



The choice

An examination of young people's commuting habits

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay was to investigate what factors were significant when choosing your form of transportation when going to work/education among young people aged 20-30.

For this essay I have worked with ten persons that lived in Sweden, Norway and Germany.

I have tested three different theses against the answers of the interviewees to determine if they were plausible or not.

The significant factors were the distance between the subject's home and work/education, the time it took between the subject's home/education, and also the availability of the public transport as well as economic reasons. A factor that was insignificant when choosing your form of transportation was the subject's environmentalism.

Sammanfattning

Denna uppsats syfte var att undersöka vilka faktorer som var signifikanta i valet av transport för unga människor som var mellan 20 och 30 år gamla.

I denna uppsats har jag arbetat med tio subjekt som bor i Sverige, Norge och Tyskland.

Jag har testat tre teser mot de svarandes resultat för att se om de verkade vara rimliga eller inte.

De signifikanta faktorerna var distansen mellan hemmet och jobbet/utbildningen, tiden det tog mellan hemmet och jobbet/utbildningen, lokaltrafikens tillgänglighet samt ekonomiska anledningar. En faktor som däremot inte var signifikant var de svarandes miljömedvetenhet när de använde sin valda transportmetod.

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Background:

In today's globalized society it is possible to travel great distances between your home and the place where you work or get your education. Many travel by vehicles that emit CO₂, which lowers the air quality in the surrounding areas. Also it adds to the effect of global warming.

There are several factors that are significant when making a decision of what kind of transportation that is used.

I, for an instance live about 20km from the university. As you can see it is not really an option to walk or bike there. My decision is to take the bus, despite the fact that it takes about an hour to get there, excluding the time waiting for the bus. As I do not own a car or got a driver's license it is a fairly simple choice for me.

However, between the 25th of January and the first of March I was having an internship at a local factory which was located about 5km from where I live. My decisions varied between walking, biking and taking the bus. Most of the time I took the bus since the road conditions was quite bad, namely it was lots of ice and snow on the road, not to mention it was snowing most of the time. As the road conditions improved I more frequently opted to walk.

Transportation has in the last decade become a prominent issue in the global environmental debate about climate change. Few social norms exist, which decree that individuals should

reduce their car use. In Sweden a majority still drive their cars into work on a daily basis¹. It is also clear that there are costs and sacrifices attached to reducing car use, and alternative transport modes are perceived too time-consuming or troublesome to use. People have often been using cars for a long time and many have developed a habit of using the car.

Purpose, Research question and hypothesis

The purpose of this essay is to investigate young people's commuting habits and investigate what factors are significant when making the choice between using the car or public transportation.

The reasons I have chosen young people that are aged between 20 and 30 as they are, in my opinion and experience, more prone to reflect current changes in attitudes and habits.

My first research question is:

What factors are significant when deciding what form of transportation, (car, bike, public transportation², by foot e.tc.), one uses to get to work/education?

My second research question is the following:

Is there a connection between young people's environmental attitude and the form of transportation that is chosen?

My hypothesis is that the availability of public transportation, the distance and the amount of time it takes to get from ones home to ones work/education are significant factors. Weather conditions could also be a significant factor when deciding between biking and taking the bus for an instance. Also I think there is no connection between the environmental attitudes and the form of transportation that is chosen.

Method and material

The method I have used is an internet survey for collecting data.

¹ cf. Skr, 2002/03:31, 5 referred to in Lundmark et al. 2010.

² By public transportation I mean busses, trains, subways etc.

As a method an internet survey is a cost efficient and fast method of distributing a survey, there are no administrative bills. Greater volumes of data can be gathered from web surveys compared to mail surveys. Data are automatically captured and can be analyzed immediately.

The negative sides of using an internet survey as a method is that there are concerns that internet surveys does not work well in developing countries. It can be difficult to reach target population that has limited access to the internet, like older or the lower income sections of the population. There are security risks when gathering online data, like hacking, that can breach the subject's confidentiality. Loss of data can be incurred through technological failures.³ It is also a little impersonal.

