



The "Macron buses," a low-cost mode of transportation put to the test of sustainability and desirability

Ongoing research

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Allowing everyone to travel easily while simultaneously limiting CO² emissions: that was the goal of Macron's 2015 law liberalizing the market of intercity buses. But what has actually come of it? This research will focus on understanding how this new market fits into the transportation system, who the users of the Macron buses are - what are their motives, their practices, their representations, their experiences - and to what extent value for money is crucial in their use and sustainability. The challenge: identifying to what extent this offer of low-cost transport can be a part of the transition towards sustainable and desired lifestyles.

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In August 2015, the Macron law liberalized the market of intercity bus travel, which was previously permitted only as part of international travel. The introduction of this new low-cost mode of transportation was supposed to benefit those on lower incomes, allowing them to travel more affordably. Officials also emphasised the fact that the buses were a low-emissions mode of transport so long as they ran at at least 38% capacity, a level that was achieved within the first few months of operation. The image conveyed by officials was therefore a very positive one.

And yet today, this market, which is progressively being concentrated within the hands of a few companies - there were five major operators in 2016 and only three today - is still not profitable. In this context, it may be that the low prices, which formed one of the main arguments for this low-cost mode of transport, are unsustainable in the long term. Yet of course, higher prices could jeopardize the whole system: indeed, would the people who travel on the Macron buses continue to take them if prices were to increase? Would the quality of the service or even the practicality of the proposed destinations retain customers? And if so, under what conditions? The social model of the Macron buses, supposed to benefit the less wealthy members of society, could be undermined by a price increase. The resulting loss of customers could in turn threaten the financial health of the companies running Macron buses and also negate their environmental advantage if the number of passengers falls too much.

While price increases are an issue, the goal of maintaining low prices is not without ambiguities either with regards to the sustainability and desirability of the Macron buses. Despite the laudable intention of providing the worse off with affordable mobility options, some have called out the Macron buses for relegating the poor to a more uncomfortable, slower and less convenient mobility than trains, which remain more expensive. In addition, the development of a new range of low-cost travel options enables even more trips, which is questionable from an environmental standpoint even if it may be socially desirable. Finally, while this evolution in mobility practices may be experienced in a positive way and respond to people's aspirations, it can also feed into a system of mobility-related constraints and pressures - such as the need to be mobile to find and hold onto work - that the Macron buses would thereby be contributing to.

The research therefore aims to analyze these tensions between the system's durability and desirability, between its profitability and sustainability, by directly interviewing its users. Who are the passengers of the Macron buses? What are their mobility habits? Why do they take the bus? What is their experience of travelling on these buses? What are their representations of their own mobility? Have their lifestyles changed with the use of these buses? Under what conditions would they continue using these buses? What effect would a price increase have on their travel choices? Is the quality of service sufficiently satisfying for them to continue traveling by bus if the prices increased? To what extent can the evolution of their habits undermine the entire system?

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The research project, which is conducted by a group of Masters students in planning and urbanism at the University Paris I, thus focuses on the following problematic:

How can the practices, representations and experiences of users support or undermine the use of the Macron buses, as a low-cost mobility system, in the transition towards sustainable and desirable lifestyles? To what extent is the issue of price and delivered service crucial in the continuation of passenger habits and thus in the sustainability of the system? What proposals could we make for this mode of transport to fit in the transition towards desired and sustainable lifestyles?

Mobility

Broadly, the word mobility can be defined as the intention to move and the realization of this movement in geographical space, implying a social change.

More

Lifestyle

A lifestyle is a composition of daily activities and experiences that give sense and meaning to the life of a person or a group in time and space.

More

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Disciplines : **Social sciences**, **Urban studies**

Transport mode(s) : **Coach**

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² <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/mobility-450>

³ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/lifestyle-1756>

⁴ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/lifestyles>

⁵ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/mobility-transition>

⁶ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/sustainable-development>

⁷ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/disciplines/sciences-sociales>

⁸ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/disciplines/urbanisme-architecture-et-paysagisme>

⁹ <http://en.forumviesmobiles.org/modes-transports/car>