To Have and Have Not: Exploring Grammars of Sharing in the Context of Urban Mobility

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This paper explores cultural differences in the practices of car sharing in the context of urban mobility. Challenging the all too frequent and often uncriticial uses of the term "sharing economy", we argue for a more granular representation of practices that occur when "sharing" meets "economy", focusing on the tensions that characterise people's embodied experiences of carpooling. By exploring emergent behaviour conventions, this paper seeks to highlight the ethnographic value of shifting perspectives between different players in car sharing transactions. We aim to offer a fresh, ethnographically rich and critical perspective on practices of mobility sharing in the context of an industry in flux.

Keywords: consumption, mobility, sociality, transportation, sharing economy

INTRODUCTION

The "sharing economy" has had the attention of the anthropological community since the dawn of the Internet, with the likes of eBay and Craigslist, back in the 1990s, beginning to transform the lives of ordinary people for whom historically sharing has been limited to known social networks, friends and families and local communities (Schor 2014). It remains unclear when exactly the term was coined and what its original meaning implied. An umbrella category rather than a strictly defined concept, "sharing economy" has since its conception come to comprise a wide range of distinctly different phenomena: from collaborative to access-based consumption, from peer economy to asset-free business models. Formally defined as "an economic system in which assets or services are shared between private individuals, either free or for a fee, typically by means of the Internet" (Oxford English Dictionary), sharing economy's ever-expanding label has been attached to a large number of hybrid market transactions. Online marketspaces (eBay and Craigslist), peer-to-peer accommodation (Airbnb, Couchsurfing), travel (Blablacar, Tripr), tap and ride services (Uber, Lyft) and social lending (Prosper, Lending Club), despite being hugely different phenomena in both content and form, often get grouped together under sharing economy's bland, nondescript umbrella.

In a rapidly changing world, where society is becoming more liquid (Bauman 2007) and markets are increasingly being replaced by networks (Bardhi & Eckhard 2012), the temptation to group these together is high: they were indeed made possible by the same technological advances, and rely on a similar business model. "Sharing economy" as an analytical framework, however, fails to address the differences and granularities in the ways these types of businesses actually operate and fit into people's lives. It is too broad and vague a term to be applicable to often strikingly different phenomena: while the underlying business models are similar, the embodied experiences of the above-mentioned platforms differ from country to country, from culture to culture, from person to person. As boundaries are shifting between ownership and access, shared and personal, public and private, our relationships with things, spaces and each other are similarly transforming.

To fully understand the nature and the shape of some of the emerging practices of sharing, we need a new language to help us get to the core of what happens when "sharing" meets "economy". In order to achieve this, we suggest moving away from debating "sharing economy" as a wider societal phenomenon, and instead look at more specific cases of economic transactions that involve sharing spaces, services, costs and responsibilities. By getting at the ethnographically rich core of particular sharing practices within the context of economic transactions, we hope to arrive at more subtle and actionable insights that would help us understand how ideas of ownership and freedom, responsibility and flexibility, are changing across the world.

In this study, we have looked at one of the areas that's been affected most dramatically by the rise of the internet-enabled peer-to-peer networks – urban mobility. We are presently witnessing the demise of the so called "old mobility", a rigidly organised system with private cars at its cosmic epicentre, and the dawn of a new kind of mobility: one that brings a future "in which we would all be free to move in the greatest variety of ways" (Montgomery 2013). Tap and ride services, such as Uber and Lyft, are classic examples of that futuristic vision. They transform the ways in which we think about vehicles, routes and travel. They allow more and more users across the globe to benefit from their competitive prices and mobile, cashless interfaces. They change the way we think about city travel, planning and time.

Amongst the more recent additions to the global mobility marketplace are pooled mobility services such as UberPool and Lyft Line (amongst many other local competitors). These are built on algorithms that enable strangers to carpool together within a city, when travelling in a similar direction, at a cheaper cost than if they were to use the service by themselves. For the purposes of this article, when talking about carpooling, we distinguish between two different types. Firstly, the well-established practices of ride sharing, or carpooling, amongst close circles of friends and colleagues, organised on a regular or ad-hoc basis by individuals themselves; these practices we refer to as *informal pooling*. Secondly, by *formal pooling*, we mean centralised app-based paid services that connect strangers travelling in the same direction – such as UberPool. The latter practices are pivotal to the argument of this paper. As a relatively recent phenomenon, studying them allows us to focus in on the tensions that arise as people make sense of the new practice. We have not included cases of shared car ownership in this study, focusing exclusively on instances of shared rides.

As cities are changing and car ownership becomes less attainable (Cheshire et al 2010), with demand for freedom and flexibility growing (Bauman 2000; Levine 2009), practices of sharing car rides with friends as well as with strangers find themselves in a liminal space where old values clash against new opportunities. As travel norms and aspirations change across locations, genders and generations, so do travel patterns. With cities undergoing significant demographic, economic and infrastructural changes, our relationships with urban landscapes are to a huge extent experienced and take on an embodied form through travel. When we traverse urban landscapes, we create points of contact with different parts of the city, appropriating and getting more intimate with some, while rejecting others. The modes of transportation we choose for traversing those landscapes are linked to how we think and feel about the city; what aspirations and values we have in life; who we want to be and how we want to appear to others. Reasons behind choosing one transportation mode over another can thus reach far and wide. They can say as much, if not more, about our identity and values, as about our attitudes towards transportation. Sexualisation of the car (Miller 1997) and its linkage to higher socio-economic status has been commented on by a number

of economic and urban anthropologists over the years (Freund 1993; Brandon 2002; Sheller 2004; Miller 2001b; Motavalli 2001; Sachs 2002). In a similar vein, this paper shows how different transportation modes can be associated with a whole range of socio-economic and phenomenological meanings.

Formal pooling thus enters a highly-saturated context, where people have tightly formed relationships with different modes of transportation. Formal pooling practices relying on a car as a vehicle are thus entangled in webs of meaning that reach beyond the realm of mobility and transportation. An understanding of how formal pooling fits into one urban landscape or another, cannot be achieved without looking at social, cultural and emotional factors surrounding each journey.

It is important to emphasize from the outset that the theoretical and ethnographic contribution of this paper does not attempt to address the whole body of "sharing economy" debate, nor does it offer an in-depth discussion of anthropology of mobility. What it seeks to do instead, is explore the liminal spaces and shifting perspectives shaping people's relationships with transportation modes, mobility marketplace, and with each other: spaces between private and public, teleological and experiential, freedom and ownership. What we find is a continuous oscillation between what's perceived to be public and private spaces, the social grammars that go with them; a compromise between the practical, logistical elements of a journey, and the embodied experiences of it; a choice between being and having, using and owning. These tensions come to define people's perceptions and experiences of formal pooling. By shifting perspectives between these categories, we hope to move away from a discussion of sharing economy that is too broad and controversial to have much use in applied ethnography. Instead, we focus on a very specific yet increasingly relevant and fascinating instantiation of urban mobility, which involves sharing resources, spaces and responsibilities.

In this paper, we argue for the need to focus on *how* car sharing is conceived and practiced by family and friend groups, colleagues, strangers and drivers; *how* it is transforming the mobility landscape and *how* it is reconfiguring our relationships with cities and with each other. With this approach, we hope to get closer to a more fluid understanding of this specific form of sharing practice, and glance at what the future of pooled mobility might look like.