First and foremost a survey shall have a title and explain the purpose of itself. A few other important points to address are how the anonymity is dealt with as well as how you should respond.⁴ Also one must be wary of the length of the survey because it has shown that long surveys receive lower response rates.⁵ Also an explanation to why the questions are asked should be provided. You also have to choose if to funnel the questions or to use an inverted funnel. The last few things that need to be down when writing a survey is that questions should be clear and only give one dimension of answers and all possible answers when the survey is written must be considered. You also should avoid negatives and double negatives as well as that you should not imply that you want a specific answer. Finally unfamiliar words and abbreviation should be explained. The very last thing you should do when writing a survey is to decide if the questions should be open ended or closed.⁶ I will use a content analysis of the choices regarding the themes that I asked questions about.

I have interviewed ten persons. The interviewees that were chosen are people who were not chosen randomly. Four of the interviewees are classmates of the author who were asked to responds to the questions. Out of the seven remaining interviewees three of them are friends with the author who agreed to answer the questions. Out of the remaining three interviewees, two of them are flat mates of a friend of the author. The remaining subject is a friend of one of the respondents.

Limitations

I will not examine what type of car is used and how much fuel it consumes per kilometer. Electrical cars and such are treated the same way as "regular" cars. Gender will not be examined since I think that I lack too many persons to make it credible on an empirical level.

³ Stewart 2003 referred to in Wagner et al. 2012 p 102

⁴ Walonick 2004 referred to in Wagner et al. 2012 p 103

⁵ Goodman 2003 referred to in Wagner et al. 2012 p 104

⁶ Wagner et al. 2012 p 104-108

Theory and previous research

In Gottfridsons “Färdmedelsvalets komplexa förutsättningar” the author drives the thesis that in today’s society the car holds a grand importance. This is mainly because many people needs to use it a on a daily basis to get to work, shopping etc.⁷

The act of car travel is not a neutral act of no consequence because every trip creates a significant number of environmental hazards in the form of emissions and noise. “Kollektivtrafik med människan i centrum” concludes that public transport's share of travel must increase on important societal goals within the environmental field to be achieved⁸. For such a development to be possible, a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the composed conditions of everyday life that sets the framework for commuter transportation choices. Based on this, it is important to increase our knowledge of the conditions that underlie the choice of transport and ultimately reduce our traveling by car.⁹

Simplified it can be said that the means of transport which, from an individual's point of departure is possible for a journey is governed by the travel chain formulation (purpose, destinations, transportation, departure times, routes and costs) and household strategies for traveling devalued. The individual and household's ambition is to find solutions where the result is much as possible consistent with the objectives they have in the area. For actions to be carried out the perception of being meaningful is important. Other factors also impact is that people generally overestimate the benefits of what they have against the usefulness of what they can achieve in a change.¹⁰

The described process, above, is based on the principles that even if individuals and households always consider seeking the best option based on each one's own perspective it also means that the process is not taking into account all possible alternatives that always should be considered and evaluated before a decision is taken. It endeavors to individuals invests in the decision is proportionate to the experience of decision importance. Another aspect of the choice is that a decision is made gradually over time and thereby is a drawn-out process where the effects are not always direct. In the process of evaluating the pros and cons of different options available the tendency is that directly perceived disadvantages will have the greatest impact on the choice¹¹

In “Walk the talk for sustainable everyday life: experiences from eco-village living in Sweden” the author, Hilde Ibsen, drives the thesis that people act more friendly towards the

⁷ Gottfridsons 2007

⁸ Regeringens hemsida.

⁹ Gottfridson 2007. P 11

¹⁰ Gottfridson 2007. P 40

¹¹ Gottfridson 2007. P 41

environment if it becomes a habit, but that you use the car because it is more comfortable. This was especially evident when using the car as a means of transportation during holidays.¹²

Research has approached the environmental problems caused by consumer's attitudes and behaviors towards the automobile. They pointed out the fact that there is a gap between awareness about the problems and practice.¹³ This is also applicable with eco village householders. When it comes to the use of everyday transport with private cars there are differences in both attitudes and behavior between the households.

