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► **To cite this version:**

Sophie Hasiak, Fabrice Hasiak. Living near a railway station : a well-reasoned choice for inhabitants ?. 5th Transport Research Arena, TRA, Apr 2014, Paris, France. hal-04373951

HAL Id: hal-04373951

<https://hal.science/hal-04373951>

Submitted on 9 Jan 2024

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Living near a railway station : a well-reasoned choice for inhabitants ?

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"Au 1er janvier 2014, les 8 CETE, le Certu, le Cetmef et le Sétra fusionnent pour donner naissance au Cerema : centre d'études et d'expertise sur les risques, l'environnement, la mobilité et l'aménagement."

Abstract

In France, the enhancement of the railway transport system is at the heart of land use planning policies. Policymakers consider that an urbanization policy centered both on and around the railway network may incite people who live near a railway station to take the train more often. However, does the average man hold the same reasoning as policymakers?

Based on a sociological survey carried out in a peri-urban town of the urban area of Lille, this paper examines the links between individuals and their local railway station. At first, it is based on a qualitative analysis of the railway station factor into the residential choice made by the respondents. Then, it focuses on the issues of mobility behaviors of people who live near a rail station by comparing the use of regional railway services with the importance of the station criterion.

Keywords: residential choice; railway station; railway station area; mobility; train; behaviour

Résumé

En France, la valorisation du système ferroviaire pour le développement urbain est au cœur des politiques d'aménagement du territoire. Les décideurs politiques considèrent qu'une politique d'urbanisation orientée vers le rail devrait amener les individus résidant dans les quartiers de gare à recourir davantage au train. Pour autant, l'individu raisonne-t-il comme les décideurs politiques ?

A partir d'une enquête sociologique menée sur une commune périurbaine de la métropole lilloise, cet article se propose de qualifier les relations existantes entre individu et gare. Dans un premier temps, il propose une analyse qualitative de la place de la gare ferroviaire dans les stratégies résidentielles déclarées par les individus. Puis, dans un deuxième temps, il aborde la question des comportements de mobilité de ces individus vivant à proximité de la gare en confrontant la place de gare dans les stratégies résidentielles et la pratique du train.

Mots-clé: choix résidentiel; gare ferroviaire; quartier de gare; mobilité; train; comportement

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1. Introduction : towards a planning policy centered both on and around the railway network in France

Considering the challenges of daily mobility, of increasing road congestion and control of greenhouse gas emissions, with the Grenelle laws, the French state has encouraged local actors to look for better coherence between sectoral policies of urban planning, land development and transport, especially the railway network. The enhancement of the railway transport system is at the heart of planning policies whatever the scale (urban, peri-urban, rural or national scale). The railway station is considered as a node at the interface between the transport supply and the land territory. So that, since more than a decade, it has become the main focus in urban planning discussions. And the station is considered as an area where the concept of “urbanity” could be strengthened. According to Kokoreff (2000), the notion of railway station has evolved from a « monofunctional area vision » (transit and mobility space) to a « multifunctional vision » that includes the « urbanity of spaces ».

This new approach invites local actors to focus on the link between the railway station and the area surrounding. The enhancement of the railway system takes the form of a re-conquest of railway districts. The result is the definition of new urban development strategies around rail links in order to control urban sprawl, and at the very least to improve the quality of urban forms. Besides, the transport aims are also to improve the accessibility of railway stations and to encourage their use. This last item means that politicians presume that people who live near a station will be more inclined to take the train.

This paper analyses the potential impact of a railway service on the residential choice made by people who live near a station in a peri-urban area. The aim is to assess the importance of the railway station criterion in the preferences or motivations given by the respondents among their choice arguments, including those related to the property and its surroundings. At first, the paper outlines the state of scientific knowledge about the residential strategies of people. It then explains the methodological approach to build the information gathering. The first results about the evaluation of the link between railway area and use of rail services are approached in two ways. The first aims to determine whether living near a railway station is a strategic choice or not. The second suggests a typology of individual behaviours according to their relationship with the station and its use.

