Research in Transportation Economics xxx (xxxx) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Research in Transportation Economics

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/retrec

Editorial

Social interactions and travel behaviour

This special issue presents six papers that explore the potential of explicit accounting social interactions in the understanding of people's travel behaviour. The papers use a variety of applications that illustrate the possibilities of these perspectives as a tool to understand travel behavior.

Pike and Lubell explore how social influence can be a relevant factor to predict mode choice, conditioned by commuting distance and the traveller's context. Their conceptual model complements and extends traditional individual-based perspectives, by including the mediating role of social influence on distance and mode choice.

The important topic role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is explored by Konrad and Wittowsky, who focus on the reinforcing role of ICTs and face-to-face interaction, with a focus on younger generations and their different activity and travel patterns related with social interaction. This approach helps to unveil and further understand the complex relationship between virtual and physical mobility, remarking that the motivation for key travel purposes is social, and the need for analyzing from a social interaction perspective. This matter is especially important considering the relevance of virtual communication in current relationships, and the differences they find on social interaction in time and space between different age cohorts.

Hyun Lee and Goulias present an interpersonal focus to understand time-space allocation and travel, where the number of people with who and for whom people interacted in a day is a key dimension to explain the amount of activity and travel time they spend daily. In this way, these authors expand traditional time use perspectives in travel behavior, by explicating time allocation, travel patterns, and accessibility in an integrated way with the social dimension of daily activities.

In a similar perspective, van den Berg and collaborators focus their analysis on the role of socio-demographics, mobility characteristics, and lifecycle events in face-to-face and ICT interaction. Their approach extends traditional perspectives, by explicitly incorporating a life course approach to understand people's social activities, in an effort towards understanding how people's longer term context plays a role in their dynamic behavior.

Another key question that requires further understanding, is the role of transportation on people's ability to build and maintain spatially diverse social networks. Chua and collaborators explore this question linking the social capital framework with other dimensions taken from the travel literature. Their evidence suggest how this approach can be a useful way to understand people's spatial and temporal processes on longer time spans.

Finally, and complementarily with the previous papers, Levy and collaborators focus on route choice. Although this is topic widely studied in other contexts, the authors employ a novel approach to incorporate social influence on route choice, revisiting game theoretic applications in network modeling to incorporate explicitly the social dimension of travel behavior.

Overall, these six papers also present a variety of data collection and analysis methods. Some of them, rely on tailored, in-depth data collection efforts such as personal (egocentric networks), retrospective social contact questions, and novel dimensions such as with whom and for with activities were conducted. Paper and pencil and online surveys are complemented with agent-based approaches, remarking the diversity of approaches needed to understand social interactions. Similarly, the methods of analysis range from statistical and econometric modeling to other tools such as simulation and geospatial analysis. Overall, the papers serve as a good example to suggest that studying the social dimension on travel behavior constitute a very useful approach to understand the complexity of not only current transport-related challenges, but also future mobility scenarios.

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.retrec.2018.05.008