Not even in Eco villages they have managed to set aside the car. The reason for this is the traveling distance and possibly convenience. But one must note that they used the cars in a better way than most of us by trying to fill the car when they used it.¹⁴

In the book *Auto mania*, the author Tom McArthy drives the thesis that the environmental impacts on automobiles are more varied and substantial than is commonly recognized. He also writes that these impacts have occurred because we have consciously and unconsciously pursued important personal and family agendas that have involved practical and psychological satisfactions offered by automobile ownership and operation. His conclusion is that the previously mentioned satisfaction as well as the significant economic stakes for both producers and consumers has made it difficult to address the environmental impacts. The trouble was never about discovering the impacts, but to do something against them.¹⁵

All of the environmental impacts of the car have occurred in a larger context shaped by consumers and producers.¹⁶

To sum up the whole theory section McArthy drives the thesis that the environmental impacts on automobiles are more varied and substantial than is commonly recognized. Ibsen drives the theses that people will use cars as a travel method because you will need to travel long distances and you can only get that far with the alternatives that are friendlier towards the environment, the other one is that citizens are responsible for the current situation and needs to exercise some responsibility to fix the problem. Gottfridson drives the thesis that in today's society the car holds a grand importance. This is mainly because many people needs to use it a on a daily basis.

¹² Ibsen 2007.

¹³ McArthy 2007 p 247

¹⁴ Ibsen 2007. P 129-145.

¹⁵ Tom McArthy *Auto mania* p XIII.

¹⁶ Tom McArthy *Auto mania* p XIV.

Result

I have interviewed ten persons about their car and environmental habits. For more in depth information about the questions I asked please check the appendix, at page 23 where the exact questions are provided.

“Kalle”:

Kalle is a male 22 year old and is currently studying at the University in Karlstad. He also lives in the city. The subject lacks a car but has a driver’s license. The distance to the university is about 6-8 km and it takes 15 minutes to get there. Since Kalle lacks a car, the alternatives are to walk, bike or use local transportation. Kalle also stated that he considered the bus tickets a little expensive. In this case the benefits of fast transportation outweighed the negative side to it, which is payment of about 20SEK (approximately 2.33¹⁷€) per ticket. While the cheapest way would be to bike or to walk it might be consider a little too far too use it as a viable option, especially if the subject would be walking. The subject uses the bus and walks a lot when going somewhere. Kalle considers himself to be environmentally active and buys organic products, and recycles garbage as well as trying not to over consume.

“Maja”:

The subject is a female 23 year old and lives in Sunne and is studying at the University of Karlstad. Maja has driver’s license and a car and uses it to get the university. Maja thinks that because she only goes to the university a few times per month the benefits of using local traffic would be nonexistent. It takes an hour to get there and the distance is approximately 70 kilometers. Maja has chosen the car because it gets to destination faster and she doesn’t have to adapt herself to the timetables. In this particular case the subject does not consider herself to be environmentally active.

“Kristina”:

The subject is a 22 year old female who lives in Säffle and is currently studying environmental science at Karlstad University. The subject has both a driver’s license and a car and travels to the university by car and by bus. The subject thinks that the local traffic works very well from Säffle to Karlstad but because Kristina lives out in the countryside she has to take the car to Säffle before taking the bus to Karlstad. So out on the countryside the local traffic doesn’t work quite as well. It takes about an hour and a half to get the university and the distance is about 63, 5 km from the subject’s home to the university. It would go faster if the subject took the car but because she’s not at the University that often it works fine to go

¹⁷ Coinmill

by bus. Another reason Kristina has chosen to take the bus is because she finds it relaxing and the fact that you don't have to maintain your focus when you drive compared to when you take the bus. I also take the bus because it goes often from Säffle and from Karlstad. Kristina also stated if she were to start working fulltime in Karlstad she would consider taking the car some days to save some time. Kristina also considers herself environmentally active because she's studying environmental science.

“Hanna”:

The subject is a female 20 year old who lives in Jessheim, Norway. Hanna works as a service employee and is cleaning airplanes. The subject has both a driver's license and a car. The subject travels by car to work and has not really tested the local traffic but feels that it works fine as the busses and trains can be used regularly. It takes 5 minutes to get to the workplace by car and the distance is approximately 7-8 kilometres. The reason that Hanna has chosen the car is because it is comfortable and she does not have to adapt herself to the timetables. Hanna does not consider herself to be environmentally active.