To fully understand *why* and *how* attitudes to car ownership are changing and *why* formal pooling services like UberPool are successful in some cultural geographies and not in others, we will start by exploring three mobility landscapes, outlining the limitations of existing public transportation services, tracing pain points experienced by local commuters, and exploring existent practices of informal and formal pooling. We will then look at the wide spectrum between the functional "why's" and "how's" of pooling, and look at the cultural, social, and emotional factors affecting people's choices.

In this study, we looked at formal and informal pooling practices and attitudes across three cities: London (UK), Ahmedabad (India) and São Paulo (Brazil). Over a period of three weeks we conducted 45 interviews mixed with immersive travel and commuting activities, participant observation and interactive exercises. Our research focused on documenting and investigating different commute and travel modes, seeking to understand existing cultural, social, economic, functional and logistical drivers and barriers to pooled mobility, as well as already established practices of short and long distance informal vehicle share.

Hugely different but comparably vast, populous and congested, the three cities have unique and intricate mobility landscapes, across which millions of people navigate daily, to work and to home, to shops, hospitals, schools and night clubs, constantly trading off different needs and priorities, negotiating between being a driver and a passenger, an owner and a user. Often locked in by circumstances, commuters are seeking creative and elaborate ways to traverse their cities, making sense of formal pooling, as more and more car sharing solutions emerge in the market. In some places, formal pooling is a practice that doesn't have clear rules of engagement, causing significant tensions among unaccustomed users, who are yet to learn pooling's do's and don'ts. In others, people find that they are already "fluent" in the grammar of car sharing. To have or have not, to own or to share, to be or to seem – these are but a few questions they are facing. Exploring these granularities of ownership and use, sharing and exchange, is key to situating formal pooling in the urban mobility landscape, if we are to avoid politicising the discourse and instead get at its ethnographically rich core.

A TALE OF THREE CITIES

São Paulo

A commuter's journey – It's 5:50pm in São Paulo, as Fabio, a 33-year wholesale energy salesman, leaves his office in the busy Vila Olimpia. He walks over to a nearby bus stop to catch his bus home. Home is in Santos, a costal suburb 55km south east off the city - or rather, one and a half hours' commute, for travel here is not measured in distance, but in hours spent on the road. Distances are abstract, rendered meaningless by the webs of bad roads, heavy congestion, temperamental climate and poor infrastructure. Time is more certain, and a lot of it gets wasted every day by Paulistano commuters.

Fabio's commute is in fact comparatively pleasant by São Paulo standards. His employer pays for a "fretado" bus – a chartered service for forty odd people. It runs from Santos to Vila Olimpia. Fabio – and everyone else on the bus – gets his own seat, a blanket and a pillow. "If I'm not on the bus, they will put my blanket and cushion up in the overhead locker, it will wait for me there until the next trip. The bus is like a family". Fabio and his fellow co-riders make a real effort to have an active relationship with the service and with each other, taking on responsibilities and creating a more personal travel space. Fabio is good friends with twelve of the regular commuters. They created a WhatsApp group, where they can let others know if they are running late and need the bus to wait for them. One of the bus conductors has recently joined the group to provide better logistical support and timing information to the passengers, simply by messaging them.

Fabio will make it home by 7:40pm. If he had chosen to go back to his parents' home in São Paulo, which is much closer, he wouldn't be home until 9pm. "Thanks to this service, the journey is easier and quicker than the shorter distance commute within São Paulo". The day before we met, Fabio had taken an UberPool back to his parents' place. Having bought an expensive drone that day, he didn't want to be on public transport, which is considered unsafe; and a private taxi (or even an Uber X) would have been too expensive. The pooled journey took him painful four hours and a half. The extreme congestion in the city means you never know how long you will be stuck in traffic for – diversions are long and undesirable, particularly in the less safe parts of the city.

Public transport – São Paulo is home and work place to 12 million people and a regional population of 21.1 million. The public transport infrastructure struggles to serve them – particularly failing those living in less wealthy and more populous suburbs in the south. A rail and metro network takes over five million passengers daily, however remains too small to adequately cater to the city's growing needs. A fleet of buses carries another five million every day, but these offer little in terms of safety, efficiency and comfort. First and last mile challenges are severe, with no services to connect major arteries to new communities and settlements. Residents have no alternatives but to use what there is to make long duration journeys across large distances. São Paulo traffic jams infamously span over hundreds of kilometres. They are exacerbated by frequent rainfalls, which often lead to floods, drainage failure and falling trees that destroy electrical wiring and stop the operation of the traffic lights.

Whether in the context of crowded buses serving poorer neighbourhoods, or that of queuing on a platform to get on a train, personal safety is always on people's minds. Accounts of being mugged and held at gun point were shared by a high number of people we spoke to. Female commuters are particularly wary of taking certain types of transport and walking home by themselves in the more peripheral parts of the city. As public transport is considered unsafe, WhatsApp is extensively used by people to create a safer travel environment. Since waiting for buses outside is considered particularly dangerous, WhatsApp "communities" are formed by bus passengers and drivers. They alert those on the route ahead when the bus is about to arrive. This allows people to wait in a safe indoor space, knowing exactly when to come out and hop on. This civic, bottom-up engagement with public transportation system, enabled by social media, allows Paulistanos to better navigate the risks and the dangers of public transport commuting.

Private cars – As public transport struggles to keep up with the needs of a growing population, car ownership is rapidly expanding. There are presently 4.2 million cars in the Municipality of São Paulo. Cars are seen as mobile enclaves that provide shelter and offer a more comfortable experience. Car ownership is also linked to higher socio-economic status, and have long been seen as a rite of passage for the aspiring middle classes.

In recent years, however, high congestion and lack of parking spaces make younger generations reconsider their priorities: perception of who you are in society as being linked to the transportation you use is visibly changing. Increasingly, more and more urban users are moving away from the ownership ideal and towards increased flexibility. This move is exacerbated by tough economic circumstances and decreased ability to purchase a personal vehicle.

Taxis – While extensive taxi fleets provide good services across much of the city, these are expensive and therefore not an option for many of the city's residents – particularly in view of the ongoing recession, which is on everybody's mind. Access to bus lanes is an advantage, making taxis the first choice in contexts of urgency. However, the landscape is highly competitive with Uber, Taxi99 and EasyTaxi offering similar services for much less. Being allowed to drive in bus lanes, legacy taxis travel through the city much more quickly than the new services. However, new services offer the same level of comfort at a lower price – the combination of comfort and affordability trumping the need to be on time.

Informal pooling – Informal pooling is well established in São Paulo. For shorter distances, school runs, neighbour and colleague pools are popular, especially amongst those living on the periphery. Such pools are typically organised through WhatsApp. "We have a WhatsApp group for parents with kids in the building block – we all trust each other even though we haven't all met each other", Dario told us. He is also a member of a WhatsApp group for people living in his condominium, which he frequently uses for finding and offering lifts.

For longer, intra-city journeys, Facebook is the first place to go. "Carona" groups, where long distance routes can be searched, are created by individual users for specific routes and times. "There are 256 people on the Ride Santo to São Paulo Facebook Page. It has grown from 50 three months ago" Fabio, who watches this space closely, told us. These informal, smaller user-driven initiatives are significantly more popular than services like Blablacar (a ride-sharing online community connecting people looking to share long distance journeys). Facebook is heavily relied on by Paulistanos in day to day life: upon meeting new people, one typically "checks their profile", looking for subtle cues and visual clues. "It takes me one look at someone's Facebook profile and I can tell what kind of person they are and if I can feel safe around them" Carmela, a 26-year old Paulistana, told us. Many others agreed. Facebook thus satisfies people's need for personal safety and security, by allowing them to make fine-grained judgements based on profile pictures, education and personal tastes, which the likes of Blablacar doesn't offer.