2. Current state of scientific knowledge of French residential strategies

Talking about residential strategy implies that individuals are able to make a free and rational choice based on their own decision-making process. This concept also implies that households have some leeway even if the scope of possibilities may be reduced (Rérat, 2012).

In the general discourse, the residential choice may be explained by personal criteria based on individual characteristics and residential preferences. However, this choice is not solely the result of households aspirations, it is also a choice dictated by a number of constraints (Bonvalet, Duireau, 2000; Brun, Bonvalet, 2002; Authier and al., 2010).

Many research studies have focused on the issue of understanding the factors, which determine the residential mobility (Bonvalet and Fribourg, 1990; Hirschhorn and Berthelot, 1996; Bonnin and De Villanova, 1999, mentioned in Dodier, 2009). The results concur to highlight a certain complexity of these factors. Dodier (2009) emphasizes that the actual residential location of households results from a compromise between their needs (especially linked to a family composition), their “multi-faceted” aspirations (ownership, type and size of housing, location, living environment, quality of life), which are a function of the life cycle, and some constraints (budget, constraint associated to the real estate market : prices and supply). Globally, the residential choice is “only one of the elements of the life choices which households make, among other choices such as employment, family relationships, spatial practices” (Dodier, 2009).

The different analyses highlight the multiplicity of declarative factors, which could have an effect on residential choices. Financial factors, family criteria, professional concerns, spatial preferences as well as social factors all affect the choice of residence. Dodier (2009) emphasizes that the life trajectory is as important as social factors.

Consequently, how could we qualify the importance of the location factor in the choice process? Madoré and al. (2003) raise the difficulty to single out a spatial dimension in the residential strategy. According to Brun (1990,

mentioned in Madoré) “the choice of location is never, so to speak, a goal as such, but it is a way to reach a compromise between professional, patrimonial and family stakes”. So, at some point in their life cycle, some households choose to go and live in a peri-urban area. For more than two decades, the sudden rise of land and real estate prices has had a marked effect on the peri-urban enhancement process. But should the peri-urban residential choice correspond either to a transitional step of the life cycle, or to a stable and lasting lifestyle choice? The exploration of this topic is far from over so that it is difficult to provide appropriate responses. By observing the peri-urban area migrations, Dodier (2009) suggests the idea of a settlement of some households in the peri-urban area, which could be questioned according to life cycles and job market instability.

According to several sociological surveys about the issue of peri-urban residential choice (Urbanism Agency of Angers, 2013; Dodier, 2009; Baudelle, 2004), the main arguments to justify this choice depend on several dimensions, such as the wish to become an owner with acceptable economic conditions, to have both a pleasant living environment and a preserved rural environment, the proximity of the conurbation, and at the same time the wish to escape city life, the proximity of family members and a kind of re-enactment of their past (peri-urban childhood model).

The decision to live in a peri-urban area but not so far from the urban area, implies the idea that one can easily access the urban centre within acceptable travel times. This approach of the urban city proximity and therefore of its employment market, services on offer and shops, echoes the modal accessibility issue (car accessibility, public transport accessibility). So, is the decision to live in a peri-urban town with a rail connexion a strategic choice for people? Our research is based on the assumption that nowadays, the presence of a railway station in a peri-urban town of an important conurbation is not a major determining factor in individual residential choices. And so the challenge of a policy centered both on and around the rail network is to focus on how to reverse this trend.

3. The methodology of our exploratory work

Analyzing whether the "station" criterion is part of the residential strategy of households living near a station in a peri-urban town led us to use a specific survey methodology which is not built from an explicit question such as : “did the railway station influence your choice?”. Indeed, a directive or semi-directive approach would inevitably have led respondents to give an opinion about this criterion, since it is precisely one of the points covered in the investigation. On the contrary, with an open question, they would probably not mention this element automatically.