“Jonas”:

The subject is a male 25 year old who lives in Bergen, Norway. Jonas is working as an engineer in the gas-/and oil sector. Jonas has driver's license and a car available for use if he wants to. The reason for this is because Jonas and his friends bought a car together. As Jonas does not own his own car he always takes the bus. Jonas thinks that the local traffic in Bergen works very well and goes at regular hours and to most places in town and right outside town. It takes about 25 minutes to get to work at normal hours. But at peak hours, especially in the afternoon it can take up to 45 minutes to get home. The subject's workplace is about 15 km south of Bergen. Jonas thinks that using the bus is the cheapest and easiest way to get around and if he would use the car he would have to pay toll and most presumably would probably be stuck in traffic a lot, since the buses have their own lanes at some places, this way of travelling is more efficient for Jonas. Jonas does not consider himself environmentally active, despite taking the bus instead of the car, as it is for comfortable and economic reasons. The subject also feels that his way of living overall is not considered environmentally active.

“Natalie”:

The subject is a female 28 year old who lives in Bergen, Norway and is currently Studying and working. Natalie has neither a driver's license nor a car. The subject uses Bybanen, which is the name of the tram in Bergen. It had one line to begin with, going from Bergen city center to Nesttun. They have recently built another line, with the starting date in June, going from the city center to Lagunen shopping center. The subject thinks that the local traffic is working very well as they have the previously mentioned Bybanen and buses going everywhere and

often in Bergen and the places nearby. It takes approximately 10 minutes from Bergen city center to her stop, Kronstad. Natalie is not sure about the distance but guesses it would be about 3-4 km. Natalie finds that the usage of Bybanen is the easiest and fastest way of transportation to work. The reason for this is since it's a tram it's not depending on traffic and you can always be sure on the time of arrival. Bergen is a busy city and at peak hours there is a lot of traffic in town, which means that going by buses would be unreliable in comparison. Natalie uses this method of transportation for time reasons, and not because of an environmental thinking. So when it comes to transportation the subject feels she is not environmentally active but the subject tries to be environmentally active, mostly regarding waste approach and buying fair-trade goods when possible.

“Anders”:

The subject is a male 24 year old and lives in Southern Germany 40 km from Stuttgart approximately. Anders is currently studying business and economics at a University in Stuttgart and working part time as a freelance journalist and has both a driver's license and owns a car. Anders drives by car to the University. Anders lives in a small village which is located close to the 'Autobahn' (highway) it only takes him about 30-35 minutes by car to get to University.

When asked about how the local traffic works the subject had the following to say in the matter:

“Well, it depends. In the big cities the local traffic is quite good and used by the broad mass of people. Driving by car into the cities is mostly not a good option as almost every day you end up in a traffic jam and parking is quite expensive. Currently those big cities try to establish car sharing models as another option to busses, subway, etc. which are accepted pretty well. But in smaller cities or in villages the local traffic can only be described as poor. For example I live in a small village about ten kilometers far from the next city where my school was located. It took me 35 minutes each day to go there by bus (10km ride!). So villages and even the smaller cities are poorly connected to the big cities where most of the people work. Therefore lots of people have no other option than driving by car.”

The subject feels he has to drive by car, as it is both cheaper, and faster to use. If Anders would take local transport to the University it would take him around 3 hours to get there. He would need to change the bus, train and subway four times. Anders would not consider himself environmentally active in terms of attending protests, buying only healthy food, not driving by car, etc. But he cares about the environment and tries to avoid wasting energy, food and gas wherever he can. Anders also stated that if there was a better local transport to his University he would take it but unfortunately it is still not possible. But when Anders has to do shopping or need to get somewhere close to my home he prefers to walk or ride my bike instead of driving by car.

“Marie”:

The subject is a female 27 year old and lives in Cologne, Germany and is working as an economist lawyer in Inhouse Consulting. Marie has both a car and a driver’s license and uses the car to get to work. In General Marie thinks that the local traffic works quite well. Everything is well connected. Unfortunately her work place is a 20 minute walk away from the next station so it takes quite long to get there. In the morning it takes 20-25 minutes to get to work by car, and in the afternoon 30-45 Minutes. The distance between the subject’s home and workplace is approximately 25 kilometers. Marie uses the car because; although everything is good connected getting to work by train would take over 1, 5 hours. The subject does not really consider herself to environmentally active.