Formal pooling – In a city where transport infrastructure is highly insufficient, formal pooling comes to fill an acutely felt gap. New mobility solutions (such as UberPool and its local competitors) are emerging, rapidly becoming a part of the strained mobility landscape. The likes of UberPool and 99POP eliminate first and last mile challenges and provide a shelter from the heat and the rain, while still being affordable. Andre, 41 years old and working for an education consultancy, takes an UberPool to work every day. It offers him door to door connectivity and A/C, while costing only $R3 more than a bus, where he wouldn't get a seat after having walked to the bus stop for ten minutes in the heat, up and down the city's hilly landscape. "I cannot arrive at a meeting and be all sweaty, or wet from the rain" Marcela similarly told us. Even if it's a walkable distance, because of the hills and the weather she will not walk; with taxis being too expensive for regular use, UberPool and 99POP come to save the day.

The general friendliness and sociality of the city's residents provides a natural home for formal pooling. Teresa, a 41-year-old social worker, shared a story of Uber-pooling during the World Cup, watching a football game together with fellow riders on a smartphone, getting the car to stop and celebrate each time their team scored. "We didn't care we were late. We were having fun, we even got beers at a kiosk and celebrated".

The norms around interaction are well established, with most people knowing how to "play it" and how to "go with the flow". When Felipe gets into an UberPool, he says "hello" and "how are you", waiting to see whether other riders "take the bait" and begin to chat. If they do, the journey is filled with amicable conversation; if they don't, it's "headphones on mode"; no one will feel offended. In a similar vein, Marcela, a 40-year old Paulistana residing in the wealthy Consoloção neighbourhood, spoke about how easy it was to establish a social dynamic that everybody is happy with. "Sometimes you talk to people, sometimes you get the impression that they don't want to talk, and both are fine. It really depends on everyone else in the car".

Uber and other tap and ride services generally feel safer than the public transport: they offer a small, sheltered space and a driver who oversees everything that goes on in the car. At the same time, however, formal pooling vehicles attract a high degree of criminal activity. Since Uber introduced cash payments in Summer 2016, the number of attacks on Uber drivers and passengers has skyrocketed from an average of 13 per month earlier in the year to 141 per month in the rest of the year[1]. An UberPool carrying multiple passengers is automatically at a higher risk of being robbed – something both drivers and riders are all too aware of. Many drivers we spoke to admitted to feeling unsafe driving to certain parts of the city, however, have little choice as they don't get to see the destination until they accept the ride. "Since cash payments were introduced", Carlos told us, "I no longer work after 9pm, as I don't want to risk going somewhere dangerous late at night, particularly if I have several passengers carrying cash on them".

Younger and female family members taking UberPool or 99POP journeys, use WhatsApp as a safety tool - to check in with their parents throughout the journey. "Our daughter always messages the family group when she gets into the car – to tell us where she is, who else is in the car, what the number plate is. That way we don't have to worry too much", Jose told us.

London

A commuter's journey – It is 7:10am in London and Chris is getting in the car to take his sons to the tube station (sometimes he would get a minicab, to avoid having to find parking). At 7:20am he picks up a friend's son James, who goes to the same school as his boys. At 7:30am he drops them off at the Ruislip Garden station. They take the Piccadilly line to their school in Ealing. Chris parks his car somewhere in between Ruislip Garden and Ruislip Manor stations – this is where he can find a free parking place: closer to the station is always full, and is £8-12 a day. He then walks to Ruislip Manor station and continues his journey to work, using public transport – he would never drive into London because of how bad the inner-city traffic is.

Chris is married with two sons (aged 12 and 15). He lives in Ruislip, a green suburb 16 miles northwest of Central London (45-60 mins travel by public transport). He is known to his friends and neighbours as the "Uber-dad", as he is always picking up and dropping off kids, his own and others'. He spends every Sunday afternoon planning for the week ahead. While the kids' routine is fixed, the parents' afternoon schedules are often changing which is why it's important to make a new plan every Sunday.

There are five stations near his home, however each is 15-20 minutes' walk away, with no public transport solution. He has to plan bringing and picking his sons up from the station, as well as figure out transportation for their social and sporting activities. Chris has different streams of communication that are directly related to car sharing arrangements. He uses texts with his sons and his wife to agree on bringing and picking up the kids. These are one-on-one relationships that are "strictly functional" and informative. He is also a member of a WhatsApp group where kids' afterschool and weekend activities are arranged by the parents. This group has a livelier social dynamic and interactions; run by parents who have known each other for years, it mainly revolves around football activities for the kids. Because

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[1] São Paulo Public Safety Secretariat, Reuters

social activities are malleable and can change, the dynamic nature of conversation allows for more flexibility.

Public transport – Finding first and last mile solutions, arranging school runs, working on the go – are tasks many Londoners have to deal with in one way or another. Greater London is home to 8.6 million people. Over four fifths of the city's workforce commutes into work from within this area, heavily relying on the extensive network of public transport services operating across the city's six fare zones. The established public transportation system has a wide reach, and is generally seen to be good and reliable. This means that Londoners have high expectations towards the transportation system. It needs to work, and it needs to be reliable, as punctuality is critical for professionals, especially in the peak morning hours.

Private cars – Roads, on the other hand, are something Londoners have very little faith in. Since utility and efficiency are the key drivers behind modal choices, most would never consider commuting into work by car, as roads are considered to be "broken" and the city is seen as "not a place to drive". Presently, London's 2.56 m cars equate to 0.3 cars per adult[2]. An increasing number of households opt out of having a car, particularly those living in Inner London[3], where congestion is at its worst and parking is excruciatingly expensive and difficult to find. As inner city is heavily congested, cars are not seen as a viable option for peak hour commute. A parent like Chris might be doing a pooled school run locally in the early hours of the morning, picking up neighbours' kids, counting on the favour to be reciprocated. Nevertheless, while Chris loves his car, he will not be driving into the city to work, nor would he be Uber pooling to cover the last mile to a client's office. Reliability and punctuality are the priorities for Londoners – they can therefore not leave chances to congestion when being somewhere on time is at stake.

Taxis – Despite the congestion, the number of taxis, including traditional black cabs, various mini cab services and tap and ride apps like Uber, continues to grow[4]. Uber, having entered the scene just before the 2012 Olympics, now accounts for 40,000 drivers (twice as many as black cab drivers), increasingly putting the old-school black cab drivers out of jobs. While considered a different experience altogether in comparison to black cabs – cars less comfortable, drivers "don't know where they are going" – the 30 percent lower fares nevertheless contribute to Uber's ever-growing popularity. Black cabs are a luxury, used by few, or on special occasions. Ubers, on the other hand, are becoming part of the weekly routine for many.

Informal pooling – Well-established in the suburbs, informal car sharing is not generally widespread, and is mostly done within very close circles of friends, neighbours and colleagues. School runs, commutes shared between colleagues, neighbourhood pooling with "strangers that we know" – are some examples of where informal pooling fits into Londoners' lives. Two respondents working in creative industries told us how producers

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[2] Transport for London, Road Task Work – Technical Note 12, 2012
[3] LSE Cities, Towards New Urban Mobility, 2015
[4] Department for Transport, Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Statistics: England 2015

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typically encourage them to carpool together – to save costs and get everyone to arrive at the same time.

