to expected or observed behavioural effects.

GLOBAL EFFECTS

At first sight, students react generally quite positively to the free public measure proposed for Dutch-speaking students. When exploring the topic in more detail, differences in opinion however appear. Sometimes, students who were first quite in favour of the measure changed their mind radically after having explored the details of the measure implemented in more depth.

One global negative effect often mentioned is that a free transport system policy could lead to a group advantage – referring to the group benefiting from the measure implemented (DW_6,8,10,11,12,13,14,16,20,21). As far as the current free measure is concerned, students often point out the advantage of the measure for Dutch-speaking students, for students who are less than 26 years old and following a degree for the first time and for higher education students only. So all Dutch-speaking students are not affected by the current measure.

The reasons why the measure focuses on this particular population appeared not to be clear. The objectives of the institutions financing the measure were cautiously regarded. Several students feared this measure to hide other goals, such as to give a community advantage or an "age advantage" to Dutch-speaking students in order to attract this young population to the capital (which is mainly composed of French-speaking inhabitants but located on Flemish soils). This opinion is shared by students, whatever their linguistic community of origin but asserts itself more forcefully and is the cause of more reactions amongst French-speaking students. Dutch-speaking students benefiting from the measure, as to them, may be aware of these iniquities but adopt an opportunist attitude: they find detrimental that the measure is not widespread to all students but are glad they could personally benefit from it.

So a question of justice and equity is raised when students consider the free public transport measure currently implemented. To explain this observation, it is referred to different financial means between both communities' institutions – the Dutch-speaking community being supposed to have more financial means at disposal.

Some global effects seem to divide students: varied meanings were expressed relative to the effects of a free transport system on the quality of service, on insecurity feelings. Students also question the financing of the measure.

As for the quality of service, some students think a free measure would allow it to be enhanced (because of an increase of the customer base of public transport) (DW_6,(10),13), whereas some see a status quo, or even a deterioration of the service (because of the loss of the customer status which does not allow to ask for some improvements any more) (DW_2,9,(10),11,20,23).

As far as insecurity feelings are concerned, some students think that free public transport would contribute to diminish it (as more persons would frequent public transport) (DW_8,14), or on the contrary to increase it (since more "suspicious" persons would frequent public transport to live in it or to carry out fraudulent activities) (DW_11,12).

The financing such a measure imposes seems also to result in different positions. These positions are obviously linked to the objectives of the financing organizations, and especially of the transport companies. These companies may be considered as private companies aiming at achieving profits, at reaching a definite turnover. In this case, transport companies are not considered as being able and as having to finance a free public transport measure. This would represent a substantial loss of profits. More generally financing organizations able to finance such a measure do not appear to be numerous, that is why many students think this measure is "not very realistic" (DW_2,3,4,(7),10,11,12,13,23). Some other students conceive, for their part, transport companies as public utilities whose mission would be to offer a performing service to the community. Free public transport appears then conceivable, or even considered as obvious. The argument logic is here based on a collective utility mission, financial considerations being raised in the middle distance (DW_(7),8,14).

Positive effects mentioned are those of the social equity regarding mobility, the improvement of traffic conditions and the facilitated discovery of the space, of the city.

Social advantage as for mobility facilities has an important place in the lines of arguments. Free public transport would indeed allow the less well-off individuals to travel (DW_2,4,10,12,14,21). A financial aspect appears then clearly here: this kind of measure would allow these low-income persons to travel lawfully without having to do without other goods. As it already appeared with regard to the assessment of prices of public transport, the image associated with these low-income persons is joined to honest persons never travelling or few, in order to devote the income to other more essential goods. This image could be linked to that of a poor household, but students seem not really to identify themselves to this image.

As more people would frequent public transport as it became free, several students also expect that traffic conditions would improve on a global scale within Brussels, that car mobility would be reduced (DW_2,4,8,9,10,13).

An "enthusiasm scale" seems to arise regarding global effects of free transport system: pessimism; moderation; moderated enthusiasm; enthusiasm.

In a pessimistic approach, free public transport is seen from an almost negative angle, notably because it could result in a lack of effort of the users. It is referred to an ascetic moral which emphasizes effort, labour according to a logic of merit (DW_1).