The aim is to study behaviors, views spontaneously expressed, based on the life experience of the respondents, their logic and their way of thinking. The challenge is then to work on inhabitants' words through a method of a qualitative survey. The focus group approach was dismissed because it could potentially affect the views of some of the respondents who might have been influenced by the words of others. The survey choice was made on the basis of semi-structured individual interviews. The principle is to allow the respondents to speak freely on three main topics. Two of them are analyzed in this paper : on the one hand, there is the issue of residential choices introduced by an open question in order to talk about the last two dwellings. This way of approaching the issue of residential strategies highlights the argumentation of each individual based on his/her own experience. Thus, the analysis scale focuses on the elements highlighted by individuals, rather than their initial expectations. On the other hand, the topic of the actual perception of the rail mode is brought into the discussion through the evocation of daily practices of travels. The third topic of the survey (not mentioned in this paper) relates to the perception of the station area which is expressed by inhabitants.

As it is a qualitative study, the objective was not to achieve representativeness of the views expressed, but to explore the topic of the link between station area and railway services use by making sure that a wide range of "behaviors" and "views" was taken into account. The survey sample was formed from several methods of recruitment because of a difficulty to mobilize people for a face-to-face survey over a period of about an hour. No prior selection criteria relating to individuals was made, however the recruitment phase enabled us to obtain a varied sample of men and women that integrates all generations in age to make a residential choice. In total, 28 persons were interviewed (Fig. 1).

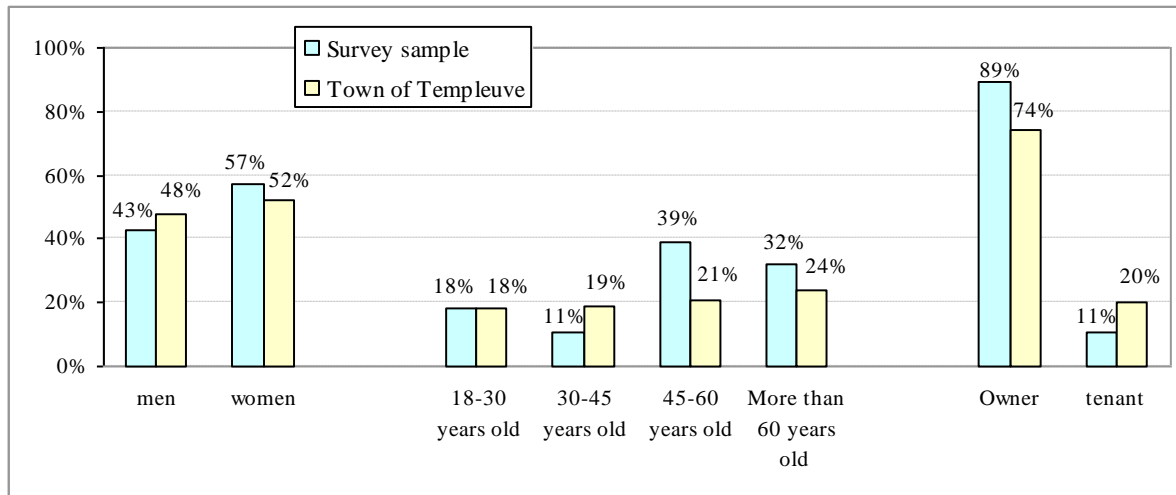


Fig. 1. Main characteristics of the survey sample

4. The field of study : the station area of Templeuve

4.1. Peri-urban area and railway station in France

The aim of our work is to explain to what extent a policy built on the re-conquest of peri-urban railway station areas may contribute to strengthen the use of railway services. So we chose a railway station located in a periurban area of an important conurbation. Before presenting our field of study, we explain the main concepts that structure our spatial scale of analysis : the peri-urban area and the station area.