Pooled trips with colleagues are better value, however, are not necessarily the most pleasant way of travelling for some, particularly on the journey home. Andrew, a police officer living in Dunstable, used to share the car with a colleague twice a week, when they worked at the London Heathrow Airport. While journeys to work were perfectly enjoyable (and saved them both money), on the way home he missed the opportunity to "unwind" and de-stress. The need for personal space, particularly at the end of a long day, was a re-occurring theme amongst Londoners, whether in informal or formal pooling. "You need to be British and say hi, make small talk. It's not relaxing, definitely not a moment for myself" – Liz summed up the way many Londoners felt about having to talk to strangers (or even people they knew) at the end of a long day.

Formal pooling – Since UberPool was introduced in London in December 2015, the city's residents are still figuring out how it fits into their travel routine and habits, still unsure of the "rules of the road" and the social grammar of pooling with strangers. The transition to formal pooling struggles to draw on the rules established in informal pooling – particularly as the latter is not too widely practiced by many Londoners in the first place. As a result, UberPool experience is typically measured against the experience of Uber X, or other taxi services.

Hopping on an UberPool goes very much against what people were taught as children. "I was always told to never get into cars with strangers", Molly, 71, laughed, when remembering her times ridesharing in California where she was travelling in her mid-twenties. It felt a dangerous activity then, it still makes little sense to her today. Londoners are thus hesitant when it comes to the social dynamics of travelling in cars with strangers. What came naturally to Paulistanos, causes tensions and awkwardness amongst Londoners, who are unsure whether to behave as if they are on public transport (i.e. no talking) or in a private car (talking required).

"We are British, we don't like talking to strangers" was a sentiment many shared, particularly older respondents. "In a car, you have to talk to people" – Andrew complained to us, and many others living in and around London echoed his sentiment. However, worse than talking to strangers in cars was not actually knowing whether you are supposed to talk to them or not; the uncertainty makes for an awkward, stressful experience.

The physical space of an UberPool vehicle (typically a not very spacious Toyota Prius) is another challenge, even though it is an improvement on a crowded tube carriage in the rush hour. Because it's a car, the expectations are different. "I don't want to be crammed in with strangers in a car. But on the bus, you tolerate it, don't you?" Alison, a 32-year old school teacher living in North London relied on buses heavily in her daily commute, however had a different view on bodily proximity in a car, where she wanted privacy and personal space. She admitted this was double standards, but that didn't change the way she felt about the two modes of transportation.

Younger users are by far the ones most open to the idea of formal pooling; some are indeed attracted by a sense of adventure and serendipity. Nitika loves to take an UberPool home after a night out, and not just because of the reduced cost. "It's so much fun, there is always banter. Always a Tinder guy who's moody because his date wouldn't go home with him. It's hilarious, I love it". Vishal similarly enjoys the serendipity of pooling: "It's fun, like

a game. Every time I order it I always wonder who I am going to meet. My friend once met a hot girl on an UberPool and got her number. You get this thrill of meeting strangers". The "thrill" of pooling can be emotionally exciting and attractive. But it can also be awkward and uncomfortable.

Ahmedabad

A commuter's journey – It's 9:45 in the morning and already hot, as Shivam, a 23-year-old student and a freelancer, walks down from his house in Vasna to meet up with four other friends going to the university in Motera, 16 km away. Everyone is on time and the journey begins. A few of Shivam's friends have cars, so they take turns – it is always the car's owner that gets to drive. While Shivam has a car, it's reserved for special family occasions, temple visits and festivities – he cannot use it in commuting context. Shivam and his friends take turns paying for petrol, rather than splitting the cost each time in between them. In Ahmedabad, where value is prioritised over time efficiency, it's important for the costs to be kept low. Sharing space with friends also helps them bond and have a good time: taking turns at driving on different days makes it a fun social activity where responsibility is shared by all equally.

Half an hour later, they arrive at the Chandkheda University. In the past, Shivam used the AMTS, the official state bus service, until he found a set of then strangers who appeared to be taking a similar route to his and they agreed to carpool. Pooling with his new friends works out better than using AMTS, as he doesn't have to wait at the stop on hot days and deal with crowds at the stop or during the journey. He is guaranteed a seat, A/C, and shelter from the weather, with intense heat and heavy rains making most other modes of commute stressful. Besides, the bus would take 45 minutes. Driving not only saves time, however, but is also a more pleasant and sociable experience, which gives him the opportunity to chat to friends instead of being crushed in a crowd. Despite being less comfortable, however, the AMTS was an important milestone in Shivam's life, as it allowed him to meet strangers and experience the reality of the city.

Public transport – The largest city in Gujarat and the seventh largest in India, Ahmedabad is dominated by private transport (mainly two wheelers and rickshaws): only one sixth of its 6.3 million inhabitants use public transport for getting around. This reflects on the rigid hierarchy of transport modes: with walking at the very bottom, followed by public services, private vehicles are always at the top.

The city has plenty of mobility options, however, they often struggle to address the pressing needs of Ahmedabadi commuters. AMTS (Ahmedabad Municipal Transportation System) has a fleet of 540 buses, operating 250,000 daily trips – these, however, are considered to be at the very bottom of the transport hierarchy, offering neither comfort nor flexibility: crowded, hot, and infrequent, they are not a pleasant way to get across the city. BRTS (Bus Rapid Transport System) was introduced in 2009, presently running 160 buses (of which 59 have A/C) along dedicated bus corridors across the city. Originally intended as a fast, comfortable and inclusive service that should attract poorer commuters, only few of these shifted from rickshaws over to BRTS, which offered neither flexibility, nor covered all the routes.

New developments are underway, supplementing AMTS and BRTS buses and holding a promise of better options and connectivity in the future. MEGA (Metrolink Express Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad) construction started in 2015, aiming to offer a better integration of BRTS with railway services and state-wide buses. As things stand, however, public services do not offer the point-to-point connectivity of private vehicles (highly desirable due to hot weather and heavy rains), nor do they afford the much-wanted status that comes with owning a car.

Private cars – Offering the best point-to-point connectivity, cars are linked to social status and are highly aspirational, even if regular usage is low: parking is a nightmare, and streets in the old town are often too narrow for cars to get through. Car usage is therefore often limited and associated with leisure and family occasions, rather than regular commuter journeys. Individual space and ownership remain highly desirable amongst the rising middle class and continue to be main drivers for buying cars. A car offers a protective bubble, a shelter and a refuge. Decorating and accessorising the car is a common practice, suggesting that the car space is a cherished project for the owner. For those not able to afford a car, scooters give a first taste of personal mobility. For women, it's a mobility solution that enables independence, freedom and empowerment. Such attitudes mean that formal pooling with strangers is automatically associated with "not doing well in life", regardless of its convenience and value.

Taxis – Prior to Uber and Ola entering the scene, Ahmedabad had no history of taxis comparable to São Paulo and London. Rickshaws are the closest equivalent, and by far the most common vehicle for individual and shared rides – typically resorted to for short rides and during peak hours. They are widely available and easy to access anywhere in the city and are commonly referred to as "autos". A well-established and common practice, they are considered a safe option for female passengers as well as male: because of their open layout, everyone can see what goes on inside.