“Jens”:

The subject is a female 24 year old who lives in Campus/Karlstad currently as an exchange student but usually lives in Hannover Germany. Jens is currently studying and has a driver’s license but does not own car. In Karlstad the subject travels by foot / bus, usually and in Hannover the subject uses the Subway. Jens thinks that the local traffic works well in Karlstad and Hannover, however Karlstad is not that big so the busses do not drive as often as in Hannover, but the subject feels that it’s okay. In Karlstad it takes 10 minutes to walk from the subject’s home and in Hannover 1 hour with the subway. The distance by car to the university in Hannover is 14 kilometers. In Karlstad the subject walks because it is easy and close and in Hannover using the subway is free because it is included within study fees. The subject does not really consider him/herself environmentally active.

“Mustermann”:

The subject is a female 23 year old who lives in Campus/Karlstad currently as an exchange student but usually lives in Oppenheim near Frankfurt in Germany. Mustermann is currently studying and working as student assistant in the field of Human Resources. Mustermann has a driver’s license but does not own car. The subject travels by train and bus in Oppenheim and walks in Karlstad. When asked how the local traffic works he stated the following: “In Karlstad it is more often than in my small hometown” With it I presume Mustermann meant the buses. In Karlstad takes 10 minutes to the university and in Oppenheim 21 minutes by train plus 20 by bus. Mustermann walks to the University in Karlstad because it is very close, but in Germany it would not possible to walk and also the subject can take the bus/train for free because of his/her student ticket. The subject does not really consider him/herself environmentally active.

General observations:

A large majority of the people who were interviewed had a driver's licenses. One possible explanation of that is that getting a driver's license is part of the cultural norm, and that in one point or another you are going to need a car, especially if you live in the countryside like some of the respondents do. There is also the fact that you can get your license when you are 18 in Sweden, 17 in Germany and 16 in Norway. As all respondents are at least 20 years old it is quite reasonable that almost everyone's got a license.

The average transportation distance was 27 kilometers.

Five of the interviewees feel that the local traffic works well whilst the other five of the interviewees feels the opposite.

The problems with the local transportation that the interviewees stated was that the rides weren't frequent enough, there were too few stops, they were poorly connected to the big cities where most of the people work, going by buses would be unreliable in comparison with the tram, the local traffic doesn't work as well in the countryside compared to the cities and that the bus tickets were little expensive. The positive aspects with the local transportation that the interviewees mentioned were that it was free, the bus rides were frequent, you could go to adjacent places often, the tram was not depending on traffic and is reliable in comparison to buses, the bus is the cheapest and easiest way to get around and it is also quite fast. This can be explained by the fact that some of the interviewees live on the countryside while some of them live more urban.

Discussion and Conclusions

The theses that I have used as a theoretical background are McArthys thesis that the environmental impacts on automobiles are more varied and substantial than is commonly recognized. Ergo he attributes the problems to a lack of knowledge.¹⁸

I feel that almost all the interviewees are aware of the problems with using cars but they do not have a real choice in the matter. Of course one can always improve their method of transportation from an environmental point of view. But if we are to be rational and not walk thirty kilometers every morning I cannot help but wonder where is the limit? At what point is it reasonable to take the bus instead of biking? Everyone has their own personal preference. Naturally I do not agree with everyone's choices but for the most part I do. To sum it up I think that the interviewees are aware of the problems and are doing as much as is reasonably requested by them for the most part.

I have also used a thesis from Ibsen which states that people will use cars as a travel method because they will need to travel long distances and it is only possible get that far with the alternatives that are friendlier towards the environment. I should also mention that people use the car for convenience reasons, and that it is not merely about distance.¹⁹

This thesis has, according to me, been proven to be true. For the most part that is. I have elaborated a bit more on this in the previous section.

The last thesis I have is Gottfridsons which is that in today's society the car holds a grand importance. This is mainly because many people needs to use it a on a daily basis.²⁰

I find this thesis to hold some truth. While it is true that the interviewees have to travel an average of 27 kilometers per day, they do not have to use the car and they are not using it at all in some cases. This can be explained by looking at the age of the interviewees. I think it is reasonable to claim that if the interviewees were older it is likely they would have to use the car more because eventually most people settle down and starts a family. With a family everyone needs to go somewhere in the morning. A kid needs to get to his school which is located around, say 25 kilometers from the parent's workplace. When you look at it from that perspective you can understand why they opt to use the car instead of another form of transportation.