The French peri-urban area is generally explained on the basis of the definition of INSEE, the French national institute of statistics. It is based on the proportion of working population who works in the central urban centre and who lives outside. However, in this paper, we prefer to rest on the qualitative definition of Chapuis (1995), reflecting the notion of a territory of transition between two different areas. The French peri-urban area can be identified as an half-urban and half-rural territory, “an intermediary area that surrounds almost all urban areas”. Its rural character is given by landscapes of fields, cultivated lands, meadows and a lower population density. But it is also a “functional urban space”, in the sense that a large majority of the inhabitants work, purchase and use services in the urban area (Chapuis, 1995).

The station area is difficult to define as there is a variety of districts according to their geographic location and their territorial attractiveness. The thinking on the enhancement of these areas is mainly carried out within a perimeter defined by a ring around the station. But the distances used can range from 500 meters to over 1km with the objective to reflect the theoretical conditions of walkability (from 6 minutes to a quarter of an hour). Kokoreff (2000) suggests going beyond the notion of perimeter surrounding the station because he considers the approach overly simplistic. He talks about the station as a “hybrid territory”, broader and more complex than a simple sector of town. The urbanity of this territory “results from the combination of various poles (transport, shops, housing), and from the mixing of heterogeneous people”. Consequently, it is a “territory covering different entities (train station, shops, parking, ...) which becomes socially consistent with the social players’ action and with the practices and representations that characterize the place”. This specific vision of the station area best reflects our way of thinking.

4.2. Main characteristics of the town of Templeuve

The town of Templeuve is located in the south-east of the urban area of Lille (a millionaire conurbation in the north of France), about 15km from the city of Lille. It is connected to the urban centre by a dense road network (motorways and secondary roads) and the regional rail network (Fig. 2 (a)).

It is a town in the peri-urban area of Lille with a lot of individual dwellings (detached or semi-detached houses). There are approximately 5.800 inhabitants and the population density is low (371 inhabitants per km², against nearly 17.700 on average in the metropolitan area of Lille). As observable in any periurban town, the urban form is diffuse and is structured along the existing road network. One can note an important part of green areas and farmland. The area around the station includes only 16% of dwellings within a perimeter of 500 meters.

The peri-urban inhabitants of Templeuve are characterized by a high residential stability with an average of 22 years spent in the dwelling for owners and nine years for tenants. According to a household travel survey carried out in 2006, 50% of these households used to live in the urban area of Lille, while a part of 26% decided to stay in Templeuve.

17% of the working population live and work in Templeuve. The other main workplace (cities of Lille : 19%, Villeneuve d'Ascq : 11% and Lesquin : 15%) are located in an area of 15 kilometers around Templeuve. And so, nearly three-quarters of the working population work in a city served by train regional services. However, the presence of a rail station does not mean that they have a relevant rail modal alternative to go to work. Indeed, this alternative is very dependent on the quality of railway supply and the configuration of the rail network. And the rail network around Lille is based on a railway node structured by seven segments converging to the centre of Lille. There are very few transverse links.