Informal pooling – Informal pooling is typically limited to known circles of friends and family. Pooling with friends, family and colleagues makes the journey itself an important part of the experience: catching up, spending quality time together, planning ahead. In the context of family trips, pooled travel has a positive association with "care and love for immediate others as well as care for others within wider social networks" (Maxwell 2001). Tesh, a 38-year old school teacher, told us how he missed being able to take his wife and his parents on weekend trips to the temple. Since he sold his car, he has had to share his scooter with his wife, getting an Uber or an Ola for his parents. While logistics of it work out just fine, it takes away the fun of a shared journey. In much the same way, Shivam enjoys the chance to bond with his new friends while travelling to university. Arjun told us of community based pooling – also widely practised: "There are more than twenty of us going to this show tonight". Religious, recreational and ceremonial events are typical occasions for community members to share vehicles.

Pooling with strangers is welcome for short rickshaw rides even for women. Arjun's wife told us that "sharing an auto after the Sunday market is very normal and happens a lot – it makes sense for drivers to pick up more people". A well-established and common practice, it is considered cheap and accessible. The open layout of a rickshaw vehicle gives passengers

a sense of security, allowing them to pick who they get into the rickshaw with in the first place.

Formal pooling – Formal pooling services are often met with doubt and hesitation, as they don't have the natural feel of their closest alternative – shared rickshaw rides. Conventions in shared rickshaw journeys rely on immediate visibility. Furthermore, as rickshaws are ubiquitous, they are easy to jump on without having to use an app and wait. On the other hand, apps help create transparency and reduce haggling friction. Despite offering cost efficient travel in a city where value is king, formal pooling is a source of heated debates in the rest of the country, struggling against rising safety and legal concerns.

While informal pooling is as much about socialising as it is about travel, in the context of formal pooling with strangers, Ahmedabadis are keen to maintain socio-economic distance. Khevana, a 39-year old teacher, says she doesn't like "sitting too closely to people from different backgrounds"; the lack of choice she has over who she travels with in a formal pooling context is a clear drawback. Similarly, drivers operating formal pooling rides don't feel comfortable offering mixed gender shared rides. One of them told us that each time there is a female passenger he would tell her to move to the front seat: "You never know and I don't want to take risks in my car".

Local formal pooling services are aware of these tensions, and are seeking to resolve them. Ola Share, for instance, seeks to address safety and social proximity concerns by offering an option to choose co-riders. "You share your ride with the people you choose" – an in-app function allowing people to choose friends, co-students and colleagues to carpool with. Ola is thus beginning to operate more as an open platform than a dedicated service, allowing people to form their own pooling groups and to connect to their wider networks of "known strangers". This kind of message shows a clear appreciation of local values as well as an understanding of the passengers' need for a service that reconciles logistical requirements with those of emotional comfort.

Overall, UberPool and Ola Share can be said to have a more practical, and less of a socio-emotional dimension for people: they solve mobility needs while under-indexing on the symbolic dimension. They provide the comfort of a car without its social standing. For some, it's a compromise. For others, it's better than nothing. Despite Uber being highly standardised (the Uber app in Ahmedabad works exactly like everywhere else), and Ola seeking to be as "local" as possible, addressing the above-mentioned tensions, there is little loyalty to either of the providers (or to any other local competitors) – the only loyalty being to the best price. In reality, this means that people employ a wide range of formal mobility apps, using these depending on which happens to have the best offer at the time.

LIMINAL SPACES AND SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES IN "STRANGER SHARING"

How various formal pooling services fit into a city's mobility landscape undeniably depends on a number of "hard" factors, such as the state of existing mobility infrastructure, available public transportation services, citizens' disposable income and various sets of rules and regulations that affect formal pooling services. Thus, formal pooling may not always be a positive choice, but one brought about by the lack of alternatives. In a city like São Paulo, due to poor network coverage and undersupply of public transport, formal pooling is a

major logistical addition to the city: it may not tick all the boxes, but it's better than what people currently have. In London, on the other hand, where people have plenty of transport options, it becomes merely another option for those who want to experiment with a new, sociable way of travelling. In Ahmedabad's hot and temperamental climate, comfort and shelter offered by formal pooling vehicles is attractive; on the other hand, formal pooling encounters a number of strong socio-cultural barriers.

Differences in existing mobility landscapes and needs inevitably lead to formal pooling playing qualitatively different roles and fitting into different lacunae in urban travel in the three cities. Nevertheless, the way formal pooling is conceptualised by commuters in each cultural geography bears similarities. A Londoner may have a completely different approach and attitude to getting around their city than a Paulistano; the tensions they face when making their transport choices, however, have certain things in common.

Firstly, the positioning of formal pooling gets caught between the private and the public transportation modalities. Formal pooling thus becomes a liminal activity; it sits betwixt and between the established categories and behaviours – it's not mass transit and it's not taxi or private car. As a result, it can be hard to know for certain which "rules of the road" apply, or who is in charge. Formal pooling may be viewed as an upgraded bus (with the public elements prevailing) or a downgraded taxi (with privacy and extra comfort still being key). The way people conceive of public and private spaces is therefore essential for how attitudes to formal pooling develop.

Secondly, Londoners', Paulistanos' and Ahmedabadis' conceptions of travel swing on the pendulum between the teleological and the experiential aspects of the journey: it is all about prioritising and compromising, picking and choosing between the rational considerations such as cost, efficiency, speed, convenience, and a wide range of emotional, cultural, aesthetic and sensory factors that often go against the grain of rational choices. Millions of commuters around the world are constantly negotiating which matters most: the teleological "destination" or the experiential "journey". Travel – pooled or otherwise – is rarely just about getting from A to B: how one gets there, in what company, temperature, environment, ambience – plays a significant role in the decision-making process.

Thirdly, formal pooling exposes the dichotomy of freedom and ownership, particularly in geographies where car ownership still holds sway over the values and aspirations of the rising middle class. Sharing a car can feel constraining - to those who strive towards individual ownership associated with elevated socio-economic status. But it can also feel liberating - to those who've had enough stress associated with owning a car, and would like a more affordable alternative to traditional taxis – with a bit of serendipity and sociality thrown into the bargain. Where the scale tips in any given context can come to define whether formal carpooling will catch or fail amongst different demographics.

By looking at these tensions in the following section, we hope to illustrate the complexity, granularity and multimodality of the shared mobility phenomenon, moving away from the all too broad economic discourse that has prevailed in anthropological writing on collaborative consumption in recent years. To fully uncover the cultural, emotional and phenomenological aspects of formal pooling, we need to keep shifting perspectives between the public and the private, the teleological and the experiential. Last but not least, we need to see how the balance shifts between these categories, depending on the point of view of actors involved – drivers and passengers, owners and users, old and young, male and female.

Public/Private

Automobility has always contributed to the blurring of boundaries between public and private activities (Sheller and Urry, 2003): a mobile private enclave caught in a web of immobile public spaces, an autonomous unit adhering to collective rules and regulations. As formal pooling enters the picture, a further tension arises between what people perceive to be public and private modalities. These modalities heavily impact the nature of social interactions and shape expectations to the pooling experience itself.

In London, formal pooling is a practice that doesn't have clear rules of engagement. It sits in the ambiguous space between buses and taxis. This results in a considerable amount of uncertainty and doubt with regards to social interaction and general expectations towards the course of the journey. A city where commutes are highly ritualised and any deviation from the norm strongly discouraged, it is difficult to know how to act in a space that's liminal, a space that's neither public nor private. Even across the public domain, the expectations are known to be different: on buses, it is ok to talk to people; on the tube, it's a faux pas only a tourist would commit.