Other students have a moderate opinion as to free public transport. It seemed however that two different kinds of moderate opinion could be observed. In some cases, positive, as well as negative global effects are mentioned (DW_5,9,10,11,23). Some other students showed a more enthusiastic point of view but mentioned one important condition which should be respected to really consider the measure from a positive angle (DW_2,3,4,7,20). A more practical logic appears here, the measure being analysed at different levels by the students.

Enthusiasm is the last way of looking at global effects of the free measure. Nearly all elements resulting from the free measure are considered as positive, except from the group advantage the measure could lead to. Two kinds of enthusiasm were however observed. The positive repercussions of the free public transport measure are raised on a large scale for some students (benefits for public transport, for the population, for the city…) (DW_6,8,13,21), whereas other students analysed the benefits of the measure by referring to their own benefits of it (pleasure, savings got) (DW_12,14). Two different kinds of enthusiastic attitudes appear then: altruistic and individualistic ones. Potential effects are then here very positively considered.

Finally, honesty considerations may still be observed here. A free public transport policy would indeed allow solving the question of the honesty of the user as for the public transport payment. Other kinds of questions would however arise: how could sincerity of the users – the fact that their use of public transport is only linked to the travel motive – be checked? How the sincerity of public transport companies, as to the right use of funds, could be checked? How could it be proved that financing organizations are not hiding some objectives they associate with the free measure? All these questions are raised throughout the above kinds of arguments and refer to an honesty axis.

The free public transport measure may then be analysed in various ways by students and even if lines of arguments are globally more positive than negative when it is focused on the global effects of the free measure, this latter generates an analysis full of nuances. The group advantage such a measure may lead to appears in particular to worry respondents. A consensus seems to exist regarding social equity and improvements of traffic conditions as sure advantage of such a measure.

After having explained the global effects students mentioned when talking about free public transport in Brussels, let us examine how students perceive the travel behavioural change such a measure could induce, according to their current free or paid use of public transport.

BEHAVIOURAL EFFECTS

In order to examine the possible behaviour change of the users due to a free public transport policy, we propose to differentiate two categories of students: those who benefit from the measure and those who do not, as their respective experience is different.

Non-beneficiary students

Students who are not benefiting from the measure often approach the potential behavioural effects according to three ways: some think that such a measure will not lead to any behavioural effect; others think that the effect would be moderate; some consider that the mobility behaviours would certainly change.

In the first case – students who are not expecting any real behavioural change –, respondents expect that users will go on with their usual travel habits. Users who possess a season ticket would not fundamentally change their current travel habits, in the same way as frequent car users. According to them, price does not constitute the main drawback of public transport. Other changes have to be brought about to public transport to observe a real modal transfer. The question of the quality of the service is here crucial towards the aim of "competing" the assets of the car, which are otherwise more important than those of public transport. The behaviour,

and more precisely the attitudes, of those students and of the other users should therefore not significantly vary (DW_3,7,11,12,14).

Students of the second category – who think the effect would be moderate – do not exclude that a change in the use of public transport could be observed but this change is restrained by different elements. First, personal mobility habits are considered by some students as being few inclined to change, as these habits fit their current way of life, as no other habit would be really viable. These respondents conceive however that other persons could change their modal behaviours because of a free public transport policy (DW_4,5,10,13,20). Secondly, some doubt that behavioural effects could still be observed in the long run. These students think the measure could at the beginning of its implementation attract new users, because of a psychological attraction of the absence of payment. Behavioural effect would then occur, due to opportunist reactions: people want to benefit from it. Long-run effects of such a measure are however questioned (DW_1,2,11).

Finally, students envisage the measure as attractive. This would involve modal changes and would appeal new users. A snowball effect would then occur, which would be beneficial for public transport. Only positive repercussions would arise (DW_8,16,21).

Behavioural effects of a free public transport measure by students who are not benefiting from the measure are then assessed variously. If students often consider at first sight that behavioural effect is obvious, they often moderate their opinion after having deepened this aspect. Free public transport measures are indeed seen quite positively but are not always considered as being a solution, as for some price is not the main drawback of public transport, for others their own mobility habits are rooted in their mind – even if it does not exclude that modal change could appear for other users – and for some others, long-run behavioural effects are not guaranteed, because of the psychological attraction of the free measure which could fade.