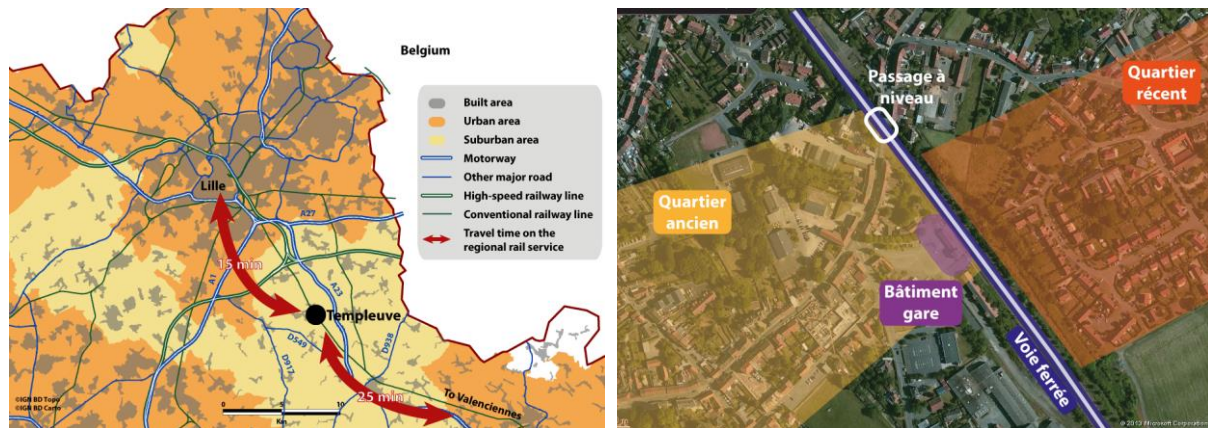


Fig. 2. (a) Templeuve and the urban area of Lille ; (b) the station area of Templeuve

The town of Templeuve is served by the railway link connecting the two urban cities of Lille and Valenciennes. The railway supply is based on 70 daily trains and the attendance of the station is about 750 passengers per weekday. The territorial attractiveness of the station goes beyond the boundary of the town. Indeed, more than half of the rail users, who take the train at Templeuve's station, live outside. Its influence covers the surrounding areas over a distance of 6 km. The location of the station is peripheral to the town centre.

We have opted to define the station area of Templeuve according to the approach of Kokoreff (2000) who suggests, in order to describe station areas, to talk about a "mosaic". And this definition is relevant in the case of Templeuve. Indeed, the structure of the station area is contrasted (Fig. 2 (b)). First of all, the presence of railway equipment (the passenger building, the tracks, the railway level crossing) is a reminder that this area includes a visible transport node. Secondly, on both sides of the railway infrastructure, we can observe two different urban forms : south of the tracks lies an old quarter with services, shops, and old dwellings. However, this neighbourhood may change its quality image within two years with the implementation of a interchange node at the rail station and housing projects on land opportunities near the station. In the northern part, the contrast is perceptible because the dwelling style is quite different with both some detached and semi-detached dwellings built during the last twenty years. It seems to be more a residential area.

4.3. Inhabitants mobility

According to the data of a households travel survey dated from 2006, a typical inhabitant of Templeuve makes about 3.44 travels per weekday. So he is less mobile than an urban inhabitant of Lille (4.10 travels per weekday).

As it is generally observed in the peri-urban areas, where households are more highly motorized (in Templeuve, more than 80% of households have at least one car), an inhabitant of Templeuve mostly takes the car for his travels (a part of 68% of their travel compared with 56% in the metropolitan area of Lille). Only 14% of residents are “captive” people that is to say, as they do not own a car, they are dependent on public transport services for their travels. The train mode represents only 3% of all travels of Templeuve inhabitants, including short trips. But, according to the 2009 population census, the use of train services is more important for commuting trips (16% of people in working life use train services to go to their workplace). It even reaches a share of 48% for people who work in Lille (the main destination of working population).

5. Is living near a railway station a strategic choice ?

5.1. The residential strategy factors revealed by the inhabitants

The survey carried out in the town of Templeuve shows that the argumentation of residential choice in this peri-urban area is based on recurrent factors underlined in the various existing studies on this subject (see above). Thus, this choice is mainly structured on the topic of the desired life environment. This subject, which was mentioned immediately by almost of the respondents, includes several dimensions. The first one refers to the implied wish to escape city life without being too far from the urban city. Most respondents largely justify their choice using residential living environment criteria which may correspond to a spatial constraint to live midway between the city centre and the countryside. Like Bernard, 47 years old, who explains that, as his wife is a native of the country, while he previously lived in an urban city, he took into account a specific criterion of “a mix between a mid-town and a mid-countryside [...] where there are lots of interesting facilities that almost allow to live independently”.

More generally, we can interpret this argument in the sense of geographical proximity. This notion of geographical proximity can be expressed in three aspects. The first one concerns the proximity of the urban city where one can find jobs, services, shops and leisure facilities. Pascale, 35 years old, justifies the choice to live in Templeuve because of her husband’s workplace : “We need to live not far from Wattignies because my husband works there, so our new dwelling had to be at a driving distance no more than half an hour”.