Expectations towards interaction dynamics are therefore typically linked to what Londoners believe to be right and wrong in the context of public or private transportation. As pooling sits somewhere in the middle, there are few "rules of the road" or yardsticks for people to judge formal pooling against. This leads to formal pooling constantly being caught in between and in betwixt; it is measured and positioned against taking a bus or taking a taxi, against driving or being given a lift, rather than seen as a unique modality in its own right. Various factors can make the pendulum swing one way or the other between the public and the private. Walking to meet a pooled vehicle at a pick-up spot can bring pooling experience closer to public transport and decrease its value for some riders. "If I have to walk to my pool, it's not worth it, then I might as well go get a bus. If I want it, I want it here and now" Nitika, a 26-year old Londoner, told us. A regular UberPooler, she loved late night shared journeys because they offered her a combination of emotional fun, physical comfort and reduced price. For her, pooling was a taxi at a lower cost with added fun and serendipity. A step away from that, and it suddenly becomes more "like a bus" – not an option she would consider.

As expectations towards a journey differ depending on how pooling is positioned on the spectrum between the private and the public, users demonstrate an evident lack of common language. The "do's" and "don'ts" of the journey could be completely different depending on its wider context. Who takes control over the route? Who gets dropped off first? What is the role of the driver in all this? Do I have to do any walking? Do I have to talk? Can I be on my phone?

Drivers have a big role to play in helping riders answer these questions as well as in positioning formal pooling as a practice. "If there was no driver", Vishal, a London-based account manager in his late twenties, told us, "then it would feel like being at the back of a bus or in a train carriage – like we are just there to get somewhere. Because the driver is there it feels like we are sharing a car… it makes the ride more intimate". Drivers are often expected to be responsible for what happens in a formal pooling context, for setting out the ground rules, establishing and maintaining the social dynamic. This is a burden they don't necessarily want to add to the stress of driving in a congested city. "I'm working and

focusing on the road, I don't want to deal with people being awkward or rude to each other", Khaleed, an Uber driver in his thirties, told us.

Paulistanos, on the other hand, have a much more flexible approach to interaction in both public and private transportation contexts, thanks to their shared norms of sociability and bodily proximity. What this means in practice, is that the tension between the public and the private is considerably less prominent. It is not the case of the binary not being there – but rather, of it paling in comparison with other concerns, such as cost, comfort and safety. This flexible approach allows formal pooling to rapidly cut across existing transportation categories.

Simply put, for less affluent Paulistanos pooled mobility is seen as an upgrade from the crowded and insufficient public transport options; a service that makes taxis affordable for the masses. For the more affluent, who are sick of being stuck in traffic, finding parking and worrying about their car, it is an acceptable "downgrade" from a car, which is still close enough to being in a private vehicle – minus all the worries and responsibilities. Thus, when contrasted against both public and private modes of transportation, formal pooling looks like a rather good option. With few alternatives out there, Paulistanos have a stronger incentive to make it work, and to rapidly master the social grammar of sharing.

One of the key differences between the three cities' perceptions of the public and the private transportation modalities, is the status attached to these. While Londoners prioritise efficiency above all and attach little symbolic value to the transport they use ("as long as it gets me there on time"), Paulistanos to some extent and Ahmedabadis to a huge extent link transport choices to socio-economic standing.

In Ahmedabad, aspiration is a defining feature of life. Regardless of logistical, financial and infrastructural context, private modes of transportation have an aspirational appeal that is hard to match. The hierarchy of transportation modes matters, for how you travel says something about who you are. "Once you have a car, you move away from certain types of transportation types like the AMTS and rickshaw". Public transport thus sits at the very bottom, and private vehicles, such as scooters, and, ultimately, cars, reign at the top of the mobility ladder.

Where formal pooling fits in the hierarchy of public and private, is therefore crucial to its success or failure. In reality, Ola Share and UberPool sit closest to the rickshaws. The latter, however, are extremely familiar to the city's residents. They make it easy for them to instinctively judge the situation – the driver, the co-riders – and to make decisions on the go. This is important, as it allows passengers to maintain the much-desired social distance. Female passengers and older people in particular care a great deal about who they are pooling with. In familiar transportation contexts, they know how to work the system. OLAs and Ubers, however, represent a completely new environment. While technically being an upgrade from a rickshaw – offering A/C, route visibility, cashless payments – it doesn't allow people to make judgement calls as to who is appropriate and who is not appropriate to share a car with. OLA Share's recent addition allowing users to pick co-riders, shows an acute understanding of the social tensions that define public and private travel modalities in the city. Drivers too, work hard to seat female passengers separately from male passengers in formal pooling scenarios, taking it upon themselves to create the right dynamic in the vehicle. As in London, the role of the driver in helping the passengers establish the right social dynamic is paramount for the success of formal pooling.

In all three cities, formal pooling highlights the contrasting norms of privacy and sociability which drivers *and* poolers need to resolve. Riders often expect for the driver to help establish the right dynamic, helping the passengers decide whether the vehicle is private or public. The drivers, however, don't always have clear answers, despite wanting to have a bigger say in what goes on in (typically) their car. Stories of awkwardness were shared by drivers operating formal pooling journeys across the three cities – with us, as well as with our respondents. "Horror" stories were interpreted by passengers as drivers' attempt to put them off pooling simply because they were paid less in a pool. While there was truth to that, such "warnings" had nevertheless as much to do with the fact that drivers don't want to deal with the negativity that arises from lack of basic ground rules. Drivers are not in the least interested in being the ones establishing rules of behaviour, nor do they see it as their job to carve out a distinctive space for formal pooling, reconciling the tensions between the public and the private. This is a task that needs to be done collectively, with drivers, passengers, and app developers all actively involved.

Teleological/Experiential

Choosing one mode of transportation over another is never simply about rational, function-based decisions. A number of urban anthropologists have shown how mobility choices are deeply entrenched in emotional and sensory responses to acts like driving or being driven. Our relationship with cars in particular has had much attention from the anthropological community. Car consumption has been linked to patterns of kinship, sociality, habitation and work (Sheller 2004). The relationship between cars and people has been described as "intimate" (Miller 2001b) or even as a "love affair" (Motavalli 2001), suggesting there is much more to cars than a set of hardware and software functions.

Other modes of transportation similarly engage and affect our senses and desires: waiting in the rain for one's bus to arrive; standing up in a crowded carriage with no signal; scootering down a long dusty road in forty degrees' heat; queuing to get on a train during peak hour: the mental, physical and emotional impact of these embodied experiences shape people's relationship with their city, moulding the ways in which they navigate across different mobility options, making their choices – to pool or not to pool. Sharing a car with others – formally or informally – inevitably draws upon a wide range of cultural, experiential and sensory associations, which often go against rational decision making.

It may well be that getting a private taxi would result in a quicker journey and still be affordable; after a night out in Soho, however, Nitika prefers having the company of others: "It's more fun that way". It will take her longer to get home, but the experience will be more enjoyable. Serendipity and fun attract younger Londoners, like Nitika and Vishal, while also making some feel virtuous about being good citizens. "I feel like using UberPool is better for the environment. I don't feel guilty over adding to the congestion and therefore increasing the pollution levels" John, another regular late night-time UberPooler, confessed.