My own hypothesis were that that the availability of public transportation, the distance and the amount of time it takes to get from ones home to ones work/education are significant

¹⁸ McCarthy 2007

¹⁹ Ibsen 2007

²⁰ Gottfridsson 2007

factors. Weather conditions could also be a significant factor when deciding between biking and taking the bus for an instance.

The availability of public transportation, the distance and the amount of time it takes to get from ones home to ones work/education are quite clearly proven to be significant factors.

However, none of the interviewees mentioned weather conditions as a factor, which leads me to believe that it could be a factor during certain seasons only and not broadly throughout the year. That or I might have overestimated its significance as a factor. The result has shown quite clearly that for young people environmentalism is not a determinant factor when it comes down to choosing between various methods of transportation. That as well as that in the eco village Tuggelite, they were unable to completely set aside the car, leads me to the conclusion that the commuting issue should be treated differently than other environmental problems.

The reasons that four of the interviewees choose the car was because of the distance between the subject's homes and work/education was very far and it would take very long to get to the point of destination. Out of these four interviewees one of them felt that the local transportation was working well. One of them thought that the local transportation worked very poor. The two others were a bit ambiguous with their answers. It is hard to decide whether they think it works or not. Obviously they think it had some flaws, but on the whole?

Conclusions: If more people are to start using public transportation instead of the car the platform for it will need to improve. But for those who live very far away from their work/education, I'm uncertain whether any improvement on the public transportation will make them go by busses instead of cars because I'm not sure if it's economically sustainable to have busses go out to those that live in the countryside as often as it is preferred.

The reasons that six of the interviewees choose local transport instead of the car were that they lack a car and the alternatives are to walk bike or use local transportation. One of the interviewees also finds it relaxing and appoints it to the fact that you don't have to maintain your focus when you drive compared to when you take the bus. Using the bus is the cheapest and easiest way to get around and if he would use the car he would have to pay toll and most presumably would probably be stuck in traffic more often than with the busses, since the busses have their own lanes at some places, this way of travelling is more efficient is the easiest and fastest way of transportation to work. The reason for this is since it's a tram it's not depending on traffic and you can always be sure on the time of arrival. The subject walks because it is easy and close and in Hannover using the subway is free because it is included within study fees. walks to the University in Karlstad because it is very close, but in Germany it would not possible to walk and also the subject can take the bus/train for free because of his/her student ticket.

Conclusions: Everyone had their own reasons for using local transports instead of the car. They varied greatly, but if I have to find a common ground somewhere I have to say it is the economic reasons. It is also worth noting that two of the interviewees used the exact same reasoning for their choice of transportation which varied between car and bus.

Ultimately this leads me to the conclusion that the only thing that needs to be done is to break the habit of using the car. That's also the most difficult thing. I don't think that you can compare the issues with cars with other unsustainable behavior that have been dealt with. With bottles for an example you get a very small amount of money each time you recycle them. With the car, however, you would save some money for gasoline purchases, or reduced electrical bills if the car is electrical. You could argue that both of them are long term rewards. I wouldn't disagree with that, but in a way I think that since you do not get money directly, but rather indirectly when stopping to use the car, you forego the reward system in the brain. To continue to stop using the car, rewards could be established to give a push to the ones who are trying to stop.

To sum up, the significant factors, for deciding between car and public transportation are distance, time, availability and economic reasons.

Factors which were investigated but deemed not to be significant were the following: Different attitudes towards the environment did not have effects on the choice of transportation.

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Appendix

Questions asked to the interviewees:

1. How old are you?
2. In what city do you live?
3. What are you currently doing for living?
4. Do you have a driver's license and a car?
5. How do you get to your workplace/education?
6. In your opinion, how does the local traffic work where you live? With local traffic I mean buses, trains, subway etc.
7. Approximately how long time does it take for you to get to your workplace/education with your chosen method of transportation?
8. Why do you use your chosen method to get to work/education instead of other methods? Also why do you use your chosen method of transportation?
9. Do you consider yourself to be environmentally active in any way? If the answer is yes, please elaborate.