Then, we can also note the aspiration to have services such as doctors, banks, schools and shops in the immediate proximity of the dwelling. The existence of these amenities in the vicinity seems to be a key factor for families in their residential choice. According to Nadine, 46 years old, the main aspiration was “to live in the countryside but at the same time not to be too secluded. And [...] we sought out an area where there is lot of facilities such as associations, sports, but also doctors, podiatrists, dentists”. The municipality of Templeuve has clearly identified these aspirations of people who want to leave the hustle and bustle of cities. Therefore, it promotes its city through a very evocative slogan reflecting these expectations : “Templeuve, the spirit of a village, the advantages of a city”.

Finally, the third sense of geographical proximity is related to the proximity of transport networks. Generally discussed at the end of the argumentation by the respondents, this argument is often mentioned in terms of road infrastructures, like this couple, in their fifties, who say they were looking for a dwelling in “the countryside without being too far from Lille and near the A1 motorway”. However, according to some of interviews, we note that the transport networks proximity is also expressed through the existence of public transport service, in particular a railway station. Thus, for the case of Gilles, a 56-year-old professional and father of four children : “We wanted to live near a railway station, more generally near means of public transport, train or/and bus. We chose this town for the convenience of public transport modes [...]. My criteria were both the station and the wish to live in a village with some amenities of an urban city”. It is also one criterion which was taken into account by Dominique, 57 years old when he sought out a building land : “I looked at the railway tracks, I examined the lands available for sale between the cities of Lille and Valenciennes. The main reasons were the location between Lille and Valenciennes, near Lille, and the regional railway service”.

This geographical proximity argument seems to bear more weight than the issue of the housing type. In the respondents’ discours, the housing type model often appears after having evoked the desire to live in a protected

environment. This idea reflects the wish to reach this residential housing model which is widespread in France (Dodier, 2009).

Finally, in addition to these two main factors, several inhabitants of Templeuve highlight the factors of social and family proximities at the end of the interview. It means for them to find a dwelling which would be close to family members. For couples, this target often results from a compromise since it is a main factor for only one of them. It is the case of this owner settled in Templeuve for two years with his wife and his four children : “The house had to be close to grandma's house. It was not my main criterion, but my wife's”. There is also the consequence of the disruption of the family structure as it is the case of this divorced father with three children who chose to live in Templeuve “because I have two of my children who live with their mother in Templeuve. [...] We live close to one another, it is better for our children”.

The economic factor (financial budget) is not absent from the discourse of the inhabitants but it was not often mentioned directly. We can say that this factor is latent in their words. Indeed, the town of Templeuve, is, like some other peri-urban areas of Lille, an area where the property prices are relatively high. So that we can assume that people take the price factor into account upstream in order to target the potential geographic areas.

Although the residential choice is a complex process, the combination of the different factors mentioned allows us to draw a typology of different residential strategies profiles based on arguments and values expressed for the choice. Two major models are in opposition. On the one hand, we can identify a group of “pragmatic people” including individuals who indirectly referred to an arbitration between several factors : geographical proximity of the workplace and the city, proximity of facilities, social proximity and living environment (quality of life and type of housing). Among these pragmatic people, two profiles coexist : the new peri-urban and the former peri-urban people. The new peri-urban people are individuals who previously lived in an urban city in the urban area of Lille but who wanted to live in an another living environment, either remaining or becoming an owner. The former peri-urbans had already experienced the peri-urban lifestyle in their previous dwelling and wanted to maintain this way of life. Then, the second model refers to a group of individuals that we can call the “traditionalists” insofar as their choice reflects a mechanism of social and geographical re-enactment. The “traditional opportunists” group includes mainly pensioners who have always lived in Templeuve and for whom the residential choice is no longer an issue. The aim was clearly to become an owner in this town. In contrast to these seniors, the traditionalists also include some “ambitious persons” who are mainly young people who yet live with their parents. But these “ambitious” already anticipate their future life in the same living environment, that is to say a town or a village near Lille with amenities and services like in Templeuve.

