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# Uses of Collaborative Platforms, a Comprehensive Study *The Case of Blablacar*

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# Summary

1. What is an ideal type ?
2. 3 kinds of ideal types for Blablacar
3. Main results from an economical and statistical study
4. An alternative proposal of model based on comprehensive sociology
5. Back to theory

# Context

- The « analogy » research programme for IMT Atlantique computer science students
- Goal : discover Weberian sociology through Blabacar's case and make a comparison with a « hard science » model
- T. de Swarte's research goal : start a comparison between quantitative economics and comprehensive sociology, especially « ideal type » in the field of digital platforms

# What is an ideal type ?

- The ideal type is an abstraction that considers the fundamental properties of a social phenomenon in order to allow a relevant conceptualization.
- "An ideal type is formed by the one-sided **accentuation** of one or more points of view and by the **synthesis** of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those onesidedly emphasized viewpoints into a **unified analytical construct**...[Weber, 1904]"

# The English « ideal type » of Blablacar users viewed by Blablacar itself

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hKH4zmTX2U>
- A mix of spontaneous sociology and advertisement

# The « ideal type » no 1 : Blablacar as it would like to be considered by its users

- Money saving
- Good for environment,
- Fun
- Usability of the application,
- Examples of users,
- Sharing of expenses,
- Chat onboard,
- Rating of members of the community.

# Ideal type 2 : the utilitarian user of Blablacar (from our interviews)

- *BlaBlaCar is used to look for inexpensive trips or even profitability on the trip.*
- *The price comparison between train and carpool encourages this category to opt for carpool because it is cheaper.*
- *Flexibility while planes and trains are more and more rigid in terms of pricing*

# Ideal type 3 based on friendliness, intimacy and ecology (interviews)

- Friendliness :
  - is as important than the monetary gain.
  - This friendliness allows the user to meet people he would not meet in his everyday life.
- Intimacy
  - This allows him to confide more often than with his friends, because knowing that he will not see them again invites him to confide more intimately.
- Ecology
  - The ecological aspect is evoked since carpool increases the filling of cars, thus potentially reducing the number of cars on the roads and therefore pollution.



# Main results from Pénard & al. (2018)

- The probability of being a driver or passenger decreases with age.
- Women are less likely to offer trips on a carpooling platform.
- The level of education and income has no effect on the decision to be a driver/offeror.
- On the demand side, comfortable incomes stimulate the use of carpooling platforms.
- Confidence and family and friends have a positive effect on carpooling on both the driver and passenger sides.

# Pénard's & al. work interest and limits

- Interest :
  - Economics and statistics,
  - Measurement,
  - « Photography » of users at time « t »
  - Risks of social eviction effects
- Limits
  - Nothing on :
    - Sustainable environment
    - Sociability : fun and chats onboard
    - Future of platforms

# Comparison of results : Penard & al. vs de Swarte & al.

- The statistical model used in Penard's study is based on a large number of testimonials to extract a model.
  - Such a statistical model applied to the use of collaborative platforms does not make possible to understand the deep reasons pushing a person to become a user of these platforms.
- Our ideal type model, on the other hand, is based on a limited number of qualitative case studies in order to build a comprehensive model.
  - It is therefore not ideally suited to categorize a population, because representativeness is neither a goal nor ensured.
  - It is more adapted to theorize and problematize uses, in order to obtain a concept as close as possible to reality.

# The future of Blablacar in 2029

- All interviewees seem to be in agreement that carpooling is expected to increase in the coming years :
  - Entering the new manners of the world
  - Ecologically interesting
  - Financially interesting
  - Convenient advantage (fewer traffic jams in cities)
  - Social interests
- Carpooling would, in the opinion of the interviewees, be developed by increasing the number of users of Blablacar, or at least by expanding carpooling services on the Internet

# Back to theory : is Reductionism relevant to understand Collaborative Platforms ?

- Could be
  - Progress realized in applied microeconomics since Walras
  - The enormous amounts of money spent to obtain « big » datas necessarily product results that could have a scientific interest.
- Is not
  - Marx as a philosopher AND an economist who is the thinker of China's strenght and of chinese politics of platforms
  - Work of Piketty showing that Economics make sense only if connected with History and Sociology
  - Nobel Prize Jean Tirole has not supported a French project to enlarge the research field of Economics
  - Microeconomics and statistics of collaborative platforms fail to fully interpret major drivers of their development : environment, need for sociability, usability,...

# Which Intellectual tools for « uses of collaborative platforms »

- Uses

- User studies, which appeared in the 1980s, have most often been financed by telecommunications operators (Boullier, 2016)>>>>>scientific bias
- These studies have underestimated the emergence of intelligent terminals and collaborative uses while open interviews did estimate (de Swarte, 2014)

- Which economics of collaborative platforms ?

- The “*Science of Economics*” is axiologically not “equipped” to analyze collaboration because it is focused on the study of competition
- Platforms as bifaces markets : a substitute for classical market mechanisms (Alain Tirole) but not really an answer to the question of

# Blablacar in Russia

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwT9B9trfSs>

# Conclusion, limits and future research

- Comprehensive sociology is really useful to have a deep understanding of the uses of collaborative platforms today and in the future.
- Economics fail to interpret environmental and sociability challenges
- Limits
  - Low number of interviews
  - Comprehensive analysis seems less « scientific » than big data.
- Future research : ethics and socio-economics of collaborative platforms integrating the quantitative dimension