Change the context, and the same people come to dread the serendipity of social encounters. During the journey home from work, London commuters like "zoning out" and relaxing. Some people want their journey to be their "decompression" time, others want it to be productive. Whether texting a friend, checking news or email, it is important to be doing something with transit time. Journeys have to mean something. Where formal pooling can create an environment that is conductive to creating that meaning, it strikes the right cords;

however, if instead it amounts to social awkwardness and uncertainty around interaction with others, the experience won't be considered a positive one. A journey that goes along the same route, at the same speed, in the same vehicle, can be experienced in completely different ways, depending on the time of day, the mood and the needs of the passenger.

Tweak the time of day to the rush hour commute, and the picture changes once again. Here, experiential aspect of the journey is the last thing on people's mind. In a city like London, with its congested roads and tight timeframes (punctuality is key) – rush hour journeys, particularly in the morning, have to be efficient; one needs to be on time. For the vast majority of commuters in London being on time for work outweighs the comfort of being in a car. As formal pooling involves multiple pick up and drop off points, and sometimes significant diversions, it does not answer the commuters' need for punctuality, most acute in the mornings: every minute is counted, every mile is measured in time.

In São Paulo, the experiential aspect is particularly important for longer distance journeys. Creating the right environment is worth investing time and effort in. Felipe's "fretada" service, much like formal pooling, is caught somewhere between the public and the private transportation modalities. Which prevails – is very much up to the riders to establish: which is why they work very hard to create an ambience that is pleasant, personal and relaxing. Felipe starts off his week by having a breakfast with his friends from the "fretada" service: they form a community, a group of friends. "The journey is more enjoyable with people you know. If one of us is late for the fretada, he can text the group and they will ask the driver to wait". Felipe's practice of social engagement with his co-poolers goes well beyond the context of travel. It shows the extent to which pooling can be about sociability as much as it is about mobility; there are times when journey matters as much as the destination.

In hot temperamental climates, experiential and sensory aspects of the journey often come down to protection from the heat and the rain. It may take longer, but the shelter a car provides is worth the effort. Marcela won't walk the hills of São Paulo in the rain, however short and "walkable" the distance is. Andre, unlike many fellow Paulistanos, doesn't enjoy proximity with strangers. Nevertheless, he cannot afford a private taxi, so the relative physical comfort and shelter of an UberPool trumps the emotional discomfort of being close to strangers. It is thus not only experiential and teleological aspects of the journey that play out against each other, but different factors within each type of needs that can be in conflict.

In Ahmedabad, a city of forty degrees' heat and heavy monsoons, physical comfort is thus crucial. High congestion and time wasted in traffic retreat into the background. In fact, the higher the congestion, the higher the tendency to opt for cars. "I would rather be stuck in a car than on a bus with no A/C", many told us. Older people in particular value the comfortable experience above speed and efficiency.

On the other hand, there is the afore-mentioned socio-emotional need to maintain distance. While sociality is central to informal pooling practices amongst friends and family, these attitudes don't translate into the formal pooling context. The desire to maintain social distance from people who are further down the socio-economic ladder, can lead to formal pooling being experienced as stressful and inappropriate. When this happens, it may well be a deal breaker, trumping the cost effectiveness, physical comfort and formal pooling's relatively high standing in the transport hierarchy. While both app developers and drivers actively seek to address these tensions, it remains critical for understanding how people make transportation choices.

The choice – or perhaps the continuous compromise – between teleological and experiential aspects of a journey, is never constant. It has to be negotiated depending on the context and the purpose of the journey, the age, the gender, the mood of the riders. Inner-city rush hour commute, long distance family weekend trips, Friday night late ride home – these journeys relate to different needs and show just how much the pendulum can swing between logistical considerations and emotional biases. Interaction with others is one of the key areas where people have to balance their social and emotional needs against functional benefits such as reduced cost and elimination of first mile challenges. Pooling offers a highly social experience compared to typically "asocial" experiences of public transportation modes, or isolated experiences of private driving. For many of those who chose to pool, the fun, randomness and sociability of pooling is an appeal that often trumps the savings. For those who choose not to pool, the very same experiential aspects are often the reason behind their decision.

Comfort may come at the cost of time, and serendipity of social encounters in a closed space is as much of an appeal to some as it is a deterrent to others. What people do with their journeys may or may not be rational, but they do it to gain control, to be the kind of person they want to be, and to achieve something that matters to them.

Freedom/Ownership

One of the biggest emotional benefits that can be derived from owning a car is the feeling of socio-economic achievement. Purchasing a car has traditionally been associated with becoming a part of the middle class; it is attractive "to the young and the poor because of the sense of displayed personal identity it conveys" (Stradling et al 2001). Such attitudes, witnessed both in Ahmedabad and São Paulo (however not in London) support classical theories describing the world of old mobility, where car owners are seen to view their vehicles as prosthetic extensions of their bodies and souls, life aspirations and fantasy worlds (Freund 1993; Brandon 2002).

Emotional investments in cars inevitably makes formal pooling seem less attractive. Despite being more comfortable and private than public transport alternatives, pooling with strangers doesn't convey the much-desired socio-economic status and therefore has little cultural appeal for the aspiring middle classes, who still perceive ownership as the main means of capital accumulation, "a way to provide a sense of personal independence and security" (Snare 1972).

Over the last decade, however, the idea of ownership as the only means to a very singular socio-economic end has received considerable amount of critique for being somewhat problematic in an increasingly liquid society (Bardhi & Eckhardt 2012; Bauman 2007). The "coercive freedom of driving" (Sheller and Urry 2000) stands in stark contrast to the freedom from owning things and the freedom to move in the greatest variety of ways (Montgomery 2013). With the responsibilities (and liabilities) removed, people can become free from having to plan ahead and spend money on maintenance. As ownership becomes less attainable (Cheshire et al 2010), formal pooling finds itself in a space where century-old values clash against new opportunities.

Londoners are furthest away from linking car ownership to financial aspirations. Only the older respondents still displayed a sense of pride in owning a car: "I'm very territorial about my car – it's like my second home" – Molly, a 72-year-old part time secretary living in

North London, told us. The majority of Londoners we spoke with, however, didn't see the appeal. "Our generation is not into possessions but into experiences. Car is a responsibility I don't want to bear" – Vishal explained to us how congestion, parking costs and the stress of driving make owning a car undesirable. Buying a car demonstrates a sense of commitment he isn't ready for; an attitude to life that doesn't match his desire to feel young and free. Formal pooling enables younger commuters like Vishal to "differentiate themselves from owners of vehicles that entail many liabilities" (Bardhi & Eckhardt 2012). It is freedom from owning things – "freedom distilled" (Britton in Montgommery 2013) – that urban dwellers are beginning to aspire to, trading in the ideal of ownership which is starting to feel constraining and old-fashioned.

In São Paulo, younger generations are slowly beginning to arrive at similar conclusions. Older generations, nevertheless, still reminisce over getting their first vehicle, the act marking their passage into adulthood. "You never forget your first car", Jose, a 68-year-old accountant told us, with a sentimental, almost romantic longing in his voice. He acknowledged that the age of the car was behind. "For my sons, it's different. It's a just car. These days they often just hop on an Uber because it's less hassle. Increasingly, I do the same". Historically an urban rite of passage, a sign of status and success, car ownership is slowly but steadily losing its status as the ultimate expression of consumer desire in the context of mobility (Chen 2009, Marx 2011). Instead, flexibility, freedom from constraints and responsibilities, and, last but not least, practicality, are beginning to outweigh the desire for ownership (Bauman 2000; Levine 2009). Marcela told us: "I sold my car years ago. Many of my friends still have theirs, but hardly ever use them. It just takes up too much of your time and is stressful". Andre had a similar experience himself. "I got my first car and a driving license when I was still at high school. I felt like a cool kid. But soon it wore off. I grew up and decided I've had enough of driving. The same happened to a lot of my friends".