Beneficiary students

On the other hand, students who are benefiting from the repaid season ticket measure observe nearly always a personal behavioural change as to their mobility in Brussels, especially when they used to get travel tickets (DW_6,9,23). Indeed, a season ticket often corresponds to a change in the student's behaviour, as students benefiting from the free measure often reckon to travel more regularly to the centre of the town, even if this regularity appears to vary from student to student. Some students use public transport more regularly for "utility journeys" (to the centre, for example), but some others are really taking advantage from the ticket to stroll in the town and to learn using Brussels' public transport system.

It has then to be pointed out that in our case behavioural change appears more particularly because of the obtaining of a season ticket. The free aspect of it encourages getting a season ticket, but this free aspect in itself does not constitute the cause of behavioural changes.

The possession of a season ticket also encourages students to get used to public transport. But the fact of possessing a season ticket does not directly lead to a more positive assessment of public transport.

The season ticket seems often to lead to a spatial discovery. Having a season ticket allows them not to think about the cost and the ticket and so to jump in public transport, sometimes just to look at the town and to be able to link locations between them.

As far as spatial knowledge of Brussels is concerned, the interviews frequently show that Dutch-speaking students often stay near the university and sometimes go to the centre to do some shopping. We are currently broadening the questionnaire to be able to give some explanation to this observation. It seems it has among others to do with language problems and bad perception of Brussels, related to insecurity feelings, by Dutch speaking persons. A free season ticket as it usually leads to an increase in the student's journeys, and then often also corresponds to a better spatial knowledge.

The impact of such a measure has however to be questioned for French-speaking students as the economic survey of our research showed that these students more regularly use public transport within Brussels and that their knowledge of Brussels is better. It could then be expected that the behavioural change would be less important by French-speaking students for these reasons.

However, several Dutch-speaking students also point out that risks of under-use of the season ticket may occur. Some students reckon by themselves that they do not absolutely need a season ticket, but the fact of possessing one allows them to move more freely and more regularly.

More generally, Dutch-speaking students appear to be less critical and suspicious as to the behavioural impact of free season tickets, than French-speaking students. This may be explained by their particular situation concerning mobility behaviours within the capital, but it has maybe also to do with the fact that free public transport are directly experienced by them.

It appears thus that the measure encourages students to travel more frequently with the public transport network. The effects in the long run are however difficult to explore within the framework of this research. The learning process of the public transport's network due to repaid season tickets and its impact on the travel habits in the long run should thus be studied in more depth.

In conclusion, behavioural changes are once again contrasted but the main trend seems to show a personal change in the personal mobility behaviours, notably regarding the frequentation of the centre of the town. These behavioural changes seem however not to have directly to do with the fact of using free public transport but with the fact of using a season ticket. The free character of the season ticket encourages students to take the necessary steps to get a season ticket, rather than using journey tickets. The knowledge of the town is on another side often improved. Risks of underuse of the free season tickets have however already been observed.

Now most of the results of our research concerning a free public transport policy have been presented, we will give a summary of the main lessons we may learn from it.