5.2. The railway station criterion among the residential strategies

Among the geographical proximity arguments, we saw that the presence of a railway station was spontaneously mentioned by some respondents during the discussion about their residential strategies. But how does this criterion occur in their argumentation or values assigned to their choice?

The comparison of the different interviews allows us to identify three profiles that characterize the importance of the station criterion in the residential strategy :

- the first profile, which can be summed up by the term of “the indifferent” brings together individuals who did not mention the station criterion in their words. This lack of referring does not mean that there is a total indifference to this infrastructure. It seems that the fact of having a railway station near their house did not correspond a priori to their initial criteria.
- The second profile, the “interested people” refers to individuals who expressed that the station had an influence in their residential choice, but with different degrees of importance. The station is spontaneously discussed in their argumentation and in a transparent way like Veronica, 51 years old, who says : “Our choice was built on a residential area served by a regional train service”. So, this group reflects the idea of an obvious and predicted strategic choice.
- The third profile, the “cautious people” reflects individuals who, spontaneously or not (indeed, respondents were invited to give, after the topic of residential choice, their point of view on the station), consider the station as an interesting advantage without specifically telling that the station was part of their initial selection criteria. This could be a discovery, once settled in Templeuve, as underlines Christiane, a 48-year-old professional : “when we settled here, I did not think at the railway station. We did not buy this house because there was a station. But afterwards, I realized we had a lot of chances to have it”.

6. Living near a railway station and rail mobility

If the railway station is a weakly highlighted criterion for the residential choice, could it be a mobilised resource once the individual is settled in his new dwelling, after having experienced the peri-urban life style (especially for his daily travels)? Crossing respondents words about their positioning relative to the station factor with modal travel practices reveals a variety of behaviors.

Thus, we might expect that individuals for whom the station had an influence in their residential choices, take exclusively the train for their daily travels. But among these people, the survey reveals different behaviors of travel practices. On the one hand, there is a group of individuals that we name “the users” for whom we can affirm that there is a close relation with the railway system for their current or past life. Every day, these people in working life take the train for their travel from home to work or also for their leisure journeys. Ghislaine, 46 years old, says : “every time I have to go to Lille, either for work or pleasure, I take the train”. This use of the railway service is observed for the couple husband/wife who are in a situation of modal choice because they have two cars. This group includes also some pensioners who travelled by train when they were in active life. Some of them did not have a modal alternative (only one car in the couple). However, when they stopped working, they changed their travel practices, and nowadays they use their car as underlines Roger, 58 years old : “Before being retired, I always took the train to go to work. Now I am retired. It still take the train occasionally, however my main means of transport is the car”. On the other hand, the survey highlights a group of working persons that we call “the non direct users” who considered that the station had some influence in their residential choice but who do not use the train for their daily travels. These people argue that there is an incompatibility of taking the train because they have several workplaces in a working day. Beyond these aspects, this survey especially highlights an argument based on the opportunity to facilitate the specific travels needs of children (to go to their study place, to go to Lille). This strategic choice to live near a train station is then explained as a way to make it easier the children independence. This could be interpreted into a specific point of view of the railway service, that is to say an image of a transport service for people who do not have a car. That is implied by the words of Laurence, 50 years old, “the train service was important, especially for my children but not for my husband and me because we are able to drive”.