In Ahmedabad, however, car ownership still significantly outweighs car usage, a result of the social image most citizens are eager to project: a car owner is an economically successful and independent individual. Buying a car is highly aspirational for the rising middle class. "What's my own is my own" - Ruchit, a 30-year-old appliances salesman, told us. Ruchit doesn't currently have a car, nor would he have anywhere to park one if he did (he would have to store it in the other side of town at a family member's garage). For him and for many others, a car is something that signifies status. Arriving in a private vehicle would signal to others that he was a successful young man. Hardik, a 36-year-old businessman went even further, arguing that "you can build a personality by having a car". Car owners spend great amounts of time decorating and personalising their vehicles, conveying their own identity onto the much-cherished car space – a second home; a shelter from the world.

Even in Ahmedabad, however, a shift from ownership to flexibility is slowly taking place. Modi, a 36-year old hospital supervisor, told us she would not have bought a car if services like Uber and Ola were available five years ago. Tesh sold his car due to serious parking challenges in his part of the city: he now relies on a combination of scooter, public transportation and formal pooled services. Even in locations where ownership is highly aspirational, flexibility that comes with freedom from owning things is often far more practical.

The increased flexibility and freedom that come with the "new" *freedom from* ownership, comes at a cost. Aggregation of people inevitably means aggregation of unknown people, and the unknown creates a reduction of control amongst riders – something we witnessed

across all three cities. Herein lies one of formal pooling's key departures from its informal counterpart. A distinguishing characteristic of car sharing, "interdependency between participating consumers, demonstrating a high level of consumer involvement" (Bardhi & Eckhardt 2012) – disappears in a context where even the driver has to give up control – for the algorithm to take over. The latter, of course, is not only blind to cultural, social and emotional needs of the passengers, but more often than not also to the landscape, character and life of the city.

Losing he *freedom to* choose the route and the co-riders is the price many struggle to accept. Urban commuters in the twenty first century may not want to own a car, but they want to "own" the journey; they also want to feel safe. In-app surveillance and command controls in formal pooling contexts are welcomed by female riders in particular, supporting McGrath's (2004) controversial conclusion that big brother control models can be beneficial to consumers in the context of negative reciprocity transactions (Sahlins 1972), where goods and services are exchanged with one side always benefitting at the cost of the other.

In London, this tension doesn't get resolved: passengers begrudgingly learn to accept the lack of control over the route and the drop offs, resorting to vocalising their annoyance when diversions get too big. "People get annoyed if they get in first and get dropped off last. They feel like their time is being wasted, and they think it's my fault" an Uber driver in London complained. Liz, a 33-year old actress living in East London, shared a similar experience: "People always feel that if they get on first they should be dropped off first, there is no way of changing that". In Ahmedabad, the need for control is so high, that formal pooling app developers are swiftly reacting, by giving passengers the ability to choose their co-riders (discussed above). However, the route is still decided by algorithms that tap and ride services so heavily rely on. In São Paulo, riders resorted to social media to create, at the very least, a semblance of agency. Whether checking someone's Facebook profile or reporting to one's family on one's whereabouts on WhatsApp actually resulted in increased safety, is hard to tell. Nevertheless, these kinds of actions helped people alleviate the feeling of losing control. Negotiating between *freedom from* and *freedom to* is not an easy process. As mobility landscape across the world changes, people are beginning to keenly engage in those kinds of negotiations in order to make sense of what mobility is about in their cities.

FINAL WORDS

By exploring the differences in how formal car sharing is experienced across the three markets, this paper sought to highlight the ethnographic value of shifting perspectives between liminal spaces that such practices occupy; and between different players in formal carpooling. We came along on our respondents' daily journeys; we immersed ourselves in the crowds and the queues, in the heat and the rain, and in a number of agonizing traffic jams; we travelled at the back and at the front of cars, carriages, buses and rickshaws. In doing all this and much more, we tried to understand mobility from the point of view of the passenger as well as the driver, witnessing first-hand how formal pooling practices are shaped. This method proved extremely useful not only for understanding the complex sociality of transportation, but ultimately for tying this new knowledge back to the mobility industry, and generating valuable strategic insights.

On the one hand, we looked at tensions and contrasts that come to define users' attitudes towards pooling. Ethnographic method allowed us to repeatedly shift the focus

from private to public positioning; from teleological to experiential aspects of the journey; and from aspirations of freedom and ownership, to those of flexibility and control. It allowed us to explore norms and values, goals and desires, social structures and cultural biases that define people's relationship to urban travel in general and formal pooling in particular. We have shown how positioning of formal pooling is key to setting up expectations for the experience and helping users master the language of sharing. We have highlighted the compromises and dilemmas between what makes most sense and what "feels good" – choices commuters face daily when choosing between the teleological and the experiential aspects of a journey. Last but not least we looked at socio-economic values and aspirations, and explored the shifts and the transformations people's perception of urban mobility. As desire for ownership ebbs away in some places (while still holding sway in others), we saw people across continents embrace freedom and flexibility that new mobility brought with it.

By going into the field and participating in embodied travel activities side by side with Uber drivers, early morning commuters and late night "party poolers", we were able to see how attitudes change depending on one's role and place in the transaction: male or female, young or elderly, driver or passenger – all had different embodied experiences of formal pooling, which cut across and add further complexity to the socio-cultural context of urban travel. Personal safety and socio-economic status; serendipity and adventure; risks and liabilities – these had different meaning and priorities for different actors.

Like other forms of sharing, car sharing isn't a new phenomenon. We have contrasted formal pooling against a number of well-established informal pooling practices. We looked at the ways in which these informal practices fit into people lives, and are entangled in nets of close relationships – between families and neighbours, friends and colleagues. As they become formalised, however, culturally intuitive behavioural models and practices inevitably get lost in translation. Interacting with strangers in a confined space, negotiating route diversions, managing various cultural and social uncertainties: to many, formal pooling meant learning a whole new social grammar.

Learning this new grammar of sharing is above all a collective project. It requires all parties' involvement and time. Examples of long-standing informal pooling practices throughout the paper show that shared social grammars take time to emerge – a fact often ignored by the algorithms behind formal pooling services.

The success of formal pooling depends highly on getting the grammar and the language right, on establishing culturally sensitive rules of engagement all parties are happy to honour: commuters, drivers, public sector policy makers and private sector innovators. But first, they need to be established through active involvement and participation on behalf of drivers and passengers alike.

Moving away from broad and overarching definitions such as the "sharing economy" we attempted to outline a more fluid but also more focused perspective on practices that involve sharing and economic transactions. Shifting between categories, and between actors involved, has allowed us to glance at the granularities of formal car sharing practices, and the different roles these come to play across continents, cities, and people's lives. To have and have not, along with many other dilemmas faced by today's urban dwellers, is a question that does not have a clear answer. As the perspectives shift, and we experience pooling through the eyes of drivers, passengers, men and women, the young and the old – needs and desires change as well. Mobility needs to be studied "in motion", as it were – always moving from

person to person, from back seat to front seat, and even to driver's seat. By exploring these shifting perspectives, we hope to have presented a fresh, ethnographically rich and critical perspective on sharing practices in the context of an industry in flux.

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NOTES

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