Main conclusions

- The sample and the free public transport measure here examined exist in peculiar conditions. The students we are investigating consider themselves indeed as dependant and constrained, financially speaking. But the conditions to benefit from a free season ticket are also quite restricted, as only Dutch-speaking students from higher education institutions located in Brussels who are less than 26 years old and who are following a first degree are allowed to ask for a repayment of their season ticket. So finally few students are concerned by the measure.
- The price factor is neither the only one, nor the most important factor that can explain mobility behaviours and modal choice of the students.
- Prices are estimated and judged with common sense criteria that are relative. Mobility behaviour is linked to these relative assessments; so is not based on strictly speaking calculation processes.
- Students often speak of a real modal choice when they have a car at least regularly at their disposal. A paradox appears as having a car would also lead them to maximise their investment, and so would lead them to use the car intensively, or even exclusively.
- Free public transport measure is seldom referred to environmental benefits, but rather to practical, personal suitability. This may be explained by the context of the implemented measure, as the analysed measure has not been mainly linked to environmental objectives. Environmental concerns seem however to timidly exist and appear more frequently with reference to the assets of public transport and drawbacks of the car.
- This kind of measure is quite positively seen, above all at first sight. The main negative element could be that of group favouritism, whereas widely reckoned advantages of such a measure are the social equity the measure can provide as to mobility and the improvements of traffic conditions.
- Students who are not benefiting from free season tickets look at the behavioural effects of the measure quite variously but are less enthusiastic than students who are benefiting from the measure. These latter consider having personally observed behavioural changes, above all for those who used to travel with journey tickets. The use of public transport is more regular and is especially more frequent for shorter ways. The free season ticket allows then to "jump" in any public transport. But a free season ticket also often corresponds to a spatial discovery of the town.
- It has to be pointed out that in our case behavioural change appears more particularly because of the obtaining of a season ticket. The free aspect of it encourages getting a season ticket, but this free aspect in itself appears not to constitute the cause of behavioural changes.
- Another point was to examine whether the perception of price could influence the paying of public transport. The fraud problematic constitutes in addition another way of getting information about perception of prices. "Fare dodging" – which is an informal way to ride free – is often observed by the respondents, but is perceived as "bad" by the students doing it, who experience then a cognitive dissonance situation they try to reduce by mentioning "understandable" motives for fare dodging. One significant motive mentioned is indeed the price, but it is not the only one. Another "understandable" reasoning consists in pragmatic monetary and risk calculations.
- The way of considering money is consequently not exclusively based on individual maximization and is linked to personal experience and especially to civility, social and moral concerns, as the questions of sincerity and honesty often underlain the respondents' talks.

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DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT RECORDED INTERVIEWS

Table 1. French-speaking students.

Interview code	First name	Sex (0=men 1=women)	Age	Season ticket STIB (0=no 1=yes)	Date	Transcription
DW_1 (cassettes)	Arnaud	0	19	1	16/02/04	Transcribed
DW_2	Marie-Line	1	22	1	24/02/04	Transcribed
DW_3	Céline	1	22	0	10/03/04	Transcribed
DW_7	François	0	34	0	19/04/04	Transcribed
DW_8	Antoine	0	22	1	20/04/04	Transcribed
DW_10	Fanny	1	21	0	21/04/04	Transcribed
DW_11	Julie	1	22	0	22/04/04	Transcribed
DW_12	Jonathan	0	20	0	23/04/04	Transcribed
DW_13	Renaud	0	19	0	25/04/04	Transcribed
DW_14	Thibault	0	20	0	26/04/04	Transcribed
DW_15	Charlotte	1	23	0	26/04/04	Transcribed
DW_17	Sébastien	0	21	0	28/04/04	
DW_18	Dominique	1	22	0	28/04/04	Transcribed
DW_19	Mariam	1	19	1	04/05/04	Transcribed
DW_31	John	0	24	0	30/11/04	Transcribed
DW_33	Christian	0	19	1	16/12/04	

Table 2. Dutch-speaking students.

Interview code	First name	Sex (0=men 1=women)	Age	Season ticket STIB (0=no 1=yes)	Repay (0=no1 =yes)	Date	Retranscription
DW_4 (a et b)	Femke	1	18	0	0	29/03/04	Transcribed
DW_5	Laura	1	23	0	0	06/04/04	Transcribed
DW_6	Hans	0	21	1	1	08/04/04	Transcribed
DW_9	Kristof	0	19	0	0	21/04/04	Transcribed
DW_16	Wouter	0	31	0	0	27/04/04	Transcribed
DW_20	Gilberte	1	51	1	0	07/05/04	Transcribed
DW_21	Ann	1	22	1	0	11/05/04	Transcribed
DW_22	Daisy	1	22	1	0	11/05/04	
DW_23	Marijn	1	21	1	1	11/05/04	Transcribed
DW_24	Barbara	1	22	1	1	17/05/04	Transcribed
DW_25	Koenraad	0	22	1	1	30/06/04	
DW_26	Salua	1	23	1	1	02/07/04	
DW_27	Ryfka	1	20	1	1	16/11/04	
DW_28 (a et b)	Bruno	0	29	0	0	17/11/04	
DW_29	Bram	0	20	1	1	23 /11/04	
DW_30	Vanessa	1	22	1	1	29/11/04	
DW_32	Benedikt	0	30	0	0	14/12/04	

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