When the station is more considered as an advantage rather than a factor of choice, the respondents seem to have the same modal behavior : they daily use their car. But why did they talk about an advantage? We can distinguish two groups of individuals. The first one that we call “the opportunists” includes respondents who take their car but who consider that the station contributes to give some independence for their children, especially for leisure travels. Thus, Isabelle, 40 years old, affirms that the station is “an important advantage, however I do not use it a lot. [...] I take the car for most of my travels [...]. My children often take the train to go to Lille with their friend”. The second group that we name “the calculating persons” is characterized by working persons who consider that their travel destination is not directly served by a train service. For example, Isabelle, 40 years old, says : “I take my car for most of my travels because I work in Villeneuve d'Ascq and my husband in Lesquin”. Two cases are mentioned : either the destination is located in the peri-urban area without a railway service, or it is located on a city of the urban area of Lille but its accessibility by train requires a change of transport mode in Lille so that the travel time is perceived higher than the car travel time. While conceding that this sort of travel is possible to make, these words illustrate the relationship that may exist between an individual and the car as it is implied by the argument of Christiane, 48 years old : “to go to work, it is true that I can take the train but I do not live near the train station so I should take the bus. Furthermore I like driving”. Globally, this conception of an advantage is more related to occasional travels.

Finally, the group of individuals for which the station factor does not appear in their speech, generally take the car for their daily travels. Firstly, the words of retired persons clearly mean that they did not take into account the station in their residential choices. Then, the working persons justify their car choice into two main reasons. The first one deals with the idea of an incompatibility of railway service supply with their destination (a necessary modal change which is considered penalizing in terms of travel time). The second one is about the lifestyle which is seen incompatible with the railway network use. It is particularly the case of Stephen, 47 years old, who said when he was invited to talk about the station : “I do not have to depend on train services. I'm very busy in a day so that I never have enough time. That's why I take my car, it goes faster”.

7. Working on individual behaviors

This paper is a first contribution to the analysis of the link that may exist between a railway station and its local residents. The survey results tend to say that the link between living near a train station and taking the train is not systematic. It would be unreal to think that a direct link may exist because the modal choice is a more complex notion and depends on several factors that can be related to individuals like service supply to access the workplace, travel time and price, but also lifestyle, or not. As Munafo (2012) points out, “the modal practices result from a range of reasons which is wider than the only time and price criteria. This range of reasons sometimes eludes the instrumental rationality”. These reasons may concern spatial habits, modal habits among a specific lifestyle, preferences of uses, values and perceptions that people have of transport modes, and even the impact of “emotional experiences” (Flamm, 2004).

For all that, this exploratory work leads to underline several points. In a context of economic crisis, of sudden rise of energy and real estate prices, for people looking for a new home, we may wonder if there would be interesting to take more the proximity of public transport networks into account in their residential strategy. In particular, considering travel costs would seem important in the sense that it may incite people to examine the rail service, but this criterion seems not to be really present in the residential choice. This idea is suggested by Hasiak (2013) through the concept of assigning a “transport efficiency” label for all dwellings (concept based on the implemented labels about the energy performance of a dwelling). This label would translate the ability to travel by other means than the car. This survey does not provide some answers for this issue but it is a path of research to explore.

Besides, although the station criterion may be taken into account in the residential strategy, it remains, as pointed out by some interviews, that the station may be not integrated in this strategy but rather be considered as an important value, once the individual settled in the station area. But how can we succeed in making this shift to rail use? How can we act to make people aware of the benefits of taking the train? The only rail services development is not enough to incite modal changes. And so, it is necessary to act on mobility behaviours. And to do this, it is essential to understand prejudices, perceptions and representations of the modes that have people. The personalized marketing approaches widely used abroad are gradually implemented in France, especially in two regions of northern France. These approaches are based on the experience of the train by non users who are voluntary to test the train. The aim is to bring about changes in modal practices. The observed conversion rate (up to 30% for daily or weekly train use) in the two French regions is rather promising. These works confirm the need to develop targeted communications to local populations of a station area. Indeed, they have shown a certain misreading of the train advantages in comparison with the car. The challenge is to communicate effectively on comparative approaches between train and car. There are several topics that may be interesting to explain such as user costs (because they remain largely unknown), the qualitative benefits of a mode compared to another one (for example the opportunity to work, rest, read ...).

French people seem less inclined to take the train for their daily travel. Working on behaviours and ways of thinking of individuals seems essential and complementary to the implementation of urban development on and around a station and also of the development of rail services supply.

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